The Principle of Conquest

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*Abstract*

Territorial conquest has been an issue in international politics since the first organization of man. In modern times, coalition groups such as the League of Nations and the United Nations have attempted to stymie the conquest through legislation and *jus cogens* social pressure. Despite this effort, territorial conquest continues to be an issue. It is a large contributor to violence across the globe. The continued aggressive takeover of foreign soil not only promotes conflict between the two states but from the international community who must deal with the fallout from such acts. “The Principle of Conquest” seeks to identify why conquest is still permitted, despite decades of rhetoric.

World organizations such as the UN that strive to eliminate conflict must understand why these issues continue to occur if they are to have any success in eradicating them. “The Principle of Conquest” articulates that the UN is itself the reason why conquest continues to be an issue in modern society. An inconsistent international community has allowed for the continued practice of conquest despite firmly delineated territorial boundaries. Through a compliance test and case study of six instances of hostile takeover, this paper will explain why conquest still exists.

*Introduction*

Ever since mankind formed organized groups, conquest has been a major point in world development. The size of territory came to be an ultimate sign of power and authority. For millennia kingdoms and nations fought each other to protect or possess land. Halfway through the 20th century, the mad drive for territorial gain was supposedly put in check by a mildly authoritative international council known as the United Nations. Legislation and ideology was put in place through the Kellog-Briand Pact, the Stimson Doctrine, the UN Charter, and the *Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relationships and Co-operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations* (McDougal 2015, 1853).

While conquest is outlawed per jus cogens and aggression is outlawed in word through treaties, it is still a modern practice that has shown no signs of slowing down in the decades since two massive world wars and the sequential creation of two international governing bodies. While major world powers see no negative repercussions in major economies or regional influences, no action against conquering will be taken. This will be proven through a compliance test of six instances where conquest occurred in Cyprus, Western Sahara, East Timor, Kuwait, Ukraine, and Palestine.

The selected cases illustrate the varied responses the international community has on conquest, proving that *jus cogens* and anti-aggression treaties is not adequate in outlawing a millennia-old tradition. Compliance with the *jus cogens* rule will be determined by if the invading state begins settling the new territory or orchestrates forced movement of local populations, forcefully alters the local government in any way, or maintains any legal control over any portion of the invaded state. The most important principle of conquest is that it must be a state-issued annexation, with the purpose of acquiring new territory clearly in mind (McDougal 2015, 1851). Compliance with any of these principles will indicate an act of conquest and not simply occupation.

Examples of earlier legal treaties can be seen throughout the 20th century, showing that conquest has been an issue for some time. The first international legal body, the League of Nations, was established as a preventative council so that another world war, started by conquest, would no longer be an option. They created and accepted documents such as Article 10 in the Covenant of the League of Nations, which banned territorial acquisition by force and that the *status quo* could only be changed by agreement (Korman 1996, 183). However, even at the time, there was some dispute as to the exact meaning of the article.

World War II is evidence of the built-in ambiguity of Article 10 and continued conquest, as not twenty years passed before chaos covered the globe once again. After, the League of Nations evolved into the modern United Nations (UN). Double standards began coming out soon as well. The US had been circulating bills such as the Atlantic Charter since 1941 calling to eliminate territorial gain once more, keeping in mind that they had no intention of following through (Korman 1996, 165).

In modern times, there are only three forms of legal territory gain. They are cession, accretion, and occupation. Cession is when a treaty is reached and land is willingly given from one state to another, without the use of force. Accretion is simply the natural addition of land mass through geological processes. Anything other than these three forms is considered an aggressive act of conquest, and is seen as illegal. A distinction will be made between occupation and conquest, as the two can appear very similar at times. Occupation will be defined as a temporary military takeover of a local government, with no intention of extended physical presence, no alteration of local government, and full relinquishment of local territory upon foreign withdrawal (International Committee of the Red Cross 2004).

*I. Cyprus and Turkey*

The history of Cyprus ever since the Great War has been troubled at best, with constant disputes between themselves, Greece, and Turkey. This is in large part due to the geographical location of the state, being perfectly positioned between these two states that have been developing alongside each other and at odds with each other since 492 BC. Cyprus is a relatively new country, only gaining independence from Britain in 1960.

It is not surprising then that in 1983, Turkey made a move to annex at least a portion of the state by flooding the area with thousands of settlers and establishing a puppet government named the “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”. The TRNC was immediately condemned as illegal by the international community. The annexation controls roughly 30% of Northern Cyprus and continued the historical pattern of Cyprus being unable to have unfettered independence (Mallinson 2010, xv).

