

BOOK REVIEW

American Adventurism Abroad: Interventions Invasions, and Regime Changes Since World War II. Michael J. Sullivan III, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 267 pp.

In an Introduction to the revised and expanded edition of his eight chapter book, Michael Sullivan takes note of United States quagmire in Iraq which had dragged on the US longer than the time taken to win World War II. This is while US combat forces had also been engaged in Afghanistan for a year and a half beyond this, meaning George W. Bush had spent more time fighting wars than either Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon in Vietnam.

It was not supposed to be this way after US ascended to the heights of hegemony over the global capitalist system in the early 1990s.

By declaring a "global war on terror" after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the US returned to its pattern of robust military interventionism. This paradigm (GWOT) like the cold war before it provided US with a new generation of invasion and other type of regime change.

Nonetheless, the book tries to reinforce the assumption that the announced rationales for such foreign adventurism (fighting communism and war on terror since 9/11) are insufficient to explain totally US actions abroad. Factors like America's role as hegemon of global capitalist system, replacing European colonialists (in selected states around the world, and of preferring capitalism over

The Iranian Journal of International Affairs Vol. XXI, No.3: 165-174, Summer 2009

democracy), the use of dubious methods of violent intervention, and employment of thuggish local allies, also must be admitted. Finally, the huge scale of death and devastation that accompanies such asymmetric application of power must be recognized.

In the revised edition, the author adds four new cases to the 30 presented in 2004 printing of the book. The result is a study that covers sixty years of America's "war on terror" and puts a total of 34 cases of overseas US militaristic meddling into a longer 60-year context.

The author provides analysis not only on the understanding of the overseas intervention, but also a framework with which to interpret anticipated American adventures in other locals in the future.

Explaining the major argument and methodology of his book, Sullivan believes that American foreign policy since 1945 has been mainly motivated by the goal of being hegemony of the global capitalist economic system. As chief protector of transnational capitalism, the US has replaced the UK (which played such a role for more than a century before World War II). During the 1947-91 cold war period, the US diplomacy was not primarily about keeping the USSR out of Western Europe (the original explanations for containment strategy), rather than about being the leader of the capitalist world, the upholder of the global economic system.

This motivation (evident in US policy toward Latin America before the Cold War) continued on a worldwide stage in the post-cold war era of globalization, especially since September 11, 2001.

The 34 forceful American interventions into developing countries between late 1940s and the late 2000s foreshadow likely

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forms of involvement in the future (under various titles like "war on terror") with no specific and no identifiable end. The time frame for this study is roughly the 60-year period from the "Truman Doctrine" of containing communism in Greece to Bill Clinton's "humanitarian" intervention in Kosovo. The cases chosen are drawn from 11 presidencies: Six studies are taken from the early Cold War years, 1945-60 (including Greece, Iran, and Guatemala); 14 are investigated from the "extremist" period, 1961-70 (including the Congo, Cuba, Colombia, and Chile); and 11 Cases from the most recent era, 1981-2007 (including Nicaragua, Haiti, Afghanistan, and Iraq).

The book divides the world into five geographic regions in the periphery of the global political arena (Western Hemisphere and East Asia, the Middle East and Africa and Southern Europe). The 34 cases are divided by familiarity as famous case or the obscure ones (less familiar cases). The famous cases and the pretext for U.S. intervention include:

1. Greece: 1947-9 civil war
2. Iran: 1953 CIA coup
3. Guatemala: 1954 government overthrow
4. Lebanon: 1958 military intervention
5. South Vietnam: 1961-5 aid, coup d'état
6. Cuba: 1961 Bay of Pigs intervention
7. Dominican Republic: 1965 military intervention
8. Cambodia: 1970 "incursion"
9. Chile: 1973 overthrow of government
10. Nicaragua: 1981-8 contra war
11. Grenada: 1983 "rescue" of students
12. Panama: 1989 drug lord capture
13. Iraq: 1991 liberation of Kuwait
14. Haiti: 1994 reinstall democratic government

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15. Yugoslavia: 1995 Bosnia, 1999 Kosovo
16. Afghanistan: 2001 ff. overthrow Taliban government
17. Iraq: 2003 ff. overthrow government invasion, occupation

The obscure less familiar cases consist of:

