

The Interventionist Deterrent “Americanism” and Foreign Policy

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*

*Did the United States succeed in nation-building
and in forcible nation-restoration because
it was virtuous, or because it had
Canadians and
Mexicans as its neighbours
rather than Russians and Germans?*

C.S. GRAY¹

INTRODUCTION

The argument this paper presents is that interventions disrupt the international system, that they have generally prompted a partial or total dysfunction of world and regional order and that their appearance in world politics responds to a great extent to the functional requirements of power politics. It seems appropriate, then, to refer to Wight's views on the problem of power in the world order: he examines it by looking at the “balance of power” and shows the importance of studying the key difference between “balance of power” and “pattern of power” to situate the characteristics explaining the interludes of international politics, for,

At the shallower level, it is the rule that neighbouring states are usually enemies, that common frontiers are usually disputed, and that your natural ally is the Power in the rear of your neighbour. Let us call this for want of a better term, the conception of the *pattern of power*.²

This enables us to generalize about international politics in relation to their geographical framework. On the other hand, says Wight

The idea of the *balance of power* involves a higher degree of abstraction. It means thinking of the powers less as pieces in a chessboard than as weights in a pair of scales....The *pattern of power* leads to considerations of strategy; the *balance of power* leads to considerations of military potential, diplomatic initiative

and economic strength....To balance is to compare weights....The word “balance” has entirely lost its meaning of “equilibrium.” There is less notion of stability, more of perpetual change about it than in sense 1 [an even distribution of power].³

In this vein, I will elaborate on a framework that is likely to be of use for the study of intervention in general and U.S. intervention in Latin America in particular.

Let me say that it is a historical fact that U.S. policies and behaviour have been consistent with a sense of mission to be pursued through interventions using the pretext of revolutions.⁴ Nonetheless, the accomplishment of this pursuit of supremacy required convincing tools for the latter to be carried out. Hence, the sig-

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nificance of the following general argument on the association between: a) an important geopolitical position; b) the strong weight of “Americanism”⁵ as an innovative tradition in the foreign-policy making process; c) using revolutions as the main argument—in the context of the bipolar U.S.-USSR confrontation—for

nized on the basis of understanding and peaceful coexistence. It is also an international phenomenon intrinsically linked to the arrangements whereby the shares of power and domination are disposed of in a particular fashion by the fittest and, in addition, most representative actors of the international political system.

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alertness insofar as the defence of national interests was concerned; and d) the use of interventions as deterrents against revolutions or political changes in other countries which have been considered, particularly in the Interamerican context, the main threat to national security.⁶

INTERVENTION AS A UNIVERSAL OCCURRENCE

Intervention is universal. It has happened for centuries. When studying the different approaches to intervention as a phenomenon of the international system, it should be understood that the theoretical framework for these theories corresponds mainly to the dominant principles of realism, which has permeated international relations in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷

Intervention is a component of a dynamic movement linked primarily to the existence of nation-states ideally orga-

Although intervention has particular historical features, it has always been related to the *spatial* allocation that both geographical territories and human conglomerates have had, hence the importance of considering the configuration of national boundaries in the understanding of intervention as a political phenomenon. Notably, however, interventions have been the response to the need to establish the basis for certain directives used in the process of arrangements made in international politics. In this light, interventions must be understood as levellers in the long and sometimes laborious process of the constitution of the world order. Interventions in their various forms may precede different types of military and political confrontations or may be the result of disputes in certain regions of the globe.

And yet, the complex deployment necessary for interventions covers different types of diplomatic, material or human capabilities, the components of

an elaborate rationale directing intervention to a specific aim. However, an intervention is also a process that helps to explain the generally arbitrary configuration of the world map, as well as the state of affairs in which the different actors become involved.

