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Contemporary Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective

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President Nixon's recent trip to Peking has been heralded as opening a new era in world politics, and indeed it has. Nevertheless, these moves to overcome the rigidities of the ideological past are not without historical precedent nor should they be mistakenly viewed as providing the solution to all world problems. Looking back at history we see other nations that have emerged from periods in which ideology played the determining role in foreign policymaking, and while this did not end conflicts between nations, it did result in more realistic foreign policies more closely linked with national interests—a most welcome sign for us all.

CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

An address delivered at the Global Strategy Discussions of the Naval War College

by

Joseph C. Harsch

When I received the invitation to address this audience on the subject of "Contemporary Foreign Policy," I began to reflect on the episodes in my own experience which I thought might have some relevance to the changes we see occurring in the world today. The first thing that came to mind was a moment back in October of 1939, just after the Germans had overrun Poland. I arrived, a novice in such matters, in the city of Berlin and sought out the advice of the American military attaché, a man greatly respected and honored in the American community in Berlin at the time. He was Col. "Bullmoose" Smith, the recognized brains of the military team in the Embassy at the time. I went in to him and asked, "What is it all about?"

He said, "It is terribly simple. From the moment the Germans and the Russians signed their pact which led to the dismemberment of Poland, the world has been out of balance, and it will not come into balance again as long as the Germans and the Russians are allied or associated together."

Of course, he was totally right. There was not the slightest prospect of bringing the world back into balance and ending World War II in a manner acceptable to the Western countries as long as the Germans and the Russians remained together. This was a simple fact of life because the Russian-German combination at that time was too big for the rest of the world. It occupied such an enormous amount of territory and included such a great deal of wealth, power, and resources that it simply dwarfed everything else. If you put the talent of the Germans together with the raw materials and the space of the Russians, you have something which, at that time in history, could have overwhelmed the rest of the world. This concentration of power abruptly

dissolved when the Germans made the colossal mistake of attacking Russia. They did so because Hitler, I suppose, was incapable of grasping the realities of the world around him. He was an Austrian by birth, and while he knew something of Russia from his experiences in the First World War, he did not understand the British. His ignorance of the British nature and character was fantastic, equalled, I think, only by the English ignorance at that period of time of the realities of power in central and eastern Europe.

The British had a foreign secretary who made highly disparaging remarks about Czechoslovakia at the time of the Munich Pact. He was asked, "What is it; what does Czechoslovakia mean?"

"Nothing, nothing," was his reply.

Well, it merely meant the issue which precipitated World War II. To the upper class ruling Englishman of the thirties, even as late as 1938 and 1939, countries of eastern Europe did not count; they were unimportant. They could be discarded with little consequence for the fate of people somewhere else.

This inability of leaders of great nations to fully appreciate other people and other places in the world is one of the great weaknesses of foreign policy-making, one of the great hazards. Unless top leadership has an appreciation of other people—their capacity, their history, their records, their ability to be tenacious—one can get into dreadful problems. I believe that our ignorance of the people in Southeast Asia had something to do with our failure there.

The world was thrown out of balance by the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939. It was abruptly brought back into balance when the Germans stupidly attacked Russia. That, I think, is of profound relevance to us today. What I am groping for is the more profound meaning underlying the extraordinary diplomatic events of recent days.

We have been living in rather exciting times. No recent President has surprised so many people so frequently as Mr. Nixon has in the last 12 months. What is the meaning of all these surprises? In addressing this question I want to first take another step backward in history, this time to the year 1823.

George Canning, Foreign Minister of Great Britain, in a speech from the throne which he had written, said, "I have called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old." Now that was a bit bombastic, and I do not think Mr. Nixon reached quite such a verbal height in his visit to Peking. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that Canning quite deliberately called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old. That was a moment in history when the Russians, the Germans, the Austrians, and the Spanish were all moving to form a combination in opposition to Great Britain, and the British response was to encourage the Latin American States to break away from Spain, to become independent, and to encourage the United States to take a more cooperative attitude toward the British effort in that respect. Out of Canning's initiative grew the Monroe Doctrine. It was deliberately inspired in London. In other words, the British quite consciously built up the Western Hemisphere to balance off the forces hostile to Britain that were developing on the European Continent.

