

*Russia and China: Reasons for Vetoing UN Resolutions for an Intervention in Syria.* Por: José A. Carrasquillo. Estudiante de Ciencias Políticas del Departamento de Artes Liberales, Recinto Metropolitano, Inter-Metro.

## **I. Introduction:**

The blunt side of the interrogative spectrum that I could take in this essay would lead me into the use of international law, whether it is lawful that any country or coalition of countries, under certain normative conditions set by supranational organizations, or communities, such as: the United Nations (UN), the League of Arab States (LAS) or the European Union (EU), can by consequence of a greater hierarchy of political and legal legitimacy impose the interruption or the very dissolution of a foreign states' sovereignty, this essay does not take that illusory statement as a certain fact but as part of the overall decision making process. In the process of researching the reasons for a veto on the part of the Russo-Sino partners in the UN, I had to peel back the layers of popular opinion and propaganda imposed on this study by the media; there are three parts that I will address. First, it is blatantly clear that the intervention in Libya and the resolution of the UN that all parties either agreed or abstained from voting in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 impacted the later decision by both powers in the Syrian case. Second, as in all interests that can move the forces of government, it is a rare case where intervention happens on a purely humanitarian basis, as is argued by many western powers to be a main motivational factor, the case of these two countries and the world at large does not break that paradigm this essay will show that there are economic and geopolitical considerations in the case of both countries to preserve the status quo of the Syrian government as well as a lack of interests from member states

of the UN and EU to be more active in the conflict in one country –Syria-- because of internal strife and no particular economic interests and on the other hand, the economic interests and military considerations that play in the Libyan intervention. Third, a description of the supranational processes that took place to impose an intervention in Libya and the main players in the process to have a comparison on how these organizations take action so we have an idea of how a Syrian intervention may come about, if any does. There is no clear cut answer but there are many intervening factors to consider, in a case where historical factors are also important to take into account in this regional (I say regional because although we refer to countries in particular; there is no way of obviating the implications of the surrounding countries in the chaos of a post Arab Spring world) and nationalistic-emotional turmoil the Middle East is going through at this time, the worries and implications on the international community is weighed against these pressing factors that are in the hearts and minds of the people more directly involved in the conflict, the two countries in question –Russia and China-- are no doubt playing to their better interest and not those of the people of the Middle East, the Middle East is, like its' name implies, stuck in the middle, of an unfortunate power struggle between the more powerful countries of the world.

## **II. The Intervention in Libya as a Determining Factor:**

Picture if you will, two nemesis countries of the mainstream western ideal on international politics, one side of the debate ever more focused on humanitarian ideals while the other, more interested that the opposing side not impose their ideals on *them*. Russia would be the classic example of this; it was the enemy of the cold war, the other

component of the dyadic relationship that would define world politics for decades since the end of WWII until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. But since the Communist power structure has fallen to the more flexible and ultimately more appreciable one that the western world subscribes to, the proxy wars of the superpowers and the ultimate worry of the “M.A.D.” scenario of nuclear competition leading to a Mutual.Assured.Destruction., as described by Henry Kissinger, has since faded along with the passage of time, leaving only remnants of the Marxist ideology in practical use, a mere semblance that is not faithful to its’ true form and substance, but then again, the USSR wasn’t very faithful in either aspect. The other adversarial component of the mainstream ideal is, of course, China, once rivals of their Communist brothers, the Chinese have methodically developed themselves into a modern superpower, with its huge population and the sheer will<sup>1</sup> it demonstrates in opposing the West while skillfully maneuvering the diplomatic minefields of international relations<sup>2</sup>, it has the capacity of becoming the new and true opposing economic<sup>3</sup> and maybe military force to the US and a viable option for all those lesser powers who don’t like the idea of the supremacy of US ideals and interests. The Chinese have also become *the* allies to their once adversary, Russia. In this alliance, both parts see each other as good alternatives to the imposition of the ideological barriers of the west<sup>4</sup> on their diplomacy and economy. There already are plans to further the economic cooperation between these two

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<sup>1</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “The Post-American World” Pg. 21

<sup>2</sup> Al Jazeera: Inside Story: Russia and China: Cementing ties.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q49fooCy9Tg>

