

Ideology and Intervention

David Sylvan
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva
sylvan@hei.unige.ch

Stephen Majeski
University of Washington
majeski@u.washington.edu

Paper prepared for presentation at the 49th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, March 26-29, 2008

Abstract

It is often argued that ideology plays an important role in determining countries' foreign policies. However, the received definition of ideology, which sees it as a set of beliefs or ideas about the world, makes for insuperable problems in mapping back and forth between ideology and world. Instead, ideology can usefully be thought of as crystallized in policy instruments: organizationally structured activity sequences, in which problems are linked, practically, to their concrete solutions. Two examples of how policy instruments, as ideological, help shed light on great power interventions are discussed: the eight-nation rescue mission in the Boxer Rebellion, and U.S. support for the Northern Alliance to overthrow the Taliban.

The role of ideology in foreign policy, and in particular in great power intervention, is a phenomenon which, if never absent from consideration by commentators and scholars, has returned with a vengeance in recent years. Arguments about the “responsibility to protect” and “failed states,” about the “war on terror” and the importance of “weapons of mass destruction,” and, most of all, about the astonishing levels of destruction, chaos, and criminality of the Bush administration’s war in Iraq have highlighted many of the phenomena which ideology is supposed to exemplify: a coherent assemblage of beliefs making sense of and guiding responses to otherwise disparate phenomena; a simplifying perspective, often based on recurring dichotomies, with deep historical roots in the dominant political culture; a semi-mythological, and often downright false, set of understandings about the world which is at odds with a rational and reality-based approach to problems. Thus, on these arguments, the United States had no sooner emerged from a 40-year period in which its foreign policy was dominated by anticommunist ideology than it plunged again into crusades against new villains, with the latter now being identified as a cross between 1930s-style fascists and centuries-old Islamic bogeymen.

There are numerous problems with these types of claims, particularly if we expand our horizon beyond what the U.S. has done since the end of the cold war, or perhaps since September 11, 2001. Standard approaches to ideology end up explaining very little about most phenomena in foreign policy, even under the George W. Bush administration. Broadening the inquiry to other administrations, or to other countries, merely accentuates this point. The fundamental problem is that what are usually claimed to be ideologies map poorly onto the specifics of policy toward a given country at a particular moment. To make the connection, we have to rethink what ideology is and how it manifests itself: as something mundanely pervasive, social rather than cognitive in character, and organizationally housed. Being a great power means that the foreign policy (including military) apparatus is organized around addressing certain “problems” seen as characteristic of smaller, or weaker, or less “civilized” states through highly stylized intervention sequences. After developing this thesis in general, we will specify certain details through two examples: the eight-power intervention in China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, and the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001.

The received definition of ideology: the mapping problem

It might be thought that the enormous variety of writings about ideology – with authors ranging from Marx, Mannheim, and Althusser to Converse, Abelson, and Geertz – would make it impossible to come up with even a small number of definitions. In fact, with the partial exception of work in computation and cognitive psychology, the vast majority of works on ideology have on several occasions been subsumed under a single definition. Here, for example, is one such formulation: “a logically coherent system of symbols which, within a more or less sophisticated conception of history, links the cognitive and evaluative perception of one’s social condition – especially its prospects for the future – to a program of collective action for the maintenance, alteration or transformation of society” (Mullins 1972: 510). Here, some 15 years later, is another: “a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain” (Hamilton 1987: 38). These definitions, it will be noted, are similar to that adopted by Hunt in his well-known work on ideology and foreign policy: “an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and

suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality” (Hunt 1987: xi; extended conceptual discussion in Hunt 1990).

Our concern in this paper, and more generally, is with understanding how it is that states tend to engage in certain foreign policies on a recurring basis, often for long periods of time. Given that concern, there are several quite severe problems with using the received definition to help understand states’ foreign policies.¹ To see this, consider how ideology can be used to help explain states’ foreign policies. At the core of any such explanation is the notion of mapping: that an ideology, as a set or system of ideas or beliefs about how the world does and should work, categorizes particular phenomena as instances of that set or system and points toward responses. For example, during the cold war, a given politician in a U.S. client state may be categorized as a leftist because, say, he called for redistributing land or expressed sympathy with an independence struggle in another country. That categorization as a leftist may be triggered by certain beliefs (e.g., that leftists are in favor of redistributing land), and it may in turn trigger other views about what should be done: that, as a leftist, the politician is someone whom the U.S. must oppose by some means (e.g., backing his opponents, or advocating his arrest).² In this way, ideology maps onto the world in a double movement: by categorizing phenomena in the world as objects of belief, and by acting in the world on the basis of beliefs about what should be done.

