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## Determining Intent: Why Do US Leaders Intervene in Other Countries?

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**Abstract** *How do we determine what are the motives of US leaders when they intervene in other countries either directly with US armed forces or indirectly with surrogate forces? Rather than accepting the policymakers' claims at face value, we can look for patterns of intervention: what kinds of governments and political movements do US leaders support? What kind do they oppose and seek to destroy? And what socioeconomic goals do they pursue upon successfully intervening? Rather than seeing US policy as befuddled and contradictory, we observe that it is often remarkably consistent in services rendered on behalf of transnational corporate global domination. Other policy considerations do come into play during times of intervention, but there is no reason to treat them as mutually exclusive of economic motives.*

Human motives are impossible to observe in any direct empirical way. We can view behavior and listen to utterances, but we cannot observe the actual intent that is attributed to such things. People may profess all sorts of intentions, but they are also capable of outrageous deception, including self-deception. How then can we determine what their actual motives might be? The problem becomes crucial when attempting to divine the intent of political leaders, many of whom make a regular practice of lying about their actions. Some of us maintain that the overriding purpose of US global interventionism is to promote the interests of transnational corporations and make the world safe for free-market capitalism and imperialism.<sup>1</sup> Washington policymakers claim that intervention is propelled by an intent to bring democracy to other peoples, maintain peace and stability in various regions, protect weaker nations from aggressors, defend US national security, fight terrorism, protect human rights, oppose tyranny, prevent genocide, and the like. Are we to accept these claims uncritically? If not, how can we demonstrate that they are often false or incomplete, and that the intent *we* ascribe is the real agenda? How can we determine that US interventionism is engendered by imperialist concerns rather than, say, humanitarian ones?

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<sup>1</sup> "Imperialism" is a term not normally applied by orthodox political scientists to anything that US leaders do. So perhaps it needs a definition: imperialism, as used in this article, is the process whereby the rulers of one country use economic and military power to expropriate the land, labor, markets, and natural resources of another country in order to attain ever greater capital accumulations on behalf of wealthy interests at home and abroad.

## A Global Military Empire

If US policy is respectful of other nations' sovereignty and other peoples' needs, then we might wonder why US leaders engage in a relentless push for global military domination. The United States presides over an armed planetary force of a magnitude never before seen in human history. It includes about a half-million troops stationed at over 395 major bases and hundreds of minor installations in 35 foreign countries; more than 8000 strategic nuclear weapons and 22,000 tactical ones; a naval strike force greater in total tonnage and firepower than all the other navies of the world combined, consisting of missile cruisers, nuclear submarines, nuclear aircraft carriers, and destroyers that sail every ocean and make port at every continent. With only 5% of the Earth's population, the United States expends more military funds than all the other major powers combined.

US bomber squadrons and long-range missiles can reach any target, delivering enough explosive force to destroy the infrastructures of entire countries—as demonstrated against Iraq in 1990–1991 and Yugoslavia in 1999. US rapid deployment forces have a firepower in conventional weaponry vastly superior to that of any other nation. US satellites and spy planes conduct surveillance over the entire planet. And today the United States is developing a capacity to conduct war from outer space.

Worldwide US arms sales to cooperative capitalist nations rose to \$36.9 billion in 2000, up from \$34 billion in 1999. In addition to sales, since World War II, the US government has given some \$240 billion in military aid to train, equip, and subsidize some 2.3 million troops and internal security forces in more than 80 countries, the purpose being not to defend these nations from outside invasion but to protect ruling oligarchs and multinational corporate investors from the dangers of domestic anti-capitalist insurgency.

How can we determine that? By observing that (a) with few exceptions there is no evidence suggesting that these various regimes have ever been threatened by attack from neighboring countries; (b) just about all these “friendly” regimes have supported economic systems that are subserviently integrated into a global system of transnational corporate domination, open to foreign penetration on terms that are singularly favorable to transnational investors; and (c) there is a great deal of evidence showing that US-supported military and security forces and death squads in these various countries have been repeatedly used to destroy popular reformist movements and insurgencies that advocate some kind of egalitarian redistributive politics within their own countries.<sup>2</sup>

For decades we were told that a huge US military establishment was necessary to contain an expansionist world Communist movement with its headquarters in Moscow (or sometimes Beijing). But after the overthrow of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European Communist nations, Washington

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<sup>2</sup> For evidence in support of this see Michael Parenti, *Against Empire* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1995); Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality*, 2nd edn (New York: St. Martin's, 1993); William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1998); and the writings of James Petras, Morris Morely, Edward Herman, and various others. For Petras's latest treatment of imperialism and capitalism, see his “Neo Mercantilist Empire in Latin America: Bush, ALCA and Plan Colombia” (unpublished monograph, 2001).

made no move to dismantle its costly and dangerous global military apparatus. All Cold War weapons programs continued in full force, with new ones being added all the time, including plans to militarize outer space. Immediately the White House and Pentagon began issuing jeremiads about a whole host of new enemies—for some unexplained reason previously overlooked—who menace the United States, including “dangerous rogue states” like Libya with its ragtag army of 50,000. The elder George Bush, as Richard Barnet noted, even “proclaimed the new American enemy to be ‘instability,’ a vague but ominous political science metaphor.”<sup>3</sup> These claims were swiftly and uncritically embraced by defense establishment academics and media pundits who pretend to an expertise on foreign affairs.

