

American Foreign Policy: Learning to Lead Anew

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In the spring of 2004, Harlan Cleveland agreed to give a short presentation on the “State of the World.” He narrowed the assignment slightly by focusing on American foreign policy, but as he pointed out, this was only a slight modification since the United States was involved in everything. His presentation was given at a retreat of Board of Directors of The American Forum for Global Education held at the Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, near Tarrytown, New York, on May 24 and 25, 2004.

Those present believed that the presentation merited a wider audience. Harlan kindly agreed to “reconstruct” his presentation and update it to include some more recent poll numbers and some additional remarks which went beyond what was in his original talk.

Andrew F. Smith
President

In the final decade of the 20th century, the United States was emerging as powerful but prudent.

We had seen the remarkably peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it the end of a Cold War featuring a nuclear holocaust that was physically possible yet somehow morally and politically inconceivable.

We were watching China, then India, begin to emerge as the great economic powers they had long been in prospect and potential. Looking across the Pacific, we saw a Japan that had “made it” economically stalled in a decade of recession, and still culturally reluctant about the increasingly open world. And we could see some smaller “Asian tigers” wriggling free from authority systems that had held them back from joining that world.

Across the Atlantic, we had witnessed with admiration Western Europe’s economic integration and its outreach to the parts of Eastern Europe that had spent much of the century in thrall to the Soviet Union. But we also watched, with apprehension, Europe’s weakening will to project the values of European civilization beyond Europe’s geography. Jean Monnet, a prime founding father of European unity, had told me long ago that the last big boulder in the path to the unified Europe he envisioned would be developing “a European foreign policy.” That imagined boulder is all too real today – Europe’s trouble in dealing with the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s bore witness.

Elsewhere, we watched with sympathy as our hemispheric neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean each struggled with its growing pains of democratic politics and market economics. With the Cold War in the wastebasket, we were less paranoid about the Cuban exception to this trend. We grieved over stagnation and epidemic disease in Africa – but pretended not to notice until nongovernments, notably the Gates Foundation, started showing the way. And we watched the Middle East, out of one corner of our collective eye, as authoritarian governance, Islamic extremism, and backward-looking schooling held a whole region back from developing its rich intellectual, cultural, and economic potentials – and kept frustrating efforts to patch up the long-running, hatred-generating dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

We Americans and our government had become major players in every world region. But we were underwhelmed by geographically regional approaches to issues which were turning out to be functional and often global too – issues such as eradication of infectious diseases, international civil aviation, international trade, cooperation on fiscal policies, global information flows, agricultural research for development, UN peacekeeping and peacemaking, ocean law, refugees and displaced persons, the ozone layer, global warming, and global weather forecasting.

Meanwhile, “international relations” had become, more and more, deep mutual involvements in each other’s “internal affairs.” Some of this interpenetration was widely applauded; the Marshall Plan for European recovery, 1948-52, was popular for different reasons on both sides of the Atlantic. Some involvements raised eyebrows even among their sponsors: peacetime espionage and clandestine operations were chronically suspect.

Issues about human rights, such as treatment of political prisoners, the status of women, race discrimination, and a whole catalogue of economic/social rights reaching deep into what used to be regarded as the “domestic policy” of nations – all these have also proved sensitive to those who govern and try to influence governance. They have often been resisted as political interference, depending of course on whose ox was gored.

Much of the mutual interpenetration wasn’t even thought of as “foreign policy:” trade and investment, much of the cross-border aid for public health, cultural and educational exchange, and especially the increasingly uninhibited flows of information. In practice all of these are handled partly, and increasingly, by “nongovernments” – civil society’s many operating agencies.

In the half century after World War II, more and more international *operations* had been delegated by nation-states to international organizations – both to soften (by spreading the responsibility for) the political impact of “intervening in internal affairs” and also to spread the costs as widely as possible among donor countries, to help the largest

contributing governments reassure their taxpayers that “we are not in this by ourselves.” This trend did not apply just to economic and financial aid. It was equally in evidence each time a peace-and-security crisis created the need for neutral mediators, large-scale refugee relief, armed peacekeeping forces, and resources for post-hostilities peacebuilding.

Of course many functions are so inherently international that governments have to pool their vaunted sovereignties because the dangers of uninhibited enterprise are so great in a “global commons.” The largest, wettest and emptiest parts of our global surround – the world’s oceans, the atmosphere, and outer space – were early and obvious candidates for the Global Commons. So are some widespread environmental impacts. And so, increasingly, are issues of access and barriers to the global information flow that multiplies as more and more of the world’s people make use of far-reaching information technologies and communicate via the Internet and its World Wide Web.

In these circumstances, what was “American foreign policy” at the dawn of the 21st Century? A glance around would have revealed that we the people had already made much of the foreign policy we need, without the benefit of a single position paper from the National Security Council. For example:

- 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 our Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and the United Nations founding documents we helped write. We can’t accomplish this for everyone just yet, even in our own country, but we’ll continue to work at it 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, and they with us. It ought to be possible for us more often to be leading the progressive, anti-poverty, pro-development and pro-peace forces in world politics.

