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10 The United States and the rise of the Third World

Dennis Merrill

It was not unusual during the Cold War era for Americans to tune in their evening television news only to catch the image of US soldiers slogging across the jungles, the beaches, or the city streets of some distant, third-world nation. From Truman through Reagan, officials portrayed US intervention as reactive and defensive. Violent revolutions and civil wars, they charged, had stemmed from Soviet subversion. While Washington harbored no expansionist designs, America had a duty to save the newly emerged nations from the grip of communism, and to place them on the path to democratic development.

The frequency of intervention was striking. In Korea, 1950, Lebanon, 1958, the Dominican Republic, 1965, and Vietnam, 1965–73, the United States resorted to direct military action. A partial listing of covert Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) efforts to overthrow foreign governments includes Iran, 1953, Guatemala, 1954, Cuba, 1961, and Chile, 1973. More than any other single event, America's disastrous engagement in Vietnam sparked historians, beginning in the 1960s, to challenge the official story. Surveying the vast destruction of the Vietnamese countryside, the staggering casualty rate, and the many points of government deception, these "revisionist" scholars searched for a fuller explanation of their country's behavior. The persistence of military interventions into the era following the Cold War – in Panama in 1990, the Persian Gulf in 1991 and Somalia in 1992 – only reinforces the need for new perspectives.

Recent scholarship explains third-world turmoil in historical rather than cold-war terms. Between 1945 and 1960 thirty-seven nations emerged from the ashes of dying colonial empires. Largely non-industrialized, non-white, and located in the southern half of the globe, the new nations reeled from the birthpangs of freedom. Proudly nationalistic, many proved reluctant to align with either the Soviet or the American camp. Thus, analysts referred to them as the "Third World" – a term that lent itself to oversimplification. In actuality, the new states, along with the developing nations of Latin America, varied widely in geography, culture, and aspirations.

The rise of the Third World coincided with another major development of twentieth-century history: the rise of the United States to world leadership.

While American power had been building for decades, widespread destruction in Europe and Asia left the United States after 1945 as the world's premier economic, military, and political power. With its own anti-colonial history, the United States often sympathized with the aspirations of the developing world. Yet as a global power with far-flung interests, it sought to manage a revolutionary world.

It was not an easy task. More than anything else, recent writings on United States/Third World relations show that the days when western powers could easily impose their will on others had passed. Still, Washington flexed its muscle. Sometimes policy succeeded and American interests remained secure. But US officials often failed to grasp the root causes of discontent and frequently stumbled when newly independent states resisted.

INTERPRETIVE OVERVIEW

Was American policy imperialistic? Part of the answer lies in how one defines the term. Some historians take a narrow view and insist that imperialism happens only when a stronger nation establishes *formal* political and military control over a weaker nation. By these standards, US policy after World War II was not imperialistic. The historic rise of the Third World determined that America's influence would differ from that of previous western powers.

Yet the quest for control, and the interventionism, betrayed a certain kind of expansionism. Historians most often use the term "hegemonic" to describe America's policies in the Cold War. A developed, industrial nation, they note, can deploy a vast economic arsenal – trade, investments, and foreign aid – to manipulate weaker states and to establish *informal* control. Diplomatic recognition and non-recognition, the limited use of force, and action taken before international forums also carry weight. The term "hegemony" does not imply that the developed nation always obtains its goals, it simply denotes power and ambition.

Historians have emphasized several factors in explaining why America acted hegemonically. The first generation of revisionist scholars during the 1960s turned to economic theories. In his pathbreaking *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams argued that US foreign policy since the turn of the century had centered on the pursuit of a world economic order characterized by the "open door."¹ Primarily interested in markets for a fast-growing economy, America had usually tried to avoid the costs of direct colonial rule. Instead, they preached that developing areas, especially in Asia, should be kept open to all external powers for purposes of trade and investment. The open door seemed perfectly suited to US needs since it promised to provide access to markets for the nation's competitive industrial economy without violating anti-colonial traditions. Of course, the United States often violated the spirit of the doctrine with its own interventionist policies in the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and much of the Caribbean region. Still, the open door served as the central organizing

principle behind America's ever-growing economic empire in the early twentieth century.

Updating the open door thesis thirty years later, Gabriel Kolko argued in *Confronting the Third World* that US diplomacy during the Cold War revolved around a relentless effort to gain access to investment opportunities and markets.² Whereas direct US private investment had a book value of \$7.5 billion in 1929 and only \$11.8 billion in 1950, by 1966 those investments had reached \$54.6 billion.³ Although Western Europe and Canada remained the most active investment markets, America's growing dependence on imported minerals made investments in the Third World especially important. By 1960, the United States imported 32 per cent of its iron ore, 46 per cent of its copper, 60 per cent of its zinc, and 98 per cent of its bauxite, mainly from developing areas.³ To acquire these materials and assert its "mastery" over the Third World, Washington worked to establish a stable, capitalist world order through trade agreements and the creation of multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. When political instability threatened to disrupt the economic environment, the United States utilized the CIA or resorted to military intervention.

