UNITED STATES GLOBAL AGENDA AND THE PRINCIPLES OF NON INTERVENTION AND INTERFERENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CASES

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Abstract

The fundamental norms of contemporary international relations and international law are made up of principles of sovereignty, non-intervention and non-interference. Threatening or using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of States is proscribed by the Charter of the United Nations, at the same time; Article 2(7) places restraints on intervention in issues that are fundamentally within the domestic jurisdiction of States. These principles notwithstanding, States that are powerful, especially the United States of America, have consistently undertaken military, intelligence, coercive and law-enforcement actions within the territories of other independent states. Operations such as these are usually seen as justification for counter-terrorism, national security, and humanitarian protection, crime prevention across nations, the saving of citizens, democratic governance, or exercising the innate right of self-defense. This paper takes a look at the tension that exists between the global agenda of the United States and the principles of non-intervention and non-interference through four instances namely: the 2011 U.S. operation that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan; the 2020 assassination of Major General Qassem Soleimani of Iran in Baghdad, Iraq; the operation of the United States' special forces in 2020 that rescued its citizen, Philip Walton, in Nigeria; as well as the US operation of January 2026 that led to the arrest and removal of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to the United States. This paper uses qualitative historical and documentary analysis to examine these instances within the framework of the United Nations Charter, Customary International Law, the Inter-National Court of Justice jurisprudence and the African Union's commitment to sovereignty and non-interference. It puts forth argument that the global agenda of the United States exposes a continued tension between the formal universality of international law and the uneven power distribution within the international system. Though there are legal differences among the circumstances surrounding the four cases, all of them illustrate the capability of countries that are powerful to stretch, reinterpret or selectively apply principles of sovereignty, self-defense, counter-terrorism and international security. Drawing inference from Ukpe (2022) on his criticism of selective application of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine in Nigeria, the study argues that international norms cannot achieve legitimacy only when intervention undertaken by powerful nations is upheld while the intervention undertaken by weak nations is condemned. It comes to the conclusion that no matter the political or military power of the state concerned, a more credible international order needs applicability of the principles of sovereign equality, non-intervention, territorial integrity and international accountability that are consistent.

Keywords: United States, global agenda, sovereignty, non-intervention, non-interference, international law, self-defense, counter-terrorism, Qassem Soleimani, Osama bin Laden, Philip Walton, Nicolás Maduro, Nigeria, Venezuela.

Introduction

The international system is basically founded on the principle that sovereign states are equal legally and as well possess the same territorial integrity and political independence. Though they differ greatly economically and in terms of military capability, technological sophistication and diplomatic influence, there is no formal establishment of hierarchy of sovereignty by international law. Article 2(1) of the Charter of the United Nations acknowledges the principle of the sovereign equality of all its member states, and Article 2(4) strongly condemns threatening or using force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state (United Nations, 1945).

From the sovereign equality follows logically the principle of non-intervention. When states have independent political authority in their domains, other states are generally restricted from forceful interference in their internal or domestic affairs. This principle is mainly important for developing and weaker states because their sovereignty can virtually become useless if developed and powerful states can gain access to their territories, carry out military operations, overthrow governments, assassinate officials or extract individuals without the approval of the territorial state.

In any case, the present day international system has come up with a remarkable contradiction. The contradiction is that while sovereignty and non-intervention are central principles of international law, states that are powerful continue to uphold intervention by implementing national security, counter-terrorism, human rights, humanitarian protection, democracy, transnational crime and self-defense. In this contradiction, the US takes a prominent position due to its extraordinary capabilities military wise, economically, technologically and diplomatically.

The United States of America views maintaining a favorable international order as a significant aspect of its national interest. Thus, its global agenda involves the protection of national security, fighting terrorism, securing strategic interests, maintaining alliances, protecting its citizens, defending democratic values, safeguarding international economic interests and preventing the emergence of hostile powers. These objectives give rise to extensive involvement of America in different regions of the world.

There is bound to be an issue when the pursuit of these objectives has to do with undertaking of actions within the territories of other sovereign states without their prior approval or without authorization from the United Nations Security Council. In a situation like this, it is pertinent to ask whether the language of national security can legally change an otherwise proscribed intervention into a legitimate act.

This question is particularly pertinent for developing states. For instance, African countries have historically undergone/witnessed colonial domination, political arrangements imposed

externally, military interventions and foreign interference. Consequent upon this, the African Union has emphasized sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference, and at the same time acknowledges limited circumstances in which collective intervention may be justified (African Union, 2000).

Ukpe (2022) contributes significantly to this argument by assessing the application of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine to Nigeria. His assessment of the applicability of the doctrine highlights a basic or principal contradiction in the international system. This contradiction is the fact that interventionist principles may be strongly promoted when they advance the interests of powerful international actors but become difficult to apply consistently when circumstances involve strategically important states or powerful political interests. Given this situation, the matter or problem lies on who determines when intervention is justified and under what institutional authority, rather than on whether intervention can ever be justified.

