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# Empire State of Mind

## *The Illiberal Foundations of Liberal Hegemony*

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CHRISTOPHER J. COYNE  
AND ABIGAIL R. HALL BLANCO

**T**he global reach of the U.S. military is truly staggering. Consider that “[t]oday US military operations are involved in scores of countries across all the . . . continents. The US military is the world’s largest landlord, with significant military facilities in nations around the world with a significant presence in Bahrain, Djibouti, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Kyrgyzstan, in addition to long-established bases in Germany, Japan, South Korea, Italy, and the UK” (Bilmes and Intriligator 2013, 9). In addition, the U.S. Central Command is currently carrying out various military-related activities in at least twenty countries in the Middle East. Further, the United States “has some kind of military presence in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, U.A.E. [United Arab Emirates], Uzbekistan, and Yemen” (Bilmes and Intriligator 2013, 9). This list does not even include the U.S. government’s significant presence and influence in Africa: “[T]he US Africa Command . . . supports military-to-military relationships with 54 African nations” (Bilmes and Intriligator 2013, 10). Consider further the U.S. government’s use of special-operations forces. A recent review of the global use of special-ops forces concludes that “[d]uring the fiscal year that ended on September

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30, 2014, [they] deployed to 133 countries—roughly 70% of the nations on the planet” (Turse 2015).

Yet another indicator of the U.S. military’s global reach is the prevalence of bases around the world, as cataloged in the Department of Defense’s annual *Base Structure Report*. For fiscal year 2014, the department operated more than 470 bases in foreign countries and an additional 4,000 bases in the United States and its territories (2014, 6). The department’s total real estate portfolio is significant, consisting of “more than 562,000 facilities (buildings, structures, and linear structures), located on over 4,800 sites worldwide, and covering over 24.7 million acres” both domestically and internationally (2014, 2). Other estimates of U.S. bases on foreign soil are even greater. For example, David Vine calculates that “today there are around eight hundred U.S. bases in foreign countries, occupied by hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops” (2015, 3).

The U.S. military’s massive boot print is not a recent phenomenon. The United States has been engaged in a state of permanent war for decades, and the U.S. government has been intervening in global affairs for centuries (see Shoup 1969; Johnson 2000, 2004; Bacevich 2002, 2010; Kinzer 2006; Dudziak 2012; Duncan and Coyne 2013a, 2013b; Posen 2014). Attempts to catalog U.S. interventions abroad have documented hundreds of cases starting in the late 1790s (see U.S. Department of State 1967; Goldwater 1973; Collins 1991; Torreón 2014).

Deepak Lal captures the U.S. government’s activist foreign policy in the conclusion that “[t]he United States is indubitably an empire. It is more than a hegemon, as it seeks control over not only foreign but also aspects of domestic policy in other countries” (2004, 63). There is no reason to think that this deeply engrained mentality will change anytime soon. In recent comments regarding the Department of Defense’s fiscal year 2015 budget request, Deputy Defense Secretary Christine Fox stated that “[t]here is just too much to do in the world, and we need clever ideas on how to be everywhere, do everything with fewer forces across the entire joint force” (qtd. in Lyle 2014).

What mentality does the proactive and militaristic foreign policy of the U.S. government require? We answer this question by identifying the defining characteristics of the interventionist mindset. The U.S. government’s current grand strategy in foreign policy has been described as “liberal hegemony” (see Ikenberry 2012 and Posen 2014). From this perspective, the U.S. government uses its position of global power to exert influence over others while promoting Western liberal values, including constitutional democracy, the rule of law, economic freedom, individual rights and freedoms, and an appreciation of the forces of spontaneous orders (see Posen 2014, 5–6). The U.S. military has been the centerpiece of this strategy of liberal hegemony, which requires “a sustained investment in military power whose aim is to so overwhelm potential challengers that they will not even try to compete, much less fight” (Posen 2014, 5).

We point out the inherent tension in this position. Proponents of the current U.S. grand strategy claim a commitment to liberal values. However, successfully

implementing the strategy requires, attracts, and reinforces a mentality fundamentally at odds with liberal values. The adoption and reinforcement of this mentality is incentivized by government bureaus that reward those who successfully implement the government's foreign-policy strategy. Within this system, those who rise to the top will tend to be those who are most comfortable and willing to engage in illiberal behaviors toward foreign populations.

