THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1976

American Intervention

By James Chace

The United States, contrary to popular mythology, has never been an isolationist country. Almost as soon as we became a nation we became interventionist.

The United States used its armed forces abroad 159 times between 1798 and 1945; of these, 73 were initiated under prior legislative authority, without a declaration of war. Even between World Wars I and II—said to be the heyday of isolationism—we engaged in 19 military actions outside the Western Hemisphere. Since World War II we have used military forces in Korea, Indochina, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic and the Congo.

What all this indicates is that since its inception the United States has been unafraid to exercise power in world affairs.

There is every reason to believe that military intervention will continue, and, indeed, that it may even intensify. There are a number of indications that we may find ourselves committed to policies that go beyond the diplomatic, economic or covert forms of intervention we have practiced in the distant and near past. One indicator is a poll recently taken by Potomac Associates that points to a growing tendency for Americans to think in unilateral terms.

The very fact that United States control of the Panama Canal should have been a major issue in the Presidential primaries this year demonstrates that nationalistic impulses have by no means been quelled. Thus, if there is a disposition to intervene, the reasons are not likely to be those we are most familiar with, such as a desire to contain the expansion of Communism on a global scale. In this respect, Vietnam may well have proved an end game—the cold war is already history. Our responses will be different because the international system is different. What we appear to be entering is a period of relative disorder, with a greater degree of interdependence among nations; this could lead to greater tensions and more, rather than less, interference by one nation into the affairs of another.

From an American perspective, military intervention might be most readily occasioned by our fears of resource scarcity. As regards our dependence on foreign oil, for example, in 1975 net petroleum imports for the United States were 36 percent of its total consumption. In 1970 they were 22 percent and by 1980, according to estimates of the United States Bureau of Mines, the United States will probably be buying up to 41 percent of its petroleum abroad. In a situation of perceived resource scarcity, intervention could easily become a demand by the Congress rather than an assertion of executive will.

Another reason for intervention could be to preserve America's sphere of influence in the Caribbean. Cuba remains resistant to United States dominance, as was most recently evident in the Cuban military presence in Angola directed against the United States-backed liberation movements. Mexico has already demonstrated its solidarity with third-world blocs unsympathetic to United States policy. Panama will not be satisfied with the status quo. In the Caribbean and Central America — deemed by most Americans as essential to United States security — the possibility of intervention is never far from mind.

A third reason for American intervention would be to affect regional balances of power. In Northeast Asia, for example, an embryonic regional balance comprising Japan, China, the Soviet Union, the two Koreas and the United States is already in place. The very concept of regional balances of power also demands a willingness of the great powers to intervene to prevent the balance from being upset. It is for this reason among others that any outbreak in hostilities between the two Koreas is threatening. There are also at least hints of a balance in South Asia. Unwilling to put itself in the position of being a Soviet client, India wants recognition as a power in its own right. Moscow and Peking seem disposed to grant India its wish. And the United States, far from abandoning the region, is planning an increased naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

In other areas no such balances as yet exist. However, nations such as Brazil and Iran have already shown a drive for dominance in their regions. Should such nations embark on an aggressive course, the very fabric of interdependencies being created both in the region and globally could be ripped apart. In such a situation, the United States might find intervention —either alone or in concert with others—desirable in order to tame the dangerously expanding power.

Finally, there is often a felt need for great powers to demonstrate their global concerns. For the United States, these would probably include a concern for human rights and the espousal of liberal, pluralistic democracies. Realizing that the United States is a worldwide power with social, economic and ideological interests, Americans may accept intervention in the manner of other great powers of the past by pursuing activist policies. The evidence is on the side of the activists. A recent Harris poll showed that support for an activist foreign policy has hardly changed since 1947.

Does global power, then, lead to intervention? History suggests that it does. An anarchic world with shifting coalitions and overlapping alliances certainly does not diminish the likelihood. And if wars of attrition and massive nuclear exchanges are improbable, the so-called decisive stroke of intervention could seem most appealing. Such interventionism will often be wrong and almost always will be dangerous. Yet there seems to be a certain inevitability to it. The 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes was right when he perceived as "a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power that ceaseth only in death."

James Chace is managing editor of the journal Foreign Affairs and author of "A World Elsewhere: The New American Foreign Policy."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL,
Tuesday, Sept. 7, 1976

America's Colonial Headaches

By B. Bruce-Briggs

The charge that America has imperialistic ambitions is hard to believe these days, but the truth of the matter is that the U.S. *does* have a colonial problem, and not just in Panama and Puerto Rico either.

