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Bush's Second Term And the World¹

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The United States is not the same country as it was at the end of World War II. It is a nation that dominates the international scene, today a lonelier power than ever with increasingly fragmented legitimacy. To the extent that the United States reinforced its positioning in the international theater, it has also been very difficult for it to do so with full legitimacy, to the point that in this new century it has become “a hard power,” a power that uses coercion, above all military coercion, to “convince.”

In the last 70 years, the world has become an increasingly dangerous and insecure place, especially in the last two decades since the end of the Cold War. Certainly, the peace of the world—the perpetual peace that Kant wanted—is not a guarantee of civilization. To the contrary, once again, it is war that imposes its pattern on the changing world. From that perspective, it is important to say that the chaos that has led to different incidents of war in the modern era contradicts democratic transformations. Today, war is the main enemy of democracy, the interests of civil society and the integrity of democratic consensus, its fundamental space for cohesion.² Proof of the articulation between messianism and the use of force is to be found in Clinton’s Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s statement, “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.”³

Cioran said that as soon as we refuse to admit the interchangeable nature of ideas, blood flows. But there is something more transcendental to add to the very existence of the uncontrolled world disorder, which exists either because it is functionally convenient to great powers like the United States or because of their manifest incompetence. The obligatory question is whether the global village’s agenda today will include war as part of the modern democratic arrangement: it is a matter of elucidating to what point war is already part of the social and political consensus. In that sense, it would seem that in the framework of the standards of living offered by the modern world—in some cases more satisfactory than in others—it is power and force, as well as military aesthetics, that strongly attract the clientele of different nationalities and cultures, although more importantly today, the Americans.

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mented legitimacy—in itself a perturbing situation. To the extent that the United States reinforced its positioning in the international theater, it has also been very difficult for it to do so with full legitimacy, to the point that in this new century it has become “a hard power,” a power that uses coercion, above all military coercion, to “convince.” In the current phase, it is difficult for it to come to agreements with its counterparts, particularly the European Union, in multilateral bodies.⁴

The United States has historically been a nation used to reaping enormous benefits with great ease, at the same time becoming a world unto itself.⁵ With regard to its political advances, Alexis de Tocqueville already said, “The great advantage of the Americans is that they have arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution; and that they are born equal instead.”⁶ For his part, geopolitical scientist Colin S. Gray asked, “Did the United States succeed in nation-building and in forcible nation-restoration because it was virtuous, or because it had Canadians and Mexicans

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Colin Powell's replacement by former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice puts an end to moderation in Washington's international policy decisions.

as its neighbours rather than Russians and Germans?"⁷ With time, the advantageous position of what A.K. Henrikson called the *insula fortunata* would become more evident.⁸

Permit me to argue that the basis which operates in Washington's rational action of intervening in a country is also found in the historic sense of mission with an eye to defense—most of the time a messianic defense—of a destiny: that of making the world a safe place where new conditions necessary for a modern exercise of power in world matters can be created. Intervention was not only conceived as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy to which Washington could resort under the condition that the international normative framework allowed it. It was also used to satisfy the U.S.'s need to affirm its theological vocation and messianic uniqueness, thus officializing its exceptional status as a nation and global power.

Intolerance (an expression of the most conservative Protestantism of the new civil religion in the United States and foundational agent characteristic of its socio-political condition) is the factor that from very early on would play a leading role in this country. It is an extreme Manichaeism whereby this concept of the world explains historic events and social and political actors. This would be done in the name of a concrete abstraction: "the defense of liberty" against all threats. Condoleezza

Rice's libertarian rhetoric is a case in point when after September 11, she said that an earthquake of the magnitude of 9/11 could move the tectonic plates of international politics; that the United States should move to take advantage of these new opportunities since it was a period like the one from 1945 to 1947, when U.S. leadership expanded the free democratic states to create a balance of power favoring freedom.

All these components are contained in past and present official discourses and even in that of some intellectuals, politicians or writers, and reflect, apart from political Manichaeism, an ethnocentric conception of society and politics that will have a negative repercussion in the United States' actions, perceptions and foreign policy. And all in the name of safeguarding the "eternal" integrity of the *insula fortunata*.

