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William L. Langer

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AMERICAN OBJECTIVES

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 10 June 1952, by
Dr. William L. Langer

The United States Government has been frequently charged, particularly of late, with failure to determine, proclaim and pursue consistently its basic objectives. Eminent critics like George F. Kennan have denounced our inveterate habit of following what he calls the legalistics-moralistic line, that is, the habit of attaching ourselves to abstract moral principles, such as freedom and justice, and looking to the orderly processes of international law to protect our interests, and assure our security. Personally I agree that this approach to international problems, however laudable in itself, is apt to lead to misconceptions and result in disappointments. The time has passed when we could afford to delude ourselves with pious hopes, high-sounding shibboleths and sanctimonious protests. Faced by a major crisis it is urgently necessary that we get down to brass tacks, decide what it is that we should strive for, determine what our capabilities are for attaining our objectives, and lay concrete plans for their implementation. Without clear definition of objectives it is impossible to plan sound strategy, impossible to make and hold friends, impossible to impress potential enemies.

Parenthetically it may be remarked that our mechanisms for planning policy are still woefully inadequate. While, through the Central Intelligence Agency, provision has now been made for the effective coordination of all foreign intelligence and for the production of national intelligence estimates, there is as yet no analogous staff organization under the National Security Council for the long-range study of national objectives and policies. Neither is there adequate provision for consultation and coordinated action between the executive and legislative branches. If there were, it is incon-

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ceivable that such dickering as we have recently seen over the Mutual Aid appropriations should take place. This reckless cutting and slicing, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, to me reflects a disregard for careful factual study, and a lack of understanding of national aims that can only confuse the country and shake the confidence of the world at large.

Let it be said, at once, however, that the definition of positive national objectives is no easy matter. In an age of increasing tempo, of shrinking space and of terrifying complexity it becomes, indeed, exceedingly difficult.

Reduced to the simplest terms, the basic objectives of any nation must be the preservation of its society and its territory against disintegration from within and against assault from without. These objectives, in turn, presuppose adequate resources and a sound social and political structure on the one hand, and adequate military power for defense in any emergency on the other.

It is unlikely that any nation will ever have the means to assure itself of absolute security. However, for a brief spell in the later 19th century, our own country approximated that happy state. Having severed the ties that bound it to Europe, and having overcome a domestic crisis of the most serious character, the United States was left undisturbed to develop its social and political system, to open up and exploit the vast resources of a continent and in general to build up wealth and power far beyond that attained by any other nation in history. Secure behind the barrier of the oceans on the east and west, flanked by thinly populated and generally undeveloped countries on the north and south, the United States could afford isolation and could hold itself aloof from the problems that plagued most other peoples of the globe.

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Seen in the larger historical perspective this period was, however, but a brief interlude. In the context of the present world crisis it is worth recalling that in the beginning of our history the fathers of the then weak and infant republic were also confronted with an ideological menace. They were all too painfully aware of the strength of the feudalistic, monarchical, undemocratic system of Europe. Because they feared reconquest by the old order against which they had rebelled, they made themselves experts in international politics and diplomacy. They bent their every effort toward playing off one power against another. In view of British seapower they did not regard even the broad Atlantic as an adequate protective barrier. What, after all, was the purpose of the Monroe Doctrine if not to extend the defense lines of the nation by thousands of miles and in principle at least to seal off the entire hemisphere against the renewed intrusion of a social and political system that was regarded as unalterably hostile to the ideals and objectives of the New World?

The threat that confronts us today is not dissimilar, though it is more immediate, because the number of genuinely great powers has been reduced to two and because the distances between them have been greatly narrowed by the improvements in communication. True, the threat now comes from the left rather than from the right; it is revolutionary and subversive rather than conservative and reactionary. But this appears to have made the antagonism all the more bitter and irreconcilable. It would indeed be difficult to exaggerate the depth of the gulf dividing American democracy and Soviet Communism, or to overplay the menace of Communism to American institutions and national security. Soviet leaders have been taught by Marx and Lenin to speculate on the collapse of the system of free enterprise, but in the interval to do everything possible to undermine and weaken it. Through the

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brutality of their dictatorship they have been able to harness the power of a vast territory and a huge and rapidly growing population for the realization of their purpose, which is avowedly to make the whole world safe for Communism. Finally, through the ruthless exploitation of want and discontent throughout the world they have already subverted many neighboring governments and have expanded the circle of their power over European satellites and over the vast territory and population of China.

