

Parliamentary involvement, party ideology and majority-opposition bargaining

Citation for published version (APA):

Fonck, D., Haesebrouck, T., & Reykers, Y. (2019). Parliamentary involvement, party ideology and majority-opposition bargaining: Belgian participation in multinational military operations. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 40(1), 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2019

DOI:

[10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document license:

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To cite this article: Daan Fonck, Tim Haesebrouck & Yf Reykers (2019) Parliamentary involvement, party ideology and majority-opposition bargaining: Belgian participation in multinational military operations, Contemporary Security Policy, 40:1, 85-100, DOI: [10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1500819>



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Parliamentary involvement, party ideology and majority-opposition bargaining: Belgian participation in multinational military operations

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of parliamentary involvement in troop deployment decisions on restrictions on military mandates by examining the Belgian contribution to the 2011 Libya intervention and the coalition against the self-proclaimed Islamic State. More specifically, we analyse (1) the effect of party ideology on mandate preferences, and (2) the impact of bargaining between majority and opposition parties on the outcome of mandate negotiations. Our case study demonstrates that left-wing parties show a strong inclination toward imposing restrictions on the use of military force beyond humanitarian goals, while right-wing preferences tend to depend on the national interests at stake in the operation. With regard to majority-opposition bargaining, our study shows that the impact of opposition parties is dependent on the degree of contention between government and opposition parties, as well as on the extent to which the executive needs to seek support across its own majority.

KEYWORDS Caveats; coalition warfare; political parties; legislative-executive relations

Whether having a democratic political system constitutes a liability or an advantage when fighting wars has been a contentious issue ever since the authoritarian Sparta defeated the democratic Athens in the Peloponnesian War (Desch, 2002, pp. 5–6). Realists like Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr suggest that significant mass influence has a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the foreign policy of democratic regimes. In contrast, so-called democratic triumphalists point out that democracies have been at the winning side of most wars since 1815 (Desch, 2002). More recently, scholars started examining whether or not democracies are more or less reliable allies in multinational coalitions, with authors like Mello (2018) and Tago (2009) pointing out that the reliability of democratic allies primarily depends on domestic political conditions.

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Research on national caveats, or national restrictions on what coalition militaries are allowed to do, has arrived at similar conclusions. In their groundbreaking work on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan, Saideman and Auerswald demonstrate that these restrictions are largely driven by domestic political institutions (Auerswald & Saideman, 2014; Saideman & Auerswald, 2012). Likewise, the comparative case study of Frost-Nielsen (2017) of Denmark's, The Netherlands', and Norway's contributions to the NATO-led intervention of 2011 in Libya shows that whether or not states impose restrictions on their forces can best be explained by domestic factors. Strikingly, however, the impact of one domestic institution on national restrictions remains underexplored in the literature on caveats: parliamentary involvement in decisions on the use of force. As argued in the introduction of this forum (Mello & Saideman, 2019), prior research provides evidence that participation in (coalition) warfare is less likely if the legislative branch is involved in military deployment decisions (cf. Dieterich, Hummel, & Marschall, 2015; Mello, 2014; Wagner, 2018). However, the effect of parliamentary involvement on the restrictions faced by national contingents has not been structurally examined.

The answer to this question matters because it sheds light on the tension between democratic control of armed forces and military effectiveness (Wagner, Peters, & Glahn, 2010, p. 11). On the one hand, strong parliamentary involvement in military deployment decisions is desirable from a democratic oversight perspective, given that it opens up governmental decision-making to public scrutiny and forces "governments to give reasons for political decisions" (Dieterich, Hummel, & Marschall, 2008, p. 4; Ruys, Ferro, & Haesebrouck, in press). On the other hand, legislative involvement threatens to undermine executive flexibility and responsiveness, thereby assumedly having a negative impact on the utility of the contributions of junior partners to military operations (cf. Schmitt, 2019). Given that national reservations are an important challenge to the effectiveness of coalition warfare, the impact of the legislative branch on national caveats should be accounted for to assess the desirability of parliamentary involvement in decision-making on the use of force.

