

The Origins and Development of U.S. Democracy Promotion

By Arnold August, April 2012

Once the Thirteen Colonies broke from England, the new chess player in the international arena had a major advantage. It was established in the New World. Its capitalism was new and unfettered by European stratification; it could use the open spaces and beckoning spheres of endeavours for the spirit of innovation, so important for expansion.

Even the very conservative U.S.-based think tank Council of Foreign Relations (2010), in an essay entitled “Empire Without End,” in its journal, *Foreign Affairs*, traces the beginnings of the dreams of a new empire to the roots. In 1778, while the U.S. War of Independence was still raging and almost ten years *before* the adoption of the U.S. Constitution (1787), which set the basis of the new state, David Ramsey (South Carolina’s delegate to the Continental Congress) expressed the sentiment that originated from the initial days of the Thirteen Colonies. He wrote that the “grandeur of the American continent provided the basis for a realm that would make ‘the Macedonian, the Roman, and the British sink into insignificance.’”¹ Even while the Council of Foreign Relations distances itself from those serious, critical U.S. historians who claim the capitalist search for markets motivates “U.S. imperialism,” it also admits that the “Empire could not exist without its intellectuals, who take up the task of explaining that goals pursued for self-interest are in fact justified for progress.”² This elucidates the role of U.S.-centrism and the section of academia and political actors in its service. They provide and elaborate pretexts, such as “democracy promotion,” as a ploy for imperialism.

It is perhaps one of the strangest twists of history that Europe, as the birthplace of “Eurocentrism” (as the term indicates) in the sixteenth century, had to cede its pre-eminence to its growing offspring, the U.S. It expanded into the western frontiers and then to the South, where Cuba was a prime target. George Washington’s “rising empire” vision for the Thirteen Colonies was declared during the War of Independence. The second U.S. president, John Adams, whose son, U.S. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, proclaimed that Cuba will fall into the grips of the U.S. as a ripe fruit, amplified this vision. The third president, Thomas Jefferson, followed suit on Cuba, as did the fourth president, James Madison. The Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed in 1823, served as a political pretext for the 1898 U.S. intervention in Cuba. Other U.S. military interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean served as the

sword to appropriate Eurocentricity for the U.S. to the detriment of Europe. During this long period, U.S. capitalism developed and, with it, the need for expansion. Simultaneously, the U.S. political system consolidated itself, ridding itself of its most grotesque features of slavery, even though it was only on a superficial basis, making U.S. democracy increasingly appropriate, in the eyes of its beholders, for exportation to the countries in the South. My investigation is found in “Appropriating Eurocentrism for Itself.”³

The Monroe Doctrine continued in different forms, such as the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904), for more than a century until World War II. The Monroe Doctrine was supported by the Manifest Destiny. Therefore, even President Taft’s pretext for expansion throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, in his own words, “by virtue of our superiority of race,” was an outgrowth of the previous doctrines.⁴ Woodrow Wilson’s presidency coincided with, among other events, the October Revolution in Russia and his motto called for “making the world safe for democracy.” Franklin D. Roosevelt’s (F.D.R.) Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America did not hinder further U.S. interference and violent repression in that area. Notable as well is the initial U.S. support for fascism. For example, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Henry Fletcher (1924–29) expressed the view that was to oversee U.S. guidelines for many years, not only toward Italy, but in other areas, such as with regard to Germany: “Italy faced a stark choice ... either ‘Mussolini and Fascism’ or Giolitti [a leading Italian progressive personality] and Socialism.” This support for fascism was at the very least “acceptable” if not fully endorsed until such time that Germany and Italy contested the interest of the U.S. and the U.K.⁵ When the U.S. finally joined in World War II, F.D.R. articulated the ambition for the U.S. being “The Great Arsenal of Democracy.”⁶ This was to be used as an instrument for U.S. policy after the war. For further information and background material on the entire epoch from the Monroe Doctrine to World War II, see “The Manifest Destiny of the U.S. and Beyond to World War II.”⁷

U.S. intervention in World War II took place only when and as far as it served its imperial interests. The participation was embedded into the policy of self-interest and expansion as the very nature of U.S. foreign strategy. This strategy was initiated following its inception as a former colony and was accelerated after World War II, when the U.S. scheme of foreign expansion exploded onto the world scene without letup until today.

