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Clientism is seen by some as hegemony, an evil that includes any linkage of support for concession. This paper disputes that view and argues that we have not learned from experience nor have we considered what lessons our experiences have taught others; it argues for a different method of selecting friends and a different way to define the terms of support we offer friends.

CLIENTISM UNBOUND: AMERICA AND THE TACTICS OF THIRD WORLD SECURITY

by
Robert King Morris

Art is still instructive.

In a scene from David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, the leader of the Arab Revolt confers with tribal chieftains and gazes into the great desert known as God's Anvil. Beyond the sands lies the Turkish garrison at Aqaba, their objective, and Lawrence has just decided they will cross the desert and take it. The sheikhs reproach him: for it is written that no man may walk God's Anvil and live. Nonetheless the once and future enigma who will one day write *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* looks at them, sandy-eyed, and replies simply, "Nothing is written."

His words are with us even now. Similarly might we judge, though not out of self-confidence but self-consciousness, any doctrine today that colors our vision of America's role in the world. The Monroe and Truman Doctrines, our twin pillars of confidence only 30

years ago, have almost been lost since then in the furious recycling of our principles. Unfairly, these cycles began with the very doctrinaire John Foster Dulles. For the simple goal of containing communism, Dulles reinvented collective security, creating ambitious treaty organizations as regional stop-gaps. America thence was not only committed to new allies but entangled in often age-old rivalries: in any Holy Alliance there was always to be a brush-fire, a weakest link that would require us on a crisis-footing. In this sense the Dulles legacy's denouement in Indochina was almost an afterthought, though for the home audience the Kennedy-Johnson rendition of containment floundered climactically on the screen. So, for that matter, did the Nixon Doctrine—which hypothesized that America's allies should, with American arms, be able to fight their own

wars—but the freshness of this doctrine allowed it respectability for a while longer, particularly in our Persian Gulf policy, until the fall of the Shah. Arms alone, we then divined, cannot always save lost clients from true believers, as our third decade of doctrinal confusion drew to a close.

But we have since entered a new decade: the Carter Doctrine complemented if not replaced old policies, and backing it were policymakers who preferred, or wished for, our eventual “rapid deployment” interception of Soviet adventurism over steady on-scene protection of our clients. The assumption behind this preference seems dangerously bipartisan—Dr. Kissinger stated frankly in a *Washington Quarterly* interview antedating the doctrine that we should expect little in lasting cooperation from those we perceive as potential friends in the Third World.¹ Even now in our vigilant aloofness, however, we are uncomfortable and our interests insecure. Proof of that: one wonders how our pro-peace posture will stand us in the world when, for instance, the Somalis make their perennial foray into Ethiopia, rendering our base in Berbera beholden to the aggressors’ demands that we continue—or perhaps *bike?*—the financial support we promised them. More critically, what can the President do when the turmoil from the next ambushed dynasty or desert war in Southwest Asia swirls up into another oil price spiral?

A key foreign policy question, then, seems to be how we should define our relations with an ally. This old problem’s thesis and antithesis basically have been that we profit greatly from rewarding our friends and punishing our enemies *versus* that we profit little from allies who abuse and extrapolate our support in directions we had not intended. The synthesis of these contradictions is, perhaps, that we should more carefully select our friends and

define the terms of our support. With our European allies, this process has been relatively easy because of their at least casual consensus over the danger lying to the east, as well as their happy weariness with war among each other. With the Third World this process has not been so easy.

In his signal piece, “The United States in Opposition,”² Daniel Moynihan complained that in international forums U.S. negotiators too readily retreat from our proposals and accede to the demands of others, especially those of the underdeveloped nations. Today we might add that such poor horse-trading dogs even our bilateral dealings with those nations we want as our friends. Of late we have granted protection to the oil states of the Persian Gulf, given billions in arms aid to Egypt, offered tons of enriched uranium to India, shown interest in the guarantee of Somalia’s border with Marxist Ethiopia, and so on, world without end. Think on it: what have we really secured? The Saudis lend a restraining hand on the oil market, but not so much as will prevent a 1979-style price spiral should history repeat itself; Sadat generously lends his restraining hand to a separate peace with Israel that gains *him* the lost Sinai, its oil, and its airbase; India resists any restraint on her ability to make atomic bombs that are more likely meant for use on Pakistan than Russia; and Somalia has demanded our backing of her Ogaden adventure as well as her borders before allowing our Navy rights to Berbera. What lessons can such deals as these convey to prospective clients?

