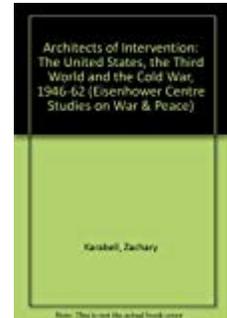


Zachary Karabell. *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War 1946-1962.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999. ix+248 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-2307-2.



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In *Architects of Intervention*, Zachary Karabell argues that throughout the early Cold War period leaders in the third world encouraged, and at times orchestrated, the process of U.S. intervention. Rather than being acted upon, local elites could influence the terms of great power involvement, and through a process of collaboration with the U.S. either protected, enlarged, or developed their own authority. Karabell suggests that while Washington needed to be interested in a specific problem (generally the opposition to the spread of Communism), interventions would not have occurred if local leaders had not effectively lobbied for support.

To demonstrate this basic thesis, Karabell examines a series of seven interventions, beginning with Greece in 1946 and concluding with Laos in 1962. In reviewing each of these cases, Karabell focuses his attention on the role of the local leaders, their interests, and how they exploited U.S. government concerns to encourage a favorable response. Ultimately, he argues that U.S. engagement in the third world was not beneficial to the long-range interests of democracy, rather to Kara-

bell "As a way of establishing or supporting conservative, anti-Communist, antirevolutionary regimes, cold-war interventions were usually antidemocratic." As important, "The subsequent histories of every country in which the U.S. intervened was typically brutal, with civil war, massive human-rights abuses, and ugly authoritarianism" (p.3) as the result.

The case study approach has a political science feel in that each of the short pieces offers evidence to support a grand thesis, and in most cases, relies on well-known secondary sources. While Karabell does employ some primary sources, the work rarely presents new and dramatic information, or even advanced understandings about the details of any of the interventions. However, the analysis is not intended to be comprehensive. Karabell suggests that he hopes to refocus and recast the extant information in new ways. Understandably in a work with so many case studies, the quality of the analysis and presentation varies. Further, and quite reasonably, Karabell's notion of what constitutes an intervention is also quite broad. Military and economic aid in Greece

and Italy, CIA operations in Iran and Guatemala, full scale military intervention in Lebanon, a hybrid CIA trained-exile force invasion in Cuba, and political manipulation in Laos all qualify.

By far, the most compelling and convincing study is the review of the 1958 deployment of U.S. troops in Lebanon. In two chapters on this case, Karabell skillfully weaves an understanding of the potency of pan-Arabism and Nasserism in the 1950s with an explanation of the various religious divisions in Lebanon and the political relationships between different groups. In looking at the background for the intervention, Karabell focuses on the ability of Lebanese President, Camille Chamoun to convince the Eisenhower Administration of the threat to regional stability if the U.S. did not support his administration. Here the impetus for the intervention did not come from Washington, but rather depended on events in Lebanon, and a late-in-the-day U.S. attempt to provide support for the status-quo.

Some of the shorter studies, especially the failed case of Cuba and the muddled efforts in Laos, also are effective in defending the argument that, for intervention to be successful a reasonable amount of local power is needed. The Cuba case especially, while not offering much in the way of new revelations about the Bay of Pigs fiasco, does suggest something of a control to the overall thesis. Without mobilized local elites on the island willing to work with the force of invading exiles, the CIA effort could not have succeeded. Karabell is careful to point out that this was not the only reason that the invasion failed, but he argues that it would have made long term prospects for victory unlikely, even if the landing had worked.

Other case studies are more problematic in their own right, especially since Karabell generally fails to assess the complete effects of an intervention. For example, in examining the economic and military aid and the CIA activity in Greece and Italy, Karabell does a fine job of suggesting

why the U.S. intervened, but is not as clear about how effective that involvement was in achieving results. In addition, Karabell's assessments also are not always entirely convincing. Like the Iran study, the examination of the Guatemala case is a generally strong review of the extant literature. However, the overall argument, that Castillo Armas needs to be taken seriously as an independent actor rather than as Washington's puppet, is still a tough sell. Still, the seven case studies (Greece 1947-1949, Italy 1948, Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Lebanon 1958, Cuba 1961, and Laos 1960-1961) do provide a well-organized catalogue of the essential local conditions that drove the U.S. interventions.

Karabell's overall thesis relies heavily on the arguments of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher. In studies of European imperialism and African collaboration Robinson and Gallagher argued that imperialism was possible only because of the acceptance and support of local elites. The relationship between these local elites and the European power shaped the structure of imperialism. When these local leaders ceased to accept western power as legitimate and necessary, imperialism was no longer possible.

