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A Realist Theory of International Politics

This book purports to present a theory of international politics. The test by which such a theory must be judged is not *a priori* and abstract but empirical and pragmatic. The theory, in other words, must be judged not by some preconceived abstract principle or concept unrelated to reality, but by its purpose: to bring order and meaning to a mass of phenomena which without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible. It must meet a dual test, an empirical and a logical one: Do the facts as they actually are lend themselves to the interpretation the theory has put upon them, and do the conclusions at which the theory arrives follow with logical necessity from its premises? In short, is the theory consistent with the facts and within itself?

The issue this theory raises concerns the nature of all politics. The history of modern political thought is the story of a contest between two schools that differ fundamentally in their conceptions of the nature of man, society, and politics. One believes that a rational and moral political order, derived from universally valid abstract principles, can be achieved here and now. It assumes the essential goodness and infinite malleability of human nature, and blames the failure of the social order to measure up to the rational standards on lack of knowledge and understanding, obsolescent social institutions, or the depravity of certain isolated individuals or groups. It trusts in education, reform, and the sporadic use of force to remedy these defects.

The other school believes that the world, imperfect as it is from the rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized, but must at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts. This school, then, sees in a system of checks and bal-

ances a universal principle for all pluralist societies. It appeals to historic precedent rather than to abstract principles, and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.

This theoretical concern with human nature as it actually is, and with the historic processes as they actually take place, has earned for the theory presented here the name of realism. What are the tenets of political realism? No systematic exposition of the philosophy of political realism can be attempted here; it will suffice to single out six fundamental principles, which have frequently been misunderstood.

SIX PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL REALISM

1. Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.

Realism, believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects, however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws. It believes also, then, in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion—between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking.

Human nature, in which the laws of politics have their roots, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these laws. Hence, novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect. The fact that a theory of politics, if there be such a theory, has never been heard of before tends to create a presumption against, rather than in favor of, its soundness. Conversely, the fact that a theory of politics was developed hundreds or even thousands of years ago—as was the theory of the balance of power—does not create a presumption that it must be outmoded and obsolete. A theory of politics must be subjected to the dual test of reason and experience. To dismiss such a theory because it had its flowering in centuries past is to present not a rational argument but a modernistic prejudice that takes for granted the superiority of the present over the past. To dispose of the revival of such a theory as a "fashion" or "fad" is tantamount to assuming that in matters political we can have opinions but no truths.

For realism, theory consists in ascertaining facts and giving them meaning through reason. It assumes that the character of a foreign policy can be ascertained only through the examination of the political acts performed and of the foreseeable consequences of these acts. Thus we can find out what

statesmen have actually done, and from the foreseeable consequences of their acts we can surmise what their objectives might have been.

Yet examination of the facts is not enough. To give meaning to the factual raw material of foreign policy, we must approach political reality with a kind of rational outline, a map that suggests to us the possible meanings of foreign policy. In other words, we put ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy under certain circumstances, and we ask ourselves what the rational alternatives are from which a statesman may choose who must meet this problem under these circumstances (presuming always that he acts in a rational manner), and which of these rational alternatives this particular statesman, acting under these circumstances, is likely to choose. It is the testing of this rational hypothesis against the actual facts and their consequences that gives theoretical meaning to the facts of international politics.

2. The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood. It sets politics as an autonomous sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres, such as economics (understood in terms of interest defined as wealth), ethics, aesthetics, or religion. Without such a concept a theory of politics, international or domestic, would be altogether impossible, for without it we could not distinguish between political and nonpolitical facts, nor could we bring at least a measure of systemic order to the political sphere.

We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out. That assumption allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversation with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts. Thinking in terms of interest defined as power, we think as he does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the political scene, does himself.

The concept of interest defined as power imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible. On the side of the actor, it provides for rational discipline in action and creates that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British, or Russian foreign policy appear as in intelligible, rational continuum, by and large consistent within itself, regardless of the different motives, preferences, and intellectual and moral qualities of successive statesmen. A realist theory of international politics, then, will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences.

To search for the clue to foreign policy exclusively in the motives of statesmen is both futile and deceptive. It is futile because motives are the

most illusive of psychological data, distorted as they are, frequently beyond recognition, by the interests and emotions of actor and observer alike. Do we really know what our own motives are? And what do we know of the motives of others?

Yet even if we had access to the real motives of statesmen, that knowledge would help us little in understanding foreign policies, and might well lead us astray. It is true that the knowledge of the statesman's motives may give us one among many clues as to what the direction of his foreign policy might be. It cannot give us, however, the one clue by which to predict his foreign policies. History shows no exact and necessary correlation between the quality of motives and the quality of foreign policy. This is true in both moral and political terms.

We cannot conclude from the good intentions of a statesman that his foreign policies will be either morally praiseworthy or politically successful. Judging his motives, we can say that he will not intentionally pursue policies that are morally wrong, but we can say nothing about the probability of their success. If we want to know the moral and political qualities of his actions, we must know them, not his motives. How often have statesmen been motivated by the desire to improve the world, and ended by making it worse? And how often have they sought one goal, and ended by achieving something they neither expected nor desired?

Neville Chamberlain's politics of appeasement were, as far as we can judge, inspired by good motives; he was probably less motivated by considerations of personal power than were many other British prime ministers, and he sought to preserve peace and to assure the happiness of all concerned. Yet his policies helped to make the Second World War inevitable, and to bring untold miseries to millions of people. Sir Winston Churchill's motives, on the other hand, were much less universal in scope and much more narrowly directed toward personal and national power, yet the foreign policies that sprang from these inferior motives were certainly superior in moral and political quality to those pursued by his predecessor. Judged by his motives, Robespierre was one of the most virtuous men who ever lived. Yet it was the utopian radicalism of that very virtue that made him kill those less virtuous than himself, brought him to the scaffold, and destroyed the revolution of which he was a leader.

Good motives give assurance against deliberately bad policies; they do not guarantee the moral goodness and political success of the policies they inspire. What is important to know, if one wants to understand foreign policy, is not primarily the motives of a statesman, but his intellectual ability to comprehend the essentials of foreign policy, as well as his political ability to translate what he has comprehended into successful political action. It follows that while ethics in the abstract judges the moral qualities of motives, political theory must judge the political qualities of intellect, will, and action.