This paper furthers the argument by assessing the four cases that involved the United States; which are: the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011; the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq in 2020; the rescue of Philip Walton in Nigeria in 2020; and the January 2026 operation through which the United States captured and removed Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela. These cases are pertinent in this discourse because they involve different justifications and different levels of intervention.

The argument centers in the point that the global agenda of the United States demonstrates the persistent tension between great-power politics and the universal principles of international law. The contention of the paper is not that every operation of the United States constitutes the same kind of unlawful intervention; instead it argues that the cases illustrate how the interpretation of sovereignty, self-defense, counter-terrorism and national security can become deeply influenced by asymmetries of international power.

Statement of the Problem

The ban on intervention is one of the basic principles of the present day international system. All the same, intervention remains a recurring or constant characteristic of international politics. Powerful states have been interfering in the domestic affairs of weaker states via military intervention, covert operations, economic sanctions, political pressure, intelligence operations and support for preferred political actors.

The end of the Cold War never ruled out this problem, rather, it saw to the emergence of new rationales for intervention. Therefore, humanitarian intervention, democracy promotion, counter-terrorism, protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect kept featuring prominently in international discourse.

According to Ukpe (2022), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) development signifies an important change in the traditional understanding of sovereignty. Sovereignty does not merely covey rights against external intervention; rather, it continuously bears responsibilities toward populations. However, the applicability of such principles is controversial due to the existence of possible selective enforcement.

The main challenge is the gap that exists between the formal equality of states under

international law and the practical inequality of states in international politics. If a developing state (country) that is weak happens to violate the territorial integrity of another state, it may face penalties such as international condemnation, sanctions or military consequences. On the other hand, if such action is undertaken by a developed or a powerful state, then such a state may characterize the action as self-defense, counter-terrorism, humanitarian protection or the enforcement of international security.

The case studies that are analyzed in this article put forward several related questions such as:

1. What is the level or extent of conformity of the U.S. foreign policy to the principles of non-intervention and non-interference?

2. What are the circumstances that a state can use force lawfully within the territory of another sovereign state?

3. Can counter-terrorism justify unilateral military operations without the consent of the territorial state?

4. Did the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan conform to the sovereignty of Pakistan and international law?

5. Was the killing of Qassem Soleimani in consonance with the international law governing self-defense?

6. Did the rescue of Philip Walton constitute unlawful intervention in Nigeria, or did Nigerian consent provides a legal basis for the operation?

7. What are the international-law implications of the January 2026 capture and removal of NicolásMaduro from Venezuela?

8. What do these cases reveal about the selective application of international norms?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to give analysis of the relationship between the global agenda of the United States and the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in international relations; while the specific objectives are to:

i. survey the legal and theoretical foundations of non-intervention and non-interference;

ii. give analysis of the primary motivations underlying the global agenda of the United States;

iii. investigate the operation of the United States against Osama bin Laden in Pakistan;

iv. examine the killing of Major General Qassem Soleimani;

v. analyze the rescue operation of the United States that involved Philip Walton in Nigeria;

vi. assess the international-law implications of the capture and removal of NicolásMaduro from Venezuela;

vii. give a comparison of the legal justifications advanced by the United States in the four cases; and

viii. assess the implications of these cases for sovereignty, international law and the international system.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

i. What are the principal legal and theoretical foundations of the principles of non-intervention and non-interference?

ii. In what way does the global agenda of the United States interact with the principles of non-intervention and non-interference?

iii. What was the extent of consistency of the killing of Osama bin Laden by the US

with

international law?

iv. Can it be said that the killing of Qassem Soleimani was lawfully justified under the right of self-defense?

v. Could the rescue of Philip Walton constitute a violation of Nigerian sovereignty?

vi. What are the legal implications of the capture and removal of Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela by the United States?

vii. What is the comparison of the legal justifications promoted by the United States across the cases of Osama bin Laden, Qassem Soleimani, Philip Walton and NicolásMaduro?

viii. What do the four cases expose concerning the selective application of international norms?

Methodology

This article applies qualitative research method based primarily on historical and documentary analysis. The design is so adopted because the work is concerned with international legal principles, foreign-policy decisions, military operations, diplomatic statements and documented historical occurrences.

Information were sourced from both primary and secondary documented sources such as: the United Nations Charter, judgments from International Court of Justice, United Nations reports, resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, African Union legal instruments, official statements by governments, reports of international organizations, scholarly books and journal articles, as well as accounts from credible documentary.

The paper adopts a comparative case-study approach, citing four cases which represent different forms and justifications of the United States intervention. The cases are:

- counter-terrorism: Osama bin Laden;
- anticipatory or responsive self-defense: Qassem Soleimani;
- rescue of a national: Philip Walton;
- forceful removal of a foreign head of state: Nicolás Maduro.

This comparison is given interpretative analysis, not statistical; and what forms the core analytical question is, does the justification cited for each operation has compatibility with the established principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention and the prohibition of force?

