
CURRENTS and SOUNDINGS

Coherence and Consultation: The President as Manager of American Foreign Policy

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I. An Inchoate Consensus

"American foreign policy" is not an abstraction. It is what the governed and their government do from day to day about world security and international relations. "Policy" is driven by what happens. What happens is seldom initiated by the President of the United States. So U.S. policy is mostly and necessarily reactive. But in reacting, the President and his advisers are guided by some general ideas, articulated or not, about where they want to go, what they are trying to do. And this frame of reference is heavily influenced in turn by the leaders' perceptions of what actions will elicit "the consent of the governed" (on TV tonight, in Congress next month, at the polls next year).

The leaders' problem is that they often get left behind. Public opinion may move both faster and farther than the perceptions "of policy makers." My colleague, Royce Hanson, speaks of "the tendency of officials (. . . especially policy professionals) to use Higher Idiocy rather than common sense in arriving at policy pronouncements."

Back when he was running for President in 1976, Jimmy Carter wisely didn't say he wanted to be the architect of U.S. foreign policy. "No one can make our foreign policy for us as well as we can make it ourselves," he told a Chicago audience, speaking as a private citizen. He did volunteer to manage it for us, though.

The division of labor implied in this campaign rhetoric is sound. People, not leaders, really do make the policy. At any given moment in time, therefore, most of the elements of American foreign policy are already lying around, in an inchoate consensus not yet fully codified by the foreign policy establishment and the professionals and amateurs temporarily residing in Washington, DC. Despite what one reads in the newspapers, sees in television debates, and hears from partisan podiums (the three forms of organized communication most dedicated to highlighting differences of opinion), the mandatory mode of American foreign policy is essentially bipartisan, even nonpartisan. The people's policy is their commonsense reaction to the changing facts of international life.

■ *U.S. foreign policy normally develops first as an inchoate popular consensus, then is codified by experts and is announced by "leaders," including the President of the United States, only when the consensus is well formed. In these circumstances the President's task is not "to make policy." It is to cohere and to consult: to formulate in an understandable strategy the many things the U.S. government is trying to do at any one time to carry the people's policy into action; and to decide with which governments and nongovernments around the world to consult, how early, how often, and how candidly.*

II. The People's Policy

What are the elements of this "people's policy"? Each analyst is entitled to an opinion, of course; but I believe that the American people by sizable majorities would sign onto the following propositions.

- We are for the rights of human beings, a fair chance of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all, just as it says in the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the early United Nations documents we helped write. We can't accomplish this for everyone just yet, even in our own country, and anyway each people must ultimately organize its own destiny, just as we have had to do these past two centuries. But we'll continue to work at freedom for all, because it's our nation's very reason for being.

- It bugs us that we are so often out of step with the rest of the world—or they with us. It ought to be possible for us more often to be leading the self-reliant, prosperous, pro-enterprise, pro-development—and, yes, pro-U.S.—tendencies in other countries. We're frustrated by finding ourselves cast, again and again, as the fall guy for every two-bit dictator—Makarios, Castro, Somoza, Khomeini, Marcos, etc., etc.—who learns how to manipulate the power of weakness.

- We're willing to use our armed forces for quick and decisive operations in limited arenas (Grenada in living memory, the shores of Tripoli in song and story), but don't ask us to hang in there by ourselves beyond all reason the way we did in Vietnam.

- We're determined to remain the world's strongest power overall. That doesn't have to be done entirely with military strength; we have all sorts of other assets to work with—our money, our food, our freedom, and the fact that most of the world's people who have to move want to come here. (Jack Paar, no foreign policy expert, said it: "Immigration is the sincerest form of flattery.") But we'll support a strong military defense too, just to make sure.

- We have a hunch that nuclear weapons are unusable except to keep the other side from using theirs: after all, we were willing to stalemate a war in Korea and lose a war in Vietnam without using them ourselves. But we want to prevent their spread just in case. We'll also maintain a "rough equivalence" with the Soviets on all this fancy weaponry and make sure of that in the future through a strong research and development effort, too—and we'll pay whatever that policy costs.