INTERVENTION AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

To understand interventions in the context of the modern international system, it seems appropriate to inquire into the nature of the latter. In this respect, there seem to be three dominant issues to consider first: a) the international system puts a priority on the separation of the “domestic” and the “international”;⁸ b) interventions take on importance because the choice in international affairs has never been

between intervening and observing the sacred principle of non-intervention. The choice has always been between individual intervention and collective intervention, or else between the establishment of conditions in which interventions will become less likely, and living in conditions in which intervention is more likely,⁹

and; c) the problem with intervention and the key variable is, as Hoffmann states, in the “nature of the international system.”¹⁰

U.S. INTERVENTION AND AMERICAN NATIONAL INTEREST

Richard Nixon once said,

Mr. Khrushchev predicted that our grandchildren would live under Communism

And this is my answer to him. I do not say that our grandchildren will live under capitalism. We prefer our system. But the very essence of our belief is that we do not and will not try to impose our system on anybody else. We believe that you and all other people on this earth should have the right to choose the kind of economic or political system which best fits your particular problems without *any foreign intervention*.¹¹

This might have easily been uttered by an average progressive-liberal member of the late 1950s U.S. foreign policy establishment. These were indeed the thoughts of a powerful member of the American political system, himself an essentially conservative, fervently anticommunist political figure, and, in 1968, candidate for the presidency of the United States. Richard Nixon's words offer a clear example of the many peculiarities (and in some respects and contexts, contradictions) that explain some of the routes taken by U.S. foreign policy. At the same time they offer a "situational" context of analysis on the extent to which the U.S. has historically exhibited its contradictions in the making of foreign policy decisions. Thus, they can be taken as an appropriate tool and the ideal empirical platform for continuing discussion of intervention in an area of influence.¹² In exploring the features of U.S. foreign policy, particularly when to a great extent characterized by intervention, it inevitably becomes important (given also the relevance of drawing the proper distinctions in the Latin American case) to resort to testimonies of this kind before such a complex discussion can begin. As shown in the Guatemalan intervention in 1954, the U.S. interventionist impetus

has been a key feature of its foreign policy philosophy. This has been the case whatever the country's partial responsibility for the subsequent relative decline of most of the nations concerned and whatever the many contradictory explanations offered by leading figures in the foreign policy decision making process.

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The historical record acknowledges that U.S. interventionism has led in most cases to various kinds of authoritarian forms of government. Moreover, these interventions have resulted in a high degree of structural pressure and rigidity upon both the polity and state actors and institutions, quite apart from the pressure on the economies of the countries involved.

This feature has been remarkable, playing an important role in the long-term crises that some countries in Latin America have faced. Though the United States has performed a relatively influential role in this process, U.S. interventionism has inflicted severe pressure upon the target countries' long-standing difficulties in achieving political progress and economic development. It is not the purpose here to take the U.S. indiscriminately to task as the single actor responsible for all the misery in Latin America. The problem is much more complex than that. Accordingly, one of the main

concerns is to make a case of a country, such as the U.S., which was clever enough to utilize the existing contradictions inherited from colonial times, such as despotism, anti-democratic structures and economic weakness, to the benefit of its very particular strategic pursuits. To a certain extent the United States

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POLITICAL FEATURES AND FOREIGN POLICY THE INEVITABILITY OF DETERRENCE?

It is my argument in this study that (over and above the specific international realities and constraints that explain foreign policy and which I try to discuss here) there is always a cultural-political element which explains why U.S. foreign policy resorts to deterrence for its legitimization. In this light, it is my assumption that the foreign policy of a great power always needs to ensure that the national interest in a continental area of influence is reinforced by means of deterrence.¹⁴ Furthermore, a foreign policy of deterrence represents the best way to establish from the very outset the conditions and the extent to which certain

partne's behaviour may be tolerated. Typically such policy results in interventions of the most diverse types, the most important of which are those in which force is used to settle disagreements and disputes, whatever their nature.

Beyond examining both the theoretical and systemic characteristics of inter-

politics. Although it is not the purpose of this work to measure the degree of social polarization of the country's political foundations, Lippmann's remarks nevertheless should be stressed when talking about the United States' political heritage.

