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# Human rights institutionalization and US humanitarian military intervention

Seung-Whan Choi<sup>a</sup>, Youngwan Kim<sup>b</sup>, David Ebner<sup>c</sup>, and Patrick James<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Illinois at Chicago; <sup>b</sup>Hankuk University of Foreign Studies; <sup>c</sup>University of Southern California

## ABSTRACT


Are human rights a core value of US foreign policy? If so, how does the United States enforce human rights standards? Extant studies maintain that mass media, public opinion, and/or political concerns drive US decisions to engage in humanitarian military interventions. In this study, we explore the extent to which “human rights institutionalization” through the State Department’s human rights reporting affects the likelihood of US humanitarian interventions. We find that human rights institutionalization is a viable, and perhaps even the best, explanation for the robust connection between human rights violations and deployment of the US military. These findings suggest that the United States is willing to undertake costly action to enforce international standards of human rights, but with some important caveats. Overall, we provide large-*N*, quantitative support for the broader shifts in US humanitarian intervention described by qualitative scholars and experts in US strategy and security policy.

## KEYWORDS

Institutionalization of human rights; mass media; state department; US humanitarian military intervention

When announcing the release of the US State Department’s 2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo’s remarked that “every year since 1977, the State Department has through this report put the world on notice that we’ll expose violation of human rights wherever they occur. We have told those who disgrace the concept of human dignity they will pay a price, that their abuses will be meticulously documented and then publicized” (Department of State 2018). While American officials often make similar claims, significant questions remain regarding the relationship between human rights violations and US military intervention. While claims of human rights concerns are central to scholarly accounts of US interventions in the Balkans during the 1990s, geopolitical realism also emerges as another credible explanation given the relatively weak response to humanitarian disasters in Somalia and Rwanda. Indeed, qualitative studies of US foreign policy have revealed important findings of the processes that link human rights abuses to US military intervention (Drezner 2000; Weiss 2016).

**CONTACT** David Ebner  [debner@usc.edu](mailto:debner@usc.edu)  USC Political Science and International Relations, Von Kleinsmid Center (VKC), 3518 Trousdale Parkway, Room 327, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0044

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To further evaluate the role of human rights in US foreign policy, we offer the first large- $N$  examination that explores not only *if* human rights conditions are connected to US foreign policy but also *how* human rights violations are factored into the US policymaking process. We find that all things being equal, the institutionalization of the State Department in human rights reporting and advocacy emerges as a viable and perhaps even the best explanation for the relationship between human rights abuses and US military intervention. Our empirical results, in an overall sense, support the position that the United States has enforced and reinforced international standards of human rights in the late twentieth century.

Many existing studies regard mass media as one of the most influential players that incentivize US leaders to punish human rights abusers. They contend that media activism creates inherent pressure on leaders who then act in response to developing humanitarian crises such as massive violations of human rights (i.e., genocide). Media activism seems to be particularly visible in an era of increasingly rapid and even instantaneous communication (Gilboa 2005; Van Belle 2012; Whitten-Woodring 2009). In this study, we look beyond the role of mass media and present the institutionalization of human rights reporting by the Department of State as a significant driver for US humanitarian intervention. The United States has been eager to promote the protection of human rights with help of the State Department since at least World War II because it is a cornerstone of US foreign policy (Choi and James 2017).

We argue that what today is called US “humanitarian” foreign policy against human rights abusers was gradually shaped along with enthusiastic support from former Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan – the institutionalization of human rights evaluations by the State Department (Drezner 2000; Innes de Neufville 1986). Of course, failure to act militarily in catastrophic areas such as Somalia, Rwanda, and, more recently, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have, to some degree, shaken the credibility of human rights institutionalization (Chesterman 2011). Critics often cite those failures as evidence that US foreign policy is driven mostly by economic and/or geopolitical interests, while the promotion of human rights takes a back seat (Tasioulas 2009). The veracity of State Department reporting on worldwide human rights abuses is also questioned on the grounds that it (a) may represent the top-down influence of the president or other elite policymakers and/or (b) may be biased toward US national interests, values, and policy goals (Poe, Carey, and Vasquez, 2001). Our empirical analysis takes these criticisms into account and still finds that State Department human rights reporting is a more reliable predictor for US humanitarian military intervention than mass media, public opinion, inter-branch politics, or advocacy organizations. Overall, our research provides an encouraging foundation for a new research program on human rights institutionalization.

## US Military Intervention: Humanitarian versus Non-Humanitarian Reasons

Humanitarian intervention is defined by scholars as “coercive action by one or more states involving the use of armed force against another state without the consent of its authorities and with the purpose of preventing widespread suffering or death among the inhabitants” (Roberts 2000, 5). A “wide range” of human rights treaties that came into force in the 1960s and 1970s “led states to see human rights as an obligation of the international community” and potentially intervene when conditions within a state constituted “a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights” (Cohen 2012, 7). Additional inquiries indicate that human rights conditions abroad<sup>1</sup> are a powerful determinant of US military action since 1980 (Choi 2013). Despite the uncertainty regarding both the motivations behind intervention and their effectiveness (Pickering and Kisangani 2009), humanitarian intervention has become a “prominent” policy tool for preventing human rights abuses, especially those perpetrated by states against their own people (Pattison 2010, 48). The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor within the US Department of State clearly points in this direction: “promoting freedom and democracy and protecting human rights around the world are central to US foreign policy.”<sup>2</sup>

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine “legitimized humanitarian military interventions, the phenomenon in which third-party actors use force to mediate intrastate conflicts” (Kushi 2019, 1; see also Weiss 2016). This intervention doctrine, however, has come into question from critics who argue that “the focus on human rights is designed to facilitate Western expansion” (Hehir 2013, 134). For example, the claim that “human rights are commonly invoked as an ethical justification or ‘just cause’ for states to resort to military force against those who threaten them” is considered to be a pretext for use of armed forces by imperialist “security states” (Denike 2008, 96; Young 2003, 14). When US military and economic interests overshadow the protection of human rights, it raises serious doubts about the main mission of the foreign policy tool (Choi and James 2017). Further examination suggests that factional dynamics within the executive branch became just as influential as on-the-ground humanitarian concerns in the decision-making process (Western 2002). Taken together, existing studies suggest that humanitarian intervention is neither a purely a domestic consideration related to US politics nor solely an international concern dictated by the geopolitics of the UN Security Council.

In the next two sections, we discuss how mass media and the State Department – two major advocates of human rights promotion – affect US foreign policy decision making in responding to human rights abusers abroad.

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<sup>1</sup>Measured by the Cingranelli–Richards (CIRI) index of physical integrity rights.

<sup>2</sup><https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/index.htm>.

## Mass Media and US Humanitarian Intervention

References to compelling media effects on US foreign policy became standard practice during the first Gulf War in 1991 (Gilboa 2005). With its “very high drama,” that war had been “tailor made for media coverage” (Goebel 1995, 7–8). The fledgling cable news network, CNN, meticulously covered every day of the war. Soon after, events in crisis-laden Somalia received the same treatment. At that time, the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (and later Secretary of State) Colin Powell described television coverage of Somalia as quite graphic and effective (Dumbrell 1997, 198). “Pictures of starving children,” in the words of one observer, “shook the ground underneath those who favoured caution in Somalia” (Dumbrell 1997, 209). Thus, people started to pay attention to how media might be able to influence foreign policy in a new and more immediate way. Soon after the war, George F. Kennan, a longstanding and prominent commentator on US foreign policy, created the term “CNN effect” (Van Belle 2012, 277).

