



# The Past, Present, and Future of U.S. Ground Interventions

## Identifying Trends, Characteristics, and Signposts

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This report uses an original data set of U.S. ground interventions to identify factors that determine where and when the United States is most likely to intervene militarily. The report focuses on interventions into armed conflicts, stability operations, and deterrence missions. It identifies signposts of future interventions that can be used by Army planners and also explores intervention lead time, duration, and resource constraints.



### RESEARCH QUESTION

- Which factors determine where, when, and with how many troops the United States is most likely to intervene militarily?



### KEY FINDINGS

- The closer the relationship between the target country of the intervention and the United States and the greater the severity of the conflict, crisis, or threat to which the United States is responding, the greater the likelihood of a U.S. ground intervention.
- The United States has been substantially more likely to intervene in a country when it has intervened in that country within the past 10 years, and has been more likely to conduct stability operations in a country when it was involved in a preceding combat phase.
- Interventions into armed conflicts have been less likely following large numbers of U.S. combat deaths—evidence of “war weariness”—but this effect does not extend to other types of interventions.
- Interventions have clustered geographically; the United States has been more likely to intervene in a country if it has recently intervened in a nearby country (within 1,000 kilometers).
- The number of wars going on in the world and the U.S. domestic political context have not appeared to affect the likelihood or size of an intervention.

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- While deterrence interventions have tended to be larger in cases involving close U.S. allies, interventions into armed conflicts and stability operations in close allies have tended to be smaller.
- The actual duration of an intervention has tended to be significantly longer than planned for or expected.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Closer attention to the key intervention signposts identified in this analysis—such as a target country’s relationship with the United States, past U.S. military involvement, and the severity of the crisis or threat—could increase preparation and planning time and allow for better anticipation of interventions.
- Beginning the planning process and developing some resource estimates and generic outlines for what an intervention might look like using intervention signposts as a guide would go a long way toward reducing the number of unexpected interventions and speeding the ability of the Army to respond quickly and efficiently when needed.