

Michael Ledeen

THE FUTURE OF FOREIGN POLICY

It will depend on whether we support democratic revolution.

With the explosion of the Iran/contras aid debacle, we are once again involved in an agonizing reappraisal of American foreign policy, just as in the immediate post-Watergate period and again in the last period of the Jimmy Carter presidency. Before the essential problems are lost in the predictable sea of recrimination and moralism, it behooves us to consider the essential ingredients of the problem.

Foreign policy can no longer be discussed in its traditional—international—context, for the design and conduct of foreign policy is so deeply enmeshed in our domestic stresses and strains that it is hard to determine where the “domestic” ends and the “foreign” begins. This is not merely an intellectual problem, for it reflects the mounting strength of the Congress—indeed, the state legislatures and executives—in the foreign policy process. Each of our elected officials is busily involved in maintaining political power, and thus in catering to the moods of the public, thereby ensuring that “domestic” considerations play a major role in the foreign policy debate. With each additional player, the game becomes more confused, and nowadays it is a wonder that anything like coherent policy comes out of Washington.

Any detached observer watching the goings-on in the United States these days must be struck by the relentless congressional demands on the executive branch: more information, more control over every aspect of policy-making, more power in its execution.

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And just as the Church and Pike Commissions in the mid-1970s used their investigative powers to reshape—and severely limit—the ways in which the executive branch could carry out its business, so today we have a welter of congressional bodies insisting that the National Security Council, and indeed the President himself, bend to the legislative will.

Critics of the enhanced congressional role in foreign policy like to say that one cannot possibly conduct foreign policy with more than 500 secretaries of state. They are certainly right, but they have actually understated the case; each member of Congress has numerous staffers, and each of these aspires to the seventh floor of the State Department, or the West Wing of the White House, or the E ring of the Pentagon. So we have thousands of people in Washington involved in the formulation and conduct of American foreign policy, with the resultant confusion well known to us all.

Nor does the matter end there, for

in addition to those elected and appointed officials and staffers (and the wives and husbands of all of the above), we now have the media, actively engaged in making policy as well. It has been remarked that in many ways the media have taken over the prerogatives of a secret intelligence agency, for our journalists, editors and producers now pay for information, have secret sources inside various governments around the world, decide when and if to declassify their information, all with a claim to an absolute right to protect their sources and methods from public disclosure.

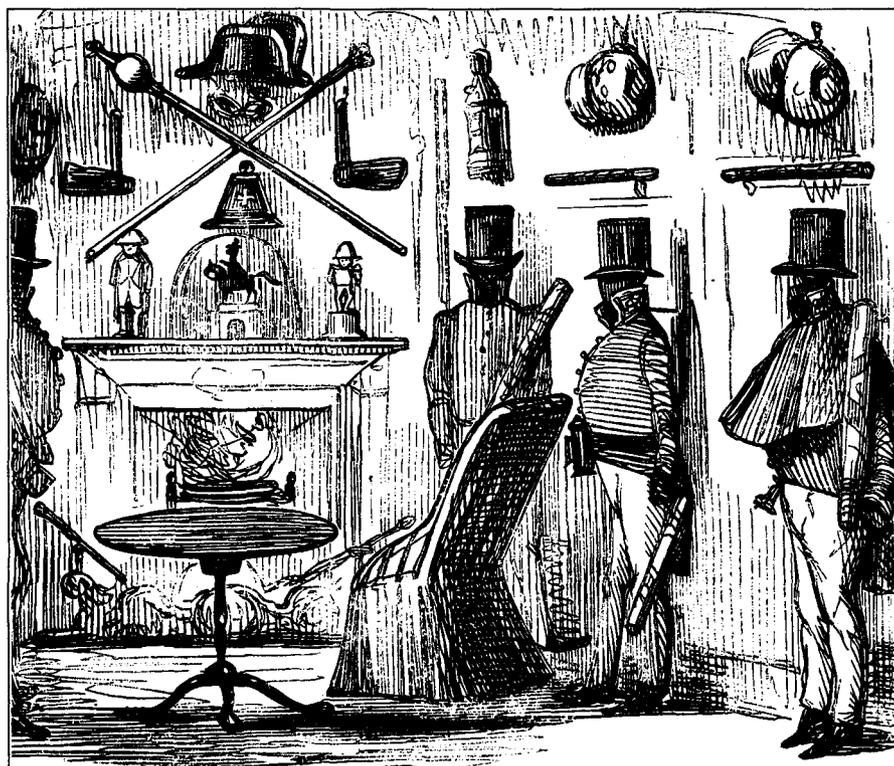
Finally, to round out the current players, we have the lawyers and the judges. The lawyers have been more active in policy-making itself, for they often hold high positions in government, or serve as legal counsel to Cabinet members, and thus get to “weigh in” on matters currently being discussed. Moreover, they give opinions

on the legality of proposed policies, and therefore they can often eliminate certain policy options before they even enter the broad debate. Judges don't have nearly so much access to the mighty as the lawyers do, but they have carved out quite an influential niche for themselves even so. For the judges are the arbiters of conflicts between the various branches of government, including the all-important one between the media and the executive branch.

