

H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-3 1

Elizabeth Schmidt. *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018.
ISBN: 978-0-89680-320-6 (hardcover, \$85.00); 978-0-89680-321-3 (paperback, \$36.95).

2 March 2020 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-31>

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

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INTRODUCTION BY PHILIP MUEHLENBECK, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Elizabeth Schmidt's *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War* is a much anticipated follow up to her 2013 book, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*.¹ The book includes case studies on post-Cold War conflicts in Somalia, Sudan (including South Sudan), Rwanda, Congo, Liberia/Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, the Arab Spring in North Africa, as well as a chapter on U.S. intervention in Africa. The reviewers in this forum agree on the immense value of this book, which was written for a general audience and for undergraduate students.

The two reviewers in this forum, A. Carl LeVan and Carol Thompson are both political scientists and thus approach their reviews from a different perspective than I or Schmidt would as historians. Their reviews are insightful because they demonstrate the value that the work of a historian such as Schmidt can inform both International Relations scholars and foreign policy practitioners. As LeVan astutely notes in his review: "Perhaps the public policy scholar's task begins where the historian's job ends—or better yet, the question requires intentional interdisciplinary."

LeVan states that Schmidt has produced "what should become the quintessential building block for future conceptual, theoretical, and empirical explorations of international affairs in and with Africa" and refers to the book as "an excellent resource for practitioners and scholars." He in particular notes how valuable the author's chapter on "identifying the actors" (nation states, non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, and international organizations) is. I second LeVan's praise; many (most?) authors would not include such a chapter—to the detriment of their readers' understanding of these complicated case studies. Thompson's review, meanwhile, offers excellent suggestions for how the book can effectively be used in the classroom.

Schmidt provides a logical and understandable explanation for why her book does not discuss China's influence on the African continent, writing that "Chinese involvement is primarily economic, rather than political or military, and thus falls outside the scope of this study" (15), I was nonetheless disappointed by this omission given that from my personal experience, China's recent involvement in Africa is the topic in which students in my modern African history course are most interested. This disappointment aside, I join LeVan and Thompson in commending Schmidt's book for both its accessibility to a broad range of readers and for the depth in which it covers its subject matter.

Participants:

Elizabeth Schmidt is Professor emeritus of History at Loyola University Maryland. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin and has written extensively about US involvement in apartheid South Africa, women under colonialism in Zimbabwe, the nationalist movement in Guinea, and foreign intervention in Africa from the Cold War to the war on terror. Her books include: *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War: Sovereignty, Responsibility, and the War on Terror* (Ohio University Press, 2018); *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958* (Ohio University Press, 2007); *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (Heinemann, 1992); and *Decoding Corporate Camouflage: U.S. Business Support for Apartheid* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1980).

¹ Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Philip E. Muehlenbeck, Professorial Lecturer in history at George Washington University, is the author of *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and editor of four volumes on various aspects of the Cold War.

A. Carl LeVan is Associate Professor in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, DC. He is the author, most recently, of *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror* (Cambridge University Press 2019), and the co-editor, with Patrick Ukata, of *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Carol B. Thompson is Professor *emerita* at Northern Arizona University. Author of four books and over 60 articles, she is currently engaged in debates about how philanthrocapitalism is replacing neoliberalism, especially as a justification for exploiting Africa's genetic resources. Two articles are under peer review, with two published: "Philanthrocapitalism: Rendering the Public Domain Obsolete?" *Third World Quarterly* 39:1 (January 2018): 51-67. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1357112 and "Philanthrocapitalism: Appropriation of Africa's Genetic Wealth," *Review of African Political Economy* 41:141 (May 2014): 389-405. DOI:10.1080/03056244.2014.901946.

REVIEW BY A. CARL LEVAN, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

For scholars interested in international relations (IR), there are surprisingly few entry points for linking foreign policies with and within Africa to IR theories and contemporary debates in the field. In her sweeping new book, the second in a series, Elizabeth Schmidt acknowledges in the opening pages that she does not seek to engage such theories. Instead, she performs an equally valuable service to scholars of IR by producing what should become the quintessential building block for future conceptual, theoretical, and empirical explorations of international affairs in and with Africa. *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War* spans the continent with a broad selection of cases, including North Africa, which is often neglected in work focused on Sub-Saharan Africa. It offers an expansive and rigorously researched history of intervention and a critical probe of interventionists, lifting the veil covering their mixed intentions.