Conceptual Clarification

Sovereignty

Sovereignty refers to the complete/absolute power or authority that a state has to govern itself, its populace and its freedom (independence) from foreign political authority. There are both internal and external aspects of modern sovereignty. While the internal aspect has to do with the state exercising supreme/absolute governmental authority; external is concerned with possessing independence from the coercive authority of other states. The Charter of the United Nations puts sovereignty at the foundation of international order through Article 2(1), and by this, the sovereign equality of all members are established. Moreover, sovereignty should not be perceived as a limitless license for governments to infringe upon fundamental human rights. After the Second World War, the international order increasingly subdued states to international obligations as regards human rights, humanitarian law and international criminal responsibility.

Intervention

Non-intervention is concerned with the ban against coercive intrusion by one state in issues that fall within the internal or foreign affairs of another State. The International Court of Justice made significant declaration to the principle in Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States). The Court ruled that the principle of non-intervention is concerned with the right of every sovereign state to conduct its affairs devoid of interference from the outside and that intervention is wrongful when it has to do with coercion in affairs in which states are entitled to decide freely (ICJ, 1986). The judgment of Nicaragua is specifically significant because it concerned the United States itself. The Court rebuffed several arguments put forward by the United States and held them liable for breaching customary international law.

The non-intervention principle is also seen in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2131, which declares that no state has the right to directly or indirectly interfere in the domestic or foreign affairs of another state [United Nations General Assembly, (1965)].

Non-Interference

Non-interference and non-intervention are closely related to each other but the former can be understood more broadly. It includes the expectation that states should refrain from coercively influencing the political choices of another state. Interference can be military, political, economic, intelligence or diplomatic in nature. Accordingly, a state may intrude another state's affairs without deploying conventional military forces. This distinction is pertinent in that contemporary intervention is no longer limited to occupancy or invading. Cyber operations, intelligence operations, targeted killings, sanctions, political financing and covert activities may affect sovereign decision-making without resembling traditional warfare.

The Use of Force

According to Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, there is an establishment of broad prohibition on the use of force or threat against the territorial integrity or political independence of states.

Two cardinal exceptions generally recognized are:

1) force authorized by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII; and

2) the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense under Article 51.

The international legal argument in relation to United States interventions therefore usually take the angle of whether a particular action falls within one of these exceptions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks that this article adopts are Realism and International Legal Institutionalism.

Realism

Realism offers a useful framework for conceptualizing the global agenda of the United States. Realists view international politics as a struggle for power and security in an anarchic international system. Since there is no world government that has the capability of ensuring the survival of all states, states seek capabilities that enable them to protect their interests (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). From the realist standpoint, international law matters, but powerful states may interpret legal rules in a manner that is compatible with their security interests. The United States' global military presence, counter-terrorism strategy and willingness to undertake unilateral action can therefore be perceived as clearly manifesting power politics.

International Legal Institutionalism

International Legal Institutionalism provides a contrasting view as it lays emphasis on the importance of rules, institutions and international organizations in restraining state behavior. Based on this understanding, the legality of international action depends both on the objectives pursued as well as whether the means used are in compliance with established international rules. The tension existing between these frameworks is cardinal to this present work. While Realism offers explanation on the reason powerful states may act unilaterally; International Legal Institutionalism gives the normative basis for assessing whether those actions are lawful.

The United States Global Agenda

The United States is both a national state and a world power at the same time. Its foreign policy historically has a combination of traditional national interests and broader conceptions of international order. There are several elements that characterize the global agenda of the United States.

1) **National Security:** Protection of the United States against foreign threats forms the

primary justification for many U.S. international operations. Since the terrorist attacks of the September 11, 2001, the United States has significantly expanded its global counter-terrorism operations. The administration of President Bush characterized the struggle against Al-Qaeda and associated organizations as a global war against terrorism (Bush, 2001).

2) Counter-Terrorism: Counter-terrorism has become a major tool of the United States foreign policy. It conducted operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen among other places. The killing of Osama bin Laden typifies the most prominent example of this approach.

3) Protection of American Citizens: The United States has also deployed military might to rescue American citizens held by armed groups. The Philip Walton operation is a typical example of this category. The case is especially useful because it raises a different legal question: when a territorial government gives consent to an external rescue operation, the operation may not constitute prohibited intervention in the same way as an unauthorized invasion.

4) Promotion of Democracy and Political Change: American foreign policy has also emphasized democracy and political reform. There are debates among critics that promotion of democracy can at times get intertwined with the objectives of regime-change, especially where there is a conflict between U.S. political and strategic interests and the ones from an external government. The case of Venezuela is a particular instance in this regard.

5) Strategic and Economic Interests: The global agenda of the United States also portrays geopolitical and economic interests that are broader, such include: energy security, accessibility to strategic regions, protection of international commerce, alliance management and competition with rival powers. Realists debate that interests such as these cannot be completely severed from the language of values and international security.