A realist theory of international politics will also avoid the other popular fallacy of equating the foreign policies of a statesman with his philosophic or political sympathies, and of deducing the former from the latter. Statesmen,

especially under contemporary conditions, may well make a habit of presenting their foreign policies in terms of their philosophic and political sympathies in order to gain popular support for them. Yet they will distinguish with Lincoln between their "*official* duty," which is to think and act in terms of the national interest, and their "*personal* wish," which is to see their own moral values and political principles realized throughout the world. Political realism does not require, nor does it condone, indifference to political ideals and moral principles, but it requires indeed a sharp distinction between the desirable and the possible—between what is desirable everywhere and at all times and what is possible under the concrete circumstances of time and place.

It stands to reason that not all foreign policies have always followed so rational, objective, and unemotional a course. The contingent elements of personality, prejudice, and subjective preference, and of all the weaknesses of intellect and will which flesh is heir to, are bound to deflect foreign policies from their rational course. Especially where foreign policy is conducted under the conditions of democratic control, the need to marshal popular emotions to the support of foreign policy cannot fail to impair the rationality of foreign policy itself. Yet a theory of foreign policy which aims at rationality must for the time being, as it were, abstract from these irrational elements and seek to paint a picture of foreign policy which presents the rational essence to be found in experience, without the contingent deviations from rationality which are also found in experience.

Deviations from rationality which are not the result of the personal whim or the personal psychopathology of the policy maker may appear contingent only from the vantage point of rationality, but may themselves be elements in a coherent system of irrationality. The possibility of constructing, as it were, a counter-theory of irrational politics is worth exploring.

When one reflects upon the development of American thinking on foreign policy, one is struck by the persistence of mistaken attitudes that have survived—under whatever guises—both intellectual argument and political experience. Once that wonder, in true Aristotelian fashion, has been transformed into the quest for rational understanding, the quest yields a conclusion both comforting and disturbing: we are here in the presence of intellectual defects shared by all of us in different ways and degrees. Together they provide the outline of a kind of pathology of international politics. When the human mind approaches reality with the purpose of taking action, of which the political encounter is one of the outstanding instances, it is often led astray by any of four common mental phenomena: residues of formerly adequate modes of thought and action now rendered obsolete by a new social reality; demonological interpretations of reality which substitute a fictitious reality—peopled by evil persons rather than seemingly intractable issues—for the actual one; refusal to come to terms with a threatening state of affairs by denying it through illusory verbalization; reliance upon the infinite malleability of a seemingly obstreperous reality.

Man responds to social situations with repetitive patterns. The same sit-

uation, recognized in its identity with previous situations, evokes the same response. The mind, as it were, holds in readiness a number of patterns appropriate for different situations; it then requires only the identification of a particular case to apply to it the preformed pattern appropriate to it. Thus the human mind follows the principle of economy of effort, obviating an examination *de novo* of each individual situation and the pattern of thought and action appropriate to it. Yet when matters are subject to dynamic change, traditional patterns are no longer appropriate: they must be replaced by new ones reflecting such change. Otherwise a gap will open between traditional patterns and new realities, and thought and action will be misguided.

On the international plane it is no exaggeration to say that the very structure of international relations—as reflected in political institutions, diplomatic procedures, and legal arrangements—has tended to become at variance with, and in large measure irrelevant to, the reality of international politics. While the former assumes the "sovereign equality" of all nations, the latter is dominated by an extreme inequality of nations, two of which are called superpowers because they hold in their hands the unprecedented power of total destruction, and many of which are called "ministates" because their power is minuscule even compared with that of the traditional nation states. It is this contrast and incompatibility between the reality of international politics and the concepts, institutions, and procedures designed to make intelligible and control the former, which has caused, at least below the great-power level, the unmanageability of international relations which borders on anarchy. International terrorism and the different government reactions to it, the involvement of foreign governments in the Lebanese civil war, the military operations of the United States in Southeast Asia, and the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe cannot be explained or justified by reference to traditional concepts, institutions, and procedures.

All these situations have one characteristic in common. The modern fact of interdependence requires a political order which takes that fact into account, while in reality the legal and institutional superstructure, harking back to the ninteenth century, assumes the existence of a multiplicity of self-sufficient, impenetrable, sovereign nation states. These residues of an obsolescent legal and institutional order not only stand in the way of a rational transformation of international relations in light of the inequality of power and the interdependence of interests, but they also render precarious, if not impossible, more rational policies within the defective framework of such a system.

It is a characteristic of primitive thinking to personalize social problems. That tendency is particularly strong when the problem appears not to be susceptible to rational understanding and successful manipulation. When a particular person or group of persons is identified with the recalcitrant difficulty, that may seem to render the problem both intellectually accessible and susceptible of solution. Thus belief in Satan as the source of evil makes us "understand" the nature of evil by focusing the search for its origin and control upon a particular person whose physical existence we assume. The complexity

of political conflict precludes such simple solutions. Natural catastrophes will not be prevented by burning witches; the threat of a powerful Germany to establish hegemony over Europe will not be averted by getting rid of a succession of German leaders. But by identifying the issue with certain persons over whom we have—or hope to have—control we reduce the problem, both intellectually and pragmatically, to manageable proportions. Once we have identified certain individuals and groups of individuals as the source of evil, we appear to have understood the causal nexus that leads from the individuals to the social problem; that apparent understanding suggests the apparent solution: Eliminate the individuals "responsible" for it, and you have solved the problem.

Superstition still holds sway over our relations within society. The demonological pattern of thought and action has now been transferred to other fields of human action closed to the kind of rational enquiry and action that have driven superstition from our relations with nature. As William Graham Sumner put it, "The amount of superstition is not much changed, but it now attaches to politics, not to religion."[1] The numerous failures of the United States to recognize and respond to the polycentric nature of Communism is a prime example of this defect. The corollary of this indiscriminate opposition to Communism is the indiscriminate support of governments and movements that profess and practice anti-Communism. American policies in Asia and Latin America have derived from this simplistic position. The Vietnam War and our inability to come to terms with mainland China find here their rationale. So do the theory and practice of counterinsurgency, including large-scale assassinations under the Phoenix program in Vietnam and the actual or attempted assassinations of individual statesmen. Signs of a similar approach have been evident more recently in Central America.