A chapter on ‘identifying the actors’ introduces the European powers, non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, and international organizations (IOs), including some lesser studied entities. Thus we learn about the United Nations, regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Arab League, as well as sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Research on how these institutions shape broader geopolitics remains surprisingly limited. Jason Warner and Timothy Shaw’s recent *African Foreign Policies in International Institutions* thus fills an important gap.² As the U.S. expands its presence on the continent—from the Lake Chad region to the Maghreb to the Horn—its relationship to the regional and sub-regional IOs will grow in importance. And as we saw in Sierra Leone and Liberia, “foreign intervention in response to instability or to protect civilian lives often had mixed motives or conflicting interests” (209).

Schmidt shows first how common intervention in Africa is, including interventions by African countries into the affairs of others. She illustrates how the rationales, or one might say the rhetorical frames for intervention, have shifted over the last several decades. And while some forms of intervention, such as drones, might be new, under-studied proxy wars continue apace, with the same disastrous consequences that we witnessed in Angola, Mozambique, and Zaire during the Cold War. The book also contains an important, if implicit, examination of how the interests of states can be inferred from their actions. The chapters repeatedly show how effects and motives of interventions often depart from the publicly stated policies. In doing so, she gives us painful reminders of how multilateral missions often served as enablers for unilateral interests.

Importantly, the book balances the multiple scales of imperial design. Therefore Kenya’s invasion of Somalia (which Kenya’s ambassador, while participating in an African Studies Association conference panel with me in Washington, DC in 2011, insisted was merely an “incursion”), Rwanda’s repeated interference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo/Zaire, and Ethiopia’s meddling in Somalia are treated alongside interventions by IOs and the former colonial powers. She also acknowledges that many interventions have been full of unintended effects. The Obama administration’s pursuit of Joseph Kony in Uganda made Washington look the other way as Yoweri Museveni’s slide into authoritarianism continued, and he deepened western ties by embracing George W. Bush’s Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief as well as the post-9/11 war on terror. When American domestic groups pressured the military to pursue the Lord’s Resistance Army, Museveni collaborated with Special Operations Forces as they obsessively pursued Kony. A top AFRICOM official told me at the time that the U.S. should simply let Kony rot in the jungle. But the example is an important story about the emergence of ‘liberal interventionists’ in the United States. Inspired by Invisible Children and other activist organizations, an influential faction of the left imagined intervention in youthful idealism that could be divorced from imperial motives. The “savior complex,”

² Jason Warner and Timothy Shaw, *African Foreign Policies in International Institutions* (New York: Palgrave, 2018).

as Mahmood Mamdani critically referred to it,³ led proponents back to the most conventional interventionism. Kony is still out there somewhere, and AFRICOM has 34 sites across the continent, with many more under construction.

Schmidt says intervention occurs “when a dominant country or organization uses force or pressure to exert power over a weaker sovereign entity or when a weaker entity requests external assistance to restore order, monitor a peace accord, or end a humanitarian crisis” (9). This presumes an unequal power relationship, but not necessarily a lack of consent or consultation. Who gives the consent is often exactly part of the problem in Africa: during the grassroots debt relief protests of the 1990s, when organizations such as the Jubilee Campaign called for debt forgiveness, an explicit motivation was that a new generation of African political leaders, legitimized through democratic elections, should not be held responsible for the corruption and reckless borrowing of their authoritarian predecessors. Western governments and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank continued lending money to zealous autocrats such as Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko despite his horrendous governance record and long after the donors became aware of his spectacular corruption. While books such as Tom Burgis’s *The Looting Machine* (Collins, 2015) give us the financial mechanics of this globalized financial malfeasance, Schmidt navigates the boundaries of western foreign policy hypocrisy.⁴

On the one hand, interventions are contaminated by self-interest. America’s foray into Somalia which ended with the killing of U.S. marines in 1993, “CIA support for anti-Islamist warlords” (72) in 2006, and the more recent string of drone strikes which all carry neocolonial overtones. A recent Amnesty International Investigation reveals that the U.S. has carried out over one hundred drone strikes in Somalia since 2017, and that at least 14 civilians (and certainly many more) have been killed. As the Obama administration expanded the use of drone strikes in Africa, Schmidt notes, they “generated enormous hostility toward the United States. Indeed, the killing of innocents had become a focal point of international criticism and a recruiting tool for al-Qaeda and its affiliates” (357).

Schmidt amply documents similar examples of concealed intentions and the instrumentalization of multilateralism, which enable western countries to pursue national objectives under the cover of international legitimacy. For example, France’s involvement may have averted a deeper state collapse in Mali, but the intervention also helped to protect its interests in uranium, on which France’s nuclear industry depends. Worse, the war on terror has often served as a substitute for the sort of difficult deliberation meant to produce multilateral expressions of global norms.

