

## **The Recovery of Internationalism: Stemming the Isolationist Impulse**

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From *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1994

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Summary: President Clinton has tried to pursue a foreign policy agenda even more ambitious than his predecessor's. But as international realities and domestic priorities become clear, he has been forced to retreat in area after area of policy. The resulting flips and flops of policy toward Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, North Korea, and China have undermined U.S. credibility. But more important, they risk making Americans turn inward in dismay, forsaking the prudent internationalism that has characterized American foreign policy since World War II. Let us abandon a kind of leadership we are not prepared to exercise on behalf of a world order the price of which we have no intention of paying.

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That American foreign policy stands in disarray and confusion is one of the few propositions on which a consensus exists in the country today. The flips and flops of policy toward Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, North Korea, and China, to mention only the more prominent examples, have elicited ridicule from all points on the political spectrum. The growing attention the president gives to foreign policy seems largely to respond to the pressures of domestic constituencies. It is as if President Clinton conceives his role to be that of a spiritual medium and has accordingly gathered round himself (hands clasped) a ramshackle collection of interest groups whose discordant voices from the netherworld are each allowed to dictate policy for a season.

But the president's problem goes deeper than his apparent belief that foreign policy can be successfully constructed by adding up the demands of domestic interest groups. His basic dilemma is rooted in the foreign policy agenda he embraced in his campaign for the presidency and in the impossible demands it has imposed upon him. Clinton's success in portraying Bush as a foreign policy president who was oblivious to the nation's domestic problems obscured the fact that the Democratic challenger's foreign affairs agenda was far more ambitious than that of the foreign policy president himself. Bush's internationalism was centered on his revival of the collective security idea: the notion that the United Nations, with the United States at the lead, would guarantee the territorial integrity and political independence of all members of international society (although in practice this idea was applied rather selectively).

Clinton's strategy in the game of political poker he played with Bush was to see all bets the incumbent had placed and then raise him. Clinton not only signed on to the idea of the "new world order," but added others that, taken together, amounted to a considerably more ambitious agenda. He would press the Chinese on human rights by linking improvements to renewal of China's most-favored-nation trade status, bring democracy to Haiti and Cuba by tightening the trade embargoes against both, and stop Serbian aggression in Bosnia by air strikes and by opposing any settlement that seemed to reward the Serbs for their misdeeds. There was scarcely any item on the wish-list of contemporary American internationalism, preventing aggression, stopping nuclear proliferation, vigorously promoting human rights and democracy, redressing the humanitarian disasters that normally attend civil wars, where Clinton promised a more modest U.S. role. On the contrary, the gravamen of the critique was that Bush had done too little, not too much.

The predicament in which this placed Clinton's incoming administration was clear enough. He could not ignore the promissory notes he had extended in foreign policy without severely damaging his credibility. However, he could not carry through on his foreign policy agenda without posing a radical threat to his desire to focus on America's internal renewal; the promise of internal renewal, he well understood, was the main reason for his election. Faced with a growing public mood of psychological disengagement from the world and confronted with resistance from both allies abroad and the U.N. Security Council to some of its favored projects, the administration retreated from its stated aims in area after area of policy.

This pattern of behavior has had two bad consequences. First, America has lost prestige abroad, stemming from the realization in foreign capitals that American policy cannot be taken at face value or need not be taken seriously (because, as J. P. Morgan said of the market, it fluctuates). The second is the effect on U.S. public opinion. The likely effect of an administration that repeatedly fails its own litmus tests is a further deepening of the insularity of the American people and its propensity for international disengagement.

Disillusionment with extravagant internationalism can easily foster disillusionment with a more moderate variety. It has done so before. When Woodrow Wilson articulated a similarly extravagant version of internationalism and proposed that the only alternative was a return to isolationism, he prepared the ground for the very reaction he most feared. Not only did the Senate reject the League of Nations and the promise of collective security it entailed, but public opinion also turned away from the commitment to the security of European allies, which represented the sensible middle ground of policy and was favored by moderate Republicans. Clinton's foreign policy, which has been avowedly neo-Wilsonian, courts a similar reaction. The danger is that its tactical retreats will turn into a rout, that the bases of a more moderate

internationalism will evaporate along with, and in reaction to, disillusionment with its repeated failure to achieve its neo-Wilsonian goals.

