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A review of balance of power theory reveals that three nations, each in competition with the others, seldom enjoy that stability of relationship necessary for extended peace. The United States-China-Soviet Union triangle may prove to be different because of increasing emphasis on and attention to communication; it must prove different because of potential consequences.

REFLECTIONS ON MULTIPOLARITY

by

William A. Platte

Perceptions and beliefs of a society are difficult to change. William James' conception of society as a huge flywheel, whose tremendous inertia can be overcome only by repeated nudges, has been validated.¹ A major validation of the "flywheel thesis" concerns the international political system. It required roughly a decade for Americans and others to begin to realize that their world was no longer "bipolar."

It had been easy, if unpleasant, for American society to accept the concept of a world led by two superpowers, two giant nation-states, each leading a camp composed of sometimes ardent, sometimes reluctant "client" nation-states. World War II brought about this new phenomenon: of the victorious Allies only two remained major world actors. Without going into the several interpretations of the origin of the cold war,² it nevertheless can be stated that it was not difficult for both camps, Soviet and U.S. East and West, to slide into

entirely Manichaeian views of the world, each holding that the other embodied evil.

A continuing series of crises, nearly all of which involved some application of military power, reinforced the view of a dichotomous world. But during the 1960's a phenomenal transition in world politics began. Unnoticed by all but a few astute observers, world politics began to move from a bipolar to a "tripolar," or "triangular," orientation of power.

To be sure, a bipolar world had been, by and large, a theoretical expression, a model, only in part a true description of the international political system. The innovative school of modern systematic political theorists usually differentiated even a bipolar world. Among six theoretical world political systems, Morton Kaplan conceived loose bipolar and tight bipolar models and thought that post-World War II international politics more closely resembled the former.³

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By 1963, it was predicted that in the next 10 years "the system of polarization of power will cease to be recognizable; that other states will count for so much in world politics that the two present great powers will find it difficult, even when cooperating, to dominate them."⁴ Theorists began to search for international political models more apropos of the present decade. One of the most provocative models derived from this search was Rosecrance's prescription for a "bi-multipolar system."⁵

The newer models were not conceived on the basis of hard evidence that great international political changes were in progress. However, considerable evidence of change had been recorded by a small group of Western Sinologists and Sovietologists who, admittedly somewhat after the fact because of the necessity for the time-consuming decipherment of Communist esoteric communication, discerned the initial cracks in the theretofore monolithic Communist empire.

Although North⁶ had chronicled the disregard, if not outright hostility, shown by Moscow to the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920-1945 period, it was Zagoria's *tour de force* in 1964 that, after examining the record of the erstwhile international Communist compatriots in the 1956-1961 period, authoritatively revealed the high potential for a definite and lasting split between Moscow and Peking.⁷

Major additions to the literature on the Sino-Soviet rift were made by Griffith,⁸ Mehnert,⁹ Brzezinski,¹⁰ Ulam,¹¹ and Crankshaw.¹² By the late 1960's, literature and documentation on Chinese-Soviet relations was fairly comprehensive. In 1968, Gittings chronicled the dispute in book form through 1967.¹³ Clemens related the dispute to arms control efforts by Washington and Moscow, and gave modest attention to the triangular relationship developing between Moscow, Washington, and

However, the triangular relationship, or tripolarity, between Peking, Moscow, and Washington was not the major focus of these works. As the 1960's ended, interested readers could forage through excellent volumes on the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, or on U.S.-Soviet relations, including strategic warfare and deterrence, or on U.S.-Chinese relations since the end of World War II.

However, there was no single volume that treated in detail the new situation in world politics at the turn of the decade. There was some news commentary and a few magazine articles, but even these did not begin to appear until the Sino-Soviet rift erupted in widely publicized border fighting from March to August 1969.

Harsch was one of the first news analysts to acknowledge the new world political phenomenon and to question its implications.¹⁵ In late 1969 he noted, "Life in a triangular-power world is going to be more fluid, less predictable than it was in the old two-power world which now recedes into history behind us."¹⁶

Others analyzed "the big triangle in world relations" and explored the policy implications of a Sino-Soviet war for the United States.¹⁷

In December 1969, Davies published a provocative analysis of the triangular relationship: "The U.S. Invented the Imbalance of Power" alluded to the theoretical aspect of a triangular international system.¹⁸

In 1970, triangular power relationships were more regularly discussed.¹⁹ But the analysis of the triangular power relationship was still inadequate and often directed only in part toward the major international systemic phenomenon.²⁰

The common characteristic of scholarly effort and news commentary on Chinese-Soviet-U.S. relations was its emphasis on balance or equilibrium. Most authors, representing commonly held sentiment, voiced their preference

for peace and stability, or the status quo, or at most, very gradual change. They evidenced real trepidation at the emergence of a tripolar situation involving three nuclear nations, for this was a heretofore unknown development in history. Having become accustomed, in 25 years, to a "bipolar equilibrium," their implicit question was "Can there be a tripolar equilibrium?" There must be some grounds on which to base an affirmative answer, for there had to be at least a possibility that three super-states somehow could achieve a balance or equilibrium. Any one of the three powers could adjust its position ever so slightly away from the second and toward the third power to maintain balance and avoid the possibility of all three plunging into the abyss of war. The three powers may be viewed as aerialists balanced on a frame mounted atop a great tower—they must interact in very coordinated fashion or their frame becomes destabilized and, in company with the aerialists, falls to the ground.