On the other hand, interventions are sometimes welcomed and/or needed. Aside from a few revisionists, who are noted in the chapter on Rwanda, few would disagree that stopping the genocide in 1994, when 800,000 people were killed in a hundred days, would have been warranted. When the goal is restoring democracy, or removing a particularly brutal dictator, the consensus around what to do is more dubious. Many in the foreign aid industry optimistically—and naively—interpreted Côte d’Ivoire’s 1999 coup as a way to get rid of a stubborn dictator. Schmidt’s astute telling of the civil war and regime change that followed details just how long it took to restore some semblance of democratic hope. Rwanda’s invasion of the Congo to remove Mobutu and NATO’s bombing in support of efforts to bring down Muammar al-Ghaddafi in Libya show how intervention for regime change is as troublesome as George W. Bush’s reckless invasion of Iraq. As Schmidt notes in a lucid and insightful chapter on the Arab Spring that untangles the morass that is Libya, “The lessons of Afghanistan in 1989, Somalia in 1993, and Iraq in 2003 had not been learned” (273). Changing missions, vague goals, poor post-conflict contingency planning, and diplomacy which is insufficiently integrated with kinetic operations—all come back to haunt the intervenor and linger with the directly affected populations for years to come in the form of weak states, warlords, and humanitarian problems.

Among the great powers on the UN Security Council, China and Russia hold fast to orthodox and reified definitions of sovereignty. While Schmidt understandably does not unpack their foreign policies, she does successfully show how post-

³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010).

⁴ Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015).

Cold War humanitarian intervention, the 'Right 2 Protect' doctrine, and the contemporary decay of multilateralism all shifted with global politics, with troublesome consequences for African democracy and development.

Though the book treats interventionism with all its complexities, if not an evenhandedness, it stops short of navigating a way out of the hypocrisy and double-standards that plague foreign involvements. In the chapter on Sudan and South Sudan, which will provide an excellent resource for practitioners and scholars who are looking to get a handle on the transition currently under way there, Schmidt argues that oil quickly became "a primary objective" of the civil war that preceded the secession (110). The U.S., which had been warming up to Khartoum for several years due to its counter-terrorism cooperation, had to navigate domestic Christian support for southern rebels, and later a vocal humanitarian lobby angry that a Rwanda-style genocide appeared to be unfolding in Darfur. What principles could help a country weigh competing policy priorities as it considers intervention? Perhaps the public policy scholar's task begins where the historian's job ends—or better yet, the question requires intentional interdisciplinarity.

Finally, the book suggests, fairly in my view, that the U.S. and the European powers too often still seem to view security and democracy in terms of a tradeoff; Schmidt's critique of the imperial impulse is well informed and well intentioned. But she also makes a strict case for continuity. "Sustaining a pattern established during decolonization and the Cold War, foreign governments and other entities intervened in African affairs," she writes (65). In the same spirit, she writes of the Arab Spring: "Just as some US officials had confounded radical nationalists with Communists during the Cold War, many in its aftermath failed to distinguish between organizations that promoted Islamic values in government and the minority that employed terrorism" (243). This is convincing, but the case for continuity may also understate how the world is changing. I am not sure I would submit that the war on terror, or even President Donald Trump's populism, has a hold on American imagination and institutions that is on par with the Cold War's anti-Soviet ideology. This may suggest a window of hope: duping the citizens of great powers into supporting military adventurism in the name of a thinly disguised humanitarianism or a crude Islamophobia has possibly gotten more difficult. Schmidt's work could serve as the arsenal for peace activism as well as the building blocks for a historically informed and more just foreign policy.

REVIEW BY CAROL B. THOMPSON, NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY, EMERITUS

After outlining the themes and approach, this review of *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War* addresses the author's goal of writing beyond simplifications and distortions about foreign intervention in the continent by suggesting ways in which this study can contribute to lively classroom discussions, be they in the fields of history, politics, or international relations. Further, this review signals the book as an important scholarly work, one that only a senior scholar, who has conducted extensive primary research (archival and interviews) for several books in two regions of the continent (West Africa and Southern Africa), could realize. The book offers 'no easy answers,' because it accomplishes more important goals, as will be discussed below.

Elizabeth Schmidt clearly states the study is written for a general audience and for students, and indeed, its themes offer a comparative framework, while giving the historical context for each case. The book is an excellent combination of a valuable overview (Chapters 1-3, 12-14), with detailed case studies (Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Arab Spring in North Africa, Mali, and Nigeria). Southern Africa is not a primary focus because "it was largely exempt from external political and military interference" (17) after the Cold War, although the influence of South Africa in other sub-regions is addressed.