Returning to the question of American objectives it is clear that first and foremost this country must look to its defenses. We do not have and should not have any aspirations towards territorial expansion. The imperialist aberration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was never really popular among us and soon proved disappointing. The empires of the European powers have disintegrated and are in the process of liquidation. The idea of empire is dead and no one in this country, so far as I know, believes that the security of the United States can be strengthened by direct control of foreign peoples. The posture of the United States is, therefore, a defensive one. Directly threatened by a powerful state and a hostile ideology, it must rededicate itself to democracy and apply itself with renewed vigor to the solution of social, economic, racial, religious and kindred problems that tend to weaken and divide it, that create the climate for Communist agitation and subversion. To pursue this phase of the problem through all its ramifications would distract us from the issues with which this group is chiefly concerned. Besides, these are issues with which every thoughtful American is painfully familiar. It is sufficient, therefore, to remind this audience that historically speaking social and political systems that fail to provide a reasonably satisfactory mode and standard of living for the population are bound to be supplanted by other systems. The much

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vaunted "new order" may in our day be of the Fascist or the Communist variety. We as democrats may be convinced that, in terms of freedom and respect for individual rights, both varieties are the negation of freedom and progress. Nonetheless, they hold the promise of novelty, always a potent appeal to desperate men.

In terms of military power it is inconceivable that for the foreseeable future the United States can escape the burden of conscription and of heavy expenditure for defense. Obligatory military service, in addition to its cost in terms of labor power, is by its very nature distasteful to a free and individualistic people. The appropriation of a substantial part of the national income to unproductive and quickly outmoded military equipment is equally objectionable. No doubt the late President Roosevelt was right in holding that sane international relations are possible only if based on drastic disarmament all around. But there is, at the present, no even remote possibility of reaching agreement with the Soviet Union on such a program. The Kremlin retained a huge military establishment when, in 1946, the West hastily liquidated the great armies that might have served as a deterrent to Soviet expansion.

The facts are familiar to all: for a period of five years all Western Europe lay defenseless before Soviet Power. If in fact the Kremlin did not press its gains beyond Czechoslovakia it was certainly not for lack of divisions, planes and other equipment. It may have been from fear of taking over so large and so recalcitrant an area. More likely it was from fear of atomic retaliation on the part of the United States. Reluctant though I am to accept a simple explanation, I find it increasingly difficult to reject Mr. Churchill's view that the atomic bomb was in fact the decisive deterrent. But America's atomic superiority is no longer unchal-

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lenged. The race for atomic power is already on. The Communists undoubtedly have a bomb and there is at least a strong probability that they have already built up a stockpile sufficiently large to enable them to wreak havoc on American cities and seriously, if not critically, impair the war making potential of the United States. It is impossible to speak with any assurance on these matters, but the very depth of our uncertainty dictates a supreme effort on our part. Since the Soviet Union has steadfastly refused to accept such control of atomic production as we regard necessary, we have no choice but to live with the threat and counter it to the best of our ability.

This country is as yet far from a state of preparedness even for self defense. The value of the atomic bomb as a deterrent has been reduced by the Soviet's presumed capability for retaliation. Under present circumstances it is all but impossible to foresee any alternative to large-scale rearmament and to redoubled efforts to devise ever more effective and consequently more terrible weapons. This is a dismal conclusion to arrive at, for it would seem that other methods than those of the jungle could be discovered for settling issues among nations. Yet given the apparently irreconcilable conflict between West and East no one, to my knowledge, has been able to produce any other solution. With two antagonists acting on incompatible principles and not even speaking the same language of international relations, I see no alternative to armament and more armament, at all cost short of national ruin.

Even among those who fully recognize the threat of Communist power to the security of the United States there have long been two schools of thought. Some hold that, with resources which are after all limited, the United States would do best to con-

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concentrate on strictly national or at least on hemisphere defense. There is no prospect, they argue, that determined Soviet aggression in Europe or Asia can be contained. We are therefore in danger of having our capabilities drained by futile efforts to strengthen others or by hopeless attempts to check our opponent in far-off places where no decision is possible.

