On Power and Ideology

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The Managua Lectures

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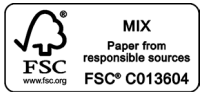

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LECTURE 1

The Overall Framework of Order

In these lectures, I will be concerned with United States policy in Central America in the contemporary period. But I want to consider this question in a much broader context. What the United States is doing today in Central America is not at all new, and it is not specific to Latin America. We mislead ourselves by viewing these matters in too narrow a focus, as is commonly done in journalism and much of scholarship, both in the United States and elsewhere.

Surveying the historical record, we do find some variation in U.S. policies. The continuities, however, are much more striking than the variation, which reflects tactical judgments and estimates of feasibility. The persistent and largely invariant features of U.S. foreign policy are deeply rooted in U.S. institutions, in the distribution of power in the domestic society of the United States. These factors determine a restricted framework of policy formation that admits few departures.

Planning and action are based on principles and geopolitical analyses that are often spelled out rather clearly in internal documents. They are also revealed with much clarity by the historical record. If these principles are understood, then we can

comprehend quite well what the United States is doing in the world. We can also understand a good deal of contemporary history, given the power and influence of the United States. Current U.S. policies in Central America also fall into place, fitting historical patterns that change very little because of the relatively constant nexus of interests and power from which they arise.

I would like to address these questions in a fairly general way in my first two lectures, turning specifically to Central America in the third. In the fourth lecture, I want to shift the focus of discussion to U.S. national security policy and the arms race, to factors in the international arena that may well terminate history before the immediate problems that concern us can be effectively addressed. In the final lecture, I will turn to domestic U.S. society and ask how foreign policy and national security policies are fashioned. I will also want to inquire into the possibilities for modifying them, a profoundly important matter. The fate of Central America, and in fact the continued existence of human society on this planet, depend to no small extent on the answers to these questions.

Let us turn now to a review of some of the systematic patterns of U.S. foreign policy, beginning with a few general principles that I will then illustrate with various specific examples.

The first principle is that U.S. foreign policy is designed to create and maintain an international order in which U.S.-based business can prosper, a world of "open societies," meaning societies that are open to profitable investment, to expansion of export markets and transfer of capital, and to exploitation of material and human resources on the part of U.S. corporations and their local affiliates. "Open societies," in the true meaning of the term, are societies that are open to U .S. economic penetration and political control.

Preferably, these "open societies" should have parliamentary democratic forms, but this is a distinctly secondary consideration.

Parliamentary forms, as we shall see, are tolerable only as long as economic, social and ideological institutions, and the coercive forces of the state, are firmly in the hands of groups that can be trusted to act in general accord with the needs of those who own and manage U.S. society. If this condition is satisfied, then parliamentary forms in some client states are a useful device, ensuring the dominance of minority elements favored by U.S. elites while enabling the U.S. political leadership to mobilize its own population in support of foreign adventures masked in idealistic rhetoric ("defense of democracy") but undertaken for quite different purposes. In its actual usage, the term "democracy," in U.S. rhetoric, refers to a system of governance in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society, while the population observes quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification, as in the United States itself. Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a serious threat. It is not a step towards democracy; rather, it constitutes a "crisis of democracy" that must be overcome. The problem arises both in the United States and in its dependencies, and has been addressed by measures ranging from public relations campaigns to death squads, depending on which population is targeted. We will turn to examples as we proceed.

What all of this means for much of the Third World, to put it crudely but accurately, is that the primary concern of U.S. foreign policy is to guarantee the freedom to rob and to exploit.

Elsewhere, I have referred to this as "the Fifth Freedom," one that was not enunciated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt when he formulated the famous Four Freedoms, which were presented as the war aims of the Western allies during World War II: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. The history of Central America and the Caribbean—and not these regions alone—reveals just how these

fine words are to be understood: as a means to gain public support for crusades in defense of the Fifth Freedom, the one that really counts.

In the perception of U.S. planners, which is not inaccurate, the world is peopled with enemies of the Fifth Freedom, who seek to impede the free exercise of our fundamental right to rob and to exploit. Among the most dangerous and threatening, throughout U.S. history, we find Britain, France, Germany, Japan and other industrial powers belonging to what is now called "the First World." U.S. expansion and intervention in the Western Hemisphere has been guided by concern over various of these enemies since its origins, and the same was true of the conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the century, which left several hundred thousand Filipinos dead and much of the U.S. military command facing court martial for brutal atrocities (for which they received trifling sentences), an operation undertaken to ensure that the United States would have a favored position in the competition to control the wealth and markets of Asia. President Woodrow Wilson's famous rhetorical flourishes during World War I concealed measures by which the U.S. displaced Britain from Central America, taking over control of Guatemalan petroleum resources, for example. During World War II, the U.S. exploited Britain's travail to expand its influence and control at Britain's expense in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East.