Turning to more recent history that also bears heavily on today's diplomatic maneuvers, it is instructive to note the views of Winston Churchill and his friend Harold Nicholson at a time when Churchill wanted to take some initiative to lessen East-West tensions. Harold Nicholson wrote a book on the history of the Congress of Vienna for the purpose of helping Churchill persuade people that a summit conference with the Russians might be a useful event. Nicholson treated the whole subject of the Congress of Vienna in its relation to the broader political conditions of the post-Napoleonic era. He made a state-

ment which I frequently recall when reflecting on the manner in which Mr. Nixon is transforming our foreign policy. Noting the repeated efforts made by Austria's Prince Metternich to get the British back into Europe and thus help drive the Russians out, Nicholson vividly described how Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary, always managed to evade making importunities on that subject. For as Nicholson put it, Castlereagh knew deep down in his heart that if he could just manage to keep things from getting too much out of hand, if he could avoid any great wars or issues, "the time would come when the vast tide of Muscovy would be sucked back out of Europe by the Asiatic moon." It was Asia on the rear of Russia, not the overt actions of the Europeans of the period, that caused the Russians to gradually lose interest in Europe and to turn around and move back into Asia—their preoccupation down to World War I.

Now I think these episodes in the past help to illustrate the great meaning and importance of what Mr. Nixon has done since the moment he startled everybody by announcing that he himself was going to China. The political impact of the President's trip to China was quite literally that he called a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old. He released the weight of China in the heart of Asia against the rear of Russia, and the effect of that reawakening of China—that invitation to China to reenter world politics—has been to suck the vast tide of Muscovy out of Europe. At the present moment there are 44 Russian divisions deployed in the heart of Asia against China as opposed to the 31 or 32 in Eastern Europe.

How did we get into a position where the most earthshaking political event in a generation is a decision by a President of the United States to put an end to a period of hostility with China? I would like to go back and examine the era which ended when Mr. Nixon made that decision.

While it is difficult to set a precise date, the argument can be made that the cold war technically began with a decision taken in the Kremlin which was made manifest in a speech by Stalin in February of 1946. In essence, this decision meant a policy of guns, not butter, for the Russian people. Instead of offering them rewards for their victory in World War II, Stalin called upon them to keep their belts tight and build more military power. It was a speech which did not invite any continuation of the wartime association between the Russians and the Western countries. It was a speech calling for the Russians to go on living in austerity. One month after that speech Churchill recognized and identified the course of Russian politics in his great speech at Fulton, Mo. For the next 12 months there was a battle royal in Washington over the full implication of Stalin's speech and the accuracy of Churchill's assertions that an iron curtain had, in fact, been rung down across ancient Europe.

However, 1 year later there occurred an event which really precipitated the postwar foreign policy of Washington, and I think it is worth remembering in a little detail what really happened there because it throws both a great deal of light on the time as well as on the policies we have pursued ever since.

The Truman Doctrine, which served as the foundation for American foreign policy and, in fact, Western foreign policy from 1947 until last year, started with the knowledge that the governments in Greece and Turkey were under enormous pressure and about to fall. This was the moment in history when the British Ambassador went to see the Secretary of State of the United States, then George Marshall, and informed him with great regret that the British could no longer assume the burden of supporting Greece and Turkey, and invited us to take over if we so desired. The

British Government told Washington that they were going to have to leave regardless of the consequences. This rapidly deteriorating situation precipitated some very hasty thinking at high levels in Washington as Secretary Marshall went to the President at once. The White House came to the conclusion that the United States should, if possible, take over the burden.

The leaders of Congress were summoned for long discussions with the President and General Marshall. They concluded that the United States should provide the necessary support to both Greece and Turkey. The leaders of Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, agreed with the President that this was what ought to be done, but in effect they said that the President would have to state his case in the strongest terms possible before they could publicly support it. Thus, while President Truman's message to the Congress was first written as an appeal for U.S. support to Greece and Turkey in the face of Russian supported subversion, American political leaders felt it was necessary to place the message in the strongest possible terms to ensure widespread popular support. Anticommunism *per se*, as a fundamental principle of U.S. foreign policy, was written into it. It became the first step in a worldwide crusade against communism.

