



# Characteristics of Successful Military Interventions

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# Research Objectives

- When tasked by U.S. policymakers with planning an intervention, Army leaders must consider:
  - What is the degree of risk associated with a given type of operation in a particular operational environment?
  - How can that risk be managed by appropriately scoping the operation (size, activity, capabilities, duration) or adjusting the goals to reflect the resources available for the operation?
- Answers to these questions may help to inform decisions regarding which capabilities to assign to missions, as well as longer-term force structure
- This briefing synthesizes the results of multiple RAND Arroyo projects on this topic

# Research Approach

- RAND has closely examined the full historical record of U.S. interventions using both case studies and statistical models
- Statistical models can be an important aid to judgment
  - Avoid over-reliance on lessons from recent or famous cases
  - Highlight broad trends for decisions with long-term implications (e.g., procurement, force structure)
  - However, case studies vital to validate results, identify factors that could not be quantified
- To facilitate this analysis, RAND created extensive datasets on intervention
  - Our datasets includes 145 U.S. military interventions since 1898
  - Interventions are coded by forces involved, activity type, duration, and objectives

# Research Questions

## BACKGROUND

Where and when has the U.S. historically intervened? On what scale?

## DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS

What objectives has the U.S. pursued? How successful have interventions been? What factors influence likelihood of success?

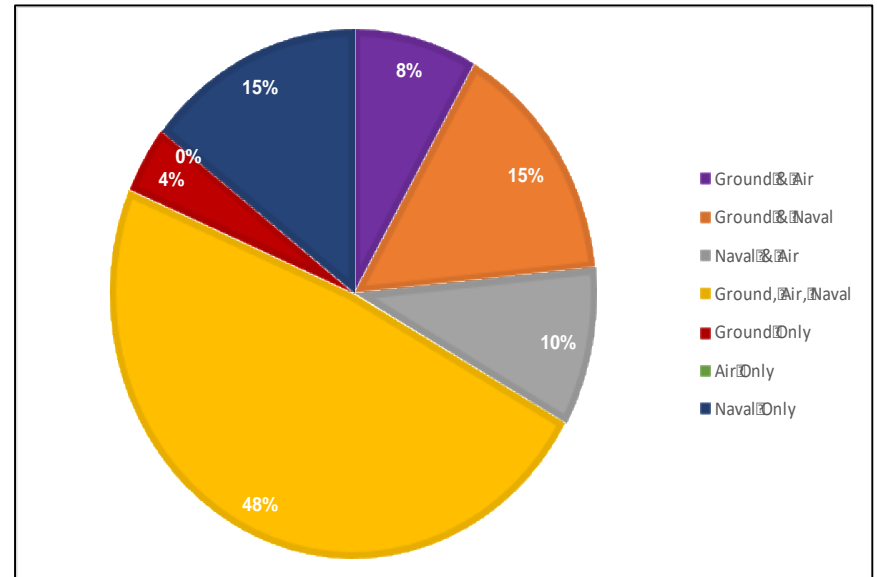
## OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

How quickly do forces need to be prepared to deploy in interventions? How has deployment duration matched expectations?

# We Collected Comprehensive Data on U.S. Military Interventions

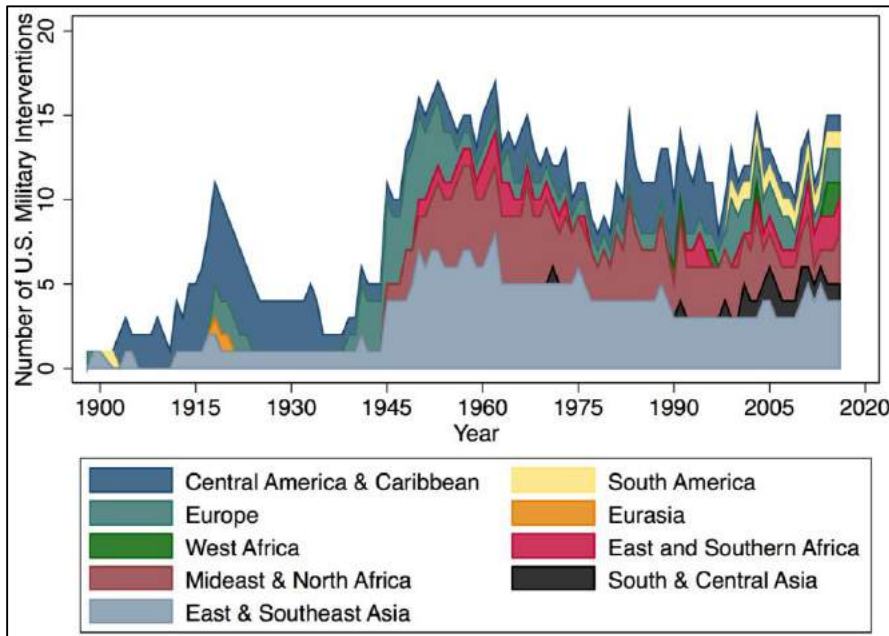
- Our dataset includes 145 U.S. military interventions from 1898-2016
  - Interventions identified by size and services involved:
    - Ground interventions exceed 100 person years
    - Air interventions involve either strikes/combat or a wing-year of support aircraft
    - Naval interventions involve a Carrier Strike Group or pre-WWII size equivalent
- Most interventions involved multiple services (81 percent), and most included a ground component (75 percent)