While the international community did not accept the TRNC and wanted Turkey ousted from Cyprus, major world powers such as the US and Britain saw it expedient to legitimize the hostile takeover (Mallinson 2010, 38). Greece had made it known that if Cyprus was not in the new batch of countries to be admitted to the UN, it would bar entrance for the other countries. The US could not give the entirety of Cyprus to Turkey; doing so would cause international outrage. However, the US also needed Turkey as an ally. The US needed Turkey to be their political foothold into the Middle East. With the US refusing to chastise Turkey, no actions could be taken and the TRNC was legitimized, if only by being ignored by the rest of the world. While no countries formally recognized the TRNC, no countries could demand its dissolution. While still not a recognized, independent state, the TNRC is still alive.

The need for a foothold was not the only reason the US was so eager to look the other way with Turkey’s actions in Cyprus. The US and a few other Western powers were planning their invasion of Iraq and were desperately trying to woo Turkey to join them. They could use Turkey, a bordering country, for easy access into Iraq, reducing the amount of resources they would need to carry out their mission. Even more diabolical though, was the US and British plan to undermine the EU in favor of NATO, and allowing Turkey to agitate the EU through Cyprus would do just that (Mallinson 2010, 39). It comes as no surprise then that there was no forward motion on this issue for decades after.

Only recently has the situation of the conquest showed signs of a peaceful end. For years, the Annan Partition scheme was the only diplomatic evidence of talks between the two parties, and all it did was further legitimize Turkish presence on the island. Cyprian President Makarios conceded a large degree of autonomy to Turkish Cypriots and formed a non-aligned bicommunal federal republic, hoping Turkey would reciprocate with some concessions as well (Mallinson 2010, 82). Unfortunately, none came until recently, with Turkey and Cyprus set to have peace talks in Switzerland this month of November 2016 (Kambas 2016).

Turkey complies with every measure to deem their actions in Cyprus to be conquest rather than simply occupation. Turkey flooded Northern Cyprus with hundreds of thousands of settlers to create a stronger Turkish culture. Turkey created a totally new government, the TRNC, as an extension of Turkish government on the island of Cyprus. Finally, Turkey fully annexed one-third of the island as claims it as Turkish land. Inversely, Turkey has upheld very few of the laws occupying states are held to in the Fourth Geneva Convention, thereby eliminating any chance of their conquest being considered occupation.

*II. Western Sahara*

Western Sahara, or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, is one of few entities known as a non-self-governing territory in the UN. The region was ruled by Spain through 1976, when the UN increased worldwide pressure to decolonize. Spain had no intention of letting Western Sahara become a self-governing entity, despite a multitude of local efforts to assert self-rule. The SADR was recognized by the ICJ as an independence-worthy colony, but the US and France instead favored a Moroccan annexation. This was an effort to gain favor in the African North West on the part of the west.

While all of this was going on in SADR, Spain was experiencing fierce domestic upheaval as the throne had almost drained Spanish reserves. In an effort to strengthen ties with their neighbor Morocco, Spain opted to give the SADR to Morocco after the Madrid Accords of 1975. This was in part due to a Moroccan threat to organize a mass march into Western Sahara to claim the land through settlers, known as the Green March, regardless of Spanish cooperation. SADR was not in agreement. There was already an established nationalist guerilla force, Polisario, that had been pushing Spain and any would-be Western occupiers out for years. Polisario was experiencing wild local success as a coalition of Sahrawi nationalists, spanning both Left and Right of the political spectrum, progressives and conservatives alike (Zunes 2010, 115). Not surprisingly, once Morocco squeezed control of the region out of a dying Spain, a liberation war ensued.

Morocco, upon gaining quasi-legal control over SADR, went through with their threatened Green March and sent thousands of Moroccan settlers into norther Western Sahara. Natives began a fiery war for independence that continues to this today. SADR experienced international acceptance, despite Morocco's efforts to dissuade potential allies. SADR was even admitted to the Organization for African Unity in 1982, backed by loyal ally Algeria. Morocco pushed back and threatened to tear the OAU apart, forcing Western Sahara out shortly after their entrance. The OAU did play a major role in the UN finding SADR independence worth pursuing (Zunes 2010, 174).