“Clients,” it should be noted here, need connote neither puppets nor leeches, although many critics of “clientism” would have its meaning so oscillated and obscured. It need not even indicate a lord-and-vassal relationship, notwithstanding the existence of many vassals among Moscow’s clientele. What clientism should mean in security affairs is a *free* exchange of protection

from the stronger state in return for a contribution, such as base rights, to the protector's security system. In essence this is not feudalism but free enterprise in the security realm.

Critics who nevertheless see hegemony in clientism argue that our development aid (or its withholding from human rights violators) would better avert instability in the poorer regions. Windfalls or reform have a value, undeniably, but probably not in ensuring stability: oil wealth, after all, has not washed away the endemic uncertainties of life in the Persian Gulf, and reforms imposed on client tyrannies have wrought absurd repercussions from the mutiny of the noncompliant rajahs in 1857 to the untimely fall of the compliant Shah. Even those in the foreign aid establishment seem too trusting—or fatalistic. First, they trust that the despots through whom the aid must be siphoned are genuinely preoccupied with their people's welfare. Second, they trust that the insurgents' invariable terrorization of the populace is a lesser cause for popular revolt than are hunger or injustice, and that insurgents in any case can be deterred by soft-term loans given the regimes they seek to destroy.

Indeed, linkage of our support to any concession, like the very concept of having clients, has enjoyed widespread unpopularity in Washington—even heard to be disparaged by cognizant officers in the Pentagon. Knowing foreign service careerists reveal that no strings-attached good will serves a mature example and is eventually repaid through patiently cultivated, intangible influence among the regime's moderates. On the other hand, commitments to or even arms-for-minerals deals with these same regimes spoil with age, according to modern idealpolitik, and cannot be considered. Somewhere, though, the syllogism sags: the lay logician will find it harder to imagine gaining a return on our support without deals, or regaining credibility in

the world without commitments.

Unarguably, the symbol and the essence of such commitment between protector and client has been the military base, whether maintained under the flag of the protector or, more fashionably nowadays, that of the host. And yet, in the seventies the pursuit of U.S. bases abroad was thought by most to be outmoded. In the Persian Gulf the pro-Shah Nixon Doctrine perceived no need to remain old British outposts with Americans; the post-Shah Carter Doctrine perceived no invitations. But suppose, shrugs the majority view, we are welcome. The cost of supporting a shore establishment overseas—and, in particular, renting it from governments from Manila to Madrid that eventually demand exponential leaps in aid—requires matching leaps of faith in Congress. For during crises such hosts might close a base to our warplanes bound for a controversial ally. Why, even our superpower rivals, far from faring better, have been denied the bases *they* deserved (Angola and Mozambique) or, worse, been turned out after their clients had sucked in heavy investments (Egypt and Somalia). Finally, our need for bases—however ambitious abroad we are—has receded bit by bit as intercontinental missiles once obviated SAC bases in Africa and underway replenishment and nuclear power may someday allow warships to bypass naval stations altogether. In short, concludes this argument, the role of bases in clientism is an unnecessary commitment and so no longer credible.

Nonetheless there are cataracts in this smooth, Nile-long logic. It is hard to believe that any token of power is suddenly so perfectly anachronistic, even in the Atomic Age. Bases need no longer be our crutch but they could always be a backup. Just as we have refused to guarantee the absence of nuclear weapons aboard our warships in foreign ports, we should adhere to our cardinal

right neither to confirm nor deny the use to which we put those bases. This is no cloud city. During crises, a power's less strong, less self-sufficient allies have always hedged their commitment at some level: it is a role they must play and the power must not. With regard to bases, the power (e.g., Britain in Gibraltar) would ignore the host's demand for closing the base if its presence were well-entrenched on land and in mind. And if it were not, the power might still exercise its will by graciously offering to terminate the security agreement and move to another base in another country, perhaps one hostile to her ex-ally. The rent of a base might be high with even our apolitical clients, but only if we have bargained poorly by granting them U.S. protection too freely, not keeping in reserve rival base opportunities, or waiting until a crisis occurs before we seek a proximate base. Legends are legion of how we could have once obtained posts at now strategic chokepoints—most regretably, at the Strait of Hormuz.