### Supporting the Right

The intent of US national security state leaders<sup>4</sup> can be revealed in part by noting whom they assist and whom they attack. US leaders have consistently supported rightist regimes and organizations and opposed leftist ones. The terms “Right” and “Left” are seldom specifically defined by policymakers or media commentators—and with good reason. To explicate the politico-economic content of leftist governments and movements is to reveal their egalitarian and usually democratic goals, making it much harder to demonize them. The “Left,” as I would define it, encompasses those individuals, organizations, and governments that advocate egalitarian redistributive policies benefiting the common people and infringing upon the privileged interests of the wealthy propertied classes.

The Right also is involved in redistributive politics, but the distribution goes the other way, in an upward direction. Rightist governments and groups, including fascist ones, are dedicated to using the land, labor, markets, and natural resources of countries as so much fodder for the enrichment of the owning and investing classes. In almost every country, including the United States, rightist groups, parties or governments pursue tax and spending programs, wage and investment practices, methods of police and military control, and deregulation and privatization policies that primarily benefit those who receive the bulk of their income from investments and property, at the expense of those who live off wages, salaries, fees, and pensions. That is what defines and distinguishes the Right from the Left. In just about each instance, rightist forces abroad are deemed by US opinion makers to be “friendly to the West,” a coded term for “pro-free market” and “pro-capitalist.” Conversely, leftist ones are labeled as hostile, “anti-democratic,” “anti-American” and “anti-West.” While claiming to be motivated by a dedication to human rights and democracy, US leaders have supported some of the most notorious rightwing autocracies in history, governments that have tortured, killed or otherwise maltreated large

<sup>3</sup> Richard Barnet, “The Uses of Force,” *New Yorker* (April 29, 1991), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> By the “US national security state” I mean the Executive Office of the White House, the National Security Council, National Security Administration, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other such units that are engaged in surveillance, suppression, covert action, and forceful interventions abroad and at home. Also included are the various monitoring committees set up by the NSC, such as the “54/12 Group,” later known in the Nixon era as the “40 Committee,” composed of top players from State, Defense, the CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House, and the NSC itself.

numbers of their citizens because of their dissenting political views, as in Turkey, Zaire, Chad, Pakistan, Morocco, Indonesia, Honduras, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, the Philippines, Cuba (under Batista), Nicaragua (under Somoza), Iran (under the Shah), and Portugal (under Salazar). Assistance is also given to counterrevolutionary groups in leftist revolutionary countries. These groups have perpetrated some of the most brutal bloodletting against civilian populations, as has Unita in Angola, Renamo in Mozambique, the Contras in Nicaragua, the Khmer Rouge (during the 1980s) in Cambodia, the counterinsurgency ethnic slaughter in Rwanda, the *mujahideen* and then the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the rightwing Albanian separatist KLA in Kosovo.

US support of rightwing conservatism has extended to the furthest reaches of the political spectrum. After World War II, US leaders and their Western capitalist allies did little to eradicate fascism from Europe, except for putting some of the top Nazi leaders on trial at Nuremberg. In short time, former Nazis and their collaborators were back in the saddle in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Hundreds of Nazi war criminals found a haven in the United States, either living in comfortable anonymity or employed by US intelligence agencies during the Cold War.<sup>6</sup>

In France, too, very few Vichy collaborators were purged. As Herbert Lottman writes, "No one of any rank was seriously punished for his or her role in the roundup and deportation of Jews to Nazi camps."<sup>7</sup> US military authorities also restored fascist collaborators to power in various Far East nations. In South Korea, for instance, police trained by the fascist Japanese occupation forces were used immediately after the war to suppress left democratic forces. The South Korean Army was commanded by officers who had served in the Imperial Japanese Army, some of whom had been guilty of horrid war crimes in the Philippines and China.<sup>8</sup>

In Italy, within a year after the war, almost all Italian fascists were released from prison while hundreds of Communists and other leftist partisans who had been valiantly fighting the Nazi occupation were jailed. Allied authorities initiated most of these measures.<sup>9</sup> From 1945 to 1975, US government agencies gave an estimated \$75 million to rightwing organizations in Italy, including some with close ties to the neofascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI). From 1969 to 1974, high-ranking elements in Italian military and civilian intelligence agencies, along with various secret and highly placed neofascist groups, embarked upon a campaign of terror and sabotage known as the "strategy of

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<sup>5</sup> See Ingo Muller, *Hitler's Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Part 3, "The Aftermath."

<sup>6</sup> Jon Wiener, "Bringing Nazi Sympathizers to the US," *Nation* (March 6, 1989), pp. 306–309. Nazi war criminals have been aided by Western intelligence agencies, business interests, the military, and even the Vatican. In October 1944, German paratroop commander Major Walter Reder slaughtered 1836 defenseless civilians in a village near Bologna, Italy as a reprisal against Italian partisan activities. He was released from prison in 1985, after Pope John Paul II, among others, made an appeal on his behalf—over the strenuous protests of families of the victims.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Lottman, *The Purge* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), p. 290.