Another group of revisionists, inspired by Marxist thought, emphasized the impact of US policy on third-world living standards. They challenged the conventional wisdom that investment and trade brought economic progress to developing areas. Instead, the producers of raw materials and other primary products suffered a disadvantaged position in the marketplace. Capitalist development, from this point of view, came to be seen as retarding industrial growth and serving mainly to enrich foreign investors and a small domestic elite, which then resulted in the creation of a world economy which was divided between have and have-not nations, in which the have-nots descended into a condition of "dependency" on richer, more powerful states. As the world's economic giant in the postcolonial era, the United States became the system's main beneficiary.⁴

Another economic interpretation has recently explored the impact of empire on the United States itself. Thomas J. McCormick's *America's Half-Century* uses "world systems" theory to explain how America after 1945 became the latest of a series of great powers which, since the fifteenth century, had worked to incorporate "peripheral" areas into the world capitalist system. At the outset, the process had enriched the United States. Indeed, most of the organized elements of America's "corporatist" society – business, labor, and government – supported the effort. Towards the end of the century, however, the country showed signs of decline. In the Third World, communist North Vietnam and Cuba defied US military power. Capitalist states such as South Korea and Taiwan defied dependency theory and assembled dynamic industrial economies. On the home front, America reeled from excessive defense spending and a deteriorating economic infrastructure. America's empire, McCormick concluded, seemed destined to follow the path laid down by its Spanish, Dutch, and British forebears.

While economics is obviously an important factor in foreign affairs, most historians agree that it cannot explain the totality of United States/Third World relations. While US investment in and trade with the Third World has been sizable, it has constituted only a small portion of total world commerce. And, if hegemony has contributed to overcommitment and budgetary woes, surely economics alone is not a sufficient explanation of them. Recognizing this complexity has led scholars to consider other factors to explain America's relations with the Third World.

One group of historians, led by John Lewis Gaddis and Gier Lundestad, point to geopolitical interests as the source of America's international behavior.⁶ They describe how the term "national security" was redefined during and after World War II, when challenges to national well-being increasingly arose beyond the borders of the United States. A new concept of security emerged, which encompassed access to the strategic materials, such as oil, titanium, and chromium that undergirded modern, mechanized warfare. In an age of airpower and atomic weaponry, it also included access to forward bases overseas. These developments, considered in the light of Soviet expansionism, provided the basis for America's cold-war foreign policy.

National security analysts, also frequently referred to as foreign policy realists, do not necessarily condone the American record in the Third World. The game of power politics involves rules, and realists argue that the cardinal principle of diplomacy is to recognize *vital* interests and identify threats posed to those interests. Interests are deemed to be vital if they deliver a large "security dividend"; if the dividend is not substantial, then an alliance or a military intervention may not be worthwhile.

Melvyn P. Leffler has provided the most complete account of the origins of America's cold-war security policies in *A Preponderance of Power*.⁷ While he generally praises the "Wisemen" of the Truman era for their prudent policies in Europe, where both American interests and the Soviet threat to them were substantial, he chastises them for their "foolish" decisions in the Third World. By making anti-communism a global policy, they failed to distinguish between vital and secondary interests. Assuming that third-world revolutionaries such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh owed their power to the Kremlin, they exaggerated the Soviet threat. Most important, according to Leffler, Washington consistently overestimated the strategic value of "peripheral" areas. In terms of war-making capacity, most developing areas outside of the petroleum-producing Middle East possessed only modest strategic value.

The national security thesis echoes economic theory in that it describes a hegemonic US foreign policy, but it differs from it in that it paints a policy that sprang more from imperial blunder than imperial design. At times, security decisions fell victim to domestic politics or bureaucratic infighting, but more often policymakers simply misread the international setting. Yet the security thesis also leaves a number of questions unanswered. If diplomats operated according to a careful calculation of their nation's strategic interests,

why did they so frequently misunderstand the Third World, or misread Soviet intentions? What made them define American interests in the way they did? How do we account for their blurred vision?

To fill in the gaps, a third group of scholars have probed cultural and ideological factors. One of the most striking characteristics of the Third World for these historians is its cultural diversity: from predominantly Hindu India, to Confucian East Asia, to the Islamic Arab world. America's encounter with the non-western world, they stress, involved a collision of cultures, as well as a clash of economic and security interests. The methodological challenges to studying cultural relations are numerous: many US historians lack the language skills and anthropological tools to analyze cultural differences, while even definitions of "American" values and beliefs are not easily agreed upon. Still, interpretations of political and economic behavior that leave out the role of ideas run the risk of underestimating human complexity.

In *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Michael Hunt explored the attitudes and assumptions that have guided and justified hegemony.⁸ Convinced of America's national greatness, and informed by doctrines of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority, US officials have felt compelled to intervene in developing areas. During the Cold War, according to Hunt, the catalyst for intervention usually arose from Washington's distaste for revolutionary change. America's own historical experience, which had featured a limited, political revolution in the eighteenth century, did not prepare US leaders for the tumultuous social upheavals of modern times. From the communist Chinese revolution of 1949 through Nicaragua's Sandinista revolution in 1979, Washington viewed radical change as a threat to its interests, and as contrary to acceptable international conduct.