In the generation since that decision we have lived through a period in which history has been heavily influenced, if not even at times dominated, by ideologies. Over the last 25 years the policies of nations have not arisen solely and exclusively from considered, calculated national interests but, in numerous instances, by ideological considerations as well. Communism is a religion; anticommunism became a religion. To the Russians, capitalism became the devil, all evil; to us, communism became the devil. We have been engaged in a period of history dominated by ideological thinking, by deep emotional feelings which have, on both sides, gotten in the way of calm consideration of national interests. The Russians have done things in this period which were not in their national interest, so have the Chinese, and so have we because this is one of those periods of history when man perceives or thinks he perceives an evil and proceeds to act as though the dominant reality in the world is the conflict between good and evil.

Having identified the period from which we have recently emerged as a period of ideological conflict, I think it is now helpful to go back and examine other such periods in history. There have been many times in history when ideology existed and became important, but there are two which I think are particularly relevant, and the only two which provoked long periods of human conflict in which national policy was influenced by ideology.

The first was the great sweep of Islam from the time of Mohammed's death to the Battle of Tours, when Charles Martel of France turned back the tide of Islam and ended the period of history in which there seemed to be no limit to how far Islam would spread. It started out in the Arabian peninsula and traveled as far as the Pillars of Hercules in the west and the Philippine Islands in the east. And then it started pushing north and south. Had the Franks lost the Battle of Tours in the year 732, all of France and probably all of Western Europe would be Moslem today. But the tide was turned back, limits were placed around it, and very soon Islam began breaking up into various communities in which the interests of the local political leaders took precedence over the holy crusade against the infidels. It was not much later before we had Christian states aligned with Moslem states in wars against either Christian or Moslem. The time came when national interests began to cross the ideological boundaries. In theory, Mohammedans still are engaged

in endless warfare against the infidels. In theory, they may again at any moment pick up the banners and declare war against all infidels and seek once more to spread the religion of Mohammed across the face of the world. As a matter of practice, however, there has been very little of that for quite a number of years.

The other period of time in which we had ideological emotions unleashed to the extent that we have seen in the last generation was during the religious wars of the 17th century. The great Thirty Years War in the heart of Europe, beginning in 1618, was an ideological struggle of the most intense and violent sort. It was Protestant against Catholic, and it is amazing how tumultuous ideological emotions can be and how violently they express themselves. By the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, however, you saw the same thing beginning to happen that happened to the Islamic movement, that is, national interests began creeping up and breaking through the rigid lines drawn during the ideological struggle. By 1648, when the whole thing ended, there were cases of Catholic France siding with Protestant northern Germany against Catholic southern Germany. Ideology was giving way to the interests of the state. History certainly teaches us that when ideology cuts across the path of the interests of the state, the tendency is for ideology gradually to give way and for the interests of the state to rise and take precedence over the emotions of the ideological period of history.

Returning to more recent times, we can see in the Soviet and American reactions to the Sino-Indian border difficulties of 1962 the telltale signs that the stark ideological confrontation of earlier years had begun to break down. Here we had a case where the United States and Russia both rushed arms to India to help the Indians protect themselves against pressure from Communist China. Thus the national policies of Russia and China were already in overt conflict as early as 1962, a fact which Washington failed to perceive until several years later. It predated the decision to commit half a million Americans to Vietnam on the assumption that we were still in an ideological period of history. Nevertheless, these decisions gave very strong evidence of the rise of national interests as a factor in policymaking taking precedence over ideological emotions. It was the beginning of the new period of history which Mr. Nixon has formally inaugurated by going to China.

I am not sure that enough people noticed it at the time, but early in the Nixon administration one of the announcements made by the President on foreign policy was his observation that the Communist monolith no longer existed. While Mr. Nixon's observation at this time was undoubtedly accurate, it nevertheless raises questions about America's capacity to conduct foreign policy calmly and rationally.