And perhaps that is why the Russians seem now to be balancing so many tactical blunders with such a strategic *coup de grace* in their encirclement of the Persian Gulf. Opportunism has led them wherever any *conceivable* advantage might one day lie, and tenacity has kept them from easy disillusionment. In the late fifties they funded yet another perhaps ill-fated revolt in Latin America, long, long before the Cubans' application in African states bordering the oil lanes could have fired anyone's imagination. Of course, any client can be bribed and turned, and the Old World knows it: lest Castro should someday feel strong enough to break from the orbit, Moscow now employs in target nations not only Cubans but East Germans, Bulgarians, Yemenis, and Ethiopians for good measure.

Nor is strife between potential clients deemed a deterrent to Moscow's multiple courtships: in fact, it but opens up

more opportunities. War tests the relative fitnesses of the candidates. At times it has suggested a switch in clients, as in the Somali-Ethiopian fracas, and revives remarkably their interest in a patron as their arms inventories run low. (Witness wartime Iraq's reformed deportment towards Russia.) So long as the victor does not vanquish all rivals all at once, Russia can still undermine the capitalist order while retaining alternative candidates in that region. None of this implies that war is the immediate end of every Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation—bases and position still appear paramount—but that conflict between clients worries not the Kremlin as would us any spat between our allies. To the protector in a true client system, collective security is not the end-all, and allied unanimity is not the be-all. The weakest link is dropped, not wooed.

The moral is twice-told: we need not imitate Russia's antisocial behavior, but we should adopt her discretionary play of the field. Let's now apply this discretion to our opportunities in the Horn of Africa. The Somalis have tried to entice our support with the prospect of causing the Soviets trouble, an inviting yet not unmixed prospect. Consider the Soviets' situation: in Ethiopia they have gained the two best developed and located ports on the Horn, Assab and Massawa; their client is more popular than Somalia in boundary-sensitive Africa; they have never been dislodged by a third party from their allies' lands. *Ipsa facto* the possibility of America's effecting Russia's dislodgement seems remote. Surely the reestablishment of Washington as an arms aid alternative to Moscow would better tempt Addis Ababa to eventually expel her immenently opprobrious patron—this perceived alternative, after all, was what finally led to the ouster of the Russians from Cairo and, more recently, Mogadishu.

If we follow such a policy, though, we are liable to hear charges from Moscow's

enemies that the United States is but again demonstrating inconsistency and duplicity. They will try to embarrass us with the examples of Riyadh and Bonn pledging millions of dollars of aid (much of it in arms credits) to the anti-Soviet regime in Mogadishu. But let us not be too deceived; in the absence of sufficient development aid from Russia and her satellites, "over three-quarters of the loans listed in the [1978] Ethiopian budget apparently came from the West and China."³ Thus we find that the other powers' russophobia, while pronounced, is not to be pursued free of the wisdom of maintaining flexibility between mercurial belligerents.

This wisdom can save us not only from the chagrin of not knowing unexpected victors should our favorites be vanquished, but also from missing another chance of obtaining our original goal, regional stability. So long as the nascent Zimbabwe does not allow guerrillas to cross the South African frontier, we should send her incentive pay and perhaps even stay interested in the Namibia talks. If Mugabe relapses into old ways, though, we should then quietly encourage Pretoria to mete out justice as it likes in the sanctuaries. Similarly, Nicaragua should be granted aid only if she ends her current deleterious influence of her neighbors' health; otherwise, we should arm and encourage her neighbors to battle the Sandinistas on the latter's home ground. Note that in neither case is an aid ransom alone advocated, for in both the candidate is shown a threat far worse than the aid offer's withdrawal. Above all, we ought to realize that whenever we display our largesse, our invariable *leitmotif*, to a beneficiary who promises us little in return, we are not yet by definition "influencing a would-be ally." We are being swindled.

