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Studying U.S. Intervention in the Third World

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A series of dramatic international events at the beginning of the 1990s seriously called into question the ways in which scholars, policymakers, and individual citizens perceived the world. Among the most significant of these was the decline of Communist party rule in the Soviet Union, a process that led not only to the overthrow of similar single-party regimes in Eastern Europe and the various regions of the Third World but also to the fragmentation of the Soviet Union itself into a host of smaller independent and noncommunist countries. Other aspects of the rapidly changing international environment at the beginning of the 1990s included the reunification of Germany and its assumption of a dominant role in Central Europe; the rising strength of an increasingly integrated European Community (EC); the spread of democratization movements in Africa and other regions of the world; and the rising influence of Japan as an economic superpower with an increasingly prevalent political agenda. Although this critical turning point in world history offers tremendous opportunities, particularly the possibility of replacing Cold War confrontation with a greater sensitivity to a host of development problems in the Third World, it is also ushering in an emerging post–Cold War era replete with problems as old as history itself, such as rising ethnic conflict, religious fundamentalism, and economic nationalism. To these one can add a variety of more recent but equally threatening problems: nuclear proliferation, chemical weapons production, and the spread of international drug cartels.

As policymakers prepare to guide the United States into the twenty-first century, the time seems ripe for a critical examination of over fifty years of U.S. interventionist practices in the Third World during the post–World War II era. The primary purpose of this book is to assess the shortcomings of these policies in the hope that an understanding of past mistakes may provide the basis for a more enlightened foreign policy of the future. This is no mere academic exercise. Ill-conceived policies have had severe consequences for
U.S. society as a whole, the most notable example being U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. More recently, the Iran-contra affair led to an exceptionally vociferous public debate in which the Reagan White House found itself accused of covertly trading arms for U.S. hostages held in Iran—a significant reversal for an administration that claimed it would never “deal” with terrorists.

An equally important purpose of this book is to contribute to the ongoing debate in official policymaking circles and academia and among the general public as to what should constitute a proper U.S. foreign policy in the Third World during the post–Cold War era. It is only by reasoned debate that a policy consensus—the basis for an effective foreign policy in a democracy—can be achieved.

This chapter is devoted to answering three basic questions frequently asked by those interested in learning more about U.S. interventionist practices in the Third World: What are the meanings of “intervention” and “Third World”? Why study about U.S. intervention in the Third World? What are the themes that guide this study? A final section offers an overview of the chapters that follow.

WHAT ARE THE MEANINGS OF “INTERVENTION” AND “THIRD WORLD”? 

Any discussion of U.S. intervention in the Third World first requires a brief explanation of what is meant by “intervention” and “Third World.” Both concepts are widely used and are potentially confusing, meaning many different things to many different people.

“Intervention” is most commonly understood to mean the use of military force by one country to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. A classic example would be the Bush administration’s invasion of Panama in 1989 to remove the unpopular military government of Panamanian dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega. This narrow definition may be expanded to include the use of economic force, such as the U.S. adoption of economic sanctions in 1990 to pressure Iraq to end its illegal occupation of Kuwait, an act that served as a prelude to direct U.S. military intervention in 1991. In an even broader sense, intervention may be defined as any form of interference with the domestic policies of a country. It has been argued, for example, that President Jimmy Carter’s mere declaration in 1979 of his administration’s support for the presidential aspirations of South Korea’s Lieutenant Colonel Chun Doo Hwan actually prompted Chun to assume the presidency by military force.1 In the extreme, the definition of intervention could even include the absence of foreign policy behavior in some situations. For example, if Israel were subjected to an extended military conflict with all of its Arab neighbors, complete U.S. neutrality most likely would ensure Israeli
S. involvement in Iran—a deal never “done” among the U.S. White House officials frequently intervene in a foreign policy in a reasoned debate on policy in a world where intervention is defined as “deal”

requires a brief overview of the Third World.” Both meaning many use of military power in other countries. A man of Panama in manian dictator’s tenure to include economic sanctions in Iran, an act that

In an even more example, the administration’s tenure Colonel presidency by an could even situations. For it in conflict with all of this to ensure Israeli

defeat. Although the United States would not have physically intervened, its inaction—contrary to Israeli expectations—would be crucial in determining the outcome of the conflict.

For the purposes of this book, intervention is defined in a broad sense as the calculated use of political, economic, and military instruments by one country to influence the domestic or the foreign policies of another country. Four important aspects of this definition stand out. First, intervention is seen as purposeful, underscoring the intentional nature of the act. Second, intervention entails a wide range of instruments ranging from the extension of economic and military aid to economic sanctions, covert action, paramilitary interference, and, finally, direct application of military force. Third, attempts to influence a country’s domestic or foreign policies need not be restricted to efforts to change those policies but may also support a given regime in order to insulate it from change. Finally, intervention is not limited to affecting the domestic politics of a given country but can be undertaken to affect that country’s foreign policy as well. This broad definition of intervention is adopted to capture the richness of U.S. actions in the Third World.