In 1991 the first UN Envoy specifically set aside to handle the conquest-hungry Morocco made marginal gains through a proposed Settlement Plan. This plan did a good job of favoring both parties, allowing Moroccan settlers to be counted as part of SADR for legislative purposes, but also letting SADR have an independence referendum where only natives would be allowed to vote. Negotiations went so far as to become UN Security Council Resolution 690, also known as MINURSO. Negotiations failed to proceed, however, and the resolution was quickly abandoned and the UN Mission in Western Sahara was abandoned. There was good news though, as a cease fire was agreed upon and has been in effect through this diplomatic push.

Morocco and Western Sahara soon engaged in a conflict similar to the Israel-Palestine conflict on the other side of Africa. International efforts to find peace were quickly exhausted, causing even long-time SADR ally Algeria to question their independence movement. In 2000, the UN made another large push to settle the issue, sending another mission to the area. The Baker Plan came into creation. It called for an interim SADR government voted in by pre-1975 locals, with a referendum occurring five years later, with all current citizens voting. Surprisingly, Polisario went for the deal, but Morocco denounced it. This proved to be a benefit to Polisario though, as the state fighting for independence gained a great deal of international approval for their efforts at diplomacy (Zunes 2010, 121).

Ever since the failed Baker Plan, the Moroccan-Saharan relationship has only worsened. Due to the UN pullout, Morocco has essentially gained de facto control of Western Sahara. All efforts on the part of Western Sahara have fallen short as well, since the US and France continue backing Morocco. There was an especially strong peak of violence in 2004 when a native political movement led to an all-out intifada against increasingly oppressive Moroccan forces. What is more, SADR supporters now view the once-glorious MINURSO as an accessory to the brutal occupation instead of the liberator it once was (Zunes 2010, 190).

Much like Turkey in Cyprus, Morocco sent massive amounts of government-sponsored settlers into the region that they want to annex. Also like Turkey, they did so to strengthen Moroccan influence in the region and to hopefully skew any referendum for independence. While Morocco did not establish a de facto government in Western Sahara, they do exert an immense amount of political sway in how other states interact with SADR. This negates any need for Western Sahara to negotiate foreign agreements and means they are not completely sovereign. Finally, while Western Sahara is still not universally recognized as part of Morocco, it does not have the international support needed to assert true independence. Therefore, it can be determined that Western Sahara was conquered by Morocco.

*III. East Timor*

East Timor is another example of a smaller region that has been oppressed and occupied throughout modern history. Portugal colonized the island as far back as the 16th century, which, while being a common practice at the time, was not well accepted by the natives living there. The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor succeeded in declaring independence in November of 1975, but was invaded by Indonesia just nine days later. Indonesia used the pretext of the Truman Doctrine to overtake the country, claiming danger of a communist regime. What is more, Australia’s Prime Minister at the time directly told the Indonesian President Suharto that, with local consent, East Timor should be part of Indonesia (Simpson 2005, 286).

Indonesia wasted no time. During the transition period before full Timorese independence, Indonesia began spreading propaganda against the dominant Fretilin political party. Indonesia even went so far as to send military groups guised as opposition forces to provoke conflict seemingly within the country itself (Simpson 2005, 293). The US and Australia simply observed. When Indonesia saw that there was no way to justify their invasion through a civil war, they launched an all-out invasion nine days after Timorese independence.

Twenty-five years of suffering followed the invasion. While the US and Australia watched, the Revolutionary Front fought to re-liberate their homeland. Indonesia responded with ferocious oppression. Famine came into the conquered 27th province of Indonesia, and massacres totaling some 200,000 people were carried out to oppress liberation movements. Just one year later Guinea-Bissau introduced General Assembly resolution 3485 to the UN, condemning Indonesian actions and calling for an immediate withdrawal (Simpson 2005, 298). Australia surprised the assembly by voting in favor of the resolution, while the US and most of Europe voted against Indonesian withdrawal.

Indonesia gave the appearance of a withdrawal when the resolution became internationally vetted; instead they established local militia factions to continue the work of death and oppression in East Timor (Tanter 2006, 17). In 1999 international efforts finally came into motion and Australia sent in peacekeepers to ensure that Indonesia was leaving the region ahead of a referendum vote for independence. Not surprisingly, East Timor voted for freedom and in the ensuing months Indonesia performed mass-deportations to try and ensure that East Timor would not be a stable country and have their freedom revoked. East Timor achieved full independence three years later, after the region has been stabilized by an interim UN government, with native Timorese clamoring for justice after attempted genocide (Tanter 2006, 17).

