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Book Review by Nan Braman, Henry George School, New York

Title: Betraying the National Interest

SubTl: How U.S. Foreign Aid Threatens Global Security by Undermining the Political and Economic Stability of the Third World.

By Frances Moore Lappé, Rachel Schurman and Kevin Danaher.

"The greatest threat to the United States is not change in the third world. It is a government in Washington that fears such change and is willing to sacrifice democratic principles at home and abroad in order to block change."

According to the authors of this important book there is a plot (with genuine undertones of Dr. Strangelove) to keep the Third World in its place, and, further, that the billions of dollars in foreign aid that Congress is pouring into impoverished countries is increasing dependency and misery rather than alleviating it.

This is a well documented book that doesn't leave much doubt that the people in Washington are not running our foreign aid programs the way you or I would. As one Phoenix businessman, Saul Diskin, responded when he learned that Salvadoreans lined^k to the death squads were being trained by his own city's police:

"I keep asking why do people need training to refrain from murdering and raping nuns and campesinos and committing massacres...That's not something they are going to learn not to do by riding around in Phoenix polic^e cars...Training these people in modern intelligence techniques will only make them more efficient killers."

Probably the most acute observation in this book comes at the end.

In discussing the decline of Soviet influence and Washington's resistance to admitting this, the authors ask: "But what if an emerging society were to question such a dogmatic approach to the market and private control, putting peoples' need for land, jobs and food first...and such policies were pursued with broad popular support...so that people felt their freedom expanded?

"Might not U.S. citizens observing these developments abroad be encouraged to challenge the control of concentrated wealth here at home, as well as the assumption that those monolithic corporations so determining our well-being are best left beyond democratic control. It should be noted that the concentration of wealth in the United States is no less than in many third world countries. Here, the richest one percent own more wealth than the bottom ninety percent..

If the authors had included a discussion of the part that land monopoly plays in allowing concentration of wealth this would be an even more potent book than it is. And, ~~although the book has not become a~~ ^{most regrettably,} best seller probably indicates that the American people don't care that much about these problems, perhaps with a new administration coming up some of these policies may be reversed.

Chapter One highlights how something called ESF (Economic Support Funds) provides what Washington calls "security assistance" to help protect the status quo.

Chapter Two, which I'll come back to, is entitled Armed Aid: At War With American Values, explores the biggest component of U.S. foreign aid -- military assistance. That assistance comes in three different packages and some countries receive more than one type of military aid so it is actually possible to get a three-pack. These packages are called FMS (Foreign

Military Sales Programs), MAP (~~M~~ilitary Assistance Programs) and IMET (International Military Education and Training Programs.)

Chapter Three suggests that while U.S. development assistance should be more effective than security assistance in addressing poverty, if it doesn't challenge the structure of control over ^{resources} ~~resources~~ that caused impoverishment in the first place, what's the point?

Chapter Four reports that most food aid flows to favored U.S. allies, and that even there the "trickle-down" theory of the sixties was a fraud. In fact, a study by economists Irma Adelman and Cynthia Morris made in 1973 demonstrated that "the absolute position of the poor tends to deteriorate as a consequence of economic growth." Sounds as if it's right out of Progress and Poverty!

Chapter Five outlines the "black and white" world view present in Washington, where if you're not with us, "you're agin' us" as ^b ~~G~~ay Hayes, ~~or~~ ^{that} one of those old Wild West codgers would have put it. Apparently the John Wayne Grade "B" Western film mentality ~~is~~ operative in Washington, ^{plays out the} ~~and in its~~ ^{fantasy} ~~that~~ we're the good guys and any country with the temerity to want to run things themselves without outside interference from either East or West ^{is} where you'll find the bad guys.

In other words, he who rocks the ^{boast} ~~boast~~ for American interests in his country is going to get squashed, and "we're just the ^{guys} ~~guys~~ who can do it!!"

In concluding, the authors emphasize that they didn't write their book merely to elicit outrage. They want to help Americans see behind the

reassuring rhetoric and official rationales in order to understand why ~~it~~ is failing and why U.S. foreign aid ^{its} programs are not working the way Americans expect they should be working, considering the billions of dollars we have shelled out.

The message it has for Georgists ^{shows} ~~is~~ what happens when the issue of land is practically ignored when the question of redistribution of wealth occurs. Henry George ^{knew about} ~~predicted these~~ wars of adventure and ^{untested} ~~bold~~ of diplomatic machinations, but even he, I think, would have been shocked and appalled by the rape and murder that is being committed in his country's name in Central America. Or perhaps he did ^{foresee} ~~of~~ that the barbarians he saw springing up within the city gates would spawn another kind of barbarian--the ^{educated} ~~kind~~ that has replaced expediency with fellow feeling and the desire for social justice.

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Which brings me/to the really chilling chapter entitled Armed Aid: At War with American Values.