The task of policy is thus to save American internationalism from itself, to salvage it by reining it in. How that might be done can be seen in relation to three general issues for which a set of countries has become symbolic: democracy and human rights (Haiti, Cuba, and China), nonproliferation (North Korea and Ukraine), and intervention in civil conflicts (Bosnia and Somalia).

## SPREADING DEMOCRACY AND HUNGER

No American policy makes for a more depressing spectacle than that which the United States has pursued toward Haiti since the coup that ousted Jean-Bertrand Aristide from power in 1991. For nearly three years an economic war has been waged by the richest country in the hemisphere against the poorest, all in the name of "enlarging democracy." The contradictions in this policy are now legendary. Despite an evident interest in avoiding a large surge of Haitian refugees to this country, American policy has seemed calculated to encourage that very thing. The United States has avoided that result only by ringing the island with warships and refusing political asylum to most Haitian refugees. Haiti's thuggish rulers, the logic of U.S. policy appears to say, threaten everybody in general, but few people in particular. Those refugees are thus treated as economic migrants, whom we have no legal obligation to let in, despite being responsible for the desperate economic conditions that make them flee.

American policy has reached this impasse because of the belief that economic sanctions would restore Aristide if given a bit more time and fine-tuning. Yet given the objective, displacing those who exercise military control over the island, it is not possible to put serious pressure on the rich without squeezing the poor. At the same time, the fear of the ruling elites that they will suffer a flood of vengeance if they surrender, a fear that Mr. Aristide has done little to allay, save under open U.S. pressure, has made that surrender seem a dubious proposition indeed.

From the beginning, the logical terminus of this policy was force. But that too has drawbacks. It was long opposed by its putative beneficiary, Mr. Aristide, whose recent Delphic statement on the question (understood by the Security Council as indicating his endorsement of a U.S.-led invasion) provides ample room for back-sliding. Given the long history of Haitian nationalism and the deep suspicion with which Haitians look upon the motives animating the cold monster to the north, the prospects for a successful occupation of the country seem none too good. The military intervention would have to be undertaken in the teeth of U.S. public opposition, for Americans are

a long way from accepting the financial and human costs that are a necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) condition of a successful occupation.

Instead of advancing headlong into military intervention, the administration needs to reconsider the policy of fostering democracy through trade embargoes. Though ineffective in achieving the objectives of policy, such embargoes are terribly effective in inflicting grievous suffering on civilians, who are normally exempted in theory but never in fact from the reach of our sanctions. Attempting to extend democracy through trade embargoes violates two fundamental norms of the society of states, the prohibitions against intervention in the internal affairs of states and against doing harm to the innocent. Both, it may be noted, are rooted historically in internationalist doctrines.

Advocates of economic sanctions, whether against Haiti or China, have successfully defined the debate as being one between narrow self-interest and lofty ideals. If the United States is to be true to its 200-year heritage of freedom, they say, it must be willing to cut off economic ties with human rights abusers. The norm of nonintervention, according to this view, has little legal or ethical weight. Instead, nondemocratic regimes are considered illegitimate, their very existence violative of an emerging right to democratic governance. International law is held to approve every measure of harassment of such regimes short of actual invasion, including interdiction of their commerce by naval blockade. By promoting democracy through such methods, finally, we are supposed to further both our ideals and our security interests, because democratic states do not fight one another.

This consensus of opinion, I submit, is wrong, wrong in its understanding of the American tradition, wrong in its estimate of both customary and positive international law, wrong in its dismissal of the ethical basis of the nonintervention norm, and wrong in its characterization of American interests.

The democratists are right in only one thing: their estimate of the intrinsic value and potential exportability of American ideals and institutions. The constitutional principles on which this nation is founded, representative government, freedom of expression, the separation of church and state, the legal protection of private property and individual rights, have shown a remarkable ability to work their wonders in cultures vastly different from our own. Even if the whole package of American ideals and institutions appears as an alien imposition in some cultural contexts, or as dangerous to political stability if introduced all at once, it is difficult to think of any people in the world for whom the assimilation of at least some of these ideas into their governing practices would not be beneficial.