- The 59 years since the end of World War II are replete with reasons why we need a United Nations with the capacity to act – to act in our interest, or to bless a “coalition of the willing” that is ready to act. It’s important for us to remember that the United Nations is not “the other guys;” the UN is us, complicated to be sure by the fact that we have to act in the collective interest of many others as well. So it’s a first essential of American foreign policy to work through the United Nations we helped so much to create, building up its capacity to act for purposes we can make collective if we keep on being creative about multilateral systems.
- We know now that, for us, nuclear weapons are unusable except for deterrence. After all, we were willing to let one war drift into stalemate (Korea) and lose another war (Vietnam) without using the Big Bang ourselves. But we still want to prevent nuclear spread – and that policy will make much more sense worldwide when, as we should, we cut our own bulging stockpiles to the minimum levels needed for deterrence.
- We think we have the world’s best allies – and want to stay close to them. Some of them handle some economic or social issues better than we do, and maybe we have something to learn from them. When it comes to our joint use of NATO, in Europe or farther afield, we’ll be a loyal member of the club, but the Europeans are going to have to assume more of the responsibility.
- We are coming to realize that turbulence and uncertainty in the developing world, the product of rising expectations, rising resentments, and rising frustration, are now bound to drive our older, more settled relationships – that is, our Atlantic and Pacific alliances.
- We’ve come to think that Asia and the Pacific, as the fastest growing region and maybe the most dynamic during the coming generation, needs much more attention than the U.S. has latterly been giving it – even though its

dynamism is partly the product of our earlier aid. Our relations with China and India especially need to be put permanently on a front burner. The future relations between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, and the timing and method of reuniting the two Koreas, won’t be masterminded in Washington; but we do have to make sure that whatever happens comes about peacefully.

- In the Middle East, we want whatever peaceful outcome the Arabs and Israelis can agree on, and we’ll even help it along, whatever it turns out to be, through aid and security guarantees.
- The deterioration of Africa spells big trouble for us. The continent is a chronic venue for local wars and humanitarian disasters, and the spread of global epidemics. We should be taking more initiative to bring the richer countries together for a sustained effort to ward off these troubles.
- Fidel Castro is a thorn in our side, but with the Soviet Union imploded and the Cold War over he’s certainly no “threat.” Much more important are: maintaining Latin America as a zone of nonviolence, developing a workable immigration policy with Mexico, keeping relations with Canada as friendly and free of minor scraps as close cousins can be, and developing relations with Brazil that are fitting for one of the next world-class economic powers.
- We want fair trade – untrammelled trade seems to bring in its train too many lost jobs and too much uncertainty, so we think markets work better when they are regulated by agreement. That’s what most of the rest of the world thinks too, so we ought to get on with good-faith bargaining. Since our farm subsidies – and Europe’s – are getting in the way, let’s work out a long-range plan to enable more American farmers to get into other lines of work and American consumers to benefit from the best and least expensive farm products wherever produced.
- Our balance of trade is ridiculously out of kilter. We can’t seem to sell enough to foreigners,

even of the information gadgetry we've helped invent, to pay for their oil and steel and small cars and color televisions. So we're obviously going to have to work even harder to produce and deliver more efficiently what the rest of the world needs – including all sorts of things and processes and ideas that are waiting for us to invent them. And we'd better quickly develop new energy sources that will enable Europeans and North Americans to cut back on oil from the Arabs and others whose role as suppliers is so undependable.

- We really want to see a fair shake for the world's poor, but the way foreign aid now works isn't close to getting the job done. We would go for a much larger and better targeted effort, *if it's truly international in scope and management*, and *if our leaders can convince us that the aid will get to the people who need it most* – not just enrich the already affluent here and abroad. We don't need to worry about other donors providing their fair share: the Europeans and Japanese already pony up a good deal more *per capita* than we do.
- We're proud of the science and technology that has learned to use outer space, not only to get humans to the Moon and robots beyond that, but for worldwide human benefits – satellite communications, arms control inspection, weather forecasting, resource sensing from space, monitoring environmental risks. Global systems will keep having to be organized to secure the human benefits future space technologies make both possible and necessary. Plenty of international cooperation is going to be required, and U.S. leadership is going to be indispensable. (It's hard to understand why – since President John F. Kennedy's initiatives on satellite communication and the World Weather Watch – no national political leader has grabbed this quintessentially American torch.)

That was my snapshot of the American people's foreign policy at the start of the new Millennium. But in the first years of

this century, our long record of American leadership for constructive international cooperation has been seriously derailed – by American leaders.

Shocked by the size and suddenness of the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, the U.S. government first acted with wide popular and international approval – invading Afghanistan, brushing aside the Taliban and chasing after al Qaeda, the loose-knit terrorist group blamed for the first attack on the U.S. mainland in more than 200 years.