In this article, we explore the impact of parliamentary involvement in military deployment decisions on the scope of the mandates of deployed forces. In line with the general aim of this special forum, we hereby aim to shed light on how allies of the United States define the terms of their participation in multinational operations (Mello & Saideman, 2019). In particular, we subject two main claims that emanate from the current scholarship to empirical scrutiny. First, it has been suggested that the mandate restrictions desired by political parties depends on their ideological orientation. More specifically, right-wing parties are expected to argue in favor of restrictions if there are no clear national interests at stake in the operation, left-wing parties for

restrictions on the use of military force beyond humanitarian goals. Second, prior research has suggested that parliamentary involvement tends to increase the restrictions on the mandate of deployed forces because it opens up decision-making on the use of force to opposition parties and potentially sceptical backbenchers in governing parties.

Empirically, we focus on the Belgian contribution to the 2011 military intervention in Libya and the coalition against the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq from 2014 onwards. Belgium was governed by a caretaker government at the time of the Libya crisis and the 2014 Iraq intervention. Because of this particular political context, the Belgian government decided to place the decision to participate in both interventions to vote in parliament, a decision which is under normal circumstances an executive prerogative. This temporary parliamentarization of war powers provides a unique opportunity to examine the impact of parliamentary involvement on what national militaries are allowed in multinational coalitions. We show that the Belgian case raises doubts over the conventional wisdom that parliamentary involvement increases national restrictions in coalition warfare.

Parliamentary involvement and national restrictions

Scholarly literature on national caveats began with a seminal article and subsequent book-length study of Auerswald and Saideman on NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan (Auerswald & Saideman, 2014; Saideman & Auerswald, 2012). In this groundbreaking work, the authors demonstrate that restrictions on mandates of national contingents are driven by domestic political institutions. More specifically, they concentrate on the difference between individual and collective decision-making. Whereas presidents and prime ministers can decide relatively independently on the use of force in presidential regimes and single party governments, contributions of coalition governments are the result of bargaining between members of different parties (Auerswald & Saideman, 2014, p. 65). Because enthusiasm for deployment is likely to vary amongst coalition partners and since the threat of government dissolution forces leaders to take the preferences of less enthusiastic partners into consideration, the authors expect coalition governments to be inclined to impose tighter restrictions on their military contingents. Building on the work of Auerswald and Saideman (2014), Frost-Nielsen (2017) examines whether caveats in the Libya operation were the result of a bargaining process among political actors in domestic decision-making. More specifically, one of his hypotheses is that “caveats are the negotiated compromise between a government proposing to support a coalition militarily and opposition parties with veto powers skeptical to the government’s proposal” (Frost-Nielsen, 2017, p. 6). Rather than considering constraints on the mandates of military operations the result of intra-coalition bargaining, this hypothesis

assumes these are the result of a compromise between government and opposition parties. Given that the latter are only represented in parliament, this suggests that parliamentary involvement in military deployment decisions makes restrictions more likely.

The latter resonates with the expanding scholarly debate about whether strong parliamentary involvement restricts a government's ability to participate in (coalition) warfare. Several studies confirm the restriction on war involvement conjecture. Choi (2010, p. 438), for example, shows that legislative constraints "are likely to discourage democratic executives' use of force." Reiter and Tillman (2002, p. 824), in turn, conclude that greater legislative control over foreign policy is associated with lower propensity to initiate conflicts. Likewise, a study of European involvement in the 2003 Iraq intervention by Dieterich et al. (2015) confirms that strong parliamentary war powers are associated with weak degrees of war involvement. In contrast, a book-length study by Mello (2014, p. 186) on the military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo only provides mixed support for the parliamentary peace proposition. Wagner (2018), in turn, studies patterns of participation across 25–35 countries in five military missions. He finds modest evidence for the impact of parliamentary involvement on military deployments and concludes that its impact depends on the character of the military mission in question.

In combination with the "domestic-bargaining-hypothesis" of Frost-Nielsen (2017), these insights from literature on "parliamentary peace" raise the expectation that parliamentary involvement in military deployment decisions restricts the mandates of the deployed forces. More specifically, parliamentary involvement is expected to open up the decision-making process to members of opposition parties, who might be more skeptical on the deployment of national forces. However, there is an increasing scholarship on how preferences on mandate restrictions tend to correlate with the ideological orientation of political parties represented in parliament (Mello, 2012). After testing one of the most sophisticated models of the impact of domestic-level conditions, Mello (2012) concludes that only left-leaning parliaments constitute an effective veto point against military contributions to Operation Iraqi Freedom.¹ This corresponds to the tested assumption that right-wing parties are generally more supportive of military interventions than left-wing parties.

