

AMERICAN INTERVENTIONS IN THE THIRD WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

I. CORE QUESTIONS

- A. How large is the American "empire"?
- B. What have been the effects of US interventions on the USA? Have they improved or injured U.S. security? U.S. prosperity?
- C. What have been the effects of US interventions on the target societies? (Answer: it depends. Results varied.)
- D. What caused US interventions? Mainly security or economic concerns?

II. THE SPANISH-AMERICAN-FILIPINO WAR, 1898-1902

- A. Background to war.
 1. The U.S. suffered economic downturns in 1873-78, 1882-85 and 1893-97. The 1893-97 depression was perhaps as bad as the Great Depression of 1929-41.
 2. Americans believed that China could be a large market for U.S. goods, and that the one-way export of U.S. goods to this China market would prevent further economic depressions.
 3. Americans believed in 1898 that Europeans were about to conquer and partition China; and that the U.S. needed military bases in East Asia if it wanted its slice of the China pie. The Philippines could supply such bases.
- B. The costs of the U.S.-Filipino war: 5,000 Americans and 200,000 Filipinos killed. Some 70,000 US troops were deployed to the Philippines.
- C. Were American perceptions accurate? In fact the China market was a myth, one-way trade with China was impossible, and future depressions were not prevented by U.S. empire. Moreover, US possession of the Philippines caused unforeseen US-Japan conflict, since US measures to defend the Philippines also threatened Japan--an example of the security dilemma at work. Oh dear.

III. US CARIBBEAN INTERVENTIONS, 1900-1934

- A. Background: "Dollar Diplomacy" before World War I. Note: dollar diplomacy was about U.S. national security, not dollars.
- B. Dominant U.S. motives:
 1. Dollar Diplomacy/Security:
 - Dominican Republic 1916-1924.
 - Haiti 1915-1934.
 - Nicaragua 1909, 1912.
 - Russia 1918-1920 (not a Third World intervention but I toss it in).
 2. Economic:
 - Cuba 1906-1909, 1917--to protect U.S. investors.
 - Panama 1903--to get a bargain price on canal rights.
 - Mexico 1913--to protect U.S. investors.
 3. Other:
 - Nicaragua 1927-32--to contain leftist Mexico.
 - Mexico 1914--to promote democracy in Mexico.

The U.S. Marines fought nasty counter-insurgencies against locals who resented US occupation in Haiti 1915-34, the Dominican Republic 1916-24, and Nicaragua 1927-32, killing several thousand people.
- C. Non-intervention: FDR's Good Neighbor Policy, 1934-45.

IV. COVERT OPERATIONS, 1945-PRESENT

- A. Iran 1953: a CIA coup against the elected Mossadeq regime. Britain sought a coup against Mossadeq to protect British oil companies from nationalization by the Mossadeq government. So Britain fed the U.S. false tales of communists penetration of Iran and of communist leanings by Mossadeq. These fables helped spur the U.S. to organize the 1953 coup. The U.S. then installed a cruel pro-U.S. rightist dictatorship under the Shah Reza Pahlavi (1953-1979). In 1979 the

- Shah's regime was overthrown by extremist Shiite mullahs who had been radicalized by the 1953 coup and the Shah's dictatorship. These mullahs then established their own cruel dictatorship (1979-present) and pursued a fiercely anti-American foreign policy.
- B. Guatemala 1954: a CIA coup against the kind-of-elected leftist Arbenz regime. The coup brought a brutal rightist dictatorship to power. Vast horrors followed. Guatemala saw periodic rebellions for the next four decades. These were suppressed with immense violence (200,000 killed). Peace came only in 1996. A military-influenced government still rules a crime-ridden country.
 - C. Chile 1970-1973: CIA operations against the elected Allende regime. Dictatorship followed, 1973-1989; democracy restored in 1989.
 - D. Other successful operations: Brazil 1964, Greece 1967. Failed operations: Cuba 1961, Indonesia 1957, Eastern Europe and China 1950s, against Saddam's Iraqi regime 1991-2003.
- > Possible moral: covert operations are effective against democracies but useless against tyrannies. US operations against Cuba, the USSR, China and Iraq all failed.
 - > Question: what about assassination as a U.S. policy? Ever a good idea? E.g., against Saddam Hussein during 1991-2003? Or Hitler 1933-45?
- V. DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN OTHERS' INTERNAL AFFAIRS, 1945-PRESENT
- A. Direct interventions, 1945-89.
 - 1. Vietnam/Indochina 1961-1973.
 - 2. Dominican Republic 1965.
 - 3. Grenada 1983; Panama 1989.
 - 4. Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, 1941-1945. These interventions had striking democratic and peace-causing results.
 - B. Direct interventions, 1989-present.
 - 1. 1990s interventions: Somalia 1992-93; Haiti 1994; Bosnia 1995; Kosovo 1999. Observers disagree on whether these were successes or failures. The Somali intervention probably saved over 40,000 lives and cost 42 U.S. lives. Haiti remains a mess, Bosnia and Kosovo are quiet but remain powder kegs.
 - 2. 2000s interventions: Afghanistan, Iraq. Still underway, wish us luck.
 - 3. Some intervention issues, regarding three main intervention missions: democratization, pacifying societies in conflict, and defeating insurgencies.
 - > Regarding democratization:
 - > When does imposing democracy require long occupation? Long occupations were needed in Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, but not in Panama or Grenada.
 - > When is democratization impossible, even with a long occupation? Intense poverty and illiteracy usually preclude democracy, and cannot be easily cured. Some argue that Haiti, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq fall into this category.
 - > Regarding preventing/dampening/ending civil war:
 - > Do deep social divisions preclude democracy civil peace? (And perhaps democracy as well). Some argue that Bosnia, Serbia/Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan fall into this category.
 - > Regarding defeating insurgencies:
 - > When will U.S. intervention face insurgency that requires U.S. counter-insurgency (COIN), as in Vietnam 1965-73 and Iraq 2003-? When and how can insurgency be avoided, as in Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria after 1945, Grenada 1983-, and Panama 1989-? The U.S. is bad at COIN and needs to keep such interventions to a minimum.
 - Some argue that the Iraq insurgency of 2003- was inevitable. Others say it was avoidable, and stemmed from U.S. blunders:

entering Iraq with a fairly small invasion force, failing to provide security following the invasion, disbanding the Iraqi Army in spring 2003, and unduly broad de-Ba'athification of the state, which amounted to de-Sunnification and so provoked the Sunnis.

- > Can U.S. military forces succeed at counter-insurgency (COIN)? COIN is essentially police work, alien to the ethos of the U.S. military services, and requiring skills and assets, especially knowledge of local language and culture, that U.S. forces often lack.
- > What are the keys to success in COIN? Many point to nine keys:
 - a. Good intelligence, as COIN is largely police work (as noted above), not war.
 - b. Avoiding injury to innocents. This requires good intelligence; and very restrictive rules of engagement for your troops ("shoot only when you are sure you will not harm civilians.") Your troops will chafe at strict rules of engagement but they are essential to victory.
 - c. Good communication with the occupied public. Explain your actions, tell your side of the story.
 - d. Carrots as well as sticks. Offer economic incentives (bribes) for cooperation with your program.
 - e. Take steps to ensure that the government you support behaves in ways that cause it to be viewed as legitimate by the public. It must deliver services competently and fairly.
 - f. A clear-and-hold strategy is far better than a search-and-destroy strategy.
 - g. **Get local forces to do the heavy lifting in COIN.** Locals know the local language and culture and will be far better at intelligence collection.
 - h. Insurgencies are very hard to defeat if they have sanctuaries in neighboring countries. Such sanctuaries must be shut down.
 - i. Don't let the insurgency start in the first place. Insurgencies are like peat fires--very hard to start, very hard to stop. The best COIN strategy is to prevent insurgency in the first place.
- > Can mass violence (e.g., killing everyone in rebellious districts) defeat insurgency? History (e.g., the defeat of the Guatemalan insurgents in the 1980s) suggests yes if the violence is accurately directed at the most rebellious areas. But this is not a tool the U.S. can use. If used today in Iraq or Afghanistan it would further alienate the wider Muslim world and bolster al-Qaeda.
- > Is torture useful in COIN? Does successful COIN require the use of torture or other violations of the laws of war?

VI. INTERVENTION BY PROXY: PARAMILITARY INTERVENTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS BY ASSISTING REGIMES, 1945-PRESENT

- A. The Reagan Doctrine Wars, 1983-1991.
 1. Nicaragua: the U.S. supported Contra rebels against the Marxist Sandinista governments, 1983-90.
 2. Angola: the U.S. supported UNITA rebels against the Marxist MPLA government, 1975-91.
 3. Cambodia: the U.S. supported anti-Hun Sen forces, 1979-89.
 4. Afghanistan: the U.S. supported Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet invaders, 1980-92.

Possible morals: (1) paramilitary campaigns can have military success. The US proxy armies did well in all four wars. (2) Paramilitary intervention makes a big mess because civil wars tear up society. Fighting continues to this day in Afghanistan and Angola is a mine-ridden ruin, strewn with death and suffering. A

million Angolans died in the war of 1975-1991.

