Honduras y los Estados Unidos de América: un corto caso en las características de la construcción de imperios.
Honduras and the United States of America: a short case on empire-building features.

Sigfrido Burgos-Cáceres[*†]

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Resumen: Este corto artículo aclara características selectas de la construcción de imperios al observar la relación entre Estados Unidos y Centroamérica en general y con Honduras, en particular, a través de un estudio de caso. Se examinan brevemente las herramientas e intervenciones que permiten a los Estados Unidos mantener su imperio, que incluyen, pero no se limitan a, la extraterritorialidad, las acciones de políticas exteriores coercitivas, las multinacionales, los golpes de Estado patrocinados, los acuerdos de cooperación comercial y económica, y las guerras satelitales. Mientras se hace reflexión sobre las dinámicas de poder, autoridad y jerarquía, se contribuye a una comprensión más profunda de los procesos políticos, los diseños de políticas e implementaciones, y las instituciones políticas en América Central.

Palabra Clave: Honduras, Estados Unidos, Centro América, Imperialismo, Imperio, Poder

Abstract: This short review article elucidates selected empire-building features by looking at the intercourse between the United States and Central America in general and with Honduras, in particular, through a short case study. It briefly examines the tools and interventions that allow the United States to maintain its empire, which include, but are not limited to, extraterritoriality, coercive foreign policy actions, multinationals, sponsored coups d'état, trade agreements and economic cooperation, and proxy wars. While reflecting on power dynamics, authority, and hierarchy, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the political processes, policy designs and implementations, and political institutions in Central America.

Keywords: Honduras, United States of America, Central America, Imperialism, Empire, Power.

[*] Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome – Italy. Doctor en Políticas Agrarias, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas, Universidad de Roma, Italia. e-mail: sigfrido.burgos@fao.org
[†] The views expressed in this information product are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Rationale

The United States of America and Central American countries have had a chequered past. This review article elucidates selected empire-building features by looking at the intercourse between the United States and Central America in general and with Honduras in particular. The article starts off with a brief account of power, hierarchy, authority, and control. This is followed by brief overviews on selected empire-building features like extraterritoriality, coercive foreign policy actions, multinationals, sponsored coups d'état, trade agreements and economic cooperation, and proxy wars. Lastly, a conclusion offers summary findings, and reflections offer workable suggestions.

Methodology

This work is the result of a literature review that covers books, magazine essays, and scholarly articles. A number of keywords were typed into an online academic search engine to identify and select the most robust writings on the subject from experts and scholars. The headings were carefully chosen based on empire-building features that applied to Honduras in particular, but also to Central America in general. This work is merely descriptive and is not intended to assign blame to actors for the actions and intervention herein described.

Introduction

The supreme economic, military, and political power exercised by a single authority over several countries is contemporarily known as empire. It is important to clarify to readers that contemporary empires differ from classical ones. Classical empires were major political units having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority, such as an emperor or empress. There are four widely-known examples of classical empires: the British, Roman, Russian, and Spanish empires. In contemporary politics, empire is not an extractive system in which power, resources, and tribute flow from the peripheral regions to the metropolitan core, but instead consists of more diffuse and intertwined networks of hierarchy that generate privilege for a select few (Doyle 1986). Especially in the case of an empire, the skilful management of affairs between and within states is hinged on relationships of power.

In general terms, power is the production of numerous effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fates (Scott 2001). In 1947, Max Weber defined power as the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists" (Weber 1947: 52).

Ten years later, Robert Dahl proposed that power is best understood as "the ability of A to get B to do what B otherwise would not do" and that "a relation of power is knowable if and only if there is an observable and traceable connection between A and B" (Dahl 1957: 202-204). Richard Little, based on Waltzian conceptions of authority and control, notes that power flows one way when there is a large power differential between two states (Little 2007: 182) and Ian Hurd posits that the authority of power is "characterized by commands issued by one actor that are expected to be obeyed by a second" (Hurd 1999). It is evident from the above that power, for all it encompasses, is an essentially contested concept (Gallie 1956).

However, of relevance to this discussion is the fact that power, in its various forms, still exists even when those who dominate are not entirely conscious of how their actions and interventions are producing unintended effects (Bachrach and Baratz 1962: 952). In essence, power is best comprehended not from the viewpoint of the deliverer, but from the perspective of the recipient of the direct actions or the ones experiencing the interventions. Other scholars share this view. For instance, Kenneth Waltz (1979) assumes that a state with very extensive power resources can indeed have very large effects, often unintentionally, on states with very limited power resources, whereas the small states will have an insignificant impact on the larger state.