“Third World” is a popular label for the majority of the world’s countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East that historically belonged neither to the “First World” (the United States and other industrialized capitalist nations, including Australia, Canada, Japan, and Western Europe) nor the “Second World” (the former communist countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). The concept of a Third World arose from these countries’ wish to pursue a third, “nonaligned” path of development during the Cold War period, independent of the political-military wishes of either the Soviet Union or the United States. Implicit in this approach was a desire to draw attention to the economic inequalities between the industrialized North (including both the First and Second Worlds) and the developing South (the Third World) and to the need for a restructuring of North-South economic relations through plans like the New International Economic Order (NIEO).

Several characteristics further distinguish the Third World from the industrialized North. Typically former colonies, Third World countries exhibit low levels of industrialization, lack well-developed infrastructures in terms of transportation, energy, education, and social services, and exhibit large inequities in the distribution of wealth and resources. Moreover, they often are saddled by high rates of population growth, are unable to bring the majority of their populations into the formal economy, and rely on a single agricultural or mineral export to sustain their economies. Most important, the combination of these factors contributes to the economic and political fragility of Third World regimes, making their systems highly vulnerable to intervention. This state of affairs has been described as one of “dependency” in which the northern industrialized countries not only control the destinies
of their neighbors to the south, but have contributed to the “underdevelopment” of their economies and political systems.

Despite the common label and shared characteristics of dependency, the Third World is not a homogeneous group of countries with identical interests. Rather, it constitutes a highly heterogeneous set of countries divided along numerous lines—ideological, ethnic, religious, and economic. Ideology, or the principles and assumptions that guide the formation of a nation’s domestic and foreign policies, has served as a tremendous barrier to effective Third World cooperation. In the case of Central America, for example, Marxism served as the inspiration for the Faribundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), a guerrilla group that sought to overthrow the ruling government of El Salvador. The actions of this group contributed to an intense ideological conflict between El Salvador and Nicaragua, with the El Salvadoran leadership accusing the Nicaraguans of supporting the FMLN. Similarly, the Marxist-inspired policies of the former Sandinista government of Nicaragua made that country a flash point of Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet bloc during the 1980s. One outcome of this conflict was the polarization of Central America along ideological lines.

Ethnic differences constitute an equally important point of division both within and between Third World countries. In the case of Africa, arbitrarily drawn colonial boundaries formalized during the independence period of the 1960s often did not coincide with the wishes of the local peoples. As a result, almost every African country comprises numerous ethnic groups that, at best, had never sought significant relations and, at worst, were historical rivals. In the case of Nigeria, composed of three major (Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa-Fulani) and literally hundreds of minor ethnic groups, the result was a brutal civil war in the late 1960s in which the Ibos unsuccessfully sought to secede from the union. At the other extreme are African countries, such as Somalia, that comprise only one ethnic group (Somalis) and have resorted to war (the 1977–1978 Ogaden war with Ethiopia) to reunify peoples of that group who were incorporated into neighboring territories during the colonial period.

Third World countries are also distinguished by religious differences, such as those between Jewish Israel and its Muslim neighbors in the Middle East. As clearly demonstrated by Iraq’s unprovoked Scud missile attacks against Israel during the 1991 Persian Gulf war, these religious differences are often manipulated by leaders for national gain. In fact, deep divisions within major religions have sometimes exacerbated historical rivalries. Among the factors that contributed to the bloody Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s was the animosity between the dominant Sunni Muslim regime in Iraq and its Shia counterpart in Iran.

Economic factors, particularly levels of economic development, also divide Third World countries. Within Asia, some countries (such as Indonesia) may be members of the oil-rich Organization of Petroleum
Exporting Countries (OPEC) or be one of the Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs), such as the four so-called Asian tigers: Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. And, countries such as Bangladesh belong to what the World Bank has termed the “Fourth World,” or the “poorest of the world’s poor.”

The often dramatic similarities and differences among the southern developing countries lie at the heart of an ongoing debate over the relevance of even using the “Third World” label. As demonstrated by a series of articles published in Third World Quarterly, such as a 1987 contribution titled “Why ‘Third World’?: Origin, Definition and Usage,” the debate over usage of this term most assuredly will continue. Indeed, with the collapse of communism and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union into several smaller republics, the Second World seemingly no longer exists (although some argue that this label should be retained to distinguish the former communist bloc countries that are industrialized). Moreover, despite levels of industrialization that perhaps require inclusion of these countries under the First World label, other characteristics, such as growing ethnic turmoil and dependence on the West, favor their inclusion in the Third World category. Although for the purposes of this book the term “Third World”—referring to the lesser-developed regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East—is retained as a useful distinction for an analysis of U.S. intervention, one should not lose sight of the characteristics that divide the countries included in this grouping.