The ideological blessing that U.S. foreign policy needed from the main

“Americanism” as a national tradition became, both in Europe and in the so-called Western Hemisphere the doctrinary fabric that would become the dominant (and paternalistic) feature in world affairs. This came to reflect on the rules imposed upon the Western world as a result of bipolarity.

vention, particularly in the case of Latin America, it is important to elaborate further on the number of arguments concerning the relationship between the historical national character and the political behaviour of the United States in foreign affairs.¹⁵ I argue that the most salient feature of U.S. geopolitics and ideology and, hence, of its political behaviour in foreign policy, has been intolerance. This feature of the U.S. character was best promoted by Attorney General Tom Clark, who in his 1948 address to the Cathedral Club of Brooklyn, New York, stated that “those who do not believe in the ideology of the United States shall not be allowed to stay in the United States.”¹⁶ For his part Walter Lippmann claimed that, “a nation, divided irreconcilably on ‘principle,’ each party believing itself pure white and the other pitch black, cannot govern itself.”¹⁷

This is only one part of the social complexity of the United States, which is often still expressed in U.S. domestic

domestic ideological input of the U.S., “Americanism”, was decisive in that it developed strong shields of protective principles around the foreign policy making process. From 1945 onward, U.S. foreign policy could be portrayed and seen as strong and legitimate in that—and only in that—it reflected “American values,” each of which would require a whole gamut of policy were foreign policy to be coherent. Does any nation's foreign policy reflect national values? Whatever the case, what I want to emphasise here is, in the first place, the importance of the very creation of a *national tradition* in foreign affairs: from 1945 onward, the U.S. was able to impose its interests in the name of the defence of all the values which represented and were represented by the “American tradition”; and, secondly, “American interests” were imposed on other actors' foreign policy traditions. “Americanism” as a national tradition became, both in Europe and in the so-called Western Hemisphere the doctrinary fab-

ric that would become the dominant (and paternalistic) feature in world affairs. This came to reflect on the rules imposed upon the Western world as a result of bipolarity. Moreover, this tradition would appear as a unique and compelling avenue by means of which the U.S.'s hegemonic position could and would be achieved. In some respects, the Western tradition has been marked since the mid-1940s by such a climate, and it seems likely to remain so until the end of this century. As Beloff has said, “The United States ... intervened or attempted to intervene in the internal affairs of other states under the guise of the slogan, ‘making the world safe for democracy.’”¹⁸

Simultaneously, to some extent these values, unlike those in some other developed nations, have been the reason for the injection of intolerance into the U.S. political tradition. It is with this in mind that Lipset states,

The historical evidence ... indicates that, as compared to the citizens of a number of other countries, especially Great Britain and Scandinavia, Americans are not a tolerant people.... One important factor affecting this lack of tolerance in American life is the basic strain of Protestant puritanical morality which has always existed in this country. Americans believe that there is a fundamental difference between right and wrong, that right must be supported, and that wrong must be suppressed, that error and evil have no rights against the truth. This propensity to see life in terms of all black and all white is most evident, perhaps most disastrous, in the area of foreign policy, where allies and enemies cannot be grey, but must be black or white.¹⁹

In light of this view, I suggest that, as a political creed, "Americanism" has turned, quite conveniently, into an essential ideological component of the U.S. political consciousness, "much like Socialism, Communism or Fascism."²⁰

However, it must be stressed that, for better or for worse for the foreign policy framework of this nation, Americanism has been the backbone of the U.S. foreign policy project. Consequently it has been an essential feature in the overall definition of U.S. national interest, whose main expression is found in the international system, most particularly the Interamerican system.

Given, then, the struggle to produce a national foreign policy, it is essential to consider the cultural and political circumstances that precede foreign policy decisions. According to Bell,

There has been little evidence that American foreign policy is guided by a sense of historical time and an accurate assessment of social forces....Foreign policy has foundered because every administration has had difficulty in defining a national interest, morally rooted, whose policies can be realistically tailored to the capacities and constraints imposed by the actualities of world power.... Americans have rarely known how to sweat it out, to wait, to calculate in historical terms, to learn that "action" cannot easily reverse social drifts whose courses were charted long ago.²¹ **MM**

NOTES

¹ Colin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Superpower* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 39

² Martin Wight, "The Balance of Power," Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic*

Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Relations (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1966), p. 149.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 150, 155.