Schmidt argues that after the Cold War (1991-2017), "The continent, its people, and its resources again became the object of internal and external struggles in which local concerns were frequently subordinated to foreign interests" (25). Foreign interventions invoked "new rationales" (23) and a "new character" (24) by emphasizing that responses to instability raised a corollary of the "responsibility to protect." This first organizing theme of the book immediately indicates the complexity of issues behind the interventions and assists the reader in comparison of the cases, because 'protection' was offered not just to women and children but to armed jihadis and ethnically-based militias. The second theme, the war on terror, focuses on the power of religion as a weapon in defining and defeating an enemy, a weapon used by all sides but especially by the United States, from Iran (in 1979, after the fall of the Shah, and increasing U.S. support of rival Sunni in Saudi Arabia) and Afghanistan (in 1979, arming Sunni militants against Soviet occupation), and spreading across Africa.

Because the African continent is home to one-third of the world's 1.8 billion Muslims, particularly notable for a general audience are sections that carefully discuss inappropriate generalizations about Islam, as well as elucidate the diversity of international Muslim organizations (34-38, 59-64). While reading a case study (for example, on Mali and Nigeria, Sudan, or Somalia), one can refer to these specifications, as well as begin to better understand the interstices among the conflicts. To give one example: What is al-Qaeda on the African continent and how do its allies differ? This study clarifies such questions, with insight.

After the case studies, Chapter 12 gives a concise summary of policies of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. The author demonstrates in detail (here and across the cases) the continuity of U.S. policies, including under President Barack Obama: "Despite an anticipated break from tradition, the Obama administration built on the Africa policies of previous administrations....Like his predecessors, President Obama built strategic partnerships with oppressive regimes that were expected to safeguard US interests" (342, 343). A whole section on Africom (350-360) is a welcome exposure to a little discussed policy since its inception in 2007. Promoting "armed social work," the policy it is so unpopular that no African government would host its headquarters, which are still based in Stuttgart, Germany (351). The epilogue addresses President Donald Trump's misconceptions of Islam, reflected in the Muslim travel ban (for Africa, prohibiting visitors from Libya and Somalia). Schmidt carefully analyzes Trump's choices for military action over diplomacy. A quotation from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson encapsulates current U.S. foreign relations: "Our values around freedom, human dignity, the way people are treated—those are our values. Those are not our policies" (383).

Because the study is a) continental, b) cross-disciplinary, and c) inclusive of global, regional, sub-regional, and national levels of analysis, readers might be disappointed in that the author's discourse was not applied to their own core questions. For example, as a political economist, I would have savored more details about the interactions of key economic actors, but that was not Schmidt's goal, and she often does address economic interests behind political and military interventions. Another

reader might appreciate her probing more into humanitarian non-governmental organizations as key actors, precisely because she does weave them into understandings of each specific case. The author is also clear to specify that her analysis of 'foreign intervention' (well-defined, 9) does not encompass China, because "Chinese involvement is primarily economic, rather than political or military, and thus falls outside the scope of this study" (15). At the same time, China's role in the United Nations Security Council and other international forums as they affect the continent (e.g., Sudan, Arab Spring, Congo, Rwanda) are addressed and can be easily traced by using the detailed and very useful index.

This book offers overview chapters and case studies for classes of politics, international relations, and African history. The rich material goes well beyond the dichotomous (inside/outside forces, old guard/young blood, and many more) debates that prevent understanding of African complexities. Often, reviews of a book simply declare that it would be an 'excellent text', but elaboration is necessary to explain what that means. As a first example, either an undergraduate or graduate class could begin to understand Côte d'Ivoire (to pick one case) from multiple perspectives, removing simplicities. The class could work to understand the perspectives of the Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire, the Jula, Malinke, and Baule, the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire as well as neighboring Burkina Faso and Liberia, and including the French, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and eventually a United Nations mission. The chapter, especially with its 'suggested reading' section, gives basic information for such discussions, encouraging student analyses to probe much beyond news reports to understand the interests behind local, sub-regional, regional, and intercontinental power struggles within the Côte d'Ivoire.

Another teaching tool the book offers is for a class to focus on two seemingly disparate case studies and begin by discussing how different they are. With the book as a guide, the goal could be to recognize those differences and then have the class, perhaps in small group discussions, explore the similarities. The background chapters (1-2, and especially 3, "Identifying the Actors") would give the students guidance for how to pursue this synthesis. In short, the book's composition (overview chapters, detailed case studies, suggested readings, and extensive index) offers many tools for overcoming stereotypes of the continent, but also for advancing students' critical thinking.