Hunt argues that American diplomats tried to accommodate the thirst for change by offering their own prescription for political and economic development.⁹ Economic aid served as the mechanism; "modernization" provided the ideological foundation. Development would begin, American officials advised, when the Third World opened its doors to private capital and built the modern banking and commercial institutions needed to make capital work. Investment and technology, not class conflict and revolution, provided the key to the future. In some cases, historians of development have noted, the formula did promote growth. But it often underestimated the depth of third-world poverty, and failed to relieve the causes of unrest. Value laden and paternalistic, US development programs certainly reflected the deep cultural divide that separated developing states and the West.

The recent work of historians has demonstrated that US intervention in the Third World occurred for a variety of economic, strategic, and ideological reasons. What the interpretive schools have in common is that they link US policy to larger developments in world history. To comprehend US relations with any developing nation, historians must consider not only bilateral ties but also the position of the former colonial power, the views of neighboring

states, the ambitions of other great powers, and the influence of multilateral institutions. In searching out the richness of these relations, scholars have not only illuminated the history of United States/Third World relations, they have also begun to redefine what it means to study American diplomacy.

A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

The same internationalism evident in the various interpretations referred to above has been reflected in the growing number of case studies that deal with United States/Third World relations. Most of these studies, unlike many of the broader theoretical works, are based on archival research in US government records; but a significant number of them utilize British and French materials, as well as third-world sources – although such materials are usually less accessible. These studies offer a fuller account of how economic, security, and ideological factors have interacted in particular settings, while providing a sense of chronological development. This essay breaks the history of United States/Third World relations into three periods, although these overlap in time: 1941 through 1953, when rapid decolonization brought the United States into contact with many developing areas for the first time; 1953 through 1969, when European decline and the Cold War heightened America's presence in developing areas; 1969 to the present, when US influence became increasingly tenuous.

US relations with the Third World technically began at the turn of the century when America first reached beyond the shores of the continent in search of empire. The establishment of colonial rule in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Hawaii, along with "dollar diplomacy" and frequent military intervention in Latin America, foreshadowed Washington's future collision with third-world nationalism.¹⁰ Yet in a more precise historical sense, this period in American diplomacy predated the rise of the Third World as an independent political force.

World War II marked the rise of the modern Third World, and initiated American involvement with it. The conflict badly weakened the empires of Europe and energized movements for national independence. In spite of America's own history of imperialism, US leaders often voiced sympathy with the aspirations of the emerging nations. In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt joined with the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, in issuing the Atlantic Charter, an eloquent statement of the principle of self-determination. But when the allies sat down to implement the charter, controversy ensued. Pressed by Roosevelt to implement home rule in India, Churchill insisted that the charter applied only to those territories occupied by the Nazis.

In what would become a regular occurrence in United States/Third World relations, America backed away from its anti-colonial ideology. Both William Roger Louis in *Imperialism at Bay* and Christopher Thorne in *Allies of a Kind* concluded that the retreat flowed from American ambivalence on

a number of issues.¹¹ First, the United States generally shared with its European allies the prevailing cultural and racial attitudes of the day, and doubted the capability of darker-skinned peoples to practice self-government. Indeed, few US officials envisioned immediate decolonization. Most subscribed to President Roosevelt's hopes for a gradual transition to trusteeship under the United Nations, followed by a period of carefully managed economic and political development.

Second, and perhaps more decisively, military exigencies – or what in a later day would be termed matters of national security – did not permit a breach in the Grand Alliance. As the war dragged on, and strategic realities increasingly impinged upon their decisions, US diplomats abandoned plans for a broad application of trusteeship. Demonstrating the power of strategic thinking, even the American military had, by the time the war ended, successfully vetoed the plans of the State Department to place Japanese-held islands in the Pacific under international trusteeship. Their usefulness as military bases proved too great to sacrifice.¹²

Decolonization went forward nonetheless. Weakened by the war, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and other colonial powers increasingly lost their hold on their empires. Nationalist movements, some of which were led by advocates of radical social change, swept across Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Washington might have welcomed these developments as harbingers of a more open, capitalistic world system. But by the late 1940s, the Cold War had reached fever pitch. President Harry S. Truman, in March 1947, addressed Congress in order to request economic and military aid for Greece and Turkey, both of which, he implied, faced communist aggression. In enunciating his famous “Truman doctrine,” the president indicated that the containment of communism was about to become a global effort.

Cold-war anti-communism drew the United States deeper into third-world affairs while simultaneously restricting the options available to it in responding to nationalism. Recent research has revealed that the Truman administration, 1945–53, did not always oppose anti-colonial movements. When decolonization occurred peacefully, or when Soviet influence seemed to be absent, the administration accommodated it. Gary R. Hess has demonstrated that Washington looked favorably upon Britain's peaceful transfer of power to moderate nationalists in India and Pakistan in 1947.¹³ Robert J. McMahon has argued that the United States gave its support to Indonesian freedom from Dutch colonial rule because the independence movement there was led by decidedly non-communist nationalists.¹⁴ Finally, the Truman administration believed that its own policy of an early transition to self-rule in the Philippines could serve as a model for other colonial empires.¹⁵