The twenty-first century brought an intensified internationalization of domestic politics through the effect of the transnationalization of power, but above all because of a political-cultural climate in which the ultimate argument of the great power is imposed through a process that Toynbee called "anarchy by treaty."⁹ In that same sense, it can be suggested that for this circularity of domination to yield the promised fruit at the highest level of globality, the *Pax Americana* requires organizations or events that promote "instability" with

an eye to a greater involvement in world affairs, in which the need for the threatened stability is what demands its course.

The U.S. democratic system—to a certain extent admirable and an inspiration for many democracies throughout the world—has been exposed once again to a local and global crisis unknown since the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. This is today's so-called "50/50 society," alluding to the polarization of public opinion around the conflict in Iraq, a polarization reflected in the recent electoral results.

II. The turn to war in U.S. foreign policy, its obstinate crusade in the defense of causes not its own, the old-fashioned (but still existent) missionary tone *à la* Woodrow Wilson and the bias toward radical conservatism are aspects that pressured the political actors and the voters in the 2004 presidential elections. It is very probable that this will give George W. Bush the opportunity to prolong his unilateralist temptation to an ever-more-fragile world, exposed to the zigzags of Washington's exercise of hegemonic power that tries to put other people's houses in order before attending to its own. Richard Barnet says that Calvinism forces people to face the question, "Who will be the sheriff? Who will create order in an unruly world?" And he himself provides the answer: "Those whose virtue has been certi-

fied by world success.”¹⁰ And that is where the second Bush term seems to be heading; to a certain extent, it will owe its possibilities for success or failure to the bases it imposed during the first term.¹¹

Instituting democratic systems in Iraq and Afghanistan has not been as successful as expected. Given the escalation that seems to be becoming a civil war in Iraq, analysts are viewing with growing concern what could turn into the biggest failure in the history of U.S. foreign policy since the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam. This could well be the last war that the United States does not come out the victor in, since its power is insufficient —paradoxically— to wage others.

While recovering Americans’ living standards was in theory the best electoral strategy for Republicans and Democrats alike, the fact is that the post-9/11 situation and the strengthening of the Bush administration, all of which were undoubtedly elucidated by his main strategic mind Karl Rove, made it abundantly clear that for the time being, security, the defense of traditional values and, as a result, a “securized” and even more messianic foreign policy were the issues that dominated the electoral climate and presumably the minds of Americans.

In 2004 the Democratic Party radicalized its political position by saying that what was to be decided in the elections was actually the short-term des-

tiny of the United States, in very, very complicated circumstances for a government hobbled with a badly planned military conflict and an economy that was not functioning for the majority. The Democrats proposed a policy of greater unity over polarization, not without resorting to a discourse in which they also boasted having the best attributes of the “original nation” whose “eternal mission” is to remain united with greater opportunities for all.¹²

The Republicans consolidated their position by openly haranguing U.S. society about basic values, the most conservative values in the United States that today seem to be awakening with great vigor. We are witnessing a return to nativist convictions that in the past were the basis for strong isolationism *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world. The immigration law approved a few weeks ago, restrictive in the extreme, seems to demonstrate this. This is one of the consequences of the 9/11 attacks, which, seen in the framework of the articulation and recovery of this conservative discourse, pushed Americans backward so that today they seem to be questioning some of the liberal and libertarian principles that gave their democracy its original meaning. This revived conservatism, accompanied by an exacerbated nationalism in which Americanism is once again put forward as an entire ideology (“We are Americans first, last and always,” Bush *dixit*), had an impact on the outcome of the

election, noticeably favoring the president. The war kidnapped democracy and, faced with the government’s aggressive policy, Senator Kerry saw no other way forward than getting as close as possible to Bush’s extreme positions in the false hope of getting close to society. If the resurgence of the neo-empire at the expense of the democratic republic had not been enough, the United States condemned the existence of other worlds like Latin America to be forgotten. This new moment of isolation could last if the Secretary of State’s campaign to get closer to its traditional allies is not as successful as expected.