Scholars have attempted to ascertain whether the CNN effect exists in real politics. Those who support and believe in the CNN effect argue that shifts in public opinion reflect media influence, which in turn influences politicians in democracies like the United States to act given their reliance on public support. At least some interventions by the United States, and Western governments seem to have been influenced significantly by extensive media coverage (Bahador 2007). Without sustained media attention, some argue, military interventions in Grenada, Panama, Iraq, and Haiti under the auspices of human rights enforcement might not have occurred (Shaw 2012). Studies of the impact of media have found that the medium of transmission is also an important factor – CNN brought moving images to its viewers. Furthermore, studies indicate that this new media environment has fundamentally changed presidential rhetoric (Stuckey 2010).

Other scholars, however, argue that the CNN effect is a “poor representation of the reality of news media and American foreign policy” (Van Belle 2012, 277). Among critics, the causal arrow is believed to point, if at all, in the other direction: media follow rather than lead foreign policy. Herman and Chomsky (1988), for instance, assert that the influence of media over policies is very limited. Media, for the most part, simply “manufacture consent” for elites (Robinson 2001). Those at the top are more able and likely to manipulate media for the government to adopt and implement policies in their interests. Therefore, media coverage ends up conforming to the policy preferences of the executive and elites in a society (i.e., the “indexing hypothesis”).

Further investigations of media coverage of US intervention in Somalia through (a) interviews with journalists and officials and (b) content analysis confirm that officials from the United States Agency for International

Development and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance, along with congressional leaders, took the lead regarding the case for intervention and used media to further their agenda (Livingston and Eachus 1995, 418, 427). Additional research into the Somalia case found media coverage proportional to the level of interest expressed in Washington, suggesting that, while media can move forward policy at times, “governments also have the power to move television” (Mermin 1997, 403)

Another scenario is easy to imagine: the government is neither well equipped to respond to new policies nor to implement them. In such contexts, policy-makers cannot be certain about policies. Casework on Somalia and Ireland, for instance, reveals “sheer uncertainty associated with military or diplomatic intervention in complex processes” (Dumbrell 1997, 208). Thus, an opening exists for media to play a far more important role than the decisions of policy-makers in shaping implementation. By contrast, when government officials are confident about their positions and policies are decided on with certainty, the influence of media can be anticipated to remain very limited. Under such conditions, indexing of coverage to an official agenda becomes most likely (Robinson 2001).

Some research is at odds with the idea of public opinion shaping foreign policy – an important aspect of the media-centered model. Jacobs and Page (2005, 110) used data on interest groups, epistemic communities, and public opinion from 1974 through 2002 to assess domestic influences on US foreign policy. For all policymakers combined, as well as those in the House, Senate, and Administration individually, the business community emerges as the preeminent influence. Public opinion, as the most salient point of comparison among other possible influences, failed to obtain statistical significance (Jacobs and Page 2005, 111, 114–115, and 117). This result casts doubt on the causal mechanism that links media coverage and government foreign policy action (with underlying concern about public opinion) because the business community would seem to matter more and thus confirm an elite-based interpretation. In a more general sense, critics point to excessive interest group influence over statecraft (Freeman 2011).

Overall, existing research on media and US foreign policy, while limited, is of high quality and creates the foundation for further, more comparative analysis. But these studies have yet to evaluate the role of media in competition with other factors (Bahador 2007, 165). This points us toward appreciating the potential value of an aggregate data analysis to see how much media matter in military intervention decision making of the White House when pitted against another significant factor such as institutional expert advising from the Department of State.

## Institutionalization of Human Rights within the Department of State

While institutional approaches are widely used in understanding US foreign policy-making (Hall and Taylor 1996; Ikenberry 1988; Weaver and Rockman 1993), their application to the Department of State *per se* is limited. Despite an influential role dating back to 1789 (then called the Office of Foreign Affairs), the State Department's role has been "understudied in comparison with other executive branch departments or agencies" (Rosati and DeWitt 2011, 178; see also Rosati and Scott 2010). Relative absence of scholarly attention is not entirely surprising given that many believe that the State Department's influence has declined considerably from the Cold War onward (Hastedt 2017; Hook 2008; Sampas 1987). Extant studies either view the State Department as a secondary component of the foreign policy bureaucracy and/or provide critical reviews of how the Department functions. In general, studies of the State Department tend to overlook the fact that it has played a central role not only in helping the president craft and execute foreign policy but also in advancing the president's agenda via its interactions with Congress (Clausen and Wilcox 1987), mass media, and the public since the country's foundation (Clarke 1987; Haney and Snow 2013; Hook 2008). Finally, given that the State Department's first robust data compilation of global human rights began in the 1980s, studies appearing before this era may have neglected the role of the State Department as a key advocate for human rights promotion worldwide. When taking the literature in sum, it seems likely that the State Department's influence has ebbed and flowed due to a variety of factors, we argue that the institutionalization of human rights reporting within the State Department has allowed it to play a prominent role in the US foreign policy process since the 1980s.

Although the White House can be unilateral and imperial when it comes to issues beyond the United States' borders (Rudalevige 2006; Schlesinger 2004), other actors that include the Congress (Cho 2003; Marshall and Prins 2016), the public (Reeves et al. 2017), the Supreme Court (Howell 2003), and even governors (McMillan 2008) may assert themselves in the foreign policy sphere. However, when it comes to foreign policy-making, the White House has clear institutional prerogatives and advantages in setting the agenda with help from its administrative branches (Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis 2008). Coinciding with the wider militarization of US foreign policy and continued movements toward adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Brooks 2017), the institutionalization of human rights by the State Department has led to a series of putative "humanitarian interventions." After the State Department exposes mass human rights abuses by states against their own people, US military forces are likely to be dispatched to punish the abusers in the name of humanitarianism.



Another possible reason that the State Department has been understudied in the subject of humanitarian intervention is that existing studies tend to focus on its diplomatic role in foreign affairs. Since the National Security Act of 1948, the State Department has primarily served as the United States' diplomatic corps, while institutions such as the Department of Defense (DoD), National Security Council (NSC), and later the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have taken over lead roles in national security, military planning, and trade policy, respectively. However, scholars of diplomacy are also keen to point out that reporting on international affairs, including human rights violations, is one of the five primary functions of the State Department since the 1961 Vienna Convention (Sharp and Wiseman 2012). This expertise, combined with existing embassies and contacts in nearly every country in the world, led Congress to enact legislation creating the Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (HA) within the US State Department in 1976. Despite early struggles (Kaufman 1998), HA's eventual success was due in part to its "missionary" role in protecting human rights and protection from other agencies resulting from embeddedness within the larger State Department bureaucracy (Drezner 2000, 733). Once established, human rights reporting has become a "de facto" policy tool for the State Department to advance its mission of human rights promotion (de Neufville 1986). Indeed, several studies find evidence that State Department reporting on human rights conditions within countries correlates strongly with the disbursement of US foreign aid (Cingranelli and Pasquarello 1985; Poe and Meernik 1995; Poe and Sirirangsi 1993). In spite of some inhospitable aspects in the early years of the Reagan Administration, HA has managed to thrive and even improve the quality of its human rights reporting and had some notable success in influencing policy on issues including US military intervention (Drezner 2000).