- We know by instinct that *détente* translates not as relaxation but as something more like "the continuation of tension by other means"—and that the Soviets are out there to play hardball. But we also know that there's no point in both of us having far more unusable weapons than would be needed even for all-out retaliation against each other. So we want to make this nuclear balance of power less expensive and also safer, more stable; those are two good reasons for getting on with arms control. By very large majorities, we think it would be sensible, by agreement with the Soviets, at least to freeze the production and deployment of nuclear weapons.

- We think we've got the world's best Allies and want to keep it that way. Some of them are handling their economic management better than we are, and maybe we have something to learn from them. But when it comes to the defense of NATO and the Pacific, the Europeans and the Japanese are just going to have to assume more of the responsibility. It's simply unfair for the Japanese to be spending one percent of their national product on defense and the Europeans three percent while we spend six or seven percent of ours, partly to defend them. Why should we be in the position of having to decide how much risk it's all right for them to take?

- We keep hearing experts talk about the twenty-first century as the "Pacific century," and we think there is something in that. Certainly the peoples to the west of us have made a better try at development, with help from us that was mostly *not* wasted, than other countries have.

- We're glad that it seems to be possible to get along with China these days. They're a different breed of Communists from the Soviets. They do after all have a quarter of the world's population, and they're obviously on the move, so we have to take them very seriously. We thought it was silly not to "recognize" China for so long, but we don't think it's up to us to figure out the future relationship between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. They can work that out, or fail to work it out, between themselves.

- We are coming to realize that turbulence and resentments in the developing world, the product of rising expectations and rising frustrations, are now driving those older, more settled relationships in world politics—the U.S.-Soviet standoff and our Atlantic-Pacific alliances. We know we can't escape the task of helping keep change peaceful worldwide.

- In the Middle East, Israel's survival is a must. In the long-running fight between Israel and its Arab neighbors, we want whatever outcome the Arabs and Israelis can agree on ("Let's you and him make peace"). We'll even help the deal along, whatever it turns out to be, with aid and security guarantees.

- In Southern Africa we want the majority to rule but we also want the changeover to be peaceful. We're not about to plunge in with a solution of our own, but the situation is too dangerous for us not to be willing to mediate if necessary—and meanwhile to help educate South Africa's coming black leadership.

- Fidel Castro is a thorn in our side, but neither the Cubans nor their Russian guests are really a mortal threat to the United States of America. Much more important in this hemisphere is developing a viable relationship, in a spirit of bargaining among equals, with Canada, with Mexico, with Argentina and with Brazil, which could soon be one of the world's great economic powers. As far as the smaller countries are concerned, we want to prevent Communist inroads but we shouldn't get drawn in too deeply the way we did in Vietnam.

- We want fair trade—*free* trade seems to cost us too many jobs, so we think markets work better when they are rigged (uh, regulated by agreement). That's what most of the rest of the world seems to think, too, so we ought to get on with the bargaining. We can't seem to sell enough to foreigners to pay for their oil and steel and small cars and microchips and color television sets, so we're obviously going to have to do something about our capacity to produce more efficiently, and cut back on the oil we get from the Arabs and others whose dependability as suppliers is uncertain. Most important, while protecting what we used to do well we're going to have to crank up what made America great: doing what nobody's ever done before, and doing it first.

- We don't even pretend to understand the international money system. But we have a hunch things would work better, without these wild ups and downs in the value of our money and the interest rates we have to pay, if the world's major trading countries, who also happen to be mostly democracies and our allies, could coordinate their economies better and relieve us of some of the trouble that comes from everybody using the U.S. dollar as *their* means of exchange and measure of value.

- We would like to see a fair shake for the world's poor and especially for the world's hungry, but we're sick and tired of foreign aid as it's presently administered. We might even go for an international campaign to get rid of the worst aspects of world poverty, or at least bring an end to hunger, by the end of this century—if our leaders can convince us that it can be done and

that others will do their share. Meanwhile we will insist that the benefits of trade and aid get to the people who need them most—not just enrich the monarchs and colonels and politicians and corporations that still seem to get most of the gravy.