Thus, the strong candidate won, or at least the candidate the Americans perceived as the strong one.¹³ Among the many reasons that Senator Kerry was not elected president, I consider one very important. It is a stratagem used successfully in the past and this time by the Republicans: the extension of the U.S. neo-empire is viable only by obtaining support from the private sector and a kind of evangelism through the conversion to the “American Way”, to which certainly a good number of Americans (the majority) belong who went to vote in large numbers (60 percent) to support Bush’s theological crusade.

Once again these principles were applied impeccably during the campaign and were very useful in achieving a double objective: convincing Americans that security and the war against

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terrorism were the two central pragmatic pillars —this is why the politics of fear and intolerance were imposed on the campaign— and compelling Kerry to radicalize his discourse in favor of the use of force in Iraq and in a defense at all costs of security as cross-cutting issues in his foreign policy platform. On domestic issues, the Democratic Party was obliged to take on board the topics imposed by Bush and turn them into their own priorities; to the disappointment of its traditional followers, it watered down its electoral proposal. Kerry not only shifted toward Bush's more conservative positions, including religious principles, but also stopped having a policy of his own on these issues. As a result, Bush's agenda was that of a divided society without the determination to leave its president alone in a moment of danger. That is why people tended to vote —certainly some reticently— for the candidate who best guaranteed them the exercise of force, both necessary, and desired by the majority.

In effect, a paradigm was dismantled if we consider that for the first time in a long time, Americans did not vote for economic well-being but for greater security and in favor of a more aggressive war against terrorism. With things like this, those who believed that this horizon of “securitization” of foreign policy could change and Bush would move toward the moderate center seemingly will have to wait. Colin Powell's

exit from the Department of State and his replacement by former National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice open up room for the most rigid foreign policy positions in the cabinet to prevail.

In fact, it can be said that this long awaited replacement puts an end to moderation in Washington's international policy decisions and signals the advent of a hard-line group gathered around the neo-conservative project. Rice, recognized for winning Bush's favor when he was governor of Texas, is the representative who was missing to make the foreign policy team speak in a single voice, that of the president himself.

This is a voice with all the bureaucratic power of the U.S. diplomatic apparatus needed to ensure continuity for today's international policy and a programmatic basis for more years along the lines of “hard power,” and with that, clinch the successes Bush has proposed, those he promised to achieve in his global crusade against the calamities that arose since September 11, 2001. And it cannot be any other way, despite the relative softening shown in the early stages of his second term.

In any case, it is certain that Rice will bring greater cohesion to the government in its formulation of foreign policy. It is also certain that there will be continuity given that her appointment guarantees the prevalence of a single kind of thinking in the White House's world view. This would seem

to be the tone of Rice and Bush's recent trip to Europe in which they proposed to the European Union nations a re-discussion of multilateralism from the standpoint of the unilateralist idea that Washington encourages; the Europeans received the proposal with a mixture of resignation and distaste.

III. All of this is also reflected in some of Bush's more recent appointments. It is to be expected that at least the presence of Rice as Secretary of State and Alberto R. Gonzales as Attorney General means exactly the opposite of what the official discourse has tried to show and will not favor either the ethnic groups' or binational interests that in theory they represent. It is to be predicted that underneath these appointments lies a high degree of opportunism as they simulate a renewed interest in racial minorities and a different relationship with Mexico. While it is true that to a certain extent Rice and Gonzales are the expression of the culture of hard work that awards anyone who tries hard enough with the “American dream,” it is also the case that they both represent intransigent positions inside the government and are unconditionally close to Bush's ideological positions.