There really was no such thing as a unified Communist world from as far back as 1960. While the experts are still in some disagreement as to when the breach between Russia and China really began, most now base it at least as early as 1960 when the Russian technicians left China. Whether they were thrown out or went of their own volition, we still are not sure. Yet we do know that they all left in 1960, and we do know that there has not been any successful collaboration between the two since that time. Was the breach in existence earlier but glossed over? Most of the experts on China that I know tend to say that it probably happened as early as 1958, if not earlier. This means that communism was one great big, solid, happy, brotherly mass only from 1949, when communism won in China, to 1958–a matter of less than 10 years. But U.S. foreign policy did not take this fact into account until 1969 and 1970 when Mr. Nixon first officially iden-

tified the fact that the breach existed. Lyndon Johnson never did, although his State Department experts, long before Nixon's declaration, had recognized the fact that Russia and China were at great odds with each other. The fact that it took us such a long time to recognize one of the most important facts about the alignment of power in the world should trouble us all. Unless we can quickly integrate events as significant as the breach between Russia and China into our operating policy, we will not be in a position to successfully accommodate to the changing conditions of the world.

Now I submit that many of the mistakes we have made in the management of our foreign policy in the past have been symptomatic of our immaturity as a nation. As evidence of this, it is instructive to examine the motives behind one of the more fateful policies we advocated soon after entering the world stage during the waning days of World War I. President Wilson's insistence that the Austrian Empire be dismembered, despite the useful role it played both as an early sort of common market for south-central Europe as well as balancing the power of Germany and Russia in the region, did not serve American interests well. Yet we were carried away at the time with this phrase about self-determination of people. Woodrow Wilson was going to make the world safe for democracy by applying the abstract concept of self-determination of people throughout Europe. In the name of self-determination we tore apart one of the most useful institutions in European history. Truthfully, Austria-Hungary was not the strongest of states. It had been a little bit ramshackle for a long time, and it did defy a lot of ethnic boundaries. Yet somebody back in the Napoleonic period—paraphrasing Voltaire's comment on God—commented about Austria saying, if we didn't have it, we would have to invent it. That empire, or conglomeration, of peoples was a very useful thing, and we, in a fairly careless moment, threw it away simply for reasons of domestic politics. The political lobbying of the ethnic groups in the United States was sufficient to pressure Washington into tearing apart a very useful old institution. That was one example of where we went very wrong.

Americans love all sorts of slick formulas like making the world safe for democracy. Well, what does that mean? Upon close examination, Wilson's popular slogan had two potentially very dangerous features about it. First, it encouraged the idea that you can solve world problems by self-determination. Good heavens, if you apply that literally everywhere in the world today, what are you going to have? You would have even more chaos than presently characterizes the world scene. The Welsh want self-determination, independence from England; the Scots want independence; and certainly today everyone is painfully enough aware of the passions rampant in Northern Ireland. The British Isles are small enough as they are. They ought to be able to live together under one government. I do not think that the Welsh and the Scots are going to declare their independence from England, but they might if this sort of thing goes too far.

The other aspect of Wilsonianism that I find distressing is the tendency in it, which is quite American, to think that by some one deed you can end the problems of the world, that somehow history will all come to an end, and we will all achieve happiness as we go off into the millennium. Unfortunately, life is just not like that. The solution of today's problems may in turn generate new difficulties. There is no such thing as a final solution to the problems between nations. This is the beginning of wisdom about foreign affairs.

The relations of nations to each other are always fluid. We have been through an ideological period in which

we accepted the premise that our enemy would always be anybody who called himself Communist. Yet the truth of the matter is that very early in this period Yugoslavia broke away from Russia and developed its own independent form of socialism, as they like to call it. We failed to recognize it, however, and if it had not been for the British and their attitude toward Tito at the time, we probably would have tried to do to Yugoslavia what we tried to do in Vietnam. Fortunately, however, we avoided hostilities with the Yugoslavs, and the result was an independent form of so-called communism. Yugoslavia today is a considerably more open society than is found in the rest of Eastern Europe. In fact, it is rather difficult to find where the boundaries between the public and the private sectors of the economy run in Tito's Yugoslavia. I was there when the only private enterprise left in Yugoslavia was a row of five or six bootblacks outside the Moskva Hotel--the only hotel operating in Belgrade at the time. Now agriculture is back in the private sector, restaurants in the private sector, even light industry has been revived in the private sector.