Palmer, London, and Regan (2004) assume that political leaders, above all, want to remain in office. Since the electoral platforms of right-leaning parties are generally more pro-military than those of left-leaning parties, right-wing governments should be more likely to resort to the use of force. The analysis by Palmer et al. (2004), as well as the successive study of Arena and Palmer (2009), confirms this inference. Likewise, Schuster and Maier (2006, p. 233) conclude that left-wing parties were more inclined to object to the 2003 Iraq War, while Stevens (2015) shows that the United Kingdom's leftist

prime minister Blair paid a higher political price for the Iraq War than the U.S.' right-wing president Bush. Finally, the study of Massie (2016, p. 106) suggests that right-leaning executives tend to slow down decisions to withdraw from combat operations. In line with these studies, Auerswald and Saideman (2014, p. 69) assume that left-wing coalitions are more likely to impose tighter restraints on how operations are conducted.

However, academic research has moved beyond examining the binary distinction between the pro-military right and the pro-peace left. More specifically, scholars have developed more complex hypotheses on the differences between left- and right-wing parties on military action. Rathbun (2004) has introduced a three-dimension model, which suggests that leftist parties are not only more antimilitaristic, prefer operating under multilateral frameworks and have a broader conception of the national interest, which comprises the promotion of human rights (Rathbun, 2004, pp. 18–21). Rightist parties, in turn, have a more narrow conception of the national interest, consider the use of force an acceptable instrument in international relations, and are more reluctant to delegate control to multilateral institutions. Building on the model of Rathbun, Frost-Nielsen (2017, p. 6) expects rightist parties to be in favor of national restrictions if there are only limited national interests at stake in the mission, while left-wing parties are expected to be in favor of restrictions to avoid “excessive use of force outside the humanitarian mandate of the mission.”

Building on this prior research, two main expectations can be formulated. First, parliamentary involvement can be hypothesized to increase the restrictions on the mandate of deployed forces because it opens up decision-making on the use of force to opposition parties. Second, the mandate restrictions desired by political parties is expected to depend on their ideological orientation. More specifically, right-wing parties can be expected to prefer restricted mandates if there are no clear national interests at stake in the operation, left-wing parties tend to prefer restrictions on the use of military force beyond humanitarian goals. To test these propositions, we first assess whether or not the arguments provided by members of the Belgian parliament (MPs) in the debates in the Belgian House of Representatives on participating in the Libya intervention (2011) and the air strikes against the Islamic State over Iraq (2014) are indeed in line with the expectations derived from literature on the link between party ideology and desired mandate restrictions. Subsequently, we discuss the actual impact of this temporary parliamentarization on the outcome of the mandate negotiations for the Belgian military contribution to the examined operations.

Case selection

Belgium's participation in the military interventions in Libya (2011) and the coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq (2014–2017) provides two unique

opportunities to test the conventional wisdoms of the literature on parliamentary restrictions. As the Belgian government found itself at both occasions in a caretaker states, there was debate about its constitutional prerogative to autonomously decide upon military troop deployments (Fonck & Reykers, 2018; Reykers & Fonck, 2016). As a result, both decisions were exceptionally brought to parliament for a formal vote of approval. In the Libya case, the decision to participate with six F16 fighter jets, a marine minesweeper and approximately 200 military support personnel was voted upon on March 18, 2011, receiving a quasi-unanimous parliamentary support. On September 26, 2014, also the decision to deploy again six F16 fighter jets and an additional 120 military support troops to Iraq again received convincing parliamentary support, with only the extreme-left Partij van de Arbeid-Parti du Travail de Belgique (PVDA-PTB) voting against and the green Ecolo-Groen fraction abstaining.