One of the centrepieces of the U.S. democracy model for exportation is the supposed competition between political parties and the participation of the citizens in changing political parties

and presidents. In principle, it is a multi-party system. However, in reality, in the words of Parenti, it is a “two-party monopoly.” He explains, “all fifty states have laws — written and enforced by Democratic and Republican officials — setting some daunting requirements for third-party ballot access.”⁸ Even a CNN commentator, Fareed Zakaria, who resides very far on the political spectrum from Parenti, says that the “two parties have effectively created a duopoly. It is very, very difficult to get on the ballot in any state.... The two parties collude to make sure that you don’t get a third party.”⁹ In addition, the establishment media and the U.S. presidents provide the U.S. democracy model as the capacity of the people to change presidents only among the candidates of the two parties. In this book, I refer to the “competitive multi-party system,” but, in reality, it is a two-party system.

One of the indications of the two parties’ similarity is the role of the U.S. in foreign military interventions. *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* provides a base for information regarding U.S. direct and indirect military interventions in Latin America from 1898 to 1989.¹⁰ If one collates the Harvard data with the records indicating which of the two political parties were in power at the time of each intervention, the results speak for themselves. The real participation of the people in the contemporary U.S. political arena is still based on the principle of franchise exclusivity promoted by the Founding Fathers, despite the important gains made by the peoples’ struggles. These constraints in franchise rights are detailed in Chapter 2. In addition to this very restricted participation, irrespective of which of the two political parties is in power, the same policies of military intervention are followed. The Harvard list, moreover, is somewhat conservative, as indicated by *ReVista* in its explanation of the guidelines followed in tabulating the list:

Direct intervention ... involved the use of U.S. military forces, intelligence agents or local citizens employed by U.S. government agencies.... [in the indirect role] ... local actors played the principal roles, but either would not have acted or would not have succeeded without encouragement from the U.S. government.... [The 1973 coup d’état in Chile] is included in this list because U.S. opposition to a coup (rather than encouragement) would most likely have enabled Allende to continue in office until new elections.... The 41 cases [of direct intervention] do *not* include incidents in which the United States sought to depose a Latin American government, but failed in the attempt. The

most famous such case was the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961.¹¹ (emphasis added)

In addition, it is not explicitly divulged that Cuba is absent from the victims' list of indirect intervention regarding the 1952 Batista coup d'état. It is true that the U.S. military forces did not intervene directly and that the coup was formally the work of Batista himself and other officers. Yet, his army was completely armed and trained by the U.S., which immediately recognized the Batista military coup regime. Important for the focus of this chapter (the multi-party or two-party competitive democratic system) is that both the Democratic Party and Republican Party had equally taken part in these interventions, as the table below indicates. In fact, without placing more weight, importance or length of one intervention over another, taken together, the Democratic Party presided over *more* interventions than the Republicans.

Table: U.S. Direct and Indirect Interventions in Latin America 1898–1969 and Democratic-Republican Parties^{12; 13; 14}

U.S. direct interventions: Military–CIA activity that changed governments

Country	Year	U.S. Political Party in Office
Cuba	1898–1902	Republican
	1906–09	Republican
	1917–23	Democratic
Dominican Republic	1916–24	Democratic
	1961	Democratic
	1965	Democratic
Grenada	1983	Republican
Guatemala	1954	Republican
Haiti	1915–34	Democratic, Republican and again Democratic
	1994	Democratic
Mexico	1914	Democratic
Nicaragua	1910	Republican
	1912–25	Democratic and Republican
	1926–33	Republican and Democratic
	1981–90	Republican
Panama	1903–14	Republican and Democratic
	1989	Republican