The other school, of course, insists that if eventually one has to fight, it is better to engage the enemy as far away as possible from one's own frontiers. This is the principle on which the system of hemisphere solidarity is based. It is the system which proved itself in both recent wars. For my own part, I believe it the only sound strategy. Indeed, when I hear people debating whether we should devote so and so much money and equipment to the defense of others, I am always tempted to say that the real issue is not whether we should support others, but whether we can, at whatever price, induce others to stand by us. For it cannot be a matter of indifference to us whether the Soviet Union overruns, subverts or in any way establishes control over all Eurasia. Perhaps other nations of the West do not like us. Perhaps they are apathetic and listless. Perhaps they would put up a miserable fight against Soviet aggression. Nonetheless, we need them. Actually we cannot expect them to fight for love of us, but only in their own cause, in their own interest. In any case, the essential issue for the United States is that they should provide us facilities, support our position, and resist as long as possible.

Quite aside from any positive contribution which Western Europe might make in an armed conflict with the Soviet Union, we have the greatest interest in denying that area to the enemy. The loss of China to the Communists has been a calamity. How much more so would be the loss of Western Europe! For the re-

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sulting accretions to the Kremlin in terms of manpower, skills, resources, facilities and equipment would be such as to make it impossible for the United States to check Communist inundation of the Middle East and Africa, and probably even to protect the Western Hemisphere from subversion and conquest. The military strength of the South American nations is so limited that that continent could hardly be defended against a major hostile power in control of West Africa. In the light of these facts it appears that our agreements with the other American Republics involve grave liabilities unless supplemented by provisions for the utmost possible defense of Western Europe.

The foregoing considerations suggest that it is incumbent upon us to rally as many of the free nations as possible to our side and to give them all available support, economic and military, to strengthen their powers of resistance. In the most generalized terms this policy dictates adherence to and support of the United contribution not only to the peaceful solution of international differences but also to the frustration of aggression. The high cost in men and treasure of the Korean intervention and the disheartening deadlock that has ensued must not be permitted to blind us to the epoch-making importance of prompt international action in this instance. Failure to act would undoubtedly have entailed the complete collapse of international organization and a total loss of confidence in the purposes of the United States and other leading nations of the free world. Whatever the solution of the current stalemate, the fact remains that the Communist assault on South Korea was frustrated and that its immediate effect has been to dispel whatever doubts may have remained as to Communist aims and tactics. As a result of Korea the United States, and the West generally, are today in a state of military preparedness far beyond what would otherwise have been possible, and it is

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not unreasonable to suppose that further aggressions, as on Taiwan or Indo-China in the east, or on Iran or Yugoslavia, have been forestalled. The Korean action has certainly involved us in a remote and difficult theater. It holds the danger of too great commitment in what is strategically a secondary area. But our opponents can hardly be expected to act in accordance with our interests. On the contrary, we can probably count on them always to strike where it is most difficult for us to react effectively.

With respect to Europe the United States is now fully obligated by the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty and by the commitments inherent in the recent contractual agreement with the West German Republic and the European Defense Community, to support the free nations of the Old World in the event of attack.

The numerous agreements concluded between West European powers in recent years, supplemented by the creation of the Council of Europe and the mechanism of the Schuman Plan and the European Defense Community, have brought these nations more closely together than they have been since the decay of the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, federation is now frankly envisaged as the ultimate solution of Europe's economic and military weakness. It is quite conceivable that eventually the United States might find a united Europe a formidable economic competitor and politically a somewhat obstreperous colleague. Nonetheless, I believe it important if not essential to build up this additional power center, to consolidate the European powers as at least a partial counterweight to the Soviet Union. Individually none of these countries can offer effective resistance to Communism. United they can certainly do much to redress the balance.