**WHY STUDY U.S. INTERVENTION IN THE THIRD WORLD?**

U.S. scholars and policymakers traditionally have paid greater attention to U.S. foreign policy toward the industrialized countries of Western Europe and the West, as well as toward the former communist bloc countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, to the detriment of the study of U.S. interventionist practices in the Third World. This Europe-centric tendency was reinforced in the 1990s by three important events: the reunification of Germany, the growing integration of Western Europe, and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union. Yet the study of U.S. interventionist practices in the Third World has become increasingly important during the post–World War II era for five reasons:

- **The Third World Constitutes an Increasingly Important Focal Point for U.S. Trade and Investment**

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, imports from Third World countries in 1988 totaled $164.2 billion, or 37.2 percent of the $441.3
billion in total U.S. imports. Similarly, U.S. exports to the Third World in 1988 totaled $114.5 billion, or 35.7 percent of the $320.4 billion in total U.S. exports. Moreover, U.S. direct private investment in the Third World during 1988 exceeded $78 billion, or 23.9 percent of total U.S. private investment in the world, earning nearly $7 billion for U.S. private industry (nearly 32 percent of all U.S. profits earned from overseas private investment). This trend was not unique to the United States, but was indicative of the Third World’s rising fortunes throughout the 1980s. According to a United Nations (UN) study published in 1991, foreign direct investment in the Third World rose 22 percent annually from 1985 to 1989, a significant increase in the 3 percent annual growth rate for the years 1980–1984. According to this report, the five largest targets of foreign direct investment in 1989 were Singapore, the PRC (People’s Republic of China), Brazil, Mexico, and Hong Kong.

This gradual shift in U.S. financial interests is perhaps best reflected by the changes in the extension of U.S. government foreign grants and credits overseas since the end of World War II. From 1945 to 1955, the lion’s share of U.S. grants and credits were targeted toward the reconstruction and economic rehabilitation of war-torn Western Europe. Delivered under the sponsorship of the Marshall Plan, over 63 percent (nearly $34 billion) of U.S. government grants and credits went to Western Europe. By the late 1980s, however, Western Europe was receiving a mere 1.8 percent of these resources, whereas the various regions of the Third World were the recipients of nearly 90 percent. Although northern industrialized countries remain the premier economic partners of the United States—indeed, the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has led to a dramatic rise in investment capital flowing to these regions—there can be no doubt that the Third World will become increasingly important in the economic calculations of U.S. policymakers.

The Third World Is a Theater for Conflict of Increasing Scope and Intensity

Prior to 1945, the center of conflict in the world was Europe—two world wars were fought there in the first half of the twentieth century. In the second half of this century, however, the major portion of conflict moved to the Third World. As the 1980s drew to a close, a cursory overview of Third World conflict turned up wars between Cambodia and Vietnam, Iran and Iraq, and Libya and Chad; domestic uprisings in the search for national self-determination by black nationalists in South Africa, Palestinian nationalists in the Middle East, and Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka; and civil wars in Afghanistan, Angola, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. Although U.S.-Soviet competition during the Cold War period was a major
element behind the growing intensity of these conflicts, increasingly significant for the post-Cold War era of the 1990s is the rise of regional powers attempting to pursue strategies of regional hegemony (i.e., domination), often through the use of military force. Among the most noted examples of such aspirations at the beginning of the 1990s was Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Other examples of potential regional hegemonic powers include Brazil (South America), Nigeria (West Africa), South Africa (Southern Africa), India (South Asia), Vietnam (Southeast Asia), and Saudi Arabia (Middle East). This trend toward the diffusion of power within the international system has been complemented by the growing salience of nationalism, ethnic strife, and religion in contributing to regional conflict in the Third World.

A number of global military trends—what one author has called the “deadly convergence”—at the end of the 1980s clearly demonstrate why the Third World undoubtedly will be the theater for conflict of increasing scope and intensity, especially in a post-Cold War era. First, the conventional arms trade greatly expanded as Third World countries imported record numbers ($381 billion) of increasingly sophisticated weaponry between 1981 and 1988. A second, more deadly trend was the increased proliferation of nuclear weapons technology. In addition to the five declared nuclear powers of the 1960s (Britain, France, the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the United States), during the 1970s and the 1980s four countries (Israel, India, Pakistan, and South Africa) developed de facto nuclear weapons capabilities, while several others (Argentina, Brazil, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Taiwan, and North and South Korea) launched programs clearly designed to develop a nuclear weapons capability. The obvious threat posed by nuclear proliferation, enhanced even more so by the breakup of the massive Soviet nuclear arsenal among several independent republics at the beginning of the 1990s, was matched by a third trend: the spread of chemical weapons technology. And, the acquisition and development of advanced missiles and aircraft provided Third World countries with a greater capability to deliver these conventional, chemical, and nuclear weapons systems over longer distances. As demonstrated by the 1991 Persian Gulf war against Iraq—formerly the leading regional hegemonic power embodying all four of these trends—the origins and theater of any future world war involving the United States very likely could be in the Third World.