We used to, in the early days of the so-called cold war, assume that once a country had gone Communist, it would always be Communist. In actual fact, however, this is not necessarily true. They may continue to use the words and the slogans, but the reality underneath has been flexible in every one of the Communist countries. Times change, and the Communist countries do not fully reflect our concept of what a Communist country is any more than we reflect accurately their concept of what a capitalist state is like.

As a result of Mr. Nixon's trip to Peking, we are now in the process of discovering reality as opposed to illusion. We are coming out of the ideological phase of history. It is going to be a bit of a jolt for some people. I am a little surprised, however, at how popular Mr. Nixon's actions thus far have proved to be. There has been, of course, a little opposition here and there, such as the Congressman from California whose district includes Mr. Nixon's home in San Clemente who said that he did not mind Mr. Nixon going to Peking, but he did mind his coming back. Nevertheless, we are leaving behind an ideological phase of history, both we and the people on the other side, and moving into a new pragmatic period.

Turning once more to history, we can perhaps gain a greater appreciation of just how much this new flexibility and pragmatism may mean to the shape of international politics in the years to come. In the period after the great religious wars in Europe, you saw a pattern of alliances develop in which the primary hostility was between Catholic France and Catholic Austria, the Empire. It was the period of Louis the Fourteenth when French foreign policy was devoted to the expansion of the frontiers of France. Louis wanted his frontiers to run from the North Sea in the north to the Rhine on the east. He wanted to round out the territory of France, and his principal enemy was Austria because it meant taking from Austria territories still then attached to the Empire. So during most of that period you had Catholic France fighting Catholic Austria with Protestant Britain on the side of the Empire. One of the great world wars of all time took place then. It was not called a world war, but it was indeed. The Duke of Marlborough made his military reputation in a fantastic campaign in which he led British and Dutch troops halfway across Europe, joined up in a brilliant maneuver with Prince Eugen of Austria, and triumphed over the armies of Louis the Fourteenth in the great Battle of Blenheim.

Under Louis the Fifteenth, France's expansionist policies continued, but there came a moment when the French King decided that France had gained the

European frontiers she needed, and he saw the nation's interests as lying overseas and the enemy as being Great Britain. This change in thinking heralded a period of naval rivalry between the French and the British. Thus there no longer was any need for France to be at war with Austria. Suddenly you had what was known in that period of history as the *bouleversement des alliances*, the overturning of alliances.

Richard Nixon has given us what I would call a *bouleversement des alliances*. He overturned our hostilities; he changed the whole pattern of relations among nations. He has gone not only to Peking, he has gone to Moscow, so the whole picture has changed. He has thrown away the idea that there is only one Communist world, that it is coherent. We are now allied with China against Russia in some areas and the other way around in others.

The decade of the seventies is going to be dominated by this fluidity. It will be a period of time in which almost anything can happen, and I believe that the first thing that is going to happen is that we are going to get out of Vietnam in fairly good condition. I would not be surprised if our prisoners are safely home and our forces are largely out of Vietnam in the very near future. Some U.S. air and naval forces may remain in the vicinity, but we will be largely out; the fighting will be over; and the non-Communist regime, I suspect, will still be in power in Saigon. I think this is likely to happen because there are a lot of things the Russians want from us.

One of the Kremlin's chief concerns is that we do not get too friendly with the Chinese. The Soviet leadership is also most anxious to gain some sort of economic support for the development of Siberia so that this vast expanse will eventually be sufficiently inhabited so as not to fall easy prey to the Chinese. After all, how long can the Russians hope to hold empty territories of enormous proportions that used to be inhabited by Mongols, Tatars, and other people more akin to the Chinese than they are to the Russians, land which the Chinese regard from ancient times as being under their suzerainty, if not necessarily sovereignty. Why shouldn't the Chinese, with their bulging population, have some of that empty territory? Well, this is the question that intrigues the Chinese and worries the Russians.

What intrigues and bothers me in thinking about this period of history we are entering, though, is how slow we were to recognize what was really going on in that part of the world. We must be more alert to perceive these things because they make an enormous difference, especially in an era free of the restrictions of ideology. Sound foreign policy depends on the ability to quickly perceive changes in the relations between other nations.