That, at least, is the theory. It is what underlies the received definition, whether in the domains of voting by mass publics or of foreign policy making by elites; and it corresponds well to critiques of particular decisions as ideological rather than pragmatic.³ However, a closer look reveals several problems with the notion of mapping. To begin with, how exactly is categorization supposed to occur? Presumably, some phenomenon (a person, an event) in the world is flagged (perhaps by an ambassador in a cable) as a) relevant and b) an instance of some more abstract phenomenon (e.g., a danger). That is, the ideology has heuristics of some sort that permit selective focusing, and other heuristics that permit instantiation. However, since most ideologies are usually described as highly abstract in nature (e.g., Hunt’s claim that the U.S. has strong biases against revolutions), we actually have no examples of what focusing and instantiation heuristics actually look like in practice. Should we assume, for example, that an anti-revolutionary ideology would contain heuristics along these lines: “killing heads of state is a sign of revolution” or “rioting in the capital city is a sign of revolution”? Even if there were such heuristics, would there be others that distinguished between guillotining a monarch and shooting a president, or between sacking government offices because cooking oil is too expensive and stoning troops because bread is no longer affordable? Either there have to be heuristics for every possible contingency in the world, which obviously is impossible; or

¹ At a more abstract level, the idea of coming up with a single definition, in isolation from any particular theoretical or practical use to which it might be put, is problematic. Concepts are not all-purpose in nature: they are embedded in frameworks which are put forward to address specific issues. Thus, to take a classic example, the definition of democracy will differ depending on whether the theoretical purpose is a) to explain why it is that the executive in a democratic system is, in principle, more constrained in his/her ability to go to war than the executive in a nondemocratic system; or b) to explain why democracies (supposedly) are more respectful of human rights than nondemocracies. If our concern is with task (a), we would define democracy in republican terms, as a set of procedural safeguards (e.g., regular elections with wide suffrage) that cut down on executive prerogatives. If, however, our concern is with task (b), then the definition of democracy would highlight certain normative commitments to debate and deliberation. Much the same can be said about ideology, and we do not believe that the received definition really is all-purpose. Instead, it is designed to be used in explanations of why individuals express particular political or policy preferences (this is, in effect, the Converse side of its intellectual DNA) rather than, say, why political repression is less common in wealthy capitalist countries than in poorer ones (we can call this Gramsci’s question).

² As we are describing it, ideology can be represented as mapping onto referent phenomena in a computational fashion along the lines that Abelson and Carroll (1965) put forward (cf. Carbonell 1978; Taber 1992).

³ To reiterate the point made in footnote 1, Marxist concepts such as subject positioning or war of position do not quite fit the double mapping claim, since the content of ideologies in those works has more to do with what the world looks like rather than action implications. Nonetheless, even here, ideologies map in one direction; otherwise, claims that subjects are “interpellated” by ideologies would make no sense.

else there have to meta-rules which specify the circumstances under which particular heuristics should or should not apply, which obviously leads to an infinite regress of meta-meta-rules, and so forth.

Beyond this, there is a second mapping problem with categorization. Assume now that there somehow are elements in an ideology permitting phenomena to be highlighted and instantiated. However, why should there be such elements in only one ideology? Hunt, for example, discusses three “core ideas relevant to foreign affairs” that, by the early twentieth century, “collectively began to wield a strong influence over policy” (1987: 17): one having to do with national greatness and the promotion of liberty, the second with racial hierarchy, and the third, as indicated above, with the dangers of revolution. If a revolutionary non-European leader refuses to cooperate with the United States on, say, regional politics, which set of ideological elements will be used to categorize his or her activities? Will the leader be viewed as inferior or dangerous or (mysteriously) both? Assume the leader holds free elections: will this be seen as evidence of the pursuit of liberty or as a ruse to stay in power? In short, a given phenomenon can be mapped onto multiple, and often mutually contradictory, ideologies, and there is nothing in the mapping theory that sheds any light on which ideology will in fact be singled out.

A third problem concerns the move back from ideology to policy output. Even if a phenomenon is categorized unproblematically and inferences drawn about the appropriate response,⁴ it is not at all clear how the latter maps onto actual policies. For example, assume that ideology dictates a policy of opposition to the hypothetical leftist politician whom we have been discussing. What form should that opposition take: overt criticism? a push for economic sanctions in the Security Council? secret backing for a coup d'état? encouragement of exiles to launch an invasion? When should the chosen policy be carried out: today, next year, or when certain other conditions are met? How strongly should the policy be pursued, how much money should be devoted to it, and what should be done if initial efforts fail? No ideology of which we are aware has any components which permit these kinds of mapping issues to be addressed, nor could it, for the same reasons we discussed above with regard to categorization.