□ U.S. Strategic Planning Is Being Reoriented Toward the Third World

U.S. strategic thinking in the 1980s began to question the traditional emphasis on preparing for a conventional, full-scale military conflict in Western Europe and focused more on the rise of “low-intensity conflict”
(LIC) in the Third World. As a result, U.S. military strategists began to emphasize the need for the United States to reorient its military capabilities to deal with this “unconventional” threat. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger captured this growing sentiment within the military establishment in his 1987 annual report to Congress:

Today there seems no shortage of adversaries who seek to undermine our security by persistently nibbling away at our interests through these shadow wars carried on by guerrillas, assassins, terrorists, and subversives in the hope that they have found a weak point in our defenses . . . these forms of aggression will remain the most likely and the most enduring threats to our security.¹³

This type of thinking obviously received a major boost in the 1990s as the fragmentation of the Soviet Union removed the greatest perceived threat to the national security of the United States. Clearly unwilling to accept quietly the inevitable budget cuts destined to accompany the end of the Cold War, those seeking to maintain a strong defense establishment pushed the threats posed by LIC and radical Third World leaders to the forefront of a rising domestic debate. In this regard, the 1991 Persian Gulf war against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, described by administration officials as the “Hitler” of the 1990s, was successfully used by these same officials to partially stem rising domestic calls for dramatic cuts in military budget outlays.

The net result of this shift in the policy debate at the beginning of the 1990s was the continued development of LIC doctrine and the expansion of “projection forces” (such as the army’s Green Berets and the navy’s SEALs, or sea-air-land commandos) especially designed to take part in a host of military operations within the Third World. Divided into eight major categories that are discussed at length in Chapter 3, these operations include counterinsurgency (aid to an allied government to defeat a guerrilla insurgency); preinsurgency (aid designed to foster a guerrilla insurgency against a foreign government); peacetime contingency operations (such as short-term rescue missions); terrorism counteraction; antidrug operations; pacification or control of ethnic conflicts; humanitarian assistance; and military civic action. Two fundamental assumptions lie at the heart of this rising strategic emphasis within the U.S. policymaking establishment: (1) Vital U.S. interests are threatened by radical and revolutionary violence in the Third World; and (2) the United States must be prepared to use military force to protect these interests. As Michael T. Klare argues in Chapter 3, just as a growing emphasis on counterinsurgency during the 1960s led to increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam, so the current evolution in strategic thinking ensures that LIC “will be an increasing U.S. strategic concern of the 1990s, potentially leading to ever-increasing U.S. involvement in regional conflicts.”
The designation of individual Third World countries or regions as “vital” to U.S. strategic interests continues to provide the basis for U.S. intervention to safeguard these interests. The Carter Doctrine, for example, identified the continued flow of oil from the Persian Gulf as one of the paramount strategic interests of the United States, to be defended with U.S. military force if necessary. This doctrine served as the basis for the 1987 Reagan administration policy of reflagging Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, as well as U.S. involvement in the 1991 Persian Gulf war against Iraq, a conflict that led to the deployment of over 400,000 U.S. troops and the most massive intervention abroad since the Vietnam War. Among the other examples of perceived strategic interests that have led to U.S. intervention in the Third World throughout the post–World War II period are the critical importance of maintaining stability in the U.S. “backyard” (the Caribbean and Central America), a factor that led to the 1983 military invasion of Grenada and the promotion of the contra war against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during the 1980s; the maintenance of a free and open Panama Canal, one of the many rationales offered for the 1989 military invasion of Panama; continued Western access to strategic minerals in southern Africa, the basis for close U.S. relations with the apartheid regime of South Africa from the 1940s to the 1980s until Congress (over executive-branch objections) passed sanctions in 1986 in the form of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act; and the maintenance of Western control over strategic maritime “choke points” (such as the Straits of Bab el Mandeb in northeastern Africa), an interest that partially underscored U.S. rationales for providing nearly $800 million in economic and military assistance to Somali dictator Siyaad Barre before his overthrow at the beginning of 1991.

Although individuals from all points of the ideological spectrum agree that the United States has strategic interests worth defending in the Third World, differences arise over where they are, their relative level of importance, and the proper means of maintaining their integrity. For example, although the conservative Committee on the Present Danger considers the Persian Gulf to be a region of vital strategic importance to the United States and favored the Bush administration’s 1991 war against Iraq, policy analysts from the libertarian Cato Institute questioned both the strategic value of the Persian Gulf to the United States and the war itself. Even when these two schools of thought have agreed upon a region of vital strategic importance to the United States (such as Central America), policy prescriptions greatly differed. Whereas the Committee on the Present Danger favored expanding U.S. support for the contras to overthrow the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, the Cato Institute viewed such a policy as counterproductive to long-term U.S. foreign policy interests in the region.14
Despite these differences, the fact remains that the official designation of areas of vital strategic importance provides the basis for increased U.S. intervention in the Third World.

☐ **U.S. Intervention in the Third World Has Had a Spillover Effect into U.S. Society**

Perhaps the most important reason for studying U.S. intervention in the Third World is to understand the effects it has had on U.S. institutions and society. In the case of the Vietnam War, for example, the wiretaps initiated to uncover who had leaked highly sensitive information pertaining to secret U.S. B-52 bombing raids into Cambodia gradually mushroomed into the Watergate scandal, which drove Richard Nixon from the presidency.\(^{15}\) The Iranian hostage crisis revealed the seeming impotence of the Carter administration in protecting U.S. citizens abroad, contributing to President Carter’s ultimate defeat and the subsequent election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential elections. U.S. intervention in Nicaragua under the Reagan administration led to the Iran-contra affair, which led to further straining of relations between the executive branch and Congress over the proper role each should play in the foreign-policymaking process. And, the Bush administration found itself attacked by both liberals and conservatives during the 1992 election campaign for his administration’s failure during the Persian Gulf war to remove Saddam Hussein from power and, subsequently, protect Iraq’s Kurdish minority when they unsuccessfully rebelled against the Iraqi regime. In short, U.S. intervention in the Third World has contributed to U.S. domestic crises of legitimacy.