We proceed as follows. The first section discusses what constitutes foreign intervention, the core characteristics of the interventionist mindset, and how this mentality is at odds with liberal values. The second section explores the internal incentives of the government apparatus used to design and implement foreign policy that reward the adoption and reinforcement of the interventionist mindset. And we conclude our argument in the third section.

## The Interventionist Mindset

For our purposes, the term *foreign intervention* refers to the use of the discretionary power held by members of one government to achieve some desired end in another society (Coyne and Hall 2014). At the core of foreign intervention is the desire by the intervening party to impose a desired state of affairs on another population. The specific desired end will vary depending on context, but the key point is that foreign interventions by their very nature are at odds with the prevailing status quo. If they were not, the intervention would not be necessary in the first place.

Where there is a disjoint between the intervener's desires and the target population's desires, mechanisms of social control will be required to raise the cost of resistance and ensure compliance. Examples of the tools of social control used by the U.S. government in past foreign interventions include surveillance, curfews, segregation, bribery, censorship, suppression, imprisonment, torture, and violence. Given the nature of foreign intervention as well as the type of activities required for success, a certain type of mindset is required that includes some mix of the following characteristics:

1. *Extreme confidence regarding the interveners' ability to solve complex problems in other societies.*

Foreign interventions require the belief that a small group of elites can redesign entire societies according to a grand blueprint. Moreover, it requires the belief that this blueprint can be implemented in the desired manner. According to this logic, all issues are to be treated as technical engineering problems, which can be resolved with appropriate resources in the hands of the intelligentsia. The very idea of externally driven "nation building" perfectly captures this extreme sense of confidence because it assumes that entire nations, including all of the complex institutions necessary for a well-functioning society, can be designed and built by outsiders.

One of the implications of treating the world as a simple rather than complex system is that interventionists downplay or completely ignore the possibility that their actions create perverse unintended consequences. This neglect is evident in the recent

U.S. government intervention in Libya. The original U.S.-led intervention in Libya in 2011 was hailed as a success because it helped depose Muammar Gaddafi without any U.S. military boots on the ground. Although the operation was supposed to be the model of a limited, humanitarian foreign intervention, it resulted in chaos and instability both in Libya and in the broader region.

Consider two headlines from the *New York Times* that capture the lack of appreciation for the possibility of negative unintended consequences. In 2011, the newspaper ran an article titled “U.S. Tactics in Libya May Be a Model for Other Efforts” (Cooper and Myers 2011). As mentioned, many policy makers and pundits at the time hailed the intervention as a success and model for subsequent interventions. Four years later the headline was “ISIS’ Grip on Libyan City Gives It a Fallback Option” (Kirkpatrick, Hubbard, and Schmitt 2015). Today, many of the same interventionists who advocated for intervention in Libya and elsewhere are now calling for further interventions by the U.S. government to combat ISIS with no consideration for subsequent unintended consequences.

2. *A sense of superiority regarding scientific knowledge, preferences, and righteousness.*

Interventionists believe that their vision is superior to the status quo; otherwise, an intervention would be unnecessary (see Brenner 2014). This sense of supremacy is multifaceted and is predicated on the belief that the interventionists (*a*) possess superior technological knowledge to foreigners, (*b*) possess preferences that are preferable to and desired by those intervened upon, and (*c*) possess the moral right and duty to spread their superior knowledge and preferences. Together, this overarching sense of superiority reflects an attitude of condemnation toward the preferences, choices, and ways of life of others, which are necessarily viewed as inferior.

3. *Limited compassion and sympathy toward foreigners.*

Interventions are typically complex and are motivated by a variety of goals. These goals often include humanitarian goals to the extent they align with the interveners’ broader aims. Even where humanitarian motives exist and where associated benefits are generated, interventionists often have limited compassion and sympathy toward the target populace.

Consider the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Part of the justification for these interventions was improving the well-being of citizens in each country. And on some margins, interventions have indeed generated improvements for certain groups. This is not surprising given that the U.S. government spent significant sums of money on the occupations, which included an array of humanitarian programs. Despite these improvements and benefits, concern for the well-being of Afghan and Iraqi citizens is limited.

