A Tribute to
Mario Vargas Llosa
*European Member*
1997-2009

*At the Warsaw Plenary Meeting in May 2004*

The Nobel Prize in Literature 2010
was awarded to Mario Vargas Llosa
"for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt, and defeat".
TOKYO 2000
The Annual Meeting of The Trilateral Commission
Trialogue: 54

The Trilateral Commission was formed in 1973 by private citizens of Europe, Japan, and North America to help think through the common challenges and leadership responsibilities of these democratic industrialized areas in the wider world. The leadership tasks of the Trilateral countries need to be carried out with others to an increasing extent, and the 1997–2000 triennium of the Trilateral Commission has reflected this changing context and the opportunities it provides.

North American Chairman
Paul A. Volcker

European Chairman
Otto Graf Lambsdorff

Japanese Chairman
Yotaro Kobayashi

Subscriptions are available to Trilateral Commission publications.
Subscription rates are $20 for one year and $38 for two years.

See our website for more information: http://www.trilateral.org

Mail all orders and payments to:
The Trilateral Commission (North America)
345 East 46th Street—Suite 711
New York, New York 10017

Copyright © 2000 The Trilateral Commission
All Rights Reserved
human dimension of our global reality. Not surprisingly, the themes are the same, not because great minds think alike, but simply because global priority concerns are obvious.

But the Secretary-General and the organization he leads can only succeed in the global governance agenda of the next century if interests converge in all of these survival areas: economics and development, human rights and security, a sustainable earth environment, and a renewed United Nations.

Let me appeal to you, the Trilateral Commission individual members, to play that vital, literally global emergency ward role, of bringing convergence about, not only among developed societies of the North, but between them and those of the South. When I say South I mean many things, many cultures, many countries where I have served, but it can be summarized in two words: Brazil and Timor. Brazil because it is my country and it encapsulates many if not all of the contrasts, contradictions, hopes, and misery that mirror the globalization process. Timor, because Kofi Annan put me in charge of that tiny country on its long and traumatic journey to independence, and whose people should be the first beneficiaries of ethical global governance in the twenty-first century, in all the areas I have reviewed.

Coming back to my contrarian starting point, global governance far exceeds UN responsibility. The UN is an instrument, a frame, an engine as dynamic, as conciliatory, as innovative, as successful—in global and local terms as the two extremes of the spectrum—as the Secretary-General, and yourselves, concerned individuals, and all shades in between—primarily, but not exclusively, states—wish it, allow it, make it to be.

As noted elsewhere, before he was disabled by a stroke, Prime Minister Obuchi planned to give a major speech at the outset of the Trilateral Tokyo meeting setting out the agenda for the July G-8 Summit in Okinawa. A large part of the Okinawa Summit agenda will be devoted to the challenges of globalization and how the leading industrialized democracies should respond to them. The session of the Tokyo meeting opened by Keizo Takemi, Mario Vargas Llosa and Fred Bergsten (whose opening presentations are set out below) was framed with this large part of the Okinawa agenda in mind. Mario Vargas Llosa took up culture and globalization. Keizo Takemi put his remarks in the framework of “human security” in the context of globalization. Fred Bergsten, with special attention to the world economy, focused on the backlash against globalization.

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

Local Cultures and Globalization

One of the most frequent arguments leveled against globalization was the one used during the controversial riots in Seattle, Davos and Bangkok and it is as follows: With the removal of national frontiers and the advent of an interconnected world through the creation of international markets, a deadly blow will be dealt to national and regional cultures, traditions, customs, religious beliefs and other benchmarks of behavior that are the determinants of a cultural identity in a country or community.

The inability of some countries to resist the avalanche of culture-laden products that necessarily trail behind international corporations from developed countries, or should I say

THIS QUASI-ORWELLIAN NIGHTMARE... IS ALSO FOUND IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF CULTURE. SHARING THIS ATTITUDE WITH LEFT WING, CENTER, AND RIGHT WING POLITICAL GROUPS.
more specifically from one particular super-
power, the United States, will mean that the
North American culture (arrogantly labeled by
some as a "sub-culture") will eventually reign
supreme, casting a blanket of uniformity over
the world and suffocating the rich panoply of
other existing cultures.

In this way all peoples, not only the weak
and defenseless, will lose their identity, really
meaning their soul, and will be occupied, becom-
ing the colonized nations of the twenty-first
century, clones or automatons caricaturing the
cultural model of the new imperialism which
as well as using the power of money, technol-
ogy, military might and scientific know-how to
reign over the planet, will also impose their
language, their beliefs, their creeds, their lifestyle
and their dreams, on all of us.