This is in fact the case of Honduras, and the large majority of Latin American states, in relation to the United States of America [USA] (LaFeber 1983). It is widely known that the USA has decisive advantages in the individual components of national power: demographic, economic, military, and technological (Brooks and Wohlforth 2005: 511), and it wields this power strategically and tactically to shape, as best possible, the outcomes of its

actions by channelling forces on predetermined paths. Clearly, influences are more easily disseminated on near rather than faraway spheres. For example, it is logistically easier for US agencies to deploy operatives, whether these are military or not, to close neighbours within the continent instead of trying to do so across the Atlantic or the Pacific (this is evident and most clearly visible by protracted US warfare operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and previously in Vietnam).

Prominent scholars including John Mearsheimer (2001) and Stephen Walt (1987) account for these geographical and material considerations in their theoretical constructs to better understand the substance, nature, and limitations of power projection, and its variegated results on foreign policy designs. These power wielding capacities are hinged on hierarchical conceptions (e.g. I am bigger, stronger, and tougher so you must follow my lead), and hierarchy is, and has always been, part of interstate relations (Galtung 1971). On this subject, David Lake (2003: 312-313) identifies continuums of hierarchical relationships that make sense of the various forms of restricted or mixed sovereignty that are observed in contemporary world politics. These relationship continuums are on economy, politics, and security. In the economic dimension, Honduras and the USA fall in the criteria of economic zone; in terms of political linkages, it is conceived as a mandate; and with regards to security affairs, the relationship is defined as a sphere of influence.

It is important for readers of diplomacy and international relations to understand the need for independence and the struggle for authority between sovereign states (Krasner 1999, 2001). The United States, as a regional hegemon, not only interferes in the internal affairs of Honduras (and other Central American states), but also validates its right to intervene through conspicuous, coercive foreign policy actions. The specific relationships between these and other states are firmly hinged on the extent of authority, control, and hierarchy of the dominant actor on the subordinate one (Jackson 1990; LaFeber 1994). In recent past, the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and the United States in Latin America were two of the most cited examples of dominant powers exerting coercive foreign policies on subordinate states (Triska 1986).

More specifically, the United States, with its large domestic market, relatively tolerant values, multiculturalism, and geographical closeness to Central America, makes it the most likely candidate with which to engage in substantial relations that go far beyond economics and trade. This position grants the USA with enough latitude to constrain the authority and power possessed by the subordinate party in the areas of economic and foreign policy, therefore limiting Honduran rights to make unencumbered decisions in economic, political, and security affairs. This phenomenon is not new. The best example can be the USA and Latin America under the Monroe Doctrine. In 1823, US President James Monroe (1817-1825) launched his Doctrine arguing that the USA would ensure that the existing balance of power in the western hemisphere would remain unchanged. This was to be principally done by resisting any attempts by the Europeans to control or repossess states that had established their independence. Furthermore, the Monroe doctrine of the 1820s and the westward expansion in the 19th century stemmed in part from the United States' desire to prevent any European power from establishing a presence that could menace United States' near interests (Merk 1966; Jervis 2003: 370). Put simply, the establishment of strongholds on its near-abroad awarded the United States a sense of security by bulwarking threats and making transatlantic interventions less palatable.

Then, as now, the dynamic international activism of the United States was solidly grounded on three primary ends: security, order, and peace. These are fundamentally essential features for United States-led democratic capitalism to flourish and spread over the world. In fact, United States' global domination has two major goals: spread liberal democracy and maintain primacy. It is this ideology that US decision makers have come to believe—that their country should be economically, diplomatically, and militarily involved on the world stage. To do so, Barnett and Duvall (2005: 66) argue that compulsory and institutional powers share a role with how the USA is able to sustain dominance in international affairs in ways that influence the foreign policies and even domestic political arrangements of other states.

The following pages will delve into brief explorations of selected empire-building features that are most visible in Honduras, but that also apply to a large number of Central American countries. While it is true that these features limit the breadth of this discussion, they do however provide the reader with the necessary information on the relations between the United States, its private sectors, and the Honduran governments.

Extraterritoriality

Kal Raustiala (2009: 5) argues that one of the most widely accepted propositions in the modern world is "that states have borders, and that these borders determine the limits of their sovereign domain." Territoriality—the organization and exercise of power over a defined space—lies at the centre of most legal systems, including that of Honduras and the United States. In fact, territoriality is the most acknowledged form of jurisdiction, yet it is far from being an inviolable principle. To be sure, there is a fundamental way that the linkage between law and land can be broken, and this occurs when domestic laws extend beyond sovereign borders. This is known as extraterritoriality. Garrett Mattingly (1988: 236) notes that in many respects the development of extraterritoriality was an outgrowth of Westphalian territoriality that emerged in 1648, after thirty years of wars.