The U.S. has consistently been "anti-imperialist," in the sense that it has opposed and sought to dismantle the imperial preference systems established by Britain and lesser powers. The meaning of this "anti-imperialism" is hardly obscure to its Third World victims, or to competing imperial powers displaced by these operations.

As conflicts over this matter erupted within the Western alliance during World War II, the British Colonial Office observed that "the Americans are quite ready to make their dependencies

politically 'independent' while economically bound to them and see no inconsistency in this" as "American imperialism" is attempting "to elbow us out" in many parts of the world, relying on its overwhelming economic and military power facilitated with trusteeship schemes and other devices to ensure U.S. control. Such measures were legitimate, U.S. planners explained: even though other imperial systems were being dismantled, "these reservations" in favor of the United States "were being made in the interest of world security rather than of our own security . . . what was good for us was good for the world," so Abe Fortas explained, in internal U.S. government discussion. Needless to say, such idealistic thoughts scarcely impressed Europeans who were being displaced by the expanding U.S. neo-colonial system, for example, Winston Churchill, who "viewed American trustees hip schemes as mainly a cover for annexationist plans" (Wm. Roger Louis notes in the major scholarly study of these operations, referring here to the Pacific region). In the crucial Middle East region as well, U.S. interests displaced British and French competitors during and after the war by a combination of economic measures and legal chicanery, based ultimately on the realities of power.

As for Latin America, U.S. ideas were clarified in May 1945 by Secretary of War Henry Stimson, well-known to Nicaraguans for his role in the Marine invasion of the late 1920s that established the rule of the National Guard and the Somoza dictatorship. In private discussion on the need to eliminate all regional systems dominated by other powers, in particular the British, while maintaining and extending our own regional system in Latin America, Stimson explained: "I think that it's not asking too much to have our little region over here [namely, Latin America] which never has bothered anybody."

Similarly, in 1973, in his "Year of Europe" address, Henry Kissinger warned that the Atlantic alliance was endangered because Europe might develop a trading bloc including North

Africa and the Middle East that would raise barriers to U.S. access, failing to comprehend that the role of the European states is to pursue their "regional interests" within an "overall framework of order" managed by the United States. The United States may have "little regions" here and there that it dominates, but not its competitors. More generally, the United States favors "open access" for everyone, as long as its own economic power is so overwhelming (with latent military force at hand if things go wrong) that U.S. corporations are well-placed to win the competition. On the same reasoning, Britain firmly supported "free trade" during the period of its hegemony.

The U.S. conception of "open access" is marvelously expressed in a State Department memorandum of April 1944 called "Petroleum Policy of the United States," dealing with the primary resource. There must be equal access for U.S. companies everywhere, the memorandum explained, but no equal access for others. The U.S.-dominated Western Hemisphere production (North America was the leading oil exporter until 1968), and this dominant position must be maintained while U.S. holdings expand elsewhere. U.S. policy, the document asserted, "would involve the preservation of the absolute position presently obtaining, and therefore vigilant protection of existing concessions in United States hands coupled with insistence upon the Open Door principle of equal opportunity for United States companies in new areas." That is a fair characterization of the famous principle of the "Open Door."

As I mentioned before, the "absolute position presently obtaining" in Central America, and rapidly expanding at the time in the Middle East, was based not only on overwhelming U.S. economic and military power but also on effective state intervention at the expense of rivals such as Britain. But once the "absolute position" has been achieved, "free competition" must be defended "everywhere."

In some cases, fascist powers have been enemies, in other cases, friends, depending on the role they play with regard to the Fifth Freedom. Thus in Asia, fascist Japan became an enemy in the 1930s as it responded to its effective exclusion from the imperial systems (British, Dutch, U.S.) by creating a "co-prosperity sphere" in East Asia to which U.S. access would be limited. In contrast, the semi-fascist Marcos dictatorship installed in 1972 with U.S. backing in the Philippines was a friend, and remained so until Marcos could no longer be maintained, because it firmly defended the Fifth Freedom, reversing measures that might have led to Philippine control over their own land and resources under a capitalist democracy.

The major enemy, however, is always the indigenous population, which has an unfortunate tendency to succumb to strange and unacceptable ideas about using their resources for their own purposes. They must therefore be taught regular lessons in obedience to thwart any such evil designs. Thus in Southeast Asia in the post-World War II period, national movements arose that did not comprehend the conceptions developed by State Department planners, who explained in internal documents that the region was "to fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market for Japan and Western Europe." The more general plan was that East Asia and Western Europe were to be reconstructed as regional groupings dominated by Japan and Germany, their "natural leaders," within the overarching U.S.-dominated system of world order. The effort to tame the enemies of "stability" and "order" in Indochina, who rejected their assigned "function," was to become a major theme of postwar history.