Clinging ^{stubbornly} to the idea that Vietnam² did not prove the inadequacy of counterinsurgency warfare because it was never fully tested, the Reagan Administration has resuscitated it and developed it into a full blown, coordinated strategy. But knowing the American people's aversion to the experience in Vietnam², this operation has been kept secret, with ~~covert~~ ^{covert} operations (probably with ~~aid via the~~ CiI.A.) substituting for foreign policy (as observed by a former chairman of the Intelligence Oversight Board in 1986.) Called "low intensity conflict," these "non-wars" are directed at any third world government whose agenda Washington decides it does not like. And because it is carried on with no loss of U.S. life it can proceed relatively unseen. As one military strategist writes, low intensity conflict is "a pseudonym for a war without full political support." If it is successful the American people won't even know they're at war!

Listen to some of the people who are responsible for "selling" this form of armed aid to ~~the~~ Americans.

Former Rand Corporation George Tanham laments: "but the most pressing problem" that using counterinsurgency military forces outside our borders is "here at home in the struggle for the minds of people." ^{to be fought}
 The enemy ^{here} is the "Vietnam syndrome" --Americans' reluctance to intervene abroad, arising from fear of losing American lives and undermining the U.S. economy in drawn out, faraway wars.¹ →

Equally problematic is the Carter era legacy of a foreign policy sensitive to human rights concerns. But perhaps most troubling are Americans' democratic values. ~~Our~~

Our "concern for or belief in the sacredness of life, individual autonomy, freedom of choice and justice" worries ^{one} military strategist.

To protect our way of life Americans must do things that "may not be in accord with...the American political system in morality ^{and ethics} ~~and~~ ²

And if the American people can be made to perceive all third world insurgents as terrorists they will surely condone such compromises, the authors observe. The administration must ~~shape~~ **citizens** perceptions of the governments the U.S. supports. Thus, in the aftermath of Marcos winning a rigged presidential election in 1981 George Bush toasted him: "We stand with you, sir, ... We love your adherence to democratic principles and democratic processes. " Apparently killing the opposition, abducting their troublesome civilians, controlling dissent and blocking any substantive change to meet majority needs does not disqualify you from being a democracy.

So, our programs continue to deny access to land or decently paying jobs because we are propping up right wing governments which prop up multinational corporations greedily planning to exploit the natural resources and cheap labor of these countries for themselves. The multinational corporations don't want much, only to replace former colonial powers, using their methods of exploitation so they can take up where those now discredited nations left off. And the way it looks, that's what they're doing, with the American taxpayer footing the bill.

The authors stress this one last note. Although many of the worst offenses, such as Contragate and our other highly questionable activities in Central America have occurred during the present administration,³ our foreign aid policies have been the same since World War II ended and the Communists threatened world domination.⁴ Washington doesn't seem to have noticed that Soviet influence has dwindled from 15% to 11% in the ensuing 43 years. Or have they? And are they just using the Red Menace as a Red herring to allow U.S. corporations to gain the profits in the Third World they can't get here?

It is crucial for the American people and the people in Washington who run our foreign aid programs to see that if the third world doesn't make it, we aren't going to make it. This^{is}/truly one world, as Wendell Wilkie put it more than forty years ago. "After centuries of ignorance and full compliance, hundreds of millions of people in eastern Europe and Asia have opened the books...they are no longer willing to be Eastern slaves for Western profits. They ... know that men's welfare throughout the world is interdependent. They are resolved, as we must be, that there is no more place for imperialism within their own society than in the society of nations. The big house on the hill surrounded by mud huts has lost its awesome charm."⁵ (Reviewers'italics)

It bears repeating:

If they don't make it, we don't make it.

References.

1. Santa Monica: Air Force report prepared for the U.S. Air Force by the Rand Corporation, 1985.
2. Dr. Sam Sarkesian, "Low Intensity Conflict: Concepts, Principles, and Policy Guidelines," Air University Review, Jan. - Feb. 1985, # 9.
3. Covert U.S. aid in support of low intensity wars now flow to Africa and Asia as well. IN 1985 Congress approved \$5 million dollars for the Khmer People's National Liberation Front and a group led by Prince Sihanouk. Both belong to a coalition which includes the Khmer Rouge, which under Pol Pot murdered two million Cambodians--one of the most hideous atrocities of modern times. And at least \$30 million in covert U.S. aid has gone to South Africa-backed Angolan rebels, helping to perpetuate a war that is devastating Angola's economy. Source, The New York Times, articles appearing Dec. 23, 1985, July 18, 1985, July 27, 1987 and Sept. 19, 1986.
4. U.S. policymakers see our world as divided into two camps. From the 1954 U.S. assisted overthrow of a reform government in Guatemala, to the assassination of the Congo's Patrice Lumumba in 1965, to cover war against Nicaragua, U.S. policymakers operate on the assumption that no third world nation can be independent of control by one of the other superpowers. (The authors)
5. Wendell L. Wilkie, One World, PocketBooks, 1943.