

# A comparative study of the principles and approaches of British Labour and Conservative governments intervention in the Kosovo and Libya war from the English School of International Relations perspective

Ali Sabaghian<sup>1\*</sup>, Mohammad Orf<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Regional Studies, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
2. Department of European Studies, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: International Relations Scope: UK</p> <p>Received: 13 March 2025 Revised: 10 April 2025 Accepted: 20 April 2025 Published online: 28 April 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Britain, David Cameron, English school, NATO, responsibility to support doctrine, solidarity, Tony Blair.</p>	<p>British foreign policy at different times can be explained based on different theories of international relations. In the two periods of its military intervention in the Kosovo and Libya wars, the reasons and justifications of the Labour and Conservative governments rely on the theory of the English school of international relations and can be interpreted on this basis. However, the approaches adopted by Tony Blair and David Cameron, influenced by evolving international norms and geopolitical considerations, show continuity and differences in the country's foreign policy. Accordingly, the main question of the research is: What are the reasons for Britain's entry and intervention that led to its performance under NATO missions and reflected the differences in the foreign policy approaches of the two Labour (Tony Blair) and Conservative (David Cameron) parties in the Kosovo and Libya wars? This article is based on the answer to this question and the hypothesis that Britain, during the rule of both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, justified its entry into the wars in Kosovo and Libya and advanced its national goals by using humanitarian reasons and taking advantage of the capacity of international organizations such as NATO and the Security Council. In order to reach the research question and hypothesis, the English school of international relations is used, and the data of this research, which is the result of analyzing the content of the speeches of the then British prime ministers using MAXQDA software and the Attridge-Stirling method, point to the fact that Britain in both wars was completely based on humanitarian reasons and based on the solidarity principle of the English school, but the Labour Party was more interested in global influence and, in contrast to the Conservative Party, sought to advance diplomacy.</p>

**Cite this article:** Sabaghian A, Orf M. (2026). "A comparative study of the principles and approaches of British Labour and Conservative governments intervention in the Kosovo and Libya war from the English School of International Relations perspective". *Countries Studies*. 4(1): 23-28. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2025.392078.1265>.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License  
 Website: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir/> | Email: [jcountst@ut.ac.ir](mailto:jcountst@ut.ac.ir) |  
 EISSN: 2980-9193  
 Publisher: University of Tehran

\* Corresponding author: ✉ [sabbaghian@ut.ac.ir](mailto:sabbaghian@ut.ac.ir),  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4505-2133>

**Extended Abstract****Background**

The British government's decision to intervene militarily in the Kosovo War (1999) and the Libyan Civil War (2011) marked significant shifts in its foreign policy. These interventions were led by two different prime ministers from opposing political parties: Tony Blair from the Labour Party and David Cameron from the Conservative Party. The justification for involvement in both wars was primarily based on humanitarian concerns, strategic national interests, domestic political calculations, and the commitment to maintaining an active international presence through NATO. While Blair's intervention in Kosovo was shaped by the lessons learned from Bosnia and Rwanda, Cameron's approach in Libya was influenced by the establishment of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, recognized by the United Nations in 2005.

**Aim**

This study aims to comparatively analyze the fundamental principles and intervention strategies of the Labour and Conservative governments of the United Kingdom in the Kosovo and Libya wars via the English School of International Relations. By examining the speeches of Blair and Cameron using qualitative content analysis, this research seeks to explore the rationale for military interventions, the role of NATO, and the impact of international norms on British foreign policy.

**Methodology**

This study employs a comparative qualitative approach to analyze the UK's interventions in Kosovo and Libya, focusing on the decision-making processes of the Labour and Conservative governments. Using content analysis, the research examines key speeches, and policy statements made by Tony Blair and David Cameron to identify patterns in justification, strategic reasoning, and devotion to international norms. Then, in order to analyze the data, MAXQDA was used for extracting the patterns. In addition, the Attridge-Stirling method provided the network map which indicates that the devotion of the PMs toward norms.

**Discussion and Findings**

The UK's intervention in Kosovo under Tony Blair was framed as a moral duty to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide. Blair's speeches emphasized humanitarian intervention and the doctrine of an "international community" that must act in cases of severe human rights violations. This approach aligned with the solidarist perspective of the English School, which argues that sovereignty should not serve as a barrier when human rights are at stake. Blair's advocacy for NATO-led interventions without UN approval set a precedent for later humanitarian missions.

In contrast, Cameron's intervention in Libya was legally sanctioned under UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. The Libyan intervention was framed within the R2P doctrine, suggesting an evolution in international norms toward humanitarian intervention. The case of Libya demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations of the R2P framework when used as a justification for military action.

A comparative analysis of the two interventions reveals key differences in strategy and justification. While Blair relied on moral and ethical arguments to defend action without a UN mandate, Cameron sought legitimacy through multilateral institutions. The Kosovo intervention occurred at a time when the world was wrestling with the consequences of inaction in Bosnia and Rwanda, leading to stronger support for interventionist policies. In contrast, Libya's intervention occurred in the context of the Arab Spring, where Western powers were eager to support democratic uprisings, but the lack of post-intervention planning created long-term security challenges.

### **Conclusion**

The UK's approach to military intervention in Kosovo and Libya, despite being under different leadership and political parties, demonstrated a continuity in its commitment to humanitarian intervention. Both Blair and Cameron justified their actions on ethical and humanitarian approaches, reflecting the solidarist perspective of the English School of International Relations. However, Blair's intervention in Kosovo, was largely successful in achieving its humanitarian goals and was perceived as a necessary action to prevent ethnic cleansing. Cameron's intervention in Libya, despite being legally sanctioned, faced long-term strategic failures due to the absence of a clear post-war plan.