- B. Assistance to El Salvador's government, 1979-91. The U.S. helped El Salvador's rightist oligarchs defeat the communist FMLN rebellion. 70,000 killed. Democracy has followed since.
- VII. DIRECT INTERVENTIONS AGAINST INTERNATIONAL AGGRESSION, 1945-PRESENT
- A. Korea, 1950-present. The U.S. reversed North Korea's aggression and deterred any renewed aggression.
- B. The Persian Gulf War, 1990-1991. The US forced Iraq out of Kuwait. Possible moral: the US is good at this kind of intervention. US armed forces are well-designed for halting or reversing cross-border aggression.
- VIII. CURRENT INTERVENTION ISSUES
- A. Controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This is now a paramount U.S. interest! Consider these strategies:
1. Denying technology to proliferators--can this still work by itself? (No.)
 2. Economic carrots and sticks: (a) threat of economic sanctions and (b) bribery for good conduct. Are these measures strong enough alone to stem and reverse proliferation?
 3. Provide security for potential proliferators. But what if they are nasty countries hostile to U.S. allies? E.g., Saddam's Iraq, Iran, North Korea.
 4. Hold proliferators' nuclear forces at risk. The U.S. would let proliferation happen but be prepared to undo it by (nuclear) preventive war. This threat will make proliferators behave. It requires a nuclear first- and second-strike capability. Can such capabilities be gained and sustained against such states? Many say it requires national ballistic missile defense. Is this true?
 5. Counter-society deterrence. Threaten to annihilate societies that use nukes recklessly. But will this work after they get a second strike capability? Will it prevent transfer of weapons to terrorists? And is it right to threaten to slaughter innocents?
 6. Counter-elite deterrence.
 - a. Threaten to annihilate proliferators' elites if they use or transfer nukes recklessly.
 - b. Establish the principle that all governments must pay damages to anyone injured by their WMD. Face proliferators with the risk of countless immense lawsuits if they lose control of their WMD to terrorists or others. Will possessing WMD then be so fashionable?
 7. Regime change by subversion or economic strangulation (including by blockade) or air strike.
 8. Preventive war (either limited or total):
 - a. Conventional preventive war, e.g., Israel against Iraq in 1981. This is now U.S. policy as framed in the 2002 U.S. national security strategy. Possible candidates for future action include Iran, North Korea, Syria, Libya (if it backslides), Sudan, and maybe more.
 - b. Nuclear preventive war--a more frightening idea.
- Question: How can the U.S. justify denying WMD to others while maintaining thousands of nuclear weapons itself?
- B. Interventions against terror networks, as in Afghanistan 2001-. What are the options?
1. Is it enough just to intimidate terror-harboring regimes into controlling their own terrorists? Or ...
 2. Must/can the US oust terror-harboring regimes and replace them with regimes that will police their terrorists (as the US did in Afghanistan in 2001)?

3. Must the U.S. also save "failed states" (e.g., Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo) to prevent them from becoming terrorist havens? Is the U.S. sufficiently good at social engineering to save them? Or ...
 4. Can the U.S. instead learn how to intervene in failed states to destroy terror networks, without establishing effective governance in those states? (The Biden Plan for Afghanistan.)
- C. War prevention: If the U.S. doesn't prevent or halt distant wars will they spread to involve the U.S.? Also, will terrorists feed on distant wars if the U.S. doesn't halt or prevent them (as al-Qaeda fed on the Afghan civil war)? But if the U.S. tries try to prevent wars, will it succeed? (Does it know how?) And if the U.S. doesn't will it get sucked into wars it could otherwise avoid?
- D. Human rights. Should the U.S. undertake humanitarian interventions to stop gross human rights violations, e.g., the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the continuing slaughter in Burundi, the horrors in Sudan (including Darfur) since 1983?
- General background questions that are relevant:
- Has the U.S. done good for others when it intervened overseas in the past? If not will it do better in the future?
 - Is the U.S. state, or any state, good at performing philanthropies--especially abroad? Will governments do more harm than good when they are not accountable to those affected by their actions, as when they intervene in others' affairs?
 - Are societies entitled to shape one another when they "know better" than the other--or do societies have a right to commit their own crimes and blunders?
 - Does the U.S. have a duty to help others? At what discount do we value others' lives? How many Sudanese, or Afghans, are worth one American?
 - What instruments of intervention are legitimate? Covert action? Economic sanctions? Assassination?
- E. Democracy: is democracy good for everyone? Can the US export it successfully?
- F. Defending America's cultural/historic kin: Israel, South Korea, Philippines. Who do Americans owe, and what do Americans owe them?
- G. Environmental interests, especially **global warming**. The U.S. has been the laggard state on this issue. (Should others intervene here and make us behave??)
- H. Miscellaneous: drugs (Colombia today), migrants (Haiti 1994).

IX. WHO FAVORS INTERVENTION TODAY?

The U.S. has intervened abroad repeatedly since the Cold War ended (1989) under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Under President George H.W. Bush the U.S. intervened in Panama, Kuwait/Iraq, and Somalia. Under President Bill Clinton the U.S. remained in Somalia, and intervened in Bosnia, Kosovo, and (indirectly) Haiti. Under President George W. Bush the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. President Obama has expanded the intervention in Afghanistan. Neoconservative foreign policy thinkers are the strongest advocates of interventions today, especially in the Mideast.

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