Following the caveats literature, one would expect that these exceptional episodes of parliamentary involvement impacted the mandate of the Belgian contribution to both coalitions. In their analysis of national restrictions on the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, Auerswald and Saideman (2014, p. 208) already briefly referred to the Belgian participation in the Libya intervention, framing it as “perhaps the most interesting and underrated part of the Libyan campaign.” Remarkably, however, they suggested that while Belgian forces “faced significant restrictions in Afghanistan,” its active engagement in the air strikes over Libya was guided by a mandate “with little restrictions.” The authors not only refer to the humanitarian nature of the intervention as a potential explanatory factor, but also point at domestic political factors. The caretaker status of the Belgian government in 2011 is suggested to having created a situation with “essentially no veto-players,” which, according to them, together with a large parliamentary support might explain for this rather forceful mandate (Auerswald & Saide-man, 2014, p. 208).

Against the background of findings about how parliamentary involvement leads to higher national restrictions in coalition warfare, the forceful participation of Belgium in the Libya and Iraq interventions are indeed puzzling observations. They seemingly contradict the aforementioned findings about the determining effect of domestic bargaining, and hence require closer scrutiny.

Libya operation

The military intervention in Libya was launched in response to the brutal repression of the Libyan uprising by the Qaddafi regime. On March 17, 2011, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 1973, which established a no-fly zone over Libya and authorized all necessary

measures to protect civilians under threat of attack. Military action to enforce this resolution began two days later and ended in October 2011. The operation started as an ad hoc coalition, but NATO took command ten days after its launch.

Party politics and the mandate preferences for the Libya operation

Following UNSC resolution 1973, the Libya intervention primarily focused on the protection of civilians under threat of attack and the enforcement of a no-fly zone. Statements by government leaders of participating coalition members, including those of Belgium, reflected this overarching humanitarian framing. For instance, Prime Minister Leterme declared before parliament on March 21, 2011 that “Resolution 1973 of the UN Security Council confirmed the responsibility of the international community to protect the Libyan population against attacks” and “the Libyan population needs our support now” (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a, pp. 3–4). In consequence, building on the aforementioned literature, we expect left-wing parties not to argue in favor of general restrictions on the tasks of deployed forces, but instead to restrict the mandate towards protecting the Libyan population. Given that there were no clear Belgian interests at stake in the operation, we would expect right-wing parties to prefer a more restricted mandate for the deployed forces.

The parliamentary debates provide mixed support for these expectations. The MPs that took the floor during the extensive discussions on Belgian participation in the military operations in the plenary session of March 17–21, 2011 and the Joint Committee for External Relations and Defense of March 18, 2011 consistently supported military action in Libya for protecting the population against mass atrocities. Neither members of right-leaning or left-leaning parties argued that there were clear interests at stake to motivate their support for military action. In consequence, we would expect right-wing parties to be in favor of a more limited goal. However, MPs of right-wing parties generally did not argue for putting restrictions on the Belgian contribution. Intervening right-wing and centrist members mentioned that Belgium should stay within the limits of the UN Resolution, but were not explicit on which the goals of the operation (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a, p. 22, 27). In the debates on the Belgian contribution, right-wing conservative members even argued that the operation could, in fact, pursue regime change. They furthermore claimed that the military intervention would make the deportation of Qaddafi to the International Criminal Court in The Hague possible (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a, p. 39).

Members of left-wing parties did argue to keep the operation focused on the protection of civilians. During the debate of March 18, 2011, members of the [Flemish] socialist party and the [Walloon and Flemish] green parties did argue that the intervention should pursue limited and very clear

goals (Verenigde Commissies voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen en voor de Landsverdediging, 2011, pp. 13–16, 25). One socialist MP, for example, explicitly warned not to pursue regime change or nation-building. In the plenary session of March 21 when parliament almost unanimously adopted the resolution on participation in the operation, members of the socialist and green parties put strong emphasis on the necessity of staying within the limits of the UN resolution and avoiding that the operation would pursue other goals than protecting the Libyan population. Left-wing social democrats argued that it must be avoided that the operation results in an occupation or in an offensive operation. They furthermore explicitly warned against mission creep, thereby joined by a green member who argued the operation should not result in regime change (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a, p. 8, 14, 18). Finally, green and socialist MPs furthermore insisted on the necessity of avoiding collateral damage and civilian victims (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a, p. 16, 18).