But difficulties in translating an aerialist model to the reality of international politics are substantial. Aerialists can see and communicate and feel the results of the others' moves immediately, and therefore respond rapidly and accurately to adjust their collective balance. International diplomacy unfortunately exhibits many of the opposite characteristics: nations keep secrets from each other, they often refuse to speak to each other, and their perception of moves by the others has been regularly in error. Aerialists must perform successfully in order to earn their living. National decisionmakers, on the other hand, may deem it advantageous, within limits, to upset an existing equilibrium. Once this is done, for however limited an aim, the prevalence of misperception and over or under-reaction in the past record of international political performance indicate that there is a fairly high probability

that the other states concerned may act so as to further destabilize the equilibrium rather than restore it.

Estimating this probability has been a major occupation of political theorists, historians, and commentators since time immemorial. The body of theory, commentary and outright speculation on the balance of power in all its ramifications is huge. But in considering the ramifications of the present at least tripolar world, it will be useful to search the balance of power literature for theory on tripolar or multipolar systems.

The concept of balance of power has been expressed in four basic ways; as propaganda, as a policy prescription, as a system, and as a mode of analysis of the international political scene. Governmental information agencies will sound an alarm that the balance is being endangered, or cite the need for maintaining or restoring a balance of power in justification for national actions. Politicians, diplomats, and statesmen often assist this propaganda effort, but tend to emphasize the use of the balance of power as a prescription for national actions—the balance of power should be "enhanced," or "maintained," or "restored," or "institutionalized"—as the case may be. Both statesmen and scholars have been concerned with the balance of power as a system. In systematic terms, the concept is one in which some states work away from an equilibrium, causing other states to work to restore it, a process that can be seen as dangerous or beneficial. If the former view prevails, the balance of power system should be destroyed and a substitute found. Thus Woodrow Wilson fought for collective security in the League of Nations. If the latter view prevails, the balance of power system of course should be enhanced by any means available.

Scholars have tended to concentrate on the analytic definition of the term.²¹ Distinctions have been made

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between static balances of power and dynamic balances of power, between regional or limited balances of power and universal balances of power. In considering a static balance, a distinction may be drawn between an equal, or balanced, condition or an unequal, or imbalanced, condition. In considering a dynamic balance, a distinction usually is made as to whether the balance is the result of either an automatic or a manual process involving a nation or nations in a conscious role as the make-weight or "balancer." (The automatic process is referred to as the "Hidden-Hand" mechanism.) Regional or limited balances of power, while certainly of some applicability today, are better defined as phenomena of yesteryear. Universal balances of power, on the other hand, are modern phenomena if the concept of the "known limits of the ancient world" is disallowed.^{2 2}

Scholars began making these analytical distinctions many centuries ago, for the concept was known and applied in the Greek city-states, Egypt, India, and China.^{2 3} A "prevailing notion of ancient times,"^{2 4} the concept of balance of power declined to insignificance during the days of the Roman Empire. However, it revived and achieved wide recognition thereafter. Especially after the Treaty of Westphalia, in 1648, the balance of power became a cardinal feature of international politics.^{2 5} According to Friedrich, Bernardo Rucellai, related to the Medicis, first explicitly stated the doctrine in modern times.^{2 6} Machiavelli's comments emphasize a concept of triangles or trilateral relations. He spoke of balancing processes between three states in *The Prince*, under three headings:

"Active Alliance Wins Friendship."

(... irresolute princes, attempting to escape present danger, most of the time follow the neutral road and most of the time

"Alliance With A Weak Prince May be Profitable."

"Never Make a Voluntary Alliance With a Stronger Power."^{2 7}

Machiavelli's advice to the prince effectively made the transition through the centuries. Friedrich noted that there has been a "balancer behind each balance."^{2 8} The balancer was highly desirable, if not indispensable, and the keystone of the entire theory.^{2 9} Herz made the "holder of the balance" one of three conditions for a balance of power resulting from conscious policies.^{3 0}

Following World War II, accompanying the general realization that the world had become bipolar, scholars began to raise questions about the balancer. Morgenthau decided that the balancer was a variant of a basic form of opposition of two alliances, which was the more frequent form.^{3 1} Others began to see the balancer merely as one of several ways in which a balance of power might be maintained.

