Panama Canal As US Desire for Power

The Desire for Power

Imperialism is the quest by a stronger country to dominate over a relatively weak country. This kind of dominance is often exhibited through economic, political, and cultural aspects of a country in the receiving end. Thus, the main aim of imperialism is to extend influence. The United States has been at the forefront of imperialism since the 19th century. The United States has consistently demonstrated imperialism by aggressively involving itself in countries such as Haiti, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. The main reasons for its imperialist policies and expansionism are political dominance and superiority, military control, the fulfillment of its economic agendas, and moral obligation to civilize other nations.

In order to demonstrate its military might in the global arena, the US imperialistically involved itself in the Caribbean and Central American politics from which a number of both positive and negative outcomes transpired. Historically, Haiti has undergone a series of revolutions, coups, and wars. Some of its presidents have been killed or exiled during these events. An outstanding case is the killing of the seventh president of Haiti by a Mob in 1915. Around this time, European powers were actively engaging in World War I. Germany was potentially having an interest in Haiti. As such, the US got alarmed that Germany may take over Haiti and be a threat in the sea route to the Panama Canal. As a protective measure, the US deployed 330 troops to Haiti for purposes of safeguarding US interests besides restoring order in the country. The US marines stayed in the country until 1934. As a way of ensuring that the country complies and pays its external debt, the US took over its customs duty collection. Besides the US ensuring the country was once again stable by distributing food and medicine, it established a military court and censored the press. It recruited and trained the Haitian army. It also played a significant role in replacing a Black-led government with Mulattoes, with both black and white ancestry. The country was forced to adopt a new constitution that served the interests of the US In the new constitution, wealthy American businesspersons had the right to own land in Haiti. In 1918, the American forces were attacked in a war started by Charlemagne Peralte and his forces. Before then Charlemagne was serving in the Haitian army. This war was a protest against forced labor that was imposed on Haitians as the US marines were constructing roads and other infrastructure. In 1919, the officer was captured by the US military, killed, and photographed on a crucifix as a lesson against like-minded people. In its first five years of occupancy in Haiti, more than 2000 Haitians were killed by the US military. It was not until 1925 when the US left the country after receiving international criticism after the US troops fired at a crowd of protesters and killing 12 of them. These actions and inactions of the US in Haiti are evident that its main aim in deploying its marines into Haiti was not for the best interests of the Haitians. Instead, besides wanting to gain in monetary sense, they were interested in Americanizing Haiti. They strived to have optimal influence over the country in all spheres. Even though US claimed to be interested in stabilizing the country, the locals were not pleased and therefore, opposed the US administration. This resentfulness was met with violence from the US forces as it threatened their imperialistic course.

Regardless of the risk for animosity from regional countries, nothing has ever proven to hold back the well thought out imperialistic actions of the US. The United States had a master plan of

constructing the Panama Canal long before Panama became independent. Under the support of the US, Panama successfully revolted against Colombian rule in 1903. Until then, Panama was part of Colombia. The US offered this support to serve its interests. Over time, many countries had expressed interest in building a canal in Panama as a shortcut between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This kind of shortcut was viewed to have positive economic and military outcomes. Due to these reasons, the United States instigated a revolution in Panama against the Colombian government. It sent its marines to protect Panama against Colombia's military intervention. Afterward, the US recognized Panama as an independent country. In years to follow, the US signed a treaty with Panama, allowing it to construct a canal through the island into the Pacific known as the Panama Canal. The canal remained a property of the US until 1999 when it voluntarily handed it back to Panama after 85 years of control over it. With its economic and military might, the US never hesitates to work for its own best interests no matter the cost. It is heavily oppressive and full of incitement against their perceived enemies or those who may potentially stand in between themselves and their targeted prosperity. Colombia was a hindrance to the economic gains that were anticipated to come out of the Panama Canal. The only way, therefore, was to be behind the succession politics of Panama and later compromise it for its benefit as compensation for its “acts of kindness” which, to many are outright impunity.

Far from economic gains, protection of its sovereignty has been the motivation behind the US distrustful attitude against other countries. The US used imperialism to ensure the protection of territory and countries in the Western Hemisphere against European invasion. In 1904, Germany wanted to have control over a port in Santo Domingo, which is now the Dominican Republic. Control of the port was to be compensation for the unpaid loan the country had taken from Germany. However, the US demanded that Germany stays away from the Western Hemisphere as a measure to protect its interests especially now that it had successfully supported the Panama revolution and aimed to construct a canal. The presence of other countries around the region was a threat to the US’ economic and political stability. In years to follow, the US officially occupied the Dominican Republic mainly because of its political instability that prevented it from settling its debt. The United States also strived to install a president who could serve its interests. It, therefore, supported Francisco Henriquez into leadership, who was later removed from the presidency after not meeting the US expectations. The US established its military government in the country and disbanded the Dominican army. The US occupied the country for eight years and established the Santo Domingo Improvement Company responsible for regulating the country’s ports to ensure the country pays its debts. Due to the US occupancy in Dominican Republic there was increased resistance against the American troops. The increased pressure against America led to it withdrawing its marines in 1924. However, before doing so, it brokered a deal with the country so that it could continue ensure that the customs duties continued to be used in settling the debts. The US had an alternative of intervening using diplomatic means but preferred to impose itself in an imperialist manner. It well understands that use of force against vulnerable countries rather than peaceful approach is a way of optimizing its imperialistic objectives. First, the use of force attracts the attention of other countries who may feel threatened and easily yield to its demands. Secondly, the US finds it easy to impose a leader on the citizens after conflicts and wars. The media is especially used to sanitize its wrongdoing and sending a signal that the US is only interested in helping, only for them to hide their interests behind the leaders they help come into power.

Notably, the US government has exhibited imperialism over the years in various countries with an intent to either gain economically or spread its influence. As a result, it has caused more harm than good at least for those countries. A number of lessons, therefore, can be learned

from the actions of US since the 19th century in matters imperialism. Even though the United States imperialism is a fundamental venture for its continued prosperity, it has attracted hatred and distrust from other countries. The long-term implications of these actions are instability in other countries that may eventually affect their stability. The US has no moral standing to police other countries on democracy, while it does not exhibit democracy that it was once known for. Therefore, it is high time it reconsidered its foreign policy and started promoting peace instead of only focusing on self-interests.