As U.S. general Thomas Franks once remarked when discussing the number of people killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, “[W]e [the U.S. government] don’t do body counts” (qtd. in Tirman 2015). This attitude of indifference toward deaths caused by intervention neglects the fact that while enemies can be killed during foreign interventions, so too can innocent civilians. In addition to fatalities,

foreign interventions can also impose other, nonlethal costs on innocent civilians, including displacement, the onset and spread of disease, and psychological harms. These costs counter any of the aforementioned humanitarian benefits generated by interveners.

This characteristic is also evident when those in the intervening country discuss the costs of war. There is a tendency to focus narrowly on the lives lost and monetary costs incurred by those in the intervening nation. Excluded are the heavier costs that fall on the intervention's target population (see Tirman 2015). This approach not only severely underestimates the total costs of intervention but also reinforces a moral apathy toward harms imposed on human beings in the target country.

4. *Comfort with the use of a wide range of often repugnant means to impose externally determined and desired ends on others.*

The interventionists are so confident in their vision for other societies that they are comfortable using a variety of means to implement them. The means employed typically include some combination of soft power—the ability to attract and persuade—and hard power—force and coercion. In some cases, the latter entails extreme forms such as torture (McCoy 2006), long-term incarceration without due process (Slahi 2015), and the killing of innocent civilians (Physicians for Social Responsibility, Physicians for Global Survival, and Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War 2015), who are dismissed as “collateral damage.” Where such extreme tactics are employed, the interventionists fail to appreciate that they have adopted the most vicious methods and characteristics of those they condemn and combat.

In addition to directly adopting ruthless techniques of social control, the U.S. government has also historically partnered with brutal authoritarian regimes in order to achieve short-term goals (Carpenter and Innocent 2015). In doing so, the members of the political elite seem indifferent, if not entirely oblivious, to the significant costs imposed on innocent people in terms of human rights violations. In general, in order to succeed, the interventionists must be willing to consider employing any and all means available under the belief that “the ends justify the means.”

5. *A lack of self-awareness and the inability to self-reflect in the face of rejection or failure.*

Where an intervention is met with resistance or outright rejection, the interventionists often blame the target population for being ungrateful and do not consider the possibility that the intervention was not desired by those being intervened upon (Brenner 2014). During a speech in 2005, President George W. Bush stated that “we [the U.S. government] gave the Afghan people a chance to live in a free and democratic society” (2005, 992). Almost a decade later, in 2014, President Barack Obama similarly noted that “[w]e gave Iraq the chance to have an inclusive democracy” (qtd. in Ernst 2014). The implication of these statements is that Afghans and Iraqis should be grateful to the U.S. government for bestowing upon them these opportunities through military invasion and occupation. This attitude also suggests that the failure of interventions has nothing to do with the intervening government but rather is the

result of the foreign population's failure to take advantage of the opportunities provided to them by their interveners.

6. *Great confidence in a massive, bureaucratic, public-private complex to carry out interventions in foreign societies.*

Foreign interventions are designed and implemented by numerous, overlapping government bureaucracies. This massive bureaucratic network partners with the private sector to produce goods (i.e., the military-industrial complex) and deliver services abroad (e.g., Halliburton, Blackwater, etc.). Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, those on both sides of the U.S. political spectrum take issue with various aspects of this relationship when it comes to domestic issues. Yet both political parties seem to ignore their respective complaints when it comes to foreign policy.

Although those on the right are purportedly skeptical of “big government” domestically, they are entirely comfortable relying on an immense and largely unconstrained government apparatus when intervening abroad. Likewise, those on the left claim to be skeptical of “big business” and the various favors and privileges it secures domestically, yet they are often more than willing to endorse foreign interventions that entrench and extend corporate cronyism in the form of lucrative contracts and salaries that allow well-connected private parties to benefit at the expense of taxpayers. This unquestioning confidence in the far-reaching bureaucratic apparatus to carry out foreign interventions neglects the epistemic constraints that bureaucrats face (Coyne 2008; Duncan and Coyne 2015) as well as the perverse incentives that contribute to waste, fraud, and corruption in military contracting (Coyne, Michaluk, and Reese 2015).