1. Italy: 1948 election rigging
2. Philippines: 1946-53 counterinsurgency
3. Congo: 1961-5 civil war
4. British Guiana: 1961-6 independence delay
5. Laos: 1961-73: "secret" war
6. Brazil: 1964 coup d'état
7. Indonesia: 1965-6 "year lairing dangerously"
8. (Iraqi) Kurdistan: 1971-75 "missionary work"
9. Angola : 1975 civil war
10. Australia : 1975 parliamentary government ouster
11. East Timor: 1975 genocide
12. El Salvador: 1979-92 counterinsurgency
13. Afghanistan: 1981-8 support for jihad
14. Libya: 1981-6 bombings
15. Somalia: 1992-4 nation building
16. Venezuela: 1994-2002 failed coup attempt
17. Haiti: 2002-2004 government overthrow and kidnap of president

The main thesis of this book is that the primary strategic goal of the United States since 1945 has been to supplant the major imperial powers of the pre-world war II era- the UK, France, Germany, and Japan- as the sole economic hegemon of the global capitalist system. Therefore the strategic rivalry between US and the Soviet Union in post-World War II Europe was over the same stake.

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In addition to political aspects of US goals, its objectives (pertaining more specifically to economics) in most cases of interventions have been primarily to make the world safe not for democracy (as is often claimed), but rather for Western capitalist system. Such an attitude has been justified by arguing that safeguarding capitalism in a developing nation sometimes leads to an improved quality of life and in the long run to democracy. The fact is that for many of the states studied in this book, "the political system" which has promoted to preserve capitalism range from one-party rule and military dictatorship, to monarchies, colonies, and recurring civil wars.

Among the noteworthy methods adopted by the United States in its interventions, the most notorious methods include: overt military invasions; the provoking of coups resulting in the military takeover of government; attempts at assassination of foreign leaders; and the tolerance of over-kill, sometimes to the point of genocide, by some American surrogates.

The most common example of this category (as in nine cases of US interventions covered in this book) is taking side in civil wars with military arms and advisors, including anti-government forces in efforts that could be described as state-sponsored terrorism. (countries like Laos, Indonesia, Iraq, and Iran of Pahlavi era are among the cases of this category.)

The book also provides a detailed list of cases in which the US helped existing governments- sometimes in civil wars involving brutal counterinsurgency campaigns. (The author names countries like Greece, the Philippines, Guatemala, the Congo, South Vietnam, Cambodia, El Salvador and Indonesia in this category.)

The manipulation of the constitutional relationship between branches of governments, using military and economic development aids for narrow political gains are considered to be the less violent tactics of US intervention abroad. Another common technique by US in dealing with disfavored Third World leaders has been to defame them as "crazy", "unstable", "Hitler-like", etc.

The major contention of this book is that although the US adventurism abroad by employing nefarious means may have brought in some short-term US foreign policy successes, it have always proved tragic for local societies affected. Several tables with detailed numbers over cases of US interventions are provided by the authors as indications of themes and patterns of the book.

In chapter one which covers the years 1945-52, a few cases of US interventions in Europe and East Asia are studied including the launching of the Cold War in 1947 under the "Truman Doctrine", military aid in the Greek civil war, followed by a 1948 CIA's not-so-covert collusion in Italian elections of 1948, Philippines (1946-53) and US involvement in Korean War of 1950-3 in which American troops directly clashed with those of China.

The chapter two covering the years 1953-60, marks the Eisenhower presidency as America moved beyond the "manifest destiny" regions of the Western Hemisphere and Pacific Asia and Europe. While the case of Guatemala in this chapter represents a consolidation of America's traditional role in the Western Hemisphere, two other cases in the chapter _Iran and Lebanon- are from the Middle East, a region where US foreign policy during the late 1950s led to the announcement of the "Eisenhower Doctrine" to prevent communism from spreading to that area of the world.

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On Iran as the case No. 4 of US adventurism in 1953, the author explains how the nationalization of Anglo-Iranian Oil Company by then Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh led to the joint covert action of US-British intelligence agencies. The coup dubbed "operation Ajax" was accomplished in six-days, August 16-22, 1953, as the CIA took advantage of instability within Iran. A year after the coup, in September 1954, a new treaty was signed under which an international consortium took control of Iranian oil, while US and Britain each shared 40 percent of the oil royalties. In addition to the financial windfall for American corporations, the US had begun to replace the UK as the region's political hegemon.

In the second part of the book, the author calls the 1961-1976 period as the "Extremist Year". Therefore chapter three that covers the Kennedy-Johnson era also brings the United States to Africa, a new continent in America's quest for global hegemony. However for much of the cold war period, Africa was ceded to Britain and France in a division of labor with respect to containment of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, Congo (1961-5), Cuba (1961), British Guiana (1961-6), Laos (1961-73), South Vietnam (1961-5), Brazil (1964), Dominican Republic (1961-6), Indonesia (1965-6) are the cases that author brings circumstantial information and evidences on US interventions in other countries of the world.