When the Iran story first broke, at a time when it seemed to consist solely of an effort to use American weapons both to improve relations with Iran and ransom American hostages in Lebanon, the lawyers and judges from the Department of Justice immediately launched an investigation of the National Security Council, ostensibly to determine if any criminal activity had occurred. It was this investigation that uncovered the evidence of the contra financing scheme. Yet hardly anyone stopped to ask whether the Justice Department had any basis for its investigation. It would seem, at a minimum, that at least one prior question needed to be asked: What, if any, decision had President Reagan taken in this matter? If that decision flew in the face of law, then certainly a full investigation was in order. But if the presidential decision was lawful, then there would seem to have been no basis for the investigation.

As of the end of the year, the question of just what the President had approved was still in doubt. Yet no one had suggested that the judges and lawyers in the Justice Department had acted precipitously, or that their investigation was itself out of order. Such is the near-automatic deference paid to those in Washington who brandish legal tomes as they go about their business.

The executive branch, which is constitutionally charged with responsibility for foreign policy, is the great loser in this struggle, at least so far. To take just



one, perhaps symbolic, example: the Freedom of Information Act applies throughout the executive branch, but not at all to the legislative branch nor to the Fourth Estate—an irony that is only heightened by the media's claim to represent "the people's right to know"; the people are evidently not entitled to know what the media know, but only what the (executive branch of the) government knows.

For those who like to think in terms of social and political institutions, the easiest way to summarize the chaos that currently surrounds our foreign policy is to speak of the triumph of bureaucracy, and this fine Weberian concept has been well used by John Lukacs, among others, to describe our current plight. Yet it is a mistake to place too much emphasis on the structural aspects of the confusion that now exists; much of the bureaucracy that seems triumphant is in fact timid, and would probably be relieved to see a reassertion of real leadership from the proper quarters. The causes of our problems are fundamentally intellectual.

I have argued elsewhere at greater length¹ that our elected leaders are rarely well versed in foreign policy matters. The extreme case of this problem is the presidency, where the last man with real foreign policy experience to be elected to the White House was Richard Nixon. His three successors were at best unskilled, and at worst highly ignorant. But this is only the most dramatic example, because even within the so-called professional community, we lack real expertise. In the foreign service, as in the military and even the intelligence community, career advancement is easiest if one is a "generalist"; people who specialize find promotions harder to come by. We can see this alarming pattern throughout the foreign policy community, and I shall cite just two examples here. The first is in the field of counter-terrorism, where it has been virtually impossible to create an independent special unit, thanks to the opposition of the various military services, each of which wants to maintain control over its own "turf." The effect of this opposition is to make it extremely unattractive for career military officers to devote themselves to special operations.

The second example of the lack of specialization regards our knowledge of Iran. The CIA at the time of the Carter hostage crisis had no full-time Farsi-speaking Iran expert at work on the Iranian situation, and the head of the special crisis unit was in fact an ex-

pert in the (Arab-speaking) Gulf states. Indeed, the CIA station chief in Tehran during the Shah's time of troubles was a person who had spent his career in the Orient, did not speak Farsi, and had no particular expertise in Iranian matters. This was no surprise in an intelligence community that had lost over 800 of its most skilled covert agents when Director of Central Intelligence Stansfield Turner decided to reduce manpower in this sector.

Things had not greatly improved by the time of the Reagan hostage crisis. The gentleman in charge of Iranian affairs at CIA had recently arrived at his post from years of work on Latin American matters; he spoke no Farsi, had spent no time in Iran, and was not familiar with the leading political

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figures and institutions in the country. Typically, when the White House needed a top Iranian expert, a former intelligence officer was taken out of retirement.

These are common examples, not rare cases. The search for the "good generalist," comfortable in many regional and substantive areas, skilled in administration as well as in the conduct of diplomacy, or military and intelligence operations, leaves us without the knowledgeable, confident experts that we need in times of crisis. And the same holds true for the "intellectual" part of the policy community—the journalists. The day has passed when we had innumerable foreign correspondents who had spent the bulk of their lives overseas, mastering foreign languages and cultures, and building up their foreign sources. Nowadays, our journalists are part and parcel of the Washington establishment—which is, after all, where careers are to be made, in journalism as in government.

Since our leaders—in all branches of government, including the media—rarely have a clear notion of the national interest, they are subject to the daily whims of the political marketplace. Unsure of themselves, they are unable to enforce accountability upon their subordinates, thus giving "the system" (the bureaucrats) the ability to paralyze policy, or even to impose their own desires upon those of elected and appointed officials.