Wright visualized a rather grandiose evolutionary scheme in which a bipolar balance of power was the result of a long process and perhaps the last step before a universal state:

In operating the balance of power, small states tend to federate or to seek protection. Great states will frequently find it possible in spite of the balance of power to annex a small neighbor and will sometimes compensate one another by dividing, rather than defending, the small. Furthermore, the conditions of developing military technology tend to increase the relative disparity of the great and the little. This process of eliminating the lesser, then the middle sized, and finally some of the great states, tends toward a bipolar world—Athens vs. Sparta, Rome vs. Carthage, Bourbon vs. Hapsburg, France vs. Britain, Triple Alliance

vs. Triple Entente, Soviet Union vs. United States.

When bipolarity is reached, each of the centers of power fears attack by the other. No allies are possible because all are now associated with one or the other center of power and consequently the center of power against which time appears to be running is likely to start a war. Eventual war is likely to be considered inevitable and consequently, even though the chances of success are not good, it would be better to run the risk now than later. Such conditions have in the past often led to a termination of a system of power politics by the establishment of a universal state through conquest.³²

In the continental style, Aron was willing to give equal attention to bipolar equilibrium and to what he called multipolar equilibrium.³³ After analyzing the systems in some detail,

The multipolar and bipolar configurations are as radically opposed as they are pure types. At one extreme, each principal actor is the enemy and the possible partner of all the rest. At the other, there are only two principal actors, enemies by position if not by ideology. In the first case, alliances are temporary, in the second they are lasting; in the first case the allies do not recognize any leader, in the second all the political units, save the two leaders, are subject to the will of the latter. In the first case several units remain outside the alliance, in the second all units are willy-nilly obliged to lend their allegiance to one or the other of the blocs.³⁴

Aron decided that a bipolar system "may not, as such, be more unstable or more resilient than a multipolar

system, but it is more seriously threatened by a generalized and exorable war."³⁵ Without a "third man," the two great powers would be perpetually in conflict, either directly or through surrogates. Nevertheless, Aron was hopeful for bipolar stability in the nuclear age. Now, the means of destruction which the Soviet Union and the United States possess might change the essence of diplomatic-strategic competition. "On every level, differences of quantity provoke qualitative revolutions."³⁶

The work of Rosecrance contains further analysis and a synthesis of Aron's view that there were possibilities for stability in a modern, nuclear bipolar world. Rosecrance's "bi-multipolar world," however, is regarded with even greater optimism:

As a result of the threatened spread of nuclear weapons today, however, it is no longer certain that allies alone may enjoy the benefits of deterrent protection. India, in particular, may be able to retain her nonalignment while participating in nuclear guarantees of the big powers. If this occurs generally in the neutralist world . . . (outcomes which disadvantage allies and reward neutrals) . . . a considerable movement toward greater neutrality might be attained. . . .

In such a case, . . . there would no longer be a difference between allies and neutrals. The growth of multipolar sentiment would presumably reinforce the *detente* between bipolar powers . . .³⁷

The pathbreaking theoretic work of Kaplan should be compared to the Wright-Aron-Rosecrance sequence. Following Wright, Kaplan traces the rise of a bipolar system consequent to the collapse of a balance of power system. He then differentiates between a loose bipolar system and a tight bipolar

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system, the former bearing some resemblance to Rosecrance's bi-multipolar system, the latter more similar to Aron's bipolar equilibrium. Kaplan believed that a loose bipolar system could, given proper conditions, revert to a balance of power system (foreshadowing Rosecrance), but, with equal probability, it could transit to a tight bipolar system, a hierarchical system, a universal international system, or a unit veto system. His estimate was that the loose bipolar system could be marginally stable while the tight bipolar system was likely to be highly unstable. Unlike Aron, Kaplan was not particularly optimistic over the potential for a bipolar system to avoid war and maintain an equilibrium. In fact, he believed that suspicions generated in a tight bipolar system tend to undermine equilibrium and that, if there were an advantage in surprise, one bloc might strike.³⁸

Thus it is possible to distinguish two viewpoints on the question of equilibrium, balance, and stability in the international system. One view would favor the balance of power condition over the bipolar condition as more conducive to world peace and stability. The second holds at least some hope for a bipolar balance under modern conditions.³⁹ After an exhaustive review of the balance of power literature, one researcher concluded that post-World War II history *in fact has been* one of "dual predominance" in separated areas, which therefore would be best described as a "balanced" situation of two power blocs, albeit with some conflict but nevertheless avoiding Armageddon.⁴⁰

It may be asked whether any of these scholars and theorists have risked applying numbers to their balance of power theorems. The answer is "only very rarely." Wright speaks of numbers of nations only in general terms:

The greater the number of states and the more nearly equal their power, the more stable is the equilibrium. In a system com-

posed of a large number of equal states, no one can defy all successfully. Consequently, if all are ready to curb aggression, no aggression can be successful. As the number of states diminishes, the relative power of each against the whole becomes greater and the hope of successful aggression by the more powerful increases.⁴¹

Rosecrance notes, as favorable to the multipolar view, the Deutsch-Singer position that an 11-state world (assuming their relative equality of power) would avoid serious conflict.⁴² Kaplan would probably concur in the "11" figure. He is on record with the view that *three* nations are too few for a viable system.