7. *The deep-seated conviction that order requires state imposition and control.*

Absent government control and planning, interventionists see disorder and chaos in the world. Moreover, it is not just control by any government that is required for order but rather control by the “right” government as determined according to the interventionists' preferences. This mentality has a long history in the United States and can be traced back to 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt declared that “[c]hronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power” (qtd. in Beschloss 2003, 137). Over time, the U.S. government has extended its reach well beyond the Western Hemisphere in the name of promoting global order and stability.

The entrenched belief that order is contingent on government design and control neglects the importance of spontaneous orders—the emergent orders that are the result of people pursuing their diverse ends rather than of conscious, centralized planning. Instead of viewing societies as complex, constantly evolving entities that consist of numerous emergent phenomena, interventionists treat society as a grand science project that can be rationalized and improved upon by enlightened and well-intentioned engineers. This treatment neglects the long tradition of

spontaneous-order thinking that emphasizes that significant and crucial parts of the world in which we all live—that is, economic, legal, social arrangements—are not the result of human design but rather emerge from the actions of dispersed individuals. These organic orders cannot be designed because they do not fit a single, general form across contexts (Ostrom 1991, 242).

8. *Strong condemnation of other governments engaging in foreign interventions.*

Interventionists believe they possess the knowledge, resources, and moral justification to carry out foreign interventions. They do not extend this same reasoning, however, to non-ally governments that engage in similar foreign interventions. In stark contrast, interventionists meet foreign interventions by other governments with public condemnation. This attitude was most recently evident in the U.S. government's response to the Russian government's invasion into Ukrainian territory in 2014. U.S. secretary of state John Kerry publicly condemned the invasion, calling it an "incredible act of aggression" while ignoring the impressive list of U.S. military interventions discussed in the opening lines of this paper. Seemingly oblivious to the ongoing U.S. occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, he went on to note that "[y]ou just don't in the 21st century behave in 19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pretext" (qtd. in Dunham 2014). Interventionists view their own actions as noble, righteous, and justified but similar actions by others as exactly the opposite.

These eight characteristics are fundamental to the mental schema associated with a proactive, interventionist foreign policy that seeks to reshape other societies. It is a general mindset, and not all of the constituent characteristics will necessarily be possessed by each and every individual involved in the numerous aspects of foreign interventions.

Although foreign interventions are often justified as promoting liberal values, the components of the interventionist mindset are inherently illiberal. They discard the rule of law by empowering a small group of political elites with significant discretionary and unconstrained power over the lives of others. They downplay or reject the recognition and respect for other people as human beings deserving of individual sovereignty. They elevate "the government" and "the nation-state" above the individual and emphasize the collective both domestically and internationally. And they ignore or reject the importance of spontaneous orders by operating under the pretense that order is possible only through state-produced social control.

Embracing this illiberal mindset, either implicitly or explicitly, is necessary for success in foreign interventions. To understand why, it is necessary to appreciate the organizational logic and resulting incentives of the government apparatus used to implement foreign policy.

## Why the Illiberal Get on Top

In his discussion of economic planning in the 1930s, Frank Knight noted that planning authorities would have to "exercise their power ruthlessly to keep the machinery



of organized production and distribution running” and that “[t]hey would have to enforce orders ruthlessly and suppress all disputation and argument against policies” (1938, 868–69). He went on to argue that “the probability of the people in power being individuals who would dislike the possession and exercise of power is on a level with the probability that an extremely tender-hearted person would get the job of whipping-master on a slave plantation” (869). F. A. Hayek made a similar argument in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), emphasizing that under a regime of government planning the worst people in society are the most likely to rise to positions of power. The reason why is that planning grants significant discretionary power to those who are tasked with making decisions about the allocation of resources. Who, Hayek asked, is likely to flourish in a system characterized by wielding such power over others? Like Knight, he answered that “the unscrupulous and uninhibited are likely to be more successful” in such a system (1944, 135). That is, those who feel comfortable exercising power and control over others are likely to advance in a system of unconstrained discretionary decision making.

Knight and Hayek were pointing out that irrespective of the type of person who enters the system, success ultimately requires that they behave in a certain manner. The incentives created by planning will initially attract the type of people who already behave as Knight and Hayek described or will require otherwise good people to act in an unscrupulous manner to flourish in the system. An individual’s inability to act in a paternalistic and authoritarian manner will lead to his or her replacement by someone who can act in the required way. A similar type of logic can be applied to foreign interventions.

