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Humanitarian Intervention and Pretexts for War

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A long-standing objection to legalizing unilateral humanitarian intervention is that states would use a humanitarian pretext to initiate aggressive wars, with a consequent increase in the number of such wars. The article discredits the objection by drawing primarily on two research programs: quantitative analyses of the correlates of war, and qualitative analyses of the unintended political constraints that result from states' efforts to legitimate military aggression. The article concludes that lifting the prohibition on unilateral humanitarian intervention would be equally, if not more, likely to reduce the aggregate number of wars by aggressor states.

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