⁴ Terms such as "exceptionalism" and "mission," apart from being native cultural features, were direct antecedents of the United States' current position of power on the world map in general and on that of the continent in particular. It is therefore extremely important to pay attention to the material realities that made much of the content of these principles possible, as well as the means that existed to express them. In light of this, an understanding of the geopolitical content of the policy is essential to understanding U.S. geopolitical proclivities.

⁵ Martí once wrote, "Ni de Rousseau ni de Washington viene nuestra América, sino de sí misma" (Our America springs neither from Rousseau nor Washington, but from itself.) José Martí, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence*, Elinor Randall, with Juan de Onís and R. Held Foner, trans., P.S. Foner, ed. (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1977), p. 102. Another interesting book by Martí on the subject of both "América" and "America," is *Inside the Monster: Writings on the United States and American Imperialism* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1975). Note that I will refer here to "América" (with an accent) when explaining Iberian-América and to "America" (without an accent) when considering the Anglo-American geopolitical category of the U.S. as dominant power.

⁶ Gray, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6, "The American Way."

⁷ Further, I will use the term "realism" to mean a guideline of foreign policy. I do not focus on any of its specific sub-patterns. I accept the importance of the various schools embraced by realism. However, I believe that, for the purposes of an empirical study such as this, the differentiation among the various branches of realism need not concern us since they do not modify in any considerable way our understanding of the workings—as well as the general and specific objectives—of U.S. foreign policy in the early stages of the Cold War.

⁸ This is one of the maxims explaining international society. Ultimately it is an axiom boosted by realism. In order to explore this approach to international relations I will use Martin's rephrasing of Vásquez in the following terms: "Realism had three central assumptions: that nation states are the most important actors; that there is a sharp distinction between domestic and international politics; and that the focus of International Relations is the study of power and peace." See Steve Martin "Paradigm Dominance in International Relations: The Development of International Relations as a Social Science," *Millennium* 16, no. 2 (summer 1987), pp. 192-193 and 199.

⁹ Stanley Hoffmann, "The Problem of Intervention,"

Hedley Bull, ed., *Intervention in World Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Nixon's radio-television address from Moscow (August 1, 1959) (my emphasis). Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (London: W.H. Allen, 1962), p. 439. The contradictions of U.S. foreign policy basically lie in the permanent dividing line between the norm and the natural needs of the great power. This is reflected interestingly in Henry Kissinger's jocular remarks: "The illegal we do immediately, the unconstitutional takes a little longer." Gary Allen, *Kissinger: The Secret Side of the Secretary of State* (Seal Beach, California: '76 Press, 1976), p. 13. It must be noted nevertheless that from the time of George Kennan onward, not one member of the U.S. establishment (with the exception of a small number of progressive liberals) offered any serious systemic opposition whatsoever to intervention. It is understood that logical disagreements have taken place within the inner circle of state decisions. Nevertheless, and confining this observation to the discursive and political outcomes of foreign policy decisions, there have not been ultimately, functional contradictions in the nature of the decisions to intervene and to defend the foreign policy principles of "Americanism."

¹² Even though Nixon was by no means a foreign policy theoretician, he was, first as Eisenhower's vice president, then as a permanent contender for the presidency, and later as president, a key figure in foreign policy decision making in the 1950s and the 1970s. Hence his importance as a foreign policy maker. Again, I refer to Nixon's words on the subject, this time in the case of Cuba, to offer some preliminary evidence on the contradictions always present in the demarcation of foreign policy priorities, especially when referring to the need to draw a line between an evil policy (the Soviet or the Communist) and a virtuous one (the U.S.). Nixon declared: "While we should not underestimate the danger, we also must not resort to Communist methods to fight Communism. We would then become *little better* than the Communists themselves—playing their game by their rules. We must not be so blinded by the threat of Communism that we can no longer see the principles of freedom....I had been urging a stronger policy, within Administration councils, against Castro....Early in 1960, the position I had been advocating for nine months finally prevailed, and the CIA was given instructions to provide arms, ammunition, and training for Cubans who had fled the Castro regime....This program had been in operation for six months before the 1960 campaign got under way. It was a program, however, that I could not say one word about. The operation was covert." (my emphasis), Nixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 351-352.