<sup>8</sup> Hugh Deane, "Korea, China and the United States: A Look Back," *Monthly Review* (February 1995), pp. 20, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Palmer Domenico, *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943–1948* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), *passim*.

tension,” involving a series of kidnappings, assassinations, and bombing massacres (*i stragi*), including an explosion that killed 85 people and injured some 200 in the Bologna train station in August 1980. Fueled by international security agencies including the CIA, terrorism was directed against the growing popularity of the democratic parliamentary Left. The objective was to “combat by any means necessary the electoral gains of the Italian Communist Party” and create enough terror to destabilize the multiparty social democracy and replace it with an authoritarian “presidential republic,” or in any case “a stronger and more stable executive.” Implicated in this terrorist campaign, the CIA refused to cooperate with an Italian parliamentary commission investigating *i stragi* in 1995.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980s scores of people were murdered in Germany, Belgium and elsewhere in Western Europe by extreme rightists in the service of state security agencies. As with the earlier strategy of tension in Italy, these attacks attempted to create enough popular fear and uncertainty to undermine the existing social democracies. The US corporate-owned media largely ignored these acts of rightwing terrorism in Western Europe while giving prominent play to tiny and far less effective left terrorist grouplets found in Italy and West Germany.

In Italy, as long as the Communist party had imposing strength in parliament and the labor unions, US policymakers worked with centrist alternatives such as the Christian Democrats and the anti-Communist Italian Socialist Party. With Communism in decline by the 1990s, US leaders began to lend more open encouragement to extreme rightist forces. In 1994 and again in 2001, national elections were won by the National Alliance, a coalition of neofascists, ultraconservatives, and northern separatists headed by media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. The Alliance played on resentments over unemployment, taxes, and immigration. It attempted to convince people that government was the enemy—especially its social service sector. At the same time it worked to strengthen the repressive capacities of the state and divide the working class against itself by instigating antagonisms between the resident population and immigrants, all the while preaching the virtues of the free market and pursuing tax and spending measures that redistributed income upward. US leaders have had not a harsh word to say about the Italian neofascists.

## Opposing the Left

We can also infer intent by looking at who is targeted for attack by the US national security state, specifically just about all leftist governments, movements, and popular insurgencies, either in direct military attacks by US forces and surrogate mercenary forces such as the contras in Nicaragua, or by subversion and destabilization from within. The US has subverted reformist and leftist governments by financing and controlling their internal security units and intelligence agencies, providing them with counterinsurgency technology, including instruments of torture; imposing crippling economic sanctions through IMF austerity programs; bribing political leaders, military leaders, and other key players; inciting retrograde ethnic separatists and supremacists within the coun-

<sup>10</sup> *La Repubblica* (April 9, 1995); *Corriere della Sera* (March 27 and 28, 1995; April 12, 1995; May 29, 1995).

try; subverting their democratic and popular organizations; rigging their elections; and financing collaborationist political parties, labor unions, academic researchers, journalists, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and various media.<sup>11</sup>

US leaders profess a dedication to democracy. Yet over the past five decades, democratically elected reformist governments—guilty of introducing redistributive economic programs—in Guatemala, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Syria, Indonesia (under Sukarno), Greece, Cyprus, Argentina, Bolivia, Haiti, the Congo, and numerous other nations—were overthrown by their respective military forces funded and advised by the US. The newly installed military rulers then rolled back any reforms and opened their countries all the wider to foreign corporate investors. The US national security state has participated in covert actions or proxy mercenary wars against reformist or revolutionary governments in Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Portugal, Nicaragua, Cambodia, East Timor, Western Sahara, Egypt, Cambodia, Lebanon, Peru, Iran, Syria, Jamaica, South Yemen, the Fiji Islands, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> In many cases the attacks were directed at “soft targets” such as schools, farm cooperatives, health clinics, and whole villages. These wars of attrition extracted a horrific toll on human life and frequently forced the reformist or revolutionary government to discard its programs.

Since World War II, US forces have invaded or launched aerial assaults against Vietnam, Laos, the Dominican Republic, North Korea, Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, and most recently Afghanistan—a record of military aggression unmatched by any Communist government in history. US/NATO forces delivered round-the-clock terrorist bombings upon Yugoslavia for two-and-a-half months in 1999, targeting housing projects, private homes, hospitals, schools, state-owned factories, radio and television stations, government-owned hotels, municipal power stations, water supply systems, and bridges, along with hundreds of other nonmilitary targets at great loss to civilian life. In some instances, neo-imperialism has been replaced with an old-fashioned direct colonialist occupation, as in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

The September 2001 terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, causing a great loss of innocent lives, provided US leaders with a perfect excuse to intensify their policies of armed intervention, surveillance and repression, and reactionary rollback of domestic public services—all in the name of national security. “Terrorism,” defined only as something that others do to the US, became something of a national obsession, an all-encompassing imperative

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<sup>11</sup> On the widescale use of terrorism by the US national security state, see Edward Herman, *The Real Terror Network* (Boston: South End Press, 1982). The most insidious form of intervention should not go unnoticed, namely, the circumvention of an already inadequate democratic sovereignty by international agreements such as NAFTA, GATT, GATS and the like, which in effect give transnational corporations the power to overrule the laws and public protections of nation-states, in what amounts to a global *coup d'état* by the plutocratic class; see Lori Wallach and Michelle Sforza, *World Trade Organization? Corporate Globalization and the Erosion of Democracy* (Washington, DC: Public Citizen, 1999); and *FTAA for Beginners* (Boston, MA: United for a Fair Economy, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See John Quigley, *The Ruses for War: American Intervention since World War II* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992).

that elevated US leaders beyond the reach of critical protest and allowed them to pose yet again as defenders of national security, peace, and justice. Easily overlooked in all this is the fact that for over the last half century or more, US leaders have been the greatest purveyors of violence and terrorism throughout the world.