- We're justly proud of producing big food and feed surpluses with less than three percent of our work force—by putting modern science and American ingenuity to work on the farm. We don't think food should be used as a weapon, exactly, but it is a prime source of our national strength in world affairs, and we should make sure that serving as the world's residual supplier is made profitable for the American farmer.

- We're also proud of the science and technology that has learned to use outer space not only to land men on the Moon, but for worldwide human benefits—satellite communications, arms control inspection, weather forecasting, remote sensing, and keeping track of environmental risks. Global systems will have to be organized in the '80s and '90s to secure the benefits such new technologies make both possible and necessary; plenty of international cooperation will evidently be required, and U.S. leadership is going to be indispensable. (It's hard to understand why—after President Kennedy's leadership on the Apollo mission, satellite communications, and the World Weather Watch—no national political leader seized this quintessentially American torch, the exploration and human use of outer space, until President Reagan espoused the manned space station in January 1984, then followed up with the Strategic Defense Initiative ["Star Wars"] later that year.)

- Above all, we're beginning to believe in ourselves again. We picked ourselves up off the floor after Vietnam, Watergate, and a global recession and found we were still the only nation with a truly global reach. Our destiny may no longer be so manifest, but it still looks better than anyone else's. It's the job of the leaders we have elected, and will elect, to keep it that way.

III. The Capacity to Cohere

Sniffing out the "people's policy" is the crucial task of political leadership. The trouble is, the people don't tell their leaders what to *do*, exactly. The instructions are like those of the Delphic oracle, who spoke with great conviction but in riddles.

It is the task of political leadership, and in our system especially of the President, to mold this latent consensus into U.S. popular and legislative support for coherent actions that *work*—that is, actions which help make the world safe for diversity and therefore for the American people. They have to be coherent because one of the President's key functions is to build a constituency for the situation as a whole—as an offset to all the single-issue organizations and one-note themes (Madison called them "factions") that are so characteristic of American politics.

The U.S. Presidency is well placed to be, at one and the same time, the "coherence factor" both in U.S.

policy and in international politics. The President is constitutionally responsible for conducting the nation's external relations; he is expected to initiate policies and programs, including spending programs; he can consult through dozens of channels with other national governments; and he has a modernized "bully pulpit" for timely electronic communication with masses of people at home and abroad.

There is danger in such exposure: if he acts in an *ad hoc* fashion, it will look *ad hoc*. The "people's policy" does not come with its own doctrinal glue. It must be continuously clarified, codified, programmed, budgeted, and above all articulated so that it fits together as a coherent and understandable whole—not only in the minds of speechwriters and other professional rationalizers but in the commonsense reaction of the people.

The need for coherence is not just the need to explain discrete policies in their relations to one another. It arises from the main boundary condition in international affairs: everything really is connected to everything else. It is not good enough for leaders to do good things on purpose, if they are not effectively related to each other. Examples of *ad hoc* hockery abound in the several decades of history during which I have been an active participant and observer of U.S. international relations. Those I shall cite come from one Democratic administration, not because it was uniquely unstrategic in its international actions but to counter any impression that this writing by a lifelong Democrat is provoked by more recent *ad hoc* hockery under Republican auspices.

Suppose a group of American political strategists had been asked to meet with President Carter in January 1977, the week after his inauguration. Suppose each member of the group had been asked what overriding foreign-policy issue should preempt most of the President's time, preoccupy the White House staff, immobilize the United States Senate, and test the prestige of the President during the first year of his term of office. Would any of them have put the Panama Canal Treaty at the top of the batting order?

How did the Canal treaties vault over SALT, China, the Middle East, unemployment, energy, health insurance, the trade deficit, the budget deficit, and the dollar's weakness to get to the head of the policy parade? I asked that question of a number of friends in Washington that season and concluded from their replies that it was not the product of strategic thinking. It was an accident.