This quasi-Orwellian nightmare of a neutered
world devoid of its cultural and linguistic
diversity, homogenized by the United States is
not, as some would have it, the exclusive domain
of extreme-left political minorities still dream-
ing of Marxism, Maoism or third-world
Guevarism, nor is it the result of a persecu-
tion complex sparked by jealous hatred towards
the American colossus. It is also found in
developed countries with a high degree of cul-
ture, sharing this attitude with left wing, cen-
ter, and right wing political groups. The most
evident case is that of France where the gov-
ernment carries out regular campaigns each
with different ideological labels to safeguard
French "cultural identity" which they imagine
to be threatened by globalization. There is a
wide range of intellectuals and politicians who
become very alarmed at the possibility of the
land that produced Montaigne, Descartes,
Racine, Baudelaire, and was creator and arbiter
of fashion, of thought, of art, of gastronomy
and in all realms of the mind and the soul
could be conquered by the McDonald's, Pizza
Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, rock'n roll,
Hollywood films, blue jeans, sneakers and T-
shirts. This fear has meant, for example, that,
in France, the local film industry has been
heavily subsidized and that there are frequent
campaigns demanding a quota system to force

...
identity thus preserved would return that society to a pre-historic lifestyle.

It is very true that progress does away with very many traditional forms of life, but, at the same time, paves the way for new opportunities. This explains why, contrary to the wishes of governments and intellectuals, the people, given the chance, choose change and freedom.

The arguments in favor of "cultural identity" and against globalization betray a stagnant attitude towards culture that is not borne out by historical fact. Do we know of any cultures that have remained unchanged through time? To find any of them one has to travel to the small primitive, magico-religious communities made up of people living in caves worshiping the gods of thunder or wild animals and who, due to their primitive condition, become progressively more vulnerable to exploitation and extermination. All others, particularly those with the right to call themselves modern or alive, have evolved into a barely recognizable image of what they were only two or three generations back. This is precisely the case of France, Spain, or England where changes in the last half century have been so profound as to make it almost impossible that Proust, García Lorca, or Virginia Wolff could have recognized the societies into which they were born and whose conditions they helped to renew.

The notion of "cultural identity" is dangerous because from a social point of view it represents an artificial of doubtful conceptual consistency, and from a political point of view it is a threat to the most cherished of all human prizes, freedom. I do not deny, however, that a group of people who speak the same language, have been born and live in the same territory are faced with the same problems and practice the same religion and follow the same customs have many characteristics in common. However, these common denominators cannot be used to define each one of the individuals and relegate their unique characteristics to second place. The concept of identity, when it does not refer to individuals but is used to represent a whole, is debasing and dehumanizing, it becomes an all-encompassing magic word that groups individuals under one heading and deprives the unique human being of all originality and creativity, all that is not indelibly impressed in his genes, imposed by his geographical environment or social pressure but is the result of his ability to resist all those influences and balance them with acts of free will and personal invention.

In truth, the notion of collective identity, the foundation of nationalism, is an ideological fiction that for more than one ethnologist and anthropologist does not accurately reflect reality, not even in the remotest of primitive communities. No matter how important customs and beliefs may be when practiced in common for the defense of a group, the margin of individual initiative and creativity amongst its members with the objective of achieving emancipation is always wide and the individual differences prevail over the collective characteristics when individuals are examined on their own terms and not as epiphenomena of the collectivity. Indeed, one of the great advantages of globalization is that it radically broadens the possibilities that each and every citizen of this interconnected planet (homeland to us all) has of building his or her own personal cultural identity, according to his or her most intimate preferences and motivations and through voluntarily decisions. The fact is that no longer is the citizen forced, as he was in the past and still is in many lands, to accept without question the identity imposed upon her or him by language, nation, religion, etc. and of his native surroundings as if she or he were born in a cultural concentration camp. In this sense, we must welcome globalization because it notably extends the horizon of human freedom.

The fear felt by many of seeing this planet Americanized is due more to ideological paranoia than to a sense of reality. No one doubts, of course, that with globalization the importance of the English language that is now, as Latin was in the Middle Ages, the standard language of our times, will increase as an indispensable tool for international communications and transactions. Does this mean that the development of English as a common language

...GLOBALIZATION ...BROADENS THE POSSIBILITIES THAT EACH AND EVERY CITIZEN ...HAS OF BUILDING HIS OR HER OWN PERSONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY....
Those who promote this inoculation... are normally pretty ignorant people who behind this attitude hide their true obsession: nationalism.

will be at the expense of other well established languages and cultures? I do not think so. The truth is quite the opposite. The removal of borders and lure of the open world has become an incentive for the new generation to learn and absorb other cultures (now a possibility within their reach), be it for pleasure or as a necessity, given that the knowledge of several languages and the possibility of being comfortable in different cultures is a very valuable credential for professional success in our times. I would like to use, as an example of what I have been saying, the Spanish case. Half a century ago, the Spanish-speaking community on both sides of the Atlantic had hardly any links with the outside world and a very limited influence outside our traditional linguistic frontiers. Today the reverse is the case. Our language shows a growing impulse and vitality and is daily breaking new ground in five continents. This explains why we now have about twenty-five or thirty million Spanish-speaking individuals in the United States, and it also explains why at least two presidential candidates, Governor Bush and Vice President Gore, campaign not only in English, but also in Spanish.