Others too fail to understand their function in the global system, and must be properly disciplined. In the terminology of U.S. political theology, they are "Communists," a broad-ranging concept that has little relation to social, political or economic doctrines but a great deal to do with a proper understanding of one's duties and

function in the global system. A prestigious study group of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Planning Association in 1955 explained the meaning of the term "Communist" candidly and accurately: the primary threat of "Communism," the study observed, is the economic transformation of the Communist powers "in ways which reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West"—where "West" includes Japanese capitalism, and it is understood that these industrial capitalist economies are to remain firmly within the U.S.-managed "overall framework of order," in Kissinger's phrase. This is a good definition of the term "Communism" as it is actually used in U.S. political discourse. In brief, the "Communists" are those who attempt to use their resources for their own purposes, thus interfering with the right to rob and to exploit, the central doctrine of foreign policy. Naturally, the U.S. is consistently "anti-Communist," while only selectively anti-fascist.

The first principle of U.S. foreign policy, then, is to ensure a favorable global environment for U.S.-based industry, commerce, agribusiness and finance. In the Third World, its primary concern is the defense of the Fifth Freedom from various enemies, primarily indigenous. What is called "national security policy" is oriented to the same ends. In the fourth lecture, I will turn to the question of just what national security policy is. For the moment, let me just say what it is not: its primary concern is not the security of the United Stares or its allies, except in the sense of securing the Fifth Freedom.

A second and related central principle is that an ideological system must be constructed to ensure that the population remains passive, ignorant and apathetic, and that none of these matters are understood among the educated, articulate and politically active classes in the United States or, indeed, in the world in general. Recall that in the operative sense of the term "democracy," these minority elements are to dominate the "democratic process"—the

political system, the media, the educational system—as indeed they do, serving the interests of those who own and manage U.S. society and privileged groups more generally. A threat to this system of elite domination is a threat to "democracy," which must be overcome, by force if necessary.

These two basic principles are well supported in the documentary record of planning and discussion, which is available to us to quite a remarkable degree in the United States, a society that is extremely open by world standards. More important, they are very well supported by the evolving record of history.

Before proceeding, we should be clear about the fact that nothing in this record is unique to the United States. Consider Great Britain, which led the industrial revolution once it had effectively destroyed Indian cottage industry and passed beyond piracy (a major enterprise of the British colonists in America as well) to the point where it could exploit for its own ends the resources of India, the West Indies, and other regions. As it became the world-dominant power in the 19th century, Britain discovered the virtues of free trade, and maintained its devotion to these elevated principles as long as it was in a position to fare quite well in the competition. By the 1920s, this was no longer possible, and Britain moved to close the empire to free penetration by others, notably Japan, barred from free commercial relations with the British imperial system by the high tariffs imposed at the 1932 Ottawa conference. This was one of the steps that led to World War II. Throughout, the British solemnly bore "the White Man's Burden," just as the French conducted their impressive "civilizing mission": robbing, enslaving, destroying, leaving misery and starvation in their wake. The United States has resorted to protectionist measures and state intervention in the domestic and international economy throughout its history, but like Britain, has extolled the principles of free trade and the Open Door in circumstances when these proved serviceable to

the business interests that control state policy. Its devotion to freedom and democracy is apparent for all to see in Central America and elsewhere, a matter to which we return.

As for the second contemporary superpower, its domestic system of control is quite different, and accordingly it plays a different role in world affairs. It is not a major factor in the exploitation and robbery of the Third World, but its ruling military-bureaucratic elite controls the internal empire and the satellites by the use or threat of violence, sends its armies to ravage neighboring countries when this is deemed necessary, and happily consorts with the worst monsters in the international arena, for example, Argentina under the neo-Nazi generals, for whom the USSR served as one of the leading trading partners.

Rather generally, throughout history, the power of some state provides a fair measure of its external violence and the hypocrisy of its doctrinal system, which can be trusted to portray the exercise of state power in terms of unsurpassed nobility and inspiring dedication to the highest moral values. Within the ideological system, it is permissible, even meritorious, to record "errors" and "failures" in pursuit of these noble objectives, but not to expose their systematic patterns and to trace these "blunders" to the conscious planning that regularly underlies them or to their roots in the pattern of privilege and domination in the domestic society.

With these general remarks behind us, let us turn to the topic at hand, considering first U.S. foreign policy, particularly with regard to the Third World, and turning to national security policy and the domestic scene later on.

From its earliest days, the United States had wide-ranging imperial aspirations. In 1754, Benjamin Franklin, a leading spokesman for Enlightenment values, defined "the father of his nation" as the man who "removes the Natives to give his own people Room." And indeed, from the origins of the colonial settlement through the 19th century, the native population was re-