



Review of the politics of international intervention. The tyranny of peace, edited by Mandy Turner and Florian P. Kühn, Routledge, London, 2016, 288 pp., ISBN 9781138891272 £90 hardback

John MacMillan

To cite this article: John MacMillan (2016) Review of the politics of international intervention. The tyranny of peace, edited by Mandy Turner and Florian P. Kühn, Routledge, London, 2016, 288 pp., ISBN 9781138891272 £90 hardback, Conflict, Security & Development, 16:5, 473-480, DOI: [10.1080/14678802.2016.1219509](https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2016.1219509)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2016.1219509>



Published online: 17 Oct 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 19



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Review of the politics of international intervention. The tyranny of peace, edited by Mandy Turner and Florian P. Kühn, Routledge, London, 2016, 288 pp., £90 (hardback), ISBN: 9781138891272

John MacMillan

Department of Politics, History and Brunel Law School, Brunel University, London, UK

A hallmark of the Radical tradition has been critical analysis of the systemic and discursive contradictions that thwart or distort the attainment of politically and ethically desirable goals. ‘Intervention’, in which elevated moral justification for action rasps against residual questions of interests and selectivity and manifests a recurring disjuncture between stated aims and practical outcomes, is a natural subject for such a mode of analysis. For the United States, Britain and France in particular, intervention is not solely a matter of policy choice but an embedded method of addressing (and defining) certain types of situation; akin to what President Obama referred to in his interview in *The Atlantic* as the ‘Washington playbook’. The ‘playbook’ refers to the foreign policy establishment’s tendency to pursue militarised responses to various events, which Obama recognised as ‘a trap that can lead to bad decisions.’¹ It does, however, affirm the point that institutions and infrastructures are in place that reproduce and serve to normalise a militarised approach to a range of social and political circumstances. At the personal level too, for many politicians the prospect of a successful, ideally swift and low-cost intervention stands as a way to establish their masculine leadership credentials. But individuals and institutions do not exist autonomously, and it is in the cultural and normative realms that one finds the deep roots of intervention and the permissive conditions for political practice.

Accordingly, (liberal) interventions tend to require a certain episteme in which the possibility of outsiders rescuing or otherwise helping others retains sufficient ideological coherence and moral utility such as to sustain a political support base. Interventions can be difficult to undertake and costly to sustain and for these reasons politicians invest heavily in discursive justifications and moral defence of the practice, as evident for example in Tony Blair’s criticism of the present leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, for ‘standing-by’ in the face of atrocities in Syria.² There is then a paradox that whilst interventions are a long-standing and seemingly residual feature of liberal state foreign policy they are also vulnerable in the face of epistemological and political criticism.

The collection of essays in this volume, for the most part updated articles from a special issue of *International Peacekeeping*, comprises a well-edited, sustained critique of the epistemic bases and wider political context of liberal intervention, particularly those whose

legitimation rests upon the cause of 'peace'. 'Exploring peace', the first of two parts, presents the theoretical framework and central question of how 'peace' and interventions in the name of peace have become a 'hegemonic, tyrannical project' (p. 2). Whilst there are differences of emphasis the contributions converge on the theme that the contemporary politics of 'peace' are better understood as a historically specific phase of imperialism. The second part, 'imposing peace', offers a broad array of cases. Besides the high-profile interventions of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria are those in Cambodia, Palestine, the Ivory Coast and Mali which combine well together to show the context-specific manifestations of liberal interventions and the politics of peace.

This perspective is distinguished from the policy-driven nature of much of the literature on intervention and stresses in particular the lack of attention to historical and political factors in the target society and the neglect of the impact and role of intervention therein. As such an appropriately high level of attention is given to conceptual and contextual considerations as a way of shifting the focus from rhetorical (and generally abstract) ideas and justifications to actual practices of intervention. Both the introduction and a number of the chapters do an excellent job in situating intervention and 'peace' within wider sets of political and social relations rather than treating the phenomenon as an exceptional or extraordinary event. To understand intervention context is key. Yet perhaps the most powerful theme that runs through the book is the significance of the contradiction between means and ends, of how violence pervades both the path to peace and structures the hegemonic peace that results. Taken together these two themes help to situate intervention and the peace it produces at the theoretical as well as the geographical frontiers of the liberal international order. The chapters read well alongside the work of Mark Duffield and Shahar Hameiri,³ for whilst processes of primitive accumulation and dispossession remain prominent in the analyses, it is the enmeshment of target societies within wider sets of institutions and transnational social relations that offers insight into the operation of contemporary liberal governance and the associated modalities of bureaucratic and managerial—alongside military—power.

