

AMERICAN INTERVENTIONS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

I. CORE QUESTIONS

- A. How large is the American "empire"? Where is it located?
- 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? Have they improved or injured target societies' human rights? Have they brought democracy? Civil peace?
- D. What caused US interventions? Mainly security or economic concerns?
- E. When is U.S. intervention successful and when does it fail? What methods of intervention are effective and which are not?
- F. Ethics of intervention: When does the U.S. have a right to intervene in other societies' affairs? When does it have an obligation to intervene?

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

- A. Background to war.
 1. Recurrent recessions struck the U.S. in 1873-78, 1882-85 and 1893-97. Some refer to the 1873-1897 era as the "Long Depression." It was second in severity only to the Great Depression of 1929-41.
 2. Americans believed two economic myths: that China had a large market; and that one-way export of U.S. goods to this China market was possible, and 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 minuscule, and one-way trade with China was impossible. The US Asian empire did not prevent future depressions. 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. 10 INTERVENTIONS IN 6 COUNTRIES

- A. "Dollar Diplomacy" before World War I. Dollar diplomacy was actually about U.S. national security (specifically, keeping European navies out of the Caribbean), not dollars.
- B. Dominant U.S. motives:
 1. Dollar Diplomacy/security:
 - Dominican Republic 1916-1924.
 - Haiti 1915-1934.

- Nicaragua 1909, 1912.
- 2. Other security:
 - Russia 1918-1920, to support non-communists (an intervention in Europe, not the 3rd world, but I toss it in).
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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: the CIA instigated a 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 elected leftist Arbenz regime. Impetus for the coup came from the United Fruit Company, which opposed Arbenz because he refused to grant UFCo sweetheart terms. The coup brought a brutal rightist dictatorship to power. Vast horrors followed. Guatemala saw periodic rebellions for the next four decades. The Guatemalan government suppressed these rebellions with immense violence (200,000 killed). Peace came only in 1996. Guatemala is now a democracy, but is ridden with murderous street gangs who terrorize widely.
- C. Congo 1960: the U.S. (via the CIA) abetted the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the most popular leader in the newly-independent Congo. The U.S. then supported the rise and rule of the deeply corrupt Joseph Mobutu, who brought ruin to Congo. A great civil war, still simmering, followed his downfall. Murdering Lumumba: good choice?
- D. Chile 1970-1973: CIA operations overthrew the elected leftist Allende regime. Impetus for the coup came from the CEOs of Pepsico, ITT, and Kenicott and Anaconda copper. Harsh dictatorship followed, 1973-1989, ~2000 Chileans murdered by

Pinochet. Democracy restored in 1989.

- E. 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.
- > Some of these coups, most notably Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, and Chile 1973, were done partly to help US and British multinational corporations. Moral: economic motives sometimes drive US foreign policy. It is not all about national security. Question: do ordinary Americans benefit when the US government helps US corporations operate overseas? Doesn't this promote **job flight** from the US?
 - > 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. Eight direct interventions, 1945-89.
1. Vietnam/Indochina 1961-1973.
 2. Dominican Republic 1965.
 - 3-4. Grenada 1983; Panama 1989.
 - 5-8. Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria, 1941-1945. These interventions had striking democratic and peace-causing results.
- B. Twelve direct interventions, 1989-present.
1. Four 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 ~20,000 lives and cost 42 U.S. lives. Haiti remains a mess. Kosovo is quiet but Bosnia remains a powder keg.
 2. Two 2000s interventions: Iraq 2003-2011; Afghanistan 2001-present. U.S. losses in Iraq: 4,477 U.S. dead, 30,000 wounded, many badly. In Afghanistan: 2200+ U.S. dead so far. These wars illustrate that counter-insurgency (COIN) is hard! Iraq is now widely deemed a blunder. No WMD was destroyed. Al-Qaeda was boosted. ISIS was spawned. Two public misperceptions fueled the war: that Saddam was involved with the 9/11/01 attack, and Saddam had WMD. Both false.
 3. Six interventions by drone, airpower: Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan against al-Qaeda affiliates; Libya 2011; Iraq and Syria against ISIS today.
- C. A Non-Intervention: Rwanda 1994. 800,000 were murdered.
- D. Intervention issues, regarding four main intervention missions: democratization, regime change, pacifying societies in conflict, and defeating insurgencies.
1. Re: 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. Deep ethnic divisions also impede democracy. These conditions cannot be easily cured. Hence some argue that these problems preclude democracy in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and perhaps Egypt.
- 2. Re: Regime change:
 - > The most organized elements dominate politics after regime changes, not the most popular elements.
 - > The most organized elements are often the most extreme elements.
 - > Ergo: regime change often brings worse monsters to power unless the US occupies the target state.
- 3. Re: preventing/dampening/ending civil war:
 - > When do deep social divisions preclude civil peace? Some argue that deep ethnic divisions prime Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria for civil war.
 - > Does the US government know how to dampen or end civil wars?
- 4. Re: defeating insurgencies:
 - > The US military is very good at fighting the regular forces of states, but bad at 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.
 - > When will U.S. intervention require U.S. counter-insurgency (COIN), as in Vietnam 1965-73 and Iraq 2003-11? 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 2003-2011 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.
 - > COIN often degenerates into brutal operations against civilians that include widespread torture and murder, as both insurgents and counterinsurgents compete to coerce cooperation from civilians.
 - > Nine keys to success in COIN:
 - 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. Bush 43 and Obama failed on this score in Iraq, tolerating abuse of Sunni populations by the dreadful Shiite Maliki regime. Hence ISIS grew strong in Sunni areas.
 - 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 the Mideast it would further alienate the wider Muslim world and bolster al-Qaeda/ISIS.
 - > Is torture useful in COIN? Does successful COIN require the use of torture or other violations of the laws of war?
- Summary on direct intervention: US success often requires US occupation. But occupation often triggers insurgencies; and the US is bad at counter-insurgency.