A final interesting question is whether foreign policy experts from the State Department have the same preferences regarding military action as the president. An answer may be drawn from the principal-agent model: bureaucrats are known at times to possess, and even act effectively, upon preferences different from those of the president due to information asymmetry that favors the agent over the principal (Miller 2005). This model provides a theoretical explanation for possible tension between the Department of State and White House (Scott 1969). The decision-making process about military intervention is expected to differ from those typically considered in the principal-agent model; the president, not foreign policy experts from the Department of State, will make a final decision about such intervention. Therefore, in this domain, incentives to mislead or misrepresent are at a minimum. There are also some questions about potential biases in State Department reporting. To wit, if the United States had a geopolitical interest in military intervention, the State Department might be directed to produce



reports that exaggerate human rights concerns. To address these concerns empirically, we include robustness checks and evaluation of alternative measures of human rights violations in the Research Design section.

It should be noted that in advancing its bureaucratic mission of human rights promotion, the State Department often has challenged presidents, national security advisors, members of Congress, and Secretaries of Defense (Drezner 2000; de Neufville 1986). The Executive cabinet bureaucracy's reliance on Congress for funding further "weakens [the State Department's] allegiance to presidential priorities" since their "welfare is dependent upon good relations with Congress" (Weaver and Rockman 1993, 15). While this institutional design for human rights promotion may contribute to "the incoherence, volatility, and inefficiency" that characterizes US government (Weaver and Rockman 1993, 412), such cooperation is necessary for the institutionalization of new agencies (Dickinson and Lebo 2007). It also allows cabinet secretaries to "organize, lobby, and make public policy like other political actors" (Clinton et al. 2012, 352). In addition, this institutionalization of bureaucracies emphasizing human rights exists within the context of a broader institutionalization of the American presidency (Ragsdale and Theis 1997).

State Department reporting is not without potential bias. For example, research indicates that during the Cold War, allying with the United States was associated with an improvement in State Department scores when compared to those of Amnesty International (Qian and Yanagizawa 2009). Further research indicates that this political bias was mostly confined to the early years of the Reagan Administration, while overall, US allies receive higher levels of scrutiny for human rights violations when it comes to physical integrity (Bagozzi and Berliner 2018). However, there are strong indications that US trading partners receive less attention for labor rights, indicating potential bias (Bagozzi and Berliner 2018; Foot 2000; Mertus 2004). Furthermore, interviews with US government officials reveal that the US government frequently applies a double standard for human rights norms to advance its national interests during the Global War on Terror. While urging the rest of the world to protect human rights, the US government safely ignores what it is advocating when it comes to counterterrorism (Foot 2005; Mertus 2004).<sup>3</sup> Finally, other agencies such as the Department of Defense, intelligence agencies, and agencies associated with US economic interests such as the Department of the Treasury may lobby and influence the reporting process either via Congress or directly.

The State Department's staff, which consists of career officers and diplomats, represents a source of continuity in US policy and practice, in spite of

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<sup>3</sup>It is worth noting that human rights standards may have remained lower than before the beginning of the Global War on Terror because many political leaders started to justify their human rights abuses and the persecution of political opponents as being anti-terror measures (Thimm 2018).

politically appointed leadership and shifts in partisanship, ideology, and personality of the president and congress that come with each election (Pfiffner 1987). While it is plausible that the president and appointees can attempt to influence reports to their political advantage or preconceived notions, reliance on career officers and local sourcing, along with oversight by Congress and independent reporting and investigations by the mass media and non-Governmental Associations (NGOs), has produced a high quality of global human rights reports that are durable predictors of US foreign policy across eras and administrations (for alternative views, see Clark and Sikkink 2013; Hill, Moore, and Mukherjee 2013; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005). Accordingly, our analysis explores the question of whether the contents of human rights reports are associated with decisions made by US presidents to deploy military forces abroad. Given an early policy-making process that is hidden from public eyes, it is difficult to trace the details of how precisely the institutionalization of human rights promotion within the State Department affects the president's final policy actions in response to human rights violators abroad. More importantly, since we conduct a large-*N* statistical analysis rather than engage in an in-depth case study, we below take a glimpse of how former Secretaries of State played their role in the foreign policy decision making.

### Former Secretaries of State in Action

The dearth of existing studies on the interactions between the State Department and the White House leads to a lack of data collection across countries and across years. To quantify the human rights institutionalization, we turn to the annual US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.<sup>4</sup> The US government uses the Country Reports as a global benchmark for how each country should treat human rights. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor in the State Department is responsible for institutionalizing the compilations of the human rights reports with the help of staff in US embassies around the world. To many in the foreign policy elite, these reports are evidence that human rights is one of the core foreign policy missions of the State Department.<sup>5</sup> Former Secretary of State John F. Kerry claims to have "seen firsthand how these reports are used ... *by the Department of State and other U.S. government agencies in shaping American foreign policy* (emphasis added)."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it is reasonable to consider

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<sup>4</sup>See annual Human Rights Reports (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/>).

<sup>5</sup>Former Secretary of State John F. Kerry praises the integrity of the reporting in the Secretary's Preface for 2013, stating that the reports "highlight the continued pursuit of 'free and equal dignity in human rights' in every corner of the world." (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>).

<sup>6</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.

that Secretaries of State use the reports as their references to advise the Oval Office on whether intervention is warranted against human rights abusers.

However, at one extreme, Powell (2012, 36) asserts that, by the start of 2004, “the Bush national security team had become dysfunctional.” Interagency conflict took place over virtually all foreign policy matters; for example, the CIA and State Department even had a controversy over who would control the design and provision of communications for diplomatic and consular posts around the world (Powell 2012, 107). Powell (2012, 214) blamed the breakdown in Iraq, after the rapidly successful invasion, on the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who joined in with others to reverse policies that might have headed off or at least reduced the scale of the insurgency and the severity of human rights violations. Despite the inter-agency competition, it is interesting to know that Colin Power was assertive in injecting his human rights agenda into the foreign policy decision making of the Bush Administration. For example, when making the case for war in Iraq before the United Nations Security Council on February 5, 2003, Colin Power cited Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical violation of human rights as one of the three major reasons for the use of military forces (Zarefsky 2007).

Condoleezza Rice (2011) upheld the State Department’s human rights mandate during her term. In her *Foreign Affairs* article, Condoleezza Rice “wrote that both US strength and American values – realism and idealism – were the basis of US foreign policy and fully recognised the ‘importance of human rights’ and the ‘superiority of democracy as a form of government’” (Larres 2008, 212). But she also felt some tensions with the Department of Defense and “bureaucratic struggles” within the Bush 43 team despite having a positive relationship with Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense. Her overall experience resembles the generally positive recollections of Albright (2003, 348), who describes National Security Advisor Sandy Berger in the following way: “compared to some earlier NSC-State pairings we worked well together.” Albright (2003, 348), however, did not like “NSC’s attempts to micromanage” all security matters such as punishment of human rights abusers during the Clinton years in the White House.