<sup>3</sup> Fareed Zakaria “The Post-American World” Pg. 20

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Al Jazeera: Inside Story: Russia and China: Cementing ties.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q49fooCy9Tg>

countries, Russia has long depended on the EU for its consumption of its gas, the EU has long been wary of Russia many times buying gas on a discretionary basis, in return, Russia has cut of gas in winter times to the EU, this has caused a strife between the economies that is hard to mend. To lessen its need of its European consumer base, Russia is creating a pipeline to China to sell gas to its new found friend in the east while also selling its weapons to the Chinese<sup>5</sup>. This is beneficial to both parties as the commercial contract between the countries doesn't come tied with the ideological walls that plague its relations with the west and it gives the two a greater weight internationally because of their combined economic power, their diplomatic flexibility with the not so savory dictatorships of the world and their geopolitical reach, just terms of sheer size.

This reality of a much needed alliance among like-minded countries became clear in the case of Libya where both countries were criticized abroad for their lack of action and the belated recognition of the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC), and at home in the case of China<sup>6</sup> as it was seen as being too eager to meet with western demands on Libya and breaking with its long standing and carefully cultivated neutrality policy that helped them cultivate diplomatic relations with authoritarian regimes abroad and open doors with the west<sup>7</sup>. It seems to these states that no matter what action they take, they cannot please anyone on any side, and adding to that, the Gaddafi regime's "no mercy" policy<sup>8</sup>, the international public opinion was quick turning

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Asia Pacific Bulletin Num.152 Feb 27, 2012: What China has Learned From its Libyan Experience  
by:Yun Sun

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Naval PostGraduate Institute: Explaining Humanitarian Intervention in Libya and Non-Intervention in Syria by: Stefan Hasler June 2012 Pg. 64

against anyone who would not support a change in Libya and who also was not to be an active ingredient in the process. It is worth mentioning that it was not the Sino-Russo coalition alone that abstained from voting on the Libyan case in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (further referred to as UNSCR 1973). Along with these two, Brazil, Germany and India also abstained from voting, but the implications reach much further for these two countries as this alliance took Russia out of political isolation and gave it a strong partner in all spheres of state interests<sup>9</sup>. The intervention in Libya, aside from creating new ties between the Sino-Russo allies, also cemented the deep rooted fears of these two countries on how international politics would be run, that the west would insist on their own norms and interests while leaving out their own.

While the complex economic and geopolitical interests of these two countries in the MENA region (Middle-East North Africa) are close to being determining factors, the regional issues that direct their diplomatic efforts seem to be geared towards being greater players in the region to offset the US presence and to become a diplomatic medium for conflicts in the middle-east such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the case of Russia<sup>10</sup> and the greater diplomatic activity of China since the polemic UN debate over Syria. This is of course a reactionary effort against a more aggressive west whose overwhelming presence in the area leaves no doubt to their capacity to influence regional governmental players but has yet to show a nuanced approach to dealing with other groups that have as much influence, if not more, in the geopolitical minefield of the MENA region.

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<sup>9</sup>Al Jazeera: Inside Story: Russia and China: Cementing ties.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q49fooCy9Tg>

<sup>10</sup> Putin's Foreign Policy Towards Syria by: Mark N. Katz

### **III. Syria v. Libya, Economy and Geopolitics with some Internal Conflict for Good**

#### **Measure:**

Long wanting a more involved part in the middle-east geopolitics, the two countries have major interests in the area, where Russia has major interests in arms sales, as it has had with both Syria, a sum of \$2billion dollars in cold cash for upgrading old soviet era weaponry and buying new anti-aircraft armament among other arms in 2005<sup>11</sup>, energy contracts for gas pipeline from al-Rayyad<sup>12</sup>, and Libyan arms getting a sum of \$4billion from contracts<sup>13</sup> along with some oil interests in Libya<sup>14</sup>, it also has interests in its own security. Russia's domestic security interests comes from its problems in Chechnya where there has been considerable armed conflict since 1999 from the Sunni rebels in the area, it has thrown its support behind the Saudi government as well as an accommodative stance for Hamas and Hezbollah to dissuade these regional actors to not be supportive of the Chechen rebels<sup>1516</sup>. China's interests is four fold in the region:

- 1 A major region of China's energy cooperation, including direct trade of oil and gas, cooperation in upstream industries, project contracts and joint construction of refinery plants, etc...**
- 2 A major market for China's labor export.**
- 3 A major entry port of China's export products.**
- 4 A forward front and important arena where China protects its national unity, and combats terrorism and East Turkmenistan separatist forces."<sup>17</sup>**