It might be objected that these sorts of criticisms are unfair, since the point of invoking ideology in a given situation is not so much to explain the specific details of what happened, but rather to account for the general thrust of a state's policy. Thus, we would be able to understand the U.S. war in Vietnam as motivated very strongly by an ideology of anticommunism; but in order to figure out why the U.S. launched an open-ended ground war in 1965 rather than, say, in 1961, we would need other, more technical theoretical tools, such as theories of bureaucratic politics or of groupthink. This kind of argument is quite common and is usually resorted to whenever ideological (or, for that matter, claims about national character, or long-term goals) explanations are called into question. Hunt, whose work on ideology is in many ways canonical, puts the issue this way: “An understanding of a nation's ideology provides no certain insights into its behavior. Ideologies are important because they constitute the framework in which policymakers deal with specific issues ... the relationship between ideas and action is not rigid” (1987: 16).

Alas for Hunt and others who advocate one or another variety of mapping theory, the problems with using ideology to account for the general lines of foreign policy are the same as for using it to account for particular details. Consider, for example, U.S. policy regarding Libya. Some years after Qaddafi came to power, the U.S. became quite hostile to him. Over the next decade, Washington plotted an Egyptian military attack, an invasion by exiles, and a propaganda and disinformation campaign; it encouraged and supported the French to aid anti-Libya forces in Chad; and it carried

⁴ In fact, these inferences are themselves problematic, since quite often, actors hold incompatible general beliefs (e.g., adversaries' offers to negotiate may be worth pursuing, but also may represent evidence of weakness that should be exploited).

out an air strike, with two of the targets being Qaddafi's tent and his family house. The following decade, the U.S. continued sanctions against Libya but did not, as best we can tell, plan new military moves. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. reconciled with Qaddafi in exchange for Libya's ending work on nuclear weapons and cooperating against groups considered to be terrorists.⁵ Presumably, U.S. ideology (antirevolutionary? pro-liberty?) did not change over 30 years, but the general thrust of policy toward Libya most certainly did: from active intervention attempts to primarily verbal hostility to negotiations and the reestablishment of more or less normal relations. How would Hunt, or any other scholar using ideology to explain foreign policy, account for these very broad swings? The task would seem to be every bit as difficult as that involved in mapping ideology onto highly specific policy outputs. Indeed, one might even argue that general policy claims are more difficult to tie to ideology than detailed ones, since ideology may involve fetishization of particular policy instruments and thus account for the latter, albeit not in any explanatorily useful way (e.g., when would the instrument be used and in what context?).

A further defense of mapping theory would relax still further the claims made on its behalf. Yes, the argument might go, ideology cannot tell us very much about what happens or even what kinds of things happen, but it does help us understand why a given state so consistently pursues what appear to be fantasies rather than basing itself on reality. A case in point is Layne's recent (2006) book arguing that the U.S., by dint of its ideology favoring democracy and open markets, carried out an unrealistic and potentially disastrous foreign policy (see also Dueck 2006; cf. Ninkovich 1999). However, even this claim is problematic. Certainly one can show that the evidence adduced by U.S. presidents to argue for the dangers of nondemocratic regimes was exaggerated or simply invented, just as one can also criticize U.S. policies on normative, financial, and other grounds. However, to argue that ideology led U.S. elites to exaggerate or invent dangers is, once again, to map ideology onto categorizations or outputs and thus to face the same kinds of problems we discussed above. Exactly what in "liberal ideology" led the U.S. to maintain NATO and expand its presence around the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Was it really a belief that security could best be maintained in a world of democratic states? In fact, some high-ranking officials feared that a failure to expand NATO would usher in a return to the pre-World War I days of irredentism and unrest in Eastern Europe. Did their concerns also stem from liberal ideology? Analogously, one of the arguments used by policy makers in the George W. Bush administration to support what most outsiders considered to be alarmist and self-defeating policies is the "one percent doctrine," by which even a minuscule chance of bad things happening was sufficient reason to opt for a preemptive military response (Suskind 2006: 62). Is such reasoning evidence of a reality-distorting ideology of some sort, or rather a prudential generalization from the attacks of 9/11?

The mapping problems characteristic of the types of claims we have been considering about the influence of ideology on foreign policy stem, in the end, from the enormous differences between, on the one hand, the types of beliefs that, per the received definition, comprise the content of ideology and, on the other hand, the nature of foreign policy. The former are generic and categorical, the latter, practical and indexical (i.e., time-and-place specific). Of course the gap can be bridged, but there are many, most likely very many, ways of doing so, and what works for one individual at a given moment is unlikely to work for other individuals at that same moment, or for the same individuals earlier or later on. This applies not only to a particular ideology, but to the multiple ideologies that can be mapped onto a given situation.

