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AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD FOREIGN POLICY

by

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The character of the role of the American people in international affairs has been molded to a considerable extent by two factors—the attitudes and perspectives of our founding fathers and our geopolitical position. Our early leaders were profoundly influenced by the age of the enlightenment—that period of intellectual ferment based on the proposition that the application of rational thoughts could cure the ills of mankind and bring about peace and harmony. These molders of the American nation therefore conceived their task as something far more grand and noble than simply putting together a functional government. It was to be, in addition, a noble experiment for all mankind, trusting in the philosophical premise of man's ability to govern himself in liberty and equality.

This idea, that the United States was a nation apart, that it was a crucible in which freedom would flourish and spread as an example for the entire world, has had profound implications for American foreign policy. It has resulted in the injection into our policy of a strong moralistic tradition. We came to believe that we would prevail in foreign affairs as a result of the purity of our motives. We have not thought of ourselves as being concerned with the narrow preoccupations of our European counterparts, pursuing particularist

advantage through great power politics and balance of power manifestations. Indeed, those terms even today have a pejorative connotation in many of our most intellectual circles. Instead, our foreign policy has had about it something of a messianic quality. It has been our moralizing mission—championing the ideas of freedom, democracy, human rights; serving as a haven for the oppressed and the breadbasket for the hungry—these and other noble and moral purposes have been the enduring threads woven deeply into the fabric of our foreign policy over the years.

This tradition of the enlightenment has met with two other associated traditions—pragmatism and legalism. Thus we have often waited for a problem to arise and become profound in its dimensions; then we would throw all our resources at it, solve it, and turn away again. We've also tended to try to turn international political issues into legal issues, and push for the formation of international bodies to deal with them in a rational and judicial manner.

Besides this penchant for legalism these special dimensions of our foreign policy have had other distinguishing manifestations. They've at times exhibited themselves in the form of U.S. withdrawal from participation in the international system because we thought we were too good for it. Or¹

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even (of recent times) arguments claiming just the reverse—that we were not good enough. At times we've gone to the opposite extreme, throwing ourselves into total involvement, usually in the form of great moral crusades under such noble slogans as "Fighting the War to End All Wars" or "To Make the World Safe for Democracy."

Even when we engaged in power politics for our own aggrandizement, which has happened more than occasionally, we customarily cloaked our actions in a moral or moralistic rhetoric and, to a considerable extent, we tended to believe what we were saying.

In a general way, this moral dimension led us to the notion that international political and military conflicts were aberrations from the norm that arose by accident or from particular evil, such as munitions makers or other bad influences, rather than from more basic sources in the nature of man and his social structure. This in turn reinforced our tendencies either to withdraw from participation or to launch a crusade in moral indignation to punish the wrongdoer. Likewise, our long repugnance to the traditional ways of international politics reinforced our legalistic tendencies to prescribe devices such as neutrality legislation, utopian disarmament agreements, arbitration, quarantine, and international organizations for curing the ills of mankind. We've been able to indulge ourselves in this unique and sometimes quixotic behavior for much of our history for two related reasons: first, two great oceans and the British Navy provided military security and security from involvement except on terms of our own choosing. And, equally important, other nations assumed much of the burdens of preserving a world power equilibrium. It is instructive to realize that in the two World Wars had the security of the world depended on our understanding of the dangers involved, the aggressors probably would have won.

And thus our foreign policy tradition has been different, unique—the impulses behind our behavior have not been bad or wrong, not at all; they have provided the dimension to American involvement in the world that has been a fundamental element in our greatness. But the enviable world situation that enabled us to pursue our principles without restraint is no longer with us. The world has changed irrevocably, and we have lost our freedom of maneuver. No more are there other nations strong enough to carry the burden of resisting major aggression while we contemplate the situation and our own interests at our leisure. And modern technology has robbed us of our isolated position that had allowed us the option of standing aside from world events. We are now inextricably involved throughout the world.

Among free countries today, and for as far into the future as we can see, only the United States possesses the overall power, the military capability and the domestic cohesion to maintain a world balance of power. There's no escaping that responsibility where there is no one else to whom the free and the oppressed can turn. The biggest problem the American people face is how to think about a world for which we have had so little preparation. We must adjust to the fact that we carry the burden of leadership of the free world and that there can be no end to this involvement. The world will never be set to rights so that the United States can turn its back, as has happened so often in the past, and withdraw into its shell. We must realize that the problems are unending and gear ourselves for the long haul. The world is becoming more and more complex and more interrelated. It is increasingly difficult for us to cope, in view of these ingrained attitudes of an earlier era.