This is the basic reason that American foreign policy is often so undefined and unpredictable. Lacking clear guidelines, our own public, our allies, our enemies, and indeed members of

our own government, are legitimately and properly confused about our intentions and even about our most fundamental desires. This is the result of intellectual confusion, of political indecisiveness, and of the expansion of the policy-making community beyond the limits of reasonableness. With expansion has come a pernicious pseudo-democratic theory according to which everyone is entitled to a say in policy, regardless of his qualifications, thus slowing down policy-making to the point where even good policy is likely to fail because it is impossible to define and implement in a timely manner.

The paralysis of decision-making and implementation—along with the desire for secrecy—undoubtedly played a major role in the Iran affair.

Frustrated by years of immobility in fighting terrorism (the sum total of American actions against terrorists and their sponsors over the course of the past decade consists of the bombing of Libya and the *Achille Lauro* action—improvised in a matter of hours when it became known that the PLO terrorists who had murdered Mr. Leon Klinghoffer were going to fly from Cairo to Tunis later that same day), and by years of toing and froing over Central America, Angola, Afghanistan, and the like, the President and his associates evidently decided that here, for once, things would be managed quickly and efficiently by a small group of people. And by these standards, at least, the policy was successful. Decisions were made quickly, and secrecy was maintained (one of the most encouraging things about the affair is that even though several officials, including Secretaries Shultz and Weinberger, were opposed to the policy, no one leaked information in an effort to sabotage it—something that undoubtedly would have happened had the policy been more widely shared).

The best short analysis of our current travails has come from Michel Crozier, in *Le Mal Américain*, recently translated into English as *The Trouble with America*. Most of Crozier's book is devoted to domestic policy, but his conclusions are equally valid for international affairs. "When every group has access, one way or another, to every decision, one should not be surprised that the upshot is confusion and erratic choices." So far, so familiar, but

Crozier then goes on to make the crucial point:

When everybody is free to go in and out everywhere without shouldering the least responsibility in return, when there is no social or cultural barrier to straighten out the chaos of negotiations, long-term policies are no longer feasible.

In Crozier's words, the short term overwhelms the long term, and each and every decision becomes an exercise in public relations. Worse still, "there is no longer the time or the freedom needed to reflect and invest for the future." The consequences of this pseudo-democracy are what we are now living with:

No society can afford to deny a leading role to long-term thinking. Of course, it is not necessary that a king, for example, should be the embodiment of continuity, but this function must be carried out by political—or, failing that, social—institutions. If society will no longer tolerate elites and political institutions do not provide the necessary safeguards for long-term planning, for the preparation that it implies, as well as for the risks, then democracy falls apart, both at the bottom, where the sense of community is lost, and at the top, where the feeling for the state as a whole and the common good likewise suffers.

When our elected and appointed policy-makers are paralyzed, then others will try to take up the slack, and so we have witnessed the emergence of the two new groups of would-be policy-makers: the media and the legal community. One of the most alarming symptoms of the reign of confusion in Washington for the past decade is the degree to which journalists and lawyers have defined the foreign policy debate. Every morning at the staff meetings of members of the Cabinet, the first item on the agenda is invariably the Press Clips, rather than the often-urgent messages that have arrived during the night. For it is the Press Clips that will dictate the most pressing activity of the day: preparing for the evening news broadcasts.

And once the discussion turns to matters of actual policy, the lawyers play a major role, a task they are often quite unsuited to fulfill. Lawyers are versed in the narrow principles of American domestic laws, which are often quite out of place in the dangerous world at large. To give just one example, in 1982 two Nicaraguan defectors arrived in Washington after commandeering an airplane and escaping to Costa Rica. They had some important information about the Sandinista regime, and some State Department officials suggested that they should be made available to Congress for questioning in public sessions. "Wait a minute," one of the lawyers interrupted, "these men stole an airplane,

¹See Michael A. Ledeen, *Grave New World* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

which is grand larceny. If they go public, and the Sandinistas demand their extradition, we will probably be required to send them back." They never testified. A small example, perhaps, but symptomatic. The truly distressing thing is not that the lawyer said what he had to say, but that the officials of the Department of State did not override him. Crozier has a wonderful quotation from a tough-minded French prefect: "A prefect is there to break the law. If there was no need of breaking the law from time to time in order to protect the innocent or to assure the public welfare, there would be no need for prefects."

The wise prefect, understanding in detail the specific problems he must deal with, realizes the limitations of abstract principle, and is able to temper his commitment to principle in favor of good works. But those who have not mastered the real problems fear to make an independent decision, and take refuge in abstract principle. This practice, combined with a traditional American belief that one can legislate against shortcomings of human nature, produces a situation in which every person, and above all every governmental official, must be on guard at all times against the slightest slip that can be used in court against him.

In such an atmosphere the very notion of "national interest," or, as the Europeans like to put it, "reason of state," has little chance to serve as a fundamental guide for policy. If our government is to be based on the edicts of the lawyers and judges on the one hand, and the limits laid down by the media on the other, what hope is there for those few persons who are seeking to advance the national interests of the United States? Indeed, how can we even debate the matter? This brings us back to the beginning: foreign policy has become indistinguishable from the



general tumult, and can hardly be formulated on its own terms.