The composite answer I derived from those interviews at the time, according to my 1978 notes, went something like this: "There was this Panama negotiation, see, and it was almost completed by the Ford Administration. We're activists, so we added a dynamic negotiator and got the treaties finished in jig time." (Six months is jig time in diplomacy.) "So what do you do with a couple of treaties that are agreed upon? You have to sign them, don't you? And once you've signed them, you can't just let them wriggle there on the President's desk. You have to send them up to the Senate for ratification, don't you?"

The Carter staff was very good at sniffing the political winds when it was traveling the campaign trail in 1975 and 1976. In 1977, immured in the White House, the same staff (that may have been part of the problem) seems not to have realized that for millions of citizens the Canal was emotionally a piece of the American flag—and that the President's political opponents would make the most of it.

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The President, and our Latin American relations, were fortunate that the opposition to the treaties peaked before Christmas, so that after a pompous and boring debate the treaties squeaked through the United States Senate in March and April 1978. But wouldn't the time, the chips, and the clout that were spent so early and so lavishly on this project have been better used to get Senate action on a national energy policy and a strategic arms control agreement?

Instead, in March 1977, President Carter sent his Secretary of State to Moscow preceded by a barrage of leaks and explanations about the fundamentally new proposals for strategic arms reduction which Secretary Vance, over his own objections, was carrying in his briefcase. The Soviets predictably thought the first step should be to confirm by treaty the higher ceilings on land-based nuclear warheads and delivery systems that had been agreed upon in principle at Vladivostok in November 1974 by President Ford and Chairman Brezhnev. ("In principle" is diplomatese for "We haven't yet agreed, really, but we both have to announce something.") The popular consensus favoring progress in arms control had been overridden by a partisan reluctance to start by finishing an achievement on which the previous administration was deemed to hold the political copyright.

The Soviets promptly rejected the new bargaining ploy. Two years later our negotiators produced a modestly improved version of the Vladivostok deal. When this treaty, SALT II, came to the Senate for advice and consent, it was hardly surprising that some Republican opponents, relieved by White House tactics and timing of the obligation to support a Republican president's bargain, charged the U.S. negotiators with retreating from President Carter's own March 1977 bargaining position. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 then made it impossible to fight for ratification of SALT II—which made it all the more regrettable that something like the same deal hadn't been struck when it could have been struck, in 1977.

During the same period, it seemed to be necessary to learn by trial and error that SALT and human rights and the World Bank and the Horn of Africa are all

linked together—not only out there in the real world but back here in commonsense American opinion. President Carter inherited his own campaign rhetoric, which chided Henry Kissinger for "linkage." Later, in a revealing press conference reply, he commented that he was surprised by the effect his human rights campaign had on the achievement of arms control objectives.

The international human rights theme struck so deep a chord in the American political psyche, and (when bracketed by President Carter with doing something about poverty) had such widespread appeal around the world, that it survived its clumsy launching. The speed and direction of a great wave are not much affected by the skill of the surfer who tries to ride it. But at the outset, the advocacy of human rights was all heart and no strategy. As it impacted the real world, it became a textbook example of the principle, in politics or in ethics, that there are no overriding principles. Answering a letter from Academician Sakharov produced an embarrassing flow of similar requests from less famous Soviet dissidents for reassurances on White House stationery. Insisting that American representatives use their voice and vote to restrain U.N. agencies from helping governments that torture political prisoners helped politicize international agencies which the United States had been saying should *not* be treated as political footballs.

Denying "linkage" at first, then tying Soviet African policy to the SALT negotiations, the Carter administration managed to get the worst of both worlds: It first looked naïve to its domestic critics, then later looked as if it were finding an excuse to stall the SALT talks—whether because the Senate was still busy with the Canal or because we wanted to get on with cruise missile development was not clear to our would-be friends overseas.