As the operation progressed, MPs of the socialist and green parties asked critical questions on whether or not the operation was overstepping UNSC resolution 1973. This included remarks from MPs of the socialist parties on the May 10 in the Foreign Affairs Committee, pointing at the fact that Qaddafi and his family were targeted by coalition air strikes. They claimed that the operation had evolved from a humanitarian intervention into an intervention that assisted in a civil war (Commissie voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen, 2011, p. 3, 7). The same issues also resulted in animosity within the parliament's Committee on Defence, where on June 1, a green member expressed his concern on the fact that the operation was getting involved in a civil war, while the primary goal should be the protection of the Libyan population (Commissie voor de Landsverdediging, 2011, p. 28). In the plenary debate that same day, a socialist MP concluded that the operation in Libya had already gone far beyond the mandate provided by the UNSC (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011b, p. 2).

The debates in the Belgian parliament thus partly confirm the expectations derived from the literature on the link between political ideology and the desired restrictions on the mandate of military operations. In line with these expectations, left-leaning parties indeed argued against exceeding the humanitarian mandate of the operation and limiting it to the protection of civilians. However, in contrast to theoretical expectations, right-wing parties did not argue for restrictions on the deployed forces, in spite of the absence of clear Belgian interests in the operation.

The mandate negotiation of the Belgian contribution

Given the involvement of parliament, thus including the opposition parties, in the decision-making process for the Libya intervention, we would expect

restrictions also being imposed on the mandate of the Belgian contribution. Remarkably, however, the parliamentary resolution that authorized Belgian participation was far from a limited mandate. It requested the government to “actively collaborate in the implementation of the UNSC resolution” and did not impose limitations in terms of the duration of the Belgian involvement (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011c, para 2). Perhaps most strikingly, the resolution furthermore contained the message that “conditions are fulfilled for a military action against the regime of Qaddafi,” an issue which seemingly passed the Belgian parliamentary vote unnoticed (see also Fonck & Reykers, 2018; Reykers & Fonck, 2016).

Retracing the negotiations leading up to the final mandate, the reasons for this remarkably broad and permissive mandate appear to be twofold. First, the parliamentary resolution was meticulously prepared by the Foreign Affairs department, instead of by the parliament itself (Reykers & Fonck, 2016, p. 99). Limited by the rapidity of the decision-making process, parliament needed to discuss and agree on a pre-drafted mandate during one afternoon on the basis of an executive-drafted mandate. Second, and most crucially, interviews show there was a strong cross-party parliamentary consensus on the desirability to intervene, fed by a general resentment over Qaddafi’s threats towards the opposition movements and by the opposition’s strong indignation over an earlier decision of the Belgian government to approve Libya’s candidacy for a seat in the UN Human Rights Council a year earlier (Interview with Foreign Affairs Official, April 17, 2015). It has been shown elsewhere how officials within the Foreign Affairs department were aware of this general atmosphere, leading them to strategically exploit this momentum (Fonck & Reykers, 2018).

That having said, the green and socialist opposition parties did however succeed in slightly restricting the mandate elsewhere. Together with majority members they negotiated and subsequently proposed an extra condition to the parliamentary mandate which stipulated that parliamentary consultation is again required “whenever new circumstances would change the nature of the Belgian engagement” (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011c, p. 5). This seems to be in line with Frost-Nielsen’s (2017) argument that opposition parties stand skeptical to a government’s proposal and will therefore seek to limit its leeway.

Concluding, the debates in parliament are clearly in line with expectations on party ideology and desired mandate restrictions, confirming the first hypothesis. A less clear verdict can be made with regard to the effect of opposition parties on the outcome of mandate bargaining. Frost-Nielsen’s expectation that the inclusion of opposition parties, skeptical to the government’s proposals, will result in mandate restrictions, seemed to have been mitigated by the orchestrated nature of the parliamentary involvement which inhibited a genuine government-opposition bargaining process to take place. Given

these mixed results, the second hypothesis does not appear to fully hold for the case of Libya.

Coalition against the Islamic State

International military action against the Islamic State started on August 8, 2014, after forces of the Islamic State began to pose an immediate threat to the Kurdish capital Erbil and created a humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq. The Belgian government agreed on September 24, 2014 to contribute with six F16 fighter jets against the Islamic State in Iraq. Starting from February 2015, Belgium also deployed around 50 instructors to train and advice Iraqi forces. The Belgian contribution to the air campaign was paused on June 30, 2015, as part of a rotation agreement with The Netherlands.