Even before World War II, there existed a notable frequency of violent intervention. US military forces waged a bloody and protracted war of conquest in the Philippines in 1899–1903. US expeditionary forces fought in China along with other Western armies to suppress the Boxer Rebellion and keep the Chinese under the heel of European and North American colonialists. Along with 14 other capitalist nations, the US invaded socialist revolutionary Russia in 1918–1921. US Marines invaded and occupied Nicaragua in 1912 and again in 1926 to 1933; Cuba, 1898 to 1902; Mexico, 1914 and 1916; Panama, 1903 to 1914, Haiti, 1915 to 1934; Honduras six times between 1911 and 1925.

Governments that strive for any kind of economic independence, or apply some significant portion of their budgets to the public sector, to not-for-profit services that benefit the vast majority of people, are those most likely to feel the wrath of US intervention or invasion. The designated “enemy” can be (a) a *populist military government* as in Panama under Omar Torrijos (and even under Manuel Noriega), Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser, Peru under Juan Velasco, Portugal under the MFA, and—before long—Venezuela under Hugo Chavez; (b) a *Christian socialist government* as in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas; (c) a *social democracy* as in Chile under Salvador Allende, Jamaica under Michael Manley, Greece under Andreas Papandreou, Cyprus under Mihail Makarios, and the Dominican Republic under Juan Bosch; (d) an *anti-colonialist radical reform government* as in the Congo under Patrice Lumumba; (e) a *Marxist–Leninist government* as in Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea; (f) an *Islamic revolutionary order* as in Libya under Omar Qaddafi; or even (g) a *conservative militarist regime* as in Iraq under Saddam Hussein if it should attempt an independent course on oil quotas and national development.

### Exceptions that Prove the Rule

US leaders have striven with much success to repress (1) the emergence of *competing forms of production* (socialist, collectivist, communitarian); and (2) *competing capital formations* (prosperous autonomous capitalist economies, or mixed ones, in emerging nations, and with FTAA and GATS, all public sector services except police and military in *all* capitalist countries). The goal is the Third Worldization of the entire world including Europe and North America, a world in which capital rules supreme with no public sector services; no labor unions to speak of; no prosperous, literate, effectively organized working class with rising expectations; no pension funds or environmental, consumer, and occupational protections, or medical plans, or any of the other insufferable things that cut into profit rates.

While described as “anti-West” and “anti-American,” just about all leftist governments—from Cuba to Vietnam to the late Soviet Union—made friendly overtures and showed a willingness to establish normal diplomatic and economic relations with the United States. Only in a few rare cases have US leaders treated leftist governments or forces in a friendly fashion: Yugoslavia

during the Cold War, the Khmer Rouge (if it could be considered leftist) against a socialist government in Cambodia during the 1980s, China today as it allows business investments and labor exploitation within its “enterprise zones.” In such instances US support has been dictated by temporary expediencies or the promise, as in the case of China, that the country is moving toward incorporation into the global capitalist system.

In the post-World War II era, US policymakers sent assistance to Third World nations and put forth a Marshall plan, grudgingly accepting reforms that produced marginal benefits to the working classes of Western Europe and elsewhere. They did this because of Cold War competition with the Soviet Union and the strong showing of Communist parties in Western Europe.<sup>13</sup> With no competing lure today, Third World peoples (and working populations everywhere) are given little consideration in the ongoing campaigns to roll back benefits and wages.

### **After the Counterrevolution**

One can judge the intentions of policymakers by the policies they pursue in countries that have been successfully drawn into the Western orbit. For decades we were told by US leaders, media commentators, and academic policy experts that the Cold War was a contest between freedom and an expansionist Communism, with nothing said about the expansionist interests of global capitalism. But immediately after Communism was overthrown in the USSR and Eastern Europe, US leaders began intimating that there was something more on their agenda than just free elections in the former “captive nations”—namely, free markets. Getting rid of Communism clearly meant getting rid of public ownership of the means of production. Of what use was political democracy, they seemed to be saying, if it allowed retention of an economy that was socialistic or even social democratic? So the kind of polity seemed to weigh less than the kind of economy.

The newly installed private market governments in Eastern Europe, under strong direction of Western policymakers, eliminated price controls and subsidies for food, housing, transportation, clothing, and utilities. They reduced medical benefits and support for public education. They abolished job guarantees, public employment programs, and workplace benefits. They forbade workplace political activities by labor unions. They have been selling off publicly-owned lands, factories, and news media at bargain prices to rich corporate investors. Numerous other industries have been simply shut down. The fundamental laws were changed from a public to private ownership system. There was a massive transfer of public capital into the coffers of private owners. Throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, “reforms” brought severe economic recession and high unemployment; a sharp increase in crime, homelessness, beggary, suicide, drug addiction, and prostitution; a dramatic drop in educational and literacy standards; serious deterioration in health care

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Gowan, “The NATO Powers and the Balkan Tragedy,” *New Left Review* (March–April 1999), pp. 103–104.

and all other public services; and skyrocketing infant mortality with plummeting life expectancy rates.<sup>14</sup>

Another of many examples is Grenada. In 1983, US forces invaded the tiny and relatively defenseless sovereign nation of Grenada (population 110,000) in blatant violation of international law. The invasion could not be denied, but what of the intent? The Reagan administration justified the assault by claiming (a) it was a rescue operation on behalf of American students whose safety was being threatened at the St. George medical school; (b) the island harbored a large contingent of Cuban troops and “deadly armaments”; (c) the New Jewel revolutionary government had allowed the island to become a Soviet–Cuban training camp “to export terror and undermine democracy,” and was planning to build a Soviet submarine base and Soviet military air base; and (d) Cuba and the USSR could use Grenada to control crucial “choke points” along oil tanker lanes that came to the US.<sup>15</sup> When it was determined that these various charges were without foundation, some critics concluded that White House policy toward Grenada therefore had been unduly alarmist and misguided. But the fact that officials offer confusing and misleading rationales is no reason to conclude *ipso facto* that they are themselves confused or misled. It may be that they have other motives which they prefer not to enunciate.