A system of three large nations would probably have been inherently unstable. It might still be possible in a three-nation system for the nation defeated in a war to combine with the weaker of the victorious nations against the stronger victor. But the risks would be great and the opportunities to undo mistakes would be minimal. Such a system would place a high premium on striking first, on taking advantage of opportunity, on forming combinations, and on betraying allies. In a three-nation system, under conditions of conventional capabilities, turmoil and strife would be the rule; and the number would soon be reduced.⁴³

He goes on to say that "In the 'balance of power' system a minimum number of five major nations probably was necessary for stability."⁴⁴ Looking ahead to the eventuality of a multibloc system in which each bloc, or its leading nation, had protected second-strike nuclear forces, Kaplan predicted not a system with balance of power characteristics but one with unit veto characteristics, a sort of nuclear Hobbesian state of nature.⁴⁵

This review of the balance of power literature, particularly in regard to attempts to be more precise in numbers of nations required to maintain a balance, is therefore discouraging for the prospects of a tripolar world. Identifying a scholar-theorist who believes that a trilateral relationship between today's superpowers would be stable or balanced, is not possible. Only Aron has seen light at the end of the tunnel, and his light seems indistinct; he is more hopeful than scientifically persuasive. This, surely, is the main reason for his prayerful emphasis on prudence and circumspection as requirements for all world leaders.

Yet among current analysts specifically addressing triangular Chinese-Soviet-U.S. relations, Harsch and Davies stand alone as being overtly pessimistic over the portent. Harsch's commentary reads almost as though he had just laid aside Kaplan before putting pen to paper. In Davies' case, pessimism is based more on practice than theory. Davies believes that a modern tripolar system will not be workable or stable simply because of certain empirical evidence accumulated thus far. To wit, the United States will be insufficiently adept, diplomatically, to operate a triangular balance of power coherently. Thus he sees instability, disequilibrium, and the danger of general war not because of international systemic idiosyncracies but almost purely because of the record of prevalent human error or perverse judgment. This view, which holds that the international diplomatic record is more important than any theory, however persuasive, is worthy of attention.

If one were to imagine oneself in the role of decisionmaker in the Soviet, Chinese, or U.S. Governments under present circumstances, one probably would prefer to decide from the point of view of the balancer. The balancing, or makeweight, diplomatic role for a nation is obviously most advantageous,

for it allows freedom of movement presumably not available to the other two powers. An ability to act effectively as the makeweight in a balance of power situation thus may be taken as a criterion for measuring the diplomatic record of the Soviet Union, China, and the United States.

Taking the Chinese case, there is available a long record of diplomatic flexibility and astuteness. Chinese decisionmakers from the earliest days of empire practiced balance of power diplomacy, often in triangular form, and regularly attempted to balance several triangular situations concurrently. China, vulnerable to attack and disruption not only from the hinterlands of Asia but from seacoast pirates, raised massive corvees to construct coastal fortifications and the Great Wall commenced by the Han emperors. But the Chinese were equally active, diplomatically. Their practice of playing "near barbarians" against "distant barbarians" is in many ways a classic case of balance of power diplomacy, with the Middle Kingdom acting as makeweight. The Mandarins supported one side, then the other. They threatened, bribed, rewarded, promised, or seduced various tribal or clan chieftains as necessary to maintain their own polity free from disruption. Their ultimate degree of diplomatic success, of course, is debatable—there have been as many "dynasties of conquest" as there have been "domestic dynasties," although the Chinese are known to have invited and then assimilated the "conquerors."

The last Chinese dynasty, the Manchu dynasty of conquest, encountered diplomatic, economic, and military pressures from outside Asia due to European and American expansion. If Chinese success against Asian disruptions had been equivocal, Chinese measures, including balance of power diplomacy, were fruitless against Western penetration. The self-centered and self-satisfied Chinese leadership was

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hopelessly outclassed by the dynamic Westerners. One poignant tale is that of Chinese attempts to influence Czarist aims by embargoing the shipment of rhubarb to Russia.⁴⁶ Needless to say, a rhubarb shortage did not affect Russian policy.

By 1911, when Sun Yat-sen managed to give the coup de grace to the Manchu, China had become a shuttlecock in the badminton game of modern power politics. She had become relatively so weak that her opportunities to act as makeweight became nonexistent.