Extraterritoriality is a strategy to manage and minimize legal differences. In essence, a strong state projects a small and selective realm of domestic laws into a weaker foreign state so that it can better advance its interests (Raustiala 2009: 21). The sending state (in this case the USA) retains some legal authority under grants and treaties agreed with the host nation (e.g. Honduras). But this is not entirely accurate as there are areas where combinations of laws apply. For instance, Neuman (1996) lists a number of anomalous zones within territories that do not fall under domestic laws: all foreign embassies, UN agencies headquarters and regional offices, runways and selected parts of international airports, and military bases, to name a few. Today, the USA has some 766 bases in over forty foreign states (Zakaria 2008: 238). These military bases enjoy treaty-based special immunities ensuring that United States' law applies extraterritorially to US troops (Raustiala 2009: 128). In Honduras, for example, the Soto Cano Air Base (more commonly known as Palmerola) became operational in 1981.

The US government used Palmerola in the 1980s as a base of operation to support its foreign policy initiatives. Nowadays, it is a launching point for its 'war on drugs' efforts in Central America as well as humanitarian aid missions. John Woodliffe (1992: 257) claims that throughout history "overseas military bases exist almost exclusively within the context of empire."

Bases are just but a form of extraterritoriality. In rare instances Western powers have created international zones (Tangier) or international settlements (Shanghai). These were areas carved out and administered directly by foreign powers (Raustiala 2009: 17). Other states have also experienced territorial intrusions. Black (2008: 144) notes that the USA acted "unilaterally as a regional power in Latin America" in general and in Central America in particular, with the occupation of Nicaragua in 1912-1933, but later withdrawing. This comes as no surprise. The United States, after all, has used its position of power after the Second World War to establish international governance mechanisms that simultaneously preserve and diffuse its multiple types of power (Ikenberry 2001, 2003).

One year later, Bacevich (2002) similarly argued that the United States' empire expands through global institutions that creates 'open spaces' that the USA can coerce and dominate, while Charles Krauthammer (1990/1991) concurs by arguing that the USA emerged from the cold war the most powerful country on the planet which emboldened Washington to pursue a strategy of global domination. The justification is succinctly laid out by Alexander Wendt, who argues that "states are security-seeking agents that want to preserve what they already have" (Wendt 1999: 102). While this is understandable, not all states agree. The former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya Rosales made a formal request to disband all US operations from Palmerola.

While facing mounting criticism, Richard Little (2007: 155) argues that the USA is "finding it necessary to insist that it is operating overseas in good faith as a member of the international community." John Ruggie (1993) studied the many modern problems of territoriality and constitutionality in international relations, and his reasoning suggests

that extraterritoriality can be interpreted as a tool to expand empire given that it is an extension of a centralized, territorial state that maintains tight control over others.

Moreover, the phenomenon of extraterritoriality, which is by all measures a manifestation of classical and modern imperialism, produces in the host nation-state: (a) weaknesses in institutionalism, (b) problems in the development of civil society, and (c) difficulties to build indigenous real governance that can be trusted.

Coercive foreign policy actions

While statecraft is normally thought of as the skilful management of cordial relations between states, very few would agree that interstate relations are always benign. States, like people, have ulterior motives, and to achieve specific ends the means can range from plainly innocuous to downright coercive. This section deals with the latter. Coercive foreign policies are defined as the means to getting state and non-state actors to act a certain way, normally against their wishes (Schelling 1967; Byman and Waxman 2002). Coercive policy actions are an increasingly "attractive strategy as it offers the possibility of achieving one's objectives economically...with less risk of conflict escalation" (Art and Cronin 2003: vii). Kenneth Schultz (2001) explored the effects of democratic politics on the use of coercive diplomacy in international crises. He argues that in emergency situations, when predetermined outcomes depend on a series of sequenced events, coercive diplomacy takes precedence over more cursory policy instruments, especially if the possibility of political backlash is rather low.