The idea that the principles underlying the American regime might have universal applicability is as old as the founding of the country. Yet for much of the nation's history, this belief existed happily alongside the idea that we had neither a right nor a duty to intervene in the internal affairs of other states. These ideas were not seen to be contradictory; indeed, they originated in the same school of thought. The commitment to nonintervention, for example, arose from essentially the same logic as the commitment to religious tolerance; both of these norms of Westphalian internationalism were imported into the American constitutional order. Denial of legitimacy to other forms of government and intolerance of religious heretics were seen to cause perpetual war, and that was deeply offensive to American constitutionalism and internationalism. Throughout our history, American diplomatic utterances have been filled with denunciations of those projects, whether of the right or left, associated with Jacobinism, the Holy Alliance, and Bolshevism, which refused to recognize the legitimacy of governments founded on principles different from their own. These projects, all of which fatuously promised perpetual peace once the revolution was perfected, were condemned as being repugnant, in Alexander Hamilton's words, to "the general rights of nations, to the true principles of liberty, and to the freedom of opinion of mankind." Though the norm against internal intervention has often been breached by the United States in this century, particularly in relation to the states of Central America and the Caribbean, it was only seldom formally disavowed.

It will be argued, to be sure, that rights to certain political goods have become peremptory norms of contemporary international law. There are three considerations, however, that severely weaken this claim. One is that the same charters and declarations that contain statements of the democratic entitlement also reaffirm, often in the strongest terms, the norm of nonintervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states, while taking no account of the apparent contradiction. This textual peculiarity bespeaks confusion, not consensus, in the law of nations. Secondly, nowhere in the charters and declarations that ostensibly speak for all mankind is authorization given to employ either economic or military coercion to fulfill the rights proclaimed. A more explicit statement on this point would seem to be required to overturn a rule long embedded in customary practice and positive law. There is a striking contrast, finally, between the purported near-universal agreement on these norms and the reality of profound disagreement among actually existing nations and regimes, particularly those from the Islamic, Confucian, and Hindu worlds. The suspicion seems justified that our legal experts have mistaken a consensus among themselves for a consensus in international society.

The traditional nonintervention rule always had an important ethical component, which derived from the contribution its observance would make toward peace. It was

based on the assumption that mankind would forever be riven into distinct collectives and that these entities needed rules of reciprocal conduct to regulate their inevitable competition. Given the heterogeneous and pluralistic makeup of this anarchical society, reason suggested the rule of mutual coexistence, of live and let live, and hence the de facto recognition of sovereignty and the adherence in good faith, if reciprocated, to the nonintervention norm. That reasoning remains highly relevant today. It seems obvious, to take only one example, that nothing would bring closer to fruition Samuel P. Huntington's prophecy of a "clash of civilizations" than a determined effort to deny legitimacy to nondemocratic states.

The second reason for questioning the ethical basis of this policy is that it seems inexorably to lead to the use of means that are intrinsically wicked. Such must we call means that lead to the foreseeable deprivation of civilians of food and medicine. It may well be that the effective conduct of foreign policy is inevitably associated with morally tainted methods. Nevertheless, resort to such methods needs to be sharply circumscribed by the test of necessity, a test that the democratist project does not meet. The attempt to extend democratic institutions through trade embargoes represents the commission of a certain evil on behalf of a good which such means seldom realize, not a good bargain even for Machiavellians and utilitarians, and clearly forbidden by the ethical traditions that do not allow good ends to justify evil means.

It should not be surprising that the violation of a rule having such strong legal and ethical supports should have consequences that bear adversely on our interests; and so this policy does. In the Caribbean, we inflict misery on larger and larger swaths of the population, in the perverse hope that things will become intolerable. In Asia, the policy bids us to impose restrictions on American companies faced by none of their competitors, with the accompanying risk of commercial and geopolitical marginalization.

