CONFRONTING THE THIRD WORLD

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY 1945-1980

GABRIEL KOLKO

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PANTHEON BOOKS
NEW YORK

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Published in the United States by Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kolko, Gabriel.
Confronting the third world.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. United States—Foreign relations—1945–
2. United States—Foreign relations—Developing countries. 3. Developing countries—Foreign relations—United States. I. Title.
E744.K63 1988 327.730173'4 88-42600
ISBN 0-394-57138-X
ISBN 0-394-75933-8 (pbk.)

Manufactured in the United States of America

98765432
Book design by Beth McNally

PREFACE

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF SUSTAINED POlitical tension and social conflict, continuous warfare, and upheaval. Never-ending crises shape profoundly the quality of life in our civilization, defining the daily lot of a large section of the global population, particularly those in the Third World. News of this chronic state of crisis bombards those of us who do not directly confront the hunger, loss of life, uprooting, and trauma that are part of it. The very intensity and magnitude of this contemporary situation pose a challenge to our ability to comprehend it in its enormity and complexity. Further, because there has been relatively little effort made, given the importance of the problem, to blend discrete events and facts into coherent patterns, most outsiders lack an intelligible scale against which to understand the significance of what occurs daily throughout much of the Third World.

Since 1945 the United States has played a decisive, though by no means exclusive, part in shaping events everywhere on the globe; to varying degrees in many places, postwar history has been inextricably linked to the nature and conduct of American foreign policy. Poverty and the transition from colonialism to national independence have made the Third World the most crisis-prone, and it is here that the U.S. role has grown almost without interruption. Even if one accepts the contention that the difficulties of the Third World would be monumental even if the United States had played no role there, far less debatable is the fact that dealing with these problems and the issues they have generated has increasingly dominated American foreign policy. Indeed, it is only in these regions that the United States has engaged in violent military activities since 1950. To come to grips with the U.S. relation-

ship to the Third World is also to analyze the single most important aspect of the international role of the United States in modern times.

For purposes of this book, the term "Third World" is used to include all of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, even though I focus on only those nations that the United States actively sought to guide or in whose affairs it intervened. By the 1970s some of these states were no longer poor, as in the case of the oil producers, but their vital economic importance to the United States continued. Although this economic factor was by no means always the sole or principal cause of American involvement in these countries, the role of these nations as exporters of raw materials generally defined their structural relationship to the United States. The explanation of how such economic and structural considerations influenced American behavior and goals will require analyses transcending any one nation or region but applicable in certain ways to all of them. I have not discussed China because of its sheer size and importance and because the triumph of the Communist Party there occurred very early in the postwar era.

I have also excluded Vietnam from my account, though I often cite its relevance to the global priorities and domestic economic and political contradictions that were to reshape the context of U.S. relations to the Third World after 1964. The Vietnam story is well known, in any case, and I have a full-scale account of it in my *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (1986). In fact, though the Vietnam War became the main event in the great postwar drama of American intervention in the Third World, until 1965 Vietnam was no more important to the United States than many other nations. Almost by chance it became the place where a policy that was preordained to lead to a military crisis somewhere came to its logical end. At social, economic, and even political levels, experiences there resembled those in numerous other nations, and the Vietnam War illustrated the great unpredictable risks, given the assumptions of U.S. strategic thinking, of any intervention with American soldiers. Vietnam, even more than the Korean War, exposed America's inability to fight decentralized wars in the Third World successfully. I have left most of the details of this fundamental military dilemma to my *Anatomy of a War* as well as *The Limits of Power* (1972), written with Joyce Kolko. But I include here my general analysis of the larger American premises that made the Vietnam debacle virtually inevitable.

Just as American policy is complex in its formulation and application—notwithstanding a certain simplicity in defining its goals and interests—the nations to which the United States has sought to relate are astonishingly diverse, even though structurally they are all societies based on sharp class inequalities. Despite the many similarities among these countries that one can never ignore, the differences among them can often have as profound

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an influence on the problems the United States confronts in the Third World. Such distinctions may define the focus of U.S. efforts and determine the possibility of their success. If sorting out these critical differences has been the major challenge to American policymakers and analysts—who usually fail in their efforts to do so—such comprehension presents a no less imposing responsibility to the historian.