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<sup>11</sup> Putin's Foreign Policy Towards Syria by: Mark N. Katz

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/08/2011828943035319.html>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-08/25/c\\_131071837.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-08/25/c_131071837.htm)

<sup>15</sup> The Real Reason Putin Supports Assad. Fiona Hill, Foreign Affairs, March 25, 2013

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/08/2011828943035319.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/turmoil-in-middle-east-and-chinese-interests-overseas/>

These are some of the major economic interests involved but in the middle-east economic interests are invariably tied to the greater spectrum of conflicts in the area, made more acute by the Arab Spring. It is an unseemly paradox that one of the most potentially powerful economic areas in the world cannot develop itself economically because of all the strife in its region. Its proximity to European markets, its oil rich land, its ubiquitous access to waterways all should make this region an economic powerhouse, the conflicts in the area impede it from being so. The conflicts go from Sunni vs. Shiite, Palestine (and the greater Islamic community) vs. Israel, Saudi vs. Iran and a host of historic tribal and European caused conflicts that have carried on in the area, some from times immemorial. In an area with a greater developed economic infrastructures (roads, security, ports, etc...), economies flourish because of international cooperation but the Arab world of the MENA region suffers from five key factors that lead to its problems as well as lead to the Arab Spring<sup>18</sup>:

**“First, all across the Arab world economic and political power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Second, the typical Arab state is characterized as a security state; its coercive apparatus is both fierce and extensive. Third, the broad contours of demographic change and resulting “youth bulges” are fairly common across the region. Fourth, Arab countries are mostly centralized states with a dominant public sector and, with few exceptions, weak private enterprise. Fifth, external revenues – whether derived from oil, aid or remittances – profoundly shape the regions political economy”.**

The lack of economic opportunity for a population that is overwhelmingly young, in some countries up to a third of its population is under thirty and almost 70 per cent of

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<sup>18</sup> Oxcare Research Paper 79: The Economics of the Arab Spring by: Adeel Malik, Dept of International Development, University of Oxford & Bassem Awadallah, Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Pg. 4

the unemployed work force is in this demographic<sup>19</sup> adding to that a greater access to education that lead this youth explosion to expect greater opportunities. To sum up, the Arab Springs underpinnings are: Poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunities<sup>20</sup>.

The powers to be have to go through this maze to try to make some sense of how to carry out their interests in the most effective way possible, economic interests aren't always enough to sway leaders in the region. If we are to take Syria for example, it is less likely US and EU powers could have much influence in this geopolitically important country with borders along Turkey, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan but also with close tie to Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah<sup>21</sup>, well known terrorist organizations that are anti-Israel and anti US. In terms of ideology, the Chinese don't care and the Russians don't necessarily disagree. The last aspect to consider is the military might of either country.

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<sup>19</sup> Oxcare Research Paper 79: The Economics of the Arab Spring by: Adeel Malik, Dept of International Development, University of Oxford & Bassem Awadallah, Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Pg. 2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pg. 1

<sup>21</sup> Naval PostGraduate Institute: Explaining Humanitarian Intervention in Libya and Non-Intervention in Syria by: Stefan Hasler June 2012 Pg 115



	<b>Libya</b>	<b>Syria</b>
<b>Forces</b>		
Active Personnel	80,000	292,400*
Reserves	45,000 (Militia)	352,500
Tanks	530	4950
Infantry fighting vehicle	2840	6610
Artillery	650	2160
Anti air weapons	580	3310
Aircraft	480	830
Navy Ships	21 (2 Frigates) (2 Submarines)	19 (2 Frigates)
Long range strike systems	--	Existing, number unknown
Force Readiness	Low	Low-media
Sustainment	Poor	Poor
<b>Country</b>		
Population	6,400,000	22,500,000
Geography	Mainly desert	Stony desert Mountains

\*Other estimates range from 300,000 to 400,000.