Stripped of its domestic ingredients, and separated from the confusion that currently engulfs it, foreign policy would be viewed as it is viewed in most of the world: the effort to enhance the national interest, defined in traditional geopolitical terms. This means, above all, ensuring the survival of the country and its political system, through proper attention to such matters as our own military and economic strength, the international balance of power, the condition and intentions of our enemies, and the stability of our friends.

This notion of the national interest is easily defined in theory, but it is far

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more complex in actual diplomatic and military practice, for it is sometimes hard to know who are friends and who are enemies (duplicity and deceit do play a role in the world), especially since it is sometimes necessary to shift alliances. Nations, it is often and rightly said, do not have enduring friends, but they do have enduring interests, and this in turn means that flexibility, rather than predetermined abstractions, should characterize foreign policy.

However, unlike most other countries, the United States cannot possibly conduct foreign policy on the basis of pure geopolitical interest. This is because, in addition to defending the geopolitical integrity of the nation, we are committed to defending an ideal as well: the ideal of democracy. And it follows that we should strive to expand the sphere of democracy—and limit the strength of the enemies of democracy. Our enemies recognize this fact of American existence, even if we are wont to forget it ourselves from time to time.

That is why, with very rare exceptions, we find ourselves in relative harmony with democratic countries, and in conflict—actual or potential—with anti-democratic nations and movements. And our gravest conflict is with the Soviet Union, which threatens both our geopolitical position in the world and the very existence of democracy. Thus, it should be easy to define our most fundamental national interest at the moment: to thwart the ambitions of the Kremlin, and to expand the sphere of influence of freedom and democracy.

Alas, our foreign policy is most com-

monly analyzed in terms of abstract moral standards, rather than in the terms traditionally (and properly) reserved for it: Is our security enhanced? Are we effectively combating our enemies? Are we shifting the balance of power in our favor? Instead, we hear other sorts of questions: Are our allies sufficiently moral? Shouldn't we insist that they live up to *our* standards of public morality before we support them? Why should we take risks overseas when our enemies claim to be acting in the name of our ideals?

American foreign policy must be based on our values, and in particular on the spread of the democratic revolution. But it must also be based on an informed, hard-headed analysis of the

geopolitical situation, for to act on the basis of abstract morality while sabotaging the national interest is, as Antoine Boulay de la Méurthe described a particularly idiotic act of Napoleon's, "worse than a crime, it is a blunder." Our leaders are charged with advancing the national interest, but they are poorly prepared for this task and for the most part they carry it out poorly.

Lacking proper leadership, abstract ideas have taken the place of the many prefects we need in all areas of government; none more urgently than foreign policy.

Towards a Proper Policy

Ours is a revolutionary society, and we are committed to the spread of the democratic revolution. This commitment is a constant in our history, and functions independently of temporary alliances of convenience. Sooner or later the American people will always turn against a dictator, and thus no stable long-term alliance with a dictatorship is possible for the United States, as the Shah of Iran, "Baby Doc" of Haiti, and Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos of the Philippines discovered to their sorrow.

We can justify alliances with such types—indeed, even worse than those, since we were able to maintain a wartime alliance with Stalin—only on two grounds: either a crisis so grave that such a step, although repugnant to us, is lesser than the alternative evil; or clear evidence that the dictatorship is changing in the direction of greater democracy.

So one firm principle of American foreign policy seems clear enough: no long-term alliances with dictatorships that do not respond to calls for reform. Either the dictatorship has to change, or the alliance will eventually come apart. This principle then suggests a corollary: if our strategic interests suggest a long-term alliance with a country governed by a dictator, we should try to change its regime.

In the abstract, most Americans agree with these principles, although they are rarely stated in such bald terms. Most of the time we alternate between piously stating that we should not meddle in the internal affairs of other countries (one of the refrains of the Frank Church/Walter Mondale/Stansfield Turner crowd of the 1970s), and calling for stringent action against one or another regime (from South Africa to Chile, the Philippines, and South Korea). We rarely seem to have patience for the gray area that lies between these two "pure" positions. Unlike the prefect cited by Michel Crozier, we lack the confidence to violate the principles when the real situation calls for it. For along with the admirable goals, there are good reasons for occasionally supporting even odious dictators; the best reason for such a policy is when a change would make matters even worse (as in the substitution of the Ayatollah Khomeini for the Shah of Iran, or the replacement of Somoza with the Sandinistas).

In many of these cases, we find ourselves between the rock of a hateful dictatorship and the hard place of a totalitarian or otherwise frightening opposition because we have failed to go about our business of supporting the democratic revolution all along. This was certainly the case in Iran, and was about to be repeated in the Philippines when Ferdinand Marcos attempted to steal an election from a genuinely democratic opposition, thereby giving us a miraculous opportunity to snatch victory from the jaws of impending catastrophe.