Party politics and the mandate preferences for the coalition against the Islamic State

One of the main reasons cited by the Belgian government for its participation in the coalition in Iraq was the fight against terrorism and the particular security threat posed by returning fighters. As Belgium appeared to be one of the most fertile breeding grounds for foreign fighters, the international conflict was framed as representing a particular national concern for the government. The domestic politicization of the issue was further fed when, in June 2014, a returned foreign fighter killed four people in a terrorist attack at the Jewish museum in Belgium. Testimony to this is the discourse of the foreign affairs minister in Parliament on September 24–25, where he stated that the “presence of foreign fighters makes this issue not only a Syrian or Iraqi one, but also directly implicate Belgium” (Verenigde Commissies voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen en voor de Landsverdediging, 2014a, 2014b). In addition, humanitarian arguments guided the government’s decision to participate in the operation, such as there was the humanitarian crisis following the horrific attacks of the Islamic State on Christian and Yezidi towns in Northern Iraq (Henderson, 2014, p. 209; Verenigde Commissies voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen en voor de Landsverdediging, 2014a, 2014b). Because of the more tangible Belgian interests at stake, we expect the right-wing parties to not argue in favor of general restrictions on the tasks of deployed forces. In contrast, we would expect left-wing parties to argue for more restrictions, except for operations with a clear humanitarian goal.

The decision to participate in the air operations in Iraq was discussed in the Joint Committee of External Relations and Defense and during a plenary session, which resulted in a resolution that authorized military action in Iraq. A large majority of the parliament voted in favor of the resolution.

Only the two members of the extreme left PTB voted against the resolution, while members of the green parties abstained.

During the debates, members of left-wing parties were clearly less supportive than members of the centrist and right-wing parties. The MPs that took the floor consistently referred to the mass atrocities committed by the Islamic State as one of the main reasons for supporting the intervention. Several MPs also pointed at the threat to Belgian national security, posed by the Islamic State (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 20, 38, 44). A liberal and centrist MP referred to the attack at the Jewish museum and the threat posed by the 400 Belgian nationals that joined the Islamic State. Two other liberal members even explicitly argued that the Islamic State posed a terrorist threat to Belgian society, making them conclude that one of the reasons to support military action was avoiding that Iraq would become a safe haven for international terrorism (Verenigde Commissies voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen en voor de Landsverdediging, 2014a, p. 16). Finally, the extreme-right framed the operation as an intervention against radical Islam, which in his view poses a threat to Western societies more in general (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 45).

With regards to the mandate of the deployed forces, there were clear differences on whether or not Belgian fighter jets could also operate over Syrian territory. All green and socialist parties argued that in the absence of a mandate of the Security Council and a request of the Syrian government, there was no legal basis for conducting air operations over Syria and, therefore, the Belgian operation should remain restricted to Iraq. In contrast, an extreme-right MP questioned whether the operation should be restricted to Iraq, given that the Islamic State does not care about UN mandates (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 47). Centrists, in turn, argued that the Security Council was losing legitimacy because the veto power of Russia and China was keeping it from taking action against the mass atrocities that were taking place in Syria (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 38). The right-wing conservative N-VA was most strongly in favor of operating above Syria. Next to calling into question the legitimacy of the UNSC, which according to his argument was taken hostage by Russia, it was argued the party was not principally opposed to an intervention in Syria (Verenigde Commissies voor de Buitenlandse Betrekkingen en voor de Landsverdediging, 2014a, p. 23). On top of that, they requested to be “pragmatic” with regards to Belgian fighter jets crossing the border between Iraq and Syria (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 7). This led to a strong reply from the socialists and greens, who asked not to be pragmatic when it comes to international law (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, p. 7, 25).

The debates in the Belgian parliament, thus, confirm the expectations derived from the literature on the link between political ideology and caveats. In line with these expectations, left-leaning parties wanted a more limited mandate for the operation and argued against expanding operations to Syria. In contrast, members of right-wing parties did not argue for restrictions on the deployed forces and did not oppose extension to Syria.

The mandate negotiation of the Belgian contribution

Contrary to the Libya intervention, the parliamentary involvement in the decision about the Belgian military contribution in the coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq resulted in more significant restrictions being introduced by the opposition parties.