U.S. indirect intervention: Government-regime changes in which the U.S. is decisive

Country	Year	U.S. Political Party in Office
Bolivia	1944	Democratic
	1963	Democratic
	1971	Republican
Brazil	1964	Democratic
Chile	1973	Republican
	1989–90	Republican
Cuba	1933	Democratic
	1934	Democratic
Dominican Republic	1914	Democratic
	1963	Democratic
El Salvador	1961	Democratic
	1979	Democratic
	1980	Democratic
Guatemala	1963	Democratic
	1982	Republican
	1983	Republican
Guyana	1953	Republican
Honduras	1963	Democratic
Mexico	1913	Democratic
Nicaragua	1909	Republican
	1979	Democratic
Panama	1941	Democratic
	1949	Democratic
	1969	Republican

In Chile under Allende or in Cuba’s 1930s and 1950s growing revolutionary movements, the “struggles” strove to move from private, individual capital accumulation to socialism. These revolutionary situations meant a break from U.S.-centric paradigms imposed by the U.S. in the region. Allende was elected in a political system similar to the one in the U.S. However, what predominated in U.S. considerations was the basis of U.S.-centrism: private capital and its necessary expansion. The Chilean and Cuban experiences broke the myth of the inevitable superiority of the U.S. model of civilization handed down from the time of the classical Greeks. It was only by force that the U.S. could strive to impose the “superiority” of its system on the “non-civilized”

South. The moral persuasive force of democracy promotion was not doing the job.

What has come to be popularly known as the “military–industrial complex” shapes the dominant U.S. worldview. This credo consists of the absolute and unquestioned necessity of maintaining high levels of military spending as a given, never to be seriously defied. Confronting this militarist catechism is considered an affront to the ingrained superiority of the U.S. in the world, as handed down from the time of the Pilgrims. It serves above all as the safeguard throughout the world from any objection to private property in favour of democratization of the economy and politics. This same “military–industrial complex” controls the elections, sidelining real participation of the people not only in the daily functioning of its democracy, but also in the act that is supposed to be the hallmark of its democratic model, the ballot box. See my article entitled “Shaping Global Superiority Abroad and Elections at Home.”¹⁵

¹ Maier, Charles S. 2010. “Empire Without End: Imperial Achievements and Ideologies.” *Foreign Affairs* (July–August), 89:4.

² Ibid.

³ See “Appropriating U.S.-Centrism for Itself” at www.democracyintheus.com, Chapter 2.

⁴ Taft, William Howard. 2009. In Brett Bowden. *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 154.

⁵ Chomsky, Noam. 2003. *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*. NY: Metropolitan Books, p. 64–68.

⁶ Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1940. “The Great Arsenal of Democracy.” American Rhetoric (December 29). At <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/PDFFiles/FDR%20-%20Arsenal%20of%20Democracy.pdf>.

⁷ See “The Manifest Destiny of the U.S. and Beyond to World War II” at www.democracyintheus.com, Chapter 2.

⁸ Parenti, Michael. 2008. *Democracy for the Few*. Thomson Wadsworth, p. 191.

⁹ Zakaria, Fareed. 2012. “Zakaria: Why Aren’t There Serious Third-Party Candidates?” CNN World (March 7). At <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/07/zakaria-why-theres-no-real-third-party/>.

¹⁰ Coatsworth, John H. 2005. “United States Interventions: What For?” *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Spring/Summer), IV, 2, p. 8.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹² Ibid., p. 8.

¹³ Leip, Dave. 2011. “Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections.” At
<<http://www.uselectionatlas.org/>>.

¹⁴ Wikipedia. 2011. “List of Presidents of the United States.” At
<http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Presidents_of_the_United_States>.

¹⁵ See “Shaping Global Superiority Abroad and Elections at Home” at
www.democracyintheus.com, Chapter 2.