But past error is no reason for contemporary suicide, and we must be mature enough to choose the least of available evils when no attractive option exists. Yet our foreign-policy debate rarely permits such policies, because the abstract principles become weapons in the hands of our domestic political warriors, which helps guarantee that we shall have no serious policies worthy of the name. This is why the objects of our wrath seem to be determined as much by domestic considerations as by concern about pressing matters of national security. More specifically, foreign dictators—almost exclusively of the right—are

under almost constant attack from our own political left. The Shahs, the Marcoses, the Pinochets, the South Koreans, the South Africans, the Zias are all subjected to constant attack from our politicians and journalists. Their embassies are the objects of demonstrations, their economies the objects of demands for trade embargoes or other sanctions, and their diplomatic representatives the objects of virulent attack.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the American right tends to rally to the side of the dictators because they fear that the alternative to friendly tyrants is hostile tyrants. Fearing that change would damage our geopolitical position—and also fearing that if there were new Irans or Cubas, the actual plight of the people in such countries would be worsened as well—most American conservatives are uncomfortable with mass movements, and hope that somehow a more moderate, evolutionary change can be achieved.

The conservatives are right to be worried, but their prescriptions generally boil down to wishful thinking.² If one wants people in power to take risks, and change the basis of their regimes, it will usually be necessary to exert some sort of power in order to achieve the change. At a minimum, the friendly tyrant will have to be assured that his own security will be protected. If the tyrant refuses, we will then have to face a most difficult decision: do we settle for what we have and hope for the best, or do we attempt to organize and support the democratic opposition?

On the face of it, the latter alternative ought to be embraced with enthusiasm by the left, but in practice the people who demonstrate against the repressive governments with whom we are sometimes allied, are the most outspoken in denying to the American government the tools (which include secret actions) with which to advance the cause of the democratic revolution. And, to complete the vicious circle, they are far more concerned about condemning friendly tyrants than with finding effective ways to combat our actual enemies, even though our enemies are generally far more repressive than the friendly dictators, and are infinitely more dangerous to our national security.

We are thus confronted by another of those paradoxes that drive serious policy-makers to despair: the left has

²Wishful-thinking-as-foreign-policy is, of course, not unique to conservatives; Jimmy Carter seemed at times to elevate it to an art form. But the right has an abhorrence for revolution, and for the often chaotic turmoil of mass movements, and therefore shies away from involvement in such phenomena.

a natural sympathy for the kind of revolutionary policies we should pursue, but often misunderstands our priorities and has a visceral distaste for the instruments that are required to conduct those policies. The right has a visceral sympathy for the instruments, but distrusts the policies and is uncomfortable with many of the mass movements we should be supporting.

How to Advance the Democratic Revolution

In most countries, democratic movements are feared by the existing regimes, and if we wish to support the democrats it is frequently necessary to do so secretly. This is not because we prefer covert measures to overt ones, but because if it were to be known that we were supporting the democratic opposition, our relations with the existing regime would be strained, we would lose other opportunities to influence the course of events . . . and the people we are supporting might risk jail, exile, or death.³

Note that this is a condition of certain kinds of *real* support, as opposed to rhetorical endorsement, or the kind of quiet assistance that can be offered by private foundations or the National Endowment for Democracy. It is also a kind of support that has often been provided to democratic movements by European political parties, as in Portugal and Spain during the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Yet secret support is denounced by a surprising number of Americans as some sort of "dirty trick."

The confusion that surrounds the question of secrecy translates into a complete breakdown of discipline within the government (including the media). Since the practical requirement for secrecy in pursuit of legitimate, even vital national objectives is not properly understood, governmental officials have taken to leaking secrets as part of their everyday political activity. Little thought seems to be given to the practical consequences of leaking, even where people's lives are at stake, as they often have been. Worse still, leaking is often part of a deliberate attempt to sabotage policy—this is an extension of the pseudo-democracy discussed ear-

³To take just one example: in my view of things, the best way to conduct policy towards South Africa right now is to give covert support to democratic opponents of apartheid, whether white or black, all the while pursuing an overt policy of "constructive engagement." And the covert program should also include efforts to protect black and white moderates from the extremists who are trying to terrorize (and who often kill) their moderate opponents. Obviously, the covert program would not be permitted to function if it were a publicly announced policy.

lier, as each person arrogates to himself the prerogative of the highest policy-makers in the land.

The issue here is not whether all material classified "secret" should be so considered; there is a lot of stuff that is improperly classified. But it is simply impossible for a government to conduct its business if secrets cannot be kept. For we will not get the truth from people if they cannot speak in complete confidence that what they say will remain within a small group. And if we cannot keep our support for democratic movements secret when circumstances so demand, then we will be unable to encourage the democratic revolution as we should. Our would-be allies will take their chances without us, rather than risking the worst if they accept our help.