Those involved in foreign interventions will either already possess the interventionist mindset discussed in the previous section or will be incentivized to acquire it in order to successfully fulfill bureaucratic mandates and objectives. As noted, not all of the characteristics described here will necessarily be held by each and every person involved in foreign interventions. The extent of the required mentality is dependent largely on each person’s place in the organization because “[f]unctions within the bureaucracy [are] arrange[d] hierarchically, so that higher authorities always control those with less power at lower levels, and decisions and policies always sift from the top down” (Willers 1977, 45).

In the context of foreign policy, those farther up the decision-making hierarchy will tend to possess more of the defining characteristics of the interventionist mindset. They are the ones who decide where and when to intervene and the specific techniques and strategies for carrying out those interventions. Those farther down the hierarchy, the cogs in the interventionist machinery, will tend to possess fewer of these characteristics but will have to possess at least some of them in order to succeed in the government bureaucracy that is implementing the intervention. They will tend to be specialists in certain areas and will possess or acquire those aspects of the interventionist mentality required for their jobs.

Three related factors incentivize the widespread adoption of the interventionist mindset under a proactive foreign policy. First, those in government bureaus are often

actively indoctrinated with an unquestioning attitude toward the orders provided from above. For example, Colonel James Donovan notes that U.S. military training “stresses the fundamental obligation to serve the nation loyally and without question to carry out the policies and orders of the President, who is Commander in Chief, and the orders of his appointed officers” (1970, 39). John Conrad Willers emphasizes that those entering bureaus quickly realize that “[s]uccess within bureaucracy requires not only skill and expertise and knowledge but also above all, an apparent devotion to the bureaucracy and unquestioning loyalty to its goals” (1977, 45). Former national security adviser and secretary of state Henry Kissinger recognized a similar dynamic when he noted that once one is embedded in the foreign-policy bureaucracy, “[s]erving the machine becomes a more absorbing occupation than defining its purpose” (1969, 18). In other words, success requires adopting and perpetuating the mindset necessary to succeed. Under the U.S. government’s proactive foreign-policy strategy, this mindset aligns with the characteristics described in the previous section.

The second factor incentivizing the adoption of the interventionist mindset is the desire for personal advancement within government bureaucracy (Shoup 1969). As in any organization, those employed in government agencies advance their careers by developing the appropriate skills and reputation and by signaling these abilities to key decision makers. General David Shoup notes that in the U.S. military establishment “[p]romotions and the choice job opportunities are attained by constantly performing well, conforming to the expected patterns, and pleasing the senior officers (1969, 54). Similarly, Colonel Donovan emphasizes that in order to advance, the bureaucrat “must become known as a faithful disciple of his service. In order to promote the organization and its success, he has to compete for goals other than dollar profits, within the fields of operational doctrines, service doctrines, roles and missions, defense appropriations, new weapons programs, and service prestige” (1970, 80). This incentive generates peculiar and often undesirable outcomes in the context of foreign interventions.

In the context of for-profit markets, professional competition is desirable precisely because the process, both within and across organizations, yields beneficial outcomes for private consumers. That is, competition tends to generate new and better products at lower prices as entrepreneurs and producers compete to develop skills that are conducive to satisfying customer wants so that they can outcompete alternative entrepreneurs and producers. In the context of government-led foreign interventions, however, the nature of professional competition is dramatically different.

In this setting, the “customers” are those in positions of power in the intervening government. Those tasked with carrying out the intervention will satisfy their customers by going above and beyond to achieve the goals of the operation. This behavior entails efficiently controlling foreign populations to secure cooperation and to dampen, suppress, or altogether eradicate any resistance. Interveners will therefore face the incentive to act entrepreneurially to develop, implement, and refine a range of

social control techniques to satisfy their political customers at the expense of the target population.