American foreign policy would be better if it could find a standard in which we helped those states making the transition to freer markets and democratic institutions without undertaking warlike measures against nondemocratic states for the crime of being nondemocratic. Such a policy recognizes that the community of democratic states should elicit our deepest sympathies, and that we should want to protect the zone of peace, prosperity, and freedom that it represents. But we cross a clear line in waging war against our modern infidels and tyrants, even if the war is of the long-distance variety now favored.

By lifting sanctions against Vietnam and by delinking trade from human rights in its China policy, the Clinton administration moved much closer to a reasonable standard in its first 18 months. In the Caribbean, however, it persists with the democratist

project, leaving it with the choice of either continuing an inhumane policy or conducting a military intervention from which it understandably shrinks.

## PROLIFERATING INTERESTS

If extending democracy and human rights through economic sanctions has been the main project of the Democratic left, stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons, if necessary through preventive war, has emerged as the main fixation of the Republican right. A substantial number of critics have thus declared that the acquisition of nuclear weapons by North Korea ought in itself to be a *casus belli*.

The position of the hawks has had at least the merit of clarity. This was not true of the administration's position, which characteristically warbled between hawkish and dovish tones. In November 1993, Clinton declared that "North Korea cannot be allowed to develop a nuclear bomb," a position that then Secretary of Defense Les Aspin characterized as an "ultimatum," but which was followed shortly by the CIA estimate that North Korea probably already had one or two nuclear weapons. Moving away from the threat of force, the administration then focused on the threat of steadily tightening economic sanctions as a means of putting pressure on North Korea, a strategy supported by neither Japan, which was expected to cut off the important remittances its Korean minority sends to North Korea, nor China, which viewed the threat of total isolation as counterproductive. As always, the administration seemed to be caught between its embrace of an ambitious objective and the imperatives of multilateralism. It could not retreat without exposing itself to the ridicule of the hawks. It could not advance without seriously compromising its relations with China, Japan, and possibly South Korea.

The North Korean crisis has been significant not only because of its war-producing potential, but because its resolution will have important bearing on the nuclear nonproliferation regime, whose centerpiece, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is up for renewal in 1995. In most respects, the arguments over the significance of proliferation are not new and remind us that though the Cold War has ended, all the critiques of containment and deterrence that raged during the Cold War have enjoyed a widespread revival.

Of all the positions in this debate, that represented by the nuclear hawks seems most dangerous. Its two main alarms, of inevitable war once North Korea gets the bomb and of the destruction of our alliances with South Korea and Japan, have the character of self-fulfilling prophecies and would be most likely to transpire were the hawks' view to dictate American policy. The error in this analysis stems above all from its super-heated reading of the motives that led North Korea to want a bomb. Not even a

scintilla of fear is allowed to enter into the explanation of North Korean motives; instead, all its behavior is seen to stem from impulses of nihilistic aggression.

It is surely more plausible, however, to see North Korea's nuclear program as insurance against the strategic developments of the past five years, which bore witness to a steady worsening of its position and could not but appear as menacing to its political leadership. North Korea lost, and lost badly, the economic competition with the South. Its two protectors both turned away from it, the Soviet Union through its internal implosion and China through its opening of diplomatic and economic ties with South Korea. The loss of North Korea's strategic depth occurred simultaneously with the awesome demonstration of American power against a regime, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, with which North Korea was often paired in American thinking. Given the motives that this leadership imputed to the United States (which were, no doubt, of the same diabolical character as our hawks imputed to them), the pursuit of nuclear weapons plausibly offered them protection they could get nowhere else, even if it carried the risk of inviting the very attack they most feared.

This reading of North Korea's motives suggests that its acquisition of a nuclear capability is not a strategic danger meriting preventive war. Preventive war carries with it the serious risk of a catastrophe, because the North would set in motion its war machine in response, or the inevitably unilateral character of the action would destroy the confidence of Asian states in American leadership, or both. The threat posed by North Korea, though unwelcome, is deterrable. It needs to be met by military countermeasures (such as theater missile defenses and hardening against nuclear attack) rather than war, and by the declaration of U.S. solidarity with our allies in South Korea and Japan rather than the alarmist declaration that such a development would spell the end of our alliance system in East Asia.