Flexibility, then, cannot be without conditions. Even with regard to the requests of rebels seeking our support against an anti-Western regime, we

should oblige them only with the understanding that on liberation day we would be granted a mineral concession or at least users' rights on indigenous bases. If they should doublecross us at that time by demanding too much more aid, denying us our quid, or destabilizing the region, then our commitment to their security would cease. Then why not support the rebellion in the Ogaden? First, because those rebels are patently the creatures of Mogadishu designs, and hence our support would violate the principle of territorial integrity. Second, principles aside, they could never win secession from a state for which Moscow has demonstrated such impressive support. The bottom line for our selection of aid recipients should be—in addition to their receptivity to our objectives—their winning potential: UNITA in Angola thus today seems deserving, whereas the WPLF in Ethiopia, alas, does not.

The risk of dealing with so many clients is that some will feel less fairly treated than others. Our Arab contacts frequently question the fairness of our special relationship with Israel, although they refuse us the same naval air cover and privileges at bases with which the Israelis repay us. Nevertheless, the justifiable complaint may emerge when we rush emergency support to a beleaguered government without extracting worthwhile favors from it. In order to rationalize arms aid to, say, the Afghans (who may actually have nothing to give us and whose invaders we have been unable to buy off by other means) we may indeed have to plead an Americanized version of the adage, "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," to describe—ironically!—our collective fight against communism. But even this answer will not satisfy all: jealous clients are rarely Joblike. Every Administration has faced accusations of keeping "double standards." As long as our hard-bargained clients are the rule rather than the

exception, though, they at least cannot feel especially mistreated.

Our relations with the discontented might be further improved if we seek agreement bilaterally rather than in blocs. Regional forums and foreign policies, sadly, have only served to magnify conflicts that might have been localized. The success of collective security in history has been a perceptual cross-product of the strength of the leading power and the likelihood of an outside threat rather than the mere readiness of a CENTO or SEATO to entertain the issue. Since our debut in the Middle East, our maintenance there of not more than one or two sentinels of pro-American stability has invited focused attack from our adversaries. Dulles' touted Middle East Defense Organization only provided a talent like Nasser with an issue around which to pivot his bid for pan-Arab leadership. Paradoxically, when we have relied instead on a regional leader for security as Nixon and Ford relied on the Shah and Carter had on Sadat, that security also becomes targetable and tenuous. If we then try to distance ourselves prudently from our one and only, she is made more open to Soviet subversion or winged words . . . for, after all, she surely no longer wants nor needs U.S. protection as shown by our parting, and hence she has become self-reliant. Pleading a "new, complex world," we can only respond by trumpeting her new-found freedom. Our blast becomes the uniquely American conception of a *proxy*, not as a closer partner but as a healthy client that has outgrown the need for U.S. intervention except only in the direst straits—straits too narrow, evidently, to be made out with our eyes during the last days of Somoza, the Shah, or South Vietnam after the Peace Accords. The upshot of this studied wordplay and our enlightened aloofness is that we lose what token clients we had left in the area. And despite all our piety, wit, and tears, we have yet to learn as

well to vary our client portfolio and so spread the risk.

Possibly our problem is that America has seemed too entrapped in the super-powers' struggle for her still to be politically acceptable to the nonaligned in her timeworn role as security protector. Obliging, the West Germans have proposed a compromise division of labor. This division envisions an increased role for our NATO allies in giving aid or technical advice to unstable areas, while America retains the job of militarily defending the recipients' security. Such a revised partnership has already been rehearsed in Turkey with respect to loans and in the Persian Gulf with respect to technology;⁴ reviews have not been bad.

One may think this is the answer to Congress' increased aversion to aid-giving, while also preserving flexibility in our policy toward adversaries. Unfortunately, in the absence of local war, the patron through her purse strings will invariably retain greater influence than the protector over the client. Most poorer nations' foreign policies are focused on the assistance, preferably arms, that can be solicited from abroad. Certainly leaders whose legitimacy is based on force alone value those gifts most which will keep them in good stead with their armies: hence the patrons' power and the Americans' loss. Although the patrons may mostly be close allies, the U.S. presence in, for example, Berbera will no longer be a matter solely between Washington and Mogadishu.