The notion of the 'tyranny of peace' refers to a peace that is bound to the promotion of capitalist social relations and 'by necessity excludes and oppresses, delegitimises and criminalises alternative ideas of order' (p. 8). For Florian P. Kühn the politics of 'peace' serve the anti-emancipatory interests of a global capitalist class in averting change rather becoming a site of emancipatory politics.⁴ With roots in Lockean liberalism this is, with E.H. Carr,⁵ a peace of the 'haves' over the 'have nots' but with a far more sophisticated set of infrastructural capabilities and institutional supports than that of the liberal peace of the 1920s and 1930s. For Scott Kirsch and Colin Flint post-conflict reconstruction is a hegemonic strategy in which the distinction between 'war' and 'peace' is blurred and contingent; reconstruction is itself a moment of extended transformative warfare.⁶ Following a fast-paced overview of the critical literature on the intertwined and pervasive processes of capital accumulation, imperialism, state formation and militarisation the authors highlight the case of reconstruction following the US Civil War in the 1860s. Herewith the nature of 'peace' was contested between the promise of an emancipatory peace and the reactionary peace which prevailed as the plantocracy was able to reassert its interests through the capture of institutions and by paramilitary violence during this period. Whilst for Kirsch and Flint the role of reconstruction as part of a hegemonic strategy remains essentially unchanged, understanding how such processes serve to reproduce power relations and violence does at least hold out the possibility of creating an alternative 'pacific geopolitics'.

Yet if peace is (rightly) stripped of innocence it is Heidi Hudson who takes up the challenge of thinking through the politics of resistance.⁷ From a post-colonial feminist perspective Hudson engages with the difficult task of what an appropriate strategy of resistance might be in the face of the ambivalent implications of mainstream liberal feminist approaches. She is critical of the ease with which a 'protection' and 'representation' approach can reinforce patriarchal power relations and produce a public show of peace whilst failing to address issues of (violent) hyper-masculinity in social relations or the implications of neo-liberalism for women's lives. Yet, whilst the dangers are ones of de-politicisation and co-optation, matters of institutional representation and legal protection remain fundamental and may generate positive outcomes for women. Accordingly, Hudson's context-specific resistance involved avoiding the binary of domination versus opposition and adopting instead a hybrid form which critiques liberal feminism's emphasis on the politics of representation to the neglect of (possibly countervailing) practices of power, sites of informal as well as formal domination, and multiple identities whilst also striving towards the 'need for integrating a politics of recognition/representation with a (non-paternalistic) material politics of distribution (empowerment, protection)' (p. 108).

A point that emerges very clearly from this collection of essays is the sheer scale of the liberal intervention and peace-building/post-conflict reconstruction projects. Its extensive geographical reach is one aspect, but more pointed is the level of development and reach of the mutually reinforcing (but not seamlessly integrated) system of institutions, infrastructure, transnational social relations and ideas that under certain circumstances can calibrate particular modes of response in light of local conditions and contexts. Intervention governance is developed and entrenched if not coherent. Whilst the contemporary politics of intervention are historically specific and relatively developed, continuities with the place of intervention in earlier stages of the capitalist imperial system are readily apparent when compared with, for example, Gallagher and Robinson's work on the role of intervention in the nineteenth century 'imperialism of free trade' as a means of opening up market spaces and suppressing opposition prior to the incorporation of local agents and the establishment of rule-governed market relations.⁸ At the same time, two of the perhaps less obvious features of the contemporary system of intervention and peace-building governance may be taken to illustrate its scope: the role of the United Nations (UN), that symbol of post-1945 liberal internationalism, and the extensivity of complex transnational networks of social relations and institutions which are themselves interwoven with questions of class interests and state-building.