It is important to note that Madeleine Albright “successfully pressed for military intervention under NATO auspices during the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo in 1999.”<sup>7</sup> The US military forces were actively involved in the intervention to punish Slobodan Milosevic’s security apparatus transgressing human rights of Kosovo Albanians. BBC News reported that Kosovo’s highest court found that “a systematic campaign of terror, including murders, rapes, arsons and severe maltreatments,” occurred against Kosovo Albanians.<sup>8</sup> As the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright demanded that Serbia recognizes the “legitimate rights” of the people of Kosovo.

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<sup>7</sup><https://history.state.gov/departmentshistory/people/albright-madeleine-korbel>.

<sup>8</sup><http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1530781.stm>.

Baker (2006, 281–283) recalls a very collegial foreign policy team during his tenure as Secretary of State for Bush 41. Foreign officials, according to Baker (2006, 283), “knew I was speaking for the president.” In addition, James Baker expressed his concerns about the human rights of Palestinians despite the displeasure from Israeli officials and public. Schultz (1993, 33), in a massive book of over 1,000 pages, does not focus on bureaucratic infighting during the Reagan years, although he asserts the need for a Secretary of State to have staff around them who are “sensitive to the political currents in Washington.” Many chapters recount his direct role in advising the president on any number of matters including human rights conditions abroad. He believed that the former Soviet Union did not honor human rights agreements. “[He] gave particular attention to the human rights area: problems of Jews, dissidents, families divided by Soviet refusal to allow emigration, as well as the persecution of people monitoring Soviet compliance with their obligations under the Helsinki Final Act” (Schultz 1993, 327).

Taken together, a well-expected story of bureaucratic competition involving the State Department and other agencies, with varying intensity, emerges from the preceding memoirs. At the same time, it also shows that the Secretary of State has played a significant role in conveying his or her human rights agenda to the Oval Office.

## Research Design

Based on prior literature and theorizing, we formulate a principal hypothesis, namely, that human rights institutionalization within the State Department is likely to motivate the White House to take humanitarian military intervention against human rights abusers abroad. The competing hypothesis is that mass media are likely to induce US humanitarian intervention.

To empirically test these hypotheses, we assembled pooled panel data for 157 countries over the years 1980–2005.<sup>9</sup> The number of sample countries and the study period are determined by the data availability for human rights and US humanitarian military intervention (Pickering and Kisangani 2009; Wood and Gibney 2010). Since we assume that US humanitarian intervention is a function of human rights institutionalization, media, and other factors, we lag all predictors 1 year behind the outcome variable to reduce the possibility of reverse causality.

A US humanitarian military intervention occurs when US armed forces are deployed with a humanitarian mission that intends to address the internal affairs of foreign countries, especially when rogue leaders severely repress

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<sup>9</sup>When the sample is limited to countries at risk of human rights violations, the results are quite similar to those reported in the Empirical Results section.

their people (e.g., the US interventions in Somalia in 1992 and 1993 and Haiti in 1994). To be specific, a humanitarian intervention is defined as one “to save lives, relieve suffering, and/or distribute foodstuffs to prevent starvation” (Pickering and Kisangani 2009, 593; see also Hallenberg 1994). The dependent variable, US humanitarian military intervention, captures such humanitarian actions. When the US military action on a humanitarian mission occurred within a country’s borders, it is coded as “1” for the first year of the intervention and otherwise “0”. We drop all subsequent, ongoing intervention years from the analysis to assuage concerns about event dependence. During the study period, we identify 34 US humanitarian interventions, which is 0.97% of the total sample observations (3,500). The data are collected from Pearson and Baumann (Pearson and Baumann 1993; Pearson, Baumann, and Pickering 1994) and Pickering and Kisangani (2009). The latter is an updated version of the former; the combined data covers the years 1946–2005.

As noted, to quantify the human rights institutionalization within the Department of State, we rely on the State Department’s annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. With periodic revisions, the Country Reports are not time-sensitive documents, but instead constitute a first approximation of preferences expressed by the Secretary of State to the president. Given that State Department officials have access to both these reports and top-level decision makers, including the president, we expect that US military interventions will be strongly associated with State Department reporting on human rights violations. We also expect this connection to persist in a policy environment that includes many actors and considerations, including mass media, advocacy organizations, interbranch politics, defense-related bureaucracy, and geopolitical concerns. While some humanitarian interventions may be misguided, we argue that they are highly associated with underlying human rights conditions around the world. This relationship, however, is only possible with the institutionalization of human rights reporting within the US State Department, one of the primary institutions in US foreign policy.

By using the Country Reports, we operationalize the main independent variable, human rights institutionalization. This variable ranges from 1 to 5, with “1” indicating countries where human rights are best protected, and “5” denoting countries where the population frequently experiences unrestrained political terror by the government (see also Wood and Gibney 2010). Illustrations from the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices should help to breathe life into what the 1 to 5 scale means in practice. Appendix 1 provides several examples of country reports on human rights violations in each level.

There are other measures of human rights conditions: Fariss (2014) human rights protection, Cingranelli–Richards’ (CIRI) physical integrity

rights (Cingranelli and Filippov 2018), and Amnesty International. Standards for reporting on human rights violations have become more stringent with time, which impacts upon any future research design at the level of measurement. After accounting for the changes over time in the standards of human rights reporting, Fariss (2014) designs a latent index for human rights protection, indicating higher scores for better protection. Note that in his construction, Fariss' index takes the State Department's Country Reports into consideration so that the former overlaps with the latter. Before the arrival of the Fariss measure, CIRI's physical integrity rights had been widely used in the literature (Cingranelli and Filippov 2018). This is an additive index based on the occurrence of torture, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and disappearances, which represent the most extreme dimensions of human rights violations. It ranges from "0" (no government respect for these four rights) to "8" (full government respect for these four rights). The primary source of information about human rights practices is obtained from the State Department's Country Reports, supplemented by Amnesty International's Annual Reports. When there were discrepancies between these two sources, CIRI treated the Amnesty International evaluation as authoritative to remove a potential bias in favor of US allies. Human rights reporting from Amnesty International may be the most credible source compiled by a non-governmental organization, independent from the State Department's influence. The index ranges from "1" (best human rights) to "5" (worst human rights).

Since Fariss' human rights protection and CIRI's physical integrity rights are based on the State Department's Country Reports, these three measures should be closely correlated with one another. A correlation matrix in Appendix 2 indeed indicates that all the three measures capture the conditions of human rights well and also that they do not much deviate from Amnesty International's Annual Reports. This simple correlation analysis suggests that the State Department, Fariss, CIRI, and Amnesty International produce virtually similar indicators for human rights conditions. This should reduce concerns that the State Department's human rights reporting is biased. In addition, since all of the human rights-related institutions do not offer much different interpretations and reporting standards for human rights abuses, they appear to remain fair and neutral rather than to promote their own parochial interests (for disagreements, see Clark and Sikkink 2013; Hill, Moore, and Mukherjee 2013; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005). In an effort to assess the quality of reporting, Poe, Carey, and Vasquez (2001, 677) compare human rights evaluations from the State Department and Amnesty International. Their analysis indicates that the State Department reports do not emerge as significantly politicized in comparison to those of Amnesty International. More importantly, they note that "the bias that appeared in the initial State Department Reports in the 1970s and early 1980s



tended to disappear over time” (p. 677). This is good news for our research, given that the study period starts from 1980 and ends in 2005.