Yet American support for anti-colonialism remained limited. For a variety of security and economic reasons associated with the Cold War, US officials often hoped that former colonial powers could maintain enough influence to assure regional stability. According to Scott A. Bills in *Empire and Cold War*, Washington sanctioned French rule in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia in order

to strengthen France's support for the Cold War in Europe. In the former Italian colony of Cyrenaica, part of present-day Libya, it gave tacit support to Britain's occupying forces. In the Middle East, it hoped that London's policy of gradual devolution in Egypt would keep the strategically-valuable Suez Canal safely in western hands. It also counted on Britain to maintain stability in oil-rich Iraq and Iran.¹⁶

Washington opposed anti-colonial revolution most forcefully in French Indochina. The independence movement there had been controlled from its inception by Ho Chi Minh's communist Vietminh. Numerous scholars have examined the US perspective.¹⁷ A pro-Soviet Indochina, policymakers reasoned, would demoralize France and weaken Western Europe. It would deny a source of raw materials and markets to Japan. Underlying all of this, officials assumed that the fall of Indochina would set into motion the “domino”-like collapse of the entire region. With these considerations in mind, the Truman administration in 1950 initiated America's long involvement in Vietnam when, for the first time, it extended US economic and military aid to French forces.

The Chinese communist revolution of 1949 and the Korean War in 1950 had a profound impact on relations between the United States and the Third World. In each case the Truman administration downplayed the indigenous sources of conflict and emphasized the Kremlin's role.¹⁸ To demonstrate the credibility of the containment doctrine, America not only went to war in Korea but dramatically increased its commitment to non-communist regimes in nearby French Indochina, Formosa, and the Philippines.¹⁹ By the end of 1950, most of East Asia had become a battleground in the Cold War.

Studies of US policy in Asia tend to emphasize America's limited economic presence there, and focus instead on the impact of geopolitics. But economics did play an important role in other regions of the Third World. Certainly in Latin America, where US investment had reached \$6 billion and bilateral trade nearly \$3 billion, the United States had more at stake than political credibility.²⁰ Walter LaFeber has used the term “neo-dependency” to describe the history of US relations with Central America.²¹ In pursuit of investment opportunities and markets, and to safeguard the strategic Panama Canal, the United States had come to dominate much of Latin America long before the Cold War, which intensified, but did not substantially alter, that hegemonic system. Convinced that private enterprise best met the region's needs, Washington did not allocate substantial economic aid to Latin America; but military aid, especially after the outbreak of the Korean War, was provided to bolster friendly, authoritarian, client states.²²

The administration moved more cautiously in the Middle East. Few historians deny that economic interests, particularly a concern for oil, dominated American policy in this region of the world. But any discussion of the topic requires a precise explanation of how Washington defined those interests. Aaron David Miller's *Search for Security* and David S. Painter's *Oil and the American Century* are particularly useful in this regard.²³ Although

the United States during and after World War II imported only a small percentage of its petroleum needs, the oil of the Middle East played an increasingly important role in Europe's economic recovery, in the maintenance of international economic stability, and in strategic planning for protracted war. In short, the quest for oil related to a complex web of international economic and security interests. Thus, American-based multinational oil companies and cold-war diplomats worked together to assure the flow of petroleum products from states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Although access to oil required friendly relations with Arab states, the United States pursued inconsistent policies. Stephen L. Spiegel has demonstrated in *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict* how bureaucratic divisions within an administration can sidetrack policy.²⁴ He recounts the struggle between Truman's foreign policy and domestic advisers over the thorny issue of the creation of an independent Israeli state. Torn between a State Department that urged a delay in reaching a decision and a re-election campaign that seemed to require support for the emerging state, President Truman waffled. Finally, in 1948, owing to the dictates of domestic politics and personal philosophy, he gave strong support to the creation of Israel. The decision marked the beginning of what would become a ritualistic practice in US policy concerning the Middle East: the balancing of pro-Israeli with pro-Arab sentiments.

Most historians pinpoint the period from 1953 through 1969 as the era in which the United States fully entered the maelstrom of third-world affairs. By that time cold-war lines had hardened in Europe, but geopolitical lines had become more blurred in the Third World. French troops succumbed in 1954 to the Vietminh at the battle of Dienbienphu. Egypt's leader, Gamel Abdel Nasser, stood up to the British in 1956 at the Suez Canal. And by 1960 the continent of Africa, the last bastion of widespread colonial rule, had given birth to eighteen new nations. With its growing security and economic interests at stake, Washington increasingly intervened in third-world revolutions and civil wars, beseeched emerging nations to join in cold-war military alliances, and participated in third-world economic development.

The administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953–61, has won praise from historians in recent years for its handling of Soviet–American relations. Armed with recently released documents from the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, scholars have been impressed by “Ike’s” efforts to hold down defense spending, and his quest for nuclear arms talks.²⁵ But most historians of relations between the United States and the Third World have been far more critical. Confronted by the rise of radical nationalism and unrest, Eisenhower and his strongly anti-communist Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, often mistakenly assumed that Soviet intrigue lay behind the tumult. Critics charge that the administration’s policies often rolled back progressive social change and intensified regional conflicts.²⁶

Eisenhower’s initiatives in Asia illustrate these themes. Although the administration in 1953 broke the logjam in the Korean peace talks at

Panmunjom, it did not take advantage of that success to reorient American policy. The administration demonstrated restraint in 1954 when it decided not to come to France’s aid at Dienbienphu.²⁷ Yet George Herring’s classic study, *America’s Longest War*, laments Eisenhower’s decision to use economic and military aid to bolster the unpopular regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in the newly created, non-communist, Republic of South Vietnam. Herring also questions the necessity for the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, SEATO, a military pact that included Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan.²⁸ Guided by cold-war logic, Eisenhower failed to grasp the indigenous origins of Vietnamese communism, and underestimated the difficulty of building and defending a new nation.