Case Study One: The Killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan

1) Background

Osama bin Laden was the founder and leader of Al-Qaeda, the terrorist group that was responsible for the attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001. After many years of intelligence gathering, Osama bin Laden was located in Abbottabad, Pakistan, by the Americans. On May 2, 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs conducted Operation Neptune Spear against his compound that led to his killing and his body subsequently taken away from Pakistan. The

operation was conducted without prior notification to the Pakistani government; and the justification of the operation by the United States was primarily based on counter-terrorism and self-defense grounds.

2) The Sovereignty Question

The fundamental sovereignty question raised by the operation is: could the United States lawfully penetrate the territory of Pakistan and use lethal force without the consent of the Pakistan? The answer is complicated.

Pakistan had seriously partnered the U.S. in the war against terrorism. Even so, the operation was carried out without prior public acknowledgement of Pakistani authorization. From Pakistan's angle, the unilateral operation caused a breach in its sovereignty. The Pakistani government expressed serious concern about the operation and viewed the unilateral operation as a breach of its sovereignty.

The United Nations Charter does not generally consent to states applying force in another state's territory simply on grounds that they feel that terrorists are located there. The principal legal argument of the United States was that Pakistan was unwilling or unable to eliminate the threat posed by bin Laden. This “unable or unwilling” doctrine remains controversial in international law.

3) Was the Operation an Act of Self-Defense?

Article 51 admits the inherent right of self-defense in case of occurrence of an armed attack. The United States regarded Al-Qaeda's persistent activities as part of an ongoing armed conflict and argued that Osama bin Laden was an active operational threat.

All the same, critics have queried whether the necessary requirements for self-defense had been met by the United States. The argument is that the Americans had other means of tackling the threat; at the same time, the incursion symbolized an extraterritorial application of force without consent from Pakistan.

Partially, the legality of the operation therefore depends on one's perception of the perennial nature of the armed conflict with Al-Qaeda and the condition in which self-defense may be exercised against a non-state actor located in another state.

4) The Broader Implication

One important precedent was set in Osama bin Laden operation - that is, powerful states may support or back up their use of military force against non-state actors located within another sovereign state when the territorial state is considered unable or unwilling to eliminate the threat. The precedent has potentially wide-range of implications for Africa and other developing

states.

According to Ukpe (2022), it is necessary for international security doctrines to be carefully scrutinized because not all principles presented are all-inclusive (universal), some may have unequal consequences when weaker states are involved. The Osama bin Laden operation is a demonstration of the practical significance of this concern.

Assuming every state claimed a unilateral right to go in to the territory of another state whenever it alleged the presence of a terrorist organization, the proscription against the use of force could be severely weakened.

Case Study Two: The Assassination of Major General QassemSoleimani

1) Background

The United States on January 3, 2020, operated a drone strike close to Baghdad International Airport in Iraq that killed the then commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, Major General QassemSoleimani. Equally killed along with several others was deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The operation was ordered by U.S. President Donald Trump and the killing was justified by the United States as an act of self-defense, in which they alleged that Soleimani was planning imminent attacks against American personnel.

2) Violation of Iraqi Sovereignty

The strike occurred on the territory of Iraq, who never publicly gave consent to the assassination operation. Accordingly, the incident involves at least two sovereignty relationships:

1) the United States–Iraq relationship; and

2) the United States–Iran relationship.

Thereafter, Iraq's parliament condemned the U.S. military presence and called for the external forces to be withdrawn. The incident caused serious questions regarding territorial sovereignty of Iraq to be raised.

The United States' Self-Defense Argument

The United States principally relied on Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and the intrinsic right of self-defense. The controversy is legally concerned with the requirements of necessity and proportionality. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions concluded that the United States assassination of Soleimani was not lawful because the evidence presented by the U.S. did not establish that the attack was necessary to prevent an

imminent armed attack. [United Nations Human Rights Council, (2020)].

This assessment is highly significant. A state cannot simply characterize a foreign official as dangerous and thereby create an unlimited right to kill that individual. Self-defense requires a demonstrable armed attack or sufficiently imminent threat and must satisfy necessity and proportionality.

Targeted Killing and International Law

The Soleimani incident demonstrates the persistent problem of targeted killing. Advancement in drone technology has enhanced countries to carry out lethal operations against persons far from their own territories.

The concern from the legal angle is that judicial processes, diplomatic mechanisms and collective-security institutions may be gradually replaced by targeted killing. The legal analysis becomes even more complicated in a situation where the target is a state official, rather than a member of a conventional armed force actively engaged in hostilities.

Implications for International Order

The killing of Soleimani illustrates how the language of national security can clash with territorial sovereignty. The difference between conflict and peace becomes very much uncertain if a country can kill a senior official of another sovereign country on grounds of its unilateral assessment of a future threat.

The analysis of Ukpe (2022) in this discourse is relevant because of the attention drawn to the tension between security imperatives and the principle of sovereign equality. International security cannot exclusively rely on the unilateral judgments of powerful states.