¹³ For more on this subject see Lewis Hanke, *Do the Americans Have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Theory* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964).

¹⁴ The modern U.S. geopolitical view turned the country into one that clearly defined the boundaries of the actions of other members of the international community (i.e. the Holy Alliance confronted by the Monroe Doctrine at the end of the nineteenth century) particularly in Latin America. See Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1890); Nicolas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942); Geoffrey R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy, 1890-1987* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988).

¹⁵ Here I refer both to the broad socio-cultural, political features of the United States as well as their influence upon the conformation of certain forms of state. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest that such features have been deeply influential at the level of governmental decisions in foreign policy which constitutes the bottom line in this approach. I argue that this aspect of U.S. politics will allow us to grasp why

it is that a foreign policy of deterrence was needed.

¹⁶ David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anticommunist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), p. 15.

¹⁷ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 121.

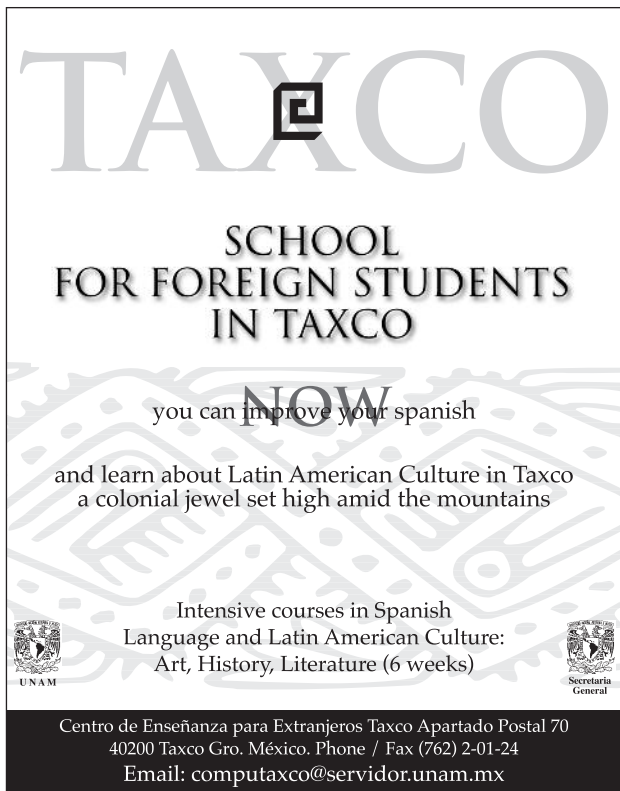
¹⁸ See Max Beloff, "Reflections on Intervention," *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 22, no. 2 (1968), p. 201. A recent case of this enduring tradition can be found in the following words by the U.S. Secretary of State Madelaine Albright referring to the right of Washington to attack Iraq: "If we have to use force it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future." See Hugo Young, "So, we are not going to war. Good: that's what the people wanted," *The Guardian*, 25 February 1998 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Sources of the Radical Right," in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (Garden City, New York, 1964), pp. 316-317.

Lipset elaborates further: "I still believe that viewed cross-culturally, Americans are more likely to view politics in moralistic terms than most Europeans. No American politician would say of an ally, as did Churchill of Russia, that I will ally with the 'devil himself,' for the sake of victory. The American alliance with Russia (sic) had to be an alliance with a 'democrat' even if the ally did not know he was democratic." See Lipset, *ibid.*

²⁰ Lipset, *op. cit.*, p. 321. Lipset adds that "Americanism has become a compulsive ideology rather than a simply nationalist term. Americanism is a creed in a way that 'Britishism' is not. If foreigners can become Americans, Americans may become 'un-American'.... An American political leader could not say, as W. Churchill did in 1940, that the English Communist party was composed of Englishmen, and he did not fear an Englishman." *Ibid.*, pp. 320-321.

²¹ Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed," in Daniel Bell, ed., *ibid.*, p. 20.





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