Moreover, the study of U.S. foreign policy in the Third World will aid in clarifying and understanding past U.S. failures and in providing the basis for formulating future policy prescriptions. The most destructive of these failures was U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War: Social costs included over 350,000 U.S. casualties (including approximately 58,000 dead) and the erosion of the social fabric of U.S. society; experts have estimated that the cumulative economic costs of carrying out the war exceeded $220 billion.\(^{16}\) Vietnam was not unique, but rather is indicative of a foreign policy whereby the United States has intervened in numerous Third World civil wars during the post–World War II period.\(^{17}\)

Foreign policy failures are not endemic to a particular president or political party but may be found throughout the post–World War II era: Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy organized and carried out the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961; Lyndon B. Johnson became increasingly mired in a losing war in Vietnam; Nixon expanded the Vietnam War to Cambodian territory, prompting ever greater unrest in the United States; Gerald R. Ford involved the United States in a losing civil war in Angola; Carter continued a faulty policy toward Iran and
the shah that ended in disaster; Reagan suffered a major policy defeat in Lebanon when terrorists killed several hundred U.S. Marines with a truck bomb; and Bush, despite initial public support for his handling of the Persian Gulf war, found his administration increasingly criticized for its failure to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Only by understanding the past—while recognizing that no two case studies are exactly alike—can one look to the future.

WHAT ARE THE THEMES THAT GUIDE THIS STUDY?

Five themes serve as the intellectual guidepoints of the twenty-one chapters of this book:

- **Overemphasis in U.S. Foreign Policy on What Has Been Titled the Globalist Perspective**

The globalist vision, which dominated U.S. foreign policy in the Third World during the post–World War II period, stressed the central importance of East-West confrontation at all levels of the international system, relegating Third World countries to the role of pawns in the greater East-West conflict. According to proponents of this viewpoint, oppressive social conditions, such as the lack of land reform or government indifference to human welfare, were not the primary causes of revolution and other forms of social conflict in Third World countries from the 1940s to the 1980s. Rather, revolution and social conflict were primarily caused by communist aggression led by the Soviet Union.

This globalist logic assumed that radical revolutionary regimes (for example, Nicaragua), along with the Soviet Union, could successfully export revolution to other areas of the Third World and conjured up visions of falling dominoes once a radical regime had established itself in any given region. In the case of Central America and the Caribbean, for example, the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro was perceived as facilitating the creation in 1979 of a communist “beachhead” (the Sandinista government in Nicaragua) in Central America. This development, unless vigorously countered by Washington, was perceived as leading to the downfall of U.S. allies in neighboring countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica) and their replacement with communist regimes. In the extreme, the metaphor of falling dominoes ultimately was perceived as leading to communist rule throughout Central and South America and, possibly, even in the United States itself. Typical of this type of thinking was President Reagan’s characterization of revolutionary conflict in the early years of his administration: “Let us not delude ourselves. The Soviet Union underlies all
the unrest that is going on. If they weren’t involved in this game of
dominoes, there wouldn’t be any hotspots in the world.”

But history does not support this proposition. Successful revolutionary
movements usually fight at first with weapons acquired locally, often from
opposing forces; external arms generally do not arrive until the guerrillas
have proven themselves on the battlefield. For example, Fidel Castro
received Soviet military support only after the Cuban revolution was won,
and Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh initially armed his forces with Japanese and
French arsenals captured during World War II. In fact, when Castro attempted
to export revolution to Central America during the 1960s, he met with
failure: The guerrilla forces were easily defeated because of their inability to
attract a major following. The example of the Sandinista-led revolution in
Nicaragua during the 1960s is especially instructive. Although the Sandinista
National Liberation Front (FSLN) received Cuban arms during the 1960s,
this aid was discontinued in the early 1970s and did not begin again until the
insurrection against Somoza was already well under way.

This is not to say, however, that external powers—whether a communist
Soviet Union of the 1980s, a noncommunist Russia of the 1990s, or a
radical Third World leader, such as Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi—cannot
exacerbate or profit from revolutionary upheaval within a given Third World
country. Rather, this evidence underscores the misplaced emphasis on these
external powers as the causes for regional turmoil, once the social, economic,
and political conditions for revolution are ripe. As distinguished specialists
on Central America have noted,

... those who point to external assistance as responsible for exploiting
internal problems often miss the depth of these internal problems. It is
not poverty and inequality that suddenly get ignited by outside arms and
ideas; it is the brutal suppression of attempts at nonviolent reform by
oligarchs and officers that moves numbers of people to pick up arms and
risk their lives to make revolutions. By pointing to insurgents who
seek outside arms, policymakers in Washington mistake symptoms for
causes and justify aid for the very military and security forces whose
opposition to reform generated armed insurgency in the first place.