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With American aid, advice and leadership something of a miracle has already been achieved in the line of economic reconstruction through the Marshall Plan, and it would be a mistake to underrate the progress that has been made in the direction of building military strength. Possibly the original schedules for rearmament, hastily drawn, were too sanguine. The effort to even approximate them has led to grave financial difficulties, discouragement and even unrest. On the other hand, there is good reason to suppose that as the defensive posture of Western Europe becomes stronger, the hopelessness and despair that has characterized the popular attitude in some countries and has facilitated the spread of Communism, will give way to a new confidence. The great danger, as I see it, is that we ourselves may become impatient and disillusioned. The recent Congressional debates on the Mutual Security appropriations seem to highlight this danger. As aforesaid, I take this attitude of impatient criticism to rest on the mistaken notion that American aid is a matter of generosity, if not charity, and that Europe alone is on the receiving end. Actually the vital issue is to hold Western Europe in line, in our own as well as in the interest of others. This is no easy matter, for Western Europe will for several years at least remain relatively indefensible unless the development of new weapons upsets present military calculations. Europeans know this and many of them are still prone to despair. While being no expert on national economics, I would judge that this country could afford up to ten billion dollars a year in foreign aid. In terms of the cost of our own defense preparations, and even more in terms of the cost of a great war the investment of such a sum to reinforce our own overseas defense lines would not appear unreasonable or exorbitant.

The question of European defense has raised such subsidiary questions as the rearmament of Western Germany, the exten-

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sion of aid to Franco Spain in return for base facilities in that country, and the provision of economic and military support to Communist Yugoslavia. Considering the nature of the emergency under which we live, all these policies can be defended as a matter of expediency. The case of Germany is in itself relatively simple, for it involves no ideological conflict and requires only the establishment of adequate safeguards against the abuse of renascent German military power. By contrast the idea of cooperation with Fascist Spain and Communist Yugoslavia is abhorrent to many Americans, for such collaboration seems a betrayal of the democratic cause. This argument is difficult to answer convincingly, but it is worth recalling that the records of history, even of recent history, are full of examples of such relationships, entered upon when national interests seemed to require them. In the present case it should be remembered that prior to the time of Woodrow Wilson our relations with other states were determined without reference to their internal regimes. We have happily outgrown the rather naive idea that the democratic system is the only desirable and suitable one, whatever the conditions and the circumstances. If we are to be purists and deny our friendship and support to all nations following a course other than our own, we shall soon find ourselves in self-imposed isolation, since almost all foreign regimes are to varying degrees socialistic or undemocratic. Actually there is reason to suppose that extremist regimes like those of Spain and Yugoslavia may see the errors of their ways more readily in cooperation with freer systems than while in a state of ostracism. Meanwhile both Spain and Yugoslavia are strategically of such importance to the defense of Western Europe and are of themselves so little a threat, actually or potentially, to American interests, that we can ill afford to renounce the aid they may provide.

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However deficient may be the power of Western Europe, that area is a pillar of strength compared to North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, the soft underbelly of Eurasia. The countries comprising that huge belt are almost without exception in a state of ferment. The opening up of these areas by European imperialism has brought in its train the introduction of European ideas, such as nationalism and self-determination, which have made the continuance of the imperial relationship impossible. European influence and the impact of great wars have made these colonial peoples conscious and resentful of want and oppression which their forefathers suffered for generations as a matter of course. Almost everywhere in these regions the social system is antiquated and the old agrarian structure is being shaken by the impact of modern industrialism. In many instances the traditional ruling classes are maintaining their privileged position despite the facade of democracy which has been erected. Invariably they exploit national feeling to throw off the shackles of European control or, where they have already achieved that objective, to divert popular attention from social problems.

Bad enough in itself, this situation provides an ideal setting for Communist activity, for the Kremlin has long shown itself expert in directing and exploiting the forces of discontent. Supposedly internationalist, according to the gospel of Marx, Soviet leaders have found no difficulty in championing the cause of nationalism where it serves their purposes. Their promises of a popular democratic regime, of expropriation of the upper classes, or of economic equality are so familiar as to require no elaboration. I do not say that the disorders in Morocco and Tunisia, the crisis in Anglo-Egyptian relations, the chaos in Iran, or the unrest seizing all of South Asia are the achievements solely of Soviet propaganda and subversion. I do say that they threaten the loss of parts or all of

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this important area to the West. No one can deny that relationships of these countries with the West have already seriously deteriorated.