In actuality US global free-market policy was quite rational and successful with regard to Grenada. Under the New Jewel revolutionary government, free milk and other foodstuffs were being distributed to the needy, as were materials for home improvement. Grade school and secondary education were free for everyone for the first time. Free health clinics were opened in the countryside, thanks mostly to assistance rendered by Cuban doctors. Measures were taken in support of equal pay and legal status for women. The government leased unused land to establish farm cooperatives and turn agriculture away from cash-crop exports and toward self-sufficient food production.<sup>16</sup> We can conclude something about the motivation underlying the US invasion by noting how *the US counterrevolutionary occupation put an immediate end to almost all these government sponsored programs*. In the years that followed, unemployment in Grenada reached new heights and poverty new depths. Domestic cooperatives were suppressed or starved out. Farm families were displaced to make way for golf courses as the corporate-controlled tourist industry boomed. Grenada was once more firmly bound to the privatized free-market world, once again safely Third Worldized.

The same process occurred after the US invaded Panama in December 1989, supposedly to bring Manuel Noriega, described as a drug-dealing dictator, to justice. With Noriega and his leftist military deposed and the US military firmly in control, conditions in that country deteriorated sharply. Unemployment, already high because of the US embargo, climbed to 35% as drastic layoffs were imposed on the public sector. Pension rights and other work benefits were

<sup>14</sup> Michael Parenti, *Blackshirts and Reds: Rational Fascism and the Overthrow of Communism* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>15</sup> Network news reports, October 27–November 4, 1983; *New York Times* (November 6–20, 1983); John Judis, “Grenadian Documents Do Not Show What Reagan Claims,” and Daniel Lazare, “Reagan’s Seven Big Lies about Grenada,” both in *In These Times* (November 6, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> “A Tottering Structure of Lies,” *Sojourner* (December 1983), pp. 4–5; and Michael Massing, “Grenada Before and After,” *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1984), pp. 79–80.

abolished. Public sector subsidies were eliminated and services were privatized. Publicly-owned media were shut down by US occupation authorities while a number of Panamanian editors and reporters critical of the invasion were jailed. The US military arrested labor union leaders and removed some 150 local labor leaders from their elected positions within their unions. Crime, poverty, drug trafficking, and homelessness increased dramatically.<sup>17</sup> Free-market Third Worldization was firmly reinstated in Panama.

### Consistent Inconsistencies

US foreign policy is often criticized for being “self-contradictory.” Thus critics have pointed out that Communist Cuba has been subjected to every hostile stratagem short of war, including travel and trade embargoes, while Communist China—guilty of numerous human rights violations—has been granted “most favored nation” trading status. US policymakers have repeatedly tried to assure fundamentalist hawks in Congress that a political litmus test should not be applied to China while one is regularly imposed on Cuba—so the argument goes. Washington’s China policy is no doubt markedly different from its Cuba policy, but behind the apparent double standard rests the same underlying dedication to capital accumulation. China has opened itself to private capital and free-market “reforms,” including “enterprise zones” where Western investors can superexploit the country’s huge and cheap labor supply with no worry about wage and occupation standards or other restrictive regulations. Cuba has so far refused to go down that road.

Lacking any class perspective, all sorts of experts come to conclusions based on surface appearances. While attending a World Affairs Council meeting in San Francisco, I heard some participants smilingly refer to the irony of Cuba’s having come “full circle” since the days before the revolution. In pre-revolutionary Cuba the best hotels and shops were reserved for the foreigners and the relatively few Cubans who had Yankee dollars; today it is the same. But this judgment overlooks some important differences. Strapped for hard currency, the revolutionary Cuban government decided to use its sunny climate and beautiful beaches to develop a tourist industry, so that by 2000 tourism had become one of the island’s most important sources of income. To be sure, tourists are given accommodations that few Cubans can afford. But in pre-revolutionary Cuba, the immense profits from tourism were pocketed by big corporations, generals, gamblers, and mobsters; whereas today profits are split between the foreign investors who build the hotels and the Cuban government, which uses its portion for health clinics, education, the importation of fuel and machinery, and the like. In other words, some portion of the surplus value is still socialized; the people reap much of the benefits of the tourist trade—as is true also of the export earnings from Cuba’s publicly-owned sugar, coffee, tobacco, rum, seafood, honey, and marble industries.

When the Cuban government no longer utilizes the public sector to redistribute a major portion of the surplus value to the common populace, when it

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<sup>17</sup> See “Special Report,” *Labor Action* (publication of the Labor Coalition on Central America, Washington, DC, July/August 1990); Clarence Lusane, “Aftermath of the US Invasion,” *CovertAction Information Bulletin* (Spring 1991), pp. 61–63; *San Francisco Examiner* (April 9, 1991).

privatizes the factories and lands and allows the productive wealth to be pocketed by rich private owners, removing all labor protections for workers, then it will have come full circle, being once more reduced to capitalist client-state servitude. Then Havana will be warmly embraced by Washington, as have other ex-Communist newly established free-market nations.