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

A. Four Reagan Doctrine Wars, 1983-1991.

1. Nicaragua: the U.S. supported Contra rebels against the Marxist Sandinista governments, 1983-90. 50,000 Nicaraguan deaths.
2. Angola: the U.S. supported UNITA rebels against the Marxist MPLA government, 1975-91. 1,000,000 Angolan deaths.
3. Cambodia: the U.S. supported anti-Hun Sen forces, 1979-89. 64,000 El Salvadoran deaths.
4. Afghanistan: the U.S. supported Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet invaders, 1980-92. 1,000,000 Afghans killed.

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. Also immense criminalization and gang violence, triggering refugee flows to the USA in 2013ff.

Summary: paramilitary interventions can effectively punish target regimes. But is this good? They also often escape US control, killing civilians and otherwise sowing wide unintended chaos and ruin.

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. DID U.S. COLD WAR INTERVENTIONS SERVE CONTAINMENT? HOW CAN WE TELL?

IX. 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. This worked with Germany, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. But what if the potential proliferators 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 ethical to threaten to massacre civilians? Children?
 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 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. Sabotage and/or disruption. Unleash destructive cyber-attacks on the proliferator's installations (for example Stuxnet). Assassinate its nuclear scientists (as someone has killed some Iranian scientists).
- 9. Preventive war (either limited or total):
 - a. Conventional preventive war, e.g., Israel against Iraq in 1981, Syria in 2007. This was Bush 41 administration policy, as framed in the 2002 U.S. national security strategy. Possible candidates for future action include Iran, North Korea, Syria, and maybe more.
 - b. Nuclear preventive war--a more frightening idea.
- 10. Tolerate some proliferation; deter proliferators from misusing their weapons.

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- and ISIS today in Iraq/Syria/Libya. US options:
 - 1. Intimidate terror-harboring regimes into controlling their own terrorists. Is that sufficient? Or ...
 - 2. Oust terror-harboring regimes and replace them with regimes that will police their terrorists (as the US did in Afghanistan in 2001).
 - 3. Oust terror-provoking regimes (Assad in Syria, Maliki in Iraq) and replace them with pluralist regimes.
 - 4. Broker an end to civil wars that feed terrorist networks, as in Syria and Iraq today.
 - 5. Build up the militaries of states, (e.g., Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, Syria, Iraq) so they can police their own territory, eradicate terrorist havens. Is the U.S. good at doing this? (No.)
 - 6. Intervene directly against terror networks in hostile or failed states, bypassing the government. This was 2009 Biden Plan for Afghanistan; and is the 2014ff Obama approach to ISIS.
- 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 horrors in Sudan (including Darfur) since 1983; the current mass killings in Syria, Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Burundi, Burma?

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. Miscellaneous: drugs (Mexico today), migrants (Haiti 1994).

X. WHO FAVORS INTERVENTION TODAY?

The U.S. has intervened abroad repeatedly since the Cold War ended (1989) under both Democratic and Republican administrations. President George H.W. Bush intervened in Panama, Kuwait/Iraq, and Somalia. President Bill Clinton remained in Somalia, and intervened in Bosnia, Kosovo, and (indirectly) Haiti. President George W. Bush intervened in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. President Obama expanded the intervention in Afghanistan, intervened in Libya and Syria, and re-intervened in Iraq. In the Trump administration interventionists Mike Pompeo and Tom Cotton are ascendant, but the less interventionist James Mattis remains powerful. Overall the orientation of the Trump administration toward intervention remains unclear. Neoconservative foreign policy thinkers are the strongest advocates of interventions today, especially in the Mideast. They hold large influence in Washington.

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