From our perspective, nothing can be done to salvage mapping theories of ideology. As long as ideology is seen as a set of beliefs or ideas that somehow or other bear on foreign policy (or any other) phenomena, then whatever mapping is needed to connect the two will of necessity be indeterminate. Instead, it is preferable to sidestep the mapping problem entirely by looking for

⁵ See Sylvan and Majeski (2008: ch. 6).

ideology in practical, rather than abstract, form. To do this, we introduce the concept of policy instruments.

Policy instruments: ideology as organizational and activity-sequential

Foreign policy making is an eminently practical activity. High level officials rarely have the leisure to contemplate the world or articulate long-term strategies; rather, they feel themselves compelled to solve, or at least attempt to solve, immediate problems. Both the identification of problems, and the solutions to them, involve carrying out specific tasks. For example, in Iraq, the U.S. military is engaged in regular infantry patrols, air-based surveillance, and advisory training. Each of these tasks involves sets of sequential activities, such as loading soldiers in a truck, driving to a specified location, searching buildings, capturing and interrogating suspicious persons, blowing up arms caches, and so forth. These sequences are carried out in the form of organizational units (e.g., army platoons or companies), each with a budget and each trained and ready to engage in those activities; in addition, the sequences have their own evaluative criteria (e.g., if patrols are no longer fired upon). Failure to satisfy those criteria is, by definition, a practical problem which will have to be addressed, perhaps by increasing the frequency or scope of certain sequential activities, perhaps by adding, or substituting, other activity sequences, possibly housed in other organizational units. Sequences which succeed at their own tasks can be scaled back or ended and policy makers can turn their attention to other matters.

Policy instruments are organizations capable of carrying out specific activity sequences. Typically, they are put together from bits and pieces of preexisting policy instruments in order to devote greater resources to, or to concentrate more efficiently, on solving particular policy problems. Thus, for example, the U.S. was faced in the 1920s with the problem of maintaining order in its Caribbean and Central American client states without resurrecting the local militaries it had earlier dismantled, while enabling the Marines to return home. The solution was to build up local constabularies which it trained, then turn affairs over to them. By the early years of World War II, such training had become a standard mission for U.S. advisers (by now, Army personnel) in Mexico and South America, often connected with arms transfers. Several years later, the U.S. began creating organizational units called Military Assistance Advisory Groups (MAAGs) to supply and train its clients in Greece, China, and elsewhere. Eventually, MAAGs were supplemented and often replaced by specialized military training facilities, with Congress establishing a regularly funded, ongoing program with yearly budget lines for training dozens of countries' militaries. Much the same elaboration and specialization processes occurred with other policy instruments, such as those pertaining to arms transfers, to development assistance, to foreign exchange support, and to covert political and paramilitary activities, among others.⁶

As we have described them, policy instruments are used to accomplish particular time-and-place-specific missions, i.e., to satisfy their own internal success criteria in given countries at certain points in time. This is not to deny that policy instruments can and are employed with the hopes of fulfilling various long-term goals, but it is to say that they come prepackaged, as it were, with their own built-in tasks. U.S. policy makers may well hope that infantry patrols in Iraq might transform the Middle East, deter Iran, and so forth, but none of those goals can be accomplished if the patrols fail to reduce violence on their routes. Infantry patrols are therefore a policy instrument capable of being used in different countries at different times, but always with the same mission: to cut down on violence at whichever place and time they are being deployed. Whether those patrols are called "search and destroy" operations, aimed at rural communists in South Vietnam in the 1960s, or

⁶ Sylvan and Majeski (2008: ch. 4).

“sweeping operations,” aimed at slum-dwelling Shiites in Iraq, in the 2000s, does not change the sequence of activities which define them.

As a general rule, policy instruments are only maintained as capabilities if they are seen as potentially usable. If certain problems are perceived as completely imaginary, then policy instruments designed to deal with those sort of problems will eventually be wound down. On the other hand, problems which are expected to arise from time to time will be anticipated by having associated policy instruments in place. Of course, surprises can occur for which no instruments currently exist (in these cases, instruments designed for other purposes may have to be employed until such time as new instruments can be constructed), but in general, if instruments exist for reasonably lengthy periods of time, they can be seen as the organizational embodiment of expectations that certain problems are likely to occur. Thus, having institutionalized military training capability (these days, through programs such as IMET and JCET) presupposes that the U.S. expects that the militaries of various countries will need training, whether against domestic insurgencies, terrorist groups, or other potential threats.

We saw above that the received definition of ideology sees it as a connected set of ideas about how the world does and should work. Bracketing for now the mentalistic connotations of the word “ideas,” we can see that policy instruments are precisely institutionalized connections between expectations about the kinds of problems likely to arise and the ways in which those problems should be dealt with. Policy instruments, in effect, are crystallized ideologies. Whatever may be going on inside people’s heads,⁷ in the domain of foreign policy making, ideology takes an organizational form (cf. Sparrow 2006).