The practice of coercing Central American countries to acquiesce on unusual proposals is an old habit of the USA. On letters dated August 26 and September 18, 1862, US government officials reported back to the Department of State on a series of conversations with the President of Honduras in relation to the potentially adverse public opinion on a proposed colonization of persons of African descent in Honduras and other Central American countries (USG 1862: 887-888). More recent examples relate to conditionality of loans, withholding of humanitarian aid, stricter phytosanitary inspections of imports at entry points (ports), massive deportation of illegal

immigrants, delayed disbursement of agreed financial assistance, and revocation of visas. For instance, in 2009 the Obama administration suspended the issuance of visas to Hondurans. It would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of this action to a country like Honduras where industry captains, the political elite and their spouses and children are accustomed to travel nonstop to Atlanta, Houston and Miami for business or pleasure. Also, the US government has used endorsements of leaders at the Organization of American States to propose or suppress political figures (Bulmer-Thomas 2010: 23-29). But these actions are not limited to Central America. The United States also helped Bolivia, in 1967, to "suppress Ernesto Guevara's attempt to stage communist insurrection among the Bolivian peasantry" (Black 2008: 179).

According to Mearsheimer (2011) the White House proponents of 'grand strategy' believe that the USA has the right as well as the responsibility to interfere in the politics and domestic affairs of other countries. In fact, there is a wide belief that the key to success in promoting democracy across the globe is removing obfuscating tyrants and replace them with pro-USA leaders; just like President Hamid Karzai was installed in Afghanistan. This phenomenon of leadership selection is partly explained by Hedley Bull (2002) who rightly notes that "because great powers are seen to have a duty to manage the international society, they are accorded a number of rights," such as the establishment of spheres of influence. Clearly, for the USA, regional leadership is both a responsibility and an unparalleled opportunity.

Even in the 1960s Edward Carr had already distinguished between economic wealth, military force and public opinion or propaganda as sources of power corresponding respectively to the actual or threatened deployment of 'nonviolent' sanctions, violence, and 'normative pressures' (Carr 1964). Moreover, Barnett and Duvall (2005: 41) note that the USA is able to use its military power to influence others to change their foreign policies, and also of non-state actors that name and shame abusive governments so these alter their human rights or obtrusive economic policies. With weak states is easier: calls for strong labour and environmental standards in trade

accords are almost enough for countries to kneel. In the end, it is not uncommon to read in popular magazines and newspaper that the USA uses coercive diplomacy to get what it wants in geographical areas that represent strategic national interest. Honduras is, like other republics in Central America, a useful case that exemplifies this behaviour and brings to light the breadth and depth of action available to great powers to advance their narrow objectives.

Multinationals

Business affairs of multinationals in Latin America are understood as profit-seeking actions by goal-oriented actors that are constrained by the regulatory acts of local policymakers and competing domestic firms (Grosse 1989: 1). More specifically, the political economy of foreign direct investments by United States' multinational corporations is belied by a desire to strengthen interstate interdependence and an accelerated expansion of US firms abroad, with the aim of reducing onerous compliance with United States' rules and regulations (Gilpin 1975). Other foreign commentators make bolder statements, linking international investments to colonial control (Frieden 1994). Nevertheless it remains true that economic incentives are powerful incentives.

In the case of Honduras, during the late 19th century, productive structures were oriented towards mining (gold and silver) under capitalist forms of exploitation. From the beginning of the 20th century Honduras became known a 'banana republic' as a result of large-scale production of this fruit under the dominance of US investments: Cuyamel Fruit Co., Standard Fruit Co., and United Fruit Co. These companies consolidated their control over Honduran political life and were largely able to manipulate government personnel to fully secure their narrow interests (Posas and Fontaine 1980: 46-47; Acker 1989). Of these three, the specific interests of the United Fruit Co. were protected by the United States' government, with the US Army invading Honduras in 1903, 1912, and 1919 (Jones 2005: 263). Later, during the 1950s and 1960s, fruit companies and other powerful multinationals (e.g. Coca-Cola Co., Morgan & Co.) had significant influence in the selection of senior government officials and even presidents (see sponsored coups below).

By the 1980s, it became clear that the behaviour and structure of global capitalism substantially determined the capacities and resources of actors and networks. This meant then, as it means now, that multinational corporations can use their control over vast resources and lobbying capabilities to shape the foreign economic policies of developing states, as well as global economic policies through institutional interdependence with powerful states.

In the 1990s international financial institutions advocated on behalf of multinationals for the establishment of industrial processing zones or zips (Spanish for zona industrial de procesamientos), which enjoyed tax exemptions and other preferential treatments to firms that signed long-term lease contracts. Zips became rapidly populated with United States' and Asian garment assembly plants or maquilas that not only generated non-farm employment to thousands of women but also attracted badly needed foreign currency to honour debt payments.