With so much evidence from the international community, Indonesia’s actions in East Timor are readily seen as conquest. While Indonesia did not sponsor mass-settlement in East Timor, they did perform mass-deportations to disrupt the local population. Indonesia also incorporated East Timor as an official province of the state, an obvious act of annexation. As a province of Indonesia, East Timor had little effective governmental control, despite a strong local political movement. Ultimately, the flagrant nature of Indonesia’s conquering of East Timor is what requited a loud international response from all states except the US and Australia, those most interested in a “dependable” government rule.

*IV. Kuwait*

The case of Iraq invading and annexing Kuwait is included as a case study because it is the only conquest that resulted in a coalition force forcefully removing the invader from their new territory. Iraq and Kuwait never had good relations: Iraq saw Kuwait as a militarily weak neighbor who exerted more political pressure than was merited. Iraq was seeking a more powerful position in the region after stalemating with Iran in war. Iraq also needed funding for military and infrastructure overhauls to make the state more competitive. Hussein saw Kuwait as the perfect target, as it was the weakest among Iraqi creditors (Gow 1993, 18). Kuwait was also the weakest member of OPEC, which had decided to lower petroleum prices, crippling Iraq’s source of income. It is important to note that while these conditions were present, the decision to conquer caught the world off-guard (Gow 1993, 16).

Iraq entered Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and very shortly thereafter His Highness Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabeh was banished from the state he was supposed to rule. Kuwait had next to no military, making the complete Iraqi takeover a speedy process. By the end of August, Iraq had absorbed Kuwait as its 19th province and had established an administrative structure in the region. Having lost all political and territorial sovereignty, Kuwait had officially been conquered. This caused outrage in the international community, with the UN Security Council forming the first unanimous resolution, Resolution 662, demanding immediate Iraqi withdrawal (Gow 1993, 22). Iraq was driven back to their own borders and Kuwait was again an independent state nine months later. While the conquest did not last a great length of time, it still constitutes complete government takeover.

The fact that Kuwait was conquered is indisputable. What is interesting about this case is why the international community responded like they did. Of interest is the eagerness the US had in liberating a tiny Gulf state. Up until the invasion, the US and Kuwait had very rocky diplomatic ties. The US wanted to have better relations with Kuwait, who was a major oil producer in the region and a member of the lucrative OPEC. Once conquered, the US saw the perfect opportunity to gain favor in Kuwait’s eyes and have a political lever besides Israel in the Middle East. Cooperation with the US following liberation was part of the deal for freedom (Peterson 2007).

Another point that should be observed is that while third-world countries in the region suffered economic losses following Western retaliation, the US found itself $50 billion higher in direct capital inflow in the new economic market that formed (Gow 1995, 10). The sharp increase can be attributed to President Bush, who used this as an opportunity to present the US plans for a New World Order full of justice and security to the world. Kuwait was the opportune moment to begin the implementation of this New Order where the US was essentially wired into the center of everything. Not only did the US find retaliation advantageous economically, but also as a political springboard for future international relations. It was the perfect opportunity for the US to be the world police and save a state in distress.

While there were obvious reasons for international intervention on behalf of Kuwait, the gains made by the US show ulterior motives. In the previous three examples, the most the US ever did was either approve of the conquest or half-heartedly tell the aggressor to stop. This is one of the few times the world powers came together to reprimand a takeover, and it is also one of the few times where obvious benefits were seen after the crisis was handled. Conquest is accepted if it does not affect the world powers directly. Inversely, conquest is only allowed when it benefits world powers in some way.

*V. Crimea (Ukraine)*

The history of Russia and Crimea is long and bloody, as Crimea is a region full of turmoil and conflict. Once an independent country, Ukraine was conquered first by the USSR and Poland at the end of World War I. During the Second World War, Ukraine was hit particularly hard with large-scale killings and deportations occurring from the advancing Nazi army from the West and the belligerent USSR to the East. After the war, the USSR kept a tight fist on the region, which was undergoing a political revival from democratized neighbors to the west. To solidify relations, Gorbachev extended the new Union Treaty. However, this came at a poor time when Ukrainian politics were in flux (Solchanyk 2001, 40). Ukranians opted out of reunifying and instead broke off from the USSR in 1991.

