Review: " The national security strategy " Of The United States of America under G. W. Bush

por Rômulo Cristaldo[i]

USA. United States of America. *The national security strategy*. Washington, DC, set. 2002.

Published by the U.S. in 2002 as a political response to an international context reshaped under the shadow of the September 11, 2001 attacks on its own territory—when al-Qaeda, a group that uses terrorism to advance its agenda, hijacked and crashed commercial airplanes into buildings that, in its view, symbolized American power over the world—the administration's security strategy marked the first decade of the 21st century in many ways. The main one, in our view, was as a practical example of the concept that when a world hegemony sees itself threatened, it resorts to the use of force to maintain its influence, thereby undermining the foundations of its own existence as such. Or not...

Our objective with this review, however, is not to evaluate the document as a whole, or even the context and structure from which it emerges, but merely to read it in light of the Hobbesian tradition in International Relations. The main goal here is to note which key propositions of Thomas Hobbes's political conception survive in the text, which ones diverge, and which ones align with the realist tradition of international relations (IR), the self-proclaimed heir to a Hobbesian analysis. The text itself is divided into nine parts, the first being an "overview" of "America's international strategy" (p. 1), and the others applying this to more specific elements, contemplating everything from the universal aspiration of its values (p. 3-4) to the proposition of an agenda for cooperation [integration] among states (p. 25-28).

The most important lines for our purposes quickly reveal themselves, though they unfold throughout the entire document. The text, notably a collective composition in which the style shifts between American legal pragmatism and military-bureaucratic discourse, culminates in an intransigent and even contradictory ultimatum to the world when it states:

> We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are note impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept.
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> [...]
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> In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require. (p. 31).

This particular passage points to an important characteristic attributed to both the political interpretation of Hobbes and to realism in IR: it is a direct declaration of independence from a supranational institution and, furthermore, from the community of nations itself. Thus, between the lines, one reads that the State is, in fact, the only relevant actor on the stage of international relations; it also seems to conceive that some states are more powerful than others and, therefore, these should be granted more rights [and perhaps duties] than the rest; this power is visibly built upon a realist conception of military capability and territorial size, but augmented by the economic element, especially when it later highlights the dynamism of its economy as a differentiating factor in relation to other nations. And, as if agreeing that a type of anarchy prevails in the international system (IS), it exposes its intention to ignore divergent interests to secure its own.

The IS, in a realist reading, would be closer to the state of nature as conceived by Thomas Hobbes: each individual seeks their particular interest; there is no government; therefore, each one, in a war of all against all, relies on their individual capacity to prevail. It is interesting to note that this conception envisions the State as an individual unit of values and interests, which is exactly what the document in question proclaims when it states that "the U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests." (p. 1).

We believe that a discourse emerging from a social institution whose main objective is to defend internal integration—especially one that responds to the interests of its dominant classes—could not, in fact, follow a different path. This is even more so considering that the document, at certain moments, points to a supposedly necessary coordination of powers on the international stage with the aim of promoting broad integration under what it believes to be universal values. In other words, to defend greater external integration, one must presuppose internal integration.

Despite these proximities to what we can call a Hobbesian reading of international relations, it is also possible to note some very clear divergences.

First, the text asserts a national security proposal for the U.S. using the belligerent role of the State not necessarily to defend peace, but mainly to ensure liberty. Or at least to disseminate its particular conception of liberty: free enterprise. In Hobbes, individuals immersed in the state of nature give up their liberty to create a State that ensures peace as the common good. For the conception crystalized in the text reviewed here, the State must even abdicate peace to ensure liberty, as long as it serves its interests, previously presented as universal.

At a certain point, it also distances itself from realism in IR, making a quick concession to Kantian-rooted idealism by defending the role of supranational organizations, provided they are capable of assisting in the dissemination of its values. Thus, in the introduction to the text

signed by the American president at the time, it is affirmed that "the United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States, and NATO as well as other long-standing alliances. Coalitions of the willing can augment these permeant institutions." (p. vi). It is striking that it only directly cites institutions in which the U.S. has a history of greater control, and which have been, since their genesis, associated with the promotion of free enterprise as a natural right of individuals.

It is worth remembering that realism in IR asserts that such institutions have no autonomy in the international system, but merely reflect the (im)balance of power among the countries that compose them. In other words, while in discourse there seems to be an alignment with this thesis, in practice the pretense of strengthening institutions that it can, in some way, dominate leads one to believe that hiding between the lines is an understanding that such bodies are, in fact, mere puppets in the hands of states.

A third striking difference can be found in the conception of the size and power of the State defended in the plan in question, and that which emerges from Thomas Hobbes. The English philosopher idealized a State that, imbued with the project of ensuring liberty, would maintain such power and autonomy that it would approach that of a mythical monster—for such an institution, everything should be permitted to obtain the common good, peace. In the document published by the American government, however, it is stated in many parts that the role of the State should be limited. This becomes quite evident when it proclaims the values it intends to defend as universal:

> […] the United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere. […] America must stand firm for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property. (p. 3, grifos nossos).

It is interesting to note that it defends an instance of absolute power for the State, an idealization that responds to its hegemonic project, even while claiming there are limits to be respected. And the main limits are contained in the conception that the State should not encroach upon private property—which we interpret here, of course, as referring to the private property of Capital—nor on the "natural right" of free enterprise (p. 18-19). In other words, the primary protection is for the business class.

We note that the document approaches a realist Hobbesian reading of IR when it argues that: (1) the international system is anarchic; (2) states are independent individual units; (3) a balance of power is necessary to ensure order; and (4) it is possible for such units to form coalitions to secure a common good. However, some crucial points mark a difference between the text and the notion of Thomas Hobbes applied to the analysis of the international system, especially when it affirms: (1) that the State must ensure liberty, and not necessarily peace; (2) that there is a favorable horizon for the action of supranational organizations; and (3) this same State must possess limited power. In fact, the document in question does not, for the most part, originate from one particular way of thinking about the reality of the international system. It emanates, above all, from a body of interests that aligns sometimes with one conception, sometimes with another, as long as its desires can be endorsed.

So much so that, in addition to the Hobbesian legacy, it is possible to note traces of Kantian idealism when it defends supranational organizations; there is also much of economic liberalism in its defense of free trade; and even hints of a Gramscian realism, at least when we find between the lines of the text a project, if not hegemonic, at least of domination. In other words, as a political document, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America reveals itself as a rich text rooted in concrete reality, in which it is material interests, and not ideas, that shape the world.

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