

OK, so you wonder whether today's diplomatic history writing is based on the "absurd premise" that

the cold war should be seen through the prism of mutual U.S.-Soviet antagonisms and suspicions without granting the possibility that much of significant U.S. foreign policy involved the attempt to extinguish unaligned, indigenous independence movements, serving the interests of economic elites.

Let me ask a question: why couldn't it be true that the cold war is best viewed through the "prism of mutual U.S.-Soviet antagonisms" *and also* that "much of significant U.S. foreign policy involved the attempt to extinguish unaligned, indigenous independence movements"? Is there really any contradiction in this formulation?

As for the final clause -- "serving the interests of economic elites" -- one thing is clear: nobody has ever claimed that the goal of US foreign policy was to *combat* the interests of US economic elites. That would be silly, obviously. But does that therefore mean the goal was therefore to "serve" the interests of those elites?

What I would suggest is that while *in theory* it sounds very logical to say that US policy would naturally be geared toward serving elite economic interests, in practice it is much, much more difficult to define what "elite economic interests" actually are in a given foreign policy situation.

For example - quick! What policy in Afghanistan do you think would most benefit the profits of Google? How about Pfizer? Not only do I have no idea, but I would wager that the executives of Google and Pfizer have no idea either.

Now, you might counter - OK, maybe that doesn't work easily in the case of Google in Afghanistan. But surely ITT knew damn well what its interests were in Chile, and United Fruit knew its interests in Guatemala. And you'd of course be right.

But let's put that in today's terms. Today, it's also true that General Electric is very clear about its interests regarding China's policy of forced technology transfer in its Chinese factories. So if GE wants to put a stop to forced technology transfer, what US policy should it dictate with regard to, say, the China-Japan quarrel over the disputed islands?

Do you have any idea? I have no idea. Maybe the US should take Japan's side as a way of pressuring China to reverse its technology policy. Or maybe doing that would provoke exactly the wrong reaction - causing China to crack down even harder on US multinationals, when otherwise it might have taken a pragmatic let's-talk-about-this attitude in its commercial diplomacy. It's not all as obvious as you think.

So let me go back to Latin America. Right at the same time that Allende's Chile was expropriating US companies without prompt compensation, a leftist military government in Peru was doing exactly the same thing -- and yet the US did not try to overthrow the government. In

fact, the Nixon administration even made strenuous efforts to avoid imposing sanctions, as required by US law (the Hickenlooper amendment).

I just looked up some of the relevant documents. Here was the State Department's explanation of the stakes when Peru nationalized the International Petroleum Corporation, a US company – this is from a Jan. 1969 memo for Kissinger (<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve10/d576>):

Consequences for US Relations.

Up to now we have apprised the GOP [Government of Peru] quietly but forcefully of the existence in US law of the Hickenlooper amendments. We have sought to avoid confrontations so far, so as to give the Government room to maneuver and find a graceful way out. Unfortunately, the GOP's reaction to our approaches has been truculent rejection of the sanctions as an intrusion in internal affairs.

What has made the situation so tragic is the mandatory requirement of the US law. Were it not for that, the US would have more flexibility, more options, and greater time to handle the problem, and without the need to appear to "punish" which makes the present confrontation so serious.

Aside from the expectable consequences already noted, application of US sanctions will surely precipitate widespread and vehement criticism of the US throughout Latin America. The larger Latin American countries especially would view such action as "intervention", and would see the power to sanction in this way as threatening to themselves. In short, it would almost surely provide impetus toward unifying the now fractionated anti-US sentiment that exists in the region.

Given even the best relationship which could be salvaged from the IPC impasse, the popular and political mood in Peru will surely require, over the next year or so, an increasing demonstration of independence from the US. It is thus likely, in any case, that coolness will characterize our relationships and the traditional friendship between us will bear an ugly scar for some time to come.

We must now face the questions of a) how far we can and will go in order to induce some sort of settlement among the two parties; and b) whether, in the absence of such flexibility, we can or should avoid a direct confrontation.

Ambassador Jones has been asked to return to Washington for consultations the early part of February in order to provide State with first-hand appraisals and analyses of the situation and probable future developments, and generally to review with State what the next steps might be. It would be useful for him to brief the President personally, if this is

possible, given the potential serious consequences of this problem for our entire Latin American policy.

Eventually, the US quietly forced IPC to accept a shitty negotiated compensation deal -- exactly the same type of compensation deal Allende was offering to ITT and Kencott Copper. In a phone conversation with Nixon, Kissinger said "IPC has been a lousy company." Tell me John: in what precise way was Kissinger "serving the interests of US elites"?

So why did the US overthrow Allende's government but not Peru's? This area is not my specialty, but I do know that for Kissinger the most important threat that Chile posed was in serving as a positive example for the Italian Communist Party. After 1968, the PCI had gone Eurocommunist, renouncing fealty to Moscow and declaring that there was an electoral road to socialism. It was politically on the ascendent in the early 70s, and Kissinger was terrified that if Communists came to power in Italy -- even though it would be through elections -- NATO would dissolve. Not so much because the PCI would withdraw, but because, as he said in a 1977 speech:

The character of the Alliance would become confused to the American people. The signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty pledged in 1949 that "they are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." If Communists entered governments in allied countries, the engagement to help maintain the military balance in Europe would lack the moral base on which it has stood for a generation. The American people would be asked to maintain their alliance commitment on the basis of two highly uncertain, untested assumptions: that there is a new trend of Communism which will in time split from Moscow, and that the West will be able to manipulate the new divisions to its advantage.

If you cut through the moral rhetoric, what he's saying is that in an era of balance of payment deficits, when Congress was already constantly trying to force a withdrawal of US troops from Europe (the Mansfield Amendment), there was no way in hell the White House could convince Congress to keep the troops there if we were there to defend a bunch of Communists. Kissinger said this in public and in private.

The eyes of the whole world were on Allende because the Italian Communists were holding him up as an example of what they could do in Italy. ("See, we're not scary Stalinist revolutionaries, we're just trying to do what nice Professor Allende is doing in Chile!") That's why Kissinger was desperate to get rid of Allende. The point was to defend NATO and hence the European military balance.

Notice that none of this means Henry Kissinger is not a ghoul. It just means US foreign policy is not simple.

I could go on and on about this whole subject, but let me instead just point your attention to the fact that Stephen Kinzer's book on Guatemala is completely out of date. By all accounts it has

been vastly superseded by the work of the historian Piero Gleijeses. Gleijeses is extremely and openly sympathetic to Cuban foreign policy, and the Latin American far left in general -- but he is also universally recognized as a brilliant scholar. I've attached a review of his book on Guatemala, which is the best source on the subject. I really urge you to read it.