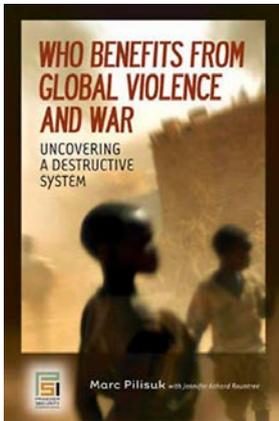




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BOOK REVIEW



Who Benefits from Global Violence and War: Uncovering a Destructive System

Andreu Solà i Martín

Marc Pilisuk with Jennifer Archord Rountree

Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Security International. 316 pages.

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■ Abstract

This book uncovers the root causes of violence in the modern world. It was completed in the fifth year of the United States military intervention in Iraq. Pilisuk describes the connections between the corporate world and the political elite in the United States, who shape foreign policy and plan military interventions.

■ Keywords

violence, war, United States, power, multinationals, neoliberalism

This book uncovers the root causes of violence in the modern world. Reading is recommended not only to scholars but any individual interested in knowing the extent to which modern warfare is still promoted by powerful interest groups in pursuance of lucrative goals. Its main contribution to the literature is to expose connections between the global economy and the triggers for violence against civilians who are often often exploited in production systems in developing countries or directly harmed by resource conflicts. This book was completed in the fifth year of the United States military intervention in Iraq. Pilisuk describes the connections between the corporate world and the political elite in the United States, who shape foreign policy and plan military interventions. Pilisuk's work is structured around two main themes. Firstly, the author

goes through some of the major conflicts in which the US has recently been involved (Chapters 1 to 4). Secondly, he explores the modalities through which networks of power profit from the maintenance of a violent system (Chapters 4 to 8).

Chapter 1, "The Costs of Modern War", focuses on the human consequences of military actions. Soldiers, including thousands of children, suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite the high percentage of allegedly precision weapons used in conflicts such as Iraq, modern warfare inflicts mainly civilian casualties. Pilisuk argues that the United States uses its military pre-eminence to protect corporate prerogatives; the United States is responsible for almost half the weapons sold worldwide, mainly to developing countries.



Chapter 2, "Killing: War and the Minds of Men", delves into the creation of enemy images and dehumanisation as a psychological mechanism, precursors of warfare. War-time perceptions are more likely to blur shades of gray: war tends to invoke the mythical perception of reality characterised by absolute good and evil, us and them. However, a substantial number of combat veterans bear painful scars of their combat experience. Those who make the decision to go to war tend to be an elite group of men with the self-fulfilling vocation to exercise divine power to subjugate the weak and women in order to satisfy their deeply entrenched macho ideals.

Chapter 3, "The Hidden Structure of Violence", unveils cases of structural violence in the global economy. These include oppressive labour conditions suffered by workers, including children, in Nike factories in Indonesia during the 1990s, the manufacturing of small promotional toys based on characters from Disney Films for McDonald's Happy Meals in Vietnam as well as the spread of preventable diseases such as AIDS amongst vulnerable groups such as sex slaves in the Philippines. The United Nations estimates that there are 57 million female and child prostitutes worldwide. Global corporate growth relies on a division of labour based on each country's contribution to production. As a result, multinational corporations outsource their production facilities to countries with weak environmental and labour laws: structural violence blocks the need for human fulfilment.

Chapter 4, "People, Farmland, Water and Narcotics", explores the effects of the change in agriculture from small to corporate, plantation agriculture. Pilisuk argues that economic development does not address food security and malnutrition because of the uneven distribution of food and the inability of poor people to afford it. Six companies control cereal grain in the US and about the same number in the rest of the world. Canada, France, Australia, Argentina and the United States account for 80% of global grain export, and most nations depend upon imported food. Moreover, the green revolution has created hybrids of basic crops and the resulting monoculture places the world's harvest at risk to unknown diseases. Global multinationals such as Monsanto and Bechtel are also seeking control of world water supplies across the globe whilst grassroots resistance to privatisation of water provision has emerged in countries like Bolivia. Corporate domination of seeds and water has made small farms unprofitable and growing illegal crops has extended in conflict zones such as Colombia, Afghanistan and Burma.