Of course, those who have unsuccessfully sought our aid against Marxist enemies can always seek as a substitute European arms financed by an oil potentate or some other rich patron. Perhaps those aid-seekers *should* be steered into a European ally's camp: as noted at the 1980 NATO conference, Britain and France have been sharing the burden for years. Let them do more.

The United States cannot be the world's exclusive policeman.

But over this easy pragmatism still looms the problem of coordination. The Western powers' vulnerability to being played off one against the other by the lowliest nonaligned is almost a proverb. What could have happened to our pursuit of Berbera if the French were offered an Arab-financed contract for arms destined for Somalia? And a worse nightmare for the Alliance would be a repeat of the 1956 Suez fiasco, when the disorganized state of Western policy in the Third World was most vividly hung out to flap in the breeze.

What is needed, then—and what we might deign to champion—is the extension of the NATO mantle (if we include France) to this burden-sharing. Although the old colonial powers, particularly France, jealously guard their unique leverage over old protectorates, this mantle need not usurp their special positions. In truth, Paris aversion to such Western cooperation was founded not only in Gaullism but in our twin vetoes of the Suez invasion and De Gaulle's 1958-61 proposal of a tripartite directorate with Britain and America to manage the cold war globally. If we substitute "NATO" for "tripartite" then we have the idea that the Alliance might debate today.

Finally, we might take our ritual solace from experience. In the last century Britain maintained the balance of power in Asia by supporting two aging empires, the Ottoman and the Persian, against Russian expansionism. London's relations with these clients were never easy. The Turks resisted all entreaties from their patrons to reform their decadent regime, and often threatened defection to Russia or even bankruptcy in order to extract more aid. Persia, even more intractable in her client role, more than once invaded Afghanistan (at times also a client, although the British Resident in Kabul was murdered in 1879) and had to be

invaded herself by British troops to protect British interests there. At least history's perversities repeat themselves! And, in East Asia, London signed a defense pact with the Japanese in time for them to act, in a sense, as proxies in Manchuria against the Tsar—thus embarking on a course that was to later leave the British Empire in the Pacific at the mercy of her old clients.⁵

And yet, what was the alternative? Where the Royal Navy could not make its presence felt, local clients had to be secured to play the Great Game. As Edward Luttwak shows in his *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, the most successful of Rome's defensive strategies was not that of annexation but the Julio-Claudian use of client kingdoms to maintain security outside the empire's long borders. Not until Rome replaced this system of clients deterred by reserve legions in Italy with the policy of direct control, which required too many centurions fighting in too many new provinces, was her decline foreshadowed. The policy that followed, that of withdrawal and paying foreigners to keep the peace, was the opposite swing of the irrational pendulum.⁶ Never again could Rome play the old middle ground.

And likewise, our post-Iran revulsion from our post-Vietnam reliance on proxies should be thought through. We can hardly afford to suffer gladly these doctrinal swings. The spectacle of America backing a host of useful tyrants to the hilt might be distasteful to some of us, but to those in the nondemocratic world it would indicate nothing so much as invincibility, by which they decide whom they should respect. In an election year we were told that strong, coherent leadership above all else would guarantee our success abroad. Well, perhaps: but it is only through doctrines that the imagination of one Administration can supplant its lack in another. Truman's containment doctrine as an end almost accomplished this, but it left

the means to be decided by each succeeding Administration. Dulles' vision focused not on clients but on over-collectivized security to legitimize our protection—but this led to our diversion into peripheral anxieties through the fifties and sixties. Kissinger's legacy has focused not on clients but regional lone rangers—but in spite of him they lack U.S. support sufficient to withstand upheaval or invasion. Furthermore, neither the vital consideration of preserving our flexibility between belligerents as an arms aid alternative to Moscow nor the wisdom of backing only potential winners, neither the need for better bargaining with a wider net of clients nor the idea of managing them in tandem with our European allies, have

yet received deserving emphasis in the policies of even our stronger Presidents.

This malign neglect should go. True clientism and its potential for saving containment should be considered as our world outlook matures.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Ensign Robert Morris graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1980. His major was Political Science and he served as an officer of the Academy's Foreign Affairs Conference. He is now being trained in the Navy Nuclear Power Program.

NOTES

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