How many million young people of both sexes the world over, thanks to globalization, have started to learn Japanese, German, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Russian, or French? Very many, to be sure. This is a tendency of our times which, fortunately, will only grow with the passage of time. The best policy for the defense of one's own culture and language is to spread them to the ends of the Earth, instead of naively attempting to inoculate them against the English infection. Those who promote this inoculation, much as they might wax lyrical on culture, are normally pretty ignorant people who behind this attitude hide their true obsession: nationalism. Human culture of whatever shape is by its nature universal and clashes with this parochial, muddled, and discriminatory vision with which nationalism tinges all cultural activities. The most admirable lesson we can learn from all cultures is that in order to remain fresh and alive they do not require protection from bureaucrats or commissioners, nor do they need to be confined behind bars or isolated by frontier police. To do this would make them wither into folklore. Cultures need freedom to stay alive. They need to be constantly exposed to other cultures that enrich and renew and inject them with renewed vigor. In ancient times Latin didn't kill off Greek; on the contrary, the artistic originality and the intellectual depth of the Hellenic culture permeated Roman civilization and thus Homer's poems, Plato and Aristotle's philosophy became known in the civilized world. Globalization will not destroy local cultures, quite the opposite; everything that is worth preserving in them will be rescued and will flourish in the new world.

In T.S. Eliot's famous essay "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture," he predicted that humanity would, in the future, see a renaissance of local and regional cultures, which, at the time, seemed improbable. Nevertheless, globalization will almost certainly prove him right in the twenty-first century. For this we must rejoice. The resurgence of small local cultures will restore to humanity a rich multiplicity of behavior and expression which during the eighteenth and nineteenth century were destroyed, sometimes more literally than metaphorically, by the nation-state, to create what was called national cultural identities. This is often forgotten or deliberately swept under the carpet due to its serious and uncomfortable ethical ramifications. These distinct cultural identities were forcibly imposed, the teaching and publication of vernacular languages were forbidden, as was the practice of any customs or religions inconsistent with that imposed by the nation-state. The result was that in the majority of countries in the world, the nation-state came to represent a dominant culture imposed upon other weaker cultures that were repressed or suppressed from official life. Contrary to what those fearing globalization seem to think, it is not easy to erase any trace of a culture no matter how small, if it is backed by a rich tradition and by people who keep the customs alive even in secret. We have witnessed, lately, how, thanks to the
Approach to the Mounting Concern of Human Security

I am grateful for this opportunity to address this illustrious Trilateral Commission on the subject of human security, a concept which holds the key to the building of the international order in the twenty-first century and is the chief concern of my work.

Globalization and Human Security

Globalization, which is the topic of this session, is often discussed in terms of a certain dichotomy. In this dichotomy, structural changes in the international community combine with startling advances in transportation, information, and communications systems to produce rapid economic growth and unprecedented prosperity. On the negative side, however, the world is beset with problems of poverty, environmental destruction, infectious diseases, and a rash of intracountry or intraregional wars or conflicts that have essentially been prevented from surfacing thus far.

Indeed, the truly global movement of short-term finance is said to have been a major factor behind the recent Asian currency crisis. It is still fresh in our minds how the crisis exposed the failings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the neoclassical conviction in the omnipotence of deregulation and the market mechanism, while also deeply undercutting optimism about the effects of globalization per se.

There is a limit to what individual countries can do in the face of...a "wide-ranging diversification of threats" in the international community. We must apprehend this phenomenon as a problem bearing on the very existence of each and every person, and develop more formidable countermeasures for it. To this end,
THE SAN FRANCISCO MEETING OF THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION, MARCH 1987
The Trilateral Commission was formed in 1973 by private citizens of Western Europe, Japan, and North America to foster closer cooperation among these three regions on common problems. It seeks to improve public understanding of such problems, to support proposals for handling them jointly, and to nurture habits and practices of working together among these regions.

CHAIRMEN
North America: David Rockefeller  Europe: Georges Berthoin  Japan: Isamu Yamashita

Subscriptions are available to Trilateral Commission publications. Subscription rates are $12 for one year and $22 for two years. A typical year includes this publication on the annual plenary and two task force reports.

Mail all orders and payments to:
The Trilateral Commission (North America)
345 East 46th Street
New York, New York 10017

Copyright © 1987 The Trilateral Commission
I am speaking as a private citizen; I represent no government and no institution. I am an independent writer convinced that the reforms Latin America requires to achieve development and social justice must be carried out within the framework of the rule of law and freedom that only democracy can guarantee.

Seen in this way, the Latin America of today justifies our cautious optimism. Never before in the history of our nations—that is, since we became independent from Spain and Portugal—has our part of the world had as many governments created by free (more or less) elections. Put in another way, never before have there been so few authoritarian regimes as there are at present. Bloody tyrannies in Argentina and Uruguay have yielded to civilian governments—the same is true in Brazil—as has the shameful anachronism until recently embodied by Baby Doc, ex “perpetual president” of Haiti. Countries in which until 25 years ago no elected president could finish out his term in office—Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, for example—are today models of pluralism and coexistence, where antagonistic political parties are voted in and out of power, and where the extreme right and the extreme left receive fewer and fewer votes in each succeeding election. Even in Central America, the region that has traditionally suffered most from political oppression, we have begun to see military regimes resign themselves—not always willingly, of course—to holding elections and yielding power to civilian leaders.