US immigration policy is another area criticized as “inconsistent.” Cuban refugees regularly have been granted entry into this country while refugees from Haiti during the 1980s were turned away in great numbers. From this, some people concluded that the difference in treatment can only be ascribed to racism, since the Haitians were more noticeably of African descent. More often, however, the decisive consideration seems to be not the complexion of the immigrants but the political complexion of the governments in question. Generally, refugees from anti-capitalist countries like Cuba are readily categorized as victims of political oppression and allowed entry, while those fleeing from brutal pro-capitalist military dictatorships like Haiti during the 1980s are sent back (often to face incarceration or extermination). During the 1980s refugees from rightwing, client-states like El Salvador and Guatemala had a difficult time getting into the US, while refugees from Nicaragua—of the same Latino stock as the Salvadorans and Guatemalans—had relatively no trouble since they were considered to be fleeing a Communistic Sandinista government. Likewise, refugees from Eastern Europe were embraced with open arms when that region was socialist. But after Communist governments were replaced by conservative free-market ones, Eastern Europeans met with an unreceptive entry policy from the State Department. Far from being inconsistent, US policy in this area has been chillingly predictable.

### When Words Speak Louder than Actions

It should not go unnoticed that leaders occasionally do verbalize their commitment to making the world safe for the transnational corporate system. At such times words seem to speak louder than actions, for the words are an admission of intent. For example, as President Woodrow Wilson contemplated sending US troops as part of the expeditionary force of Western nations to overthrow the newly installed government in Russia in 1917, his Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, recorded in a confidential memorandum the administration’s class concerns. Lansing ignored all the blather that US leaders were publicly mouthing about Lenin and the Bolsheviks being German agents. Instead he perceived them to be revolutionary socialists who sought “to make the ignorant and incapable mass of humanity dominate the earth.” The Bolsheviks wanted “to overthrow all existing governments and establish on the ruins a despotism of the proletariat in every country.” Their appeal was to “a class which does not have property but hopes to obtain a share by process of government rather than by individual enterprise. This is of course a direct threat at existing social order [i.e., capitalism] in all countries.” The danger was that it “may well appeal to the average man, who will not perceive the fundamental errors.”<sup>18</sup> Almost four

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in William Appleman Williams, “American Intervention in Russia: 1917–1920,” in David Horowitz (ed.), *Containment and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 36, 38.

decades later, in 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower uttered a forbidden truth in his State of the Union message: "A serious and explicit purpose of our foreign policy [is] the encouragement of a hospitable climate for [private] investment in foreign nations."<sup>19</sup> In 1990, General Gray, commandant of the US Marines, observed that the United States must have "unimpeded access" to "established and developing economic markets throughout the world."<sup>20</sup>

US opinion makers treat capitalism as inseparable from democracy. The preferred terms are "free market," "market economy," "economic reforms," and "free-market democracies," labels that sound less capitalistic by appearing to include more people than just the Fortune 500. So President Clinton announced before the United Nations on September 27, 1993: "Our overriding purpose is to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based democracies."<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, the *New York Times*, supportive of the repressive and murderous measures perpetrated against parliamentary democracy by Russian president Boris Yeltsin in 1993, opined that "Yeltsin remains the best hope for democracy and a market economy in Russia."<sup>22</sup> Electoral democracy is useful when it helps to destabilize one-party socialism and serve as a legitimating cloak for capitalist restoration. But when it becomes an obstacle to untrammelled capitalism, democracy runs into trouble. Far from being wedded to each other, capitalism and democracy are often on a fatal collision course, as US leaders demonstrated in Guatemala in 1953, Chile in 1973, Greece in 1967, Indonesia in 1965, and in a score of other countries.

Another example of how the supporters of capitalism are coming out of the closet came to my attention in 1994 when I wrote a letter to Representative Lee Hamilton, then Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, urging normalization of relations with Cuba. He wrote back that US policy toward Cuba should be "updated" in order to "put Cuba in contact with the ideas and practice of democracy ... and the economic benefits of a free market system." The embargo was intended to "promote democratic change in Cuba and retaliate for the large-scale seizure of American assets by the Castro regime." Needless to say, Hamilton did not explain why his own government, having supported a brutal pro-capitalist Batista dictatorship in Cuba for decades, was now so insistent on installing Western-style democracy on the island. But he did let us know that a fundamental US commitment was to make Cuba safe for "a free market system."

Over the past decade US policymakers have explicitly demanded free-market "reforms" in one country after another in the former Communist nations of Eastern Europe. We no longer have to impute such intent to them. The most recent example is Yugoslavia. As Michel Chossudovsky notes, "multi-ethnic, socialist Yugoslavia was once a regional industrial power and economic success," with a 6.1% annual growth rate, free medical care, a literacy rate over 90%, and a life expectancy of 72 years. But after a decade of IMF restructuring, years

<sup>19</sup> *New York Times* (February 3, 1953).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Barnett, "The Uses of Force," p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> When the text of Clinton's speech was printed the next day in the *New York Times*, the sentence quoted above was omitted.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times* (October 5, 1993). For a full account of Yeltsin's repression, see my "Yeltsin's Coup and the Media's Alchemy," in Michael Parenti, *Dirty Truths* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), pp. 133-140.

of war, boycott, and embargo, "the economies of the former Yugoslavia are prostrate, their industrial sectors dismantled." None of this was a matter of simple happenstance. As early as 1984 the Reagan administration issued US National Security Decision Directive 133: "United States Policy towards Yugoslavia," labeled "secret sensitive." It followed closely the objectives laid out in an earlier directive aimed at Eastern Europe, one that called for a "quiet revolution" to overthrow Communist governments while "reintegrating the countries of Eastern Europe into the orbit of the World [capitalist] market."<sup>23</sup> The economic "reforms" pressed upon Yugoslavia by the IMF and other foreign creditors mandated that all socially-owned firms and worker-managed production units be transformed into private capitalist enterprises.<sup>24</sup>