Since independence, Ukraine has struggled to maintain independence from Russia as relations between the two states remained tense. Russia was particularly uneasy when Ukraine began integrating itself with the Commonwealth of Independent States, former members of the USSR (Solchanyk 2001, 65). Further integration with the West in 1995 made Russia nervous about becoming isolated in the region (Solchanyk 2001, 92). For roughly two decades Ukraine's economy struggles and they struggle to maintain diplomatic ties with Russia. President Yanukovych, who had served previous terms, received an invitation to join the EU in 2013, but he declines it, instead opting to promote ties with Russia. Intense rioting and protests followed, lasting for months and drawing Russian soldiers into the region and driving Yanukovych out of the country for acting against the popular will (McDougal 2015, 1847).

What followed was a swift Russian entrance into Ukraine. Russia sent more soldiers into the area to “control” the rioting populations. Shortly following, there was a referendum within the country whether to reunify with Russia or not. The Crimean parliament reasserted its independence from Russia. However, the referendum came back with majority saying to rejoin Russia. Then-interim President Turchynov and the international community declared that Russia had fixed the referendum results (McDougal 2015, 1848). Russia proceeded to annex Crimea just months later and still has military control over the eastern portion of the state.

The Russian takeover of Ukraine is included because of how blatantly Russia went against all international norms and domestic laws in both countries. In annexing Crimea, Russia violated a years-old treaty with the state, and also acted in aggression, violating the UN Charter and the UN Declaration of Principles. The way in which Russia attempted to absorb Ukraine also went against local Crimean laws of independence and legal rights, especially with the referendum having been declared illegal. What is most interesting is that Russia even broke their own established legislation for the absorption of foreign states (McDougal 2015, 1850).

These factors demonstrate Russian compliance with the parameters for conquest. Russia was importing citizens into Ukraine even before the rioting began, and dramatically increased the flow once the state began weakening. Russia also asserted government control over the already-established parliament. In addition to this, Russia forcefully took the Eastern portion of Crimea and placed it under Russian military protection, effectively shutting it out from Ukrainian control. Finally, the Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta published a piece just before the invasion explaining what Russia was going to do to preserve the status quo of the region, which was to reabsorb Crimea (McDougal 2015, 1866). This article shows that Russia conscientiously acted to annex new territory with no intention of temporary occupation. This, per the definition given at the beginning, demonstrates complete compliance with the requirements of conquest.

The international community, observing the blatant and shameless act of conquest, could do nothing but watch. Russia is a dominant world power, wielding veto power in the Security Council. This means that the Security Council alone could not pass any legislation or formal reprobation against one of their own. The UN moved for a General Assembly resolution, but they could never get anything with physical consequences to come to fruition. All the international community could do was boycott Russian exports, particularly oil. This case shows perfectly why when one world power approves of conquest, or even performs it themselves, there is no real legislation or punishment in place to make the aggressor rescind their decision.

*VI. Palestine*

The history of the infamous Israel-Palestine crisis is well known. Within a year of being a sovereign state, free from British rule, Israel came under attack from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon from 1948-1949. Before the war, Israel, Palestine, and the international community had agreed upon the Partition Plan. This divided modern-day Israel between Israel and Palestine, crudely drawn to imitate the pockets of each group found across the state. After the first war, Israel expanded to hold almost all western Israel. In 1967 Israel launched a preemptive attack on Egypt in Gaza, Jordan on the West Bank, and Syria in the Golan Heights. Successful once more, Israel unofficially grew to its current size.

At the time of the 1967 war, Jordan had annexed the West Bank, lending to its name, and Egypt had annexed Gaza. After having lost two wars in a row, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt all signed peace agreements known as the Camp David accords with Israel that effectively gave the acquired territory to Israel for a transitional period that would last no more than five years, but it was struck down by the UN because Palestinian representatives had not participated in the negotiations. While Israel and the surrounding states came to peace, the Israeli-captured territories were no longer under direct legal control of anybody.

To this day, Palestine is not recognized as a regular sovereign state, being granted observer-only status in the UN General Assembly. While there are many issues to be resolved in the questionable acquisition of the land, Israel claims the territories, apart from Gaza, to be of disputed ownership. Palestinians themselves claim Israeli acts as a vernacular of post colonialism (Talhami 2014, 303). According the definition given at the outset of the study, Israel is not an occupier, but a conqueror of Palestine.