As years passed, it became evident that these US firms needed low-cost labour to remain competitive just as much as the country needed United States' multinationals to provide jobs, generate income and win electoral votes in the coastal areas. The situation turned sensitive when countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Vietnam started competing with Central American destinations. So, is Honduras locked in a relationship of servitude? The answer is probably so. According to Lloyd Gruber (2000) strong states undertake a course of action that subsequently shapes future outcomes of others, and that weak states go along with an agreement that, in all likelihood, may leave them worse off, because to oppose will only cost them more in the long run. In the context of global capitalism, Peter Gowan (2003) notes that United States' foreign policies directly and indirectly generate a particular set of socio-political positions and practices for the USA in a subjugated relationship to the structurally disadvantage and vulnerable.

Other scholars note that the USA has demonstrated its capacity and will to structurally organize globalization in ways that push forward its interests (Rosenberg 1988a). In fact, United States' economic policy mixed

regulation with the "championing of free mobility of capital abroad so as to shape the conditions of the global market in a way advantageous to US interests" (Gill 2003: 249). Few would disagree that Honduras receives much attention from United States' investors owing to its proximity to US mainland, and that most of these investment proposal take advantage of an unskilled labour force demanding low wages. For example, according to the US Department of Commerce, on a historical cost basis, the stock of United States' investments in Honduras at the end of 2008 was $700 million. Most of these investments have been in agriculture and manufacturing.

As Honduras struggles with poverty (65% of the population living below the poverty line), high unemployment (29% for men and 63% for women), moderate economic growth (6% per year from 2004 to 2007, 4% in 2008, 1.9% in 2009, and 2.6% in 2010), and low per capita incomes ($1,830 at official exchange rates), these proposal, no matter how disadvantageous they turn out to be, will be hard dismiss.

Sponsored coups

In the 1950s, and even to this day, Latin America was part of what many United States' politicians saw as an informal United States' empire, which encouraged and justified recurrent interventions. During the Cold War, this notion was further accentuated by concerns about the alleged communist leanings of populist regimes. For instance, in 1954, the Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz was committed to land reforms and this was seen by the United States as pro-communist. This led the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to establish an opposition by arming, funding, organizing and training troops that culminated in an invasion of Guatemala from Honduras. Under this coercive pressure, the Arbenz administration was deposed by the Army, and a military dictatorship was eventually created (Black 2008: 178). In the western hemisphere, the USA "seriously contemplated preventive war against nondemocratic regimes" such as Cuba and arguably democratic countries like Chile, Guatemala and Nicaragua (Nathan 2002: xviii-xix).

A series of US covert interventions were also launched in Chile (1973),

Haiti (1994) and Panama (Mearsheimer 2011: 20, 29). As for Honduras, it has experienced six coups d'état: on 21 October 1956 against Julio Lozano Diaz; on 3 October 1963 led by Colonel Oswaldo López Arellano, with backing from the USA, against Ramon Villeda Morales; on 4 December 1972 led by a military junta against Ramon Ernesto Cruz; in 1975 led by General Juan Alberto Melgar Castro, and in 1978 under Policarpo Paz Garcia (Rosenberg 1983). The latest coup occurred on 28 June 2009 led by General Romeo Vasquez Velasquez against Manuel Zelaya Rosales (famously known in United States' newspapers as Obama's first coup). Evidently, it is not possible to verify that all coups were US-sponsored; however Thyne (2010) confirms the conventional wisdom that "pressure from the USA plays a key role in stabilizing favoured leaders and destabilizing un-favoured leaders," yet these pressures have not worked well against leaders in Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela who are outspokenly critical of United States' policies in Latin America.

While it would be wrong to apportion blame without evidence, it is not incorrect to consider these actions as pure brigandage—a selfless robbing of the democratic process carried out in time of disarray by great powers against helpless neighbours. The USA could not have aided these coups in absence of accomplices with something to gain from regime change. The emergent Honduran bourgeoisie adopted three basic strategies for gaining access to the apex of the state: pliant compliance to capricious wishes of the USA (Karl 1995), a tight merger with established power holders, and direct entrance to political elites through legislature. For example, today a Congressional seat in Honduras costs one million Lempiras, a price not outside the reach of industrialists. The creation of a range of personal links with policymakers and the joining of 'selective' elite groups give rise to what is called 'capitalistic favouritism.' Unsurprisingly, most evidence suggests that the regulation of regional economies and political landscapes is accomplished through a mixture of coercion and consent (Fossum 1967).