**Table 1.** Comparison of important military data of Libya and Syria before an intervention<sup>310</sup>

Table<sup>22</sup>

Generally speaking, the Syrian army is larger in terms of personnel and armament (thanks to Russian weapons) and more advanced than the Libyan weapon systems thanks to more recent purchases from Russia. In terms of geography, Libya is 679,359 sq mi while Syria is 71,479 sq m, nearly ten times smaller, populations are 5,670,688 and 22,530,746 respectively, the population is four times that of Libya in Syria and densities are 9.4/sq mi and 306.5/sq mi respectively, nearly forty times more population density in Syria. While Libya is mainly desert, Syria is a mountainous region that would complicate a military intervention further if you were to add the population density, military capacity and political connections with regional and international players, something that Libya under Gaddafi was not skillful in cultivating.

The question that still lingers in the air: Why the deep western interest in Libya and the lack of it in Syria? This can be explained in four key factors<sup>23</sup>:

- 1 **US support for European oil interests.**
- 2 **Dissimilar levels of opposition organization in Libya and Syria**
- 3 **Russian and Chinese support for the al-Assad regime in Syria**
- 4 **The potential that continued violence in Syria could destabilize the region (civil war)**

The first, Libya is the 4<sup>th</sup> most important supplier of oil to the EU, receiving 10 per cent of its Crude from this country, while only receiving 1 per cent of it from Syria pg16. The second point is of great importance, the lack of an organized opposition in Syria would create a power vacuum that would greatly destabilize the region and invite

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<sup>22</sup>Naval PostGraduate Institute: Explaining Humanitarian Intervention in Libya and Non-Intervention in Syria by: Stefan Hasler June 2012 Pg. 94

<sup>23</sup> US Army War College: The Arab Spring: Comparing US Reactions in Libya and Syria by: Lieutenant Colonel David N. Wilson (US ARMY) Pg. 15

unfriendly and even hostile forces to western countries and would ultimately create an economic calamity because of the importance of the oil rich region<sup>24</sup>. The third, the subject of this essay is a clear reason; the veto in the UN by both countries prevented a UN sanctioned intervention. The fourth, continued violence in the region is a factor that could also destabilize the region, the civil war has no clear leader, leaving Assad as the only legitimate ruler of Syria, with its ties to criminal and terrorist organizations, Syria would be easy prey to those interests that most likely already know how to organize the country due to its long standing ties, organizations like Hamas or Hezbollah. To intervene with Assad would mean an almost certain handing over of Syria to these groups<sup>25</sup>.

#### **IV. Supranational Organizations and regional**

##### **Communities involved in the process and the process itself:**

There is a process that the international community must adhere to if they are to legitimize any sort of sanction or military campaign in the public's eyes, a structural hierarchy that leads to greater legitimacy in international circles. It is divided into three parts, individual countries, regional communities or organizations such as the League of Arab States (LAS), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the European Union (EU), and lastly the United Nations (UN). The United Nations is the supranational organization, the world forum for the discussion of conflicts and the hopefully peaceful resolution thereof, but this, the process for the resolution of conflicts starts in the regional level, in the case of the Libyan intervention it was the EU, the African Union

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<sup>24</sup> US Army War College: The Arab Spring: Comparing US Reactions in Libya and Syria by: Lieutenant Colonel David N. Wilson (US ARMY) Pg. 16

<sup>25</sup> US Army War College: The Arab Spring: Comparing US Reactions in Libya and Syria by: Lieutenant Colonel David N. Wilson (US ARMY) Pg. 20

(AU), the LAS, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the GCC that spearheaded the UN lobbying<sup>26</sup> and Jordan, the UAE and Qatar were major players in the intervention, giving it a greater legitimacy by giving an Arab face to the forces in Libya<sup>27</sup>. It is a norm set forth in the UN charter that these regional agencies (communities such as the ones mentioned before) can be used for many purposes such as<sup>28</sup>:

- 1 Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.**
- 2 The Members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council.**
- 3 The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council.**

Let's say that there could be no peaceful resolution through the diplomacy in the UN, what then? If no peaceful means can be reached, then the UN norms state that<sup>29</sup>:

**The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.**

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<sup>26</sup> Naval PostGraduate Institute: Explaining Humanitarian Intervention in Libya and Non-Intervention in Syria by: Stefan Hasler June 2012 Pg. 62-63

<sup>27</sup> US Army War College: The Arab Spring: Comparing US Reactions in Libya and Syria by: Lieutenant Colonel David N. Wilson (US ARMY) Pg. 3