In fact, Donald Rumsfeld's confirmation as secretary of defense speaks to Bush's reticence to recognize the errors of his foreign policy and confirms a historic U.S. tendency in times of world crisis: the well-known prepon-

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derance of the Pentagon in the design of foreign policy, with a strong emphasis on defense as the crosscutting axis. The continuity in the Pentagon indicates that Bush, far from including in his administration anyone else from the party who is not from his intimate circle, has chosen to deepen the style that meets with the approval of his conservative base. These are unequivocal signs about his administration's orientation. It also confirms the continuation of the strategy in Iraq and dissipates any speculation about a less aggressive, less unilateral and less arrogant international policy coming out of Washington in the next four years. To evaluate events in a different way, we will have to wait until the United States makes a real self-criticism of its foreign policy in practice. In any case, the fact that the power of the United States is the expression of militarism rooted in an autocratic state is also the measure of its own latent crisis, which today is making its domestic and international policies tremble. In addition to reinforcing the preeminence of the Pentagon *vis-à-vis* other sectors of the government in terms of foreign policy, we can see Bush's determination to implement his policies secretly, without regard to the other branches of government, the Constitution and international law.

In the last four years, we have lived in a virtual state of security cemented by military might.¹⁴ This is unprece-

dent in modern U.S. foreign policy in times of peace. It is also a reflection of the emergence of a new narrative of U.S. hegemonic power onto the world scene, whose central axis is the defense of the epic nature of U.S. history as the central agent of the unfolding of history. Everything occurs on the sidelines of the U.S. Constitution and remits us to a famous —though not pleasant— concept of Henry Kissinger's: "The illegal we do it immediately. The unconstitutional takes a little longer."¹⁵ Thus, the reconfiguration of U.S. power with representatives of minorities included for the first time in high government positions aims to culminate a mission undertaken years ago by a compact group headed up by Bush, and could tend to marginalize the most important interests of those very minorities.

IV. Although it still may be premature to pinpoint the long-term scenarios caused by the reshuffling of Bush's cabinet in his second term, it is worthwhile examining the probable continuation of the neoconservative positions reached in the last four years, although the president is now trying to tone down the harshest parts of his speeches. We can say that it is feasible that Bush will not bet on the modernization of politics and will accentuate some of the more isolationist policies that the United States has undertaken in the last five decades. Both their allies in the Euro-

pean Union and Latin American countries, among others, will see months and perhaps years go by without many of their central proposals to the United States being considered. Thus, the self-fulfilled prophecy will come true and the societies that these governments represent may well have been right when before November 2 they thought that the worst thing that could happen to the world would be that George W. Bush be reelected. Nevertheless, it is probable that the United States will have to pay attention to emerging issues that were neither important nor priorities on its agenda for expanding the doctrine of preventive policies, the backbone of its foreign policy in this second term.

What does it mean that other actors, like the South American countries, at the third South American Presidential Summit held in Cuzco last December 8, mobilize, taking advantage of this transitional moment in the United States as well as Washington's apparent disinterest in their plans and attempts at regional integration? In addition, and given the paralysis of the projects for Latin American cohesion, is it merely fortuitous that two important Latin American actors like Mexico and Chile both try to secure the general secretaryship of the Organization of American States or that Brazil has begun to seek a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council? What are our govern-

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ments aspiring to when they try to put themselves in the avant garde of regional and institutional efforts that in the framework of globalization are fundamentally dominated by Washington?

In the coming months, Mexico will encounter several limitations to Washington's sitting down to seriously negotiate highly important issues like the total or partial legalization of undocumented migrant workers. Among them are the nature of George W. Bush's victory and the quality of social backing he received, which brings with it an element of political pressure that, he will not be able to ignore, as well as the recomposition of the cabinet of the newly reelected president.

With regard to the former, we must say that the broad margin of Bush's victory gives him room to position himself on the political spectrum as he considers best in the short and long run. His main campaign banner and the backbone of his victory, the war in Iraq and the war against international terrorism, represent an opportunity to put an end as soon as possible to the threats to Washington's security.

Thus, in this post-electoral period just beginning in the United States, a new stage of the internationalization of domestic politics and the provincialism of international politics will take place there, all with Bush's well known arrogance. Given the weight of domestic politics and how important it is to the neoconservatives to reaffirm their

positions in the political debate and on the national agenda, it would be illusory to think that in his second term Bush will offer Mexico conditions for consolidating its proposals about a broad regularization of undocumented migration or achieving a NAFTA Plus.