To further test the validity of our State Department variable, we conduct robustness tests by employing Fariss, CIRI, and Amnesty International in place of the State Department.<sup>10</sup> As shown in Appendixes 3 and 4, each of these three measures turns out to be a significant predictor for US humanitarian intervention. These results are not surprising given the high correlation among the measures. Although the measures use somewhat different methodology to arrive at an aggregated assessment, their results do not diverge, verifying that the State Department’s Annual Reports are both accurate and reliable in capturing the human rights institutionalization.

We now move onto mass media. Because online news rose to prominence in the time period after our study period, 1980–2005 (Pew Research Center 2013) and because the influence of television is not as strong as print media (Ron, Ramos, and Thoms 2007, 398–399), we use print media to assess its effect on US humanitarian intervention. In terms of print versus television news, existing research indicates that print sources are more likely to cover issues related to human rights, while coverage of human rights “continues to decline in amount and depth” on television news (Brandle 2018, 190). In addition, television tends to air news on human rights violations from a “government-leading” perspective rather than from the standpoint of those abused (Brandle 2018, 190). Thus, we choose to evaluate the effect of mass media with two print sources.

First, we assemble original data based on the *The New York Times*’ coverage of countries related to human rights. *The New York Times* (NYT) Archive provides the number of articles that the Grey Lady prints in a given year starting from 1851. We calculate the number of articles that include two keywords: “country name” (e.g., Nigeria) and “human rights.” With the total number of articles, the data set with a country-year format from 1980 to 2005 is constructed. The second media variable is based on the *Economist* (international edition) and *Newsweek* (US edition); the average of articles appeared in the two sources with the keyword, “human rights,” is counted for each country-year (see Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005). The second set of media data covers the years 1986–2000, which is 11 years shorter than the first data collection. The Spearman’s correlation between NYT coverage and Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers’ measure is 0.47. This relatively high correlation ensures the compatibility and validity of the two measures in detecting the degree of media influence regarding human rights abuses, though each relies on different media sources. We also explore a possibility of the interaction effect between the State Department and mass media on the grounds that each of

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<sup>10</sup>Amnesty International’s human rights reports are useful to examine how advocacy organizations affect US foreign policy (Vestergaard 2008).



these factors may be complementary in influencing the decision making of US humanitarian intervention (Paletz 2002).

To avoid omitted variable bias – there are other factors that may influence the White House in the realm of humanitarian military actions (e.g., Choi 2013; Western 2002) – we include in the baseline model Congress, defense-related bureaucracy, democracy, economic development, US alliance, US geographic distance, post-Cold War, and regions.<sup>11</sup> In the extended model, we add three more confounding variables: US oil dependence, US strategic interests, and civil war. We design the extended model because the data for US oil dependence are available only after 1993, 13 years shorter than that for the baseline model.

Members of Congress influence foreign policy via legislation, appropriations, investigations, lobbying the president and other executive branch officials, and appearing in the media. The “two presidencies” thesis suggests that Congressional role in foreign policy may differ considerably from that in domestic policy (Canes-Wrone Howell, and Lewis 2008). However, the tools (agenda-setting, committee markup, unified opposition) that congress uses to influence foreign policy do not differ dramatically from those familiar to scholars of domestic inter-branch politics (Lindsay and Ripley 1992; Marshall and Prins 2016). Congress may also serve as a bridge between public opinion and US foreign policy in that members of Congress rely on electoral support and are more responsive to their constituencies than the president (Fenno 1978). Note that subsequent success by presidents in working around Congress has relegated the legislative body to an oversight role when it comes to policy and appropriations, exemplified by the Iran-Contra affair (Crabb, Antizzo, and Saredidine 2000).<sup>12</sup>

To capture the roles of Congress, we assign “0” when the president is from the same party as the Senate; however, when the president is from the opposite party, the value is the margin against the president in terms of seats in the Senate. We also create an interaction term by multiplying Congress by the media score (Howell and Pevehouse 2007).

Greater emphasis on the use of armed forces, along with the rise to prominence of other bureaucracies in the Beltway such as the Department of Defense (DoD) and National Security Council (NSC), may have contributed to downplaying the State Department in the realm of international security.<sup>13</sup> With its massive size, the Department of Defense, in particular,

<sup>11</sup>We also included economic sanctions as a control variable to see whether the failure of sanctions leads to humanitarian interventions. The variable achieves no significance across models, so the results are not reported to save space.

<sup>12</sup>Other studies, however, see congressional assertiveness extending well into the 1990 s since “congressional behavior materially changed following the Vietnam war” and becoming much more partisan and skeptical of Executive activities (Lindsay and Ripley 1992, 419).

<sup>13</sup>Advice from the State Department, moreover, should go through the institutionalized NSC process before it reaches the president (Rosati and DeWitt 2011, Rosati and Scott 2010). Note that the cabinet in the US is not an elected body with a final say over policy but instead a formal group of advisers with whom the president frequently consults for expertise and information (Risse-Kappen 1991; Weaver and Rockman 1993).

is in a highly advantaged position to defend military ventures already in place if and when pressures for withdrawal occur. The power of inertia can be expected to come into play once resources are invested, with the DoD and NSC as key actors (Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Rice 2011). Therefore, we include a lagged term for the US intervention variable.

Previous studies also indicate that the United States may dispatch its military abroad to promote democratic political systems (Choi and James 2016; Kurth 2006; Pearson, Walker, and Stern 2006). The Polity data set (Marshall and Jaggers 2007) provides a score from full democracy (+10) to full autocracy (−10). Higher values of Polity's measure are associated with democratic institutions, and therefore may be at lower risk of US humanitarian intervention. Several studies suggest that when Washington sees economic misery in underdeveloped countries, it may be more willing to intervene militarily (Choi 2013). Economic development is operationalized as the logged value of the gross domestic product at purchasing power parity per capita. Gleditsch (2002) and the new 6.3 version of the Penn World Tables are data sources for the economic development variable (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2009).