The possibility remains that North Korea can be coaxed out of its nuclear ambitions. All of the interested Asian parties, China, Japan, and South Korea, wish to see a gradual evolution rather than a violent end to North Korea's plight and can offer genuine incentives to the North to comply. China's role, in particular, will prove crucial. But it needs to be understood that China cannot prevent North Korea from getting the bomb unless it offers itself as a substitute for the protection nuclear weapons are meant to provide. And China cannot play this role if it presses North Korea in the draconian fashion wished for by the United States.

The hawks have taken the view that the danger of North Korea's nuclear program lies not only in its capacity to destroy the balance of power on the Korean peninsula but also in its exportability. The prospect of an Islamic bomb, particularly an Iranian bomb, hovers about the Korean crisis and gives it an apparent urgency it would not otherwise have. But this danger too needs to be tempered by a dose of realism. Given

the general availability of technical know-how, it is most unlikely that the United States can prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons if it really wants to, even if we are prepared, as the hawks doubtless are, to wage preventive war against Iran as well.

The potential nuclear capabilities of North Korea and Iran are linked in one crucial respect. They both attest to the continuing need for the United States to extend its nuclear umbrella over nonnuclear states within its alliance system, in Western Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. Even though the risks for the United States entailed by such a policy are far less than they were during the Cold War, this conclusion will be unwelcome news indeed for both the nuclear hawks and the neo-isolationists. Both share, as they did during the Cold War, skepticism toward containment and nuclear deterrence. For the former, its riskiness offers a temptation toward preventive war; for the latter, its riskiness counsels withdrawal. Though the former course appears far more dangerous than the latter, extensive nuclear spread throughout the American alliance system would be destabilizing. The academic theorists of nuclear deterrence may be right in thinking that a nuclear peace rests upon solid foundations, and that the world should have no reason to fear a Japanese bomb, a Saudi bomb, or a German bomb, but fear them the world will.

If the policy of extended nuclear deterrence is accepted for the states within the American alliance system, it might seem an acceptable procedure to bestow the verbal pledge of protection everywhere we wish to prevent nuclear proliferation and thus, for example, protect Ukraine against Russia, or even less plausibly, Pakistan against India. The administration seemed to give such a guarantee in the January 1994 agreement ending the complicated negotiations it pursued with Russia and Ukraine to rid the latter territory of its nuclear leftovers. Though it remains unclear whether this pledge was in fact given by the United States, just as it remains unclear whether Ukraine intends to comply with the agreement (its parliament still having refused to ratify the NPT, which is a key condition of the entire package), it is doubtful whether American security is served by such an extension of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

This is so for three reasons. First, the credibility of the undertaking is highly suspect. There must exist profound doubts about the political will and military capability in back of a guarantee of Ukraine's territorial integrity and political independence. Second, given the skepticism that exists over the viability of extended deterrence within the older alliance system, stretching these doubts through the admission of many other states into the charmed circle (either by the indefinite eastern extension of NATO or through bilateral undertakings) might well detract from the credibility of the entire policy. Finally, the extension of a security guarantee to Ukraine throws the United States into the middle of vexing bilateral questions between Russia and Ukraine toward which the United States should observe a policy of neutrality. Ukraine's calculation of the benefits and burdens of keeping a nuclear weapons

capability to resist Russia should not be affected by pledges we have no intention of fulfilling and which force the American government to take positions on issues it is ill-equipped to understand, much less resolve.

This discussion of nuclear proliferation within a regional context shows how difficult it is to fashion a general policy regarding nonproliferation. Regional policy must involve the assessment and maintenance of the balance of power, the elaboration of spheres of influence, and plausible definitions of *casus belli*. The general U.S. policy toward nonproliferation, by contrast, seems hardly a policy at all but a stance of moral condemnation, resembling the old American doctrine of nonrecognition. The United States needs to fashion a policy that recognizes the value of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a way of building confidence for those states that genuinely abide by its terms, while also recognizing that a significant number of states will remain outside of the regime. Nuclear threats by states outside our security sphere to states within it should be met with containment and deterrence, not war or abandonment. That course represented the sensible middle ground of Cold War internationalism. We should return to it.