We don't like to think of ourselves as a colonial power and since we led the way by granting independence to the Philippines in 1946 we have actively promoted decolonization. But as the tide of European empire has receded, the American empire has remained intact. With the exception of the ending of U.S. occupation of the Japanese Ryukyu and Bonin Islands, the Stars and Stripes are planted as widely now as they were 30 years ago.

Most of the inhabitants of our overseas possessions share our dislike for the term "colony," so the official designation is "outlying territory." But euphemism cannot modify the fact that three million people live on 5,000 square miles of American territory, governed by U.S. laws and with no say in the making of these laws either through voting for the President or members of Congress. What to do with these people is a continuing annoyance both to Congress and the Executive Branch.

Not that the colonies want to be free. Far from it. Most of them wish to retain the status and rights of American nationality, not to mention the protection of the U.S. military. They want U.S. government programs but don't want to pay U.S. taxes. In short, they share the great American dream of something for nothing.

Take our largest and most important colony—Puerto Rico, the only one which could conceivably be a real independent country. It has a minuscule independent movement, so lacking in popular support that it must resort to terrorism to be noticed. The principal issue on the island is whether to join the union or to continue the "Free Associated State" status evolved over the years. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, the island is internally self-governing (by an act of the U.S. Congress), islanders pay no U.S. income taxes ("no taxation without representation") but are subject to U.S. laws.

The U.S. denies that Puerto Rico is a colony and refuses to let the United Nations Select Committee on Decolonization

meddle in its affairs. But it is continually harassed on the issue by Cuba, backed by the socialist dictatorships of Syria, Iraq, Mali and Congo (Brazzaville). Several times Puerto Rico has voted overwhelmingly in plebiscites to continue the existing status. Presidents and Congressmen have indicated American willingness to let the island go any time it so desires, yet technically the Cubans are right: Puerto Rico is not a self-governing nation.

The Economic Benefits

Not that the Puerto Ricans particularly care. The recent Ad Hoc Advisory Group on the Status of Puerto Rico slighted constitutional issues and decided to concentrate on preparing a menu of economic benefits for approval by the U.S. Congress. Two of the status revisions—changing the nominal designation (in Spanish) of Puerto Rico from a "Commonwealth" to a "Free Associated State" and the admission of a non-voting resident commissioner to the U.S. Senate—seem reasonable, but the suggestion that federal courts use the Spanish language is impractical. Puerto Rico's desire to have some say in controlling immigration—to keep out those aggressive, successful Cuban refugees, for one thing—hasn't a chance of approval by Congress. And even Puerto Rico's staunchest friends are appalled by the recommendations that the island be exempt from U.S. minimum wage and labor relations laws, not to mention the idea that the island government have the right to decide which federal legislation will apply to Puerto Rico.

Of course, the Puerto Ricans want full federal welfare benefits. Although the commonwealth is one of the richest countries in the Western Hemisphere, its per capita income is less than half that of the mainland, so federal eligibility standards entitle much of the population to benefits. Fifty-five percent are on food stamps.

Guam, Samoa and the Virgin Islands are held by the U.S. to be "non self-governing territories" liable to supervision by the UN. Each is evolving in the Puerto Rican direction, but not without considerable pother. Guam and the Virgins have recently obtained the privilege of electing their governors and non-voting delegates to the House. Samoa also was apparently pressured by the Interior Department into electing its own governor. Bills are before Congress to allow Guam and the Virgins to have conventions to write territorial constitutions. Because of the collapse of Virgin Islands tourism, its only major business, during the recent recession, that territory is asking for an outright grant of $8.5 million and the pledge of the "full faith and credit" of the U.S. in support of a $60 million bond issue.

Apart from the tourism in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, none of the above colonies is of much economic benefit to the U.S. But the Panama Canal Zone is another matter. The economic value of the canal, especially with a toll schedule unchanged since 1914, is enormous. But we are more accustomed to think of the canal in military terms.

Even though it cannot handle super-carriers, the strategic utility of the canal continues to be so immense that the United States is understandably loath to knuckle under to demands by the Panamanian Republic for the liquidation of the Canal Zone and eventual transfer of the U.S. government-owned Panama Canal Co. to Panamanian ownership. The Hay-Varilla Treaty of 1903 provided that the U.S. shall hold "in perpetuity the use, occupancy and control" of the zone "as if it were sovereign." The U.S. is not sovereign, but how its rights differ from sovereignty is a matter perhaps better left to theologians.