The demonological approach to foreign policy strengthens another pathological tendency, which is the refusal to acknowledge and cope effectively with a threatening reality. The demonological approach has shifted our attention and concern towards the adherents of communism—individuals at home and abroad, political movements, foreign governments—and away from the real threat: the power of states, Communist or not. McCarthyism not only provided the most pervasive American example of the demonological approach but was also one of the most extreme examples of this kind of misjudgment: it substituted the largely illusory threat of domestic subversion for the real threat of Russian power.

Finally, it is part of this approach to politics to believe that no problems—however hopeless they may appear—are really insoluble, given well-meaning, well-financed, and competent efforts. I have tried elsewhere to lay bare the intellectual and historical roots of this belief;[2] here I limit myself to pointing out its persistent strength despite much experience to the contrary,

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[1] "Mores of the Present and Future," in *War and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), p. 159.

[2] *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

such as the Vietnam War and the general decline of American power. This preference for economic solutions to political and military problems is powerfully reinforced by the interests of potential recipients of economic support, who prefer the obviously profitable transfer of economic advantages to painful and risky diplomatic bargaining.

The difference between international politics as it actually is and a rational theory derived from it is like the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait. The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye; the painted portrait does not show everything that can be seen by the naked eye, but it shows, or at least seeks to show, one thing that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence of the person portrayed.

Political realism contains not only a theoretical but also a normative element. It knows that political reality is replete with contingencies and systemic irrationalities and points to the typical influences they exert upon foreign policy. Yet it shares with all social theory the need, for the sake of theoretical understanding, to stress the rational elements of political reality; for it is these rational elements that make reality intelligible for theory. Political realism presents the theoretical construct of a rational foreign policy which experience can never completely achieve.

At the same time political realism considers a rational foreign policy to be good foreign policy; for only a rational foreign policy minimizes risks and maximizes benefits and, hence, complies both with the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success. Political realism wants the photographic picture of the political world to resemble as much as possible its painted portrait. Aware of the inevitable gap between good—that is, rational—foreign policy and foreign policy as it actually is, political realism maintains not only that theory must focus upon the rational elements of political reality, but also that foreign policy ought to be rational in view of its own moral and practical purposes.

Hence, it is no argument against the theory here presented that actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to it. That argument misunderstands the intention of this book, which is to present not an indiscriminate description of political reality, but a rational theory of international politics. Far from being invalidated by the fact that, for instance, a perfect balance of power policy will scarcely be found in reality, it assumes that reality, being deficient in this respect, must be understood and evaluated as an approximation to an ideal system of balance of power.

3. Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid, but it does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all. The idea of interest is indeed of the essence of politics and is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place. Thucydides' statement, born of the experiences of ancient Greece, that "identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals" was taken up in the nineteenth century by Lord Salisbury's remark that "the only bond of union that endures" among nations is

"the absence of all clashing interests." It was erected into a general principle of government by George Washington:

> A small knowledge of human nature will convince us, that, with far the greatest part of mankind, interest is the governing principle; and that almost every man is more or less, under its influence. Motives of public virtue may for a time,or in particular instances, actuate men to the observance of a conduct purely disinterested; but they are not of themselves sufficient to produce persevering conformity to the refined dictates and obligations of social duty. Few men are capable of making a continual sacrifice of all views of private interest, or advantage, to the common good. It is vain to exclaim against the depravity of human nature on this account; the fact is so, the experience of every age and nation has proved it and we must in a great measure, change the constitution of man, before we can make it otherwise. No institution, not built on the presumptive truth of these maxims can succeed.[3]

It was echoed and enlarged upon in our century by Max Weber's observation:

> Interests (material and ideal), not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men. Yet the "images of the world" created by these ideas have very often served as switches determining the tracks on which the dynamism of interests kept actions moving.[4]

Yet the kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated. The goals that might be pursued by nations in their foreign policy can run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue.

The same observations apply to the concept of power. Its content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment. Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man. Thus power covers all social relationships which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. Power covers the domination of man by man, both when it is disciplined by moral ends and controlled by constitutional safeguards, as in Western democracies, and when it is that untamed and barbaric force which finds its laws in nothing but its own strength and its sole justification in its aggrandizement.

Political realism does not assume that the contemporary conditions under which foreign policy operates, with their extreme instability and the ever present threat of large-scale violence, cannot be changed. The balance of power, for instance, is indeed a perennial element of all pluralistic societies, as the authors of *The Federalist* papers well knew; yet it is capable of operating, as it does in the United States, under the conditions of relative stability

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[3]*The Writings of George Washington*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1931–44), Vol. X, p. 363.

[4]Marianne Weber, *Max Weber* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), pp. 347–8. See also Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1920), p. 252.

and peaceful conflict. If the factors that have given rise to these conditions can be duplicated on the international scene, similar conditions of stability and peace will then prevail there, as they have over long stretches of history among certain nations.

What is true of the general character of international relations is also true of the nation state as the ultimate point of reference of contemporary foreign policy. While the realist indeed believes that interest is the perennial standard by which political action must be judged and directed, the contemporary connection between interest and the nation state is a product of history, and is therefore bound to disappear in the course of history. Nothing in the realist position militates against the assumption that the present division of the political world into nation states will be replaced by larger units of a quite different character, more in keeping with the technical potentialities and the moral requirements of the contemporary world.

The realist parts company with other schools of thought before the all-important question of how the contemporary world is to be transformed. The realist is persuaded that this transformation can be achieved only through the workmanlike manipulation of the perennial forces that have shaped the past as they will the future. The realist cannot be persuaded that we can bring about that transformation by confronting a political reality that has its own laws with an abstract ideal that refuses to take those laws into account.

4. Political realism is aware of the moral significance of political action. It is also aware of the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action. And it is unwilling to gloss over and obliterate that tension and thus to obfuscate both the moral and the political issue by making it appear as though the stark facts of politics were morally more satisfying than they actually are, and the moral law less exacting that it actually is.

Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: "*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus* (Let justice be done, even if the world perish)," but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care. Both individual and state must judge political action by universal moral principles, such as that of liberty. Yet while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a moral principle, the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival. There can be no political morality without prudence; that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics. Ethics in the abstract judges action by its conformity with the moral law; political ethics judges action by its political consequences. Classical and medieval philosophy knew this, and so did Lincoln when he said:

> I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

5. Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws th govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and opinion, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry. All nations are tempted—and few have been able to resist the temptation for long—to clothe their own particular aspirations and actions in the moral purposes of the universe. To know that nations are subject to the moral law is one thing, while to pretend to know with certainty what is good and evil in the relations among nations is quite another. There is a world of difference between the belief that all nations stand under the judgment of God, inscrutable to the human mind, and the blasphemous conviction that God is always on one's side and that what one wills oneself cannot fail to be willed by God also.

The lighthearted equation between a particular nationalism and the counsels of Providence is morally indefensible, for it is that very sin of pride against which the Greek tragedians and the Biblical prophets have warned rulers and ruled. That equation is also politically pernicious, for it is liable to engender the distortion in judgment which, in the blindness of crusading frenzy, destroys nations and civilizations—in the name of moral principle, ideal, or God himself.

On the other hand, it is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of power that saves us from both that moral excess and that political folly. For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them. And we are able to do justice to all of them in a dual sense: We are able to judge other nations as we judge our own and, having judged them in this fashion, we are then capable of pursuing policies that respect the interests of other nations, while protecting and promoting those of our own. Moderation in policy cannot fail to reflect the moderation of moral judgment.

6. The difference, then, between political realism and other schools of thought is real, and it is profound. However much of the theory of political realism may have been misunderstood and misinterpreted, there is no gainsaying its distinctive intellectual and moral attitude to matters political.

Intellectually, the political realist maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, the moralist maintain theirs. He thinks in terms of interest defined as power, as the economist thinks in terms of interest defined as wealth; the lawyer, of the conformity of action with legal rules; the moralist, of the conformity of action with moral principles. The economist asks: "How does this policy affect the wealth of society, or a segment of it?" The lawyer asks: "Is this policy in accord with the rules of law?" The moralist asks: "Is this policy in accord with moral principles?" And the

political realist asks: "How does this policy affect the power of the nation?" (Or of the federal government, of Congress, of the party, of agriculture, as the case may be.)

The political realist is not unaware of the existence and relevance of standards of thought other than political ones. As political realist, he cannot but subordinate these other standards to those of politics. And he parts company with other schools when they impose standards of thought appropriate to other spheres upon the political sphere. It is here that political realism takes issue with the "legalistic-moralistic approach" to international politics. That this issue is not, as has been contended, a mere figment of the imagination, but goes to the very core of the controversy, can be shown from many historical examples. Three will suffice to make the point.[5]

In 1939 the Soviet Union attacked Finland. This action confronted France and Great Britain with two issues, one legal, the other political. Did that action violate the Covenant of the League of Nations and, if it did, what countermeasures should France and Great Britain take? The legal question could easily be answered in the affirmative, for obviously the Soviet Union had done what was prohibited by the Covenant. The answer to the political question depends, first, upon the manner in which the Russian action affected the interests of France and Great Britain; second upon the existing distribution of power between France and Great Britain, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and other potentially hostile nations, especially Germany, on the other; and, third, upon the influence that the countermeasures were likely to have upon the interests of France and Great Britain and the future distribution of power. France and Great Britain, as the leading members of the League of Nations, saw to it that the Soviet Union was expelled from the League, and they were prevented from joining Finland in the war against the Soviet Union only by Sweden's refusal to allow their troops to pass through Swedish territory on their way to Finland. If this refusal by Sweden had not saved them, France and Great Britain would shortly have found themselves at war with the Soviet Union and Germany at the same time.

The policy of France and Great Britain was a classic example of legalism in that they allowed the answer to the legal question, legitimate within its sphere, to determine their political actions. Instead of asking both questions, that of law and that of power, they asked only the question of law; and the answer they received could have no bearing on the issue that their very existence might have depended upon.

The second example illustrates the "moralistic approach" to international politics. It concerns the international status of the Communist government of China. The rise of that government confronted the Western world with two

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[5]See the other examples discussed in Hans J. Morgenthau, "Another 'Great Debate': The National Interest of the United States," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. XLVI (December 1952), pp. 979 ff. See also Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics in the 20th Century*, Vol. 1, *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 79 ff; and abridged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 204 ff.

issues, one moral, the other political. Were the nature and policies of that government in accord with the moral principles of the Western world? Should the Western world deal with such a government? The answer to the first question could not fail to be in the negative. Yet it did not follow with necessity that the answer to the second question should also be in the negative. The standard of thought applied to the first—the moral—question was simply to test the nature and the policies of the Communist government of China by the principles of Western morality. On the other hand, the second—the political—question had to be subjected to the complicated test of the interests involved and the power available on either side, and of the bearing of one or the other course of action upon these interests and power. The application of this test could well have led to the conclusion that it would be wiser not to deal with the Communist government of China. To arrive at this conclusion by neglecting this test altogether and answering the political question in terms of the moral issue was indeed a classic example of the "moralistic approach" to international politics.