But it isn’t only military dictatorships that have diminished in number to the point that the regimes of Generals Stroessner and Pinochet are now among the few surviving examples. The Cuban model of violent revolution is also undergoing a genuine thaw, especially if you compare the situation today in Latin America with what it was just a few years ago (when guerrilla groups operating in the mountains and cities were hard at work in a dozen countries trying to turn Che Guevara’s maxim “Create in our continent two, three Vietnams...” into a reality). There are exceptions, of course: El Salvador, although even there guerrilla activities have lessened; Peru, where the apocalyptic fanaticism of the Shining Path continues to take human lives and destroy property, even though it does not at this point constitute a real threat to the government; and Colombia, where political violence often
gets mixed up with the purely criminal violence of drug traffic. In the rest of Latin America the myth of armed revolution as a cure-all for our problems has ceased to convince people and is increasingly the philosophy of small, marginal groups devoid of popular support.

But it would be unjust to celebrate this process of democratization merely in statistical terms. Of much greater importance, I think, is the way in which this process is taking place. If we compare it, for example, with the period following World War II, when a democratic wave also ran through the continent, we see that the current situation is not the result, as it was then, of external pressures or the work of local elites. This time, the decisive—in many cases the only—reason why governments based on legality, freedom, and popular consent have replaced the arbitrary exercise of force or personal power has been the humble, nameless men and women, the usually poor, impoverished, often illiterate people of our countries. It’s true that in nations like Haiti and El Salvador it was essential for the United States to withdraw its support or exert pressure on the military to bring about the change, but even in these cases that external pressure would have come to nothing if the people hadn’t shown that they wanted the change with all their heart. Insofar as El Salvador is concerned, I can personally attest to the courage and self-sacrifice with which the ordinary

"...antidemocratic alternatives are running against the will of the people."

Salvadoran participated in the electoral campaign of 1984, how those ordinary people turned out to vote in the face of intimidation and bullets.

This fact seems extraordinarily important to me. For the first time, democracy or incipient democratic forms of government are being established in our countries with clear popular support and with an equally clear rejection of the antagonistic options of Marxist revolution or military dictatorship. Today, these antidemocratic alternatives are running against the will of the people. They are the monopoly of economic or intellectual elites, while the bulk of the populace, now that it has been consulted and has been allowed to express its opinion without interference, has been overwhelmingly in favor of moderate regimes: centerleft, center, or centerright—whichever seems to offer the most democratic possibilities. I would like to cite my own country as an example: In the 1985 elections, which extremists tried to sabotage by unleashing a terror campaign to keep people away from the polls, only seven percent of the registered voters stayed home, a real record when you compare it with voter apathy in the more advanced democracies.

It would be naïve to think that the ordinary men and women of Latin America have chosen democracy because of some ideological conversion, the result of some intellectual meditation. Such cases would be few and far between. What has spurred such huge numbers of people in recent years to turn to this option—which was never offered to this extent before in our countries—has been the terrible violence of which they have been the victims. This violence, the result of intolerance, fanaticism and dogmas, has been practiced both by revolutionary terrorists and political or military counterterrorists, and has littered our continent with the dead, the tortured, the kidnapped, the disappeared—and these people in their vast majority have been the poor. The ordinary people have opted for democracy in an attempt to find an escape from this nightmare reality of civil war, terrorism, indiscriminate repression, revolutionary "taxes," blind executions, and the proliferation of torture. These people on whom political extremists inflicted new violence—as if economic exploitation and social abandonment were not misfortune enough—decided to support that system which, intuitively and instinctively, they thought would be able to defend human rights best (or oppress them least), insure a certain social coexistence, and attempt to extirpate the pistol, the bomb, and the electric cattle prod from political life.

This undocumented fact of Latin American life—a democratization process that originates in the people themselves—has presented us with a unique opportunity: We Latin Americans now have the chance to consolidate our legal, free regimes and to eliminate forever the vicious circle of revolutions and military coups, to fight for development by linking our historic destiny to something of which we have always in fact been a part: the liberal, democratic West.

Naturally, this will not be easy. The democratization of Latin America, even though it has an unprec-
edentured popular base in our societies, is very fragile. To maintain and extend this popular base, governments will have to prove to their citizens that democracy means not only the end of political brutality but progress, that is, concrete benefits in areas such as labor, public health, and education, where so much remains to be done. But, given the economic crisis Latin America is suffering today, when the prices of the products it exports are hitting record lows and when the weight of its foreign debt is crushing, those governments have virtually no alternative but to deceive the citizens—especially the poor—demanding they make even greater sacrifices than those they've already made.

I am not one of those who believe that the problem of the foreign debt should be met with demagogic gestures or with a declaration of war against the international financial system. If such a war were to break out, Western banks might be affected, but our countries would be even worse off because one of the first casualties of the hostilities would be the democratic system. It is hard to imagine how it would survive the chaos and paralysis that would result from a boycott by the developed world of our economies.