Seeing ideology in this way sidesteps mapping problems. If foreign policy ideology is practical and exists in organizational form, then there is no need to worry about heuristics and meta-rules for highlighting problems. The latter are, as a practical matter, attended to in the course of routine task accomplishment – at least for those states trying to accomplish those tasks (see below). Day-to-day monitoring of policy instruments currently in use will report, as a problem to be solved, the inadequacy of existing policy instruments in the carrying out of their mission. Similarly, action inferences need not be mapped onto a wide array of potential policy outputs. Instead, problems are considered at a concrete, not an abstract, level, and the consideration is exactly in the form of whether the existing policy instrument is failing because of inadequate resources, or rather because some other task – for which alternative policy instruments are likely to exist – is not being accomplished and is therefore impeding the success of the instrument currently being used.

It might be thought that by focusing on concrete problem-solving activities, we are draining the significance from the concept of ideology. If this means that ideology pertains to the everyday and the routine, we plead guilty, and would remind the reader that a focus on the mundane is very much in the spirit of some of the major critical writings referred to at the start of this paper. If, however, the criticism is that we have deviated from the spirit of work on ideology, we would strongly defend ourselves by making two arguments. First, ideology is supposed to be simplifying. On our account, this is very much the case. Although we see ideology as practical, that does not mean that there are separate ideologies for every situation under the sun. Quite the reverse: there are only a certain number of policy instruments available to any state and the very fact that they are typically employed in multiple times and places suggests just how limiting and, indeed, blinkered they are. When successive U.S. presidents focus on the adequacy of the military in Colombia, they are in effect reducing the highly complex situation there to one of fighting a counterinsurgency. Given the U.S. obsession with the maintenance of the Colombian regime and the important role of the military

⁷ Cf. two headnotes to an article by Lynch (2006: 95): “there is no reason to look under the skull since nothing of interest is to be found there but brains” (Harold Garfinkel); and “don’t worry about the brains that these persons couldn’t have but which the objects seem to require. Our task is, in this sense, to build their brains” (Harvey Sacks).

in that regard, this is perfectly rational. By the same token, though, it clearly presupposes the government's legitimacy and ignores (except insofar as they affect the counterinsurgency struggle) the views of peasants, trade unionists, Colombia's neighbors, and of course the FARC itself. Do U.S. presidents have this viewpoint because they consciously have decided that the military problem is the most important problem and that all other perspectives are either secondary or unacceptable? Or is because the U.S. has for many years had a training policy instrument available whereas other solutions were not ready at hand? Whatever the answer is, there is no denying just how reductive U.S. policy is, focused as it is on an ideology of propping up client state governments by training their militaries (and hunting down their enemies).

Second, ideologies are supposed to reflect power relations. The policy instrument approach very much facilitates this reflection. To begin with, it is only the wealthiest and most powerful states that enjoy a choice of well-funded policy instruments. Only a small number of states are able to make development loans, train and equip other states' militaries, and covertly foment or discourage coups d'état. Moreover, if policy instruments are used to accomplish certain tasks, the vast majority of those tasks are engaged in outside the country whose policy instruments are being used. We are talking here about taking over the tasks of a client state, or perhaps making it impossible for an enemy state to accomplish other tasks. At the minimum, these activities are resorted to routinely, for relatively minor problems (e.g., helping out a client financially, or hindering an enemy's access to capital). In many cases, though, the tasks are critical to a client's survival, which is why the external actor in effect substitutes its policy instrument for the local counterpart; alternatively, the tasks' accomplishment may be seen as a significant blow to an enemy regime's hold on power. Both of these latter situations are in effect intervention in the affairs of a weaker state by a stronger one. In other words, ideology qua policy instruments has an important hierarchical and interventionary connotation, which conforms well to another strand in the conceptual history of ideology.

With this last point in mind, and to see how the policy instrument approach can be useful in using ideology to help account for foreign policies, we now turn to two cases of great power intervention in the affairs of weaker states: the eight-power intervention in China during the Boxer Rebellion (1900) and, just over a century later, the U.S. intervention against the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001).

Intervention 1: the Boxer Rebellion

The Boxer Rebellion occurred in the context of a decades-long process of encroachment by great powers in Chinese affairs. There had been two Opium Wars involving the British (the second saw a joint British-French military column march into the capital and burn the summer palace), another, more recent one with the Japanese, and a series of "concessions," often imposed at gunpoint, in which the Chinese government granted de facto colonial control of ports or other littoral areas. Those concessions were of course unpopular and, to protect their economic interests or their citizens, foreign powers were accustomed to having warships, with light infantry aboard, stationed at, or cruising near, the concessions. The U.S., which for various reasons had not pushed for territorial concessions, nonetheless had a history of using armed forces in China to protect U.S. interests or carry out punitive attacks. Thus, by the onset of the Boxer Rebellion, all eight great powers (Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Japan, and the United States) had some sort of a military presence in or near Chinese waters. Five of those powers (Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and the U.S.) also had foreign, but non-Chinese, territorial possessions not far from China itself.