The notion of the UN as a benign internationalist actor is challenged in this volume on two principal fronts, namely as an imperialistic institution and for reproducing militarised approaches to political problems. In a meticulous discussion Philip Cunliffe draws direct parallels between UN intervention/peace-building (including the notion of the Responsibility to Protect—R2P) and historical practices of imperialism.⁹ In covering questions of motives and interests, security, economic resources, unilateralism and multilateralism, development and reconstruction, legitimation and consent Cunliffe draws clear parallels between contemporary peace-building and the imposition of various forms of governance and market relations in the nineteenth century. Michael Pugh's focus is upon the centrality of violence and wider militarisation of 'peace-building', itself as an adjunct of imposed economic liberalisation.¹⁰ His contribution ties in well with Toshiki Mogami's important but neglected argument that the emphasis upon collective security within the UN is not only an outdated

relic of the security challenges of the 1930s and 1940s but as a form of supra-state 'super violence' fails to produce a genuine antithesis to state-level violence.¹¹ In order to institute a more expansive and potentially progressive dialectic in international relations the emphasis must be on the development of 'non-violence'. Whilst by no means mutually exclusive, for Pugh the corrective lies in the reform of capitalist and governance institutions whilst for Mogami the emphasis is upon developing the practice of non-violence as an alternative approach towards questions of security and peace. Such differences aside, what emerges very clearly is that a natural extension of the critical perspectives in this book is the further development of such alternative epistemes of peace.

Whilst there is a large and growing literature on the development of transnational networks, social relations and international institutions a noteworthy feature of this book is to identify and analyse these in relation to a number of state-specific cases, often alongside sophisticated theoretical discussions. For one thing, this addresses the editors' concern with the question of 'agency' in the analysis of intervention and peace-building, not least sites of agency within the intervened states themselves and how these fit into wider sets of transnational power relations. As political geographers Scott Kirsch and Colin Flint highlight, this enables a rich account of the disjunctures between 'space' (as an area of—usually transnational—social relations) and 'place' (as a juridically constituted location) which both fractures the notion of the nation state as a unitary political entity and establishes the actors and global nature of the politics of liberal intervention.

Mandy Turner's chapter on peacebuilding as counterinsurgency in the occupied Palestinian territory takes up the conceptual heavy-lifting.¹² Turner shows how the apparent contradiction between Western donors undertaking such peace-building activities as institution-building and development programmes at the same time as the principal local state actor, Israel, pursues various forms of neo-colonialism and occupation dissolves if 'peace-building' is itself regarded as part of the wider counter-insurgency strategy. Herewith, Western peace-building practices operate 'as another layer of pacification techniques that have complemented and meshed with Israel's structures of domination and repression' (p. 140). Turner usefully identifies not only the doctrinal bases of the connection between security/military, development and foreign policy interests but also the way in which these connections have become evident in various institutional frameworks of collaboration in the US, the UK and the major OECD donor bodies. Yet the chapter's theoretical sophistication should not obscure Turner's political point: the conflict is fundamentally one over land and international 'peace-building' serves as an adjunct of Israel's political and security strategy therein. But the tension between these two aspects of the conflict persists, for if the conflict itself is 'a form of colonisation and primitive accumulation [which] is inherently destabilising' and will continue to generate opposition, the western peacebuilding agencies currently have no 'Plan B' (p. 154).

Caroline Hughes' analysis of the Cambodian case also hinges on the nature of the relationship between peace operations such as The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the deeper economic and social forces which marked Cambodia's post-civil war transition politics.¹³ The character of the 'peace' that emerged was defined by a powerful alliance between Cambodian elites and international investors who pursued a form of predatory capitalism in the face of the legalisation of the private ownership of land in 1989 and the profits to be gained from logging, mining and plantations. As for Turner in the case of Palestine, 'land' is at the centre of politics at the liberal frontier and in the

Cambodian case land and water that previously formed the commons have been aggressively expropriated. Chiming with Hudson's analysis, the liberal elements of UNTAC such as the human rights provisions were unable to take root within Cambodian society and failed to provide a language of political resistance for those groups who had become displaced and marginalised in the post-UNTAC period.

Hughes identifies a multi-layered problematic in which a number of processes and dynamics serve to consolidate the inequality in power relations between elites and labour/agricultural workforces. The most direct is the process of predatory capitalism within an authoritarian political framework driven by Cambodian (business, military and bureaucratic) elites alongside international investors. But besides this is the role of international donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in promoting a form of civil society organisation which does not support resistance or opposition to an exploitative political economy within Cambodia but rather draws activists into a parallel universe of donor relations, networking, capacity-building, grant applications and audits. Yet where a more radical politics does emerge, such as in campaigns for land rights or the rise of unionisation in the garment industry, interventions by such international bodies as the World Bank or the International Labour Organisation (ILO) can serve not to enhance but rather to contain or disempower those Cambodian movements that do have local roots and which are politically active. The very clear charge against liberal peace-builders, then, is that they 'bind activists into projects and frameworks that promote a superficial conception of social harmony in the midst of conditions of growing inequality' (p. 136) in the context of a predatory transnational capitalism, locally enforced.