In the late 1920's and the 1930's, China became a pawn in the struggle between the Soviet Union and Japan, a device through which Stalin sought to enhance Soviet security. Stalin's policy in the period, to assist Chiang even at the expense of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) should be viewed in light of the fact that Chiang was the Chinese leader best equipped to make China a fitting counterweight to Imperial Japan. The Soviet Union was practicing balance of power diplomacy, acting as the makeweight in a Tokyo-Moscow-Nanking triangle. The record in this case parallels Soviet interwar diplomacy in Europe. From Rapallo in 1922 to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, the Soviets maneuvered in astonishing fashion to achieve their goals. Between 1920 and 1937, Moscow entered into nearly 300 international agreements of all types. This record of diplomatic initiative and flexibility indicates full familiarity with balance of power strategy and little hesitancy in applying it wherever and whenever necessary.

After World War II, Moscow continued its emphasis on active diplomacy, and acted as a balancer on several nonnuclear occasions. Among the most important of these has been the attempt to build up India as a counter to an increasingly hostile China in the early 1960's (the Moscow-Peking-New Delhi triangle), mediation between India and

Pakistan at Tashkent in 1966 (the Moscow-New Delhi-Islamabad triangle), and, lately, attempts to cement Japanese-Soviet relations as a counter to a completely hostile China, by trade and development agreements for Siberia. Moscow's diplomacy has come full circle: In the 1930's Stalin and Molotov tried to build up China to counter Japan; in the 1970's Brezhnev has wooed Japan to counter a hostile China.

In addition to these fairly obvious cases of Soviet diplomatic activity, there is the distinct but not often recognized possibility that Moscow in fact was supporting Maoist China in the period 1949-1960 as a counterbalance to tremendous U.S. power.⁴⁷ That this was a specifically designed policy by Moscow, acting in a balancer's role, may be open to some question. Nevertheless, an objective view of the history of those 11 years would be that Moscow did benefit from Washington's perception of a monolithic Sino-Soviet structure. The Soviet Union used the 11-year time span to gain strength vis-à-vis the United States. As Moscow grew stronger, the Chinese "partnership" became less necessary.

It has been said that the Soviet Union's one-party government is better suited to dealing with enemies than with friends,⁴⁸ and that the Soviet experience in dealing with internal borderland nationalities ill-prepared it for a diplomacy among equals,⁴⁹ neither of which opinions seem to detract from the Soviet record of active, advantage-seeking diplomacy and tendency to use balance of power principles; more specifically, to act as a balancer whenever possible.

The search for world order through world government and world law has been a distinctive feature of U.S. foreign policy since the turn of the century. Both publicly and privately, Americans can be said to have pursued diligently a utopia that was based on a static moral balance, or imbalance, of power. The

tragedy in this great American search is not only that such an orderly imbalance has thus far proved unreachable, but that in their quest Americans rejected or, at best, forgot balances in their concentration on collective security. In fact, the balance of power became a phrase of opprobrium—America wanted nothing to do with it—it had so often “failed” with disastrous results—American policy would be based on much loftier premises.

It therefore has become fashionable to criticize American idealism, to assert that the United States must come back to hard reality and practice “power politics,” the balance of power routine. According to some, failure to act as balancer on repeated occasions has been disastrous for the United States:

Given four adversaries, our Government managed at each level to act so as to favor the stronger: Hanoi over the indigenous Communists in the South, Peking over Hanoi, and Moscow over Peking. And all this was done at exorbitant cost to the American people. For a quarter of a century Democratic and Republican administrations doggedly pursued a lavish strategy of our own invention—a strategy of imbalance of power.⁵⁰

Over the long run, however, such criticisms may be very one-sided and unjust. It is easy to be persuaded by U.S. rhetoric and ignore U.S. practice. In the Revolutionary War the Continental Congress, through Benjamin Franklin, finally arranged for assistance from France to counterbalance British supremacy. Again in 1812 the United States was able to balance the two and emerge successful. In the Civil War both North and South sought European allies to balance the threat of the other. World Wars I and II may be viewed in the sense that U.S. entry into combat was an attempt to restore a faltering balance. Washington did not relish the

thought of all Europe under German hegemony.⁵¹ More recently, American policy could be viewed as motivated by a desire to promote a multilateral European counterweight (NATO) to Soviet action in Eastern Europe and a similar-felt need to erect some sort of viable structure in Asia to counter a resurgent China.

It may be fair to say that the United States has sought to eschew balance of power politics as a code of action but nevertheless has resorted, perhaps unconsciously, to the role of balancer when the need arose. U.S. rhetoric has been full of “collective security”—U.S. actions sometimes have pursued balances, collective or otherwise.