But the industrialized nations—their governments and banks—should face up to this matter sensibly and realistically. They must understand that if they demand that our democratic governments pay the service on their debts by implementing policies which will have an exaggeratedly high social cost—and we have already seen the explosions of rage and despair in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Brazil that can take place when the fabric of society is stretched too thin—the result, purely and simply, will be the collapse of those governments and the return of military dictatorships.

Military dictatorships are not only the best breeding ground for marxist revolutionaries; they are as well models of ineptitude in the field of economics, as all the recent Latin American military regimes demonstrate. And who reaps the benefit if all this takes place? Not the banks and certainly not Western governments. Only those who are interested in seeing that democracy does not take root in our countries.

A realistic and ethically sound approach to the problem by our creditors would be to demand that each debtor nation pay what it can without placing the stability of the system in jeopardy. At the same time, creditors should provide both the stimulus and the aid necessary to reactivate the economies of the debtor nations: The more they grow the more they will be able to pay back their debts. A veteran revolutionary who today is a genuine believer in democracy, President Paz Estenssoro of Bolivia, formulated a policy which should be considered seriously: The service on our debts should be directly related to the prices of our exports on the international market and should “float” with them. If the banks and the industrialized nations are not merely interested in being paid what they’re owed but in seeing that our nations emerge from underdevelopment as allies and in solidarity with the West, they should take these kinds of suggestions into account.

I am not trying to insinuate that the future of our democracies depends on you. We and we alone are responsible for our future. Moreover, I am convinced—although I’m not sure whether to be happy or sad about it—that when a Latin American nation chooses democracy it not only chooses freedom and the rule of law but the most extreme form of independence as well. This is because no other type of government receives less support from the West—or seems to have less “sex appeal” as far as the West’s communications media and intellectual elites are concerned—than those regimes in the Third World that try to live the ideals of freedom and pluralism, which are the West’s greatest contribution to the world. While I have no figures to prove it, I doubt that any democratic nation in the underdeveloped world has received the credits and subventions Cuba has received from the Soviet Union since Cuba became a Soviet satellite. And it is certainly true that no Latin American nation fighting to live in peace and freedom within the law ever before aroused the militant sympathy that Sandinista Nicaragua has inspired in liberal and progressive circles in the West. To the contrary, when it doesn’t simply inspire indifference, that struggle for democracy in poor countries usually inspires skepticism and disdain from those who should be its most enthusiastic

“...if we Latin Americans do win the battle for freedom we can say we won it for ourselves....”
supporters. But perhaps this isn’t such a bad thing after all. Because if we Latin Americans do win the battle for freedom we can say we won it ourselves—against our enemies and despite our friends.

If we want democracy to take hold in our countries, our most urgent task is to widen it, give it substance and truth. Democracy is fragile because in so many countries it is superficial, a mere political framework in which institutions and political parties go about their business in their traditionally arbitrary, bullyish way. Naturally, the differences in degrees of democracy vary so much from country to country that it is impossible to generalize. An abyss separates Costa Rica’s exemplary democracy from, for example, Mexico’s doubtful one-party democracy with its institutionalized corruption, or Panamá’s democracy, where the civilian authorities govern but the National Guard rules. In Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, on the one hand, democratic tendencies have permeated the armed forces as well as the extreme right and left and have thus drawn these elements into the political process. In Guatemala, Uruguay, and Ecuador, on the other hand, the military still exercises a kind of guardianship or an aloof autonomy that limits the actions of the civilian governments.

The way in which our laws are produced in Latin America is another profoundly anti-democratic factor in the majority of our countries. Laws guarantee sinequens which favor individuals or influential groups in such a way that for the poor to gain access to the legal system or even simply to earn a living of regional integration efforts and the reason for the senseless waste of money in the purchase of weapons. Freedom of the press usually degenerates into irresponsible defamation; the right to criticize into libel and insult. And the politicians with the most democratic programs usually act in private like the henchmen of all-powerful caudillos.

I could go on and on with the catalogue of the deficiencies in our democracies, but why bother? What really matters is that our democracies not only survive but that they also criticize themselves and better themselves. If they don’t, they will perish. No democracy is born perfect and none ever gets to be perfect. Democracy’s superiority over authoritarian and totalitarian regimes is that, unlike them, democracy is perfectible. And unlike dictatorships, which simply weaken if they try to reform, democracies get stronger to the degree they can change and regenerate. Perhaps the hardest struggle we Latin Americans will have will be against ourselves. Centuries of intolerance, of absolute truths, of despotic governments weigh us down—and it won’t be easy to shake that burden off. The tradition of absolute power that began with our pre-Columbian empires, and the tradition that might makes right which the Spaniards and Portuguese explorers practiced, were continued in the 19th century after our independence by our caudillos and our oligarchies, often with the blessing or direct intervention of foreign powers.