## PROBLEMS OF PEACE

The third general area that has bedeviled Clinton's foreign policy falls under the rubrics of "peacemaking" and "peacekeeping," exemplified by the crises in Bosnia and Somalia. The latter intervention, even if it accomplished little lasting good in Somalia itself, had at least the merit of inculcating some useful lessons. It showed the intrinsic difficulty of successfully intervening in civil wars and reconstructing failed states. It demonstrated the lack of public support for such missions once they encountered the inevitable setbacks and difficulties. It offered a case study of the limits of a foreign policy of crime and punishment. Finally, it led to a new directive on peacekeeping missions that wisely retreated from the overly sanguine expectations held by the administration when it began its term.

Somalia involved no great interest on the part of the United States; the intervention there could be abandoned with the same casualness as it was undertaken. In Bosnia, by contrast, crucial interests were at stake, though the administration's perception of what these were changed sharply over the course of its first 18 months. At the beginning, it saw the conflict as a clear-cut case of Serbian aggression. It considered the Vance-Owen plan, which promised 43 percent of Bosnian territory to the Serbs, a discreditable act of appeasement. The administration moved to establish a U.N. tribunal to try Serbs for war crimes, and it proposed to European allies a program for lifting the arms embargo on the Muslims and striking the Serbs with air power, with the ultimate aim of restoring Bosnia as a sovereign, multiethnic, and territorially intact state. The firm European rejection of "lift and strike" in May 1993 began a slow

evolution toward a much different policy, culminating in the partition plan (awarding 49 percent of Bosnia to the Serbs) jointly presented by the powers to the combatants in July 1994. The European order, the administration came to appreciate, required acting in concert with the European Union and the Russian Federation.

The movement of policy on Bosnia paralleled that which took place over human rights policy toward China and nonproliferation policy toward North Korea. In all three cases, there emerged a profound incompatibility between the administration's initial objectives and the requirements of acting multilaterally. In no case was it reasonable for the Clinton administration to believe it might achieve its initial goals save through unilateral action. In each case, moreover, unilateral action promised to endanger interests of greater weight than those that would be secured through such action. It was in the Bosnian crisis, indeed, that the weight of allied disapproval was felt most intensely by the administration. Once it became clear that the interests at stake in Bosnia concerned the future of the post-Cold War order in Europe, the administration evidently concluded, and for good reason, that it would be absurd to pursue a course of action that would estrange the United States from both Europe and Russia while drawing the nation, in a solo role, deeper into the Bosnian quagmire.

The ultimatum laid down by the powers in the summer of 1994 much resembled the method of the nineteenth-century European concert. By its very nature, the partition plan represented a compromise among the varied perspectives each of the major states brought to bear, but the plan was for that very reason fully satisfactory to none of these states, nor, of course, to the Muslims or the Serbs. The Clinton administration, as in other areas where it had retreated from its stated aims, was not well placed to defend the proposed accord, since the administration had previously condemned as unjust a proposed settlement (the Vance-Owen plan) that pressed even harder against Serbian interests. Given its own stated convictions, its case had to rest on the priority of order over justice, but its pronouncements seemed riven by the doubt that it could make that case persuasively to Congress or the American people.

It is typical of the Bosnian hall of mirrors that a plan initially condemned as a diktat imposed on the Bosnian Muslims should, at the end of the day, emerge as the means by which the Muslims might gain the lifting of the arms embargo. Even without that formal step, Bosnian military commanders believe that their position has stabilized and enables them to take the offensive. With their grudging acceptance of the peace plan, they have probably ensured that there is a limit to the reverses the United States would allow in the event their offensives failed and their position worsened. None of the things the United States did to improve the Muslim position in the past year, pressure on the Croats to join the Muslims in confederation, the access to arms that the Muslims gained from this re-alliance, and the U.S. commitment to the resupply of Muslim enclaves, appears threatened by the latest round of negotiations.