There seems little doubt that the American people are uneasy with the permanence of this leadership responsibility. We grasped the baton of leader-

ship with some enthusiasm in the early days following World War II, convinced that we could remake the world in our image, and that would cure its ills. But the inescapability of providing leadership of every international issue, the growing realization of the difficult if not intractable nature of many international issues and of our own limitations, our inevitable setbacks—all have combined to make us restive under our burdens. We long for the good old days when we could turn our backs on the evils of the world. We have become frustrated with the world, with ourselves, and sometimes with our dreams.

Adding to the difficulties of adjustment has been the struggle between the Congress and the President. While the roots of the struggle are imbedded in the Constitution, and the battlefield includes some domestic areas as well, foreign policy has added special emphasis and drama to this confrontation. In its contemporary manifestation, it has stemmed partly from a series of activist Presidents recognizing and playing this new world role demanded of us by circumstances. To that has been added the trauma of Vietnam and Watergate, resulting in a redoubling of congressional efforts to curb Presidential initiative or to itself play a role perhaps more suited to those days when our initiatives and our might were not crucial to resolution of world problems. In other words, Congress has been and is widely reflecting these values and has tried to force them on the President.

The War Powers Act is a good example. Passed over Presidential veto, it was seen as a means of curbing Presidential impetuosity that could involve the country in hazardous enterprises of dubious value. The constitutionality and other aspects of this legislation are beyond the scope of this paper but the Act does point up a real dilemma. Frequently action can be most efficacious and minimal when a problem is still incipient and therefore its true

nature still ambiguous. Yet that is precisely the time when the mobilizing of public opinion and supportive action is most difficult. Conversely, when a problem is unambiguously urgent it is relatively easy to generate support for taking action. At that point, however, the action necessary to arrest or correct the situation often can be vastly more costly.

A recent example of this sort of thing occurred in Angola in 1975. President Ford was barred by the Congress from providing assistance to pro-Western forces in Angola because he was unable to prove what the consequences of action, or of inaction, would be. I don't want to argue here the merits of the Angola case, but it definitely does illustrate the kinds of difficulties a President faces in trying to respond to challenges around the world.

Other congressional actions have also severely limited the President's freedom of action. The embargo on arms sales and aid to Turkey has done perhaps irrevocable damage, not only to U.S.-Turkish relations but also to the Turkish body politic. The full consequences of that action may be years in unfolding. The congressional right of veto over significant arms sales has likewise made difficult and sometimes impossible the subtle employment of this very useful instrument of foreign policy.

Vietnam, of course, bears a significant share of responsibility for these current congressional attitudes. From their attitude towards Vietnam one could get the impression that the American people woke up one morning and found themselves with 550,000 troops in Vietnam, slipped in by a deceptive president on an unsuspecting nation. The facts are far different. The buildup in Vietnam was a lockstep operation. The congressional bailout came only after a quick victory eluded us.

Regardless of the facts, the attitude remains and it illustrates another difficulty in the conduct of foreign policy;

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that is, that public attitudes, which frequently are mirrored in the Congress, often lag the actual international situation. For example, the American people, soured by the experience of World War I, refused to respond to President Roosevelt's warning about the far different situation developing in the 1930s, leading potential aggressors to believe they would be able to act with impunity. The same phenomenon may be present today. Vietnam is frequently cited as an argument against taking action in circumstances not remotely similar to those of Vietnam, aid to Angola again being a prominent example. Thus it is possible that the ill-effects of that American involvement may adversely effect American foreign policy for a dangerously long period of time.

One of our big foreign policy issues since World War II has been coping with the Soviet Union. Previous major threats to the United States, such as the two World Wars, have been acute, overwhelming threats. We have mobilized to deal with them and eventually have disposed of them. But the Soviet threat is with us constantly and will be for as far in the future as we can see. We have not really learned to behave in the face of a more or less permanent problem such as this. The results have been sharply fluctuating attitudes—from considering the Soviet Union as evil incarnate, to the spirit of Glassboro, the spirit of Camp David, and other euphoric manifestations. We may be going through another such cycle at the present time.