By the end of May 1900, as the situation for foreign nationals became more dangerous and as the Boxers moved directly into Peking, the foreign legations there requested that additional military

forces be sent immediately. This triggered reinforcements from ships or concessions by all the powers except Austria-Hungary, and several hundred light infantry (“marines”) and armed sailors were sent to Peking. When this proved inadequate, a second force was sent, with much the same type of composition as the first wave of reinforcements; and when that second force, in turn, was attacked and forced to retreat, a third force was assembled to relieve it. By the time the third force was sent, the well was running dry and so several of the powers had to use troops from outside China: in the case of the U.S., for instance, marines were sent from a U.S. base in the Philippines (where a vicious counterinsurgency war was then taking place); in the case of the Russians, troops came from their military garrison at Port Arthur.

By this time, it had dawned on policy makers in various capitals that a larger military force might be needed. Since no word had been received from the besieged legations in Peking for some weeks, officials began to assume that they had been overrun, and so the point of a new expedition had to be a combination of pacification and punishment. To that end, the great powers began to ship troops to China for that expedition. The troops were of three sorts. First, the British, the French, the Italians, and the Americans sent military units which had experience (or at the least had been trained) in putting down uprisings by colonized peoples. Thus, the British assembled indigenous forces from various parts of colonial India (other British troops were already fighting in the Boer War); the French sent forces, both French and indigenous, from their colony of Indochina; the Italians sent the Bersaglieri corps, which had been used in the conquest of Eritrea; and the Americans sent infantry regiments (including the African-American “buffalo soldiers”) with experience in the American Indian wars of the preceding decades and in the Philippines counterinsurgency. The Germans, on the other hand, put together an “East Asia brigade” from marines and army volunteers.⁸ Finally, the Russians and Japanese, who of course had forces stationed not far from northern China, sent large detachments of what seem to have been general, all-purpose troops (War Department 1900; Levenson 1953; Nish 1961; Wehrle 1966; Bodin 1979; Plante 1999).

Ironically, as the new expedition was being assembled, word was received that the legations had not in fact been overrun. Before all the troops had arrived, the expedition was converted into a kind of rescue mission and, just a few weeks later, was able to march into Peking and relieve the legations.

What this short recitation indicates is that there were two main sorts of policy instruments used, or intended to be used, during the powers’ intervention. The first was seaborne forces – marines and armed sailors – whose missions were to protect or rescue foreign civilians. Each of the powers had forces of this sort, cruising off the coast of China; the sequence of activities assumed to be at the heart of their tasks was something along these lines: foreign civilians run the risk of being attacked in China by an excitable local populace which the imperial government is unable and/or unwilling to repress; the powers will therefore have to expect to rescue their civilians from time to time; since the local attackers are unlikely to be well-armed, well-trained, or well-organized, small detachments of professional infantry, supplemented by armed sailors, are more than ample to carry out these rescues. This clearly is one strand of what can be called imperial ideology, and it will be noted that it bears more than a passing resemblance to the expected missions of special forces in today’s “failed states.”

The second policy instrument used was larger units experienced in fighting pacification campaigns against uprisings by indigenous populations. These units, often composed of soldiers from ethnic or national minorities, were expected to be stationed for considerably longer periods of time (most of the powers shipped supplies sufficient to cover a campaign of six to nine months) in the midst of a hostile population that from time to time was seen as likely to explode and commit massacres of civilized inhabitants coming from the outside. Although their military competence was not assumed

⁸ Up to that time, the Germans’ one experience of putting down a colonial rebellion was in East Africa, with primarily local troops.

to be extensive, the sheer numbers of that hostile population meant that the powers' forces would have to be garrisoned and carry out regular raids on armed units of that population. The local government was assumed to be too weak to engage in these tasks and so the intervening forces would have to rely more on each other than on any troops provided by the local government. This is another strand of imperial ideology, expressing the understanding of insurgency and pacification in a colonial setting; it too has certain similarities with contemporary counterinsurgency practices.

By contrast, the other types of armed forces were much less well defined. For the most part, they consisted of detachments from the regular army without any particular experience in either rescue missions or pacification. They certainly were capable of fighting against the Boxers, but did not engage in characteristic, well-defined sequences of activities; for this reason, we would not really qualify them as a policy instrument. Of course, over the next several decades, all three countries' forces were used in various pacification campaigns – including in China – and soon began to resemble quite closely what the British, French, Italians, and Americans had already developed as a policy instrument.