Nevertheless, there is reason for caution. First, the lifting of the arms embargo is likely to lead to much deeper U.S. military involvement, if only to counter the stepped-up military activity of the Bosnian Serbs. Second, it should be made clear to the Muslim leadership that a deepening of U.S. military involvement is conditional on their genuine acceptance of the peace accord. It is not enough for them to sign, while at the same time making declarations to the press that they consider their signatures as worthless as the whole agreement. Securing their agreement to limited aims, finally, is likely to prove indispensable in laying the diplomatic basis for continued European and Russian cooperation, as well as in securing Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's support for pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. The more extensive our war aims become, or the more unconditional our military support to the Bosnian Muslims, the greater the likelihood of increased intervention from Serbia itself and of the loss of diplomatic support from Europe and Russia. The maintenance of that concert, in the end, remains of far greater moment for European order and American interests than the precise disposition of the Bosnian civil war.

## INTERNATIONALISM RUNS AMOK

When the Cold War ended, the advance parties of American internationalism claimed a number of ambitious outposts. Deprived of the disciplining restraint once imposed by the Cold War, a great expansion took place in the objectives it seemed plausible for the United States to pursue in the world. The goals of that activist agenda are broadly identified with internationalism. The critique of this agenda, by contrast, is normally denigrated as isolationism. Yet in crucial respects the activist agenda is incompatible with the traditional meaning of internationalism. War or warlike measures against other states because of their undemocratic character violates the norm of nonintervention. Preventive war against nuclear proliferants violates the prohibition against the first use of force embedded in most past attempts to make the realm of power politics submit to law, a crucial feature of American internationalism in this century. These are basic rules in the internationalist understanding of the society of states, which has always occupied a middle position between realpolitik and revolution, the former holding that there are no legal and moral rules binding together the society of states, and the latter seeking the abolition of the state system by denying legal or ethical standing to the principle of sovereignty. It is difficult to see how a stable international order could be achieved today if the internationalist norms forbidding intervention and preventive war were continually violated by the world's most powerful state.

The activist agenda not only violates the traditional meaning of internationalism; it also regularly places the United States in opposition to allied states and other regional powers. Among the miracles it promises is a position of world leadership without any followers among the advanced industrialized democracies or the permanent members

of the U.N. Security Council. It has done so most strikingly in the Bosnian and North Korean crises, where the activist agenda is shot through with unilateralism. To lift the arms embargo against the Muslims in defiance of Britain, France, and Russia, to wage preventive war against North Korea in defiance of China, Japan, and South Korea, this agenda is at fundamental cross-purposes with a policy of internationalism, which has always been identified with the virtues of acting in concert rather than unilaterally.

The Clinton administration's dilemma in foreign policy may now be placed in clearer perspective. In its most serious external crises, it has found itself caught between its embrace of objectives that led inexorably toward unilateralism, and a modus vivendi that has emphasized multilateralism within both allied councils and the U.N. Security Council. Clinton probably realized that his domestic priorities would weigh down his foreign policy agenda, but he was doubtless unprepared for the opposition his activist objectives would elicit among the great powers, with whom good relations were usually important and sometimes crucial. The administration tried to square this circle in its first year, found that it could not, and subsequently tried to walk back the cat in several areas.

A retreat from the advanced positions taken at the outset of the Clinton administration was surely necessary. In retrospect, it seems like historical inevitability.

Unfortunately, there was no way to undertake this retreat without embarrassment; public relations offices cannot make contradictions at the core of a policy go away. Nevertheless, the administration has in many cases worsened its predicament by giving the appearance of being dragged, kicking and screaming, to a more limited and sensible policy. It could do worse than consult the advice of Richard Nixon, recalled by Henry Kissinger in his eulogy of the departed statesman: "The price for doing things halfway is no less than for doing it completely, so we might as well do them properly."

Far from representing the abandonment of internationalism, such a turn in policy is better understood as the recovery of it. Its philosophical attractiveness apart, it also carries with it a number of practical advantages. It does not continually raise the prospect of offensive war. It avoids the unpleasant and unanticipated consequences that normally follow from the pursuit of the activist agenda. It offers a basis for the continued well-being of America's alliances because it is based on the understanding that a condition for exercising leadership is to take allies' perspectives seriously. It requires only that we abandon the illusion of a kind of leadership we are not really prepared to exercise on behalf of a vision of world order the price of which we have no intention of paying.

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