To put the matter bluntly, the democratic revolution needs a good CIA, or something like it. Had we had one, and had President Carter had the knowledge and the will to conduct an effective foreign policy, the United States might have been able to support the democratic forces within the Sandinista coalition that toppled Somoza in 1979, instead of standing by and hoping that somehow the Ortegas and Tomas Borge would not pursue their plan to install a Leninist regime in Nicaragua and export like-minded organizations throughout Central America. If Carter had done that, we would today be celebrating the success of the democratic revolution in all of Central America, instead of wondering what the outcome will be.

And note that we indeed meddled in Nicaragua, cutting off Somoza's weapons at a crucial moment (and pressuring our allies to do the same), thereby guaranteeing the Sandinista victory. But in this game, medals are only given for winning, not for good intentions.⁴

So far, the discussion has been limited to cases where we seek to encourage the spread of democracy to countries that are basically friendly to us. The experience of the past fifteen years is that our lack of clarity about our objectives, combined with the intellectual deficiencies of our leaders, has produced an incoherent foreign policy. It should be clear that things are

⁴The same considerations hold for the Philippines, even though we "lucked out" at the end. We should have been supporting the democratic opposition in the Philippines, both in the political universe and within the armed forces, for years, so that if the most widely predicted scenario came to pass (Marcos wins the elections, polarizing the country between the regime and the Communist insurrection), we would have had something to work with against both extremes.

even worse with regard to our enemies.

As Jean-François Revel has so eloquently observed in *How Democracies Perish*, we have somehow managed to become far more vicious toward our friends than toward our enemies, to the point where there is a systematic double standard in our evaluation of international affairs. On occasion—as during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon—journalists and politicians actually brag about the double standard, as if there were some noble purpose served in giving our adversaries the benefit of every doubt while holding our friends to the highest possible standards. Some of this had to do with the omnipresence of the lawyers, who seem to delight in telling governmental officials that anything they actually do risks running into some statute or other, and who can generally count upon outspoken support from a large segment of the media and the academic community.

Winston Churchill once complained about such people, who, he observed, permitted our enemies to trample every moral and legal principle into the dirt when it served their purposes, while simultaneously paralyzing us by demanding that we observe every moral and legal scruple in our efforts to respond. The easiest place to see this frightening tendency at work is in the field of counter-terrorism, where the terrorists—solidly supported by our enemies, from the Soviet Union and its satellites to Iran, Syria, and Libya—have been murdering Americans and other Westerners for years, while our government forbids any of its officials

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to engage in acts of individual reprisal against the terrorists.

There are two legal measures that forbid us to conduct an effective counter-terrorist policy. One is a law that prohibits American officials from working with murderers; the other is an executive order, dating to 1975, prohibiting any official of the American government to conduct, order, encourage, or facilitate assassination. One can applaud the intent of these measures, but the effect is disastrous, for not only does it mean that we cannot go after individual terrorists and kill them (or hire others to do so, or encourage others to do so), but it also means that we cannot recruit terrorists to our side in order to find out the intentions of the terrorist organizations and their sponsors. When such restrictions are added to the bureaucratic paralysis that characterizes our system, the lack of decisive and sustained action is inevitable.

We are therefore left with inferior intelligence and an unsavory choice between rhetoric and massive retaliation against the terrorists. For the effect of these moral measures is that while it is illegal for us to kill Abu Abas, it is quite all right to bomb Tripoli and Benghazi in self-defense. Yet if we are concerned—as we should be—with innocent victims, the bombing is far more dangerous than efforts to avenge the murder of dozens of Americans, starting with that of Leon Klinghoffer on the *Achille Lauro*. And quite aside from the question of retaliation, it is absolutely vital to our national security to be able to penetrate the terrorist organizations—and the intelligence services of those countries who arm, train, and dispatch the terrorists.

Not a single voice has been heard from our government—in any branch—calling for a change in these legal measures. And the reason is not hard to imagine: our officials are afraid of the pious denunciations that would immediately be aimed at the advocates of change. So we are hamstrung by the lawyers, and by the journalists who would immediately attack any leader who spoke the truth on this matter.

This in turn is part of a much larger American problem: the reluctance to admit that we have enemies. We strain mightily to pretend that our differences with the Soviet Union are the result of poor communication, or reciprocal misunderstanding, or ill will on the part of this or that official, when in reality ours is one of the fundamental political and indeed ideological conflicts of modern history. And unless one of us abandons its world view, it is hard to imagine the conflict going away. So that while it is important to talk about how best to “manage” the conflict, we should be clear that the

Soviet Union is our enemy, and that the Soviets will do their best to defeat us.

The American resistance to the notion that some conflicts may not be subject to resolution by agreeable methods is the subject of a curious but stimulating book by Mona Harrington.⁵ She says:

At the core of the [American] myth is the conviction that human relations are, by their nature, harmonious, that *serious* conflict in human societies is unnatural and unnecessary. Or to put it another way, differences in interest among different groups in the nation or among nations, while inevitable, are essentially superficial. According to the myth, there exists, beneath such contention, a beneficent natural order within which all interests are complementary . . .