Percentage of Interventions by Force Type

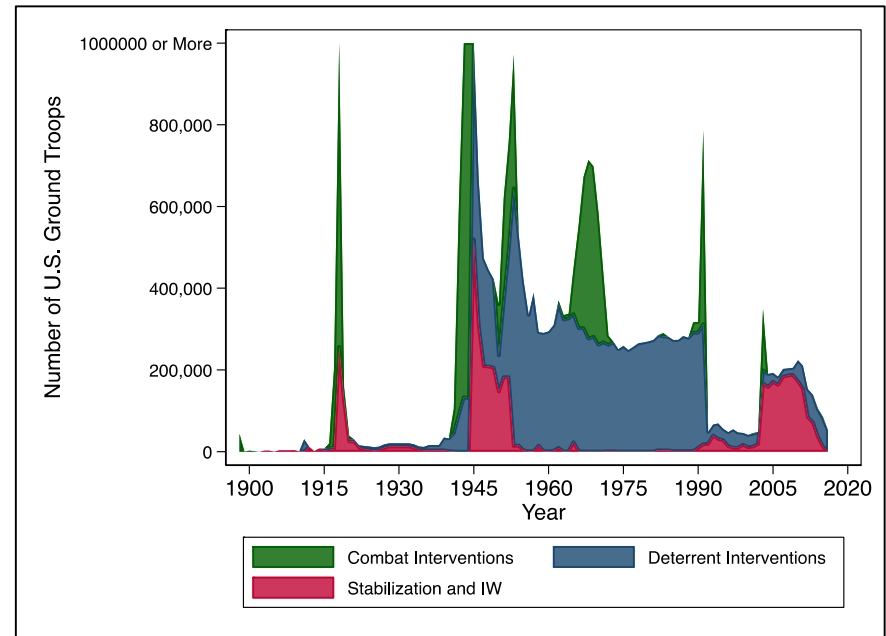


# Location and Scale of U.S. Interventions

## Number of Interventions By Region



## Size of Interventions By Type



- Interventions have been concentrated in four regions: Central America and Caribbean, Europe, Mideast and North Africa, and East and SE Asia
- Most U.S. forces were committed to deterrence missions in the Cold War, but switched to stabilization missions for the past quarter-century

# Key Leading Indicators of Interventions

Signpost	Interventions into Armed Conflict	Deterrence	Stability Operations
Close Relationship with U.S.	↓	↑	↓
Destructiveness of Conflict	↑		
External Threat Faced by Host		↑	
Previous U.S. Intervention			
Elite and Public Support			
Region of Host Country			
Humanitarian Crisis			↑
Multinational Coalition			
Lack of U.S. War Weariness	↑		
U.S. Relative Capabilities	↑		
U.S. Economic Performance		↑	

Blue cells identify signposts associated with intervention

Arrows indicate factor also affects size of interventions (larger ↑, or smaller ↓)

Our research identified indicators that can be monitored to determine whether U.S. military action in a region is becoming more likely

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# Identifying and Coding Political Objectives