It is very difficult to run the foreign policies of the United States the way a Metternicht could run the foreign policies of Austria back in the post-Napoleonic period or a Castlereagh or a Canning could run the foreign policies of Britain. The management of foreign policy is intimately tied up with domestic politics and often smothered by it. Our alliances are heavily influenced by domestic politics, and I suppose they always will be. But statesmanship is possible, as Mr. Nixon has demonstrated, and I think we are going to learn in the years ahead a great deal more about how to effectively manage this Nation's interests in the world beyond our shores.

Much has been said and written about this being a bipolarized, depolarized, or multipolarized world. Yet, if we try to look ahead and forecast what the world is going to be like by the end of this decade, we would all find our crystal balls very cloudy indeed. For example, what will be the position of Western Europe 8 years from now? Will the Common Market with Britain in it have begun to develop political insti-

tutions as well as economic? Nobody knows. There is no possible way. No European knows. They are talking about it, and they ponder it. Today Western Europe is being integrated economically, which I think is a very healthy thing. Will it also be unified politically? There is talk now of a council of ministers which would be sort of a political head to an institution which today has no political head at all. It is as though you had an alliance with countries held together by bureaucrats but with no politician at the top. We do not know what Western Europe is going to be like. It already possesses half the military power of Russia. China, on the other side of Russia, also has something like half the military power of Russia even though you really cannot accurately compare China's manpower against Russia's very considerable technical and industrial sophistication. But Western Europe today, fragmented and barely held together economically, could become Russia's military equal in 10 years, if it chose to. It could happen. Whether it will or not, we just do not know. The French and the British are wondering whether they ought to pool their nuclear deterrence. I certainly see no reason why they should not. If it does happen, then the power factors that we must weigh in our policy considerations have changed.

What I want to say in the way of conclusion is that in planning for the future you must keep your minds attuned to the flexibility which will characterize the world politics of the era we are now entering. You must recognize that the assumptions which were fundamental to American foreign policy planning over the past 20 years are no longer valid. One of the oldest rules in foreign policy management is that today's enemy may be tomorrow's ally and vice versa. You have to think of today's enemy as being perhaps the most vital of your allies tomorrow. You must be flexible in your thinking. You must not tie your own hands down by assumptions which can prove to be worthless tomorrow. The U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war is a prime example of how ideology can blind a nation to the point where it no longer acts in accord with its national interests. It sucked our military power and our interests out of Europe, which was and is vital to us, and placed them on the far side of China. This served Russia's purposes admirably—it not only kept us occupied on the farthest point on the globe, but it also worried the Chinese, so that the effect of our involvement in Vietnam was to serve the Soviets well.

We can and must emancipate ourselves from the illusions and delusions of the last 25 years. From history we can conclude that nations do come out of these periods of passionate inability to see the world in clear form. I think we will do better in the future. I am not saying that we will not make mistakes in the days ahead, but we are learning, and

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Mr. Joseph C. Harsch is a graduate of Williams College and holds honorary degrees from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University of England. He has been associated with *The Christian Science Monitor* since 1929 and currently serves as its Chief Editorial Writer. In addition to his duties with the *Monitor*, he served as Assistant Director of the Intergovernmental Committee in London in 1939, as a news commentator for CBS (1943-49), then with the Liberty Broadcasting Company (1949-52), following which he acted as senior European correspondent in London (1957-65), and then as news commentator on ABC on a regular Monday through Friday program (1967-71). Mr. Harsch is the author of *Pattern of Conquest* (1941) and *The Curtain Isn't Iron* (1950).

I think we now are moving toward a more realistic foreign policy geared more closely to our national interests, and this is a healthy sign indeed.

Ψ

Every American is now involved in the world. "The tragic events of . . . turmoil through which we have just passed have made us citizens of the world," said Woodrow Wilson. For a time we tried to dodge this new responsibility, but the world depression, World War II, and the Cold War have finally conveyed his message: "There can be no turning back. Our own fortunes as a nation are involved—whether we would have it so or not."

John F. Kennedy, Address at Madison, Wis., 16 June 1958