Harrington argues convincingly that the myth gets in the way of properly addressing some of the most serious

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social problems we face, and the same holds true for international affairs. For if we believe that, given sufficient good will, our international conflicts can be resolved amiably, we shall surely fail to make the crucial choices that, alas, we really face.

I believe that we must thwart the international objectives of the Soviet Union, and that we must directly challenge several of the non-Soviet regimes that are currently waging terrorist war against us. If it is proper to support the democratic revolution in countries like South Africa, Chile, and the Philippines, it is even more urgent to do so in Nicaragua, Libya, and Iran. And the fact that one can easily find huge American crowds to demonstrate in favor of moves against the former three countries, but almost never against the latter, shows how badly confused we are about our national interests. Not that the democratic revolution in South Africa, Chile, and the Philippines is not a worthy objective; but that it is worthy *and urgent* in Nicaragua, Libya, and Iran. The first three offend our sensibilities; the second three threaten our security as well as offend our sensibilities.

As for the Soviet Union, we need to apply the same kind of approach, but of course in a more restrained and subtle way, for the requirement of

⁵Mona Harrington, *The Dream of Deliverance in American Politics* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

avoiding nuclear war is as close to a categorical imperative as one can find in foreign policy. Yet this does not mean that we should abandon the notion of linkage between our behavior and theirs. Again, if our attitude toward trade with and investment in South Africa is linked to the abolition of apartheid, should we not take a similar position toward the Soviet gulag, or the Kremlin's expansionist policies in Southwest Asia and Central America? Why should we extend credits to Soviet banks when the Kremlin spends hard currency to finance guerrilla movements in our hemisphere? Why should we permit high-tech devices to be sold to the Soviet Union when these devices are going to be used against us? And these questions acquire greater urgency when it is realized that our money and our technology are desperately needed by the Soviets,

because they are unable to compete with us over the broad spectrum of technological advance, and are unable, without our help, to create the wealth they need to finance their vast empire.

There is a great deal that can be done to hamstring the Soviets, to make them pay for their own grave internal errors, and to demonstrate that while our problems are serious indeed, theirs are infinitely more threatening. Indeed, the failure of the Soviet system is the most serious threat to peace in the world today, and if we had a government worthy of the name, it would be planning on how to deal with the eventual breakdown (or breakup?) of the Soviet Empire. So far as I know, nothing of the sort is going on, and our efforts to acquire greater leverage over the Soviets in the areas of international banking and technology transfer move by fits and starts.

Meanwhile, we should do our best to bring down the far weaker regimes that have been carrying out murderous attacks against us and our friends. All Africa would cheer at the fall of Qaddafi, and all reasonable people in the Middle East would welcome the departure of the Assad regime from Syria. There are many forces in both countries that long for a chance to act in this direction, just as countless Iranians yearn for the opportunity to undo the horrible damage done to their country by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Not all of these regimes are Soviet proxies (Iran, for example, is certainly independent of any guidance from Moscow, and Assad undoubtedly maintains considerable

autonomy, albeit less so than Khomeini), but all are enemies of ours. To defeat one or more of them would work wonders in the international atmosphere, and marvelously focus the minds of the gentlemen who sit in the Politburo.

Yet, by the same sort of confusion that leads us to offer privileged trading status to the likes of Ceausescu's Romania, and to toy with the idea of offering similar rewards to the Soviet Union in return for token gestures on emigration or the release of a handful of dissidents, we somehow convinced ourselves that the best way to deal with the problem of American hostages in southern Lebanon was to offer weapons to the regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini. From the standpoint of the national interest, we should have been working toward the replacement of that regime with something more civilized, rather than focusing our passions on the question of a handful of Americans, no matter how anguishing was the thought of those Americans in the hands of radical Shiites. This was simply one more case of an abstractly moral goal—the liberation of innocent Americans—overwhelming a serious national objective. But while this is the most celebrated such case in recent years, it is far from the most serious one.

The defeat of our enemies, and thwarting the Kremlin's ambitions, should be the foundations of our policy to advance the cause of the democratic revolution.

Can this policy, or anything like it, be designed and implemented by an American government in the 1980s? Or are our internal problems so serious that these must remain interesting ruminations inapplicable to the actual conduct of government? I am by nature optimistic, and I believe that it can be achieved. But it will require a tremendous effort, and it will require a commitment not only to carry out such a policy, but to educate a new generation of Americans to the realities of international affairs, and hence to the requirements for our own people. It will require a dedication to excellence, a willingness to enforce reasonable standards—and thus hold individuals accountable for their errors—and a willingness to make decisions rather than submit every policy to endless debate. As Michel Crozier puts it in the closing lines of *The Trouble with America*: “Without commitment and care nothing can be built that will have a chance to last. And there won't be commitment and care without the assertive power of individual leadership; in other words, of individual leaders willing to run the risk of failure and the more basic risk of freedom itself.” □

THE NATION'S PULSE



WHAT OIL CRISIS?

by Richard J. Myers

To hear the experts tell it, the United States is lurching toward a reprise of the 1970s energy crisis. With the collapse in world oil prices last year—from about \$25 a barrel in January to, briefly, about \$11 in July—U.S. oil production declined. Oil consumption and oil imports rose. By the early 1990s, oil imports will reach about half of total U.S. requirements. With similar trends at work in the rest of the industrial world, demand for OPEC oil will surely climb. As it does, the experts warn, OPEC will use its power to manipulate the oil market and boost oil prices—as it did in 1973 and again after the fall of the Shah in 1979 and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war a year later. The U.S. will be subject to another price shock or, worse, interruptions in supply. U.S. foreign policy and economic growth, the experts say, will be hostage to the caprice of the oil producers' cartel. A global crisis looms.