Informal negotiations on the scope of the mandate were initiated by the outgoing government, who proposed to have discussions on a draft version of the parliamentary resolution, involving both past and future coalition parties while also reaching out to opposition parties. The decision to extend talks to the opposition was particularly instructed by a desire of the incumbent-yet-in-dismissal government to assure the future to the incoming would-be majority would also support and carry out the decision to intervene (Fonck & Reykers, 2018, p. 15). Negotiations therefore largely followed government-opposition dynamics reflecting the incoming government coalition, and resulted in three significant amendments.² First, green and socialist opposition parties managed to limit the mandate of the intervention to the Iraqi territory, against the will of right-wing MPs who were in favor of including Syria. Second, the socialists also opposed including any reference to “training, advising, and assisting” or “special exploratory missions” tasks in the final parliamentary resolution, which implied the possible deployment of special forces. Third, upon request of the greens and socialists, the parliamentary resolution explicitly stipulated a time limitation, in the sense of granting the government permission to participate in the intervention only “for the duration of one month.” Finally, after the resolution was introduced to parliament, the greens still managed to strengthen a provision on the safeguarding of human rights just before it was put to vote (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014a, pp. 25–26, 28–29, 2014b, p. 4).

Concluding, our findings on the Iraq intervention not only correspond with Frost-Nielsen’s (2017, p. 6) general conception of caveats as a “negotiated compromise” between government and opposition parties. Even more, the predicted relation between political ideology and mandate preferences also determined the majority-opposition bargaining process. Parties oriented to the left were clearly willing to limit the territorial scope and action range of the operation and asked for humanitarian safeguards, while right-wing parties favored a more maximalist intervention based on arguments of national interest.

Conclusion

This article has shed light on the implications of parliamentary involvement of national restrictions in coalition warfare. It has analyzed (1) the link between party ideology on mandate preferences, and (2) the impact of bargaining between majority and opposition parties on the outcome of mandate negotiations.

Overall, both case studies provide clear evidence that support the expected relationship between ideology and mandate preferences. While the literature expects right-wing preferences on mandate restrictions to be conditioned by the degree of national interests at stake in the operation, the intervention against the Islamic State clearly confirmed this tendency by showing their eagerness to intervene in Syria as well. Left-wing parties on the hand showed a strong inclination towards imposing restrictions on the use of military force beyond humanitarian goals.

With regard to the impact of opening up the decision-making on deploying forces to opposition parties, our findings are less conclusive. The case of Libya indicated that the influence of opposition parties was severely limited by a strong executive-driven and time-constrained parliamentary consultation process, which prevented a genuine government-opposition bargaining process from taking place. It furthermore showed that the cross-party hawkish consensus on the necessity to intervene failed to transform the opposition parties into inescapable veto players. The case of the coalition against the Islamic State at its turn, resulted in an effective negotiation process between government and opposition parties, with the latter being crucial players to have on board, as it included future majority members of the incoming government. In short, our study suggests that the impact of opposition parties as effective veto players on mandate bargaining is dependent on a sufficient degree of contention between government and opposition parties, as well as on the extent to which the executive needs to seek support across its own majority. In that sense, future research should do well in prioritizing the study of domestic bargaining processes over ideological preferences.

On a more generic level, our findings touch upon ongoing debates in the parliamentarization literature. They particularly shed new light on the cardinal question whether increased parliamentary involvement necessarily implies a victory for parliament. The mixed findings in this article raise the importance of investigating opposite tendencies of executive-driven attempts to legitimize military interventions (see also Fonck & Reykers, 2018; Lagassé, 2017), whereby parliamentary consultation reflects an orchestration rather than a democratization. This remains a key issue to be addressed, both in future research which seeks to establish the determinants of genuine democratic control on the use of military force, and in policy debates about changing parliamentary war powers.

Notes

1. In contrast, the study of Haesebrouck (2018) on the pattern of participation in the air strikes against the Islamic State suggests that parliamentary veto power is a relevant condition for military deployment decisions, irrespective of partisan politics.
2. Interviews with members of parliament, Brussels, July 6–7, 2015; Interview with former defense cabinet official, Brussels March 21, 2016.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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