The United States and the Soviet Union hold incompatible concepts of world order, the organization of society, and man's place in it. Because we are at the same time incomparably the two most powerful nations in the world, nations whose interests impinge on each other throughout the globe, a competitive relationship between us is inevitable. The existence of nuclear weapons

imparts to that competition a special danger unique in history. In the past, major powers have decided conflicts between them by war. Today the stakes in a conflict between the superpowers are not simply the defeat of one of them but their mutual devastation and perhaps even the destruction of mankind itself. To cope responsibly with this danger and the competition that has given rise to it, recent administrations have generally pursued a concept described by the now famous (or infamous) word "détente."

Détente, described briefly, is an attempt to reduce the threat of nuclear war by tempering the rhetoric of the cold war, ending or abating the attempt to score cheap debating points on every issue on which U.S. and Soviet interests collide, striving to develop areas in which mutual interests potentially exist, building habits of mutual restraint and patterns of coexistence. But détente did not mean the ignoring or glossing over of the fundamental antagonism between our two systems. On the contrary, accompanying a positive effort to improve relations and thereby provide an incentive for more constructive Soviet behavior was a determination to react strongly, with whatever means were required, to deter or to counter Soviet tendencies towards aggressive or irresponsible behavior. This, obviously, demanded the maintenance of powerful military forces across the entire spectrum of conflict, and the will to use them if necessary. That, however, is a very sophisticated policy to pursue. It is difficult to obtain public understanding and support at one and the same time for attempts to reduce tension with our enemies and for heavy defense expenditures. We have not been notably successful in the effort.

While détente enjoyed considerable popularity and some success for a time, it gradually and perhaps, in view of our heritage, inevitably became identified only with the conciliatory rather than

with the coercive dimensions of the policy. This, coupled with charges and indeed some evidence that the Soviets may not share our interests in mutual restraint, has led to a new wave of suspicion and antagonism against the Soviet Union.

Some of the recent rhetoric has been reminiscent of the darker days of the cold war. That is not to say that there is not a foundation in reality for these suspicions. There has been, and continues to be, an impressive growth in Soviet military power. But that is not the whole picture. We must also keep in mind that this is not a new phenomenon. It has not been a sudden expansion; rather it has been a steady, constant growth. At least since the time of the Cuban missile crisis the Soviet Union has been adding to its defense budget at an annual rate of 3 to 5 percent. Such an annual increment adds up over the years to enormous sums and while it is not necessary to catalog the military capability the Soviet Union has acquired with that differential investment, it is a spectacle not calculated to reassure even those who take a sanguine view of Soviet intentions.

But these developments, deeply troubling as they are, do not necessarily mean the Russians have suddenly changed their strategy and have begun to prepare for some specific military crisis or confrontation with us. We do not and cannot know Russian intentions but this military growth is at least logically explicable in terms of a number of traditional Soviet and Russian attitudes. There are several: the long-standing Russian inferiority complex with respect to the industrial West; the residual influence of ideology that still preaches implacable capitalist hostility; the very mixed record of Russian and Soviet military forces in conflict, the momentum and inertia of a system and of a bureaucracy that erect high barriers to changes of direction; a traditional **defensive orientation and insistence**

upon a comfortable excess margin of military equipment; and, frequently ignored by this country, the possibility of having to fight a two-front war. Also, to a far greater degree than we, the Soviets are aware of the political value and use of military power.

In addition, we should not make the error of assuming that the Soviet Union is a monolithic and inflexible entity. It is affected by interactions with and reactions to the outside world, especially the industrialized West, and to developments within the Soviet system. The leadership is beset by problems—industrial, technological, and economic inferiority, lack of true friends and allies, a rapid growth of internal minority groups and an approaching change of leadership and of leadership generations to mention only a few.

Listing these problems, weaknesses and explanations of Soviet behavior is not intended to rationalize away growing Soviet strength or the new and troubling phenomenon of Soviet and Cuban adventurism. The threat is real enough but it is not immutable and the outcome is, in the last analysis, really up to us. If we match them strength for strength, if we display the ability and determination to prevent Soviet successes through the threat or use of military force, it is possible to prevail—and to work with them for the benefit of both. It seems reasonable to conclude that if we can successfully contain and compete, the strains facing the Soviet system over a historical period are far more serious than those that will face us. But this will not be easy—above all we must be intelligent, not emotional, about the character of a very real and enduring threat that faces us and about the requirements for responding to it to preserve American security and world stability.