<sup>28</sup> UN Charter Art. 52 Chapter VIII

<sup>29</sup> Un Charter Art. 39 Chapter VII

Should the parties involved not be able to resolve disputes peacefully a round of nonviolent measures should be taken as guide lined<sup>30</sup>:

**The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.**

This would be the last step the UN would take to peacefully preserve international Peace and Security, after these measures are exhausted<sup>31</sup>:

**Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.**

An article 43 and 44 of the same Chapter (VII) includes the process for an armed conflict:

#### **43**

- 1 All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.**
- 2 Such agreement or agreements shall govern the numbers and types of forces, their degree of readiness and general location, and the nature of the facilities and assistance to be provided.**
- 3 The agreement or agreements shall be negotiated as soon as possible on the initiative of the Security Council. They shall be concluded between the Security Council and Members or between the Security Council and groups of Members and shall be subject to ratification by the signatory states in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.**

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<sup>30</sup> UN Charter Art. 42 chapter VII

<sup>31</sup> UN Charter Art. 42 Chapter VII

**44**

**When the Security Council has decided to use force it shall, before calling upon a Member not represented on it to provide armed forces in fulfillment of the obligations assumed under Article 43, invite that Member, if the Member so desires, to participate in the decisions of the Security Council concerning the employment of contingents of that Member's armed forces.**

This Last recourse has only been employed a total of four times since the creation of the UN in the cases of the Korean War, The Gulf War, Afghanistan and Libya. The 'No-Fly Zone' was imposed in by the UNSCR 1973 where the UN in a communicate said<sup>32</sup>:

**...an immediate ceasefire in Libya, including an end to the current attacks against civilians, which it said might constitute "crimes against humanity", the Security Council this evening imposed a ban on all flights in the country's airspace — a no-fly zone — and tightened sanctions on the Qadhafi regime and its supporters.**

Whether a similar case against the Assad regime is likely, Assad has used Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's) such as chemical weapons as reported by the Huffington post, Hillary Clinton communicates Washington's intentions if such an act were to occur<sup>33</sup>:

**Washington fears a "desperate" Syrian President Bashar al-Assad could use chemical weapons as rebels bear down on Damascus, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Wednesday, repeating a vow to take swift action if he does.**

This is of course added to his heavy handed policy when cracking down on protesters<sup>34</sup>:

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/05/hillary-clinton-syria-chemical-weapons\\_n\\_2245931.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/05/hillary-clinton-syria-chemical-weapons_n_2245931.html)

<sup>34</sup> Assad Won't Reform What the Recent Violence Means for Syria (and the United States) Tony Badran Foreign Affairs

**Assad seems to know as much. He reacted to the March 25th outbreak with controlled ferocity -- sniping at protesters from rooftops, kidnapping suspected participants, and carrying out other acts of intimidation and collective punishment.**

## **V. Conclusion:**

The case in the MENA region is a complex and chronologically heavy item for discussion, one must span the tensions built from the European occupation to modern day interests. It's an invariable truth that economy plays the determining factor but in the convoluted political relations, politics plays the dominant cause for competition in the region and to have influence in the leaders that most control the geopolitics is a rat race of epic proportions among dominant world powers. The population is left disenfranchised and left little recourse but to revert to the sovereign rights that the weight of their numbers proportion them, in both cases there is little case to argue against an abuse of powers and the flagrant disregard for human rights in exchange for the security of the Government rather than the integrity of the State. The final question is, really, what is the west and the other powers responsibility in all this, let's not confuse responsibility with interests. Is it in their purview to be figures of supervision and ultimately disciplinary action? Can the UN have a legitimate claim to intervene in what is ultimately an internal matter of states? Would the states that intervene be as quick to acquiesce to intervention in their own sovereign territory if it violates certain mandates?

Misfortune, double standards, ideology v. practicality, justice v. rights, ethnic entanglements, historic animosity, geopolitical end games, globalized societal trends, economic interests, economic disparity, human suffering, ubiquitous international interests and intervention and religious fanaticism all come together in the Middle East.

To offer any kind of solution with these considerations in mind would be beyond the scope of this assignment, in an unfortunate reality, this essay has to stay in the world of descriptive analysis and inferential inquiry within the bounds of its authors capacity and that of its sources, used to write it, one can only hope that time will resolve and that intervention doesn't worsen the dilemma.