Bruno Charbonneau and Jonathan Sears offer a rich account of the French intervention in Mali (2013) which was widely perceived as successful and in the authors' opinion 'might have been necessary to stop an armed rebellion' (p. 230).¹⁴ Yet the analysis of the domestic politics of Mali and in particular how they are influenced by the connections between state and society on the one hand and international donor agencies and geopolitical allies on the other clearly illustrates one of the most important and fundamental criticisms of military intervention. That intervention frequently tackles symptoms rather than causes may exacerbate underlying political grievances. In the case of the French intervention in Mali, whilst it suited both local and international political interests to frame the 'problem' in terms of the war on terror, it closed the legitimate question of the role of Islam in politics and society and the development of a narrative of national identity which minority populations as well as the populous economic centre of southern Mali could invest in. Charbonneau also offers a single-authored chapter on Côte d'Ivoire which provides an empirically rich discussion of the interlinked domestic and international processes, particularly those pertaining to issues of legitimacy and capability, which led to regime change in 2011.¹⁵

The theme of the politics of inclusion also runs through the remaining chapters on the more high-profile interventions of recent years in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Libya. Toby Dodge traces the continuing crisis in Iraq to the political settlement, comprising an 'exclusive elite bargain', imposed by the United States after the 2003 war.¹⁶ The underlying strength of such an argument is that it maintains an understanding of the rationality of violence, including the subsequent ability of Da'esh to hold ground, as distinct from the analytical complacency that characterises 'primordialist' or 'orientalist' narratives. Moreover, Dodge identifies missed opportunities for renegotiating the 'victor's peace' towards a more inclusive elite bargain in the form of, firstly, the Brahimi plan of 2004–2005 which was vetoed by the

Bush administration and, secondly, the rise in 2010 of the broad-based electoral coalition, *Iraqiya*, headed by Ayad Allawi, which was repressed by government actors. Little surprise then, 'that the [resulting] protests of 2012 and the harsh government-backed crackdown occurred in the areas where Da'esh has since come to dominate' (p. 211).

Astri Suhrke offers an excellent discussion of the contradictions of a liberal peace-building intervention in Afghanistan, most fundamentally that between the exercise of violence in the name of a less violent/more peaceful world.¹⁷ Notably, the relationship between the two was complex insofar as 'the two sustained as well as grated on each other' through peace providing legitimacy on the one hand whilst on the other being increasingly undermined as the levels of violence escalated. The case is a microcosm of the difficulties associated with extensive liberal interventions and highlights the interplay of local and international strategic considerations, as well as the political differences between the intervening states. Suhrke ascribes the initial success of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul to the effective demonstration of presence, the link to US air power and importantly the willingness of the main local factions to buy into the Bonn Agreement, for whatever reasons. Yet Suhrke also pinpoints the underlying political-philosophical factor that circumscribes the potential for such interventions to succeed. Governments dependent upon Western aid and military power need to offer a convincing legitimising ideology. However, 'unlike religion and nationalism [...] "good governance" exerts no influence simply by virtue of its ideational existence; it has to actually deliver goods and services' (p. 172). Whilst the failure to do this swiftly and fairly in Afghanistan may not necessarily mean it could not achieve this elsewhere, there is little in this volume to suggest that more positive outcomes are likely.

Nicholas Pelham's analysis of the chaos in Libya following the initial Western intervention that led to the ousting of Qaddafi identifies the running tension between the politicians of the National Transition Council who sought to incorporate members of the old regime and the militias (*thuwwar*) that overthrew Qaddafi and pressed for a more radical revolution yet have subsequently become increasingly marginalised.¹⁸ Grievances included matters of public sector employment, positions in the armed forces and recognition of the role the *thuwwar* had played. One consequence of the mistrust between these two groups is that calls for the militias to disarm have been ignored. Whilst the UN has subsequently sought to broker a new peace between the various groups, factionalism continues, Da'esh has developed a presence, and competition for lucrative resources and strategic positions continues to be the norm.