The third case illustrates strikingly the contrast between realism and the legalistic-moralistic approach to foreign policy. Great Britain, as one of the guarantors of the neutrality of Belgium, went to war with Germany in August 1914 because Germany had violated the neutrality of Belgium. The British action could be justified either in realistic or legalistic-moralistic terms. That is to say, one could argue realistically that for centuries it had been axiomatic for British foreign policy to prevent the control of the Low Countries by a hostile power. It was then not so much the violation of Belgium's neutrality per se as the hostile intentions of the violator which provided the rationale for British intervention. If the violator had been another nation but Germany, Great Britain might well have refrained from intervening. This is the position taken by Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary during that period. Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs Hardinge remarked to him in 1908: "If France violated Belgian neutrality in a war against Germany, it is doubtful whether England or Russia would move a finger to maintain Belgian neutrality, while if the neutrality of Belgium was violated by Germany, it is probable that the converse would be the case." Whereupon Sir Edward Grey replied: "This is to the point." Yet one could also take the legalistic and moralistic position that the violation of Belgium's neutrality per se, because of its legal and moral defects and regardless of the interests at stake and of the identity of the violator, justified British and, for that matter, American intervention. This was the position which Theodore Roosevelt took in his letter to Sir Edward Grey of January 22, 1915:

> To me the crux of the situation has been Belgium. If England or France had acted toward Belgium as Germany has acted I should have opposed them, exactly as I now oppose Germany. I have emphatically approved your action as a model for what should be done by those who believe that treaties should be observed in good faith and that there is such a thing as international morality. I take this position as an American who is no more an Englishman than he is a German,

> who endeavors loyally to serve the interests of his own country, but who also endeavors to do what he can for justice and decency as regards mankind at large, and who therefore feels obliged to judge all other nations by their conduct on any given occasion.

This realist defense of the autonomy of the political sphere against its subversion by other modes of thought does not imply disregard for the existence and importance of these other modes of thought. It rather implies that each should be assigned its proper sphere and function. Political realism is based upon a pluralistic conception of human nature. Real man is a composite of "economic man," "political man," "moral man," "religious man," etc. A man who was nothing but "political man" would be a beast, for he would be completely lacking in moral restraints. A man who was nothing but "moral man" would be a fool, for he would be completely lacking in prudence. A man who was nothing but "religious man" would be a saint, for he would be completely lacking in worldly desires.

Recognizing that these different facets of human nature exist, political realism also recognizes that in order to understand one of them one has to deal with it on its own terms. That is to say, if I want to understand "religious man," I must for the time being abstract from the other aspects of human nature and deal with its religious aspect as if it were the only one. Furthermore, I must apply to the religious sphere the standards of thought appropriate to it, always remaining aware of the existence of other standards and their actual influence upon the religious qualities of man. What is true of this facet of human nature is true of all the others. No modern economist, for instance, would conceive of his science and its relations to other sciences of man in any other way. It is exactly through such a process of emancipation from other standards of thought, and the development of one appropriate to its subject matter, that economics has developed as an autonomous theory of the economic activities of man. To contribute to a similar development in the field of politics is indeed the purpose of political realism.

It is in the nature of things that a theory of politics which is based upon such principles will not meet with unanimous approval—nor does, for that matter, such a foreign policy. For theory and policy alike run counter to two trends in our culture which are not able to reconcile themselves to the assumptions and results of a rational, objective theory of politics. One of these trends disparages the role of power in society on grounds that stem from the experience and philosophy of the nineteenth century; we shall address ourselves to this tendency later in greater detail.[6] The other trend, opposed to the realist theory and practice of politics, stems from the very relationship that exists, and must exist, between the human mind and the political sphere. For reasons that we shall discuss later[7] the human mind in its day-by-day operations cannot bear to look the truth of politics straight in the face. It must

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[6]See pages 37 ff.
[7]See pages 101 ff.

disguise, distort, belittle, and embellish the truth—the more so, the more the individual is actively involved in the processes of politics, and particularly in those of international politics. For only by deceiving himself about the nature of politics and the role he plays on the political scene is man able to live contentedly as a political animal with himself and his fellow men.

Thus it is inevitable that a theory which tries to understand international politics as it actually is and as it ought to be in view of its intrinsic nature, rather than as people would like to see it, must overcome a psychological resistance that most other branches of learning need not face. A book devoted to the theoretical understanding of international politics therefore requires a special explanation and justification.

2

The Science of International Politics

UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Different Approaches

This book has two purposes. The first is to detect and understand the forces that determine political relations among nations, and to comprehend the ways in which those forces act upon each other and upon international political relations and institutions. In most other branches of the social sciences this purpose would be taken for granted, because the natural aim of all scientific undertakings is to discover the forces underlying social phenomena and the mode of their operation. In approaching the study of international politics, one cannot take this purpose for granted; it therefore requires special emphasis. As Dr. Grayson Kirk has put it:

> Until recent times the study of international relations in the United States has been dominated largely by persons who have taken one of three approaches. First there have been the historians who have considered international relations merely as recent history, in which the student is handicapped by the absence of an adequate amount of available data. A second group, the international lawyers, have properly concerned themselves primarily with the legal aspects of inter-state relations, but they have seldom made a serious effort to inquire into the fundamental reasons for the continuing incompleteness and inadequacy of this legal nexus. Finally, there have been those who have been less concerned with international relations as they are than with the more perfect system which these idealists would like to build. Only recently—and belatedly—have students undertaken to examine the fundamental and persistent forces of world politics, and the institutions which embody them, not with a view to praise or to condemn,

but merely in an effort to provide a better understanding of these basic drives which determine the foreign policies of states. Thus the political scientist is moving into the international field at last.[1]

Professor Charles E. Martin has taken up Dr. Kirk's theme by pointing to

> . . . the problem which faces the students and the teachers of international relations more than any other, namely, that dualism we have to face in moving in two different and opposite areas. I mean the area of institutions of peace which are related to the adjustment of disputes and the area of power politics and war. Yet, it must be so. There is no escape from it. . . . I think probably one of the greatest indictments of our attitude in teaching in the last twenty years has been to write off glibly the institution of war and to write off the books the influence of power politics. I think political scientists make a great mistake in doing so. We should be the very ones who are studying power politics and its implications and the situations growing out of it, and we should be the ones who study the institution of war.[2]

Defined in such terms, international politics as an academic discipline is distinct from recent history and current events, international law, and political reform.

International politics embraces more than recent history and current events. The observer is surrounded by the contemporary scene with its ever shifting emphasis and changing perspectives. He cannot find solid ground on which to stand, or objective standards of evaluation, without getting down to fundamentals that are revealed only by the correlation of recent events with the more distant past and the perennial qualities of human nature underlying both.

International politics cannot be reduced to legal rules and institutions. International politics operates within the framework of such rules and through the instrumentality of such institutions. But it is no more identical with them than American politics on the national level is identical with the American Constitution, the federal laws, and the agencies of the federal government.