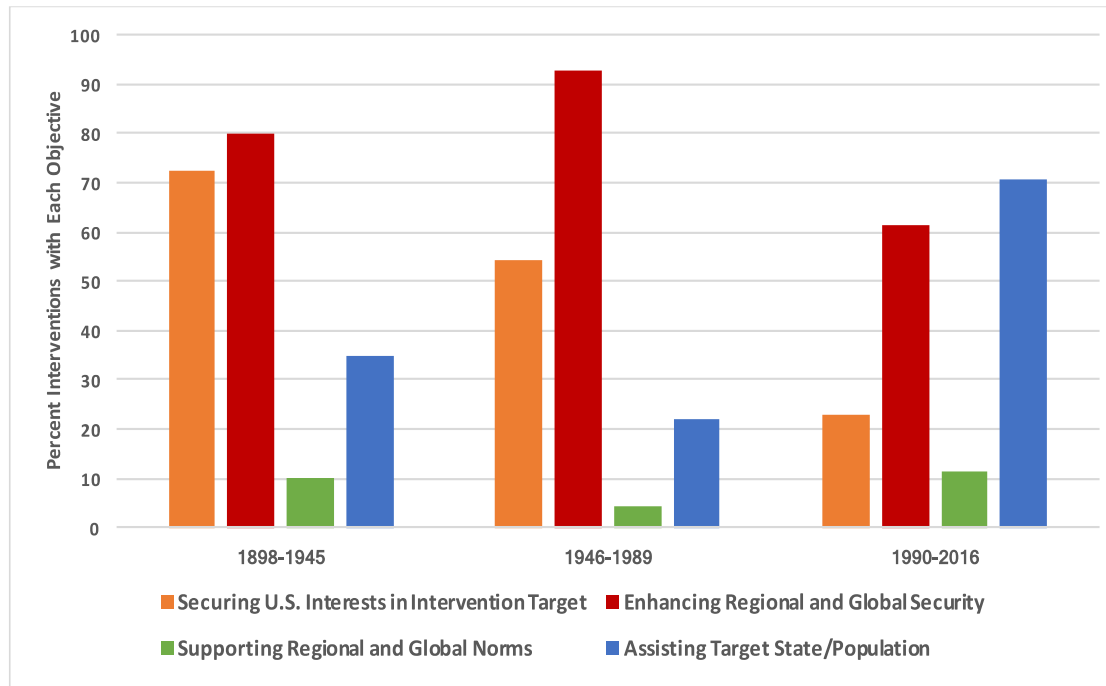
- To determine the degree to which interventions were successful, we identified the political objectives they pursued, and the degree of success associated with each
- Each intervention can have multiple objectives, and each objective may apply at different times (492 objectives for 145 interventions)
- To facilitate our analysis, we built a taxonomy of these objectives across two main dimensions: the nature and location of the U.S. interests involved

	Narrower Self-Interest	Broader Self-Interest
U.S. Interests Primarily Inside the Target	Securing U.S. Interests in Intervention Target	Assisting Target State/Population
U.S. Interests Primarily Outside the Target	Enhancing Regional and Global U.S. Security Interests	Supporting Regional and Global Norms

**Narrower self-interests** are those directly in pursuit of U.S. security, political, or economic goals

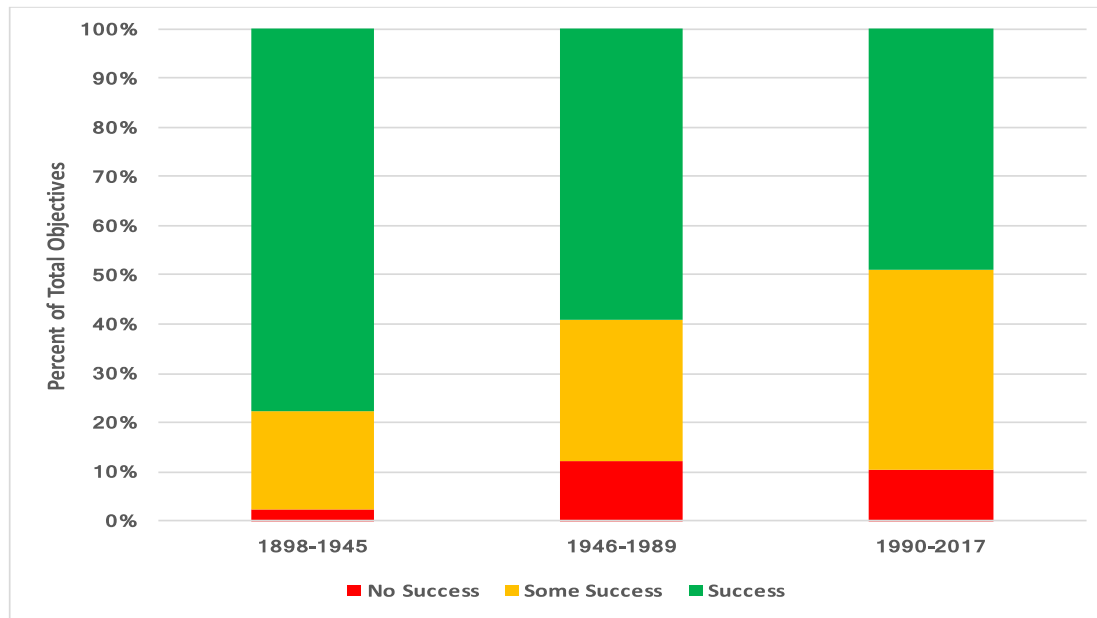
**Broader self-interests** are those that benefit the U.S. at least indirectly, and also have substantial benefits for other states or populations as well