Case Study Three: The Rescue of Philip Walton in Nigeria

1) Background

Philip Walton is an American citizen who lived in Niger Republicand was kidnapped in October 2020 by armed individuals. He was later on transported across the border into Nigeria. On October 31, 2020, the United States special operations forces conducted a rescue operation in northern Nigeria where he was rescued and returned safely. The operation attracted international attention because it involved the deployment of U.S. military personnel inside Nigerian territory.

2) Was Nigerian SovereigntyViolated?

At first instance, the rescue operation might seem like violation (breach) of territorial

sovereignty of Nigeria. Nonetheless, there are significant differences in the legal circumstances in the cases of Osama bin Laden and Soleimani.

There are reports that the operation was carried out in collaboration with Nigerian authorities. Therefore, Nigerian authorities openly welcomed the rescue and acknowledged U.S. assistance.

In a situation where a sovereign state consent to external military personnel to conduct operations within its territory, then the action cannot be adjudged unlawful intervention. Consent is by and large an important factor in examining the case.

3) Consent as a Basis for Intervention

International law acknowledges the fact that a state may give consent to external operations of the military within its territory. With consent,the unlawful character of an otherwise prohibited application of force can be removed,provided the foreign state restricts its operations within the ambit of that consent.

The Walton case thereforedemonstrates an important distinction- thepresence of a foreign military does not automatically mean unlawful intervention. The determining issue is whether the territorial state gave consent and whether the foreign state remained within the confines of that consent.

The Nigerian Dimension

The case is nonetheless important in that it illustrates the asymmetrical nature of international intervention. Nigeria, just like some other African states, faces terrorism, kidnapping, insurgency and transnational organized crime. Alliance with foreign powers can strengthen national security capacity.

All the same, African states must ensure that security collaboration does not gradually turn to a machinery for external control.

In the opinion of Ukpe (2022), African security problems must be understood within the context of sovereignty, institutional capacity and international power relations. External aid can be valuable, but African states should retain effective ownership of their security decisions.

The Philip Walton operation can therefore be viewed less as a straightforward breach of Nigerian sovereignty and more as an example of consensual intervention/security cooperation.

With this distinction, the comparative analysis is strengthened because it prevents the paper from treating all the U.S. interventions as legally being the same.

Case Study Four: The Capture and Removal of NicolásMaduro from Venezuela

Background

The most dramatic modern caseconsidered in this paper is the Venezuela operation. In January 2026, the United States conducted a military operation in Venezuela that led to the capture and removal of President NicolásMaduro from Venezuelan territory to the United States.

The operation was a clear case of an extraordinary assertion of U.S. military power against a sovereign nation and its sitting head of government. The operation raises fundamental questions relating to territorial sovereignty, political independence, the ban on the use of force, regime change, self-defense and the relationship between international law and unilateral coercion.

The Principle of Political Independence

Article 2(4) of the UN Charter protects both territorial integrity as well as political independence. The forceful removal of anincumbent head of state from his country represents an extraordinary serious interference with the political independence of that country.

The legal concern is therefore considerably broader than whether U.S. forces went into Venezuelan territory. The central question is whether aforeign power may lawfully remove the government of another sovereign state without:

- authorization by the UN Security Council;
- consent of the Venezuelan government; or
- a legally established right of self-defense.

Absent one of these recognized legal bases, forceful regime change presents a profound challenge to the post-1945 international legal order.

Counter-Narcotics and National Security

The Maduro government and Venezuelan authorities had long been accused of their involvement in narcotics trafficking and othertransnational crimes by the United States.But allegations of criminal conduct do not automatically give a legal ground to use military force against another sovereign state. International law generally distinguishes between:

*law-enforcement measures;

*economic sanctions;

*criminal prosecution;

*extradition;

*diplomatic pressure; and

*military force.

The existence of serious criminal allegations does not, by itself, convert the territorial sovereignty of another state into an unrestricted field of military action.

Regime Change and International Law

Under international law,regime change is specifically controversial. The Nicaragua judgment is pertinent because the International Court of Justice laid emphasis on the prohibition against intervention in the political affairs of another state.

The Court ruled that the principle of non-intervention prohibits other countries from interfering in issues in which each state is permitted, by the principle of state sovereignty, to decide freely (ICJ, 1986).

The forceful removal of an incumbent national government therefore presents one of the clearest forms of political intervention. The question of whether national-security claims can be used to support what would otherwise constitute prohibited interference in the political independence of another state makes the Venezuelan case consequently significant.

Comparative Analysis of the Four Cases

Different forms of the U.S. intervention revealed by the four cases.