Professor Schmidt is a 'scholar's scholar.' Only one who has done extensive primary research, engaging major theoretical debates (for example, of gender, social history), would have the knowledge to award the reader with cogent explanations of twentieth-century atrocities that are neither 'African' nor 'external' but both, to different degrees. She does not allow the reader to blink: the atrocities are not about 'the other,' but about unequal power fomenting and exploiting instability while appearing to protect human rights.

In terms of solutions to the problems, this senior scholar again offers no easy answers. She analyzes the complexities and at the end of each chapter, she summarizes both for the student and for the scholar who may intimately know only one other corner of the continent. Schmidt has engaged communities (living among them, teaching, researching, working with African refugees in the U.S.) long enough to know well that the solutions which many (Africans and outsiders) thought were clear in the past have been swept aside by 2019.

Precisely because the book is written for a general audience, scholars of Africa will greatly benefit from Schmidt's willingness to venture beyond the focused micro-studies of young scholars to offer all of us a comprehensive, nuanced analysis of major conflicts. She has given practitioners insights about how intervention—in the name of justice, freedom, or poverty reduction—can increase the suffering. The book is a call to other scholars to use their focused, detailed knowledge to draw the continental patterns they see, the continuities, along with the new dispensations (for example, protecting 'human rights' over the sanctity of sovereignty). We scholars need to follow Schmidt's example by moving out of our comfort zones, into broader perspectives of the whole continent. We can better debate necessary alternatives to interventions that do more harm than good, even under the guise of the responsibility to protect.

RESPONSE BY ELIZABETH SCHMIDT, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND, EMERITUS

I am grateful to Thomas Maddux for initiating this H-Diplo roundtable and to Philip Muehlenbeck for his concise and helpful introduction. I also wish to thank Carl LeVan and Carol Thompson for their thoughtful comments and insights, which provide a succinct overview of the book, address its strengths and weaknesses, and suggest ways it might be useful for students, scholars, and peace activists.

The reviewers accurately encapsulate the book's goals and the nature of its intended audience. LeVan notes that the study's purpose is not to engage with contemporary debates in international relations or to link Africa policies to particular theoretical frameworks. Rather, through a series of case studies that span the continent, the book offers a "history of intervention in Africa and a critical probe of interventionists" that will serve as a "building block for future conceptual, theoretical, and empirical explorations of international affairs." Thompson observes that the author challenges "simplifications and distortions" regarding foreign intervention and goes beyond the micro-studies of many experts. Concluding that the book is ideal for students, she suggests several ways it might "contribute to lively classroom discussions, be they in the fields of history, politics, or international relations."

The reviewers also address the book's scope and its limitations. The investigation focuses on foreign political and military interventions in Africa. As Thompson notes, it crosses disciplines, spans the continent, and includes analysis at the global, regional, sub-regional, and national levels. Given this complexity, nuanced treatment of the core themes inevitably results in more superficial coverage of other issues. The absence of depth in these areas may disappoint readers whose core interests lie beyond the book's reach. As a political economist, Thompson would have liked more information about "the interactions of key economic actors," even though "economic interests behind political and military interventions" are addressed. Other readers might seek greater insight into the impact of "humanitarian non-governmental organizations," which, while mentioned, do not receive significant attention. My hope is that by acknowledging the study's scope and limitations at the outset, providing summations of important factors that are not covered in depth, and offering bibliographic essays with suggested readings for each case study, the book allows those who seek supplementary information to readily find it elsewhere.

LeVan takes issue with the book's final assessment of U.S. Africa policy and what it bodes for the future. He agrees that U.S. security concerns have often trumped a concern for democracy, a pattern that was firmly established during the Cold War. However, he counters, current policies are not merely a continuation of old ones. Hence, the book's conclusion may be too pessimistic. LeVan argues instead that neither the war on terror nor the most recent brand of populism are "on par with the Cold War's anti-Soviet ideology." As a result, it may be more difficult to "dup[e] the citizens of great powers into supporting military adventurism in the name of a thinly disguised humanitarianism or a crude Islamophobia" than to rally them around the flag of anti-Communism. This difference, he posits, may lead to a decline in harmful U.S. military actions. I can only hope that he is right.

Finally, the reviewers agree that the book does not offer a blueprint for the future. It "offers no easy answers" (Thompson) and "stops short of navigating a way out of the hypocrisy and double-standards that plague foreign involvements" (LeVan). However, LeVan suggests that the study "could serve as the arsenal for peace activism as well as the building blocks for a historically informed and more just foreign policy." Once more, I hope that he is correct.