To this end, the United States has on occasion demonstrated a willingness to use its military power to maintain economic and socio-political stability to smoothen the environment under which

one-sided commerce and trade occurs. Furthermore, the USA does not seem to be interested in establishing enduring cooperative links with Honduras. The United States' focus on Central America has always been short-lived; especially after 11 September 2001, attention slumped. Observers argue that great powers fear that cooperation can lead to abuse and dependency, and for those reasons prefer to push in the direction of self-sufficiency or to engage in "imperial thrusts to widen the scope of their control" (Waltz 1979: 106). As John Ikenberry (2003) rightly asserts, the core problem is that by turning a blind eye to military coups, the US violates fundamental norms and rules among nation-states that results in an erosion of United States' credibility to commitments on a wider array of agreements and understandings.

Trade agreements and economic cooperation

It is widely acknowledged that market forces can create dependent relationships that limit the scope of choices of weaker states. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, for instance, commented on how enduring systems of exchange and interdependence can be mediums to exercise power (Keohane and Nye 1977). The consumption-oriented markets in the USA absorb most of the export supplies from surrounding countries and can thus freely dictate the terms of trade. For example, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) was marketed as a general lowering of tariffs aimed at opening markets for products and services to propel economic growth, however the low competitiveness of economic sectors in Central America allowed only for marginal increases in exports to already saturated United States' markets, but was a carte blanche for an avalanche of inexpensive imports to flood local supermarkets (Spotts 2005).

Jaramillo and Lederman (2006: 4) note that "Honduras has achieved the highest degree of trade openness relative to its level of income, but it is also the country with the weakest record of growth in Central America since the early 1990s." According to a 2008 study by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) titled *Trade, Growth and Gender in Developing Countries: A Comparison of Ghana, Honduras, Senegal and Uganda,* Honduras has a trade openness ratio of 0.93 and is

presented as the most open economy in Central America and among the most open in the world.

More generally, due partly to Preferential Trade Agreements, Mexico and Central America ushered in five years of stagnation (1998-2003) and rising poverty rates (Bulmer-Thomas, 2010). Earlier, Edward Carr (1964) had claimed that ideologies such as free trade are part of power politics precisely because they can lead indoctrinated states to consent to 'new forms' of economic relations that insert them into 'new relations' of dependence and exploitation.

According to Stephen Gill and David Law, it is a hegemonic system that serves the objective interests of the capitalists at the direct expense of the objective and unrecognized interests of the labor-providing and producing classes of the world, thereby disposing actions toward the reproduction, rather than the substantial transformation, of the global capitalist structures and its conspicuous relations of domination (Gill and Law 1989). However, impact has been widespread: free trade has devastated US farmers who are undercut by South Americans—not necessarily a bad event for producers in Latin American states.

Seven years later, Immanuel Wallerstein argued that structures of production generate particular positions for states in the world-system that generates commensurate sets of identities and interests, and that those in the subordinate positions adopt ideologically spun conceptions of interests that support their own domination and their lesser position in that system (Wallerstein 1996). The role played by multinationals working within the framework of trade agreements and 'special' economic cooperation is seen as denying states the power to decide what sort of economic activity is conducted within their borders and under what conditions. Under the shield of free trade, countries have reduced their tariff barriers and cast their not-always competitive producers onto the free market, oftentimes with negative domestic short-term consequences.

North America has shown a preference for trade blocs that are "exclusivist in their intent, designed to promote the interests of the member states through the promotion of free trade within the

bloc" at the expense of weak outsiders (Gill 2003: 228-229).

The pervasiveness of these selectively utilitarian initiatives goes back to the 1850s. A case in point is Honduras. Its position in relation to the other republics of Central America is that of buffer state; for this reason, in 1853, the government of Honduras entered into a contract with a United States' company for the construction of a railroad to be known as the InterOceanic, extending from Puerto Cortes, on the Atlantic coast, to the Bay of Fonseca, on the Pacific. This project never took off as it encountered opposition from powerful United States' interests engaged in infrastructure construction in Panama (MacClintock 1911: 216-217). Almost 160 years later the situation remains very much the same. In the end, it will not take long for powerful states to realize that 20th century capitalism cannot meet the economic and social challenges in an era when command and control is giving way to a compunctious, networked world citizenry.

Proxy wars

During the 1970s and 1980s, alongside heightened tensions of the Cold War, the use of guerrilla struggles by major powers played out in Honduras and Nicaragua. The United States used south-eastern Honduran territory as a launch pad "to destabilize the left-wing Sandinista government of Nicaragua" through armament, training and deployment of Contras (Black 2008: 177). The rationale behind regime changes in Central and South America was to hold proxy wars against the Soviet Union, as it was seen as slowly seeding communism within the sphere of influence of its archenemy. To stamp out the 'disease' before it would spread to other fragile democratic states, the USA acted resolutely to bulwark ideological contestation. This was sensible because states operate in relatively uncertain environments owing in part to the difficulty of measuring power, and as a consequence, to maintain their peripheral security, their optimum strategy is to maximize their power positions (Morgenthau, 1973).