Chapter 5, "Networks of Power", reveals the collaboration between government officials and the military-industrial complex as a major concentration of power. United States military and political officers move between

positions in government and decision-making bodies to companies seeking contracts in the defence sector such as the Bechtel Group, the Carlyle Group and Halliburton. Corporate interests are put forward by groups with ideas and resources to influence policy and elite clubs to ensure alliances and loyalty. One example of how secret societies operate is the Bush family dynasty and their network of allies belonging to the Order of Skull and Bones. Think tanks, advisory boards and councils are involved in redefining major directions of policy: The Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission work towards benefiting corporations in the market place. The Project for the New American Century was formed in 1997 to plan American domination of global affairs. Business advocacy is articulated through influential groups such as the National Manufacturers Association and the Business Roundtable. At the international level, this network is represented by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. In addition, Pilisuk argues that the corporate elite exercise considerable control over several stages of the United States electoral process, such as the funding of candidates through corporate sponsorship and political action committees.

Chapter 6, "RealPolitik: Strategies and Tactics for Winning", lays out the creation of enemy images for both anti-communism and the war on terror as policy strategies contrived by powerful corporate groups to boost the military-industrial complex. Pilisuk underlines that the policies undertaken reflect a planning process to secure the United States' corporate and military control of other nations by creating governments with a corporate agenda, to become client states of the US. Pressure to create governments willing to play by the rules of neoliberalism has also involved bypassing legal constraints and even overthrowing governments (US involvement in Iran and Guatemala). Other cases cited include undermining democracy in Venezuela, supporting mafia regimes in Eastern Europe, conspiring and aiding violent suppression in East Timor and preemptive military action in Iraq and the Middle East.

Chapter 7, "Disinformation", traces the origins of US war propaganda back to the campaign to promote United States participation in World War I through lobby groups such as the League to Enforce Peace and the Committee on Public Information. Corporations use the media to shape public opinion and advance their own interests. As a result of the mergers that have taken place since the 1980s, five media corporations now dominate the United States information industry and even have a share in over 100 joint business ventures. The power held by these media corporations results in strong bias on what passes for news. In addition, their lobby group, the powerful National Asso-



ciation of Broadcasters (NAB) presses for laws and regulations aimed at increasing corporate power. The United States government has also intensified its efforts to disseminate war propaganda through Pentagon contracts awarded to media agencies such as the Rendon and the Lincoln groups. Pilisuk also provides historical examples of media manipulation and justifications for war including a section on media complicity in spinning the war on terror.

Chapter 8, “Values and Habits that Maintain a Violent System”, discusses the belief in the moral rightness of competitive individualism. The decline in job security and social benefits is viewed as a necessary consequence of the need to be competitive in a global economy. Pilisuk argues that

gaining understanding of the long history of opposition to the corporate takeover of resources and communities can help to control its expansion. The evolution of the world’s largest retailer Wal-Mart illustrates the shift towards a society of poor workers serving immensely wealthy corporations. The values that propelled Wal-Mart reflect the larger phenomenon of Christian fundamentalism. Surveys show a correlation between how often consumers shop at Wal-Mart and how conservative they are. Against all odds, the book concludes on a positive note: a surge of communities and grassroots activities are working towards creating a more caring society and the power of those who benefit from violence is slowly waning. 

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Dr Andreu Solà-Martín has been a consultant and lecturer at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya since 2003 and is an honorary research fellow at the University of Bradford. Solà-Martín has a PhD in Conflict Resolution from the University of Bradford. He has taught courses in peace and security studies at the universities of Bradford, Birmingham and Manchester. Andreu has published monographs and articles in journals on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, mainly on Western Sahara and West Africa and has participated as a long-term observer in several EU election observation missions.



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