In Karabell's application of this approach to U.S. foreign relations, there is both a great deal of new as well as old. On one hand, Karabell's fundamental argument is part and parcel of the basic ways that social and cultural historians have been thinking about power for the last thirty-five years. To historians of gender, slavery, and even imperialism, power is best seen as a relationship. Eugene Genovese, in his pathbreaking 1972 work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, argued that slaves in the U.S. South had the ability, or agency, to manipulate the culture of their masters, and define their own culture. Similarly, and more recently, James C. Scott, in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), argued that in rela-

tionships in which power is distributed unequally, or when in which there is a power differential, the actors on the low side always have a capacity to guide their own destinies. Central to this agency is the ability to play a number of powerful actors against each other, or to suggest that threats to the powerful player are immediate and that a response is necessary. In a similar vein, Eric R. Wolf, in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), explained that in imperial relationships, non-Europeans molded their own culture and were not solely acted upon by imperial forces. Instead, processes of cultural and social negotiation determined the effects of western engagements.

It is in this vein that Karabell's work is most valuable. Historians of U.S. foreign relations have been slow to consider the leaders in the third world as capable of molding their own destinies, using western leaders to their own advantage, or guiding big-power diplomacy. Even in studies in which local actors are taken seriously and in which there is an attempt to understand the local implications of external forces, the agency of the locals is often overlooked. Karabell's work is important for the connection he makes between historians of foreign relations and the rest of the field. The central question for any historian is how power works. Karabell's work can be read as a reminder to the entire field that the study of foreign relations is about relationships.

Karabell pursues these themes in his conclusion, though in a limited way. He explains that "during the height of American power in the 1950s, the United States operated under certain constraints." (p. 226) Though militarily powerful, it was "difficult to force dramatic change in the government of a particular country..." Even more to the point, he suggests, "The capacity of small third-world states to influence a far stronger power indicates that they are not as powerless as they might appear. The economic and military weakness of many countries on paper, their statistical inferiority, does not take into account the amount

of unquantifiable power they can wield" (p. 227). Unfortunately however, Karabell does not take these arguments to their logical conclusions to suggest the importance of this theme on the broadest level. Instead, in his very short conclusion he generally focuses on developing a calculus of the factors necessary for a successful intervention. While these ideas, made clear throughout the text are important, the largest question needs more attention.

A second piece of Karabell's analysis that is useful, or at least en vogue, is an understanding of the limits of the Cold War as a prism for seeing all conflicts between 1946-1991. *Architects of Intervention* serves to reinforce many of the key points made most recently in Matthew Connelly's article in *The American Historical Review*, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence" (June 2000). Connelly argues that the Cold War, while important, was only one of a series of contests driving the Algerian conflict. The global struggle between the U.S. and USSR, and between socialism and capitalism, while a motive force for officials in Washington, was not always central to conflicts in the third world.

The focus Karabell places on the divisions between elites in places such as Lebanon, Iran, and Laos, makes clear that communism was not necessarily central to strife in the third world. Local differences of opinion between elites, or even real ideological disputes about the meanings of nationalism and independence, drove conflict. Nevertheless, local leaders presented divisions in their own countries as Cold War contests. In this way, they were able to engage the United States in a situation where no vital national interests were at stake.

This type of understanding in Karabell's analysis is quite useful in suggesting the general complexity of the post-WWII era. Looking at the notion of intervention through Karabell's eyes, using "Cold War lenses" is, on one hand, quite appropri-

ate. On the other hand it does not fit the facts. Although the world conflicts between the forces of capitalism and those of communism did not play a significant role in internal divisions, because of an understanding of that conflict, local leaders could present their divisions as Cold War ones. Thus, conflict in the periphery was both of the Cold War, and not of the Cold War at the same time. This recognition helps Karabell at least to begin to extrapolate on the different ways in which Cold War history can look from the third world. In many ways then, *Architects of Intervention* suggests the direction in which studies of the Cold War have inexorably been heading.

On the whole, *Architects of Intervention* serves as a useful and welcome analysis of some of the central features of the relationships between the United States and the nations of the third world at their most tense points. While leaving many questions about these relationships open, and without offering a comprehensive analysis of any of them, Karabell is nevertheless very effective in suggesting notions about their fundamental nature. As an extended essay about the way the foreign leaders influenced the United States actions, and of the generally negative long-term results, Karabell's thoughtful, well-written book should serve to suggest to scholars important new ways of approaching the key questions in the history of United States foreign relations.

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