Lacking a strategic view, the administration was often taken by surprise. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat announced that "I will go to Jerusalem," paving the way for a separate peace between Egypt and Israel, it took the White House a couple of days to catch up with the fast break. The reaction in Iran to the hospitalization of the Shah in New York was merely the most dramatic—and, in the outcome, politically fatal—example of a tactical mistake that generated an excruciating and unnecessary crisis.

IV. The Role of Rethinking

In the interdependent world economy it is especially evident that everything is related to everything else. With the U.S. dollar still the world's key currency, Washington's relaxed attitude during much of 1977 toward the weakening of the dollar against other currencies was hard for U.S. business people to understand, but it was easily exploited by foreign speculators. Later the administration became genuinely alarmed, but the government's bipartisan immobilism on energy policy kept the dollar hemorrhage flowing to pay for more and

more oil. The belated efforts to control the money supply were the product less of U.S. leadership than of pressure on the Federal Reserve Board from our allies, notably from those (such as Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany) which were containing their own inflation better than we were. Today, eight years later, the situation is reversed. The complaints from overseas (and from U.S. exporters) are about an unhealthily strong dollar; but the United States is still not acting effectively to harmonize economic and financial policy with its political partners around the globe.

The complexities of the world political economy—for the management of which the United States is clearly chairman of the executive committee—are such that rigid master plans and eloquent grand strategies do not prove very useful. But the support of the American people, necessary for actions by their government, does require a clear and understandable general sense of direction. The initiatives of others, rational or irrational, must be reacted to. Crises must be managed. But U.S. purposes, U.S. intentions, and U.S. limits of tolerance have to show clearly through the underbrush of tactical diplomacy.

Coherence is hard for political leaders to achieve at any time: the processes of government are fashioned for action and inhospitable to thinking, planning, and especially to asking “Why?” In consequence most of the general policy ideas, assumptions, and initiatives on which a President acts in office are developed *before* he is elected, or *outside* the precedent-bound official conformity, or both.

I have heard Henry Kissinger say that there hasn’t been a new idea on arms control since the early 1960s (the Kennedy administration) or on military strategy since the late 1950s (when Kissinger was helping Nelson Rockefeller develop ideas about U.S. national security policy). The third time I heard him say this I had an opportunity to ask whether he really meant that, in the eight years he served, in effect, as Assistant President for military strategy and arms control, no new ideas on these subjects were hatched. He cheerfully agreed: You come into public office well stocked with intellectual capital, he explained; you spend it freely, but you certainly don’t add to it.

If the government must therefore depend on a flow of facts and ideas from nongovernmental thinkers, it has to be said that the flow is far from uninhibited. On national security policy especially, funds for external research are allotted mostly for studies by consultants (among them the so-called “beltway bandits”) who are so dependent on government contracts that they cannot be expected to question basic assumptions. Those academic strategic analysts who don’t depend on government consulting form a very thin community by comparison.

Even if the flow of independent research, fresh ideas, and discomfiting questions were without impediment, there is a more fundamental problem for policy makers in the 1980s. We have quite suddenly run out of applicable general theory on several fronts at once. Over the

past decade or less, a whole range of underlying assumptions which have guided U.S. foreign policy for half a century, have turned out to be undependable as a basis for relevant action.

In economics the legacy of Lord Keynes no longer explains a business cycle in which inflation and recession are glued together in ways that public policies seem powerless to control. Conservatives to whom deficit financing used to be anathema now are willing to live with an enormous and continuing federal budget deficit which holds interest rates up, hampers U.S. exports, and impedes business recovery.

In public administration and social policy, the New Deal era of federal initiative seems to have ended with no new sense of direction to put in its place; “more governance with less government” is the Delphic instruction from the American electorate.

Information is now the dominant resource in the economy of “advanced” countries, but this expandable, leaky, shareable resource cannot be managed with the theories and calculations that served so well in the managing of depletive resources. We do not even know how to refer to the era we live in: we call it by names that describe what went before—post-Keynesian, post-New Deal, post-industrial—which do not help explain what is and will be.

