

Elizabeth Schmidt. *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War: Sovereignty, Responsibility, and the War on Terror.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018. xxiv + 462 pp. \$36.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-89680-321-3.



Reviewed by Jeremy M. Rich (Marywood University)

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Commissioned by David D. Hurlbut (Independent Scholar)

Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War is a well-organized, easy-to-read survey of a very complicated field of literature. This book is clearly aimed at undergraduates in African history and politics courses, even though Elizabeth Schmidt does provide an overarching framework for understanding the causes and consequences of foreign involvement in African countries since 1989. This is not meant to be a major theoretical contribution to international relations in Africa after the Cold War. Rather than provide detailed studies based on fieldwork, Schmidt sets up each chapter by describing the evolution and rationales of foreign intervention in countries from Somalia to Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Readers with no background in African politics will be able to easily follow the discussion. Each chapter includes a short bibliographic section that covers a select range of scholarship.

Three points undergird Schmidt's overarching argument that, ultimately, foreign military intervention in Africa "often did more harm than good" (p. 8). First, neoliberal economic policies that im-

posed austerity on African governments increased the likelihood of armed conflict, which in turn led to selective interventions by foreign regimes. Second, the US military presence expanded after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent war on terror. This led to US alliances with numerous authoritarian African states. Last (and a bit less coherently), Schmidt notes how the United States was hardly alone in foreign interventions in Africa. The United Nations, European governments, the People's Republic of China, and prominent African states like Nigeria all led or at least supported military actions in Africa. With so many stakeholders crowding the scene, Schmidt's streamlined approach tends to deal with this last point in more of a scattered way. Admittedly, the diverse number of international actors makes any effort to generalize about their goals and their results hard to sum up in a survey.

Chapters 2 and 3 situate Schmidt's later case studies in a broader discussion of African and international relations after 1989. She argues that two dominant paradigms shaped Western inter-

ventions: responsibility to protect followed by the war on terror. Specialists will not really find much new here, as the analysis does not really bring out debates within the scholarly literature. Again, this is a survey for students and readers not at all familiar with African politics. Likewise, the individual case studies are squarely aimed at introducing readers to major events and policies related to foreign intervention in countries such as Somalia, Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The analysis in the case studies is sound but relatively brief. This approach certainly would have value in the classroom, especially as comparable works often are so bogged down with detail that an inexperienced reader would have a hard time following the main points (such as Paul Nugent's now dated 2004 survey, *Africa Since Independence*).

One must credit the author for correctly identifying the general results of President Donald Trump's disdain and disinterest in African countries, despite having only the first year of his administration to use as evidence. Perhaps the only issue that I think deserved a bit more attention is the paradox that human rights served as a justification for foreign military interventions by the United States and European countries, even as major international countries largely ignored African human rights activists who contested the legitimacy of various elections, such as in Gabon and Togo. The decline of humanitarian justifications for military intervention might signal a broader trend in which the pretext of human rights to legitimize interventions may have ultimately run its course after Libya in 2011 and Mali in 2013. Trump's administration thus may ultimately serve to further dismantle the already fraying responsibility to protect model of foreign intervention. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's more recent contention (after this book was published) that human rights need to be narrowed down to meet US concerns (primarily on religious freedom) also fits with the

general decline of human rights in foreign policy toward Africa.

From the vantage point of late 2020, it is striking how a number of countries covered in individual topics already would require updating even though the book itself only came out two years ago. The Egyptian intervention in the Libyan civil war, increased European and US military efforts in Niger, and new Russian efforts to build a presence in francophone African countries (most notably the Central African Republic) all are further complications to Schmidt's survey. Any survey is bound to miss certain important issues, especially one spanning such a broad range. While Schmidt's précis of US foreign policy from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama is sound as a whole, one could well argue that mid-level State Department officials and occasional interventions by some US congressional officials (such as the conservative US senator Jim Inhofe) also have shaped US foreign policy, especially in countries where the paradigm of the war on terror is not particularly apt. Another issue would be the internal divisions within various UN peacekeeping operations. However, the author's careful condensation of various interventions undoubtedly meant that sacrifices had to be made to not overly clutter the sharp overviews of each particular conflict.

The clear and succinct presentation of major factors driving foreign intervention is very accessible to nonspecialists. The bibliographic sections offer readers a chance to access more detailed studies. There is no expectation that prior knowledge of different theoretical approaches is required. This study would need complementary readings for a class, particularly on topics such as Chinese foreign policy and the varied topics in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Likewise, the lack of an expansive central argument means instructors would have to cover rival theoretical approaches separately. Despite these issues, it is refreshing to have a textbook on the market that is

clearly designed for teaching undergraduates about foreign intervention in Africa.

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