In his chapter on Syria, written prior to the expansion of direct Russian military involvement, Christopher Philips explains the reluctance of external actors to undertake direct 'boots on the ground' military intervention whilst at the same time deploying other forms of interventionary behaviour in the hope of influencing the course of the conflict.¹⁹ The case attests to the unpredictable consequences of interventions, for whilst it was the West's intervention in Libya which triggered the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in August 2011 and the demand for weapons and a no-fly zone, the West's subsequent unwillingness to deliver led the FSA to turn to governments and private actors in the Gulf which, over time, contributed to the fragmentation, Islamicisation and radicalisation of the rebel movements.

Overall this is a rich and rewarding volume. It offers insight into the *system* of intervention that stretches from the frontier of the liberal capitalist order to its heartland in western states and societies and which operates through an extensive and relatively developed series of transnational social relations, institutions and actors. Yet there is also a vulnerability to

this system, evident variously in terms of resistance, a frequent gap between stated aims and actual outcomes, unpredictable consequences and a limited support base that raises the possibility of its future demise. The editors and contributors should be congratulated for this analysis of intervention at the frontier; yet they—in fact ‘we’—should also be challenged to think more fully about more ethically satisfactory alternatives and how to realise them.

Notes

1. Goldberg, ‘The Obama Doctrine’.
2. See *The Guardian*, ‘Tony Blair Accuses Jeremy Corbyn of Standing By as Syria is Bombed’, 9 June 2016. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/08/tony-blair-accuses-jeremy-corbyn-of-standing-by-as-syria-is-bombed> [Accessed 20 July 2016].
3. Duffield, *Development, Security, and Unending War*; Hameiri, *Regulating Statehood*.
4. Florian P. Kühn, ‘International Peace Practice: Ambiguity, Contradictions and Perpetual Violence’ (Chapter 1).
5. Carr, *Twenty Years Crisis*.
6. Scott Kirsch and Colin Flint, ‘Geographies of Reconstruction: Re-thinking Post-War Spaces’ (Chapter 2).
7. Heidi Hudson, ‘A Double-Edged Sword of Peace? Reflections on the Tension between Representation and Protection in Gendering Liberal Peacebuilding’ (Chapter 5).
8. Gallagher and Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’.
9. Philip Cunliffe, ‘Still the Spectre at the Feast: Comparisons between Peacekeeping and Imperialism in Peacekeeping Studies Today’ (Chapter 3).
10. Michael Pugh, ‘Lineages of Aggressive Peace’ (Chapter 4).
11. Mogami, ‘The United Nations’.
12. Mandy Turner, ‘Securing and Stabilising: Peacebuilding as Counterinsurgency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory’ (Chapter 7).
13. Caroline Hughes, ‘UNTAC, Peace and Violence in Cambodia’ (Chapter 6).
14. Bruno Charbonneau and Jonathan Sears, ‘Defending Neoliberal Mali: French Military Intervention and the Management of Contested Political Narratives’ (Chapter 12).
15. Bruno Charbonneau, ‘War and Peace in Côte d’Ivoire: Violence, Agency and the Local/International Line’ (Chapter 9).
16. Toby Dodge, ‘Enemy Images, Coercive Socio-Engineering and Civil War in Iraq’ (Chapter 10).
17. Astri Suhrke, ‘Waging War and Building Peace in Afghanistan’ (Chapter 8).
18. Nicholas Pelham, ‘Libya in the Shadow of Iraq: The “Old Guard” versus the *thuwwar* in the Battle for Stability’ (Chapter 11).
19. Christopher Phillips, ‘Intervention and Non-Intervention in the Syria Crisis’ (Chapter 13).

Notes on contributor

John MacMillan has published on the relationships between liberalism, democracy, peace, war and intervention.

References

- Carr, Edward Hallett, 2001 (1939). *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Duffield, Mark, 2007. *Development, Security, and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Polity, Cambridge.
- Gallagher, John and Ronald Robinson, 1953. ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade.’ *The Economic History Review* 6(1), 1–15.

- Goldberg, Jeffrey, 2016. 'The Obama Doctrine'. *The Atlantic*, April. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/> [Accessed 20 July 2016].
- Hameiri, Shahar, 2010. *Regulating Statehood: State Building and the Transformation of the Global Order*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Mogami, Toshiki, 1994. 'The United Nations and Non-Violence'. In *Global Transformation: Challenges to the State System*, ed. Yoshikazu Sakamoto. United Nations Press, Tokyo, 412–438.