Similarly in national security policy, the military unusability of nuclear explosions and the fact that so much of the initiative in world politics now comes from turbulence and ambition in developing countries, requires a rethinking of strategic theory and national security policy. (Are we also entering the post-nuclear and post-Atlantic phases of world history?)

The puzzle for a President, and for those who would succeed him, is not merely how to tie their tactical actions and advocacies to a widely-shared conventional wisdom. It is to rethink, reformulate, and persuasively project a strategic vision for a world changing so fast that existing assumptions are almost bound to be wrong—while preserving durable values: fairness, progress, freedom, and peace.

V. The Politics of Consent

Whatever their differences in teaching and temperament, most Republicans and most Democrats—and most independents, too—yearn in parallel (with carefully differentiated wording) for common, if paradoxical, outcomes: better weapons and a safer world, prosperity and fairness for all (but a lion’s share for Americans), peaceful settlements everywhere without involving us unduly anywhere.

But most of the levers of power to reach these goals and resolve these contradictions are not connected to the Oval Office, and the one form of power clearly reserved to the President personally to exercise—command and control of nuclear weapons—doesn’t seem to be much help. Suasion and consultation and patience and unremitting diplomatic effort are the mandatory style of leadership in a leaderless world.

The perilous luxury of sudden and secret operations such as Israel's hostage snatch at the Entebbe airport in 1976 is not available to big powers except in rare and comparatively easy cases (the peacekeeping mission in the Dominican Republic, the rescue of the Mayaguez, the invasion of Grenada, the interception of the Achille Lauro hijackers). Larger or more protracted operations (the Bay of Pigs, the training of Nicaraguan *contras*) collide with the people's aversion to secrecy and revulsion at heavy-handedness that isn't successful right away.

This is one reason why U.S. presidents of whatever political hue are attracted to multilateral operations. Our defense of Europe since 1949, our response (as the main element of a United Nations Force) in Korea in 1950, our support for U.N. peacekeeping in Greece, Palestine, Kashmir, Suez and the Sinai, Lebanon, the Congo, West New Guinea, and Cyprus, all featured a multilateral framework and the involvement of contingents from several nations.

Five-thousand men, drawn from seven countries, kept watch over the Gaza Strip and the Israeli-Egyptian frontier; 20,000 men, drawn from 21 countries, patrolled and periodically fought for four years in the Congo; 6,000 men, drawn from six countries, sat on the lid in Cyprus. Each of these missions was backed by a U.S. Air Force airlift. The Congo lift in the early 1960s was (at the time) the longest and largest such operation in the history of military aviation, moving 76,000 soldiers and 14,000 tons of military cargo with high professional skill and no serious accident.

Even in Vietnam, which tragically became a made-in-America war, President Lyndon Johnson kept insisting on "many flags"—and achieved in the late '60s a presence of more non-American troops helping the South Vietnamese than we ever had in the United Nations-sponsored defense of South Korea during the early '50s. It never looked that way, because in Korea we had the enormous advantage of international legitimacy (the U.N. Security Council had blessed the operation at the very outset), whereas in Vietnam the gradual Washington-managed escalation made the war American no matter how many others joined in.

In planning the U.S. Marines' 1983-84 "peacekeeping" mission in Lebanon, the Reagan administration also wanted plenty of company. But its timid diplomacy produced a military grotesquerie: the "multinational," not *multilateral*, force turned out to be four separate contingents (from the U.K., France, Italy, and the U.S.) each responsible to its own political authorities, with no common theatre commander on the ground. When the lack of political foresight was compounded by military sloppiness (a juicy terrorist target protected by a lightly defended perimeter), the massacre of the Marines and the consequent decision to withdraw the survivors were foreordained.

In the real world, the management of peace is an exercise not in shouting or declaiming or bullying but in the politics of consent. Even in regional or narrowly functional issues, the sheer numbers of notionally sovereign

actors is often quite large. In global operations (the World Weather Watch, the eradication of small pox, the tracking of epidemics, the allocation of the electromagnetic frequency spectrum, the assignment of "parking spaces" at geostationary orbit, the development of agricultural research, the protection of data flows, the inspection of nuclear power plants, etc., etc.) there is no escaping the need for wide participation and tedious consent-building.

