

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?
- C. What have been the effects of US interventions on the target societies? (Answer: it depends. Results varied.)
- D. What caused US interventions? The Marxism v. Security debate.

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

- A. Background to war.
 - 1. The depressions of 1873-78, 1882-85, 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 export of U.S. goods to this China market would prevent further economic depressions.
 - 3. Americans believed in 1898 that the 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: over 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. 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 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 here anyway).
 - 2. Economic:
 - Cuba 1906-1909, 1917.
 - Panama 1903.
 - Mexico 1913.
 - 3. Other:
 - Nicaragua 1927-32--to contain leftist Mexico.
 - Mexico 1914--a case of US democratic crusading.

Note: the U.S. fought counter-insurgencies against locals who resented US occupation in Haiti 1915-34, the Dominican Republic 1916-

24, and Nicaragua 1927-32.

C. Non-interventions: FDR's Good Neighbor Policy, 1933-45.

IV. COLD WAR ERA COVERT OPERATIONS, 1945-89

A. Iran 1953: the CIA coup against Mossadeq. Dictatorship followed, first under the Shah Reza Pahlevi (1953-1979), then under the Shiite mullahs (1979-).

B. Guatemala 1954: the CIA coup against Arbenz. Vast horrors followed: Guatemala saw huge civil violence for decades after the 1954 coup. Peace came only in 1996; a brutal government still rules and sometimes kills today.

C. Chile 1970-1973: CIA operations against Allende. Dictatorship followed, 1973-1989; democracy restored in 1989.

D. Other operations: Cuba 1961, Brazil 1964, Greece 1967, Indonesia 1957, failed operations in Eastern Europe and China, 1950s.

>Possible moral: covert operations are effective against democracies, but useless against tyrannies. (US operations against Cuba, the USSR and China all failed).

>Question: what about assassination as a U.S. policy? Ever a good idea? E.g., against Saddam Hussein?

V. COLD WAR ERA DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN OTHERS' INTERNAL AFFAIRS, 1945-89

A. Indochina 1961-1973.

B. Dominican Republic 1965.

C. Grenada 1983; Panama 1989.

D. Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, 1945. These were also "interventions," and had striking democratic and peace-causing results.

>Possible moral: imposing democracy requires occupation--less intrusive interventions aren't enough.

>Question: will the U.S. public take the casualties that direct U.S. intervention will cost?

VI. POST COLD WAR DIRECT MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN OTHERS' INTERNAL AFFAIRS, 1989-present

Somalia 1992-93; Haiti 1994; Kosovo 1999. Observers disagree on whether these were successes or failures. The Somali intervention probably saved some 22,000 lives.

VII. PARAMILITARY INTERVENTIONS: THE REAGAN DOCTRINE WARS, 1983-1991

A. Nicaragua (the Contra war).

B. Angola.

C. Cambodia.

D. Afghanistan.

>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. And Angola is a mine-ridden ruin, strewn with death and suffering.

VIII. DIRECT INTERVENTIONS AGAINST INTERNATIONAL AGGRESSION

- A. Korea, 1950-1999. The U.S. reverses North Korea's aggression and deters any renewed aggression.
- B. The Persian Gulf War, 1990-1991. The US forces Iraq out of Kuwait.
- >Possible moral: the US is pretty good at this kind of intervention. US armed forces are well-designed for halting or reversing cross-border aggression.

IX. CURRENT INTERVENTION ISSUES

The background questions, raised by growing calls for U.S. humanitarian intervention:

- Does the USA do good for others when it intervenes overseas?
 - Has it done good in the past?
 - If not, will it do better in the future?
 This raises cosmic questions about the nature of:
 - The human race. Does human compassion carry across borders? If not, why not?
 - The state. Can states perform philanthropies? Can the American state perform philanthropies?
 - The importance of accountability. Do states become dangerous when they are not accountable to those affected by their actions?
 - The right of one society to shape another even when it "knows better"--the question of self-determination and the right to commit one's own crimes and blunders.
 - Does the US have a duty to help others? At what discount do we value others' lives? How many Bosnians, or Kosovars, or Sudanese, are worth one American?
 - What instruments of intervention are legitimate?
- A. Controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Consider these strategies:
1. Technical denial--can this still work? (No.)
 2. Economic sanctions, economic coercion--adequate?
 3. Provide security for potential proliferators. But what if they are nasty-bad countries that hate our friends? E.g., Iran, Iraq, North Korea.
 4. Preventive war:
 - a. Conventional preventive war, e.g., in Gulf 1991? (But will the next proliferator do us the favor of starting a war, as Saddam did?)
 - b. Nuclear preventive war--an exciting idea!
 5. Hold proliferators' nuclear forces at risk. (That is, maintain a first strike counterforce capability against proliferators.) The U.S. would let proliferation happen, but be prepared to undo it by (nuclear) preventive war. This threat will make them behave. It requires a nuclear first-strike capability. Many say it requires national ballistic missile defense--is this true?
 6. Counter-society deterrence. Threaten to annihilate societies that use nukes recklessly. (Will this work after they get a second strike capability? And is it right to threaten to slaughter innocents?)
 7. Counter-elite deterrence--threaten to annihilate proliferators'

elites if they use nukes recklessly.

- B. War prevention: if we don't prevent or halt distant wars will they spread to involve us? But if we try to prevent them, will we succeed? (Do we know how?) And if we don't, will we get sucked into wars we could otherwise avoid?
- C. Human rights. Should the US undertake humanitarian interventions to stop gross human rights violations, e.g., the past genocide in Rwanda, the coming genocide in Burundi, the current horrors in Sudan and Angola?
- D. Democracy: is democracy good for everyone? Can the US export it successfully?
- E. Saving "failed states" (e.g., Somalia, Congo). Can the US save them? (Are we such capable social engineers?) Is it our job?
- F. Defending America's cultural/historic kin: Israel, S. Korea, Philippines. Who do Americans owe, and what do Americans owe them?
- G. Environmental interests: global warming, ozone, and more.
- H. Miscellaneous: drugs, migrants, terrorists.