Desirability of a U.S. Foreign Policy that
Emphasizes a Regionalist Perspective

Rather than placing undue emphasis on external forces as the chief
provocateurs of conflict and instability in the Third World, the regionalist
approach emphasizes the internal economic, cultural, political, and historical
roots of these upheavals. According to proponents of the regionalist
approach, several internal conditions have led to the downfall of numerous
Third World regimes: increasing income gaps between rich and poor;
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services; lack of meaningful political participation for the majority of the
population; exclusion of the rising middle class from sharing in the political
and economic benefits enjoyed by the ruling class; lack of equitable land
reform; and government suppression of peaceful attempts at reform.22

Focus on the internal causes of a particular conflict lends importance to
that conflict in its own right and renders it amenable to resolution based on
internal political and economic reforms. For example, in the case of
mounting guerrilla insurgency in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the late
1970s, the Carter administration supported Great Britain's initiatives in
pressuring the white minority regime of Ian Smith to accept universal
suffrage and transition to black majority rule—even though this ensured a
regime dominated by the Patriotic Front, a coalition of two guerrilla groups
led by avowed Marxists and supplied by the Soviet Union and the PRC. By
avoiding the traditional U.S. reflex to attribute the growing guerrilla conflict
to Soviet-Cuban interference and to back the beleaguered government, the
United States correctly perceived that resolution of the conflict depended on
internal political and economic reforms and that its influence could aid in
bringing such a settlement about. The United States was rewarded for
pursuing this policy. Despite the Marxist rhetoric of Zimbabwe's Prime
Minister Robert Mugabe, he has clearly followed a pragmatic policy of
socioeconomic reform and maintained extensive links with the West.23

The regionalist logic may be applied to many other examples. In El
Salvador, as has been argued persuasively, guerrilla insurgency was fueled by
lack of agrarian reform and by political repression.24 In the Horn of Africa,
the arbitrary colonial drawing of boundaries significantly contributed to the
Somali-Ethiopian conflict over the Ogaden region. In the Middle East,
conflict between Iran and Iraq during the 1980s was fueled, in part, by
opposing and hostile interpretations of Islam (Shia for the former and Sunni
for the latter). In short, the primary theme of the regionalist approach is that
although it is important to understand the nature of external involvement
within a particular conflict, this dimension should be deemphasized in favor
of its internal dimension. Local issues and concerns, not adherence to the
ideology of some foreign power, are the primary reasons for conflict and
revolution. As a result, correctly argues the regionalist, one must focus
primarily on the local level for both the causes and, ultimately, the
resolution of any given conflict.25

Increasing Nonviability of Military Force in Achieving
Long-Term U.S. Foreign Policy Goals in the Third World

The international system and the role of direct military intervention therein
by the major powers has changed substantially since the end of World War II.
First, one is struck by the way unwritten norms governing the use of
military force have been altered in the post–World War II period. For example, when the government of Nicaragua did not pay its debts in the 1930s, the United States sent in its marines to force payment. Yet, it is extremely difficult to conceive of Washington in 1992 dispatching the marines should either Mexico or Brazil decide to default on its substantial loan repayments to the United States. As the interdependence theorists correctly have noted, although military force is “ultimately necessary to guarantee [national] survival” and is therefore a “central component of national power,” it is “often not an appropriate way of achieving other goals (such as economic and ecological welfare) that are becoming more important.”

A more important constraint is found in the evolution of the Third World itself, whereby former colonial empires have evolved into a system of independent states of widely varying and increasing levels of power. Although the major powers of the colonial era, including the United States, still predominate militarily within the international system, there can be no doubt of the increasing diffusion of power within the system as individual Third World countries acquire more sophisticated weapons systems. As one author has noted:

> Compared to the situation that the colonial powers found in the heydays of imperialism, when a small flotilla of gunboats could manhandle an ancient civilization or conquer disorganized territories, many of today’s Third World states wield much more formidable degrees of organized power. . . . While most Third World states may not yet be powerful enough to guarantee their own sovereignty, it has certainly become more problematical for foreign powers arbitrarily to impose their will upon them.

U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War is especially instructive. Whatever lessons may be drawn from U.S. intervention in Vietnam—indeed, there are as many conflicting interpretations as there are days in a month—two themes in particular stand out: (1) Even the most sophisticated levels of military technology make victory against popular revolutionary nationalism, at the least, highly unlikely and, at the most, prohibitively costly; and (2) the U.S. people are not willing to support protracted, direct U.S. military intervention in the Third World. Although the latter condition could potentially change sometime in the future, the former is likely to persist.

□ **U.S. Inability to Control Third World Nationalism**

U.S. intervention against revolutionary nationalism in the Third World during the post–World War II period was based upon the assumption that revolutionary elites were extremely vulnerable to the political wishes of a dominant external power (such as the Soviet Union) in the sense of
becoming a “tool” for international communism. The Pentagon Papers, for example, dismissed the possibility that Ho Chi Minh or Mao Zedong could be both nationalists and communists.⁴⁹ Despite the more sophisticated view of the fragmented nature of international communism that existed in Washington in the 1980s—a result primarily of U.S. recognition of the enduring Sino-Soviet split—U.S. policymakers still viewed with suspicion Third World leaders seeking close relationships with the Soviet Union. This “tool-for-communism” thesis was dubious at best. Although Soviet allies such as Cuba surely followed the Soviet lead when such a course was viewed in Cuba’s own national interests, these common interests should not have been construed as Soviet control or ability to dictate policy. History is replete with examples of former so-called Soviet client states—including China, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Somalia, and Sudan—that have expelled the Soviets when the Soviet presence became inimical to the client states’ foreign policy interests. In Third World politics, self-interest and nationalism remain stronger than ideological affinity.