For this reason the belief that violence is the answer is not new, much less revolutionary in Latin America—contrary to what our messianic ideologues think. Actually, violence is the worst kind of conformism. It means going on—using different rhetoric and different ritual—in the same old tradition of barbarism and machismo that is in great measure to blame for our backwardness and the social inequity that plagues our countries.

What is truly original, truly revolutionary for Latin America is the other option. The one that gives a long overdue lesson to Latin America’s privileged classes—for whom military dictatorships still represent a guarantee of order—and for intellectual elites, for whom the myth of marxist revolution, of returning to a tabula rasa is still alive despite the fact that history has shown this to be a lie. The other option is the one the innumerable victims and the poor have spontaneously chosen and are now defending. After travelling the hard road of suffering violence, these
people have reached the conclusion that all other systems are worse. Now they cling to the democratic alternative as if it were a lifesaver in a storm. Will the result be a new stage in Latin American history, one that is more humane, more respectful of human dignity? This is neither the time nor the place for prophecy. But I do have a suggestion: Let us all make an effort, each one of us, within the limitations of our own spheres of action, using the means at our disposal, to contribute whatever we can to see that it works.

Mario Vargas Llosa is a Peruvian author.
TRIALOGUE 35

SOVEREIGNTY & INTERVENTION

GARDNER
GLUCKSMANN
KOHN
HILL
VARGAS LLosa
GAUHAR

March 1984

Upon learning of the intervention by the United States in Grenada in the latter part of last year, this was my first reaction:

Is a powerful country endowed with the right to intervene in the affairs of a small country when these affairs do not proceed as it feels they should? If it is, then the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia can be justified. If it is not, then the invasion of Grenada by the United States must be condemned with the same severity and for the same reasons as the actions of those other countries.

Aside from the fact that it constitutes a violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the statutes of the Organization of American States, the intervention in Grenada will have ominous political consequences for the cause of democracy in Latin America. It provides new fuel for the anti-U.S. propaganda that confronts the Reagan government, determined as it is to revive the old Washington diplomacy toward our countries: that of the cannon and the club. In the United Nations Security Council, France voted in favor of the resolution condemning Washington, and the British government, although it abstained in the voting, has made it known that it disapproved of the intervention when it was consulted on the subject by the White House. In the rest of the Western countries, the reaction oscillates between open dissent and uncomfortable silence.

These differences could not have surfaced at a worse moment. The event took place on the eve of the deployment of the new U.S. nuclear missiles in the NATO countries. The pacifist movement's campaign against these nuclear weapons has assumed great momentum in Western Europe and will be reinforced now with a theme that has been its battle cry all along: Couldn't the United States activate these missiles without taking into consideration the opinions of their host countries? There have been voices raised in the British Parliament of late, and not just those of Laborites, concluding that if the United States could act as it did in Grenada, ignoring Britain's unfavorable opinion, why couldn't something similar happen tomorrow with the nuclear weapons installed on English territory? Thus the invasion of Grenada inadvertently strengthens the pacifist movement in Western Europe, a movement which, though feigning neutralism, is in reality directed exclusively against the United States.

Therefore, both in terms of ethics and practical politics, the Marines' invasion of Grenada appears unjustifiable. What then inspired the Reagan government to go through with it? What benefits did it hope to reap? It is worth an investigation, since Washington clearly didn't dispatch its troops to that tiny territory—barely 133 square miles—without careful evaluation of the political and diplomatic price of the venture. And since it went ahead nonetheless, it was because, from the Administration's point of view, the end results justified it.

Was it concern for the lives of the thousand American residents in Grenada, nearly all of them medical students at the University of St. Georges, that was the primary reason for the invasion? Of course not. The bloody disorders that preceded the invasion claimed no victims among the foreigners and there were no indications that their security was threatened. Nor is the other reason put forth by Reagan very convincing: to reestablish the rule of law and order on the island. How many times have the countries of Latin America succumbed to lawlessness and disorder without eliciting such diligent solicitude from Washington?

In truth, the decisive factor in sending the Marines was the White House's fear that, after the assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and his primary lieutenants by the military clique of
General Hudson Austin, Grenada would turn, irrevocably, into a puppet state of the Soviet Union. The U.S. military intervention was, in fact, a last-ditch attempt to correct a very grave mistake committed by the State Department in analyzing what took place on the island and basing its policy on that erroneous interpretation.

The twelve Caribbean islands that seceded from Great Britain and that form part of the Commonwealth have shown, with few exceptions, a firm democratic vocation. The worst exception was Grenada. Its first government, though born of elections, turned out to be so despotic and corrupt that Grenadians welcomed with relief the ousting of Sir Eric Gairy in 1977. The ringleader of the coup, Maurice Bishop, led a Marxist party that answered to the poetic name “New Jewel,” and promised, upon taking power, that he would hold elections. But his promise was soon forgotten. Young, charismatic and capable, Bishop turned out to be a popular leader with his 100,000 compatriots, and his “social” dictatorship—one party, a controlled press, a number of government opponents sent to jail or exile—could count on reliable support.

Relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba developed rapidly and Grenada enjoyed the considerable collaboration of both countries on public works such as the construction of highways and the formation of cooperatives. It also received a military assistance that alarmed Washington. When 800 Cuban workers began to construct, on the outskirts of St. Georges, an airport with the capacity to handle bombers and MIG jet-fighters, President Reagan himself stated in a press conference that Grenada had become a satellite of Cuba and the USSR, and that the island was being converted into a Soviet base which would constitute a threat to the United States.

Was this true? Later accounts indicate that the reality was much more complex. Maurice Bishop and an important group of his supporters wanted at that time to avoid a break with Washington, and even wanted to find a way to distance themselves from their Cuban and Soviet allies, whose friendship was becoming embarrassing as well as risky. The inability of the U.S. State Department to realize that there was an internal struggle going on on the island is even more deplorable than if it had recognized it and acted accordingly, possibly avoiding altogether the subsequent tragedy in Grenada, from political crimes to the setback for democracy that the invasion represented.

When Maurice Bishop traveled to Washington last spring and requested an interview with the President, or at least the Secretary of State, he came up against a stone wall: He could only meet with subordinate government functionaries. The Department of State evidently believed that the attempt by the Grenadians to seek reconciliation and a modus vivendi with the United States was merely a propaganda ploy. In reality, it was a bold effort—just short of desperate—to pull Grenada from the bog by means of a compromise with the United States. It is lamentable that Washington did not take advantage of an opportunity that might have been used to disassociate Grenada diplomatically from an excessive Cuban-Soviet influence, which according to all indications was what Bishop and the moderates of his party were looking for. This episode demonstrated, on the one hand, a tremendous lack of information in the State Department about what happened in Grenada and, on the other, that the United States precipitated the fall of Bishop, its potential interlocutor, because of the hostile and contemptuous treatment which it inflicted upon him. Recalcitrant extremists were able to assume control of power, arresting Bishop and accusing him of weakness and treason.

One gets the impression that Washington fully understood the situation—that is to say, the lost opportunity—only after the massacre in which the “hardliners” of Austin and Coard liquidated the “softliners” of the New Jewel party. The latter’s disappearance caused, by all accounts, panic in the White House. The Marines’ intervention shows that the U.S. government deduced that the massacre would serve to consummate the Cuban-Soviet control of Grenada. This is, perhaps, the most serious thing that can be said of the developments on that Caribbean island: In addition to being illegal and immoral, this intervention is one where the Pentagon made Grenadians pay for errors that the State Department committed in its reading of the events.

What happens now in Grenada, four months after the U.S. intervention? According to all re-
ports, the majority of the 110,000 Grenadians approve of the intervention and feel “liberated” by the forces that overthrew the regime of Bernard Coard and General Hudson Austin. Apparently, despite the great popularity and charisma of Maurice Bishop, the Grenadians began to tire of the ideological crescendo and the atmosphere of radicalization and belligerence in which the island was submerged during the last months of the government of the New Jewel movement. The coup against Bishop, his assassination and the October 19 massacre were “the drops that overflowed the glass” and finalized the break between the Grenadians and the clique in power.

A good number of the intervening troops have left the island and those that remain appear to coexist peacefully with the natives. The Richmond Hill prison has been opened and all political prisoners of the former regime are free; the “revolutionaries” that have replaced them in their cells are, though there are no exact figures, substantially fewer. Political exiles have returned, among them the man overthrown by Bishop, Sir Eric Gairy, infamous as the one who governed Grenada for more than 20 years with a hand that was as corrupt as it was brutal. Freedom of political parties and diversity of the press have been reestablished and slowly but surely steps are being taken to revive institutional life and organize elections. International aid, which was so scarce for Bishop, has been accorded generously to the island now that no traces of Cuban presence remain. One recent communication speaks of $30 million offered to Grenada as “economic and military aid from the United States in exchange for the establishment of the private sector as a motor of development.” Without being overly optimistic, one can predict that within a few years, if all goes well, Grenada could have a fairly democratic regime and even relative prosperity, not unlike what happened in the Dominican Republic after it was invaded in 1965.

Should we conclude from this that the military intervention was justified, inasmuch as it fulfilled the desires of a majority of Grenadians and contributed to the establishment of a more civilized system than the island had before? If we respond affirmatively, we are saying that violation of the sovereignty of a weak state by a powerful one should not be judged as a question of principle, but rather as a historical fact that can only be understood, and therefore justified or rejected, as a function of its results and within the context of the battle between the communist and democratic worlds to incorporate the countries in the Third World into their respective spheres of influence.

The question is extremely delicate because within it cross and diverge considerations that belong in distinct orbits: moral, legal, ideological and practical. On the abstract and generic plane of ethics and law, it is easy to conclude that violation of sovereignty is never justified in any case or for any reason. This is a universal principle set down in international treaties and in the Charter of the United Nations. But in practice, we see that this principle has only relative import in military matters; notable exceptions notwithstanding, the great powers are continually abusing it—as in the case of the USSR, which exercises a rigorous ideological, economic, political and military control over others, or in the case of the United States, which maintains certain terms of commercial and economic hegemony that are the equivalent of virtual servitude for many Latin American countries. (For example, the adoption of a simple administrative resolution restricting imports of textile products in the United States provoked in the last year a chain-reaction of bankruptcies in the Peruvian textile industry that seriously added to the country’s economic crisis and unemployment.)

