

America and the Persian Gulf:

The Third-Party Dimension in World Politics

By Steve A. Yetiv. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995, 180 pp. with tables, appendix, bibliography, and index.

Steve A. Yetiv, an assistant professor of political science at Old Dominion University in Virginia and a research affiliate at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, has written a most interesting book on what he calls the "third-party dimension in world politics." Based on his doctoral disser-

tation, Yetiv's thesis, which at first glance seems a simple and natural way to view the cause-and-effect relationships of historical events and conflicts, is far more complex. No "domino theory," which focuses on the primary actors, the third-party dimension in world politics, as its name implies, focuses on the "third-party" actor, or actors, vis-à-vis events on the world stage.

Primarily concerned with how conflict in the Persian Gulf area in the late 1970's, 1980's and early 1990's affected the United States' position in the Middle East, *America and the Persian Gulf* generally examines the third-party situation and, in particular, how its position changes—for better or worse—as a result of the actions of the main participants and other third parties who are active or passive participants in diplomatic crises, conflicts, and revolutions. Furthermore, in emphasizing its importance, Professor Yetiv writes that by examining "the conditions under which the third party is weakened or strengthened by conflict . . . we may learn more about the utility of statecraft, the politics of rapidly changing conflictual regions of the world, conflict processes and outcomes, and conflict avoidance and resolution." He goes on to state that "the study of the third party will tell us something about the third party itself be it a state, an international organization, or some other actor in world politics." Last but not least, it "can also inform us about the context in which the third party plays a role, the long-term role of the third party in that context, other contexts which the third party affects, and the nature and impact of conflict in general" (p. 158).

Throughout the book, Yetiv ably explains and demonstrates the foregoing and the mechanics of the "third-party dimension in world politics" by applying it to a series of events that took place in and around the Persian Gulf during this period. He uses the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution and subsequent hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq War, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as the primary events. First, he shows the reaction and then the response of the United States to these events as a "third party." In his elaborate analyses, the author also includes other third-party actors, such as the Soviet Union (Russia), Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, India, and others. Then he examines their circumstances vis-à-vis the same events in the Gulf. He shows in detail how the status of each country improves or worsens at each stage, depending on its proximity to the situation and the depth of its involvement.

What quickly becomes apparent to the reader is the benefit such an approach can have in world affairs. Its facility for helping foreign policy strategists anticipate events, prepare the appropriate foreign policy response and, thereby, put their country in a position of advantage makes it an important contribution to the art of governance. Also, when a positive result is not to be the case, the "third-party dimension in world politics" approach can also be used as damage control, keeping a bad situation from getting worse. Furthermore, Yetiv writes that his "third-party approach . . . [as] developed can apply in other contexts as well. . . [for] almost every conflict seriously affects at least one third party, and some conflicts affect scores of third parties" (p. 157).

In his conclusion, Yetiv writes that, while the U.S. was a major third-party factor in Gulf affairs, he nonetheless finds in "the rise of U.S. standing and security in the Persian Gulf [during this period a] story of . . . failures and fortunes" and a paradox. For "instead of further weakening the United States at a time when it was vulnerable, [these] conflicts reversed U.S. decline, prepared it to meet the Iraqi challenge in 1990-91, and left it more secure than it would have

otherwise been." Furthermore, he opines that the "U.S. rise as a third party benefited regional security and implied several insights for history, policy, and possibly theory." (p. 157). Hence, the importance for strategists of the "third-party dimension" approach.

Also, it seems that Yetiv's analyses of evolving U.S.-Saudi relations in response to the crises discussed in this book anticipated the closeness that has developed between the two countries since the book was written. So, too, were the attacks on the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia this past year. Or so it seems in retrospect.

The only criticisms of this otherwise excellent book might be the author's tendency to continually repeat the facts and mechanics of the "third-party" approach in his examples. On the other hand, the constant repetition can be helpful for the nonspecialist to better understand this work. Also, the single, dark and rather inadequate black-and-white "area" map at the front of the book fails to show some of the third-party countries referred to in the text, like India, Somalia, and Diego Garcia. It also would have helped to have shown Baluchistan, at least in outline form in Pakistan, since it too was referred to on several occasions. Otherwise, the book's tables were strategically placed to go along with the text, the footnotes showed a good grasp of the subject and the necessary source material, and the appendix was helpful. A good selected bibliography was also included for those who wish to investigate the subject further.

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