Alliances refer to common strategic and security interests (Russett and Oneal 2000). The US president should be less likely to intervene militarily in the domestic affairs of allies (Russett and Oneal 2000). Using the Correlates of War Formal Alliance data set to identify formal alliance between the United States and other countries (Gibler 2008; Gibler and Sarkees 2004), we record countries militarily allied with the United States as "1". Despite the fact, the United States is capable of engaging in long-distance battles using multiple aircraft carriers, geographic distance should still be a factor for Washington as it considers intervention (Russett and Oneal 2000). We calculate the geographical distance between Washington, D. C. and other states using the EuGene Software (Bennett and Stam 2000). In the post-Cold War era, which no longer includes an action-reaction process with the USSR, military intervention for the United States becomes "a matter of choice rather than compulsion" (Jakobsen 2000, 131). Pressure for rapid crisis management in this new era may be greater, all other things being equal, than during the Cold War (Livingston and Eachus 1995). The post-Cold War variable is recorded as "1" for the years after 1990 and "0" otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

Oil dependence abroad may limit the security options of the White House. In particular, the US military's oil dependence may weaken US decisions on humanitarian intervention (Choi 2013; Choi and James 2016; Hall 1992). US oil dependence is operationalized as the net imports of total crude oil and products into the United States by country in thousand barrels per day, compiled by the US Energy Information Administration.<sup>15</sup> The greater the

<sup>14</sup>When the post-Cold War is recorded after the USSR's collapse in 1991, the results are virtually the same.

<sup>15</sup>[https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet\\_move\\_net\\_i\\_a\\_ep00\\_IMN\\_mbbldpd\\_a.htm](https://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_net_i_a_ep00_IMN_mbbldpd_a.htm).

strategic importance of a state to the United States, the more likely the United States is to intervene (Yoon 1997). Since the allocation of US military assistance is affected by the strategic significance of the country to Washington (Poe 1991), we use US military assistance as a proxy for US strategic interests. US military assistance is foreign assistance in millions of US dollars that is reported by the recipient country. Data are garnered from the US Overseas Loans and Grants, informally known as the Greenbook.<sup>16</sup> Since the outbreak of a civil war brings about human misery and property damage, the United States may deploy its soldiers for assistance (Choi 2016). To account for this argument, we rely on the Uppsala and PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.<sup>17</sup> A civil war is defined as a contested incompatibility between a government and one or more opposition groups which results in at least 25 battle deaths in a year. The civil war onset variable is coded as "1" when a new civil war occurs and "0" when no civil conflict occurred within the past 2 years. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the study are produced in Table 1.

Logit with clustering is employed as the main statistical model because the dependent variable is binary and because the data are clustered on countries. Three robustness checks are introduced: logit splines, generalized estimating equations (GEEs), and rare events logit. The first two methods are designed to address the autoregressive nature of the pooled panel data of US military intervention (Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998; Russett and Oneal 2000; Zorn 2001), while the last method purports to deal with the presence of excessive zeros (King and Zeng 2001). Fixed-effects logit is not used because Schneider, Barbieri, and Gleditsch (2003, 22) warn that the estimation method "does not seem ideal for binary dependent variables whose one outcome represents a rare event." When country fixed-effects are implemented, we encounter a dramatic loss of observations. Because the large number of dropped observations is not random, we forego the control for country fixed-effects and instead include dummy variables for regions. Results from random-effects logit are very similar to those from the other methods and therefore, in the interest of parsimony, are not reported below.

## Empirical Results

As an effort to assess how the institutionalization of human rights within the Department of State influences the president's use of military forces against human rights abusers, we display estimated results in Table 2.<sup>18</sup> The table shows

<sup>16</sup><https://data.usaid.gov/>.

<sup>17</sup><https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/ucdp-data/>.

<sup>18</sup>When various diagnostics such as a Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test, a test for linearity (Box-Tidwell), and an analysis of outliers are performed, no concerns arise. For instance, the models turn out to fit the data well, according to Hosmer and Lemeshow's test that yields a large *p*-value. Also, note that three sets of multicollinearity diagnostics (i.e.,  $R^2$  statistics, variance inflation factors, eigenvalues) show no severe multicollinearity among the independent variables.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Observation	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum
US Humanitarian military intervention <sub>t</sub>	3,500	0.010	0.098	0	1
Department of State <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	2.477	1.159	1	5
Fariss' Human rights protection <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.105	1.256	-2.839	3.949
CIRI's Physical integrity rights <sub>t-1</sub>	3,193	4.769	2.341	0	8
Amnesty International <sub>t-1</sub>	2,967	2.772	1.091	1	5
Mass media <sub>t-1</sub> ( <i>The New York Times</i> )	3,500	15.522	17.174	0	188
State <sub>t-1</sub> * Media <sub>t-1</sub> ( <i>The New York Times</i> )	3,500	43.169	59.356	0	575
Mass media <sub>t-1</sub> (Newsweek & Economist)	2,115	0.362	1.185	0	25.5
State <sub>t-1</sub> * Media <sub>t-1</sub> (Newsweek & Econ)	2,115	1.266	4.569	0	102
Congress <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	4.612	4.886	0	12
Congress <sub>t-1</sub> * Media <sub>t-1</sub> ( <i>The New York Times</i> )	3,500	71.107	128.440	0	1,100
Congress <sub>t-1</sub> * Media <sub>t-1</sub> (News and Econ)	2,115	2.880	10.817	0	255
Defense-related bureaucracy <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.008	0.089	0	1
Democracy <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	1.112	7.345	-10	10
Economic deveopment <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	9.002	1.157	5.832	11.556
US Alliances <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.233	0.423	0	1
US Geographical distance <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	9.134	1.149	0	9.920
Post-Cold War <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.606	0.489	0	1
US Oil dependence <sub>t-1</sub>	1,655	65.886	255.531	-105	1,980
US Strategic interests <sub>t-1</sub>	3,278	52.965	302.893	0	3,615.90
Civil war <sub>t-1</sub>	3,473	0.037	0.188	0	1
Americas <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.171	0.377	0	1
Europe <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.210	0.408	0	1
Africa <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.331	0.470	0	1
Middle East <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.091	0.287	0	1
Asia <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.160	0.367	0	1
Oceania <sub>t-1</sub>	3,500	0.033	0.179	0	1

baseline models that include the human rights institutionalization denoted as Department of State, mass media that is measured through *The New York Times* Archive, other confounding variables, and regional dummies.<sup>19</sup> The overall results in the table provide strong support for our main contention: when it comes to foreign policy decision making, *US presidents are more likely to be in line with their own expert advisors than media reports or outside organizations*. To save space, the following discussion focuses on the two variables of theoretical interest: the Department of State and Mass media.

Across the board, the Department of State is significantly different from zero and in the expected direction (the coefficient sign is positive), while Mass media are not. This comparison suggests that the key element of US humanitarian military intervention comes from the internal reporting collected by the Department of State rather than the outside source of mass media. That is, the State Department's human rights evaluations strongly influence the onset of US humanitarian intervention. We find no significant effect of the media, though several previous studies claim that graphic images sway public opinion and elite attention, thereby increasing political momentum for intervention. As noted, the results are based on the assumption that

<sup>19</sup>The results from logit splines, GEEs, and rare events logit are reported in Appendix 5.

US humanitarian intervention occurs 1 year after the political maneuvering of the State Department and mass media. However, it is also plausible that the White House may, within the same period, launch a military campaign against extremely intense human rights violations. We test this plausibility and display the results in Appendix 6. Though a bit weak, the significance of the human rights institutionalization remains, while mass media fail to emerge as a solid determinant of US humanitarian intervention.