The importance of nationalism and self-interested elites in stemming Soviet influence in the Third World from the 1950s to the 1980s is also relevant to U.S. special relationships with various Third World regimes. As was suggested by Panamanian General Manuel Noriega’s purported sharing of U.S. military secrets with Cuba, his involvement in the international drug trade, and his clear defiance of U.S. demands in 1988 that he step down, U.S. client states may act against the wishes of Washington. Some authors have argued that, in fact, a case of “reverse dependency” often exists in which the United States falls prey to the demands or interests of the client state.⁴⁸ Indeed, a more apt description of Third World elites is that they are relatively independent actors who may act contrary to the wishes of any of the major powers, including the United States.

The failure of U.S. policymakers to comprehend their limited power in controlling Third World nationalism has been especially acute concerning its populist revolutionary variant. Despite Castro’s political and economic successes by Western standards, there should have been little doubt in Washington in 1959 that his revolution generated mass support and ignited Cuban nationalism. Rather than accept the legitimacy of Castro’s revolution, the United States attempted to isolate the regime diplomatically, initiated a trade embargo, authorized assassination attempts, and ultimately managed the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of the island in 1961 by CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)-trained exiles. Rather than overthrow Castro, these actions served as focal points whereby Castro strengthened his position on the island by whipping up “anti-Yankee” nationalism and painting those elements still opposed to his rule as mere lackeys of U.S. imperialism. The lesson to draw from this—which should become the guiding principle for U.S. relations with revolutionary nationalism—is simple: “When a regime has any large degree of popular support and legitimacy, a foreign state’s
force, pressure, and propaganda directed against the country may only cause the people to rally around their government.31

- Need for Greater U.S. Tolerance of Social Change in the Third World, Regardless of Ideology

Despite the heritage of the United States as a revolutionary nation that fought against oppression and external control, U.S. policymakers have consistently failed to understand the growth of this phenomenon in the Third World. Although the original intent of the Monroe Doctrine, as enunciated in 1823, was to protect Central American revolutions from external influence, these revolutions, and the economic and political instability that accompanied them, were increasingly viewed by U.S. policymakers as injurious to U.S. interests.32 This regional antirevolutionary propensity became globalized and fused with a virulent anticommunism as the United States embarked on an ideological competition with the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. The net result is that all U.S. administrations in the post–World War II period have been hostile in varying degrees to revolutionary change in the Third World, combining antagonism toward radical regimes with support for traditional authoritarian allies, often with dire consequences for U.S. foreign policy.

The key to U.S. tolerance of social change is recognition that opposing ideologies should not automatically preclude mutually beneficial relationships and that similar ideologies should not automatically provide the basis for strong U.S. support. Indeed, growing U.S. ties with Marxist Mozambique during the latter half of the 1980s, despite U.S. conservative calls to support a noncommunist guerrilla insurgency titled the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO),33 demonstrated that fruitful relationships could be sought with revolutionary communist regimes. To the contrary, the downfall of Fulgencio Batista’s Cuban regime and the fallout then experienced by the United States underscored the dangers of supporting a traditional dictator who, although joining the United States in its anticommunist crusade, rules through a repressive regime marked by immense social inequality.

- OVERVIEW

This book is divided into five major sections. The first three analyze the origins, tools, and constraints on U.S. intervention in the Third World, and the final two comprise the case studies and a concluding essay.

Part 2, "Origins of Intervention," begins with Lloyd C. Gardner’s chapter on the evolution of the interventionist impulse. Gardner shows how the American revolutionary spirit of 1776 and U.S. expansion throughout the
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North American continent under the guise of Manifest Destiny spawned a
mythic belief in the universalism and innocence of the U.S. cause. According
to Gardner, these beliefs led to U.S. expansion beyond the North American
continent in the early part of the twentieth century and the globalization of
U.S. intervention in the Third World in the immediate post–World War II
period. Michael T. Klare, in Chapter 3, continues this historical perspective,
tracing the origins and evolution during the post–World War II period of the
military doctrine of low-intensity conflict (LIC). Klare also examines the
application of LIC doctrine to direct and indirect U.S. military involvement
during the 1980s and beyond in eight types of operations in the Third World:
counterinsurgency, proinsurgency, peacekeeping contingency operations,
terrorism counteraction, antidrug operations, pacification or control of ethnic
conflicts, humanitarian assistance, and military civic action. In Chapter 4,
Charles F. Doran examines the nature of the globalist-regionalist debate
surrounding the proper role of U.S. intervention in the Third World. Whereas
globalists historically stressed “the primacy of East-West confrontation at all
levels of international political behavior, in all parts of the international
system,” regionalists continue to emphasize “the dilemmas of North-South
relations, the idiosyncrasies of politics and culture within the various
geographic regions, and the comparative autonomy of the struggles that go
on within and between the states inside each of these regions.” The
differences between these divergent perspectives are discussed within three
broad categories: the origins of change and stability; foreign policy purpose;
and foreign policy strategy and means.

