

# A World of Enemies: America's Wars at Home and Abroad from Kennedy to Biden

Osamah F. KHALIL

Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2024, 409 pages, ISBN: 9780674244221 (Hardback)

Begüm Sezin ÖZCAN MALTA

Ph.D Candidate, Department of International Relations, İzmir Kâtip Çelebi University, İzmir

E-Mail: begumsezin@gmail.com

Orcid: 0000-0001-8245-0459

The book *A World of Enemies: America's Wars at Home and Abroad from Kennedy to Biden*, published by Harvard University Press in 2024, is a conceptual perspective study by Osamah F. Khalil. The work conveys the domino effect of United States (US) military interventions to the reader, starting with the Vietnam War. The author argues that America's wars are not merely military conflicts but also part of a political and ideological construction process. The book consists of two main parts and six chapters. Part 1, titled "The Firemen", examines the period from the Kennedy administration to the Carter era. Part 2, titled "Badlands", covers developments until the Obama administration, while the *Epilogue* is dedicated to Trump's first era.

In the introduction, Khalil discusses the book's objectives and terminology. Accordingly, the book aims to examine the intersecting trajectories of the wars on crime and terror and the consequences of the policies implemented. The author presents these policy outcomes as having evolved into a permanent security regime, rather than a temporary measure. In the author's view, this transformation results in a condition of continuous intervention by the US. This interventionist tendency is analyzed through the case of the Vietnam War. The author characterizes the Vietnam War as the event that triggered a domino effect. However, the author emphasizes that this book is not about the Vietnam War but how it helped shape subsequent conflicts (p. 6). In the book, the author underlines that the Vietnam War was not merely a military conflict but also a reflection of America's fears, serving as a key reference point. Additionally, Khalil argues that the US is not simply drawn into wars but rather a state that actively creates and sustains them. The author argues that this is due to the instrumentalization of war by the US as a strategic tool to preserve its hegemonic presence on the global stage.

In the book's first part, the author illustrates how the US assumed the role of a firefighter while, in reality, it was the one igniting and spreading the fires (p. 10). Kennedy's characterization of Vietnam as "The Cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia" highlights how the US, driven by geopolitical interests, actively created new conflicts. Khalil defines

these geopolitical interests primarily as the containment of communism, the establishment of military and economic spheres of influence, and, above all, the preservation of US global prestige. Khalil states that the operations against Cuba and the instability in Latin America during the Kennedy administration led Washington to focus more on Vietnam. This situation ultimately escalated during the Johnson administration. The author examines in detail policies such as the *Phoenix Program*, *Operation CHAOS*, and the National Security Agency's *Minaret Operation*, which emerged in response to anti-war protests. He explains that more bombs were dropped on Vietnam than in World War II and the Korean War combined. Khalil argues that every war the US engaged in afterward remained under the shadow of Vietnam (p. 50).

Evaluating the Nixon era alongside Kissinger, the author argues that US policies were based on miscalculations regarding America's global position. Khalil asserts that the political, military, and legal consequences of Nixon and Kissinger's misguided policies had severe repercussions (p. 53). Despite promising "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam," Nixon continued air operations and even expanded the war into Cambodia and Laos. Khalil critiques Nixon and Kissinger's strategy as flawed, arguing that although they recognized America's declining international influence due to the Vietnam War, they chose to expand the conflict rather than reassess their approach. Instead of de-escalation, they sought to intimidate other nations (p. 57). For Nixon, ending the war had to be done without damaging America's global prestige. Discussing the "Vietnamization" process, Khalil explains that Nixon secretly orchestrated operations in Cambodia and launched attacks on Laos, further expanding the geographical scope of the war. These developments significantly deepened regional turmoil, triggering a wave of intensified anti-war protests directed at Nixon, not only across the US but also on a global scale.

The Reagan administration is analyzed as a period marked by efforts to address the internal challenges confronting the US in the aftermath of the Vietnam War—such as diminished global influence and economic instability—as well as external crises, including the Iranian Revolution, the Oil Crisis, and US military interventions across Latin America (p. 99). According to Khalil, this period was marked by rising fears that US power had weakened after the Vietnam War, and these fears significantly shaped Reagan's policies. The author argues that a defining feature of this period was the emergence of a foreign policy doctrine advocating for the restoration of US global leadership. In line with the Reagan Doctrine, the US committed to significantly increasing military expenditures with the strategic objective of dismantling Soviet influence across the globe.

The book's second part analyzes the transformation of US domestic and foreign policy and its war strategies in the post-Cold War era. Khalil argues that the end of the Cold War did not bring peace; instead, the new world order closely resembled the old one (p. 145). The author agrees with Samuel Huntington's argument in *The Clash of Civilizations*, in which Huntington writes, "The West's victory in the Cold War brought exhaustion rather than triumph." Khalil contends that the end of the Cold War did not lead to lasting peace. Khalil argues that the Bush administration sought to secure American supremacy following the Gulf War but failed. While the US remained the world's most powerful political, economic, and military force,

Khalil emphasizes that this power never translated into lasting authority. The author contends that enduring authority must be established through consent rather than coercion. However, the US' inability to cultivate such consent ultimately undermined its efforts to construct a sustainable hegemonic order (pp. 183-184).

Khalil argues that the post-2001 interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of the "War on Terror" resembled the quick victory strategy of the Vietnam War and ultimately failed. He emphasizes that the objectives in Afghanistan were overly ambitious and challenging to achieve, yet the same flawed approach was later applied to Iraq (p. 187). The author explains how the US deliberately linked Iraq to the 9/11 attacks to legitimize its invasion and describes the terrifying military plans devised for this objective (pp. 197-202). Khalil notes that, much like in the Vietnam War, a "Vietnamization" process was eventually implemented in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He argues that these unnecessary wars resulted from America's insistence on maintaining global dominance. According to his analysis, these policies, similar to those during the Vietnam War, ultimately weakened the US's global position (pp. 212-232). The author also examines the Obama administration's efforts to manage and expand the wars, arguing that prioritizing Afghanistan was based on unrealistic military and political objectives. Like his predecessor, Obama conducted these operations under the banner of counterterrorism. By utilizing drone warfare, he further expanded the conflict on a global scale (p. 277). Khalil asserts that the Afghanistan strategy ultimately mirrored the failure in Iraq and, by extension, repeated the failures of Vietnam.

In the Epilogue, the author examines Trump's policies, arguing that he adopted Nixon's law and order approach in domestic affairs. In contrast, he followed Reagan's peace through strength doctrine in foreign policy. Although Trump suggested de-escalation in the Middle East, conflicts intensified in other regions, much like during Nixon's presidency (p. 293). Khalil critically assesses US wars and policies over the past sixty years, asserting that America has continuously pursued strategies that keep it in a state of perpetual war. These wars are military but also political, cultural, and economic. Looking at the broader historical trajectory, from Vietnam to Iraq, the US has consistently relied on force rather than diplomacy (p. 302).

The book contributes to the literature by helping critically minded readers understand the historical continuity of US foreign policy. However, it could have been enriched by incorporating non-US perspectives and engaging more directly with International Relations theory. These gaps somewhat limit the study's analytical depth.