

Dear Seth,

I hope you'll indulge my responding somewhat obliquely to your contribution to the discussion on PPS 23. I'll start by mentioning the obvious which is that, while like Noam I'm not a credentialed historian, unlike Noam I do not spend very much time doing the kind of work historians do, e.g. sifting through documents, reading mainstream work in the field, or publishing articles which deals with central historical questions.

I do, as you have noticed, on occasion write pieces (musical works or articles) which have some overlap with what certain historians do which is to say I find some set of facts or texts which appear to be transparently at variance with what they conventional wisdom appears to be on some question and then I simply register, as best I can, this inconsistency.

This, as you know, does not require much heavy lifting. Thus, for example, as you say, the mainstream conventional wisdom holds that with respect to U.S. foreign policy "the most fundamental consideration in the postwar era was the perceived balance of politico-military power vis-à-vis the Soviets." All that is necessary to contradict it, then, is, for example, to peruse Steven Kinzer's book *Forbidden Fruit* to discover that "the perceived balance of politico-military power vis-à-vis the Soviets" has virtually nothing to do with U.S./CIA destabilization of the Arbenz government in Guatemala. Rather, as documents reveal, the expropriation of foreign corporate lands was almost certainly what dictated the decision to intervene. More specifically, there was considerable interlock, as Kinzer shows, between the main figures responsible for the coup and United Fruit Company with various administration officials going through the revolving door ending up on UFC's board. Or, to take another notorious example, turning further south, similar nationalizations planned by the Allende of the telecom and copper industries are what precipitated that bloody episode in the long history of U.S. sponsored terror. Indeed, John McCone was a walking interlock between the precise national security and corporate establishments in play: a former CIA director and, at the time of the destabilization, President of ITT which had a 70% share of the Chilean telecommunications market. And so on.

I can't imagine that you doubt any of this-or the general principle which is that politically connected elites played a dominant role in dictating U.S. foreign policy when it comes to Latin America throughout most of the cold war period. Now of course mainstream historians and commentators either ignored these facts or made the claim that despite all appearances to the contrary "politico-military power vis-à-vis the Soviets" was really at stake in Latin America. For that they needed to claim that the indigenous liberation movements in Latin America were not independent but puppets of the Soviets pulling the string behind the scenes-and indeed they routinely did so. I well recall a public forum when I first arrived at U.C. Berkeley in 1979 where a CIA official named Cleto de Giovanni said precisely that with respect to the Sandinistas. But the story didn't pass the laugh test and I mean that literally-he was laughed off the stage, as he deserved to be. And so the mainstream view, certainly with respect to Latin America was exposed for the absurdity it was.

The alternative, so-called revisionist view is, rather than insist on their absence, to note the presence of dominant economic elites in positions which implement foreign policy decisions-and to assume that while there are always complications (including popular pressures, electoral campaigns, personal animus and/or affinities etc) in the main these are the interests which are likely being served within the matrix of foreign policy decisions.

As for any reasonably robust theory, this is true even when appearances seem to indicate otherwise. So, for example, with respect to the Marshall Plan, it might seem to be the case that domestic economic elites would have little interest in rebuilding Europe. Why would U.S. industrialists subsidize their competition? But the superficial impression is misleading in that, as industrialists were surely aware, the post war domestic market would be insufficient to maintain war time levels of production- with the likely result a return to depression conditions. And so developing European markets by rebuilding their industrial capacity (as well as maintaining high levels of defense spending) were crucial elements in heading this off. I'm not sure whether you agree with this but it certainly doesn't seem outrageous to posit it-and, insofar as I understand the documentary record (including PPS-23) there is pretty good evidence that these sorts of calculations were explicitly invoked within the emerging elite consensus on the Marshall Plan.

Now, when it comes to PPS-23, again, at least superficially, there are reasons for believing that the document, and the philosophies implicit within it, were not particularly influential. Though as an aside, it's worth noting that, say, a Laotian peasant, would find Kennan's recommendation for our foreign policy "to deal in straight power concepts" to be fairly consistent with his experience during the late 1960s and 70s. Or, for that matter, an Indonesian trade unionist's family probably wouldn't dispute that the U.S. (in reality as opposed to rhetoric) is uninterested in achieving "unreal objectives such as human rights". But even assuming that these represent a tendentious reading of the document, it is not so obvious that the underlying objectives were that significantly traduced as events transpired.

So turning to the seemingly unmaterialized "planning directives" you make note of, if U.S. financial and corporate elites were concerned with rebuilding Japanese industrial capacity, why did they forbid trade with China? I'm not going to claim that I have that much familiarity with this but the explanation seems pretty transparent: the imposition of a de facto (or de jure?) embargo against China was designed to insure the failure of a non-market based economy, its perception as having failed being seen as essential least the dominos in Asia begin to fall (as was, uncontroversially, I take it, the case for Cuba.) So while you're right that this isn't consistent with the plan as laid out by Kennan, once China was lost, the policy to isolate China seems consistent with the broader spirit of Kennan's recommendations. As for the question raised by the success of the Asian Tigers, again, I don't think it is such a mystery. By the 80s and 90s we are dealing with a fully globalized economy in which dominant U.S. industries had begun to write off domestic production. Furthermore, it was the beginning of the financialization of the major segments of the U.S. economy as Panitch and Gindin's book discusses, in which

U.S. investment banks and financial services were major pillars and were heavily reliant on international trade. Development of global industrial capacity was crucial to this proceeding apace. And, not surprisingly, the dominant figures in the Clinton White House, Rubin, Summers, Sperling, Tyson, Daley, had/have ties to finance more so than to industry as had been the case within previous administrations.

Obviously there is a lot more to say about this, but I'll mention in closing that, in writing all this up, I was continually aware that almost everything I mention above you almost certainly know a lot better than I do. So feels odd to bring up these examples in response to what I take to be your essential perspective here which is, as you say, "consistent with that of most diplomatic historians." As you point out, this places you necessarily in opposition to the revisionist perspective which Noam and others inside and outside the field are associated with. Now it could be the case that the field has changed so that the kinds of absurd premises which on which the textbooks I read were based are no longer routinely paraded as objective truth by the mainstream-most notably that the cold war should be seen through the prism of mutual U.S.-Soviet antagonisms and suspicions without granting the possibility that much of significant U.S. foreign policy involved the attempt to extinguish unaligned, indigenous independence movements, serving the interests of economic elites. But recent events have made me doubtful. As I mentioned in the FB posting where I pinged you and the others, I was going to drop the discussion., I'm revisiting it because of the reviews by Wilentz and Wineburg which to my mind don't aim so much to rebut the revisionist perspective but to obliterate it-in some case on fairly dishonest grounds. I don't know where you stand on these, but I would be pretty alarmed if you were to align yourself with them.

But alas, I can't say I would be entirely surprised. A lot of my older friends are pretty shocked to find Wilentz having ended up where he is now-angling for the position of Arthur Schlesinger in the impending Hillary Clinton White House. Blech.

Best,

John