In February 1999 US officials at Rambouillet made their determined goal of capitalist privatization perfectly clear. Chapter 4a, Article 1, of the Rambouillet "agreement," actually an ultimatum imposed upon what remained of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), stated in no uncertain terms: "The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles." There was to be no restriction on the movement of "goods, services, and capital to Kosovo," and all matters of trade, investment and corporate ownership were to be left to the private market.<sup>25</sup> In 2000, the "Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe," calling for "creating vibrant market economies" in the Balkans, was hailed by the White House for offering advice on investment to all the countries of Southeast Europe. That same year the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) inaugurated a fund to be managed by Soros Private Funds Management. Its purpose, as stated by the US embassy in Macedonia, is "to provide capital for new business development, expansion and privatization."<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile the Agency for International Development (USAID) announced its intention to undertake "assistance programs to support economic reform and restructuring the economy ... to advance Montenegro toward a free market economy."<sup>27</sup>

In April 2001, according to the London *Financial Times*, the newly installed rulers of Yugoslavia, beneficiaries of millions of dollars in US electoral funds, launched "a comprehensive privatization program as part of economic reforms introduced following the overthrow of former president Slobodan Milosevic." This included the sale of more than 4500 publicly-owned or worker-controlled companies to private investors.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sean Gervasi, "Germany, US and the Yugoslav Crisis," *CovertAction Quarterly* (Winter 1992–1993), pp. 41–42.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Chossudovsky, "Dismantling Former Yugoslavia, Recolonizing Bosnia," *CovertAction Quarterly* (Spring 1996); and Chossudovsky's "Banking on the Balkans," *THIS* (July–August 1999).

<sup>25</sup> *Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-government in Kosovo* (the "Rambouillet Agreement"), February 23, 1999, reproduced in full in *The Kosovo Dossier*, 2nd edn (London: Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Gregory Elich, "The CIA's Covert War," *CovertAction Quarterly* (April–June 2001), pp. 35–36.

<sup>27</sup> Elich, "The CIA's Covert War," pp. 38–39.

<sup>28</sup> *Financial Times* (April 11, 2001). By July 2001, the number of companies slated for privatization had grown to over 7000, according to a communication to me from Barry Lituchy, editor of *Eastern European Review*.

**“Conspiracy,” “Incompetence,” and “Inertia”**

In law, people are assumed to intend the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their actions. If they pursue acts that produce predictable outcomes, and avoid ones that would produce other outcomes, it is assumed that there is some link between their actions and their intent. But when one applies this principle to the US national security state, orthodox social scientists and media pundits dismiss it as “conspiracy theory.” Policies that produce undeniably unfortunate effects on others are explained away as “unintended consequences.” Of course, unintended consequences do arise, and upheavals do sometimes catch US leaders off guard, but that is no reason to reduce so much of policy outcome to stochasticism, to argue again and again that things occur by chance; stuff just happens, as innocently befuddled leaders grope about unburdened by any hidden agenda. To say, as I do, that US national security leaders know more, intend more, and do more than they let on is not to claim they are omnipotent or omniscient. It is to argue that US policy is not habitually misguided and bungling, although mistakes are made and indeterminacies certainly arise. US foreign policy is generally quite consistent and cohesive, a deadly success, given the interests it represents. Those who see it as repeatedly befuddled are themselves revealing their own befuddlement.

Sometimes policymakers themselves seize upon incompetence as a cover. In 1986 it was discovered that the Reagan administration was running a covert operation to bypass Congress (and the law), using funds from secret arms sales to Iran to finance counterrevolutionary mercenaries (the “Contras”) in Nicaragua and probably GOP electoral campaigns at home. President Reagan admitted full knowledge of the arms sales, but claimed he had no idea what happened to the money. He was asking people to believe these operations were being conducted by subordinates, including his very own National Security Advisor, without being cleared by him. Reagan publicly criticized himself for his slipshod managerial style and lack of administrative control over his staff. His admission of incompetence was eagerly embraced by various analysts and pundits who prefer to see their leaders as suffering from innocent ignorance rather than deliberate deception. Subsequent testimony by his subordinates, however, revealed that Reagan was not as dumb as he was pretending to be, and that he had played an active and deciding role in the entire Iran–Contra affair.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout its history the CIA and other agencies of the national security state have resorted to every conceivable crime and machination, using false propaganda, sabotage, bribery, rigged elections, theft, collusion with organized crime, narcotics trafficking, death squads, terror bombings, torture, massacres, and wars of attrition. At the same time, US leaders have pretended to have had nothing to do with such things. Their denials are to be expected, as are their claims that they were caught completely off guard by one or another event. No less a political actor than Henry Kissinger repeatedly pretended to innocent ignorance and incompetence when confronted with the dirty role he and his cohorts played in East Timor, Indochina, Chile, Bangladesh, and elsewhere. Kissinger’s writings and speeches are heavily larded with exhortations about the

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<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Marshall, Peter Dale Scott and Jane Hunter, *The Iran—Contra Connection* (Boston: South End, 1988); *Report of the Congressional Committee Investigating the Iran—Contra Affair* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987).