The reality today is this: Absolute sovereignty, as defined by ethics and law, is an exclusive privilege of those great powers, namely the United States and the USSR, that are able to exercise it and defend it. For the rest, it is a matter of relative privilege, entirely subordinated to the level of economic and military development, that is to say, to the degree of external economic dependence. It is clear that Great Britain and France enjoy greater sovereignty than Cuba or El Salvador, but it is also obvious that, considering the extent of their development, those countries have an autonomy and independence in the management of their destinies more limited than that of the two superpowers.

Nevertheless, this way of describing the problem is misleading since it seems to establish a symmetry, an equality, that does not exist. The way in which the sovereignty of a vassal country of the USSR is reduced is much more profound and irreversible
than that of a country economically dependent on the United States. The latter dependence is more flexible, subject to variables; it concedes a margin of initiative and includes the possibility of divorce. In the former, there is nothing of the kind—indeed, it is more appropriate to speak of subjection than influence. In spite of the Salvadoran government’s total dependence on the United States for its survival, it still is allowed by Washington some liberties that would be unthinkable in relations between, say,
Poland and Moscow.

Thus if one wants to speak of sovereignty in concrete terms, one must accept that this notion cannot be separated in the world of our times from the ideological confrontation between totalitarianism and the free world. It is when this confrontation comes into the picture that the superpowers are led, at times directly (like the United States in Grenada and the USSR in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan) and at times indirectly (like the dispatch of Cuban forces to Angola and Ethiopia to prop up the pro-Soviet regimes of both countries) to take the decisive step of armed intervention, an extreme and brazen violation of the relative sovereignty of a weak country.

It is at the level of confrontation, when a superpower is about to suffer a setback or the status quo is about to be altered dramatically, that a superpower is moved to take that decisive step. The United States’ intervention in Grenada, like that in the Dominican Republic in 1965, was intended to prevent its adversary from taking over a pawn in a zone important to its interests, not necessarily to restore to the Grenadians the liberty that the dictatorship of Coard and Hudson Austin had wrested from them; that turned out to be an added advantage. The proof of this is that the United States has never dreamed of intervening in Haiti, where the inhabitants are victims of a despotism and corruption worse than those which prevailed in Grenada under the New Jewel movement: The situation in Haiti does not affect the global geopolitical interests of Washington.

This is what is intolerable for those of us who do not believe that a moral or ideological equivalence exists between the two rival systems. It seems to us that the democratic system creates more just relations, or at least less unjust or abusive relations, between the superpower and the countries within its sphere of influence. In the democratic world, there is still an understanding (which must prevail if democracy is to continue there) of the semantic difference between “influence” and “servitude.” Influence is freely accepted and can be rejected and periodically revised and regulated; that is to say, it can be reduced. Servitude is imposed; it denies all forms of revision, is impervious to dialogue and leaves no other alternative to the victim country than blind submission or suicidal rebellion.

The protest against the U.S. intervention in Grenada should not be made, if one is a realist, in the name of a general and abstract norm of sovereignty that does not exist for any country other than the superpowers, but rather in the name of the democratic ethic and ideology that the U.S. system represents. If the relations that this system establishes with kindred countries or those within its sphere of influence are similar to those that rule the totalitarian world, not only will the notion of sovereignty be violated, but also the notions of liberty, justice and democracy for all those states that are not on equal terms with the superpowers.

Does it follow that, in the name of the ethics and practices that distinguish it from the totalitarian world, the United States ought to stand idly by with its arms crossed when a small country of the Third World is the victim of intervention, either explicit or camouflaged, from a totalitarian world bent on extending its dominion? Certainly not. That is the only case in which intervention by the democratic world—or better, counter-intervention—is justified: to prevent an act of aggression that violates the will of a country’s citizens by turning it from a nation with limited sovereignty in the free world to a vassal state in the socialist camp. For all the conditions to be fulfilled, totalitarian aggression should be flagrant and tangible, as in Afghanistan. Was it the case in Grenada? It was not. In Grenada, one could speak of a growing Cuban and Soviet influence, but not of an overwhelming aggression.

The difference between the democratic and totalitarian worlds is that the greater margin of sovereignty that the former concedes to small countries allows them not only to be right, but also to be wrong, and gives them the responsibility of correcting their political mistakes themselves. It would be the obligation of the democratic world, if the case arose, to free Grenada from Cuba and the USSR. But to free it from the “bullies” Coard and Austin was not up to the United States, but to the Grenadians themselves. Therefore, contrary to what the majority of Grenadians seem to feel, I continue to believe that the United States’ intervention was a mistake.

Lima, February 1984

Translated from the Spanish by Karen Polk