What, in this context, should be the United States objective? Obviously to hold this area if possible, if only to deny it to the enemy. But how? If we support the dominant groups in these countries against their European masters, for example France, we definitely run the risk of estranging countries vital to the defense of Europe. Furthermore, if we countenance the existing regimes in their often benighted domestic policies we will sooner or later find ourselves in opposition to emerging popular forces. The problem in each case is a complex and difficult one, for which a general solution is not apt to be found. It would appear, however, that little is to be gained simply by adroit maneuvering. We have already made clear to the European powers that we consider imperial rule done for and that we welcome the liquidation of overseas empires. Beyond that we must look to fundamentals and do what we can to remove or alleviate the basic ills from which this part of the world is suffering and which tend to accentuate the unbalance in the world's forces. No doubt the Point IV program is an important initial step in this direction. Over the years it may prove crucial and turn out to have been the most worthwhile investment of all. It certainly is a potential demonstration of democracy in action. By reducing misery it opens the prospect of effectively countering Communism, of paving the way for reform and modernization of the social and political systems of undeveloped areas. In short it promises a vast return on a relatively modest investment, as witness the results of agricultural instruction, in India for example, by a mere handful of experts.

Furthermore, the work of education, health and technical aid introduces a positive element into American policy. The objec-

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tives of the United States cannot be purely defensive or static. As John Foster Dulles has rightly said, if we merely hold our own in Asia our position in a few years will be hopeless. Communism being dynamic and aggressive, fired with the conviction of eventual triumph, it can only be fought successfully by a positive and constructive program. Publicity and information are important as weapons of refutation and instruments of truth. But they must be supplemented with the promise of improved living conditions and increased freedom. The unbalance in the world today, in terms of standards of living, population pressures, essential resources and industrial capabilities, are such that unless we can manage to raise the level of the lowly we are sure to be forced to reduce our own.

There is at present no prospect that the burdens entailed by the objectives of the United States can soon be lightened — that is, that the threat confronting our security and culture can soon be surmounted. On the other hand, progress has undeniably been made and it is not impossible, indeed it is likely, that growing strength will check the progressive implementation of the Soviet program. Since the seizure of Czechoslovakia in 1948 there has been no further aggression in Europe. On the contrary, Yugoslavia has been lost to the Kremlin. In the Middle East the Soviets have thus far failed to make capital of the unrest and tension, even in Iran. India seems to be veering steadily towards the West and in Southeast Asia the Communist cause has made no significant progress. With the Communist victory in China the Kremlin appears to have had relatively little to do, and one may assume that the emergence of the new regime in China has its dark as well as its bright sides for the Soviets. The Korean adventure has at least been frustrated, while the peace treaty with Japan has been put through despite Soviet opposition and protest. It may be taken for granted that even in the European satellites the Kremlin still has

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many problems to solve. In the Soviet homeland itself, there may be more latent dissatisfaction and hostility to the regime than we realize. Believing as we do, in the dignity of the individual and the virtues of democracy grounded in law, we cannot accept the idea that the brutality and oppression of totalitarian regimes can last forever. Mr. Kennan, who knows infinitely more about these matters than I, has noted that there are limits beyond which peoples cannot be driven. He believes in the possibility, indeed in the strong possibility, that Soviet power, like the capitalist world of its conception, bears within it the seeds of its own decay and that the sprouting of these seeds is already well advanced. Certainly the increasingly severe controls in Communist states would seem to reflect a growing need for such controls.

Consequently there is nothing implausible in the idea that Stalin and his confreres will try to avoid major armed conflict in the future as they have in the past, if only to safeguard their own dictatorship. There is nothing in their doctrine to suggest a timetable for achievement of their objectives. In the past they have shown themselves patient and flexible. They will, unquestionably, exploit, as it arises, any situation that promises success. Indeed, much of their effort is devoted to creation of such situations. We must expect them to move here, there and any where — to keep us on the run. But we may also expect them to avoid the ultimate test, at least so long as we retain certain elements of strength and can rally the support of the free world. The men of the Kremlin, unlike Hitler, have not shown themselves to be gamblers. There is reason to suppose that they hope and expect to attain their objectives without involving the Soviet Union in major armed conflict and that they would retreat rather than embark on a war in which the chances of success were uncertain. There remains a constant and grave danger that through miscalculation or through a tragic mis-

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take on either side, a general war may develop. But barring such a contingency we may expect peace — a peace, however, that will long remain precarious, an armed peace maintained under pressure and in the midst of unbroken tension.