We test the possibility of an interaction effect between the State Department and mass media in two ways. First, a simple correlation analysis is conducted. It turns out that the correlation between the State Department and the media measure of *The New York Times* is only 0.24. A severe correlation problem exists if and only if the level exceeds 0.80 (Belsley, Kuh, and Welsch 1980). This correlation analysis should also alleviate the concern about the indexing thesis: media depend on government officials when crafting foreign policy coverage (Bennett 1990). That is, although expert opinion may work its way regularly into media content, it is *not* as influential as the indexing hypothesis implies. Second, we use a multiplicative interaction modeling for a more sophisticated test. As shown in Table 2, a multiplicative interaction modeling aims to assess a potential interaction effect between the State Department and Mass media. We notice that while the Department of State is significantly different from zero, Mass media and State\*Media fail to achieve significance, indicating no support for the institutions and media interaction effect. To better help the reader, we offer visual evidence for the null finding on the interaction effect in Appendix 7.<sup>20</sup>

Since statistical significance does not necessarily indicate a meaningful finding in a practical sense, the substantive effects of variables should be reported for empirical verification. We find that substantive effects are in line with statistical significance. For example, according to the results reported in Column 1, the risk that any country will induce US humanitarian intervention increases by (a) 43% if its human rights violations increase from "0" to "3" on the 5-point scale, (b) 185% if the violations increase to "4", and (c) 462% if the violations increase to "5".

We discover that most confounding variables do not fare well across the models in Table 2. The coefficient on Congress is not significantly different from zero, meaning no evidence of effective congressional influence in the process of US foreign policy-making with regard to humanitarian intervention. As expected, defense-related institutions such as the DoD and NSC appear to make their voices heard effectively in the White House.

Defying our expectations, control variables for Democracy, Economic Development, US Alliance, US Geographic distance, and Post-Cold War

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<sup>20</sup>When conducting additional empirical tests with an alternative media measure of *Newsweek* and *The Economist* combined, we again find no significant media influence on US humanitarian intervention (see Appendix 4).

**Table 2.** Human rights institutionalization and US humanitarian military intervention.

Variable	Logit Clustering			
	1	2	3	4
Department of State <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.750*** (0.150)	0.813*** (0.183)	0.692** (0.224)	0.721** (0.252)
Mass media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.013 (0.007)	0.010 (0.007)	0.009 (0.018)	0.010 (0.020)
State <sub><i>t-1</i></sub> * Media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			0.002 (0.006)	0.001 (0.007)
Congress <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			−0.076 (0.059)	−0.074 (0.056)
Congress <sub><i>t-1</i></sub> * Media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			0.000 (0.002)	−0.000 (0.002)
Defense-related bureau <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	4.057*** (0.494)	4.111*** (0.483)	3.755*** (0.494)	3.770*** (0.506)
Democracy <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			0.051 (0.038)	0.046 (0.037)
Economic deveopment <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			−0.334 (0.246)	−0.558 (0.326)
US Alliances <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			−0.084 (0.551)	−0.178 (0.449)
US Geo distance <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			0.048 (0.155)	−0.015 (0.123)
Post-Cold War <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			−0.300 (0.435)	−0.268 (0.432)
Americas <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>		0.155 (0.798)		0.066 (0.720)
Africa <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>		−0.241 (0.765)		−0.778 (0.932)
Middle East <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>		0.148 (0.790)		0.165 (0.806)
Asia <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>		0.492 (0.745)		0.229 (0.847)
Oceania <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>		1.323 (0.847)		1.187 (0.905)
Constant	−7.630*** (0.615)	−7.915*** (0.752)	−4.600 (3.377)	−2.045 (3.997)
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup>	106.17	161.2	158.67	241.77
Prob > Chi <sup>2</sup>	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Log pseudolikelihood	−135.00	−133.67	−131.93	−129.91
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.29	0.3	0.31	0.32
Observations	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500

Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

\**p* <.05, \*\**p* <.01, \*\*\**p* <.001, two-tailed tests.

have little or no bearing on US military campaigns on humanitarian missions. Countries' levels of democracy and economic development seem to be insignificant factors that influence the decision of US humanitarian military intervention. In addition, whether a country is in an alliance with the United States might not be important when it comes to humanitarian intervention.

Geopolitical interests are often at the center of US foreign policy decision making (Flint et al. 2009). To assess the significance of US geopolitical interests, we create six regional dummies, namely, the Americas, Europe,

the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. For estimation, Europe – a region considered to maintain high levels of human rights protection – is used as the baseline for comparison. Contrary to the expectation, we see no regional differences with respect to US humanitarian intervention. Despite the fact that the post-Cold war era has a new standard for humanitarian intervention, the effect of the Post-Cold War variable seems to be insignificant, as with other independent and control variables in this study. This insignificance might be related to two contrasting views of humanitarian intervention in the post-Cold War era, as described above. While pressure for humanitarian intervention has increased in the post-Cold War era, it also became unnecessary for the United States to react to all crises given the absence of security competition with the USSR collapsed.

In [Table 3](#), we introduce the extended modeling with three more confounding variables that may affect United States' intervention decisions. As noted, we use this extended modeling due to a shorter data collection of the US Oil dependence variable that is only available since 1993. As long as the impacts of the human rights institutionalization and media are concerns, the overall results remain the same as those in [Table 2](#). While the Department of State is statistically significant in all models, both Mass media and State\*Mass media are not. This evidence indicates that when US presidents dispatch soldiers abroad to protect victims of human rights violations, their policy decisions appear to be in line with the State Department information rather than outside influence of mass media. The newly added control variables do not achieve significance across the board. In addition, the control variables do not cause the human rights institutionalization variable to become insignificant.

## Conclusion

Our study examined the influence that the US State Department has on the use of foreign military intervention as a policy tool to enforce human rights standards. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, we find that the US State Department plays a prominent role in the US foreign policy process surrounding military intervention – primarily via its role in reporting human rights abuses around the world. Beginning in the 1970s, under former Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan, the United States institutionalized the human rights reporting and advocacy in the foreign policy decision-making process. While humanitarian interventions began to rise in prominence under those three presidents, the end of the Cold War further empowered both the United States and United Nations to engage in a series of military interventions to protect citizens from human rights abuses. Concerns about both the legitimacy and effectiveness of these interventions led to the emergence of the R2P doctrine, under which both the United States and United