To summarize, changing the order of treatment to provide added emphasis:

The current Chinese diplomatic task seems to be best described as one of redeveloping or restoring a historic diplomatic capability and traditional penchant for balance of power diplomacy and adapting it to the modern international system, not allowing ideological tenets to obscure flexibility.

The task is somewhat complicated by China's political, economic, and military situation, which currently provides few assets with which to accent or reinforce a given diplomatic position. The question of importance is “Can China act effectively as a makeweight in a modern balance of power situation?” China, even though comparatively much less powerful in some respects than the United States or the Soviet Union, yet might be a successful balancer. The advent of ping-pong diplomacy and the followup diplomatic dialogue with Washington support a view that Peking at least is trying to balance off Washington and Moscow.

The American task, on the other hand, is one of achieving greater recognition of the possibilities for balance of power diplomacy in the modern world and taking advantage of them, of

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insuring that decisionmaking is not hypnotized by sloganeering for collective security.

The Soviet task is comparatively much less demanding—Moscow may have recognized the potential of the triangle much earlier than either Peking or Washington; Soviet diplomacy is experienced in the balancer role; and ideological strictures thus far have not been allowed to hinder Moscow's diplomatic flexibility.

In the review of theory regarding numbers of nations required for a stable balance of power, there appeared to be little promise in tripolarity. Three nations or three blocs of nations, in which each is in competition with two others, seem to offer little hope for extended peace and stability.

The diplomatic record of three major international actors indicates that only the Soviet Union has a current and fairly well-developed talent as a balancer. Both China and the United States appear capable of pursuing a balancer role, but only after overcoming impediments.

Neither political theory nor diplomatic record thus seems to hold great promise for continuing stability in the modern world. The opportunity for misperception, misjudgment, and misresponse on the part of at least one of the great powers in a modern crisis situation seems omnipresent. Even should each of the actors diligently try to play the balancer role, there seems to be all too much chance that at least one actor might inadvertently disrupt the balance and plunge the world into war.

This is a bleak and foreboding portrait. However, the picture is incomplete. Other pigments are needed on the canvas. There may be some justification for optimism.

Those pigments highlighting nuclear weaponry may represent a stabilizing influence on the actors of a tripolar or multipolar world. A close review of the history of the nuclear age can be inter-

preted to provide considerable support to Aron's general thesis that "On every level, differences of quantity provoke qualitative revolutions."⁵² We may be experiencing a qualitative revolution in diplomacy resulting from the quantitative increase in destructive power that science and technology have wrought. In a world where a few nations control massive megatonnage, tendencies in superpower diplomacy seem to be at least toward regularization if not consistently toward caution and great prudence.

Soviet-U.S. relations, and, to a certain extent, Soviet-Chinese and U.S.-Chinese relations suggest that nuclear nations become willing to gauge their initiatives and responses at a level well below the nuclear threshold of the warfare escalation ladder in their relations with an equally strong nation, but not necessarily in their relations with a weaker nation.

Further, the records suggest that conflict situations which pose a clear and present danger of nuclear warfare (such as when general purpose forces are engaged and escalation seems imminent, or strategic forces are arrayed against each other and a dispute seems insoluble by other than military means) stimulate the powers to a dialogue designed to lessen tension through crisis control measures or explanation of their strategic postures.

Put another way, the acquisition of large nuclear weapons systems will not necessarily cause a nation to refrain from some international risk-taking, so long as its government believes that control of a crisis situation can be maintained through unilateral restraint and good communication with affected nations.

The nuclear nations' increasing emphasis on communication and dialogue is perhaps best illustrated by the development of "hot line" communications between them. The history of "hot lines" between competing

nuclear-armed nations suggests that when mutually imminent and threatening nuclear strike capabilities are achieved, nuclear nations will move to institute "hot line" communications. The decisionmakers of nuclear nations have seemed anxious to talk to each other after a certain point is reached on the nuclear weapons system deployment "curve." This point seems to be when a nuclear exchange becomes a thinkable reality for both sides.

Although good communications and continuing dialogue are no substitute for everlasting prudence, reflection, and restraint on the part of nuclear nation decisionmakers, the fact that these decisionmakers have attempted to establish good communications, on an almost personal basis, as a hedge against misunderstanding and accident, does indicate a much heightened awareness of danger. The record indicates that the decisionmakers of the nuclear nations have been in awe of the enormous destructive power at their fingertips. Considerable support can be accrued for McGeorge Bundy's thesis that not one world political leader will knowingly

accept the total destruction of even one of his cities.⁵³

Has the nuclear imperative sufficiently brightened the bleak and foreboding protrait of a tripolar of multipolar world to lend a sense of optimism to future international developments? The answer probably is equivocal on the basis of the past 31 years, but it must be affirmative if mankind is to survive into the future.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Designated a naval aviator in 1949 and commissioned in 1950, Capt. William A. Platte, U.S. Navy, has served in patrol, transport, and training squadrons and on the staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He

commanded Training Squadron 29 and the Naval Air Facility Sigonella. He did graduate work at Stanford University and earned his Ph.D. degree in International Politics from M.I.T. in 1971. Captain Platte is Deputy to the President and Chief of Staff, Naval War College.