importance of maintaining the efficacy of US policy and the need to impress the world with the mettle of US resolve. As Christopher Hitchens observes, "... in response to any inquiry that might implicate him in crime and fiasco, he rushes to humiliate his own country and its professional servants, suggesting that they know little, care less, are poorly informed and easily rattled by the pace of events."<sup>30</sup>

Secrecy is another phenomenon that would suggest the existence of hidden agendas. If policymakers have nothing to hide, why do they hide so much? An estimated 21,500 US government documents are classified *every workday* of the year.<sup>31</sup> Some of these materials eventually come to light 30 or 40 years later—and can still be quite revealing. Thus, a recently uncovered October 1970 cable to CIA operatives in Chile from Kissinger's "Track Two" group states, "It is firm and continuing policy that [the democratically elected government of] Allende be overthrown by a coup ... We are to continue to generate maximum pressure toward this end utilizing every appropriate resource. *It is imperative that these actions be implemented clandestinely and securely so that the USG [United States Government] and American hand be well hidden.*"<sup>32</sup> If public utterances of policymakers represent their real intentions, if they have no hidden agendas, then why do they find it necessary to hide their actions not only from the US public but from their own staff.<sup>33</sup>

Sometimes outcomes are explained away as the result of a disembodied organizational inertia. With this mode of analysis there is no intentional human application to speak of. Interventions are said to occur because a national security agency wants to prove its usefulness or is simply carried along on its own organizational momentum, as supposedly happened with the CIA and Pentagon intervention in the Bay of Pigs. To be sure, organizational interests do come into play, but to see them as the predominant force behind policies is like claiming that the horses are the cause of the horse race.

### The "Other Variables" Argument

Some people might complain that the analysis presented here is simplistic and insufficiently nuanced because it ascribes all events to purely economic and class motives while ignoring other variables like geopolitics, culture, ethnicity, nationalism, ideology, morality and leadership psychology. It is a passion among certain academics to claim authorship to *nuanced* views. These views often turn out to be so much polished evasion whose primary function is to deny the existence of a material and economic base to any social conflict. Furthermore, what is more simplistic and mechanistic than to assume, without benefit of

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<sup>30</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), pp. 98–99.

<sup>31</sup> See Information Security Oversight Office, *Report to the President* (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1995 and 1996); Office of Management and Budget, "Information Security Oversight Office; Classified National Security Information," 32 CFR Part 2001, *Federal Register* 60:198 (October 13, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Cable of October 16, 1970, quoted in Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> See Daniel Elsberg, "Lying About Vietnam," *New York Times* (June 29, 2001).

empirical investigation, that a proliferation of variables *ipso facto* brings us closer to the truth? Such a question should be settled by empirical investigation rather than fiat.

In any case, I do not argue that the struggle to maintain capitalist global hegemony explains everything about world politics nor even everything about US foreign policy. However, it does explain quite a lot; so is it not time we become more aware of it and more willing to speak its name? If politically safe academics and other orthodox opinion makers really want to portray political life in all its manifold complexities, then we might expect that they be less studiously reticent about the immense realities of imperialism. They might consider how the process of global capitalist domination assumes many dimensions, including the economic realm as well as the political, military, and cultural domains.

The presence of other variables such as nationalism, militarism, the search for national security, and pursuit of power and hegemonic dominance neither compels us to dismiss economic realities nor to treat these other variables as insulated from class interests. Thus, to argue that US leaders intervene in one or another region not because of economic considerations but for strategic reasons may sound to some like a more nuanced view, but in most cases, empirical examination shows that the desire to secure or extend US strategic power is impelled at least in part by a desire to stabilize the area along lines that are favorable to politico-economic elite interests—which is usually why the region becomes a focus of concern in the first place. Various considerations are not mutually exclusive but work upon each other. The growth in overseas investments invites a need for military protection, just as military interventions open opportunities for overseas investment. All this, in turn, creates a need to secure bases and establish alliances with other nations, helping to expand the defense perimeter that must be maintained. So a particular country becomes not only an “essential” asset in the support of US defenses but must itself be defended, like any other asset.

To repeat, I am not denying that US leaders may have other concerns such as advancing their nation’s prestige, maintaining national security against potentially competing capitalist nations, developing strategic military superiority, distracting the American public from domestic problems and scandals, advancing the heroic macho image of the president, and the like. But these purposes almost always dovetail with dominant capitalist interests, or certainly do not challenge those interests in any serious way. No US president, for instance, would ever think of promoting his macho image by heroically supporting the cause of socialist revolution in this or any other country. That officeholders seek to achieve many other purposes, Ralph Miliband once noted, “should not obscure the fact that *in the service of these purposes*, they become the dedicated servants of their business and investing classes.”<sup>34</sup> The point is not that nations act imperialistically for purely material motives but that the ideological and psychic motives, embraced with varying degrees of sincerity by individual policymakers, unflinchingly serve the overall system-sustaining material interests of a particular class.

In sum, US politico-corporate elites have long struggled to make the world

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<sup>34</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 84 (italics in the original).

safe for the system of transnational corporate capital accumulation; to attain control of the markets, lands, natural resources, and cheap labor of all countries; and to prevent the emergence of revolutionary socialist, populist, or even military nationalist regimes that challenge this arrangement by seeking to build alternative or competing economic systems. To achieve this, a global military machine is essential. The goal is to create a world populated by client-states and compliant populations completely open to transnational corporate penetration, on terms that are completely favorable to the penetrators. It is not too much to conclude that such an activist and violent global policy is produced not by dumb coincidence but by conscious design.