Studies of US policy in the Middle East are even more critical. Newly available documents, along with Iran’s 1979 Shiite revolution, have inspired several new works on US–Iranian relations. James A. Bill’s *The Eagle and the Lion* and Mark Hamilton Lytle’s *The Origins of the Iranian–American Alliance* rank among the best.²⁹ Lytle focuses on the period from 1941 to 1953, when a combination of US concerns – access to oil, World War II planning, and the Cold War – initiated the American–Iranian marriage. Bill examines the history of that marriage up through its messy divorce in the 1980s. Both highlight the Eisenhower administration’s role in the August 1953 CIA plan to overthrow the nationalistic government of Muhammad Musaddiq. Tired of the stalled negotiations over oil revenues between Iran and the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, exaggerating Musaddiq’s ties to the communist Tudeh Party, and ignorant of Iranian culture, the administration threw its weight behind Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlevi. In the process, it laid the groundwork for the explosive revolution that rocked US–Iranian relations a quarter of a century later.

The Eisenhower administration’s push for military allies proved to be one of the most serious impediments to good relations with the Third World. In the Middle East, the creation in 1955 of the American-sponsored Baghdad Pact, which included Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and Great Britain, generated a major international crisis. Egypt’s fiery nationalist, Gamel Abdel Nasser, viewed the pact as an unwelcome interference in the affairs of the Middle East. Even as Washington waved the promise of financial support for the High Aswan Dam, Nasser refused to join the alliance, made threatening gestures toward Israel, and accepted military aid from the Soviet bloc. When the United States condemned Cairo’s ties to Moscow and withdrew funding for the dam, Nasser bristled with indignation.

To protest Washington’s withdrawal of funds and create new sources of revenue, Nasser nationalized the British-run Suez Canal. Soon, British, French, and Israeli troops stormed across Sinai. Concerned that the Soviets might intervene to help Nasser and that the conflict might disrupt access to Arab oil, Eisenhower in this case opposed the reassertion of colonial control and deployed economic pressure to stop the aggression – actions that made him a hero in the Third World, at least for the moment. But historians such as Peter

Hahn, Diane Kunz, and Donald Neff agree that Suez ended up as a hollow victory. After the crisis, Eisenhower reverted to his old ways. When a military coup in Iraq brought to power a pro-Nasser regime in 1958, Eisenhower responded by sending US marines to nearby Lebanon and proclaiming the Eisenhower Doctrine, which promised American assistance against communism. The initiative deeply alienated the Egyptians and once again showed how the administration confused nationalism with communism.³⁰

In response to the Baghdad Pact and the SEATO alliance in Asia, a number of states in the Third World, led by India's Jawaharlal Nehru and Indonesia's Achmed Sukarno, organized the first conference of nonaligned nations in April 1955 at Bandung, Indonesia. Anxious to assert their recently acquired freedom from colonialism, these nations denounced military alliances for violating national sovereignty and for producing regional conflicts. India was especially alarmed by the inclusion of Pakistan in both the Baghdad Pact and SEATO.³¹ Antagonism between the two nations went back to Britain's partition of the subcontinent in 1947 between a predominantly Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan. Although the nonaligned movement incorporated a kaleidoscope of political views, it became a rallying point for nationalism in the Third World. Public statements by US officials, however, at times implied that the nonaligned states sympathized with the Soviet cause. Secretary of State Dulles infuriated many of them when he declared in 1956 that neutralism in the Cold War was "an immoral and shortsighted conception."

H. W. Brands's *The Specter of Neutralism* and Dennis Merrill's *Bread and the Ballot* examine how the administration tried, in the late 1950s, to regain India's confidence and to demonstrate a greater appreciation for the non-aligned perspective.³² Following a series of Soviet aid initiatives to India and other neutrals, Eisenhower softened some of his rhetoric and increased US economic assistance to the Third World. India, with its representative form of government, was acclaimed as a model for democratic development. Brands argues that the wooing of India reassured Nehru and re-established balance in US policy. But Merrill concludes that the continued military commitment to Pakistan undercut the diplomatic offensive, and contributed to growing tensions in South Asia. US policy drifted until the mid-1960s when war broke out between India and Pakistan and President Lyndon B. Johnson turned off the aid spigot to both nations.