NOTES

1. William James, "Great Men and Their Environment," in his *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1927), pp. 216-54, especially pp. 244-45. Also see the succeeding essay, "The Importance of Individuals," pp. 255-62, and Chapter 4, "Habit," in *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., Great Books, 1952).

2. E.g., the cold war resulted from the world view and objectives of International Communism (Charles Burton Marshall, *The Cold War: A Concise History* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1965)); the idiosyncracies of Stalin personally (Marshall D. Schulman, *Beyond the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966)); the errors and intransigence of U.S. policy (D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961)); Gar Alperowitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965); or the unpurposeful, undesigned but tragic interplay of tremendous forces led by mortals all too prone to great folly (Louis J. Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967)).

3. Morton A. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1957), pp. 36-43. The loose bipolar system model accommodates other than national actors, such as multinational blocs or supranational bodies.

4. Hedley Bull, "Atlantic Military Problems: A Preliminary Essay," prepared for the Council on Foreign Relations Meeting of 20 November 1963, p. 21, quoted in Richard N. Rosecrance, "Bipolarity, Multipolarity and the Future," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, v.

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-27. The Rosecrance article has been reproduced in James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy, a Reader in Research and Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 325-34.

6. Robert C. North, *Moscow and the Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953).

7. Donald Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956-1961* (New York: Atheneum, 1964). A book by G.F. Hudson, et al., *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1961), foreshadowed Zagoria's work, but concentrated on the events of 1960.

8. William E. Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1963); *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964); and *Sino-Soviet Relations, 1964-1965* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967).

9. Klaus Mehnert, *Peking and Moscow* (New York: Putnam, 1963).

10. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), especially chap. 16.

11. Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1968), especially chaps. 11 and 12.

12. Edward Crankshaw, *The New Cold War: Moscow v. Peking* (Hammondsworth, England: Penguin, 1963).

13. John Gittings, *Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

14. Walter C. Clemens, *The Arms Race and Sino-Soviet Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Publications, 1968). A forerunner of this book was Lincoln P. Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), which, however, did not emphasize the Chinese aspect. (Discussed in Chapter 8.)

15. Joseph C. Harsch, "U.S. Faces Nationalist Red Trend," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 June 1969, p. 1.

16. Joseph C. Harsch, "Three-Power World Reshapes Policies," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 September 1969, p. 1. See also his article "U.S. Charts Sino-Soviet Split" in the *Monitor* for 2 September 1969, p. 1.

17. Max Frankel, "Tangled Web Binds U.S., China, and Russia," *The New York Times*, 12 October 1969, p. E3; Otto Zausmer, "Threat of Sino-Soviet War Burning Question for U.S.," *The Boston Globe*, 12 October 1969, p. A4; John K. Fairbank, "Peace or War Triangle," *The Boston Globe*, 6 November 1969, p. 23; Harrison E. Salisbury, *War Between Russia and China* (New York: Norton, 1969).

18. John Paton Davies, "The U.S. Invented the Imbalance of Power," *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 December 1969, pp. 50+.

19. Editorial, "Washington-Moscow-Peking," *The New York Times*, 5 January 1970, p. 36; Editorial, "Triangular Relationship," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 January 1970, p. 16; Neal Ascherson, et al., "World Giants Enter 'The End Game,'" *The Observer* (London), 11 January 1970. They describe an "unwilling triple relationship, . . . a new and intricate pattern which may prove to be the dynamic of the seventies." The title presumably refers to the final stage of a chess match, when all pieces of secondary importance have been removed from the board.

20. See, for example, Kazuo Murakamy, *On the American-Soviet-Chinese Triangular Power Relations and Japan's Role in Asia in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for International Affairs, mimeographed, March 1970); A. Doak Barnett, "A Nuclear China and U.S. Arms Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1970, pp. 427-42; and two articles by Harry G. Gelber, "The Impact of Chinese ICBMs on Strategic Deterrence," *Orbis*, Summer 1969, pp. 407-34, and "Strategic Arms Limitations and the Sino-Soviet Relationship," *Asian Survey*, June 1970, pp. 265-89. A. Doak Barnett and Edwin O. Reischauer, eds., *The United States and China: The Next Decade* (New York: Praeger, 1970), the report of a March 1969 conference sponsored by the National Committee on United States-China Relations, includes several specific references to the triangular situation, or multipolarity, by participants at the conference: Lincoln P. Bloomfield, p. 55, Allen S. Whiting, pp. 85-86, Kenneth T. Young, p. 166, Klaus Mehnert, p. 173, and John K. Fairbank, p. 199. Additionally, a number of other participants addressed the matter of concurrent U.S. policy toward the U.S.S.R. and China without referring to triangularity or multipolarity. (E.g., Theodore C. Sorensen, Harrison E. Salisbury, and others.)