In reaction to these imminent threats, Noam Chomsky (1985: 98) notes that USA-sponsored "domestic security agencies were established in Guatemala, Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica and 'would meet every three months under the supervision of the State Department'

and exchange information and methods of operation." Surprisingly, in Honduras and Nicaragua, neither the US-sponsored Contras in the 1980s, nor United States' trainers, nor even USA-trained forces were sufficient for "an early realization of the goal of achieving non-communist, stable, democratic governments." However, in 1990, in Nicaragua, the USA did achieve eventual success in that the government of Sandino agreed to hold elections that resulted, finally, in their defeat (Nathan 2002: 158).

After much effort and resources directed at threat mitigation, the USA realized that a long-term approach was indeed required. To overcome the tight-fisted Nicaraguan government, the United States had to first surround and then attack the country from "CIA-controlled sanctuaries in Honduras and El Salvador, from where pilots flew weekly deep into Nicaragua to supply Contra forces" (Chomsky 1985: 129). Now, as then, the watch over these areas continues, not against communists but in search of drug smugglers, given that in the late 1970s Honduras emerged as a cocaine transhipment point between Colombia and the United States (Rosenberg 1988b: 143). Later, in the 1980s, the United States' Doctrine of the period was understood in Central America as an attempt to deepen democratic capitalism, quite similar to the rather extraordinarily radical plan in contemporary times to transform the entire Muslim and Arab world at the point of a weapon.

In an investigation of the actual and potential consequences of democratizing interventions by liberal states from 1946 to 1996, Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny (2006) concluded that these idealistic interventions "rarely played a role in democratization of states since 1945." For example, Jerome Slater argues that during the cold war, United States' policymakers drew on a rich menu of metaphorical sources to justify and bolster their policy in Central America (Slater 1987: 195). More recently, a shift in the weight of United States foreign policy from multilateral to unilateral mechanisms provides partial cause for commentators to label the USA an empire, just as in the mid 1980s it earned the term 'obnoxiously overbearing'. Robert Jervis (2003) argues that this move erodes legitimacy and the value of United States' cultural products, whereas Brooks and

Wohlforth (2005: 519) politely disagree, counter-arguing that numerous "compensatory strategies might mitigate the legitimate costs of unilateralism."

To not be too unfair with the USA, scholars do argue that increased power "permits wider ranges of actions" and "a bigger stake in the system with an improved ability to act for its sake" (Waltz 1979: 194). Understandably, the United States thought best to work on prevention rather than reaction.

Conclusions

The international arena is a self-help system where states look out for their own interests, and the United States leverages the strengths and weaknesses of this system to pursue its most convenient agenda. If there is any region in the world where the USA is expected to be hegemonic, it is in Central America (Bulmer-Thomas 2010: 15). As a regional hegemon the USA introduces division and discord in Latin America to discourage the integration of the continent. It does this through empire-building features, as noted in the above sections. Much of the discourse on the existence and nature of United States' empire rests on its apparent quest to use, ad libitum, coercion and intimidation if and when necessary to develop and sustain its supremacy over other regions and states (Doyle 1986; Keohane 1984). A number of former Bush Administration officials disagreed. One of these was Donald Rumsfeld, who, during a blitzkrieg of questions by journalist, quipped furiously that the United States is not seeking empire (Suskind 2004). Whether this is true or not is not the point, since "a state that has no intention of creating or maintaining an empire might nevertheless exercise direct controlling effects that are nearly identical to those who do" (Barnett and Duval 2005: 62-63).

Previously, historians established a balance of power model to account for the development of international relations in South America during the 19th century (Burr 1955), but there is not a comprehensive analysis for Central America. A sober examination of power dynamics that define these relationships to the USA is urgently warranted. For the moment, a general use of scholarship is useful to better understand hegemonic drivers: both Hans Morgenthau (1973:211) and Paul Schroeder (1992:691) argue that states profess an interest in preserving

equilibrium in order to disguise their real interest in establishing or maintaining hegemony. Similar conclusions have been advanced by others too. For example, Susan Strange (1989) asserts that the USA is the epicentre of a transnational empire that gives it the ability to shape economic, financial, knowledge, productive, and security structures, which, in turn, operate to exclusive United States' advantage and chokes opportunities to other countries.