Chapter four consists of five more cases of US adventures during Nixon and Ford's terms of presidency in 1969-76. The author calls this period as Nixon-Ford realist consolidation in which a redefinition of America's role in the world took place and historic idealist advancing of American values was replaced by an embrace of realist balance of power politics. This meant a de-emphasis of the ideology by anti-communism that had resonated so deeply American political life for 20 years. A key aspect of US global view was the recognition of the

Soviet Union and China as legitimate major players in international politics.

However six other cases of US interventions in outside world, as of Cambodia (1970), Iraq (Kurdish region 1971-5), Chile (1973), Angola (1975), Australia (1975), East Timor (1975), all took place in the same timeframe.

Jimmy Carter's term defined as "Human Rights Pause" during 1977-80, is called by author as four-year aberration and transition between the excesses of the 30 years of the Cold War and its denouncement in the 1980s. Thus, there are no formal case studies in the chapter five as in the chapters covering the other ten post-World War II presidents. However, there were at least five occasions - in Congo, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Iran, and Afghanistan- when Carter might have been tempted to intervene more forcefully than he did. What he did was not a testimony to his commitment to break from the pattern of US global power projection in pursuit of hegemony, but a ramification of America's disastrous experience in Vietnam. Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1978 which ousted the US surrogate (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) holding of 52 American hostages for 444 days- which doomed the Carter reelection in 1980- as well as Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (culminated in the announcement of "Carter Doctrine" to defend the Middle East oil with, if indeed, nuclear weapons) were among the most important events during the Carter's term of presidency.

Chapter six under the title of "Ronald Reagan: The Last Cold Warrior" shows how he (during 1981-8) significantly escalated the American response to three of the situations begun under Carter in El Salvador (1979-91), Nicaragua (1981-8), and Afghanistan (1979-88). Reagan also brought up the neo-conservative agenda of heating up the rhetoric on the Soviets as "evil empire" and US attempt to roll back

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communism in places where it already existed. The cases of military interventions in Grenada (1983) and Libya (1981-6) are the other instances of Reagan administration's led interventions in the world.

In the chapter seven of the book that covers the post-Cold War era (1989-2001) which coincides with the Bush, Sr. and Clinton administration, author believes that they were struggling to define new themes and overarching public purpose for American foreign policy. Therefore in the three cases involving Bush, the rationale varied from "fighting drugs" (Panama-1989), to the creation of a "New World Order" (Iraq-1991), to "Feeding the Hungry" (Somalia 1992). Clinton's reasons also ranged from "nation-building" (Somalia -1993) to "enlargement of democracy and markets" (Haiti-1994; Bosnia-1995), to saving NATO and stopping ethnic cleansing (Kosovo-1999). In all those cases the goal of expanding America's role a hegemon of the global capitalist system was the blue print of interventions, of course, was never articulated.

In the last part of the book, the author covers the post 9/11 era, in which George W. Bush brought up the new paradigm of "war on terror" upon which, US invaded Afghanistan (October 1, 2001) and later on, US waged a costly war on Iraq (March 20, 2003) under the title of "Operation Iraqi Freedom". Although, within five weeks the Taliban regime was overthrown in Afghanistan, the leading Al-Qaeda instigators of 9/11 attacks could manage to escape. Now, eight years later the Taliban has regained strength and tried down the US in a growing insurgency. The US invasion in Iraq also visited upon a virtually disarmed Iraq which lasted longer for the US than World War II and is estimated several hundred thousands of Iraqi casualties so far. Both cases had come to resemble just other messy cases of American adventurism abroad.

Venezuela (2002) and Haiti (2004) presented two more closer to home interventions for the US and its goal to keep America's capitalist hegemony in the hemisphere.

The author concludes that despite so many debates on changing the US foreign policy in post September 11, 2001 attacks, when it comes to the patterns of US interventions and adventurism abroad, it looks a lot more like business-as usual. The "war on terror" has resulted in the over stretch of US troops from Afghanistan, and Iraq to Africa and central Asia, while there is little talk today of human rights or democracy as the justification for American adventures in the Third World during the Cold War era.

Indeed, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the area from the horn of Africa to Central Asia, represents one of the last places on the periphery of the capitalist world to which America could hope to fill the role of hegemon.

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