21. This is not to say that scholars have not often propagandized or prescribed actions concerning the balance of power, or that some statesmen have not also been scholars.

22. There may have been a "universal balance" in the Mediterranean Basin at some time in history, encompassing the "known limits of society" to the inhabitants. But another "universal

balance" might concurrently have existed in, say, ancient China, whose inhabitants also thought their area comprised the known world.

23. Thucydides explained the Peloponesian war in balance of power terms.

24. David Hume, "On the Balance of Power," in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London, 1788), v. I, p. 305.

25. "While other factors have had an influence, the concept of the balance of power provides the most general explanation for the oscillations of peace and war in Europe since the Thirty Years' War." Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), v. II, p. 759. Many other famous writers have expressed the same view, including Hume, Vattel, Cobden, Stieglitz, Spykman and Morgenthau.

26. Carl J. Friedrich, *Foreign Policy in the Making* (New York: Norton, 1938), p. 123.

27. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. XXI, "How a Prince Conducts Himself in Order to Gain a High Reputation," in Allan Gilbert, trans., *Machiavelli, The Chief Works and Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), v. I, p. 83.

28. Friedrich, pp. 126-27.

29. Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 12, 88-93; A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 278.

30. John H. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 148, 153.

31. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1967), pp. 37, 187, 191-93, 336-37, 348.

32. Quincy Wright, *The Study of International Relations* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), p. 143.

33. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War, a Theory of International Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 125-40. Aron notes "Authors generally attach the phrase *balance of power* to the systems I call multipolar," p. 128.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

37. Rosecrance, p. 335. See a similar argument by Hedley Bull, p. 21.

38. Kaplan, chap. 2.

39. Kenneth N. Waltz has spoken well to the second ordering. See "International Structure, National Force, and the Balance of World Power," *Journal of International Affairs*, v. 21, 1967, pp. 215-31. Space requirements have not permitted discussion of this article.

40. Alan Jones, "The Balance of Power," draft Ph.D. dissertation (Cambridge, M.I.T., 1970), p. VI/55.

41. Wright, p. 143.

42. Rosecrance, p. 328. The Deutsch-Singer position is contained in their article "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability," *World Politics*, April 1964, pp. 398-99: "It is perhaps not excessive to assume that the minimal attention ratio for an escalating conflict would have to be 1:9, since it does not seem likely that any country could be provoked very far into an escalating conflict with less than 10 percent of the foreign policy attention of its government devoted to the matter."

43. Morton A. Kaplan and Nicholas De B. Katzenbach, *The Political Foundations of International Law* (New York: Wiley, 1961), pp. 32-33. (A less detailed statement is in Kaplan, *System and Process*, p. 34.)

44. *Ibid.*, p. 51. Arthur Lee Burns, having examined several scenarios for a world of Red, Blue, and Yellow, comes down in favor of a 5-power world (or some greater odd number) as the most stable arrangement. "From Balance to Deterrence," *World Politics*, v. 9, 1957, pp. 494-529. Regrettably, space has not permitted further mention of this thoughtful article. Burns, like Aron, had hope for a bipolar equilibrium.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 315. The Kaplan unit veto system is "nonintegrated" and "nonsolidary" with a high level of dysfunctional tension to a point "where human agents of the actors . . . find it difficult to stand up under the strain." The unit veto system may "become chaotic." It would be highly unstable and unlikely to exist for a comparatively long period of time. Kaplan, *System and Process*, pp. 51-52.

46. Mark Mancall, "The Kiahkta Trade," in C.D. Cowan, ed., *The Economic Development of China and Japan* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 29. The Chinese were knowledgeable enough to realize that the Russians might then buy rhubarb from Britain, so they also embargoed rhubarb shipments through Canton.

47. This thesis is set out by John Paton Davies, p. 50. It is partially substantiated by

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Moscow's insistence that Peking's split from the Soviet Union permitted the United States to act in Vietnam to the great detriment of International Communism.

48. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA/USSR* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 407.

49. Richard E. Pipes, "Why the Russians Act Like Russians," *Air Force and Space Digest*, June 1970, p. 53.

50. Davies, p. 150.

51. Hans J. Morgenthau, "Alliances in Theory and Practice," in *Associates in Political Science*, U.S. Air Force Academy, *American Defense Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), p. 67.

52. Aron, pp. 149, 13.

53. McGeorge Bundy, "To Cap the Volcano," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1969, pp. 1-20.

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