I have, therefore, included a considerable amount of essential information in this book on the social and economic conditions in various Third World nations, and on their class and political systems, as well as on land and peasant questions. Such information will allow one to transcend those mystifying Cold War shibboleths that describe America's difficulties merely as part of a struggle with Communism. It will also enable one to comprehend far better the real nature of U.S. goals. For out of these social structures and class forms in the Third World have come those forces and issues that have challenged U.S. goals and interests, challenges not simply from the Left and those who are poor but also from the Center and from those many nationalist-middle-class and even rightist-elite elements in the Third World with whom the United States has also been in conflict. How the United States has responded to all these dilemmas is a major focus of my book.

Writing social histories of political movements is no small task, although in my Vietnam War book I undertook such a detailed survey, one that can serve as a model for studying other nations. It will suffice in the following pages merely to suggest the general nature of the economic and social components essential for such assessments. But even this brief summary will convey a sense of those larger relations between the United States and the countries of the Third World and of those unifying patterns and problems that emerged to define both the nature of modern history and the complex economic and political difficulties facing the United States today—many of them the outcomes of initial U.S. policy successes or of the actions of U.S. business interests, as in, say, Central America or the Philippines. Indeed, to prevent these more analytic issues from taking on an excessively abstract or theoretical quality, I will also examine them in the context of the experiences of various countries, of which the most important is the Philippines. Precisely because it had been an American colony and has assumed a special significance in the U.S. relationship to the Third World since 1945, the Philippines is the one nation I deal with throughout the entire postwar period. The U.S.-Philippine relationship illustrates better than any other the nature and goals as well as the frustrations of the U.S. postwar policies.

Purely as a literary convenience, I employ such terms as "the United States," "Washington," or "America" as interchangeable designations for the most important policymakers in Washington in various administrations, those people with the power to create and implement foreign policy. Despite

current fashions in the social sciences, I have not considered it worthwhile here to go into the detailed steps by which these men reached their decisions, basically because I have yet to see convincing evidence that bureaucratic politics among various tendencies in government, which has existed since time immemorial in all nations, really alters the substance of basic national policies. Most of these larger policies can easily be predicted in advance, and to assume that their continuous recurrence is simply the outcome of capricious or arbitrary bureaucratic processes is grossly to beg the fundamental issues of power, interests, and purposes that underlay all U.S. government decisions. The astonishing continuity in U.S. foreign policy since 1945 points not only to the very small size of the homogeneous world from which U.S. decisionmakers are drawn—a community of mobile lawyers, industrialists, bankers, and officials I have described in my book *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (1969)—but also testifies to the total socialization of all possible candidates for participation in the foreign affairs decisionmaking system. Styles may change, but the parameters of possible choices within which ambitious or vain men function do not—and this explains the uniformity of policy. For purposes of this book, then, unless I designate specific men or organisms, any reference to "the United States" and similar abstractions should be understood to mean the policy as defined by those at the highest levels dealing with the issue: usually the White House or the National Security Council, or both, but sometimes the most senior specialist official dealing with the country or problem. In any event, it is generally those at the highest levels of state who concern themselves with the broader context in which decisions are made and who transcend those parochial concerns that preoccupy, say, assistant secretaries of state or defense who concentrate on regions or topics. But when I have found divisions within Washington affecting basic policy in a significant manner, I have so indicated.

This book was written during 1986–87 while I was a York University Research Fellow, and once again I am deeply grateful to York University for its scholarly encouragement and vital support. Without York's exemplary understanding of how creative knowledge is best sustained, this book surely would not have been completed at this time. I am most indebted to the university, and I take pleasure in acknowledging what has for many years been an ideal environment for fruitful research, writing, and teaching.

Renato Constantino aided me in so many ways over fifteen years, the aid ranging from the inspiration his own great works on Philippine history provided, to his expressions of warm friendship, to his frequently providing materials one cannot find in North America, that I am unable adequately to express my profound appreciation for his generosity and patience with an eager novice. I am most grateful for all he has done. Michael Tanzer has kept

me in touch with the oil and raw materials world for many years, much to my benefit, and he and Chester Hartman will be happy to see that I have systematically mined the Cuba press digest they helped to edit. Michael Klare generously shared his documentation on arms and military aid, and Jules Benjamin kindly supplied me with several important letters on U.S. policy toward the Cuban revolution. George McT. Kahin and Albert L. Michaels helpfully clarified some key issues regarding Indonesia and Chile, respectively. André Schiffrin of Pantheon Books has been immensely supportive and a pleasure to work with, playing the roles both of ideal publisher and friend. The York University interlibrary loan office fulfilled my many requests with unflagging good cheer and efficiency, and the Faculty of Arts secretarial service typed the manuscript with expertise and grace.