Intervention 2: the overthrow of the Taliban

When the attacks of September 11, 2001 occurred, the U.S. had been in a neutral posture for almost 10 years in Afghanistan. Once the Soviet Union had agreed to withdraw its troops from that country, the U.S. began to terminate its support to the mujahedin it had once backed; and although the U.S. was not enamored of the Taliban, it was also less than happy with the Taliban's principal opponents, the Northern Alliance (and former mujahedin) forces under Ahmed Shah Massoud, whom it accused (correctly) of trafficking in heroin and of military weakness. Although the CIAS maintained low-level relations with Massoud, these were mostly on a contingency basis; as regards arms aid, the U.S. restricted itself to lukewarm encouragement to covert transfers of weapons to the Northern Alliance by Iran and Russia.

Although the Taliban were off the agenda as an enemy, policy makers in Washington were willing to consider action against Al Qaeda, whose leaders by then had relocated to Afghanistan. Until September 2001, Al Qaeda's attacks on the U.S. were considered too small to warrant some kind of U.S. ground response – “our closest allies would not support us,” Clinton said in 1998 – and so the U.S. response to embassy bombings was a series of cruise missile strikes, criticized widely as disproportionate and ineffective. This reaction led the CIA to come up with a plan for a significant covertly financed war by Massoud's forces against Al Qaeda, but that, too, was disapproved in Washington on the grounds, among other reasons, that it would elevate the standing of Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden, and make him “a hero.” Several months later, as U.S. intelligence began to be flooded by reports of planned Al Qaeda strikes, the CIA resuscitated its previous plan. This time, policy makers were more responsive, and a presidential “finding” authorizing covert arms aid to the Northern Alliance began wending its way to Bush's desk. The finding set as a goal “eliminating” Al Qaeda, though it was clearly understood that this would involve action against the Taliban itself. What would have happened had there been no attacks on September 11 cannot be ascertained; the day before, Massoud was assassinated and no one in Washington knew whether the Northern Alliance could hold together sufficiently to justify a covert war.

Within 36 hours, everything had changed. The Taliban, seen as harboring Al Qaeda, were now a prime U.S. enemy, indeed “really the same” as Al Qaeda. However, attacking “Afghanistan would be uncertain ... 100,000 American troops [could be] bogged down in mountain fighting ... six months from then”; and since the country “had few roads and little infrastructure,” it “would be hard” to find “anything to hit” with air power by itself. If the U.S. really was to act on its own, perhaps it would have to launch “military action elsewhere as an insurance policy in case things in

Afghanistan went bad.” Instead, the CIA’s existing plan of aid to the Northern Alliance was bulked up in size and extended to potential rivals in the south of the country; and to this was added a Defense Department plan for air strikes combined with commando operations. What this meant in practice, a few weeks hence, was that the CIA dispensed funds to Northern Alliance and other warlords to pay for their troops and subsidize defections among the Taliban, while the U.S. engaged in battlefield bombing against Taliban units, with targets being spotted by Special Forces teams. This combination was sufficiently powerful that after an initial scare, when the Northern Alliance stalled and Powell had to fend off contingency plans for “Americanizing the war,” the Taliban collapsed by mid-November. The U.S. then turned to Al Qaeda, trying at first for a similar marriage of its own airpower and Afghan forces and then, several months later, using larger numbers of American ground troops to carry out what would become a regular series of operations against suspected Al Qaeda fighters and, later, resurgent Taliban guerrillas.⁹

We can see from this discussion that there were two policy instruments in use in the overthrow of the Taliban: the CIA’s support of proxy ground forces, and the Air Force’s tactical bombing of the proxies’ enemies. The first of these had been used repeatedly over decades; it involved CIA officers contacting potential allies, disbursing funds, and in some cases, weapons, to them, and then, depending on the combat results, repeating the process, perhaps with additional allies. This policy instrument had been employed both on behalf of clients (e.g., in Laos, where the CIA bankrolled a Hmong army for use against the Pathet Lao) and against enemies (e.g., in Angola, where the CIA aided rebel forces opposed to the MPLA government), which indicates that the mission embedded in the policy instrument – to subsidize irregular forces against an enemy – mattered far more than the political and diplomatic context. The assumptions were that there would often be insurgencies in poor countries; that the U.S. would frequently wish to back one side rather than to stay neutral or, if it was an anti-government insurgency, to rely on the government (deemed incompetent) to quash it with its own forces; that this backing, though often quite simple (providing money with which to pay fighters or buy weapons) could well turn the tide, and that it might be unseemly for the U.S., and perhaps a client government, publicly to acknowledge U.S. intervention since the territory on which the fighting is occurring is that of a sovereign state. This is a very modern strand of imperial ideology, well-suited to a world in which states pay lip service to the UN Charter. Other states, notably the French, have capabilities that vaguely resemble those of the CIA, but the formally low-key nature of the latter sets it apart.