Case	Country	U.S. Action	Principal Justification	Consent?	Principal Legal Issue
Osama bin Laden	Pakistan	Raid and killing	Counter-terrorism/self-defence	Disputed/absent publicly	Territorial sovereignty and extraterritorial self-defence
QassemSoleimani	Iraq	Targeted killing	Self-defence/prevention of attacks	No	Necessity, proportionality and sovereignty
Philip Walton	Nigeria	Special-forces rescue	Protection of U.S. citizen	Nigerian cooperation/consent reported	Scope of consent and sovereignty
NicolásMaduro	Venezuela	Capture and removal	National security/counter-narcotics and related claims	No Venezuelan consent	Use of force, political independence and regime

					change

The comparison illustrates that intervention cannot be analyzed only by examining whether foreign forces crossed a border.

Three additional importantvariables are:

1. Consent of the territorial state;
2. Existence of a recognized legal basis for force;
3. Proportionality and necessity of the operation.

The Principle of Selectivity in International Law

The problem of selectivity is one of the crucial conclusions that have emerged from these cases.International law formally considersstatesas sovereign equals but international politicsdoes not.

Powerful stateshave greater capacity of determining interpretation and enforcement of international norms.Thisgives rise to what may be termed the power paradox of international law: the countries with capability of violating international norms themost,are usually those that are most capable of resisting enforcement mechanisms.

This problem is specifically pertinent in Africa.African states frequently confront external demands concerning human rights, democracy, governance, terrorism and humanitarian protection. Even then, the same international system may bear exceptional conduct by powerful nations when their actions are presented as necessary for global security.

Ukpe (2022) projects this contradiction through his assessment of R2P doctrine and Nigeria, which emerged from the legitimate concern that sovereignty should not become a defense for mass atrocities. However, its application raises questions concerning consistency, selectivity and the possibility of powerful states using humanitarian or security language to justify political intervention.

The lesson is not that sovereignty should shield governments from being accountable; instead, the lesson is that the criteria for intervention has to be universal and institutionally determined rather than selectively applied according to geopolitical power.

The Responsibility to Protect and the Question of Selective Intervention

The endorsement of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was given by world leaders at the 2005 World Summit.The doctrine rests on three pillars:

1. the state's responsibility to protect its population;
2. the international community's responsibility to assist states in fulfilling that responsibility; and
3. the international community's responsibility to take collective action, through the UN, where a state manifestly fails to protect its

population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Responsibility to Protect has not establisheda general unilateral right for powerful states to invade other states. The emphasis on the 2005 World Summit Outcome is that collective action should occur through the Security Council in accordance with the UN Charter (United Nations General Assembly, 2005).This distinction is important.

Ukpe (2022) questions the applicability of R2P to the Nigerian case partly because the responses of the international community to African security challenges reveal the difficulty of applying interventionist doctrines consistently.

His argument is particularly crucial to the broader question examined in this work: if intervention requires lawful international authority, unilateral military action by powerful countries cannot simply be transformed into legal humanitarian or security intervention through political rhetoric.

The United States and the "Unable or Unwilling" Doctrine

The "unable or unwilling" doctrine has become particularly crucial in modern counter-terrorism.According to this standpoint, if a country or state is unable or unwilling to suppress a terrorist threat emanating from its territory, another state may use force against the terrorist group within that territory.

Argument of supporters is that the doctrine is a reflection of the realities of transnational terrorism.Critics on their part argue that it undermines the territorial sovereignty principle and creates a potentially unlimited exception to Article 2(4).

The Osama bin Laden operation offers a clear and significant example.If the doctrine is broadly accepted, countries could determine unilaterally that another state is "unable or unwilling" and then carry out military operations within its territory.Such a doctrine stands the risk of changing an exceptional security rule into a general license for intervention.

This doctrine is particularly dangerous for developing countriesbecause powerful military states possess far greater capacity to operationalize it.

Great-Power Politics and the Selective Application of International Law

The international system is characterized by significant power asymmetry. The United States possesses:

- unequalled military capabilities;
- extensive intelligence networks;
- global military bases;
- advanced satellite and surveillance technology;
- substantial economic power;
- diplomatic influence; and
- a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

These capabilities place the United States in a vantage position providing itwith exceptional capacity to pursue its interests globally.

The issue is not that the United States has interests because every state has interests. The problem comes up when the pursuit of those concerns generates an asymmetry between what international law prohibits in principle and what powerful countries can accomplish in practice.

The Nicaragua judgment offers a striking illustration. In spite of the United States' argument that its operations were related to regional security and self-defense, the International Court of Justice found breach of international law (ICJ, 1986).

This case shows that even powerful nations are legally restrained, though the practical enforcement of those restraints is challenging.

Non-Intervention and African International Relations

The principle of non-intervention is particularly significant in Africa in the sense that the continent's contemporary political history was completely shaped by external domination.

Colonialism portrayed the ultimate denial of African sovereignty. The Organization of African Unity therefore placed strong emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states (OAU, 1963).

The African Union later made some modification to this position by recognizing a right of intervention in exceptional circumstances involving genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (African Union, 2000).

This development shows that African nations do not accept sovereignty as absolute.