While historians debate the finer points of US policy toward India, most argue that the Eisenhower administration's response to nationalism in Latin America amounted to little more than a reassertion of US hegemony. A defining moment in inter-American relations arrived with the election of President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala. A devout nationalist with widespread popular backing, Arbenz implemented sweeping land reforms, which included the confiscation of lands belonging to the Boston-based United Fruit Company. Charging that Guatemala had been infiltrated by communist agents, Washington in May 1954 orchestrated a CIA coup that overthrew Arbenz and canceled the social revolution. In seeking to explain US actions, some

scholars have pointed to the elaborate lobbying efforts of the United Fruit Company, whose board of directors included CIA chief Alan Dulles.³³ Others have argued that opposition to communism determined policy.³⁴ The most recent treatment of the subject, Piero Gleijeses's *Shattered Hope*, concludes convincingly that no single villain can be blamed but that policy sprang from both economic and security concerns.³⁵

Elsewhere in Latin America the administration followed a policy of calculated neglect. With the exception of a few cases where communism reared its head, the Eisenhower White House showed little interest in the region's economic underdevelopment, unequal distribution of land, and poverty. Eisenhower experimented with innovative diplomacy only after an angry mob assaulted Vice President Richard M. Nixon's motorcade during a trip in 1958 to Caracas, Venezuela, and even more so following Fidel Castro's triumphant march in 1959 into Havana. The creation of the Inter-American Development Bank in 1958, expanded funding for the World Bank in 1959, and the establishment of the Social Progress Trust Fund in 1960 ushered in a new era of US-backed development. But the effort involved only limited funds and remained tied to narrow cold-war aims.³⁶ John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier," 1961–3, tried to reorient United States/Third World relations somewhat by addressing more forcefully the underlying sources of discontent. During the Kennedy years, US influence in the Third World reached its highest level. He declared the 1960s to be the "development decade" and raised the level of economic aid, sent idealistic Peace Corps volunteers to distant rural villages, and promised a more tolerant attitude to nonaligned nations such as India and Egypt.³⁷ Yet Kennedy, no less than his predecessor, adhered to the prevailing cold-war dogma of his era. His legacy in the Third World remains ambiguous. The interpretive difficulties are compounded by his relatively brief tenure in office.

Most historians agree that Kennedy achieved his most impressive successes in Africa. Africa had long been considered by Washington to be a geopolitical backwater, but the Kennedy team looked upon the mineral-rich continent as a testing ground for third-world diplomacy. The New Frontier skillfully steered Portugal, its NATO ally, toward disengagement from its colony in Angola, and negotiated a UN settlement of the civil war in the Belgian Congo.³⁸ In one of the most thoroughly researched monographs on US policy in Africa, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, Thomas J. Noer discusses Kennedy's efforts to bring international pressure on the white government in South Africa to implement modest reforms of its racist apartheid system.³⁹ Interestingly, scholars agree that Kennedy proved supportive of nationalists in Africa mainly because that region had not yet become a major point of superpower competition.

In the Middle East, Kennedy initially took an even-handed approach and adopted a friendly attitude toward both Egypt and Israel. But Nasser's military intervention in the civil war in nearby Yemen in 1962 alienated even his fellow Arabs and forced Kennedy to distance himself from the

Egyptian ruler. Most specialists blame Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, for reversing policy during the Six Day War between Israel and the Arab states in 1967, and for assisting Tel Aviv with increased arms sales.⁴⁰ Stephen Spiegel draws attention to Johnson's inconsistencies. Support for Israel was contradicted by overtures to moderate Arab states. The administration endorsed UN Resolution 242 – which called for Israel to withdraw from the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai – but never developed a plan for implementation. Torn between the pro-Arab sentiments of the State Department, and the pro-Israeli lobby in Congress, Johnson increased US involvement in the Middle East without charting a clear course for the future.⁴¹

Kennedy's darkest hour came in Cuba. While CIA plans to overthrow the Castro regime originated with the Eisenhower administration, it was Kennedy who ultimately oversaw the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. The New Frontier's accommodation of third-world nationalism apparently did not apply to states in the western hemisphere that befriended Moscow. Following the failure of the invasion, Kennedy ordered covert operations to weaken, overthrow, and even assassinate the Cuban dictator. In the end, the policy backfired. Rather than bend to US hegemony, Castro moved to the left, aligning Cuba more closely with the Soviet Union, and paving the way for the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁴² Scholars have advanced a number of explanations for the US–Cuban confrontation. Thomas Paterson points to the impact of large historical forces that made western management of empires more fragile. America's relative economic decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he argues, helps to account for Castro's willingness to challenge US domination.⁴³ Writing from a Marxist perspective, Morris Morley, in *Imperial State and Revolution*, argued that American policies derived from Castro's radical economic policies, which resulted in the nationalization of many American-owned businesses and threatened the institutions of capitalism.⁴⁴

No other initiative better illustrates Kennedy's ambiguous record than his embrace of "development diplomacy." Economic aid by no means began with the New Frontier, but no other administration pursued it with as much energy and conviction. In some ways the use of economic tactics represented a refreshing departure. President Kennedy decried Washington's traditional emphasis on military aid and alliances, and argued that America should help the Third World overcome its massive economic problems. But, at the same time, he viewed economic aid as a weapon in the Cold War, to be used to win new allies, to secure access to strategic raw materials, and to give third-world peoples greater faith in non-communist change. Most scholars agree that the much-heralded Alliance for Progress in Latin America came about primarily to prevent the advent of additional Castros.⁴⁵ Although Kennedy promised to use aid to back democratic governments in the Americas, cold-war politics often required support for authoritarian clients. When Brazil elected a leftist government that challenged US hegemony, the Johnson administration resorted to covert operations to help bring to power a more pliant military

regime, which the United States then bolstered with aid.⁴⁶ And when civil war broke out in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Johnson abandoned development diplomacy altogether and sent in the marines.⁴⁷