Israel is well known for the proliferation of the settler movements from Israel into disputed Palestine. While not directed by the state, these settler movements have been supported at times by Israel (Mendelsohn 2014, 502), fitting the first requirement for compliance with conquest. Israel has officially withdrawn from Gaza, but still exerts substantial governmental control over the West Bank, where a local government has been elected but deemed unfit for stable rule due to their inability to maintain control and accept international law (Lerner 2015, 6). Finally, not only did Israel essentially annex the West Bank by establishing checkpoints and visa stations between Palestine and Jordan, but they did so with the purpose of taking over the land. Otherwise, they never would have pushed that far after the 1967 War. While it can be deemed a separate entity, the fact that you are given an Israeli stamp in your passport indicates that at least Israel recognized Palestine as an absorbed territory.

Overall, international cries have come up against Israel for taking the land in the first place, with additional cries against the human rights violations occurring in the conquered areas. However, no international coalition force has come in to force the Israelis out and restore sovereignty to the Palestinians. That is because the US is the biggest supporter of Israeli policy and practice. The US is a veto-wielding member of the Security Council and can therefore strike down any resolutions aimed at real punishment against Israel, and is a strong deterrent against a non-US coalition, as the US would have to help defend their ally.

The US defends Israel with such vigor because of how useful the state is for staging Middle Eastern missions. The US has a close ally in the middle of a volatile region and will do everything possible to maintain that position. Not only is the location strategic, Israel is also one of the strongest states in the region, making them a valuable ally in any local conflict. Because a world super power sees the conquering as acceptable and advantageous, no legal or military action is yet to be brought to Israel’s attention.

*Conclusion*

While each of the states presented have varying details of how the conquest occurred as well as the results of those conquests, it is clear that they all share the defining factors of some form of state settlement, governmental overthrow, and state-recognized annexation. Every one of these cases is an example of modern-day land acquisition by conquering. While it might seem that with a case arising about once a decade that it is not a common occurrence, we have a very comparable rate of conquering compared to even 300 years ago when there would be an empire or two that would conquer in waves. It is not a new thing that is occurring, nor does it appear to be a dying trend in the international community.

Many of these issues are still ongoing, such as the cases of Israel and Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, and Morocco and Western Sahara. None of these cases shows any sign of being resolved soon, demonstrating again that the issue of conquest was not eradicated decades ago as the UN had hoped. The only thing that has changed for the most part is how countries go about making territorial gains. Cases such as Ukraine and Western Sahara show how often it starts as a political encroachment and persuasion and not storming the borders such as Indonesia or Israel. There is a subtler approach that makes it harder for the international community to eradicate.

It is worth mentioning as well that while some countries commit to taking a parcel of land, others, such as the US, let locals rule themselves and own the country they live in. However, the US will do everything possible to influence and control the local government. In the past seventy years, the US has attempted to overthrow over sixty foreign governments, with a handful of physical invasions to restore “peace” to the ailing state.

Some cases of this that are of importance are Iran in 1953, Afghanistan in the 80s, and Iraq in 2003. Every one of these governments was toppled directly by US efforts. While the regimes in charge at the time of overthrowal were not always humane or examples of international courtesy, the US still acted in aggression, breaking UN Charter Article 2(4) as well as the host of treaties presented at the beginning of this study. While not considered outright conquest, as these instances do not meet any of the outlined parameters of compliance, the purpose behind the interventions was the same.

The US has been the dominant world player since World War II, competing with Russia for regional and world power. As mentioned above, the ousted leaders were not exemplary people, but the governments that replaced them were sometimes even worse. The defining characteristic is that in nearly every case, the new government came out as strongly in favor of more unified US relations. The US has been participating in a sort of neo-colonization where it is not land that is possessed, but political leaders and thereby governments. This avoids the legal issues of outright occupancy or conquest, and it reduces the cost of conquering lands across the globe.

Instances of conquest are not uncommon, but the instances of this neo-colonization are infinitely more so. Russia is the other majority-contributor of political reconstruction. Every war of consequence since World War II has led to another country being restructured to fit the US needs and expectations. Examples include the fragile Iraqi government, the Iranian democracy for most of the 20th century, as well as a few South American countries.

If the UN is serious about eliminating all forms of conquest it cannot rely on the just cogens rules to redirect territory-hungry states. At the current rate, conquest will continue to pop up around the globe for a long time to come. Serious measures need to be taken to eliminate the incentives of land acquisition and the socially acceptable illegality of the act, starting with the Security Council. Once the leading members can determine actual punishments for offending countries, the trend may begin to die down. Until that happens, any conquest that does not disrupt the bigger political and economic picture will go unnoticed.

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