My wife, Joyce, once again played a very special role in the writing of this book, posing the right questions and drawing my attention to lapses in research and analysis—plus a great deal more. I have benefited immensely, far more than I can express here, from her comments and support.

Needless to say, I assume sole responsibility for everything contained in this book and for any errors of fact or interpretation.

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INTRODUCTION

A MAJOR PITFALL CONFRONTING ANY writer on the history of U.S. foreign policy is the impulse to portray it much more systematically and coherently than America's political leaders and diplomats were able to at the time they were making decisions or when later reflecting upon them. Both the Vietnam War and the Iran-contra affair surely reinforce the need for historians to assign an important role to haphazard, even irrational influences that arise when those who determine America's role in the world act impulsively and in ignorance of either the challenges they confront or the consequences of their own actions. There have clearly been times in the United States' relationship to the Third World that surrealist poetry would have been much more appropriate to describe the relationship than the relatively stale prose of social science. But the fact remains that much of what we perceive as disorder and inconsistency in American foreign policy is far less the result of its goals and motives than of the United States' leadership's inability, in an astonishingly diverse and complex world, to predict the total effects of its actions or the costs of these actions to the nation's global interests. Those who read the daily news, or write about it subsequently, can easily become bewildered by information with which they are confronted ceaselessly if they fail to see the crucial distinction between the predictable regularity in the causes of policies and the frequently surprising and unintended disorder in the outcome.

Notwithstanding my concern for the uniqueness of events and nations and the foibles and miscalculations of American leaders, I have sought in this book mainly to describe those consistent larger patterns that emerged during the United States' postwar relations with the Third World and the nations in

it. I intend to focus primarily on those many similarities found among seemingly discrete initiatives in American policy and the common assumptions, motives, and objectives that underlay them. While these policies have similar institutional as well as ideological roots, in various parts of the world they have had a very different impact. Many excellent accounts of the U.S. role in specific nations exist, but analyses of the relationship between U.S. policies in one country and those elsewhere remain a great gap in current writings, and making such vital connections is essential. My emphasis here is on the whole rather than the parts of American policy toward the Third World since 1945, on those repetitive factors that unify it. My focus is much more on the forest than on the trees within it—though ultimately the trees do make up the forest. Without such a broader perspective, the sheer mass of individual cases and the cacophony of facts in the daily news will submerge the essential coherence that has defined U.S. policy toward the Third World since 1945. More important yet, a general focus is essential to grasp accurately how American policy toward the Third World has evolved in reality as well as intent.

While area-specific elements of that global policy have their own distinctive character, American conduct in one area has frequently affected its involvement elsewhere, and decisionmakers invariably include such interactions in their calculations. Distractions in one nation or region impinge on goals and interests in yet others, producing conflicting demands on U.S. resources as the universal aspirations of its foreign policy assert themselves. To understand this tension, we must comprehend the causes as well as the goals of this policy as unified, the whole becoming the key to understanding the parts to a much greater extent than has been presumed in the literature on American diplomacy. Such interrelations have grown persistently since 1945 and have more and more defined the calculations that went into the making of specific as well as general plans. And precisely because the attainment of foreign policy goals has increasingly eluded America's leaders, it is necessary to give respectful attention to those local forces and conditions that have confounded their desires and taxed their comprehension.

Explanations of difficult problems such as these exist on several levels. First there is the purely objective and reasonably obvious level involving the United States' explicitly stated goals and interests regarding the kinds of political, social, and economic orders it wished to see in various Third World nations. While particular U.S. policies may have varied in each region insofar as Europe's role or the possibility of Communist influence was concerned, America's leading spokesmen made clear the same overall goals in these regions countless times. By no later than 1960, America's ideals and assumptions regarding institutional issues, above all foreign investment and raw materials exports, had been repeated so often, both in its policy guidelines

and its routine diplomacy, that one can fairly say that for those ready to read the quite unimpeachable public printed and manuscript sources, there remains no mystery whatsoever regarding American formal premises and aims.

On a second level, far more challenging to explain are those essentially nonmaterial and symbolic elusive considerations that increasingly entered into the United States' decisions in the Third World after its failure to win the Korean War. The credibility of American military power and the emergence of geopolitical analogies and linkages in the form of the domino theory soon subjected U.S. behavior and policies in many areas to new influences that paralleled and sometimes outweighed the more traditional narrower assessments of the economic and political stakes involved in success or failure, action or inaction, in some nation or region. No less important to our explanation was the impact of the growing number of de facto and formal alliances with Third World surrogates the U.S. entered into in this period, raising for the first time the United States' increasing dependence on inherently unstable men and regimes.