Moreover, the framework of African Union is fundamentally different from unilateral intervention by a foreign great power.

The AU's intervention mechanism is entrenched within an institutional framework and reflects a collaborative continental decision.

This distinction bolstersUkpe's (2022) argument that the legitimacy of international intervention relies on the stated objective, the institutional authority as well as political context in which intervention occurs.

Implications for Nigeria

Nigeria is strategically located in Africa and has faced terrorism, kidnapping, communal conflict, separatist agitation and transnational organized crime.

The Philip Walton operation illustrates that Nigeria can collaborate with powerful external countries to address transnational security threats.

Such collaboration can offer:

- intelligence;
- surveillance;
- military training;
- technological assistance;
- counter-terrorism capacity; and
- rapid-response capabilities.

At the same time, collaboration must not turn into reliance.Nigeria should retain primary authority over security operations conducted within its territory.

The disparity between security alliance and foreign intervention must therefore remain clear.

Ukpe (2022) lays emphasis on the importance of examining African security challenges within their political and institutional context instead ofassumption thatforeign intervention automatically offers the most legitimate or effective solution.

The Nigerian state must reinforce its own security institutions while engaging foreign partners on the basis of mutual consent and clearly defined legal frameworks.

Implications for International Peace and Security

The examined cases have broader implications for global security.

1. Erosion of Territorial Sovereignty

Frequent unilateral interventions may slowly weaken the principle of territorial sovereignty.If powerful countries can routinely go into other countries to assassinate or capture people, the territorial state becomes increasingly vulnerable.

2. Normalization of Targeted Killing

The use of drones and special operations creates a risk that targeted killing will turn to a normal instrument of foreign policy.Such normalization could lead to increase in international instability.

3. Weakening of the United Nations

Unilateral military action can undermine thecollective-security system of the authority of the United Nations. The essence of framing the UN Charter was partly to replace unilateral warfare with institutionalized collaborative security.

4. Increased Vulnerability of Small States

Small and developing states (nations) are affected disproportionately due to their lack of military capacity to respond to breaches of their territorial sovereignty.This creates an international system in which formal sovereign equality exists alongside practical inequality.

5. The Danger of Reciprocal Justification

Perhaps the most serious danger is reciprocal imitation.If the United States sets a precedent that countries may conduct unilateral military actions against perceived threats in another country’s territory, other countries may invoke the same rationale.

A rule considered acceptable when applied by one powerful country may become destabilizing when several countries adopted it.

Discussion

The corefinding of this paper is that the global agenda of the United Statescannot be perceived exclusively through the language of international law.It must as well be perceived through the politics of power.The United States often portrays its actions as responses to exceptional security threats.

The case of Osama bin Laden was terrorism threat; Soleimani case was alleged imminent attacks against UnitedStates personnel; while the objective of the Walton case was rescue of an American citizen; and in the Venezuela case, the operation was linked to national security, criminality and opposition to the Maduro government.

Despite the fact that the circumstances surrounding each case are different, the four cases unveil the same pattern,i.e., the United States depends so much on justifications that are security-based in defense of operations that have significant aftermath on the sovereignty of other countries. This does not necessarily indicate that all the claims presented by the United States are not legally valid.

The Philip Walton case shows why a careful legal examination is necessary.The operation cannot be placed alongside unauthorized attacks in a situation where Nigeria had given its consent to the rescue operation.

In the same vein, the legal statusof the Osama bin Laden caserelies partially on the interpretation of the post-September 11 armed attack and the law governing self-defense against non-state actors.

However, the Soleimani operation shows the risk associated with the expansion of self-defense to include threats that are not sufficiently imminent.The Venezuela operation is a demonstration of a more fundamentalcase in the sense that forceful removal of a head of government of a country creates impact onpolitical independence.

The broader lesson to learn is that objective rules shoulddetermineinternational legitimacy rather than the identity or power of the actor invoking those rules.

Major Findings

The following are the findings made in the study:

First, sovereignty remains a fundamental principle of international law.In spite of changes in the international system, statesremain legally protected against unauthorized foreign coercion.

Second, non-intervention is not acomplete banon all external involvement.Diplomatic relations, humanitarian assistance, economicand security collaborations may occur without a breach of sovereignty.

Third, the Philip Walton case shows the distinction that consent is decisive in determining the legitimacy of many foreign military operations.

Fourth, self-defense cannot be construed as an unlimited right.Necessity, proportionality and imminence remain important legal requirements.

Fifth, the boundaries of intervention has been expanded by counter-terrorism. The Osama bin Laden example demonstrates how stateshave sought to enlarge the geographical scope of self-defense against non-state actors.

Sixth, targeted killing raises serious concerns about international law.The Soleimanicaseillustrates the challenge of determining when lethal force against a foreign official is legally justified.

Seventh, change of government throughforeign military force is seriously challenging topolitical independence. TheMaduroinstance is a clear demonstration of the exceptional gravity of forcible removal of a foreign head of state.