The multilateral imperative comes both from troubles and technologies that physically span the globe—atmospheric pollution, migrations of people (with their infectious diseases and ideas), orbiting satellites, weather balloons, information-bearing radio waves—and from the sheer number of actors in international relations.

As the number of countries rises one by one, the relationships among them grow by logarithmic leaps. It is usually a matter of simple efficiency to deal with a group of nations on whatever affects all members of the group. The 16 nations that sit around the table at the North Atlantic Council, NATO's political board of directors, would require 120 bilateral discussions to reach the consensus that can be reached in one multilateral negotiation (which, of course, may involve a good many one-on-one sessions outside the conference room or back home in capitals). A diplomacy built on bilateral relations would be like mathematics without the zero.

It is true that an enormous amount of bilateral conversation takes place between pairs of countries all over the world, and that the President conducts bilateral relations, in one form or another, with every nation in the world today: the 159 members of the United Nations and a dozen more small sovereignties which are not U.N. members. (Those we do not "recognize," such as Cuba, Albania, Outer Mongolia, Vietnam, and North Korea, our government deals with in various ways anyhow.)

But an analysis of the content of these bilateral relations reveals that most of the subjects being discussed are scheduled for decision, not between the two countries conducting the bilateral conversation, but in some multilateral forum (a U.N. agency, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Organization of American States, the European Economic Community, the International Atomic Energy Agency, several arms-control and disarmament negotiations, the European Security Conference), in international conferences and consultations on environment, population, food, women, deserts, water, science and technology for development, the law of the sea, in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and through international agreements on fishing rights, weather forecasting, Antarctica, and outer space—to mention only a few.

In the late 1960s when I had occasion to visit each U.S. mission in NATO Europe, I made a point of asking what proportion of the business on each U.S.

ambassador's desk was strictly bilateral business, and what proportion was essentially bilateral conversation about business done multilaterally. My estimate at the time was that the multilateral content of bilateral diplomacy ranged between 60 and 75 percent; a British Foreign Office study at the time showed a similar result. Now, a decade and a half later, the average would likely be at the high end of that range. The United States government is represented by an official delegation at seven- or eight-hundred conferences a year—and that doesn't count the several thousand professional and private international meetings that impinge in some way on "the management of peace."

VI. The Art of Consultation

The art of international consultation is thus central to the American presidency. If there is a general rule about consultation, it is the Golden Rule. When about to take an action affecting others, the President or other officials need to ask: how would we react if one of our friends or one of our adversaries behaved as we are about to behave without consulting us about it?

Something like this is, or has mostly been in recent history, the declaratory policy of the United States. It was expressed, for example, by Vice President Hubert Humphrey when he spoke to the North Atlantic Council on April 7, 1967:

To put it bluntly, how do you make sure that our negotiations with the Soviets—as on disarmament, on nonproliferation, or anti-ballistic missiles—do not do violence to your vital interests?

And conversely, how do we make sure that the initiatives and negotiations of our allies do not adversely affect our own vital interests and responsibilities?

We have a way of safeguarding and harmonizing our interests as traffic quickens through the "open door." It is by consultation through this Council. . . .

And if we follow the Golden Rule—that each of us consult as soon, as often, and as frankly as he would wish the others to consult—the Alliance will prove to be the midwife of more hopeful times.

The purpose of international consultation is not just to buy support for what we have already decided to do. The history so far of managed multilateralism suggests a more heretical notion: that by consulting with others before we have finished thinking ourselves, we force ourselves to think harder about what we are doing and why. It is comparatively easy for a President of the United States to be deluded, especially if he consults mostly with staff members and political friends most likely to agree with his (often unstated) basic premises. It is always much harder to delude friends and allies abroad: they have their own interests to look after and are not so reluctant as a President's advisers to ask the fundamental questions.