Concerning attempts to reform international politics before making an effort to understand what international politics is about, we share William Graham Sumner's view:

> The worst vice in political discussions is that dogmatism which takes its stand on great principles or assumptions, instead of standing on an exact examination of things as they are and human nature as it is. . . . An ideal is formed of some higher or better state of things than now exists, and almost unconsciously the ideal is assumed as already existing and made the basis of speculations which have no root. . . . The whole method of abstract speculation on political topics is vicious. It is popular because it is easy; it is easier to imagine a new world than to learn to know this one; it is easier to embark on speculations based on a few

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[1] *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 39 (1945), pp. 369–70.

[2] *Proceedings of the Eighth Conference of Teachers of International Law and Related Subjects* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1946), p. 66.

broad assumptions than it is to study the history of states and institutions; it is easier to catch up a popular dogma than it is to analyze it to see whether it is true or not. All this leads to confusion, to the admission of phrases and platitudes, to much disputing but little gain in the prosperity of nations.[3]

Limitations to Understanding

The most formidable difficulty facing a theoretical inquiry into the nature and ways of international politics is the ambiguity of the material with which the observer has to deal. The events he must try to understand are, on the one hand, unique occurrences. They happened in this way only once and never before or since. On the other hand, they are similar, for they are manifestations of social forces. Social forces are the product of human nature in action. Therefore, under similar conditions, they will manifest themselves in a similar manner. But where is the line to be drawn between the similar and the unique?

This ambiguity of the events to be understood by a theory of international politics—it may be pointed out in passing—is but a special instance of a general impediment to human understanding. "As no event and no shape," observes Montaigne, "is entirely like another, so also is there none entirely different from another: *an ingenious mixture on the part of Nature. If there were no similarity in our faces, we could not distinguish man from beast; if there were no dissimilarity, we could not distinguish one man from another.* All things hold together by some similarity; every example is halting, and the comparison that is derived from experience is always defective and imperfect. And yet one links up the comparisons at some corner. And so do laws become serviceable and adapt themselves to every one of our affairs by some wrested, forced, and biased interpretation."[4] It is against such "wrested, forced, and biased interpretation" of political events that a theory of international politics must be continuously on guard.

We learn what the principles of international politics are from comparisons between such events. A certain political situation evokes the formulation and execution of a certain foreign policy. Dealing with a different political situation, we ask ourselves: How does this situation differ from the preceding one, and how is it similar? Do the similarities reaffirm the policy developed previously? Or does the blending of similarities and differences allow the essence of that policy to be retained while, in some aspects, it is to be modified? Or do the differences vitiate the analogy altogether and make the previous policy inapplicable? If one wants to understand international politics, grasp the meaning of contemporary events, and foresee and influence the future, one must be able to perform the dual intellectual task implicit in these questions. One must be able to distinguish between the similarities and differ-

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[3]"Democracy and Responsible Government," *The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914), pp. 245–6.

[4]*The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, edited and translated by Jacob Zeitlin (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), Vol. III, p. 270. Montaigne's italics.

ences in two political situations. Furthermore, one must be able to assess the import of these similarities and differences for alternative foreign policies. Three series of events, taken at random, will illustrate the problem and its difficulties.

On September 17, 1796, George Washington made a speech in which he bade farewell to the nation, outlining the principles of American foreign policy in terms of abstention from European affairs. On December 2, 1823, President Monroe sent a message to Congress in which he formulated the principles of American foreign policy in similar terms. In 1917, the United States joined France and Great Britain against Germany, which threatened the independence of both. In 1941, the United States followed a similar course of action. On March 12, 1947, President Truman, in a message to Congress, reformulated the principles of American foreign policy in terms of the worldwide containment of Communism.

In 1512, Henry VIII of England made an alliance with the Hapsburgs against France. In 1515, he made an alliance with France against the Hapsburgs. In 1522 and 1542, he joined the Hapsburgs against France. In 1756, Great Britain allied itself with Prussia against the Hapsburgs and France. In 1793, Great Britain, Prussia, and the Hapsburgs were allied against Napoleon. In 1914, Great Britain joined with France and Russia against Austria and Germany, and in 1939 with France and Poland against Germany.

Napoleon, William II, and Hitler tried to conquer the continent of Europe and failed.

Are there within each of these three series of events similarities that allow us to formulate a principle of foreign policy for each series? Or is each event so different from the others in the series that each would require a different policy? The difficulty in making this decision is the measure of the difficulty in making correct judgments in foreign policy, in charting the future wisely, and in doing the right thing in the right way and at the right time.

Should the foreign policy in Washington's Farewell Address be considered a general principle of American foreign policy, or did it stem from temporary conditions and was its validity therefore limited to them? Are the foreign policies of Washington's and Monroe's messages compatible with the Truman Doctrine? To state the problem another way, is the Truman Doctrine a mere modification of a general principle underlying Washington's and Monroe's conception of foreign affairs, or does the Truman Doctrine constitute a radical departure from the traditions of American foreign policy? If its does, is it justified in the light of changed conditions? Generally speaking, do the differences in the international position of the United States in 1796, 1823, 1917, 1941, and 1947 justify the different foreign policies formulated and executed with regard to these different political situations? What are the similarities and differences in the situation with which Europe confronted the United States in 1917, 1941, and 1947, and to what extent do they require similar or different foreign policies on the part of the United States?

What is the meaning of those shifts in British foreign policy? Have they

grown from the whim and perfidy of princes and statesmen? Or are they inspired by the accumulated wisdom of a people mindful of the permanent forces, transcending any particular alignment, that determine their relations to the continent of Europe?

Are the disasters that followed in the wake of the three attempts at continental conquest so many accidents due to disparate causes? Or does the similarity in results point to similarities in the over-all political situation, similarities that convey a lesson to be pondered by those who might want to try again? More particularly, were the policies the Soviet Union pursued in the aftermath of the Second World War similar to those of Napoleon, William II, and Hitler? If they were did they call for policies on the part of the United States similar to those pursued in 1917 and 1941?

