

Bush's Big-Stick Folly

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September 25, 2002

The roots of George W. Bush's first-strike folly go back a century, to another Republican who had a talent for marrying foreign policy and water-cooler wisdom. Theodore Roosevelt led his country to world-power status, first as a cavalry commander and then as its 26th president. It was he who advised the United States to speak softly in global councils, and carry a big stick.

Seeking to end the influence of Europe in Latin America, Roosevelt claimed for the United States the right to regulate the western hemisphere unilaterally. It was to assume the duty of maintaining order throughout the Americas, and intervene in the affairs of Latin American states to ensure they stayed in line. In return, Washington expected the rest of the world to butt out.

Roosevelt's dictates vastly expanded the Monroe Doctrine, set out by an earlier president in 1823. These principles, together with the Cold War doctrine of containment, eventually led the United States down a sinister path. Its occupations and proxy administrations of Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic lasted for years. Later, combining the Monroe Doctrine with the Cold War principle of containment, it condoned and, in some cases, helped engineer the overthrow of elected governments. It trained armies that not only put down insurrections but brutally suppressed popular movements.

One way to read the National Security Strategy that Mr. Bush unveiled last week is as a Monroe Doctrine for the entire planet. It proposes explicitly to maintain overwhelming military supremacy around the globe. It asserts the right to intervene wherever it declares that a threat

of terrorism or mass destruction exists.

But the Bush document is much more than a justification of pre-emptive action. It is an evangelical tract, a manifesto for the implementation of the American way on a global scale. It contains strong overtones of the French *mission civilisatrice*, according to which superior civilizations had a duty to spread the lessons of success around the globe.

There is, Mr. Bush says, "a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise." He declares that "economic freedom is the only source of national wealth." He vows to use "this moment of opportunity . . . to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world."

Many Americans in many countries work sincerely to make such things come true. But they are not the only ones who do so, and U.S.-style democracy is not the only kind worthy of support. Moreover, the history of the last century suggests that the United States cannot always be counted on to act for the common global good.

Powerful as they are, U.S. presidents operate under domestic political constraints. For every Woodrow Wilson preaching self-interested internationalism, there's a Jesse Helms obstructing the United Nations. For every Franklin Roosevelt smoothing the waters with a Good Neighbour policy, there's an Oliver North working to subvert the democratic process.

The mantra of "economic freedom" is similarly unconvincing. First of all, certain restrictions on free enterprise are demonstrably compatible with economic growth, and sustainable over

decades when sanctioned by voters in free elections. Second, in U.S. practice, "free trade" means trade on U.S. terms. It means forcing its way into markets for services, cultural products, and government procurement. It means protectionism for domestic U.S. industries with political clout.

Finally, U.S. support for democracy all too often translates as support for favourable outcomes rather than free choice itself. Just this year, for example, the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia threatened a cutoff of aid—not because of weapons of mass destruction, or terrorism, or the overthrow of democracy, but because voters in a functioning democracy looked like they might choose the wrong guy. (He leads a union of growers of coca plants; the envoy all but accused him of being in league with drug traffickers.) The Bush administration didn't much care for the German people's democratic verdict this week, either, and has plunged Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder into the diplomatic deep freeze.

Whatever the morality of the Monroe Doctrine, there was logic to its pretensions. By the early twentieth century, only the United States was able to project without difficulty the military force required to dominate the Americas. Difficult as it might be for Latin Americans to admit, there was a cultural logic to U.S. overlordship, too. The New World republics shared an anti-colonial history, as well as one of brutal treatment of Native Americans and African slaves. Christianity was dominant throughout the hemisphere. The prosperous U.S. economy was increasingly capable of supplanting Europe as a market for Latin American commodities.

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The Bush manifesto rests on spongier foundations. It pays only lip service to the complexity—and fragility—of the world economy. One of its goals is to wire a world of six billion in order to detect and destroy a few thousand. Another is to create the impres-

sion of force so varied and overwhelming as to deter the most determined megalomaniac. As much as dominance, the operating principle is global micromanagement.

Yet micromanaging Osama bin Laden has hardly been easy, and there

is stiff resistance both at home and abroad to even one first-strike foray—preemptive action against Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Who can be certain that the Bush doctrine will prove as enduring as the ills it purports to address?