Eighth, international law isenforcement-deficient. The legal equality of states does not rule out the political inequality of states.

Ninth, Responsibility to Protect (R2P) creates a restricted unilateral right of intervention. AsNigerian context is illustrated in Ukpe (2022), the doctrine must be considered alongside concerns of sovereignty, legitimacy, selectivity and institutional authority.

Tenth, selective application of international norms undermines their legitimacy.International law is considered most creditable when the same rules that apply to powerful states also apply to weak states alike.

Conclusion

This paper has assessedthe relationship between theglobal agenda of the United States and the principles of non-intervention and non-interference through four instances:Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, QassemSoleimani in Iraq, Philip Walton in Nigeria and NicolásMaduro in Venezuela.Analyzing the instances shows that the United States intervention cannot be handled as a single legal category.

For instance, the rescue of Philip Walton is quite different from an unauthorized military operation in the sense that Nigerian collaboration and consent constituted the core of the operation.This distinction demonstrates why scholarly analysis must not equate every foreign military presence with unlawful intervention.

The Osama bin Laden casecomes up with challenging questions bordering on sovereignty, counter-terrorism and the extraterritorial use of self-defense. The Soleimani killing raises even more serious concerns on the necessity and imminence

requirements of self-defense and the legality of targeted killing. The Maduroinstance raises a very serious fundamental issue because the forceful removal of an incumbent head of state depicts a direct challenge to territorial sovereignty and political independence.

Moreover, the broader issue, goes beyond individual cases.The modern international system continues to be characterized by a contrast between legal equality and political inequality. Every state is formally sovereign, but not every state has equal capacity to defend that sovereignty.

This contrast is mostly significant for Africa. African stateshave historically suffered domination byexternal bodies and they remain vulnerable to foreign military, political and economic tensions. More so, African security collaboration with powerful states must be based upon sincere consent, mutual respect and clearly established legal authority.

Analysis ofResponsibility to Protectand Nigeria inUkpe (2022) offers an important foundation for this conclusion. The crux of the matter is not whether international society should respond to grave security and humanitarian crises; rather the question is whether intervention will be ruled by universal standards or by selective geopolitical calculations.

The international community must therefore differentiate between a legal international aid and a unilateral coercive intervention.

The United Nations Security Council is the principal organization through which joint authorization for the use of force should ordinarily be obtained (Ukpe, 1997). In a situation where there is invocation of self-defense, the requirements of necessity and proportionality must be shown rather than merely alleged.

The principle of sovereign equality should also be intensified by ensuring that breaches of international law receive unbiased scrutiny,not minding the identity of the perpetrator.

Ultimately, consistency is the pillar upon which credibility of the international system depends. International law cannotsustain legitimacy if sovereignty is perceived as sacred wheninvoked by weaker states but negotiable when powerful states breach it. Also, doctrines such as R2P, humanitarian intervention or self-defense can not become toolsby powerful states ofunilaterally determining when another country has forfeited its sovereign rights.

The problem for modern international politics is therefore not to do away with sovereignty but to harmonize sovereignty with international responsibility while preventing humanitarianism, counter-terrorism and national security from becoming unlimited reasons for external coercion.

A legitimate rules-based international order demands that the same principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, non-interference and accountability should apply to Washington, Abuja, Tehran, Islamabad, Caracas and every other capital city.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the analysis of the findings:

1. Intensifying the United Nations Collective-Security System: The UN Security Council should be intensified to ensure that unilateral applications of force are not routinely replaced with collective security mechanisms.
2. Clearer Rules on Extraterritorial Counter-Terrorism: The international community should work out clearer standardsto govern the use of force against terrorist groups operating from the territory of another state.
3. Strict Application of Necessity and Proportionality: States that invoke self-defense should be made to provide credible evidence that shows the necessity and proportionality of their actions.
4. Greater Accountability for Targeted Killings: Targeted killing of foreign authorities should bescrutinized internationally, especially where the location of the target is outside an active battlefield.
5. Protection of African Sovereignty: African governments should intensify regional machinery for responding to terrorism, kidnapping and organized crime so as toreducedependence on foreign military intervention.
6. Consent-Based Security Cooperation: Clearly defined consent, legal agreements and respect for the territorial state's command authority should form the basis forexternal military support in Africa.
7. Harmonious Application of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Doctrine: The application of R2P doctrine should be according to global established criteria and through legitimate multilateral institutions rather than selectively by individual powerful states.
8. Reform of International Institutions: There is need to address the uneven political power distribution within international institutions in order to improve the legitimacy and representativeness of global governance.
9. Stronger International Judicial Mechanisms: International courts and other accountability institutions need to be strengthened to prevent powerful states from easily avoiding responsibility for breach of international law.
10. Greater Scholarly Attention to Power Asymmetry: International relations scholarship should keep examining how power affects international norms interpretation and enforcement. The issue is not simply whether rules are in existence, but whetherthe application of those rules are consistent.

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