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**Stephen Wertheim.** "A Solution from Hell: The United States and the Rise of Humanitarian Interventionism, 1991-2003." *Journal of Genocide Research* 12 (3-4) (September-December 2010): 149-172.

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Review by **Tony Smith**, Professor of Political Science, Tufts University

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Stephen Wertheim is to be congratulated on his clear and compelling criticism of the way the logic of humanitarian interventionism in the United States in the years after the end of the Cold War turned the country toward the Iraq War in 2003. He gives telling evidence of the lack of realism of many idealistic humanitarian activists—calling for interventions as if success were as easy as snapping one’s fingers, sometimes in situations where American involvement might actually worsen matters. With an attention to current history that we should appreciate in a historian (many of whom are reluctant to take on issues so contemporary), he indicates the way this activity mushroomed during the 1990s, ultimately reaching a crescendo over Serbia in 1999 that set the stage for the self-righteous and self-confident invasion of Iraq less than four years later, a disaster arguably of unsurpassed magnitude for American power in world affairs.

The debate over American policy toward the Rwandan genocide is the pivot of Wertheim’s chronology. His choice is revealing. In April 1994, as the catastrophe opened, there was no humanitarian interventionist norm to push Washington into action, a reticence effectively codified that May by Presidential Decision Directive-25, which specified that any American armed intervention needed to have a national security rationale, public and Congressional support, and an exit strategy. Hideous though it was, the Rwandan genocide obviously did not meet this standard. But judgments changed fast and hard. By 1998, a host of influential publications from *Foreign Affairs* and the *New Republic* to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* were adrift in articles vociferously insisting on the moral imperative of stopping genocide and indignantly lambasting any hesitation in addressing human rights abuses by forcible intervention, quite often using the Rwandan tragedy as their case in point.

How do we explain the change in the temper of the times? Wertheim looks to an abundance of factors after 1997, including changes within the foreign policy leadership of the second Clinton administration (activists like Madeleine Albright at State and Richard Holbrooke at the UN); the bad conscience of now-Secretary General of the UN Kofi Annan over his inaction toward the trouble brewing in Rwanda in 1993-94; the growing frustration with the failure to stop the on-going outrages of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, an opinion validated by the easy success in toppling him in 1999; and the rise of neoconservative action-oriented rhetoric, where Saddam Hussein had for years been their target of choice. To be sure, there were critics of this activism. Wertheim cites the work of Alan Kuperman with respect to Rwanda, and he might have referred as well to the presidential debate between Albert Gore and George W. Bush in October 2000, when both men stated they would not have intervened militarily in Central Africa six years earlier. But as his evisceration of Samantha Power's 2002 National Book Award and Pulitzer-prize winning book *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* demonstrates, Wertheim can show that before the invasion of Iraq, important segments of American opinion on the humanitarian left and the neoconservative right were primed for military action to stop murderous civil conflicts and rein in dangerous rogue states. So he mocks the title of Power's book with the title to his own essay, "A Solution from Hell: The United States and the Rise of Humanitarian Interventionism."

I would add two points to carry Wertheim's trenchant review still further. First, this particular March of Folly ending with the invasion of Iraq (to recall Barbara Tuckman's 1984 classic of this name ending with Vietnam) depended on important intellectual developments he ignores, which in neo-Wilsonian circles were part of a collective intoxication as to what the United States could and should do for the sake of the world. For it was during the 1990s that humanitarian interventionist concepts of enormous (even if misplaced) academic prestige came to prominence: democratic peace theory, democratic transition theory, and the arguments that ultimately came to settle around the "responsibility to protect." As the "sole superpower" acting in a "unipolar world" (how hollow these proud terms ring today), noted American political scientists, philosophers, and jurists (usually working in explicit Kantian and Wilsonian terms) at America's leading universities--including Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, Yale, and Wertheim's own institution Columbia (in the person of Thomas M. Franck)--concocted a witches' brew of arguments that legitimized progressive imperialism in the name of a "just war" doctrine. Henceforth, democratic states could invade non-democratic states adjudged guilty of gross and systematic human rights abuses or failing to stem murderous civil conflicts under their jurisdiction, and all this for the sake not just of American national security, but also for the liberation of foreign peoples, indeed for the eventual establishment of nothing less than an enduring world peace! History itself could be brought under control. Under the guise of promoting human rights and democratic government for the sake of all peoples, a Pax Americana or "benevolent hegemony," as the neoconservatives liked to call it, would stand as a monument to the ages.

Second, although his review stops in 2003, Wertheim might have pointed out that many of these neo-Wilsonians, precisely because they were for the most part Democrats, can now be found in high places in the Obama administration or standing close by at the Brookings Institution (Robert Kagan or Kenneth Pollack, for example) or in the Progressive Policy Institute of the Democratic Party (still under the leadership of that avid democracy promoter Will Marshall). Among the many names that could be cited are Michael O'Hanlon and Samantha Power (whom Wertheim mentions), but also Michael McFaul, Larry Diamond, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Ronald Asumus, and Ivo Daalder. Funds that can contribute to this kind of thinking now come from the American government (largely under the auspices of the State Department and the Agency for International Development) at the rate of at least \$2 billion a year (a substantial increase since 2001) and the National Endowment for Democracy continues to be controlled by Carl Gershman, a neoconservative interventionist of the first water. Or consider books by well-known authors that sit on my bookshelf, fresh off the press: Michael McFaul, *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why we Should and How We Can*; James Traub, *The Freedom Agenda: Why America must Spread Democracy (Just Not the Way George Bush Did)*; Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World*; Morton Halperin and Michael Hochman Fuchs, *The Survival and The Success of Liberty: A Democracy Agenda for U.S. Foreign Policy*.

In short, welcome as Stephen Wertheim's work most surely is, much remains yet to be done. He is not totally alone in the wilderness, but his opponents are far more numerous than those often dispirited few who would keep him company.

**Tony Smith** earned a B.A. at the University of Texas, an M.A. from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1965, received his doctorate in political science from Harvard University in 1971 and he has been a Senior Fellow at the Center for European Studies at Harvard since 1979. He is the Cornelia M. Jackson Professor of Political Science at Tufts University where these days he gives courses on U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of six books, including *The French Stake in Algeria* (1978), *The Pattern of Imperialism* (1981), *Thinking Like a Communist* (1987), *America's Mission: The U.S. and the Global Struggle for Democracy in the 20th Century* (1994), *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (2000), *A Pact With The Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise* (2007), and (with coauthors G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter), *The Crisis in American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-first Century* (2009). Smith has also published a dozen articles on the history of Wilsonianism, understood as a perspective making the promotion of democratic government abroad a central focus of American foreign policy. Princeton will be publishing a second edition of *America's Mission* late in 2011. He is currently working on the political thought of Woodrow Wilson to evaluate the contention that he intuited democratic peace theory, that is that democracy promotion was the center of gravity to his thinking with respect to what it meant to make the world safe for democracy.

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