Sometimes, as in the case of the changes in British foreign policy, the answer seems to be clear: that policy proceeded from wisdom rather than from whim. Most of the time, however, and especially when we deal with the present and the future, the answer is bound to be tentative and subject to qualifications. The facts from which the answer must derive are essentially ambiguous and subject to continuous change. To those men who would have it otherwise, history has taught nothing but false analogies. When such men have been responsible for the foreign policies of their countries, they have achieved only disaster. William II and Hitler learned nothing from Napolean's fate, for they thought it could teach them nothing. Those who have erected Washington's advice into a dogma to be followed slavishly have erred no less than those who would dismiss it altogether.

The Munich settlement of 1938 is another case in point. In retrospect, of course, we all know from practical experience that it was a failure, and from that experience we have developed the theoretical categories which demonstrate that it was bound to be a failure. But I remember very well the consensus with which the Munich settlement was approved at the time of its conclusion by theoreticians and practitioners of foreign policy and by the man in the street as well. The Munich settlement was then generally regarded as a great act of statesmanship, a concession made to a would-be conqueror for the sake of peace. E. H. Carr so regarded it then, and A. J. P. Taylor so regards it now. The flaw in that reasoning, which few people were—and perhaps could be—aware of at the time, was again the neglect of the contingencies inherent in political prediction. That which reveals itself as a simple truth in retrospect was either completely unknown in prospect or else could not be determined by anything but an uncertain hunch.

Take finally the contemporary issue of nuclear war. From time to time American policymakers speak openly about "prevailing" in a nuclear war. In this they mirror comments made by Russian military leaders—although not by Soviet political leaders such as Brezhnev, who more than once warned that a thermonuclear war would be suicidal for both superpowers. Particularly in the 1980s, as cold-war tensions mounted again, voices in both countries echoed the belief that victory in a nuclear war was not unthinkable, provided augmented strategic forces were formed through vastly increased defense ex-

penditures. It is possible to develop a theory of nuclear war which assumes nuclear war to be just another kind of violence, greater in magnitude but not different in kind from the types of violence with which history has acquainted us. It follows from this assumption that nuclear war is going to be much more terrible than conventional war, but not necessarily intolerable, provided we take the measures which will enable at least some of us to survive it. In other words, once one starts with this theoretical assumption of the nature and the consequences of nuclear war, one can logically arrive at the conclusion that the foreign policy of the United States does not need to limit itself to trying to avoid nuclear war, but that the United States must also prepare to survive it. And then it becomes perfectly legitimate to raise the question, provided 100 million Americans were to be killed in a nuclear war and nine-tenths of the economic capacity of the United States were to be destroyed, of how we enable the surviving Americans to rebuild the United States with the remaining one-tenth of economic capacity.

The contingent element in this theory of nuclear war is its utter uncertainty, and this uncertainty is typical of all levels of theoretical analysis and prediction in the field of politics, domestic and international. Even if one were to accept all its estimates of deaths and material destruction and of the rate of material recovery, this theory would have to be uncertain about the human reactions to the kind of human and material devastation which nuclear war is likely to bring about. Obviously, if a highly complex human society could be visualized to operate like a primitive ant society, its recuperative ability could be taken for granted. If one-half of the ants of one ant hill have been destroyed together with nine-tenths of the material of the ant hill, it is safe to conclude that the remaining ants will start all over again, building up the ant hill and reproducing until the next catastrophe will force them to start all over again.

But a human society does not have this type of mechanical recuperative ability. Societies have a breaking point as do individuals, and there is a point beyond which human endurance does not carry human initiative in the face of such unprecedented massive devastation. Once that point is reached, civilization itself will collapse. The exact location of that point in the scale of human reactions is beyond theoretical understanding. What we are left with are hunches which may or may not be confirmed by experience.

The first lesson the student of international politics must learn and never forget is that the complexities of international affairs make simple solutions and trustworthy prophecies impossible. Here the scholar and the charlatan part company. Knowledge of the forces that determine politics among nations, and of the ways by which their political relations unfold, reveals the ambiguity of the facts of international politics. In every political situation contradictory tendencies are at play. One of these tendencies is more likely to prevail under certain conditions. But which tendency actually will prevail is anybody's guess. The best the scholar can do, then, is to trace the different tendencies that, as potentialities, are inherent in a certian international situation. He can point out the different conditions that make it more likely for one tendency

to prevail than for another and, finally, assess the probabilities for the different conditions and tendencies to prevail in actuality.

Thus world affairs have surprises in store for whoever tries to read the future from his knowledge of the past and from the signs of the present. In 1776, Washington declared that "the Fate of our Country depends in all human probability, on the Exertion of a Few Weeks." Yet it was not until seven years later that the War of Independence came to an end. In February 1792, British Prime Minister Pitt justified the reduction of military expenditures (particularly a drastic decrease in the personnel of the British navy) and held out hope for more reductions to come by declaring: "Unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country when from the situation of Europe we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace than at the present moment." Only two months later the continent of Europe was engulfed in war. Less than a year later Great Britain was involved. Thus was initiated a period of almost continuous warfare which lasted nearly a quarter of a century. When Lord Granville became British Foreign Secretary in 1870, he was informed by the Permanent Undersecretary that "he had never, during his long experience, known so great a lull in foreign affairs, and that he was not aware of any important question that he [Lord Granville] should have to deal with." On that same day Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen accepted the Crown of Spain, an event that three weeks later led to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. Six weeks before the Russian Revolution of March 1917, Lenin told a group of young socialists in Zurich: "We old people will probably not live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution." Less than a year later, the decisive battles of the Russian Revolution began under his leadership.

When the prophecies of great statesmen fare so ill, what can we expect from the predictions of lesser minds? In how many books written on international affairs before the First World War, when common opinion held great wars to be impossible or at least of short duration, was there even an inkling of what was to come? Was any book written in the period between the two world wars which could have helped one anticipate what international politics would be like in the ninth decade of the century? Who could have guessed at the beginning of Second World War what the political world would be like at its end? Who could have known in 1945 what the world would be like in 1955, or in 1960 what it would be like in 1970 or 1980? What trust then shall we place in those who today would tell us what tomorrow and the day after will bring or what the year 2000 will be like?[5]

In 1979 the intelligence community, and more particularly the Central

[5]The fallibility of prophecies in international affairs is strikingly demonstrated by the fantastic errors committed by the experts who have tried to forecast the nature of the next war. The history of these forecasts, from Machiavelli to General J. F. C. Fuller, is the story of logical deductions, plausible in themselves, which had no connection with the contingencies of the actual historic development. General Fuller, for instance, foresaw in 1923 that the decisive weapon of the Second World War would be gas! See *The Reformation of War* (New York. E. P. Dutton and Company, 1923).