# Narrow U.S. Interests Have Predominated, Particularly During Cold War



- Most political objectives focused on narrower U.S. interests (red and orange columns), with broader U.S. interests less frequent (green and blue columns)
- During the Cold War, narrower U.S. interests predominated
- However, since the end of the Cold War assisting target states and populations has become much more prevalent

# Most U.S. Objectives Were Successfully Achieved



- Overall, 63 percent of intervention objectives were successfully achieved
  - U.S. had some success in achieving 29 percent of objectives.
  - No success was rarest, in only 8 percent of objectives.
- The degree of success varied substantially by the type of objective and the time period in which it was pursued
  - Narrow, in-country objectives were achieved most frequently, while regional, broad objectives were achieved least often
  - Success was generally highest in the pre-Cold War period, when U.S. goals were more limited
  - Since the Cold War, clear successes have been somewhat rarer, especially for regional objectives, but mission goals have also typically become more expansive

# What Factors Shape Intervention Success Across Intervention Types?

Signpost	Interventions into Armed Conflict	Deterrent Interventions	Stability Operations
Number and Types of Forces	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
Technological Superiority	Light Blue	Light Gray	Light Gray
Pre-Intervention Planning	Light Blue	Light Gray	Light Blue
Limited Objective Scope	Dark Blue	Dark Blue	Dark Blue
Relative U.S. Capabilities	Light Blue	Dark Blue	Light Gray
Lower Conflict Intensity	Light Gray	Light Gray	Dark Blue
Strong Host Political Institutions	Light Gray	Light Gray	Light Blue
Non-Military Resources	Light Gray	Light Gray	Light Blue
Limited Third Party Interference	Light Gray	Light Gray	Light Blue

Dark blue cells identify factors supported by the most consistent evidence, lighter blue cells identify factors with less consistent evidence

Our research identified factors that can be used to assess when objectives in an intervention are more likely to be achieved

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# Interventions Often Have Little Lead Time

Contingency	Lead Time
<b>Interventions Into Armed Conflict</b>	
<b>Korean War</b>	Very Little
<b>Vietnam War</b>	Moderate
<b>Operation Restore Hope</b>	Little
<b>Operation Enduring Freedom</b>	Little
<b>Stability Operations</b>	
<b>Lebanese Civil War</b>	Little
<b>IFOR/SFOR/EUFOR</b>	Moderate
<b>UNOSOM II</b>	Little
<b>Deterrent Interventions</b>	
<b>Military Advisory Group-Taiwan</b>	Little
<b>Desert Strike, Thunder, Etc.</b>	Little
<b>Operation Atlantic Resolve</b>	Moderate

Very Little: <1 month    Little: 1-3 months    Moderate: 3 months-1 year    Long: More than 1 year

# Interventions Often Last Much Longer Than Expected

Contingency	Expected Duration	Actual Duration
<b>Interventions into Armed Conflict</b>		
<b>Korean War</b>	<0.5 years	3 years
<b>Vietnam War</b>	3 years	13 years
<b>Operation Restore Hope</b>	2 years	3 years
<b>Operation Enduring Freedom</b>	3-5 years after combat	14 years; Ongoing
<b>Stability Operations</b>		
<b>Lebanese Civil War</b>	<0.5 years	1.5 years
<b>IFOR/SFOR/EUFOR</b>	2 years	14 years
<b>UNOSOM II</b>	2 years	3 years
<b>Deterrent Interventions</b>		
<b>Military Advisory Group-Taiwan</b>	<1 year	28 years
<b>Desert Strike, Thunder, Etc.</b>	~1-2 years	22 years; Ongoing
<b>Operation Atlantic Resolve</b>	Open-ended	2 years; Ongoing

