

The standard approach to any military intervention is interest-based, capacity-based, or threat-based. None of these approaches are adequate to address the challenges of the contemporary world. The interest-based approach is inherently state-based (or territorial) and incapable of addressing far away problems, seemingly unrelated to a narrowly defined national interest. The capacity-based approach is inadequate because U.S. capabilities and resources are basically limitless. The threat-based approach is not viable since the U.S. is rarely seriously threatened. Therefore, a new, needs-based approach should be developed. It should address the fundamental needs of the U.S. today, including:

- a safe and secure homeland
- a dynamic economic engine
- a desire to maintain strong friends and allies
- predictable relations with others

A point was made that the bar for "humanitarian" intervention is set too high. It is necessary to re-evaluate what is U.S. national interest and where and when should U.S. troops be deployed. How many lives lost and how much suffering does it take for the U.S. to pay attention? Preventing genocide and massive violence is surely in the U.S. interest. Using force only as a last resort is also problematic because it undermines (the use of force for) prevention.

The assertion that public support is a prerequisite for the government to intervene abroad is false. The experience from the Gulf War, for instance, demonstrates that public support requires political leadership.

The new administration has made apparent its disinclination to engage in "humanitarian" interventions. This stand reflects the view that former President Bill Clinton had too many priorities. Nonetheless, there are factors that balance this assertion:

- The budget will sustain a commitment to over-seas assistance, including funding for humanitarian organisations. These funds may well be used for "humanitarian" interventions.
- While U.S. engagement abroad may become modest, the U.S. can still leverage (i.e. support and encourage) engagement of its friends and allies in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and nation-building operations.
- The U.S. could contribute to building regional peacekeeping capacity. Attention was drawn to the training of Nigerian troops for peacekeeping duties in Sierra Leone. However, a caution was made not to ignore the regional dynamics. Nigeria, like the U.S., has vital interests to defend and to promote.
- An argument could be made that it is in the U.S. national interest to intervene abroad, if not to relieve suffering, then to diffuse instability with potential spill-over effects.