As the tide of European empire has receded, the American empire has remained intact. But not without a continuous stream of problems.

The present Panamanian regime is relatively responsible and pro-American by Central American standards, but given the vagaries of Caribbean politics, we would be foolish to take continued stability and friendship for granted. The Panama Canal is precious and we have every right in law to possess it forever, so what's the problem? First, continued occupation of the zone hurts our relations with Latin American nations who see it as evidence of Yankee imperialism. For example, the president of Venezuela took the occasion of an otherwise affectionate Bicentennial message to knock our "colonial enclave."

Complaints by Latin American countries we can easily bear, but advocates of substantial concessions to Panama have an uglier scenario in mind—that the present Panamanian regime will be replaced with one that will tolerate or promote terrorism or guerrilla warfare against the zone. So the Panama issue boils down to these questions: Is continued possession of the zone worth the risk of "another Vietnam"? Can the U.S. stand up to such a threat? The reader is as qualified to answer as anybody.

Our other colonial enclave in the Caribbean is quiet. The Naval base at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay is nice to have, but hardly necessary to national defense. But giving it up would be seen as knuckling under to Castro. Fortunately, Cuba is making no effort to pressure us out, perhaps because of the rumored secret treaty which ended the missile crisis of 1962.

No foreign nations are meddling with our Pacific possessions. Our oldest colonies are a miscellaneous collection of islands gathered in consequence of the Guano Act of 1856; the miners scooped up the guano faster than the birds could lay it down and now these islands are unoccupied and worthless. Midway and Wake are military bases with no indigenous population and are no problem. Guam is also primarily a military base and its inhabitants are firmly connected to the U.S. But there is turmoil elsewhere in the Central Pacific. The U.S. controls something called "Micronesia," the last remaining United Nations trust territory. Its 100,000 inhabitants are not U.S. nationals and are subject to direct U.S. rule, supervised by the UN.

We have been trying to develop Micronesia as a unit, but the natives who live on 100 islands scattered over an expanse of ocean larger than the United States have nothing in common save a history of being ruled successively by Spain, Germany, Japan and the U.S. Micronesia is coming apart. The Northern Marianas have already indicated their intention of becoming a "commonwealth," with U.S. citizenship, but separatist movements against continued membership in Micronesia are afoot in other island groups. For the U.S. it's hardly worth the bother. We have a missile station at Kwajalein; Japanese interests are investigating possibilities of an oil port at Palau, and there is a little copra production and fishing—and that's all.

The Pentagon's Attitude

Obviously, very few Americans are aware of the extent of our possessions. The Pentagon is concerned with those few spots that are of strategic importance, taking the position that the interests of the indigenous peoples are to be subordinated to the military requirements of the U.S. Where the military rules directly—as on Wake, Midway, Guantanamo and the Canal Zone—the milieu is that of a military base, benign but total control. The cavalier attitude toward the natives is best exemplified by Guam where the Navy grabbed up much of the best land on the eve of the granting of U.S. citizenship and rights to the islanders. This is a continuing grievance to the Guamians.

Surprisingly, the major civilian players in the colonial game are a tiny band of old-style liberals. Micronesia has been represented by Clark Clifford's law firm and former Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas has a continuing involvement with Puerto Rico. The maritime lobby is also active. Its principal interest is maintenance of the Jones Act, requiring that shipping between U.S. ports be in U.S. registry bottoms. This is very costly for our overseas possessions, especially Guam, which has one of the highest costs of living in the world.

Also on the scene is a tiny band of anti-colonialists whose views are shaped by the "new politics" of the 1960s. They dislike the military and strategic arguments mean nothing to them. In every overseas commitment they see another potential Vietnam. And they are hostile to the indigenous peoples who wish to be Americans, characterizing them as suckers or tools of U.S. interests. Apparently this small group of researchers, politicians and editorial writers is unable to comprehend what a precious boon U.S. citizenship is to the ordinary people of the world.

Should the rest of us care about our colonies? Excepting the Panama Canal, they are of little economic value and require a continual drain on the U.S. Treasury to provide them with government services. But the shuffle of history has dealt these poor and weak peoples into our hands. We are responsible for them. The optimum policy probably should be to accede to any reasonable demand they make on us.

If they wish to be independent, godspeed. If Puerto Rico desires statehood, welcome. For the rest, we will have to continue to work toward some intermediate status of internal self-government under U.S. national law that unfriendly critics will always be able to label "colonialism."

Mr. Bruce-Briggs is a member of the Journal's editorial page staff.