Since official decisionmaking circles have never rationally articulated or coherently justified their reliance upon these fluid and seemingly intangible factors, historians of American foreign policy must do so themselves wherever it appears that these factors were decisive in shaping U.S. conduct in a particular nation. If Vietnam remains the most obvious case of this, it is nonetheless far from being the only one. Plunging into such a difficult area of study may be far more daunting than, say, estimating U.S. material needs, but to fail to do so is also to miss out on some of the main dilemmas and tensions of American foreign policy in the modern era. Have, for example, the failures of past U.S. military and strategic policies produced the extreme responses transcending rational calculations we find today, explaining why the United States appears to be leaping into ever higher risk situations that only compound its problems? Does the United States seem to be increasingly ignoring its oft-repeated ideas on the desirability of certain kinds of economic and political forms for the world, and, if so, can it be because these ideas mean something different in the late 1970s than they did in the decade after World War Two? Or have U.S. goals remained constant, with only the means for attaining them having changed dramatically in the postwar era? In fact, whatever their relative weights at various times or places, the explicitly stated U.S. foreign policy goals and those less fully articulated factors that have also shaped foreign policy objectives have through this period existed in tandem and been inextricable—posing a constant and formidable challenge to analysis.

Given Washington's belief during the early postwar years that not only had it the obligation to intervene actively in any country or area in the world in

which it thought its interests warranted such intervention but, above all, also the power to do so successfully, the motives and behavior of U.S. foreign policy grew increasingly complex as its ability to impose its desires diminished. The Korean War especially caused American leaders to fear that the gap between their desires and their ability to attain them was wide and might continue to increase, and it stimulated an intense activism that did not abate. Not until the Vietnam War dramatically altered political and economic conditions within the United States and ended Washington's ability to gain its European allies' toleration of costly, dangerous policies was there even a pause in its growing interventionist momentum. The persistent search for an effective, relatively inexpensive means for using military power and force to attain political objectives emerged as a central theme in America's relationship to the Third World after 1950, and doctrines of limited war, counterinsurgency, and much else developed in response to it.

The assumption of activism was always tailored to Washington's regional priorities and options as well as to the extent of its deference to its European allies' interests. Many of its difficulties evolved out of its willingness or desire to replace its allies as the dominant regional power, as in the case of the British in the Middle East or the French in Indochina. Once it did so, the symbolic question of the United States using its military capability to impose its will in those places began to arise with increasing frequency. Coping with such challenges, whether they were real or were merely perceived to be so, became major events in postwar history, often involving scarcely more than a U.S. belief that simply because it *wished* a particular person or party to remain in power it had the duty to bring about its wish.

But even when Washington did not act directly, it increasingly did so indirectly. In order to understand the U.S. relationship to the Third World, it becomes essential to chart U.S. arms aid, its growing reliance on covert action, and its support for ostensibly friendly military elements in many countries. What were the risks and complications of aid and assistance to proxies and friends? Was Washington able to strengthen the role of the military in the political life of the Third World? And, perhaps above all, was the growing U.S. reliance on local officers as the instruments for protecting its interests counterproductive to the accomplishment of its original goals, carrying with it risks that might later require more direct forms of U.S. intervention? Given the enormously diverse problems of nations in the process of dramatic changes, could military officers guarantee the stability so essential to the attainment of America's tangible economic and strategic goals, or would they undermine its realizing its objectives over the long run? These issues were discussed in Washington as its leaders sought to avoid the more obvious dangers of direct American troop involvement, and increasingly they were to emerge as fundamental challenges.

Just as the average Third World nation has its own distinctive qualities, touching everything from its culture to economic organization and social dynamics, so too does the United States have both ideologically and institutionally defined reasons for its actions. How did U.S. objectives in such vast, rich nations as Brazil, which were relatively insulated from the Cold War strategically and politically, differ from those in the Philippines and Indonesia? What weight did the United States assign to strategic and military factors in the various regions? And what was the extent of its economic goals and interests? The nature of the U.S. material relationships to the Third World and its objective position in a global economy that was changing over time provide a crucial context for assessing American behavior. But was this setting a sufficient as opposed to a necessary explanation? How did such factors influence its general policies in the major Third World areas, and how and why did they differ? The manner in which U.S. interests and policies interact and clash with institutional, political, and cultural forces in various nations, shaping as well as reacting to them as part of an integral process, poses fundamental issues for analyzing events and the dynamics of change in the Third World since 1945.

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