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## 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? 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 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 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--to promote democracy in Mexico.

Note: the U.S. 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.
- C. Non-interventions: FDR's Good Neighbor Policy, 1933-45.

#### IV. COVERT OPERATIONS, 1945-PRESENT

- A. Iran 1953: the CIA coup against the elected Mossadeq regime. A pro-U.S. rightist dictatorship followed under the Shah Reza Pahlevi (1953-1979); then came an anti-U.S. dictatorship under Shiite mullahs who railed against previous U.S. interference (1979-).
  - B. Guatemala 1954: the CIA coup against the kind-of-elected leftist Arbenz regime. It brought a cruel rightist dictatorship to power. Vast horrors followed: Guatemala saw huge civil violence for decades after the 1954 coup (200,000 killed). Peace came only in 1996. A brutal government still rules and sometimes kills today.
  - 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?

#### 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 were also interventions and 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 50,000 lives and cost 42 U.S. lives. Haiti remains a mess, Bosnia and Kosovo are quiet but remain powder kegs.
  - 2. 2000s interventions: Iraq. Still underway, wish us luck.

> When does imposing democracy require long occupation? This was needed in Germany, Japan, Italy, Austria--and probably in Iraq today--but not in Panama or Grenada.

> When is it impossible to bring a country to a soft landing by intervention, even with long occupation? Does intense poverty and illiteracy preclude democracy? (Some say this about Haiti and Somalia.) Do deep social divisions preclude democracy and perhaps civil peace? (Some say this about Bosnia and Kosovo.)

> When will U.S. intervention face insurgency that requires U.S. counterinsurgency (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.

> What are the keys to success in COIN? Many argue that the keys are: (a) Good intelligence, as COIN is largely police work, not war. (b) Avoiding injury to innocents. This requires good intelligence. (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 for cooperation with your program.

> Can mass violence (e.g., mass killing everyone in rebellious towns or areas) 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. But this is not a tool the U.S. can use.

## 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 Sandinistas, 1983-90.
2. Angola: the U.S. supported UNITA rebels, 1975-91.
3. Cambodia: the U.S. supported anti-Hun Sen forces, 1979-89.
4. Afghanistan: the U.S. supported Afghan mujahideen against the Soviets, 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 pretty 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 surely 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-bad 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--threaten to annihilate proliferators' elites if they use or transfer nukes recklessly.
7. Preventive war:
  - 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 requisites for success?
1. Is it enough just to intimidate terror-harboring regimes into controlling their own terrorists?  
Or ...
  2. Must a counter-terror policy be legitimated in the societies that breed the terror? The history of counter-terror campaigns in Malaysia (1950s) and the Philippines (1950s) suggests so. And ...
  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?
- C. War prevention: if the U.S. doesn'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?
- 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 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 Bosnians, or Sudanese, or Iraqis, 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. is now the laggard state on this issue. Should others intervene here and make us behave??
- H. Miscellaneous: drugs (Colombia today), migrants (Haiti 1994).