Overall, this research illustrates that while the UK's justification for intervention remained based in humanitarian rhetoric, its execution varied significantly based on geopolitical contexts and lessons learned from previous conflicts. The evolution from Blair's Kosovo strategy to Cameron's Libya approach reflects broader shifts in international politics, particularly concerning the role of NATO, the UN, and the legitimacy of military interventions under international law.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

### **Authors' contributions**

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

### Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

### Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### References

- Ahmida AA. (2021). *Intervention in Libya: The Responsibility to Protect in North Africa*. Karin Wester.
- Attride-Stirling J. (2001). "Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research". *Qualitative Research*. 1(3): 385-405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307>.
- Bellamy AJ. (2009). *Responsibility to Protect: The Global Effort to End Mass Atrocities*. Polity Press.
- Braun V, Clarke V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology". *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3(2): 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Brown C. (2002). *Sovereignty, Rights and Justice: International Political Theory Today*. Polity.
- Bull H. (1977). *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- (1966). "The Gratian Conception of International Society". in *Diplomatic Investigations*. Edited by Butterfield H, Wight M. London: Georg Allen & UN Vin Ltd.
- Buzan B. (2002). "Rethinking the solidarity-puralisty debate in English school Theory". *ISI panel solidarity in Anarchy: Advancing the new English School Agenda*. New Orleans.
- Carati A. (2017). "Responsibility to protect, NATO and the problem of who should intervene: Reassessing the intervention in Libya". *Global Change, Peace & Security*. 29(3): 293-309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2017.1384719>.
- Colley T. (2015). "What's in it for Us: The politics of intervention and the role of public narratives". *The RUSI Journal*. 160(4): 60-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2015.1080602>.
- Daddow O, Schnapper P. (2013). "Liberal intervention in the foreign policy thinking of Tony Blair and David Cameron". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. 26(2): 330-349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.737763>.
- Deeks A. (2018). *The NATO Intervention in Libya—2011*. Part 3 The Post 9/11-Era (2001–), 56. Oxford University Press eBooks (pp. 749–759). <https://doi.org/10.1093/law/9780198784357.003.0056>.
- Dunne, T. (1998). *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hammond P, Herman ES. (Eds.) (2000). "Degraded capability: The media and the Kosovo crisis". *Pluto Press*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs3sb>.
- Hehir, A. (2008). *Humanitarian Intervention after Kosovo: Iraq, Darfur and the Record of Global Civil Society*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jackson R. (2000). *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States*. Oxford University Press.
- Kartashkin V. (1991). "Human rights and humanitarian intervention". Domrosch LF,

- Scheffer DJ. *Law and Force in the International Order*. USA: Westview Press.
- Kazemi M, ZareBushahri M, Kazemi N. (2021). "Factors of the Tradition of Istidraj in the Qur'an Using Thematic Analysis". *Studies of Qur'anic Sciences*. 3(3): 7-42. <https://doi.org/10.22081/jqss.2022.62439.1153>. [in Persian]
- Keohane RO. (2003). "Political authority after intervention: gradations in sovereignty". Holzgrefe JL, Keohane RO. (Eds.). *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas* (pp. 275–298). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ker-Lindsay J. (2009a). "From autonomy to independence: The evolution of international thinking on Kosovo, 1998–2005". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. 11(2): 141-156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448950902920780>.
- Ker-Lindsay J. (2009b). *Kosovo: The Path to Contested Statehood in the Balkans*. I.B. Tauris.
- Kumar R. (2012). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*. SAGE Publications.
- Kuperman AJ. (2013). "A model humanitarian intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya campaign". *International Security*. 38(1): 105-136. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480571>.
- Linklater A. (1990). "The problem of community in international relations". *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*. 15(2): 135-153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40644678>.
- Masomzadeh N. (2019). "English school; from methodological approaches to security discourse". *The Monthly International Journal of Nations Research*. 3(48). [in Persian]
- McCourt D. (2012). "Embracing humanitarian intervention: Atlanticism and the UK interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo". *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 15(2): 246-262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00532.x>.
- McCumiskey JP. (2023). *British Foreign Policy in former Yugoslavia 1989-1999: Brotherhood and Unity Lost*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Omagu D, Odigbo J. (2018). "Democracy and the struggle for democratisation in Libya". *Socialscientia: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 2(1). <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SS/article/view/157>.
- Qavam SA, Najafi Sayyar R. (2014). "Promoting The concept of humanitarian intervention in the context of international relations theory (with emphasis on English School)". *Studies Of International Relations Journal (Political Science and International Relations Journal)*. 6(24): 37-60. Sid. <https://Sid.Ir/Paper/247506/En>. [in Persian]
- Rapoza K. (2011). "Russia and China team up against NATO Libya campaign". *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2011/06/17/russia-and-china-team-up-against-nato-libya-campaign/>.
- Roberts A. (1999). "NATO's humanitarian war over Kosovo". *Survival*. 41(3): 102-123.
- Stirling J. (2001). "Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research". *Qualitative Research*. 1(3): 385-405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307>.
- Thakur RC. (2011). "The responsibility to protect: norms, laws and the use of force in international politics". *CiNii*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB04580118>.
- Thomas CG. (2021). *Research Methodology and Scientific Writing*. Springer.
- United Nations General Assembly. (2005). "2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1)". <https://undocs.org/A/RES/60/1>.
- Vaismoradi M, Turunen H, Bondas T. (2013). "Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study". *Nursing & Health Sciences*. 15(3): 398-405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>.
- Vickers M. (2000). *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. Hurst & Company.

- Welsh JM. (2016). "The responsibility to protect after Libya & Syria". *Daedalus*. 145(4): 75-87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24916785>.
- Wheeler NJ. (2000). *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society*. Oxford University Press.