And President Bush's second term certainly did begin avidly with three acts that could define the general climate of the future of relations between both our countries. First, the approval (with 56 percent of the votes) of Proposition 200 in Arizona, which bans undocumented migrants from receiving state services, forces the population to denounce them and increases the requirements for proving citizenship in Arizona. Second, the approval by the House of Representatives with support from Bush and Vice President Cheney of the bill that bans undocumented immigrants from obtaining driver's licenses, makes it harder to get political asylum and mandates the completion of the construction of a wall between San Diego and Tijuana. And, finally, Ambassador Antonio Garza's communique warning Americans about safety problems and marking his concern about increasing violence on the part of drug traffickers along the border. In addition to all of this, CIA Director Porter Goss said in his testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee that the 2006 presidential campaign in Mexico will be a potential point of conflict given that it will probably paralyze

the progress of the fiscal, labor and energy reforms and may lead to a left, populist, nationalist government taking office.

If the White House were to move toward the moderate center around these issues and Washington were to accept negotiating different matters on the multilateral agenda with its partners and allies in other parts of the world, it would only happen once the U.S. government had guaranteed victory for its foreign policy (centered mainly around success in Iraq and eventually in the Middle East and other critical spots like Iran and North Korea), overcome its domestic crisis and thus surmounted the pressures that made the country turn in on itself and radicalize toward the right for the last four years.

As a result, if we do not manage to correctly read the signs of change in Washington and gradually move forward on pending bilateral issues, Mexico's vulnerability could be even further exacerbated. We must not again illusorily bet on the exchange "of security for migration," nor on Bush finally accepting all the terms that Mexico has attempted to impose on the pending agenda. In the context of growing radical conservatism, the panorama for Latin America and Mexico does not seem promising, and many of the issues abandoned by the United States in the last four years will be difficult to resuscitate in the current post-electoral scenario. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ The author wishes to thank the assistance of Adrián Villanueva Delgado for this article.
- ² A deeper analysis of this idea can be found in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).
- ³ José Luis Valdés Ugalde, *Estados Unidos: Intervención y poder mesiánico. La guerra fría en Guatemala, 1954* (Mexico City: CISAN-IJ, 2004), p. 111, footnote 257.
- ⁴ The debate on soft and hard power can be found in Joseph Nye's interesting book *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.
- ⁷ Colin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartlands, Rimlands and the Technological Revolution* (New York: Crane Russak & Co., 1977), p. 1.
- ⁸ About Henrikson's term, see Geoffrey Parker, *Western Geopolitical Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 138.
- ⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, "Anarchy by Treaty 1648-1967," Fred L. Israel, ed., *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History 1648-1967*, vol. 1 (New York and London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1967), pp. xiii-xxix.
- ¹⁰ Enrico Augelli and Craig Murphy, *America's Quest for Supremacy and the Third World: A Gramscian Analysis* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1983), pp. 63-64, and Richard Barnett, *Roots of War* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), p. 70.
- ¹¹ Because of its recent flirtation with the European Union, it is interesting to observe how the Bush administration would seek to soften its unilateralist foreign policy in this second term. It remains to be seen whether it will be able to overcome the structural impediments that it imposed on itself in the last four years.
- ¹² José Luis Valdés Ugalde, "Triunfo democrata en EU?" *El Universal* (Mexico City), August 5, 2004.
- ¹³ The Republicans once again have a majority in Congress with 55 seats in the Senate and 232 in the House of Representatives. Also, exit polls indicated that 22 percent of voters cast their ballots based on moral values, while 20 percent did so based on the economy and 19 percent based on terrorism. Finally, 44 percent of Latinos voted for Bush, an increase of 9 points over the 2000 elections. (Source: CNN, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today*).
- ¹⁴ This is confirmed by the line-up of the pillars of that parallel state that Rumsfeld built when he fostered the creation of an elite, independent military espionage corps that has operated in secret for more than 24 months and replaces the CIA intelligence corps, the so called Strategic Support Branch.
- ¹⁵ David J. Rothkopf, "Inside the Committee that Runs the World," *Foreign Policy* (March-April 2005) and Gary Allen, *Kissinger. The Secret Side of the Secretary of State* (Seal Beach, California: '76 Press, 1976), p. 13.