Although aid programs often revolved around cold-war politics, development studies offer a new focus of research for historians of US diplomacy. Beyond geopolitics, American developmentalism also reflected ideological and cultural assumptions. Their impact reached down and altered the social structure of each of those states that received assistance, usually with mixed results. In India, US agricultural programs introduced new hybrid seeds that dramatically increased productivity and helped make that country self-sufficient in food grains. But the absence of substantial land reform meant that widespread poverty continued.⁴⁸ In Iran, the Shah's American-backed, capitalistic "revolution from the top," which embodied only moderate land and legal reforms, helped modernize that country but failed to satisfy the aspirations of the middle class and deeply alienated conservative Shi'i religious leaders.⁴⁹ In a suggestive article, Emily Rosenberg has observed that development programs often had a negative effect on women in those societies where their subordinate role made them especially vulnerable to rapid social transformation.⁵⁰ In short, the blending of political, economic, and cultural factors involved in development encouraged both accommodation and discord in the relations of the United States with the Third World and demonstrate the growing complexity of modern international relations.

In spite of the emphasis on development, historians agree that the escalation of US military involvement in Vietnam ranks as the watershed event of the Kennedy–Johnson years. In many ways America's approach to Vietnam embodied all of the shortcomings inherent in its third-world policies as a whole. Underestimating the force of nationalism, the US found itself engaged in a multi-layered civil war. Once developmental policies had failed to ameliorate revolutionary conditions, the United States adopted a harsher counterinsurgency strategy. Soon America was bogged down in jungle warfare, faced a barrage of domestic and international criticism, and an economy weakened by runaway inflation and balance of payments difficulties.⁵¹

Because of the continued classification of government records, the monographic literature on United States/Third World relations in the post-Vietnam era is slim. We must rely mainly on general surveys of the period, regional studies, biographies of key leaders, and memoirs. Raymond Garthoff's sweeping *Detente and Confrontation* gives the best political overview. The strongest economic analysis is to be found in Thomas J. McCormick's *America's Half-Century*.⁵² Robert D. Schulzinger's *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* provides a scholarly introduction to Richard Nixon's years in the White House, 1969–74.⁵³ Gaddis Smith's *Morality, Reason, and Power* serves as the standard work on the administration of Jimmy Carter, 1977–81.⁵⁴ For Presidents Ronald Reagan, 1981–9 and George Bush, 1991–2 we must rely mainly on journalistic accounts.⁵⁵

When historians sit down to write the history of recent United States/Third

World relations, they will be challenged by the sheer magnitude of the subject. Covert CIA operations across the globe, clandestine wars in Central America, deepening involvement in the diplomacy of the Middle East, growing dependence on oil, terrorism, famine, and third-world debt constitute only a partial listing of the important topics. Scholars will have to bear in mind, moreover, broader changes in the international setting that affected US policy toward developing areas. Détente with the Soviet Union, the rise of a more competitive, multi-polar international setting, and the decline and collapse of the Soviet Union have all profoundly influenced United States/Third World relations.

Certain themes are nonetheless apparent. By the 1970s and 1980s the Third World itself had undergone several transformations. Although many developing states continued to depend on the export of primary products for their livelihood, many others – such as Mexico, Brazil, India, and South Korea – had emerged as newly industrialized countries (NICs), and as regional leaders. Others, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, had demonstrated the power of oil by holding back supplies to make developed economies scream. Business leaders in the NICs no longer kowtowed to western firms, but instead pressured their governments to enact restrictions on foreign investors. In those nations that still struggled as producers of primary products – such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Angola – revolutionary slogans still held sway. In short, “North/South” relations became ever more contentious. The Third World had become more than ever what Richard E. Feinberg termed “the intemperate zone.”⁵⁶

American policymakers tried to adjust to the new realities by scaling back their commitments. Direct military intervention became the exception rather than the rule. Instead, the Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations came to rely on friends and allies in the Third World, proxies and clients from a more cynical perspective, to serve US goals. Nixon and Kissinger initiated the trend by throwing their support to Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, where air and naval bases assumed greater significance in the post-Vietnam setting. In the Middle East, they accelerated arms sales to the Shah of Iran. And after the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, they lent unwavering support and arms shipments to Israel. To undo the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, the Reagan administration armed supporters of the former US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza. And in war-torn El Salvador both the Carter and Reagan administrations fought off a leftist insurgency by providing military and economic aid to that country’s right-wing government.

