IN WHICH AMERICA DO WE TRUST?

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Abstract

The paper deals with current aspects of the American foreign politics, which recently have led to rising argumentative conflicts between the United States and its traditional allies. We have tried to forward a historical explanation of the American interventionism, shaped by the Mesiannic character which the American identity has taken on since its beginning. Within the new political and historical conditions, the American foreign politics needs a flexible adaptation in order to avoid past errors and to achieve future goals.

America is, by excellence, a complexity of approaches. But, beyond all geographical, historical, social or cultural considerations, America is a dream. It is so to such an extent that people all over the world have their own personal Americas which they think of in terms of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Though the images embraced by these aspects may vary according to people's specific cultural and historical heritage, the essence stays the same, rooted in the first colonizers' attempts to conquer new lands and to push the limits of the Frontier further and further.

Talking about America can never be but topical. And especially in the modern world, when America has assumed the role of world leader in many domains of utmost importance in the public life – to mention nothing but the current fight against international terrorism – it would be difficult to be totally ignorant about the USA.

People's ideas of America are generally clearly shaped: they either completely agree with the American way of thinking, blindly assuming and incorporating it as part of their own convictions, or recoil from it and reject it.

The recent events on the world political stage have contributed to deepening these contradictory standpoints. In the light of the American interventionism in Afghanistan and Irak, one cannot ignore the controversial aspect it embraces nowadays, being one of the most highly debated issues of the modern world. The position assumed by the United States as guardian of the world peace and strong opponent of international terrorism is a problem of the contemporary world which seems to have caused an ideological conflict even between traditional American allies .

One cannot discuss about American interventionism without taking into account their messianic spirit, which has characterized the American nation ever since its birth. Therefore, all debates on modern issues which currently give rise to strong controversy throughout the world – with the increasingly greater number of American opponents – should start from this constant trait of the American character: messianism.

Many politicians argue that the role assumed by the United States in the modern world, that of guardian of the world peace and terrorist opponent, is a direct result of

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September 11 when, let aside the tragic loss of so many lives, the very spirit of the American nation itself received a powerful blow. What many people seem to neglect is that American interventionism is by no means new, and it is definitely not an effect of recent events, however dramatic they may have been. Tragedies as September 11 in America could have triggered a set of actions in this respect; however, the American sense of messianism is much older than that, being a constitutive part of the American character as we know it today. Throughout history there have been countless manifestations of this sense of messianism. For the sake of comparison, this is how American president Lyndon B. Johnson explained , in 1965, the reasons for American intervention in Vietnam:

„*Why must this nation hazard its ease, its interest and its power for the sake of a people so far away?*

We fight because we must fight if we are to live in a world where every country can shape its own destiny, and only in such a world will our freedon be finally secure.

This kind of world will never be buildt by bombs or bullets. Yet the infirmities of man are such that force must often precede reason, and the waste of war, the works of peace.

We wish that this were not so. But we must deal with the world as it is, if it is ever to be as we wish.

The world as it is in Asia is not a serene and peaceful place. (…)

We are there because we have a promise to keep. And I intendto keep that promise. (…)

We are also there to strengthen world order. Around the globe, form Berlin to Thailand are people whose well being rest in part on the belief that they can count on us if they are attacked. To leave Vietnam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability, and even wider war. (…)

Our generation has a dream. It is a very old dream. But we have the power, and now we have the opportunity to make that dream come true. For centuries, nations have struggled among each other. But we dream of a world where disputes are settled by law and reason. And we will try to make it so."

Does this not sound extremely topical? The present speeches from President Bush are based on exactly the same ideology: to make the world a safer place to live, to install democracy, to free the opressed peoples from tyranny, because it is America's duty to do so, as the greatest nation in the world.

To the knowing one, this ideology characterizing American foreign policy reminds of doctrines which constituted the dogmatic basis for such positions. Among the first phrases summarizing this ideologic approach is the phrase Manifest Destiny, probably coined by President Andrew Jackson, although the essence it contains goes back as early as the eve of the American Revolution. Manifest Destiny meant that the expansion of the United States extended the area of freedom, and that it was America's responsibility to extend its authority over „semi-barbarous people". According to President Jackson, by taking up the duty of „regeneration and civilization", America could perform the noble work of teaching inferiors to appreciate the blessings they already enjoyed, but were inclined to overlook. .

Americans never experienced a split of secular and religious matters. In the absence of medieval religious opressions which Europe experienced just too well,

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Americans have never conceived religion and Church as an instrument of opression. Thus, their sense of political missionarism, that of bringing the benefits of civilization to the unfortunate who did not have the luck to be born on the American soil, was doubled by religious enthusiasm. The American faith goes back to the Puritan experience, and it is sustained by the strong belief that God is on America's side, as they are the chosen people of God to start a new world.

American missionaries had their clear-cut role in shaping the American messianic trait. They were never completely dogmatic, rejecting the European model of the time. They greatly favoured and encouraged liaisons with secular expansionists, thus making their important contribution to the creation of an increasingly greater need to remake underdeveloped societies. They brought religious arguments to the justification of American expansion, because it created more progressive societies.

All of these aspects contributed to the shaping of American foreign policy as we know it today. In time, three main conceptions stood out as predominant: the first is a warm, generous and humanitarian impulse to help people solve their internal problems. The second is the principle of self-detemination which, apllied at an international level, means that every country should be entitled to establish its own rules and objectives and to accomplish them by the means they find appropriate. The third, which constitutes the reason of many of today's international disputes and controversies, states that there is no real solution to solving other people's problems unless they follow the American model. This principle was clearly stated by former Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson , in his defense of the American program of foreign aids developed after the Second World War: „*We are willing to help people who believe the way we do, to continue to live the way they want to live*".

If the first two principles are easily reconciled, complementing each other to an extensive degree, the third one seems to come from a superficial, even ignorant way of thinking, whose implications in the modern world are not only undesirable, but a cause of open conflict.

The American way of doing things may be applied with great success to some countries – it comes as no surprise that the most fervent supporter of the current American foreign policy is Great Britain who, apart from obvious economical and political benefits which are direct and perceivable, is offered the historic chance of recreating, under a new shape, the late British Empire, now under the form af the Anglo-Saxon spirit.

For other countries, this American model of life is simply not applicable, despite obvious values it implies, such as observance of rights and democracy. In other situations, societies may want to do it in a different way that produces equally good results, perhaps even better ones. But, even it the American model were faultless and could be applied to all societies, forcing it would break the principle of self determination. Therefore, in any case, it would not be very effective to try to help people by insisting that they follow the lead and the example of the United States on all central and vital matters.

American disregard of cultural differences in this respect, despite huge efforts which have been made towards acceptance and integration, is by no means new. Americans have lost wars because of neglecting local specificiy, and they are likely to lose more. The solution might be an adjustment to the local cultural heritage, whose disrespect has always led to open conflicts. And probably the American sense of

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missionarism and duty to help those in need should change substance and adjust to the new realities of the day, if learning from their own mistakes does not work. After all, modern people do not appreciate masters. And this is a lesson America has taught us. Some of us may just have learnt it too well.

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