Intelligence Agency, were criticized for their failure to warn American policymakers of the upheavals that culminated in the Shah of Iran's ouster. President Carter himself took the unprecedented step of publicly reprimanding the highest authorities in the intelligence field for their lack of foresight.

What accounts for this failure of foresight on the part of otherwise intelligent and responsible people? The answer lies in the nature of the empirical material with which these individuals had to deal. The observer is confronted with a multitude of factors, the totality of which shape the future. In order to foresee the future, the observer would have to know all these factors, their dynamics, their mutual actions and reactions, and so forth. What he actually knows and can know is but a small fragment of the total. He must guess—and only the future will show who chose rightly among the many possible guesses.

Thus, with regard to Iran the intelligence community guessed wrong. Instead of blaming it indiscriminately, one ought to ask oneself two questions: Could one have pinpointed in time the outbreak of popular discontent? If the answer is in the affirmative, What could the United States have done about it? The answer to the second question is, at best: very little. This is probably why the intelligence community paid less attention to Iran than it might have done in the first place.

It is sobering to note that the science of economics, presumed to be the most precise of the social sciences because its central concept, wealth, is quantitative by definition, is similarly incapable of reliable prediction. An examination of a large number of forecasts of year-to-year changes in the American GNP for the years 1953–63 established an average error of about 40 per cent.[6] In October 1966, the Prudential Life Insurance Company predicted that in 1967 consumer expenditures would rise by 31 billion dollars and inventory investments would amount to 7.5 billion dollars. In October 1967, it scaled its estimate of consumer expenditures down to 27 billion dollars, an error of almost 15 per cent, assuming the correctness of the revised estimate; it reduced its estimate of inventory investments to 7 billion dollars. The Council of Economic Advisors overestimated the growth of the GNP for the same year by about 12 per cent.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE

These questions lead us to the secondary purpose of this book. No study of politics, and certainly no study of international politics in the final decades of the twentieth century, can be disinterested in the sense that it is able to divorce knowledge from action and to pursue knowledge for its own sake.

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[6]Viktor Zarnowitz, *An Appraisal of Short-Term Economic Forecasts* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1967).

International politics is no longer, as it was for the United States during most of its history, a series of incidents, costly or rewarding, but hardly calling into question the nation's very existence and destiny. The existence and destiny of the United States were more deeply affected by the domestic events of the Civil War than by the international policies leading up to, and evolving from, the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, and the Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.[7]

Two facts peculiar to our time have completely reversed the relative importance of domestic and international policies for the United States. First of all, the United States is at the moment of this writing one of the two most powerful nations on earth. Yet, in comparison with its actual and potential competitors, it is not so powerful that it can afford to ignore the effect of its policies upon its position among the nations. From the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the Second World War it mattered little what policies the United States pursued with regard to its Latin-American neighbors, China, or Spain. The self-sufficiency of its own strength, in conjunction with the operation of the balance of power, made the United States immune to the boundless ambition born of success and the fear and frustration which goes with failure. The United States could take success and failure in stride without being unduly tempted or afraid. Now it stands outside the enclosures of its continental citadel, taking on the whole of the political world as friend or foe. It has become dangerous and vulnerable, feared and afraid.

The risk of being very powerful, but not omnipotent, is aggravated by the second fact: a threefold revolution in the political structure of the world. First, the multiple-state system of the past, whose center was in Europe, has been replaced by a world-wide, bipolar system, whose centers lie outside Europe. Furthermore, the moral unity of the political world, which has distinguished Western civilization during most of its history, has been split into two incompatible systems of thought and action, competing everywhere for the allegiance of men. Finally, modern technology has made possible total war resulting in universal destruction. The preponderance of these three new elements in contemporary international politics has not only made the preservation of world peace extremely difficult, but has also increased the risks inherent in war to the point where all-out nuclear war becomes a self-defeating absurdity. Since in this world situation the United States holds a position of predominant power, and hence of foremost responsibility, the understanding of the forces that mold international politics and of the factors that determine its course has become for the United States more than an interesting intellectual occupation. It has become a vital necessity.

To reflect on international politics from the vantage point of the contem-

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[7]This corollary is found in the message of Theodore Roosevelt to Congress on December 6, 1904. In that message he proclaimed the right of the United States to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Latin-American countries. For the text, see Ruhl J. Bartlett, editor, *The Record of American Diplomacy: Documents and Readings in the History of American Foreign Relations*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 539.

porary United States, then, is to reflect upon the vital problems that confront American foreign policy in our time. While at all times the promotion of the national interests of the United States as a power among powers has been the main concern of American foreign policy, in an age that has seen two world wars and has learned how to wage total war with nuclear weapons the preservation of peace has become the prime concern of all nations.

It is for this reason that this book is planned around the two concepts of power and peace. These two concepts are central to a discussion of world politics in the final decades of the twentieth century, when an unprecedented accumulation of destructive power gives to the problem of peace an urgency it has never had before. In a world whose moving force is the aspiration of sovereign nations for power, peace can be maintained only by two devices. One is the self-regulatory mechanism of the social forces, which manifests itself in the struggle for power on the international scene, that is, the balance of power. The other consists of normative limitations upon that struggle, in the form of international law, international morality, and world public opinion. Since neither of these devices, as they operate today, is likely to keep the struggle for power indefinitely within peaceful bounds, three further questions must be asked and answered: What is the value of the main current proposals for the maintenance of international peace? More particularly, what is the value of the proposal for transforming the international society of sovereign nations into a supranational organization, such as a world state? And, finally, what must a program for action be like that is mindful of the lessons of the past and endeavors to adapt them to the problems of the present?