Historians who have examined these policies concede that at times they served Washington’s short-term needs. But over the long run they often generated foreign policy fiascos. James A. Bill emphasizes how support for the Shah, whose repressive SAVAK intelligence organization terrorized the political opposition, fueled the Iranian revolution of 1979.⁵⁷ Stanley Karnow’s study of the Philippines, *In Our Image*, describes how support for Marcos over three administrations produced a backlash in the mid-1980s. Only astute

diplomatic maneuvering by the Reagan administration in 1986 averted a disaster.⁵⁸ And numerous studies have shown how US policy toward Nicaragua and Central America contributed to the orgy of violence that consumed that region in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁹

At times, US policymakers did seek creative alternatives in dealing with the Third World. Richard Nixon won widespread approval in 1972 when he reached out to the People’s Republic of China. The rapprochement allowed Washington to exploit Sino-Soviet discord and opened new economic opportunities for American businesses.⁶⁰ Jimmy Carter in several cases demonstrated sensitivity to third-world nationalism. Walter LaFeber’s *The Panama Canal*, chronicles the history of the Central American waterway and the Carter-sponsored treaty that will relinquish control of the inter-oceanic waterway by the year 2000.⁶¹ William Quandt’s *Peace Process* (1993) provides a rich account, from the perspective of a former official, of the delicate negotiations that led to the opening of relations between arch-enemies Israel and Egypt.⁶²

Yet the swirl of events could easily overwhelm the best-intentioned administration. Iran posed an insurmountable challenge. When the Shah’s regime teetered, Carter failed to initiate discussions with the new Islamic rulers. When the president allowed the Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment, Iranian students needed no further proof of where Washington stood. Urged on by their government, they stormed the American embassy in Tehran and initiated the tortuous Iranian hostage crisis.⁶³

The Reagan administration initially decried Carter’s weakness and tried to reassert American power. The Reagan White House launched in 1983 a military invasion to overthrow a leftist regime on the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada. In addition to the covert war against Nicaragua, it used the CIA to destabilize a communist regime in Angola, and to assist rebels in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. In Lebanon, President Reagan sent in US marines to curb fighting between Christians and Muslims. And to punish the Libyan dictator Moammar Qadahfi for supporting terrorists he ordered US planes to bomb Tripoli.

Critics such as former State Department officials George Ball and Robert Pastor pointed to the meager results.⁶⁴ Grenada succumbed to US military power, but bloody civil wars plagued Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, and Afghanistan for the rest of the decade. In early 1984 243 US Marines fell victim to violence in the Middle East when their barracks came under terrorist attack. And following their withdrawal, the rate of hostage-taking and terrorism increased. In a desperate attempt to pry loose American hostages in Beirut, the administration made secret arms sales to Iran, one of the states in the Middle East most supportive of Lebanese terrorists. The controversy that followed badly scarred the Reagan presidency.

The period that immediately followed the end of the Cold War did not bring any respite for American policymakers. One legacy of the cold-war era that persisted into the new age was America’s commitments to unsavory proxies.

Under President George Bush's leadership the United States carried out its first military intervention of the new era in Panama. John Dinges's *Our Man in Panama* explains how President Manuel Noriega had been a long-time informant for the CIA, and in the early 1980s an ally in the covert war against Nicaragua. But by 1990 the strongman's corruption and his links to Latin American drug lords made him a liability.⁶⁵ Cooperation with another third-world dictator during the 1980s also haunted Bush. Iraq's Saddam Hussein surprised the world in August 1990 with his conquest of Kuwait. For the previous five years, Washington had favored Hussein in his war against Iran. Now the United States feared that Iraqi militarism threatened oil supplies and regional stability. Bush assembled an effective international coalition, and in January 1991 launched Operation Desert Storm. The stunning ninety-day victory revived confidence in American power. Yet Hussein's ability to cling to authority in the immediate aftermath of the war suggested that the Third World still defied easy management by outsiders.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

From the Atlantic Charter to the Persian Gulf War, United States/Third World relations have evolved in unpredictable fashion. In recent years, historians have struggled to discern the larger trends behind the events. What have emerged are images of hegemonic purpose, yet evidence as well of inconsistency and ineffectiveness. We have begun to develop an appreciation for the large historical forces – decolonization, world war, cold war, and global economics – which have provided the context for relations. We have also explored the interaction between economic, national security, and ideological interests that define each relationship. Finally, we also have peeked inside government bureaucracies and glimpsed the idiosyncrasies that can affect diplomacy.

Yet in many ways our analysis is still primitive. In coming years, as archives continue to open, we will gain new dimensions of understanding. And as cold-war tensions fade, we will abandon more of yesterday's myths and view political and economic issues under more direct light. We will explore a host of new issues. Control over news gathering and information systems, environmentalism, and race relations are just a few of the subjects that merit further investigation. Increased availability of documents in developing nations in particular will provide new perspectives. A new generation of Western diplomatic historians, more fully trained in foreign languages and the study of foreign cultures, should prove eager to exploit new sources and to engage their Third World colleagues in dialogue.

While the future is impossible to predict, it is clear that United States/Third World relations will continue to be of central importance in tomorrow's world order. Political, economic, and technological trends in the twentieth century have made the world a smaller place. While the United States no longer dominates the globe as it did fifty years ago, it will still interact with

all of the world's peoples. History has taught us that Washington's relations with the Third World can involve any combination of confrontation, accommodation, collaboration, and discord. Hopefully, historians can point the way toward policies that reinforce our more cooperative instincts.

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