There are those who argue that in this situation, the United States might be well advised to strike while it still has the presumed superiority in atomic weapons, that is, that it should loose a preventative war. The argument is so logical as to be disturbing. Remember, however, that historically, preventive wars have rarely served their purposes, and remember, above all, that modern wars are so destructive that they harm the victor almost as much as the vanquished. The ruin and misery attending a war with the Soviet Union might well prepare the ground for the spread of the very social revolution we are intent on combatting.

Certainly it would be reckless to launch a preventive war and thereby lose the moral support of the free world so long as there is a reasonable chance of attaining our objectives by other means. On the theory that the Communist system cannot last forever, that power to resist will check its further spread, and that gradual improvement of conditions throughout the world will sap its appeal, it would seem to be the part of wisdom to learn patience and perseverance. Quite conceivably the situation may develop to the point where certain issues can be adjusted by agreement, even if but partially and temporarily. Such opportunities we should always seize and exploit, for even though they may not strike at the root of the matter, they may provide further time, and time has frequently proved the most effective solvent of apparently irreconcilable differences.

In any event, the main thought I should like to leave with you is that in this great crisis, in this great clash of ideas and cultures,

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American objectives cannot and should not be selfish, narrow or purely defensive: As human society is constructed today, we cannot hope to attain security for ourselves alone. Our fate is bound up with that of the entire free world. Consequently our interests, our objectives and our obligations strike across meridians of longitude and parallels of latitude. They extend as far as our influence can reach. As the greatest world power in the annals of history tremendous responsibilities and burdens have thrust upon us. Our objectives must be to discharge the obligations assigned to us by circumstances and events. Anything less holds promise only of disaster and defeat. On the other hand we have every reason to suppose that clarity of purpose, unity and resolution in action, and faith in the rightness of our cause will eventually lead us, even without war, to triumph over the dangers that presently beset us.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF LECTURER

Dr. Langer was born at Boston, Mass., March 16, 1896. He was educated at Boston Latin School and Harvard University (A. B. 1915; A. M. 1920; Ph.D. 1923). He studied at the University of Vienna (1921-1922). He was Assistant and Associate Professor of History, Clary University, 1923-1927; Professor History at Harvard University, 1927 - present (Coolidge Professor since 1936); Specialist in diplomatic history; Author of THE FRANCO-RUSSIAN ALLIANCE (1929); EUROPEAN ALLIANCES AND ALIGNMENTS (1931 and 1950); FOREIGN AFFAIRS BIBLIOGRAPHY (1938); THE DIPLOMACY OF IMPERIALISM (1935 and 1951); AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD HISTORY (1940 and later editions); OUR VICHY GAMBLE (1947); and, with S.E. Gleason, THE CHALLENGE TO ISOLATION (1952); Editor of the series THE RISE OF MODERN EUROPE, of which twelve out of twenty volumes have been published; member of numerous historical societies and of the American Philosophical Society; and member of the Metropolitan Club (Washington) and the Century (New York).

During World War I, he enlisted as a private in the 30th Engineers (later First Gas Regiment) and saw service at St. Mihiel and the Argonne. He was honorably discharged in the grade of Master Engineer, Junior Grade.

During World War II, he went to Washington in August 1941 to help General William J. Donovan set up the Office of the Coordinator of Information. He was Director of Research in that organization and later Chief of the Research and Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services (1942-1945). In 1946 he served as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Intelligence. He was awarded the Medal for Merit (1946) and an honorary LLD from Harvard (1945). From 1946 to 1951, he served as a member of the Board of Consultants of the National War College.

He returned to Washington at the request of General Walter B. Smith to set up and direct the Office of National Estimates of the Central Intelligence in January 1952 to resume teaching at Harvard.

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THE PRESIDENT OF BROWN UNIVERSITY, Dr. Henry M. WRISTON, Addresses Participants in the Global Strategy Discussions, U. S. Naval War College, Newport, R. I. The Discussions, a Forum Series Investigating Facts and Factors Designed to Assist each Individual to Become Aware of the Problems Involved in Directing the Energies of our Nation in Time of Extreme National Peril, took place at the Naval War College 9-13 June 1952. Dr. WRISTON was one of the Principal Speakers before this Distinguished Assemblage.