There are two closely related problems with which we must deal—the reality and the perception of Soviet power. Independent of the intentions of

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Soviet leaders, we must recognize that power has its own imperative and creates its own opportunity. I cannot recall a historical period when an unfavorable balance of power was not sooner or later translated into political advantage. Such a judgment could prove to be incorrect in current circumstances, but if we're directly wrong on a matter of such cosmic importance, on which side is it better to err? Equally important from a political standpoint is the impression of Soviet superiority. Should such an impression, accurately or inaccurately, gain currency, it can have a profound effect on the behavior of not only the Soviet Union but of our allies, the Third World, and even of ourselves—an effect greatly to the detriment of the West. Such a perception could alter world political alignments, increase Soviet propensity toward adventurism and risk-taking, and add greatly to our burden of exerting effective leadership. Our first and essential priority, then, must be to do whatever is necessary to prevent the reality, and the perception, of Soviet superiority.

But dealing with this direct U.S.-Soviet relationship is not the only, and perhaps not even the most complex task facing us. There is the matter of exerting leadership in an increasingly complex, interrelated, troubled world and the indirect, and sometimes direct, clash of interest with the Soviet Union over the social and political nature and direction of development of the remainder of the world. As already noted, there is no escape from this responsibility. Not too many years ago President Kennedy served notice to the world that we "would go anyplace, bear any burden, support any friends, oppose any foes, in defense of human liberty." Vietnam was a traumatic shock to that ringing declaration of unlimited commitment. The additional shock of Watergate has made us question even our successes and to doubt our motives, in whatever enterprise. The combination of the two has

placed a heavy burden on the American people. We must learn from these searing elements of our past but we must not be overwhelmed by them.

In our efforts to cleanse ourselves, we have among other things attacked the CIA, preached open diplomacy, and elevated human rights to a cardinal operating principle of our foreign policy. Actions such as these have struck a very responsive chord in our sense of moralism, and they have, indeed, restored some measure of confidence in ourselves and what we are about. But they carry with them the potential for great danger. While we must never succumb to the notion that the end justifies the means, we must constantly keep in mind that there are those in the world who do not wish us well. We've come a long way from that day in the 1930s when Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, informed that a cryptographic breakthrough would enable us to decipher the Japanese code, responded that "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail." Yet the basic outlook represented by that comment remains a part of our moral makeup, and has come again to the fore with the revelation of the so-called CIA scandal. Not that that is intrinsically bad; it is simply too good for the world in which we find ourselves.

Intelligence is one of our vital tools in preserving our security. And our security is a prerequisite for the advancement of the ideals for which we stand. We're engaged in a worldwide struggle with opponents who, to say the least, do not feel themselves bound by the Marquis of Queensbury rules. This game is for keeps. There is no reward for losing with dignity. Our opponents will not hesitate to employ any means to advance their cause. Intelligence is by its nature an unpleasant amoral business and there perhaps have been times when our practitioners may have been inclined to play the game for its own sake. On balance, however, when one

considers the requirements for secrecy, compartmentation, the numbers of people involved, and the need for flexible operating rules, the amazing thing to me is not that there were mistakes, but that so very little over for so long a period did go wrong. In any event, it is vital that a few aberrations not blind us to the absolute requirements for a strong aggressive intelligence organization if we are to survive. In my opinion, we have hurt ourselves badly, both substantively and procedurally. Just imagine the effort the Soviets would have been willing to expend to acquire the evidence of our intelligence operations that was spread across the front pages of our newspapers during the recent investigations. If we cripple our ability to compete in this vital but arcane field we hurt only ourselves, and of course delight our opponents.

There is no doubt that human rights is an enduring component of American foreign policy, pursued with a variety of styles by virtually every president of modern times. But several particular difficulties arise when human rights become a cardinal operating principle of foreign policy. First, we must recognize we are facing them in many areas of the world—fundamental, historic, revolutionary changes that go far beyond our own liberal slogans. This out-of-step nature of our attitude leads to difficulties in many areas, even that of definition. Fidel Castro in a speech a year or so ago came out strongly for human rights. What were those rights? The right to a home, to a job, food, health care, and an education. But the principal problem is the difficulty of, or the practical impossibility of, universal application as we have seen time and time again. The consequence is not only that the whole policy may have become counterproductive and may come to be viewed as a cynical exercise in public relations, but it also leads to sarcastic charges that we attack our friends because it is too dangerous to attack our

enemies. We may find in this policy an excellent example of the dictum that seeking the best can be the enemy of achieving the good.

