Juan Tovar Ruiz, La Doctrina en la Política exterior de Estados Unidos. De Truman a Trump.
(Foreign Policy Doctrine of the US from Truman to Trump)

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The special relationship between the United States of America and Europe has been a feature of the international scenario since the end of the Second World War. This interdependence has also been important for European countries qualified as medium powers; this is the case of Spain. In fact, relations between the two states have been one of the main factors of Spanish foreign policy since the second half of the 20th century. In the context of the Cold War, Spain became a relevant American military ally thanks to its privileged geostrategic position. For Spain, the USA had been one of the main anchors with the Western world until the beginning of the democratic period. Moreover, this bilateral relationship is one of the main drivers of its security and defence policy and has experienced different moments of ups and downs: during the mandate of the conservative president José María Aznar and the Iraq war in 2003 the countries enjoyed a strong partnership (although at a terrible cost in Spanish national politics), whereas the following years of the social-democrat president Rodríguez Zapatero suffered from estrangement.

This historical and political reality is the reason why Spanish scholars have analysed and examined these Spain-USA relations with special interest as a significant variable of Spanish foreign and security policy. The influence of American foreign policy has been relevant for debate in academia, as well as in the rest of the International Studies community, and in the political arena given its position of great power and prominent ally. This concern is prominent in the new book by Juan Tovar, one of the most outstanding Spanish scholars on this issue. It represents an original work among the Spanish foreign policy community, with the clear purpose of deepening the understanding of American strategic thinking. His particular aim is both to contribute to the enrichment of scientific knowledge and to disclose for lay people the main factors and facts of American international politics and policies across the decades.

Keeping in mind these goals, the analysis is based on the concept of doctrine, understood as a strategy derived from one of the main theories of International Relations. Henceforth, the evolution of the different American doctrines from the very foundation of the country to the present are explained and assessed. Nevertheless, the study focuses its attention from the Second World War forward.
In any case, the insightful work does not intend to be an exhaustive review of this whole development, but rather it contributes to a thorough wide vision; the ‘big picture’ of a complex evolution.

One of its strengths is the combination of different theoretical sources: on the one hand, it incorporates the central aspects of neoclassical realism, in which foreign policy is examined, taking into account both the structural constraints of the international system and the internal or national factors of that policy. On the other, it analyses the discourses, ideas and interactions between the actors that shape as much as reflect those policies, thus adopting a constructivist point of view. And finally, it welcomes the perspective of Foreign Policy Analysis in order to explore the outcomes of decision-making processes. Based on this theoretical triangulation, Tovar seeks to answer three fundamental questions: first, if American doctrines have been an effective mechanism to shape the international environment according to these political orientations; second, to determine influences, continuities and ruptures among different doctrines over time; and, last, to delve into the limits for their development, such as power relations, various geostrategic interests, the decision-making process or institutional constraints.

The book is structured in seven chapters. The first one summarises the doctrines of US foreign policy since the American War of Independence and the creation of the nation, until 1945. The essential character of this overview is not to gain historical depth but to frame their developments, because of their enormous influence during the Cold War and the Post-Cold War era, from an ideological and an identity point of view. The Monroe Doctrine or the Wilsonian idealism are the best examples of their persistence nowadays. The second chapter goes over the doctrines of the ‘First Cold War’ (between 1945 and 1969), analysing the policies of Presidents Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. In a repeated scheme in the following chapters, Tovar details the events that contextualised the adoption of the respective doctrines, which were the key elements of each one, which actors had a more significant role in its formation and implementation, and how the decision-making process was developed in each of these stages. Another aspect, worth pointing out, is the explanation of the institutional innovation caused by each doctrine and how they affected the conformation of the American strategic thinking, illustrated for every single period.

The third chapter is dedicated to the mandates of Presidents Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter. The author highlights from this period how “ideology and morality had an unprecedented role in the field of discourse and political debate” (p. 111) and how they play an important function in the current American foreign affairs. The fourth chapter looks at the doctrines of the ‘Second Cold War’ as well as its end, coinciding with the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, respectively. About the latter, he points out the unfolding of the so-called ‘Powell doctrine’ and its vital influence on the development of US military strategy since the 90s. He subsequently analyses the doctrines of the Post-Cold War period, between 1993 and 2017, with Presidents Bill Clinton, G.W. Bush and Barack Obama in charge of the White House. These last two chapters, due to the same proximity in time, are written in an interrogation. Thus, Tovar questions the existence of an ‘Obama doctrine’ and examines critically many aspects of his doubtful foreign policy: his focus on the security dimension, the ‘Jeffersonian prudence’ and the ‘Just War Theory’ based on Richard Haass’s arguments or the nation-building approach.
Finally, he goes over the first political decisions of President Trump, assessing his uncertainty and even his non-doctrine position. This review is especially useful in order to understand ‘the new era of competition’, as the 45th President claimed, that the world order is experiencing.

As can be deduced from the above, one of the main added values of the work is the historical and contextual perspective it offers to understand the processes of conformation of the different doctrines as well as their influence or lack of influence in the current debates of the American foreign policy. Possibly this excess of emphasis in the political-historical dimension has caused the decision-making process to be one of the lesser analysed variables. This weakness should be addressed in forthcoming works in order to gain a deeper and more complete understanding on the American foreign policy, that is to say, one of the greatest powers in our time.