Part 3 centers on the different instruments of intervention that the United
States has employed in the pursuit of foreign policy goals in the Third
World. Each author explores how Washington’s use of a particular
instrument has changed or evolved during the post–World War II period,
presents the field of case studies in which it has been employed, and asks
why it has been successful or unsuccessful. In Chapter 5, Doug Bandow
examines Washington’s use of official economic and military aid to Third
World governments. Kimberly A. Elliott, in Chapter 6, reviews fifty-eight
cases of U.S. implementation of economic sanctions. In Chapter 7, Harry
Howe Ransom examines U.S. covert intervention in the Third World,
including assassination plots, coups d’état, election intervention, and
propaganda or psychological warfare. In Chapter 8, Peter J. Schraeder
examines Washington’s use of paramilitary intervention, or external
economic and military aid to guerrilla forces intent on overthrowing a
government deemed counter to U.S. foreign policy interests. Ted Galen
Carpenter, in Chapter 9, reviews Washington’s use of the ultimate
interventionist tool: direct military force.

Part 4 consists of four chapters centering on the domestic and
international constraints inhibiting successful U.S. intervention in the Third
World. In Chapter 10, Jerel A. Rosati presents an analysis of the U.S.
domestic environment, exploring how a domestic consensus built upon the twin themes of anticommunism and containment of the Soviet Union favored an interventionist Third World policy led by the executive branch during much of the post–World War II period. U.S. involvement in Vietnam shattered this consensus, however, making it increasingly difficult for presidents to continue implementing interventionist policies and leading “to such crises of leadership and legitimacy as Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Iran-contra scandal.” In Chapter 11, Stephen Daggett analyzes significant barriers to the effective application of force that persist in the U.S. government—especially within the military establishment—despite recent efforts by some elements of the political leadership and by parts of the military to prepare for armed responses to conflict in the Third World. Among those factors discussed are the interplay between bureaucracy and ideology, priority of large-war planning in the military establishment, bureaucratic politics, and interservice rivalries. In Chapter 12, Harry Piotrowski argues that the evolving structure of the international system increasingly inhibits successful U.S. intervention in the Third World. He focuses on resurgent nationalism and anticolonialism, indigenous applications of Marxism-Leninism, communist polycentrism, proliferation of both conventional and nuclear weapons, the rise of regional powers, and the relative decline of U.S. economic and military power. In Chapter 13, Christopher C. Joyner examines the role of international law and of the internationally accepted norms of intervention and nonintervention. Joyner argues that U.S. policymakers have adopted “convenient legal license to interpret international law such that it serves their own interests as a supportive foreign policy instrument rather than as a force of restraint conducive to a greater public world order.”

The case studies presented in Part 5 provide an overview of U.S. interventionist practices in seven Third World countries and regions. Each case study includes a description of the historical nature and evolution of the particular area’s relationship with the United States, the instruments that the United States has adopted in pursuit of specific foreign policy goals, why these have been successful or unsuccessful, and general lessons that may be drawn from U.S. involvement. In Chapter 14, R. Hunt Davis, Jr., and Peter J. Schraeder examine U.S. policy toward the apartheid regime of South Africa, particularly focusing on the evolution of the sanctions debate and the viability of economic sanctions in forcing the Afrikaner elite to change their domestic system of governance. In Chapter 15, Richard J. Kessler focuses on the evolution of the U.S.-Philippine relationship as it evolved through successive stages of direct colonial rule, the creation of a patron-client relationship with President Ferdinand Marcos, and the democratic revolution led by Corazon Aquino. Peter Kornbluh, in Chapter 16, analyzes the equally extensive U.S.-Nicaraguan relationship, focusing on how the United States has dealt with what it perceived to be a radical revolution led by the
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Sandinistas in Washington's backyard. In Chapter 17, Eric Hooglund examines U.S. intervention in Iran ranging from the landing of 30,000 U.S. troops in that country during World War II, to U.S. involvement in the 1953 coup d'état that restored the shah to power, to U.S. relations with the Islamic governments that followed the Iranian revolution of 1978. Hooglund also is the author of Chapter 18, which is devoted to explaining the evolution of U.S. interventionist practices in the Persian Gulf region that culminated in the Persian Gulf war of 1991. In Chapter 19, Margaret E. Scranton discusses the evolution of the U.S.-Panamanian relationship ranging from U.S. involvement in Panama's revolutionary movement to seek independence from Colombia, to the construction of the Panama Canal, to the 1989 U.S. military invasion to remove General Noriega from power. In Chapter 20, Deborah J. Gerner analyzes the evolution of U.S. involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, focusing specifically on U.S. relations with a succession of Israeli governments and the delicate question of seeking an independent Palestinian state. In the final chapter, Peter J. Schraeder draws several conclusions about U.S. intervention in the Third World.