**Table 3.** Human rights institutionalization and US humanitarian military intervention: more control variables.

Variable	Logit Clustering		Logit Spines		GEEs		Rare Events Logit		6	7	8
	1		2		3		4	5			
Department of State <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.809** (0.314)		0.942* (0.392)		0.883** (0.311)		1.013** (0.366)	0.954** (0.329)	1.024** (0.360)	0.951** (0.363)	0.991* (0.396)
Mass media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.017 (0.028)		0.050 (0.039)		0.021 (0.028)		0.055 (0.037)	0.025 (0.029)	0.060 (0.038)	0.040 (0.031)	0.072* (0.033)
State <sub><i>t-1</i></sub> * Media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.009 (0.009)		-0.002 (0.012)		0.008 (0.009)		-0.003 (0.011)	0.008 (0.009)	-0.003 (0.011)	0.003 (0.010)	-0.008 (0.010)
Congress <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.157 (0.097)		0.167 (0.095)		0.152 (0.105)		0.160 (0.095)	0.156 (0.101)	0.172 (0.095)	0.154 (0.094)	0.154 (0.084)
Congress <sub><i>t-1</i></sub> * Media <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	-0.026 (0.015)		-0.028* (0.014)		-0.026 (0.014)		-0.027* (0.013)	-0.029 (0.015)	-0.030* (0.013)	-0.024 (0.015)	-0.024 (0.013)
Defense-related bureau <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	3.462*** (0.859)		3.366*** (0.849)								
Democracy <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.044 (0.052)		0.030 (0.050)		0.062 (0.055)		0.052 (0.052)	0.071 (0.055)	0.061 (0.053)	0.064 (0.048)	0.053 (0.041)
Economic development <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	-0.209 (0.180)		-0.649 (0.455)		-0.311 (0.183)		-0.825 (0.598)	-0.379* (0.185)	-0.997 (0.586)	-0.355 (0.204)	-0.918 (0.482)
US Alliances <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.005 (0.889)		-0.186 (0.773)		0.413 (1.002)		0.387 (0.803)	-0.241 (0.842)	-0.178 (0.774)	0.080 (0.735)	0.202 (0.667)
US Geo distance <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.743 (0.992)		-0.428 (0.565)		0.764 (1.145)		-0.403 (0.704)	0.363 (0.930)	-0.489 (0.658)	0.304 (0.784)	-0.763 (0.584)
US Oil dependence <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	-0.008** (0.003)		-0.006 (0.005)		-0.008* (0.004)		-0.005 (0.006)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.000 (0.003)	0.006 (0.005)
US Strategic interests <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	-0.003 (0.002)		-0.002 (0.002)		-0.004 (0.003)		-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.009** (0.003)	0.009** (0.003)
Civil war <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>	0.406 (0.905)		0.304 (0.969)		0.362 (0.751)		0.329 (0.853)	0.277 (0.724)	0.201 (0.766)	0.303 (0.790)	0.201 (0.839)
Americas <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			-0.274 (1.093)				-0.684 (1.350)		-0.775 (1.082)		-1.157 (0.923)
Africa <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			-1.147 (1.267)				-1.458 (1.679)				-1.879 (1.454)
Asia <sub><i>t-1</i></sub>			1.048				0.791		0.439		0.369

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

Variable	Logit Clustering		Logit Splines		GEEs		Rare Events Logit		7	8
	1		2		3		4			
Oceania <sub>t-1</sub>			(0.847) 2.387* (1.184)				(1.211) 2.298* (1.041)		(0.978) 2.260* (1.030)	(0.806) 2.434 (1.248)
Constant	-13.149 (10.303)		1.072 (7.017)		-11.330 (11.155)		3.533 (9.075)	-8.470 (9.645)	4.900 (8.770)	-7.862 (8.356) 7.386 (7.578)
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup>	93.88		115.92		83.99		79.38	71.67	69.04	
Prob > Chi <sup>2</sup>	0.001		0.001		0.001		0.001	0.001	0.001	
Log pseudolikelihood	-55.62		-52.72		-61.08		-57.91			
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.38		0.41		0.31		0.35			
Observations	1,549		1,549		1,549		1,549	1,549	1,549	1,549

Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.  
\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001, two-tailed tests.  
Post-Cold War and Middle East are not included due to a lack of variation.

Nations continue to engage in use of the military – like the 2013 intervention in Libya – to enforce international standards of human rights. Our quantitative analysis of the State Department reporting from 1980–2005 indicates that rather than mass media reporting, geopolitics, and political pressure, the institutionalization of human rights evaluations has helped Washington deploy its armed forces to punish human rights abusers abroad. This indicates that, at the policy level, protecting human rights around the world is central to US foreign policy.

This study yields at least three important findings. First, we find that the institutionalization of human rights reporting within the State Department has allowed the United States to remain a prominent player in relation to the choice of humanitarian intervention and overall security policy. Second, it suggests that the conduct of US foreign policy in the future may be altered if the institutionalization of human rights within the State Department is marginalized or comes to an end. This second finding takes on increased salience as the State Department has taken a back seat in terms of both funding and staffing under the Trump Administration. Third, we find that the State Department reports themselves represent both an accurate accounting of human rights conditions and an important policy tool for presidents and their security advisers, providing a means for empirical assessment of US policy goals and the information they have to inform their decisions.<sup>21</sup>

Taken together, our analysis indicates that social scientific research regarding US foreign policy that focuses on the State Department, one of the few institutional constants in US foreign policy advising, is long overdue. From the standpoint of popular perceptions, our analysis reveals a surprising and important result: State Department expertise, rather than media reporting or independent advocacy, is strongly correlated with humanitarian military intervention by the United States. The emphasis in this initial study is to make the case that the State Department's role in military intervention policy deserves greater scrutiny, with an initial statistical comparison focusing on media coverage.

While our results are thought-provoking, it is important to recognize its limitations and discuss high-priority avenues for further research. Looking at intervention in terms of phases, to be examined in sequence for variation, certainly would be a worthwhile extension. One possibility would be an in-depth examination of the unfolding series of steps in relation to Kurds and Shi'a in Iraq, who had been quite well protected by no-fly zones prior to the US-led invasion of 2003. Consider, in a more general sense, the likely importance of oil in the context of the Middle East and Gulf region (Yetiv 2004). Concerns about security along various dimensions might compete

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<sup>21</sup>To this point, few existing studies had assessed the roles played by foreign policy institutions and/or media influence in deciding upon US military actions related to human rights abuses (Van Belle 2012, 287).

with, or even outweigh, the humanitarian element in an account for various US interventions and instances of inaction. Thus, it becomes interesting to focus in greater detail on Israeli policy vis-à-vis Gaza. And it almost goes without saying that, in a case such as the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, stated humanitarian reasons might serve as a front for political interests of one sort or another.

In light of the preceding qualifications and nuances, more in-depth research obviously would be needed to say more about how cause and effect might be operating in the context of US interventions. Process tracing comes to the fore. Consider, for example, the role that the Secretary of State might play in the pulling and hauling associated with bureaucratic politics. Case-specific analysis might show that State Department reports make a difference, but perhaps require some degree of representation from leadership in order to affect policy. This is a standard story of intergovernmental bargaining, most closely associated with models from Allison (1972). For example, Secretary of State Madeline Albright (2003) played a significant role in stimulating the US intervention into Kosovo. Moreover, interesting to ponder in a case format is the degree to which any influence from human rights reporting by the State Department is *intentional*. Since the State Department's conventional role is to advocate for the implementation of nonviolent approaches such as diplomacy and sanctions, it becomes even more interesting to ponder any association its reports would seem to have with the use of military force in dealing with humanitarian crises.

Further work, whether qualitative or quantitative, should be aware that the impact of media in an increasingly integrated and rapidly changing world is likely to be highly nuanced in practice. As Goebel (1995, 18) observes, the "media will be more diverse and fragmented in the future." Future research, therefore, could focus upon less US-centric elements of political communication. Consider, for instance, the "Al Jazeera Effect," identified by Seib (2011, 187). It is possible that more complex relationships are waiting to be identified if a focus on Beltway-centered media is relaxed in favor of a more inclusive assessment.

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