The notion that consulting with foreigners improves the quality of our own decisions is not easy to sell to Americans whose feel for foreign policy is limited to bureaucratic bargains and legislative tactics in the District of Columbia. I know because I have tried. But

by finding out what others are likely to say and do, before the "domestic" bargains have been struck and our own policy has been frozen, the President secures a valuable input into his own thinking. Simply imagining what various kinds of foreigners are likely to say and do (for example by having the State Department's desk officers for the affected countries in the room) is too pale a substitute for the real thing.

In the interdependent world economy it is especially evident that everything is related to everything else.

Once NATO at U.S. initiative had created in the Nuclear Planning Group a forum which required that the use of tactical nuclear weapons be professionally discussed among responsible and increasingly knowledgeable Defense Ministers of allied governments, we had to think much harder ourselves about the rationale for the presence and potentials for use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. The original top-secret justification, in the late '50s, for placing the equivalent of 7,000 Hiroshima bombs in Europe had been almost unbelievably thin. The result of having to explain it to skeptical peers in the '60s was dramatic: some brilliant analytical work was done in Washington, better than anything produced on the subject prior to the self-created requirement for international consultation.

"Consultation" covers a wide spectrum of activity. It includes the exchange of information, briefings, analysis, and expertise. Briefing is about all we did with our allies on the Vietnam war, and our allies in consequence felt no responsibility for the quagmire into which we had wandered. It can mean advance notification as a matter of general interest (where U.S. naval units will be visiting next), consent-building notification just before a public announcement (President Kennedy telling key European leaders about the missiles in Cuba and what we had decided to do about them), or advance discussion on national intentions (talks with friends and allies around the world before a Presidential meeting with Soviet leaders).

Toward the "harder" end of the spectrum, there is "before and during" consultation with a view to developing parallel national actions and attitudes—as was done extensively in promoting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and is regularly (if not always skillfully) done on peace-and-security crises and fiscal and monetary policy. And in the most serious cases, "before and during" consultation can take place with a view to genuinely collective action—the appointment of a United Nations or NATO Secretary General, the mobilization of an international peacekeeping force, the rescue of a debt-ridden developing country.

Whether to consult early or late is not subject to rule-making; the answer depends so much on what the topic is. In general, if the consultation is "real"—in the sense that the nation starting the conversation is prepared to modify its views on the basis of the discussion it starts—

the conversation should be opened as early as possible. Where something more like notification is intended, but consent is needed for a decision taken, the best practice seems to be to tell those affected about the decision before they read about it in the newspapers, but not so long before as to create the opportunity to object. (President Charles de Gaulle of France was clear about this distinction. When Dean Acheson flew to Paris in October 1962 to tell him what President Kennedy had decided to do about the Soviet missiles in Cuba, de Gaulle's first question was, "Are you informing me or consulting me?")

Most international arguments about consultation stem from a sense of surprise; and timely consultation can at least obviate the use of procedural complaints as a surrogate for substantive objections. Surprise can normally be avoided by continuously informing and consulting. But no government can assume that in early discussions of a vital issue it is ascertaining the dependable and responsible reactions of other governments. Governments, like people, seldom address policy questions until they are unavoidable.

* * *

Once in office, then, a very large part of the job description for a President of the United States is *to cohere and to consult*—to glue together in an understandable strategy the many things the U.S. government is trying to do at once to make the world safe for diversity and to decide with whom, how early, how often, and how candidly to consult about carrying it into action.

Every President in living memory has been astonished, once he has moved into the White House, to discover how much of his job is "foreign policy" (and how much of foreign policy is also "domestic" politics). Asked in a January 1984 interview with *The Washington Post* what he had learned in the White House, President Reagan replied: "I think I was surprised at how much a part of the job, that is how much . . . percentage of your time and effort and thinking is devoted to the international situation." He can say that again—and so can his successors in 1989 and beyond.

Notes

Most of this writing was originally prepared as part of a longer paper entitled *Foreign Policy and Presidential Selection* for "The Presidential Selection Process," a 1984 Sloan Foundation Project at Vanderbilt University, Alexander Heard, Director.

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