



Foreign Powers and Intervention in Armed Conflicts

By Aysegul Aydin
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Reviewed by
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Aysegul Aydin, an academic scholar, sets out to determine why and through what means external states choose to get involved in interstate conflicts and civil wars. He asserts that intervening states make their choices based on a combination of security and economic interests. His challenge is significant since the related literature (that is, international relations, international political economics, and security studies) has evolved somewhat independently. Aydin's investigation is rooted in realist and liberalist international relations theory. He uses empirical data from hundreds of external conflicts and 153 civil wars from 1944 to 2001. For contextual purposes, he also brings both pre-conflict and postconflict intervention measures to bear, coupled with literature addressing conflict prevention and postconflict reconstruction. His statis-

tical analysis is complemented by qualitative analysis of numerous country case studies providing a uniquely comprehensive historical perspective on international intervention through various political and international institutional means (for example, diplomatic, military, and economic).

The author's research shows compelling proof that America and other states primarily intervene in conflicts and civil wars based on economic and national security interests. For example, his statistical analysis strongly points to intervention as a way to protect foreign direct investment and trade. Keeping land and sea lines open for trade was also identified as an imperative, one that allows other states to residually benefit. His examination also demonstrates that intervention is undertaken to circumvent potential adversaries from posing security concerns in given regions. Particularly noteworthy is that Washington has generally aligned with those states presenting the least threat to the Nation and its regional allies.

Frankly, none of the results of Aydin's analysis are necessarily profound or surprising. What they do provide, however, within a uniquely comprehensive framework, is empirical evidence linking anecdotal, independent, and often disconnected historical accounts of conflicts over the past 70 years. This empirical analysis allows collective patterns of external states' and institutional actors' actions and behaviors to emerge that otherwise would have gone statistically unproven or undiscovered. This alone makes a significant contribution to this body of scholarly literature.

More specific outcomes of this author's work include reinforcing the notion that neither liberalist nor realist theory alone can account for why nations get involved in international conflicts. Diplomacy was identified as the preferred form of statecraft used by external state actors for intervening in civil wars. The military instrument of national power was shown to be the favored option of external intervening states for international conflicts normally small in scale and short in duration. States strongly

tied to the belligerents can be readily counterbalanced by a powerful opponent in the conflict, thus diminishing the value of the use of force as an option. Democratic states support democratic states even when a democratic state is the first to employ its military in a conflict. Finally, external state actors do not get involved in conflicts to necessarily "save weak states" or "oppose those who seek to alter the world order." Again, this suggests that states intervene in armed conflicts primarily out of their own national security interests, increasingly tied to the growth of economic liberalism and the economic interdependence it creates among states.

Although the scholarly rigor of Aydin's research is laudable, there are shortcomings. The book reads too much like a doctoral dissertation, making it stylistically difficult to digest. He did not tie some of the literature cited to the main thesis. Furthermore, the book is short relative to the complex and voluminous nature of the subject matter. Finally, the excellent choice of country cases was undermined (including the chapter focused on contemporary U.S. interventions) by somewhat hollow/shallow qualitative analysis.

The book is best read by political science, international relations, international political economic, and security studies scholars. It may also be of interest to military historians, foreign policy designers, and those generally interested in why and how states get involved in the armed conflicts of others. JFQ

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