These dynamics were evident in the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, where loose bureaucratic guidelines and mandates, combined with unclear rules regarding what legally constitutes torture, led to the abuse and torture of prisoners to secure “actionable intelligence” in order to satiate the overly broad commands of those farther up the hierarchy (Coyne and Coyne 2013). More broadly, the incentives surrounding foreign interventions can result in “narrow professionalism,” whereby a fierce competition to efficiently and effectively regulate others leads to a willingness to engage in otherwise unthinkable acts of social control to achieve the ends of those in power in the intervening government (Rejali 2007, 457–58).

Finally, internal mechanisms beyond the indoctrination techniques discussed earlier incentivize conformity and weed out those who fail to fall in line by adopting the established mindset. Robert Merton notes that successful bureaus require “a high degree of reliability of behavior, an unusual degree of conformity with prescribed patterns of action” (1940, 562). He goes on to argue that the personalities of those working in the agency will tend to conform to these patterns of action because “there are definite arrangements in the bureaucracy for inculcating and reinforcing these sentiments” (562–63). When people fail to conform to the dominant mindset, there are sorting mechanisms in place.

The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model in management studies provides insight into the tendency toward conformity and reinforcement of an organization’s cultural traits (Schneider 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, and Smith 1995). The ASA framework suggests that an individual is initially attracted to an organization based on the perceived fit between his or her personal characteristics and the culture and environment of the organization. During this “attraction phase,” people will tend to self-select into those organizations where they believe they will mesh and succeed. The “selection phase” refers to the formal and informal channels internal to the organization for screening and offering employment to potential candidates. Organizations will attempt to filter and employ those people who fit with the organization’s culture and mentality. Finally, the “attrition phase” refers to people’s tendency to leave an organization in which they do not fit. They may leave voluntarily, be penalized, or be terminated for inadequate performance. The underlying logic is that employees will be unhappy and underperforming where their personal characteristics sufficiently diverge from those required for success in the broader organization.

One of the implications of the ASA framework is that absent some kind of significant shock to an organization’s culture, such as a change in mission or grand strategy, the organization’s overarching ethos and attributes will tend to be self-reinforcing over time. Those attracted to the organization in the first place will have personality traits that tend to align with the organization’s culture and mentality. Even if the selection process is imperfect, those who do not fit will tend to exit the organization due to lack of personal happiness or to underperformance. The result is a tendency

toward homogeneity around the existing culture, contributing to its perpetuation. In terms of foreign policy, this culture is one of proactive intervention on the part of the U.S. government. Those who possess or who are willing to adopt and develop the requisite interventionist mindset necessary for success will be initially attracted to and succeed within the bureaus involved in designing, implementing, and executing foreign interventions in other societies. Those who lack this mentality or fail to adopt it either will be sorted out before employment or will fail to advance if they are hired.

## Conclusion

Those in control of the U.S. government have provided numerous justifications for past foreign interventions, including some mix of empathy with the suffering, the spread of freedom and democracy, the need to fix broken societies, and retaliation against actual or potential threats or enemies. Some of these interventions have succeeded in their goals. Many have failed. Our central point is that, irrespective of the motivation or outcome, foreign interventions require a certain mindset that is at odds with liberal values. The degree to which these values are abandoned will vary with context. But as the U.S. government's recent actions at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp and Abu Ghraib prison make clear, the interventionist mindset can lead to the use of extremely vicious and repugnant techniques of coercion and control against other human beings.

Recognizing the illiberal foundations of liberal hegemony has an important implication. Even if we assume the best-case scenario regarding the intentions of those who control U.S. foreign policy, they must still adopt illiberal means, at least to some degree, to achieve their otherwise noble ends. That is, even under the first-best scenario, where the intervenors' intentions are benevolent and other regarding, foreign interventions face a fundamental tension in that they require the adoption of illiberal means to achieve liberal ends.

Of course, there is good reason to believe that this best-case scenario is not descriptive of reality. Given the insights of public choice economics regarding the operation of government and the national security state, it is more accurate to ease this best-case assumption to allow for the possibility of more narrowly self-interested motivations on the part of interveners. Under this scenario, the noble rhetoric of humanitarian intervention and the desire to spread liberal values is simply cover for the true motivations behind foreign interventions, which often produce illiberal outcomes. In this case, interveners will have abandoned liberal values not just as a means, as in the best-case scenario, but also as an end. When this occurs, the U.S. government is acting as an illiberal hegemon that threatens the very liberal values it purports to protect and advance through foreign interventions.

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