As for open diplomacy, the nature of the path between the rhetoric of 1976 and the negotiations for the normalization of relations with China indicates that the learning curve in this particular area has been high.

The essential elements in the ability of the United States to play an effective role in the world are support and leadership for friends and allies and the capability and determination to react strongly and effectively to Soviet adventurism. The key element, again, is a perception of American strength and steadfastness. On this point there is cause for concern—beginning with Vietnam, the refusal to act in Angola, and on through the cumulative effect of a number of recent events. Confidence is a very fragile commodity in international politics. It can sometimes outlast the actual concrete circumstances, such as the reputation of the French Army on the eve of World War II. But once erosion sets in, it is inordinately difficult to reverse.

The present signs are not encouraging for the United States and could foreshadow many serious challenges in the future. Indeed, with the possible exception of NATO, there is little reason for optimism in whatever direction one looks. I shall not belabor the issue of troop withdrawal from Korea. However we are here not simply dealing with the confrontation between two small powers on a remote peninsula. Korea is the point at which the interests of all the great powers in the Pacific area converge. It is of vital concern to Japan, China, the U.S.S.R. and the United States, as each has demonstrated at one time or another by undertaking military action on the peninsula. Any suggestion of U.S. withdrawal or lessening interest is fraught with the profoundest implications, particularly if done at a time of

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the questioning at home of the moral validity of our commitment to South Korea's defense.

The normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China was an objective of three Administrations. Only the conditions and the timing were at issue but notions of "playing the China card" are troublesome. Implicit in that notion is the idea that we can substitute the Chinese for some of our own efforts. The China card is not ours to play. The fundamental Chinese interest in the United States is in our strength and our willingness to stand up to Soviet adventurism. We did not generate the Sino-Soviet split. We didn't even understand it for 10 years. To the extent that the split becomes a strategic necessity for us, we will lose our leverage and could perhaps become hostage to both powers.

Although they now appear moribund, earlier negotiations for an Indian Ocean arms control agreement with the U.S.S.R. could easily be interpreted as another U.S. intention to withdraw in a region of growing importance. The strategic issue involved is that U.S. access, or presence, in the Indian Ocean can be maintained only through our naval forces. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is a back-door neighbor of many of the most important states of the region, and can easily overfly the entire region from bases in its own territory. In view of this reality, the potential modification of power relationships implicit in such negotiations surely did not escape those in the region who look to the United States for support.

Likewise, the blasé reaction of the United States to the recent coups in Afghanistan and South Yemen could not have been reassuring to our friends such as Oman and Pakistan.

Our current arms sales policy also carries with it some disturbing connotations. In a world still heavily burdened with poverty and disease we certainly should not heedlessly promote the sale

of arms. At the same time, we should not be lulled into the simple and comforting notion that arms create war. Long before there were nuclear explosives and electronic precision weapons—long before there was gunpowder—there was war. Military conflict is older than recorded history and its causes are manifold, complex and deeply rooted in the nature of man. Arms and arms races represent the thermometer, not the fever itself. We will not cure the disease simply by breaking the thermometer. Nor can it be considered reasonable that a major preoccupation of our foreign policy should be the inadequacies of our friends rather than those of our adversaries. Some countries undoubtedly want arms for purposes we do not consider overriding. But should we set ourselves up as the final judge of a legitimate national interest of our friends—friends who seek our support for measures which at least in their own eyes are important to their own security? We cannot deny them without damage to perception of American loyalties and steadfastness.

In sum, we must be true to our principles or we will lose sight of our goals and end up being false to ourselves. But to further our principles we must survive in a world of sovereign nations, competing wills, and widely differing goals and values. We cannot do that if we continue to view foreign policy as a contest between good and evil. President Carter has said that anticommunism is no longer to be the motivating foundation of U.S. foreign policy. The accuracy of the implications in that declaration aside, the fact is that the U.S.S.R. is the only nation in the world with the power to threaten us. It is the chief politically directed threat to that world stability that is in the interest of the United States and to the ability of the people of the world to choose their future in the absence of totalitarian coercion. If that is anticommunism, we can

abandon it only to our own mortal peril.

In a very imperfect world, as we know it, we must not abandon those ideals that have made America different.

But we must also insure that all people, friends and foes alike, understand that the United States is aware of its long-term interests and that it has the means and the will to protect them.