The second instrument used in overthrowing the Taliban was the use of tactical bombing by the U.S. Air Force. This, in a sense, was even simpler than the CIA’s handing out suitcases full of \$100 bills, since it only required spotters (in the occurrence, Special Forces dressed in local garb and riding mules – shades of Lawrence of Arabia) to call in coordinates for air strikes and provide real time updates on the accuracy of those strikes. Such bombing had been used in the past, if less often than one might imagine (a bit in the Kosovo war; a few days’ worth in the first Gulf War; before that, in South Vietnam. The U.S. had advised the Salvadoran military on such operations in the 1980s, but had not carried them out itself) and it was a staple of U.S. military doctrine. It presupposed open battles, or at least large and discernible troop movements which would serve as a target, and therefore was very much at odds with many types of counterinsurgency warfare. By the same token, it also would be far more difficult if the targeted enemy had its own air force or significant anti-air defenses.¹⁰ Hence, tactical air strikes assumed a foe with large manpower stocks, insufficient resources to fight off such strikes, and an incapacity or unwillingness to opt for guerrilla tactics. In this sense, tactical bombing supposes military operations of the sort that were popular among European imperial powers (and the U.S.) from the 1920s to the 1960s, in which the foe was hopelessly outmatched technically, yet too rigid to adjust its tactics.

⁹ Sylvan and Majesk (2008: ch. 6) contains the primary and secondary source citations for these paragraphs.

¹⁰ Even so, the Pentagon dragged its heels on the air war until they had bases in neighboring countries, and hence the ability to set up search and rescue operations for downed pilots.

Interestingly, there were two policy instruments not resorted to by the U.S. to overthrow the Taliban. One was a full-scale ground invasion along the lines of the Iraq war 18 months later; the second was the kind of counterinsurgency patrols which have now been used for the last few years against the possibility of Taliban or Al Qaeda resurgence. The first of these instruments was deemed inappropriate for various reasons, one being that time was of the essence and that it would take too long to assemble a large invasion force and march across the Hindu Kush. On the other hand, a counterinsurgency war would make no sense until the Taliban had been chased from power, and the idea that the U.S. should plan on the Taliban re-forming would then have been unconsidered undue pessimism, especially as it was assumed that the Northern Alliance, as Afghans, would excite less fewer political objections than had the Soviets.

Conclusion

If we think of ideologies as being crystallized in policy instruments, they turn out to be a useful way of accounting for many of the significant details of states' foreign policies. The implications for the study of international relations more generally, as well as of policy making in other domains, are intriguing. Here we will end with one thought: if there are only a limited number of policy instruments, and if it takes considerable time to put together new ones, then there may well be practical, organizational aspects to the kinds of ideological rigidities often decried as constraining change in international relations.

References

- Abelson, R.P. and Carroll, J.D. (1965) Computer simulation of individual belief systems, *American Behavioral Scientist* 8,1: 24-30.
- Bodin, L.E. (1979) *The Boxer Rebellion*, London: Osprey.
- Carbonell, J.G., Jr. (1978) POLITICS: automated ideological reasoning, *Cognitive Science* 2,1: 27-51.
- Dueck, C. (2006) *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hamilton, M.B. (1987) The elements of the concept of ideology, *Political Studies* 35,1: 18-38.
- Hunt, M.H. (1987) *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- (1990) Ideology, *J. of American History* 77,1: 108-15.
- Layne, C. (2006) *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Levenson, J. (1953) Western powers and Chinese revolutions: the pattern of intervention, *Pacific Affairs* 26,3: 230-6.
- Lynch, M. (2006) Cognitive activities without cognition? Ethnomethodological investigations of selected "cognitive" topics, *Discourse Studies* 8,1: 95-104.
- Mullins, W.A. (1972) On the concept of ideology in political science, *American Political Science R.* 66,2: 498-510.
- Ninkovich, F. (1999) *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Nish, I.H. (1961) Japan's indecision during the Boxer disturbances, *J. of Asian Studies* 20,4: 449-61.
- Plante, T.K. (1999) U.S. marines in the Boxer Rebellion, *Prologue Magazine* 31,4.
- Sparrow, B.H. (2006) *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Suskind, R. (2006) *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Puursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Sylvan, D. and Majeski, S. (2008) *U.S. Foreign Policy in Perspective: Clients, Enemies, and Empire*, London: Routledge, forthcoming.
- Taber, C.S. (1992) POLI: an expert system model of U.S. foreign policy belief systems, *American Political Science R.* 86,4: 888-904.

War Department (1900) *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900, Report of the Lieutenant-General Commanding the Army in Seven Parts*, vol. 1, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Wehrle, E.S. (1966) *Britain, China, and the Antimissionary Riots 1891-1900*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.