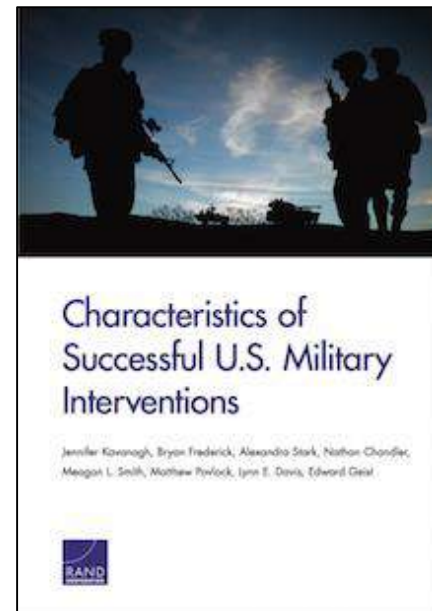
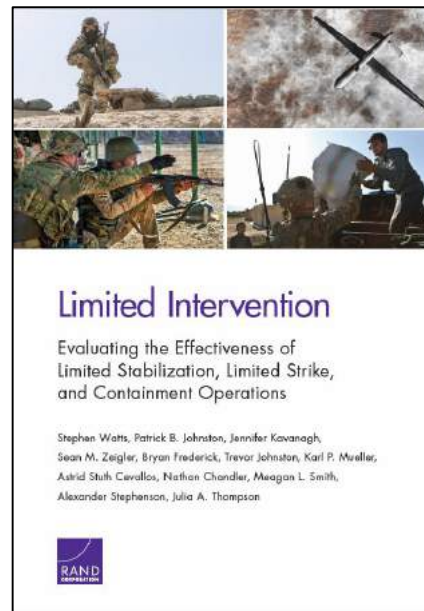
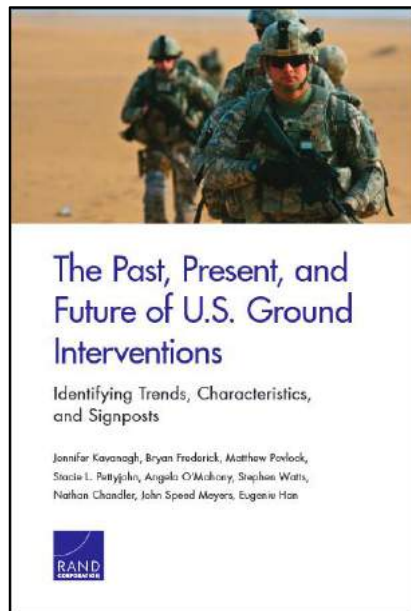
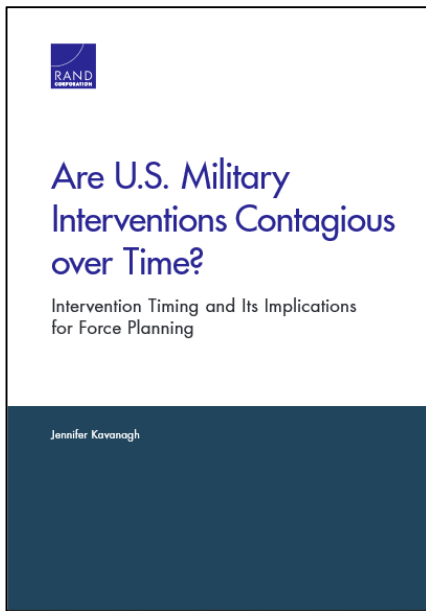
Assessments in this table are based on case study analysis of secondary and primary sources.

# ONGOING RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS



# We Make Five Main Recommendations

- Match intervention strategy with objectives
  - Different factors promote success for different types of objectives
  - Example: Advanced technology more useful for defeating adversaries than nation-building
- Ensure sufficient force size for relevant objectives
  - Allows the United States to overwhelm an adversary or compel cooperation from host state
  - Nation building objectives require large numbers of troops (often under-estimated)
- Pre-intervention planning should be comprehensive
  - Especially important for nation-building and post-conflict (e.g. Iraq, Japan post-WW2)
  - Rely on past experience, gaming/simulation, interagency expertise (e.g., State Department)
- Closely scrutinize possible role of third parties
  - Can complicate achievement of objectives (e.g. Iranian influence in Iraq)
  - Consider identity, capabilities, objectives and implications
- Longer interventions not associated with increased chance of success
  - Intervention duration likely calibrated to difficulty of achieving objectives (selection effects)
  - However, extending an intervention, without some other change in strategy, should not be assumed to increase chances of successfully achieving objectives (e.g., Iraq, Vietnam)



All reports discussed are available for download at [rand.org](http://rand.org)

A fifth report, on the Costs of Not Intervening, is in the final stages of review