This alarmist view is shared by the energy industries, many analysts in academia and think tanks, and Ronald Reagan's Department of Energy. "Somebody needs to sound the energy warning," said Energy Secretary John Herrington in March, when he released a 400-page assessment of America's energy prospects called *Energy Security*. Left unchecked, he added, today's trends "have serious implications for national security."

The doomsday rhetoric of Herrington and his fellow experts is wildly inappropriate, and shows a curious reluctance to learn the lessons of the 1970s. They could begin by reviewing the consensus predictions made by the experts of those earlier days.

The federal government's response to the oil embargo of 1973-74 was a policy document called "Project Independence." In a massive miscalculation, it forecast that oil imports in 1985 would be higher than total oil consumption in that year proved to be. As recently as 1981, the energy experts also agreed

that oil would cost \$100 a barrel by 2000 which, coupled with ever-rising oil imports, would surely bankrupt the U.S. economy.

All through the 1970s, the experts in government and the energy industry predicted that the U.S. was running out of natural gas. Chronic, growing shortages were inevitable. Hence the Synthetic Fuels Corporation, a quasi-governmental agency endowed with \$88 billion to be disbursed to large synthetic fuels projects in the form of loan guarantees and price supports.

Until at least the mid-1970s, many of the experts insisted that the U.S. would need 800-or-so nuclear power plants by the turn of the century. And with that many nuclear plants, the U.S. would quickly run short of cheap uranium fuel which, in turn, led the experts to press for accelerated development of breeder reactors.

Finally, the pessimism about oil and gas and the high expectations for synthetic fuels and electric power demand produced a consensus that more than two billion tons of U.S. coal production would be needed by 2000.

None of these hysterical forecasts

came to pass. Oil prices will not reach \$100 a barrel by the turn of the century; in fact, it's unlikely they will exceed \$30 a barrel (in today's dollars). Instead of chronic shortages of natural gas, the U.S. has an apparently chronic surplus. There is no evidence that gas supply will be constrained until well into the next century. The Synthetic Fuels Corporation collapsed, mercifully, before it squandered more than a few billion dollars on plants that produce synthetic oil and gas at prices three or four times today's level. The U.S. will not need 800 nuclear plants by the year 2000, although it may need a few more than the 100-or-so now in operation. And, of course, coal production will not approach two billion tons a year by the turn of the century. In fact, reasonable expectations indicate that a little more than half that will be quite enough. (That's up from production of 884 million tons last year.)

In spite of the lessons of the recent past, there are several myths about energy policy still being perpetuated today. First among them is the mistaken

notion that non-OPEC oil and natural gas production is now declining inevitably, which will allow OPEC to position its boot on the world's throat. This view takes no account of the surge in non-OPEC oil production that followed OPEC's attempts to run up oil prices in the 1970s. Spurred on by higher prices, non-OPEC production rose by almost 30 percent between 1979 and 1985—from about 21.5 million barrels a day in 1980 to its current rate of almost 27 million barrels a day. Even in the U.S., where the experts predicted a sharp drop in oil output, production between 1975 and 1985 was flat to slightly increasing. If OPEC tries to drive up oil prices again in the 1990s, the same non-OPEC production surge will happen again. Although today's low prices are depressing exploration and production in the U.S. and elsewhere, tomorrow's higher prices will reverse that decline.

To this the experts reply that it will take many years before higher prices encourage increased production. That fear is unfounded. Recent history shows clearly that the market, left to itself, responds quite rapidly—not overnight, to be sure, but in months rather than in years. For example, in 1979-80, OPEC managed to drive the price of oil up to nearly \$40 a barrel. It became clear rather quickly that this price would not stick and within a year, by 1981, crisis and shortage had turned into outright surplus.

Another example: in the late 1970s, U.S. natural gas demand outran available supply because federal price controls at the wellhead had crippled new exploration. In 1978, Congress passed the Natural Gas Policy Act, which partly deregulated wellhead prices. Within a very short time, shortage had turned into sufficiency and by 1981 or 1982, sufficiency had turned into surplus. The response to rising prices was so quick and so effective that the gas surplus soared to about 4.5 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) in 1983—roughly one-quarter of U.S. annual gas consumption—and stands at about three trillion cubic feet even today. →



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