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Book Review: Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror

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Elizabeth Schmidt. 2013. *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 267 pp.

The literature on Africa's foreign relations is not only vast and complex, but the field is constantly changing with new perspectives/explanations on the continent's challenges. Elizabeth Schmidt's *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* is another valuable addition to the literature. The book is unique in terms of its intellectual rigor and continental coverage. Unlike the practice where some scholars select few countries in Africa as case studies and generalize their findings for the entire continent with little/no regard for the divergent issues (cultural, historical, political, and socio-economic), this book is quite different from the norm.

Grounded on a qualitative research method, the book investigates the root causes of Africa's contemporary problems of statehood and governance. Although the problems that confront Africa are multifaceted, the dominant explanations tend to over-emphasize the internally-driven factors like dictatorship, corruption, and inactions of political elites at the expense of the externally-driven factors. While the centrality of the internally-driven factors cannot be ignored, the author also reminds readers not to forget the impact of foreign intervention in Africa on the current problems. Schmidt's main argument therefore focuses on the consequences of foreign interventions (political and military) across the continent (p. 1).

The book is categorized into phases of decolonization (1956-75), the Cold War (1945-91), state collapse (1991-2001), and the global war on terror (2001-10). Within the context of this categorization, the author sets forth four central assumptions/propositions as guiding tenets for investigation (pp. 1-3). The first assumption underscores the fact that imperialist and Cold War powers hijacked the decolonization process in Africa for their economic and political interests, to the extent that the continent became the battleground for imperialist influences and East-West ideological proxy wars. Second, the author posits that Africa became strategically less important to Cold War allies after the demise of communism. Third, like the Cold War, the global war on terror increased foreign military presence in Africa with support for authoritarian regimes. Fourth, the author theorizes that foreign intervention tended to increase rather than decrease conflicts on the continent (p. 2).

The author examines these assumptions with other topics like radical nationalism, decolonization, and the Cold War. In chapter one, for example, the author constructs a compelling narrative/argument to help readers understand the motives/tactics of these foreign actors (imperial and Cold War) on the continent. While major European countries (Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium) occupied the top group of imperial powers during the colonial and post-colonial eras, the United States and the former Soviet Union were undoubtedly the Cold War giants on the continent. The roles of China and Cuba as Cold War actors were also addressed (pp. 18-32).

With the propositions clearly outlined in chapter one, the author shifted the focus (chapters two to seven) to case study analysis of African countries that were deeply

affected by these interventions (pp. 35-189). For instance, the author has systematically discussed interventions by neo-colonial and Cold War actors in Northern Africa (Egypt and Algeria), Central and Southern Africa (Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa) and East Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea). The colonial/post-colonial relations between France and its former colonies were also examined. The case of France and Guinea's independence struggle and the Cold War power politics that occurred in the Congo and Somalia are few examples to highlight.

The eighth and last chapter explores the so-called global war on terrorism (pp. 193-222) and the growing military presence of the US in Africa. For Schmidt, "terrorism replaced communism as the rallying cry for American overseas involvement" following the 2001 terrorist attack on the US (p. 195). Clearly, the book appears to have accomplished its stated goals/propositions. Not only is it well researched and logically argued, but the author has demonstrated outstanding knowledge and an in-depth grasp of the continent's history and political complexities. The analyses and the persuasive arguments attest to this claim.

One major drawback is the author's inability to examine the current intervention in Africa by China in search for economic resources/political influence. Although the author touches on China as a Cold War actor (pp. 27-29) and again mentions China with other emerging powers in Africa (p.221), the author was unable to discuss adequately China's current/forceful involvement on the continent. I also find the broad categorization of the period of state collapse (1991-2001) somehow problematic, especially from a continental perspective, since this was the same era that many authoritarian regimes in Africa transitioned quite well to democratic/semidemocratic forms of government. Notwithstanding, this book is an excellent resource for the academia, policymakers/researchers and anyone interested in African Affairs.

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