Colin Elman (2004: 563) argues that the USA was only able to achieve regional hegemony due to the "absence of either local or extra-regional balancers," while Christopher Layne (2006) insists that the United States has "pursued a grand strategy of primacy or global hegemony" since the 1950s. International relations doyens note that the USA could best seek to realize its interests through its demonstrable ability "to shape international institutions" and not "through the exercise of military power" (Fukuyama 2006). Mearsheimer (2011: 31) agrees that the USA should "rely on diplomacy and economic statecraft, not military force." In reference to the third world, Francis Fukuyama (1989) notes that "the vast bulk of it is very much mired in history," but he is still hopeful that "peace and western liberal democratic ideals" will eventually permeate throughout the developing world.

In the past, other commentators have agreed along similar lines. Hans Morgenthau believed that "poverty and misery are largely man-made and can be remedied by man" (Morgenthau 1973: 352). At present, there is an unaccustomed atmosphere of ambivalence, strife and self-doubt as the USA encounters new limits to its power. Some observers warn that the USA in on decline, but David Bell (2010) argues that this "history of pessimistic overreaction" does not portray the real geopolitical positioning of the country. More recently, John Mearsheimer (2011: 17) calls attention to findings of a survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs that "looking forward 50 years, only 33 percent of Americans think the United States will continue to be the world's leading power." These are sobering news for both neoconservatives and liberal imperialists huddled in Washington.

As things stand today, the USA faces deep, structural economic problems,

strong challenges from China and India, and the continuing dilemma of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Islamic terrorism. Economic uncertainty and United States' waning influence abroad may very well bring a mixed bag of bad and good news to Latin America, in general, and to Honduras, in particular.

In sum, power relations are a defining feature of interstate rapprochements in the global system. To protect its interests, powerful states recur to extraterritoriality to manage or minimize legal differences which gives rise to military bases and international zones. Because state sovereignty is compromised with these incursions, great powers like the USA choose to apply coercive foreign policy action to attain its goals. Starting in the early 1800s, US governments have been advancing the interests of brokers, merchants and traders, and now, of multinationals. Leaders that threaten commerce are deposed, and if it is too difficult to do so, trade agreements and armed conflicts are used.

Reflections

Over the past two decades, Central American republics have confronted soaring crime rates partly owing to low per capita incomes, rising unemployment, drug trafficking, and criminal group vendettas, among other factors. Crime, in all its dimensions, impacts public trust in already fragile justice systems (Malone 2010: 99). For example, the judicial system of Honduras is weak and of dubious quality. It provides minimal protection to citizens against an ongoing crime crisis, despite substantial domestic and international investment in justice reforms. Indeed, there is growing concern that more visceral criminality can end up undermining justice reform efforts and eroding public support for an ailing judicial system. In view of this precarious situation, the USA could increase its support to law enforcement capacity-building, domestic intelligence gathering, and modern counternarcotics operations. Undoubtedly, if the proliferation of narcotics is not properly controlled through bilateral cooperation, cities in Honduras could easily turn out to be the next Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, where the United States is fighting its closest and most bitter drug war.

After the highly publicized coup d'état of 2009, for which the USA attracted much criticism, a good dose of political stability has returned to Honduras. This democratically-enabled stability,

coupled with improved socioeconomic prospects, a much stronger judicial system, and increased governmental effectiveness enables the better-educated, reality-speaking, energy-filled young professional to freely express their feelings without fear of repression and violence. The recent troubles in Central Asia and the Middle East—most notably in countries poorly enmeshed with the global economy, where inequality remains high—is tangible evidence of the dissatisfaction pervading these oppressed societies, but also a crude indicator that political modernization is running ahead of progress in the economic sphere. Honduras has seen its fair share of public revolt and mass discontent, but it has managed, barely, to keep the country moving forward under a divided yet somewhat functional state structure that delivers the services to the population from which it collects taxes.

Internationally-led efforts to promote democracy must address the contradiction and glaring inconsistency between the principle of internally resisting any unconstitutional alteration or interruption to the democratic order, and the fact that some constitutions, like the one embraced by Honduras, may permit such an alteration or interruption in the first place. The ease with which foreign states can establish extractive multinationals, exercise coercive foreign policy actions, impose detrimental trade agreements and sponsor coups calls for a reconsideration of efforts from undemocratic regimes to undemocratic constitutions. The Honduran government must give priority to the needs of ordinary citizens, farmers, traders, workers, consumers, students, children, and the vulnerable at the margins of society, the underdogs, the elderly and the ill.

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