But then a series of secret decisions in Washington and unilateral moves elsewhere, the product of ideological mindsets and deeply flawed intelligence, embroiled U.S. armed forces in invading Iraq. For the invasion itself, they were, if anything, overprepared; Iraq's defenders soon melted into the countryside and the inner cities. For what happened next, our forces were woefully unprepared.

The top Pentagon planners evidently assumed that their role would be as liberators: a cheering, friendly Iraqi population, freed at last from thirty years of dictatorship, would self-organize to put their own country back together.

But even in the most favorable historical case, when the Allies pushed the Germans out of an already "co-belligerent" Italy during World War II, an ambitious occupation authority – the Allied Control Commission – had to be put in place with security forces at the ready and a civil affairs staff moving north with the troops to establish local governance, fix power plants, rebuild ports and roads, and provide huge inputs of food and fuel for many months before a traumatized people could start organizing their own democratic future.

In Iraq, contrary to all the experience of successful post-hostilities planning, the "civil affairs" (G-5) elements were initially held back in offices in Kuwait, instead of accompanying the fighting forces as they advanced – until looting and disorder finally awakened the Americans to the need for an occupation authority.

Even then, our occupiers' first big move was to disband Iraq's forces that would sooner or later be needed to take over internal security from the occupation. The

disbanded soldiers, their pay cut off, were sent home with their weapons, disgruntled and jobless. Some of them soon became part of a scattered insurgency against the occupation led and reinforced by Saddam loyalists, resentful Shiite clerics, and a growing number of terrorists – al Qaeda and copycats – from abroad.

Later, after I read General Zinni's *10 Ways We Botched Iraq* and the verdict in an instantly famous book by a CIA official calling himself Anonymous ("an avaricious, premeditated, unprovoked war"), I came to regard my own early critique – "an unnecessary war" – as unduly pallid by comparison.

The resulting mess radiated far beyond the borders of Iraq. The doctrine of preemptive war compounded the U.S. Administration's evident reluctance to consult NATO allies or work with the United Nations. Commentators thoughtful enough to be swayed by evidence, such as Tom Friedman, David Brooks, and George Will, favored the Iraq war decision at first (as did a majority of Americans misled by what they were hearing from Washington), then started changing their minds. Congress was inert and compliant, voting large grants of authority and huge sums of money in a rush that precluded a serious national debate about either the decision to go to war or an exit strategy from the mess to which we were deeply and unilaterally committed.

The impact on public attitudes in Europe and "the Muslim world" – crucial segments just now of what our Founders called "the general opinion of Mankind" – was sudden and profound. Daniel Yankelovich, our most thoughtful interpreter of public opinion, has assembled some numbers that tell an appalling story. (The quotes in this section come from a presentation by Yankelovich titled "The War on Terror as a Political Issue," which I summarized for a computer teleconference I moderated during June 2004 for the International Leadership Forum of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute.)

The war in Iraq, and U.S. words and actions since

9/11, have been hardly short of devastating to our relations with the countries where most Muslims live ("the Muslim world"). The data cited here are drawn from Gallup, Zogby, and Pew polls. They show, for example, that:

- Only 18 percent of citizens in the Muslim countries polled believe the 9/11 attacks were carried out by Arabs; 11 percent approve of President Bush; and only 7 percent think the "West understands Muslim customs and culture."
- The ratio of people holding favorable opinions of the United States ranges from a high of 13 percent in Egypt to 3 percent in Saudi Arabia. It's only 6 percent in Morocco and Jordan, which I think most Americans would list among the more friendly Arab countries.
- Majorities in 7 out of 8 Muslim countries are worried about a military threat from the U.S. (The figure for Turkey, our ally in NATO, is 71 percent.)
- In the "Muslim countries" taken together, 56 percent of the people "believe Iraqis will be worse off post-Hussein." (In the U.S., 84 percent think Iraqis will be better off.)

In sum (mostly Yankelovich's words): Muslim anti-Americanism threatens our nation's security. Mistrust of the U.S. is not confined to extremists; it makes recruitment of terrorists fatally easy; it also makes it easy to channel frustration onto the U.S., and supports extremist religious clerics in their jihad against us. Our use of military force exacerbates Muslim resentment of the U.S., and makes the U.S. seem anti-Muslim – in a world with 57 Muslim nations and 1.3 billion Muslims.

"Majorities in most Western European countries consider the U.S. a threat to world peace." That generalization applies to all the NATO allies with the ironic exception of Germany and Italy which "fell slightly below the 50 percent mark." (The summary of sur-

veys doesn't include Japan, so we don't know whether the World War II "axis" would be unanimously pro-American.)

"Anti-Americanism has increased rapidly in Europe." In Germany, Russia, and France the percentages of "unfavorable opinion of the U.S." doubled from 2002 to 2003. Italy's unfavorable opinions went from 23 percent to 59 percent; they more than tripled in Britain and quadrupled in Poland. In Turkey, where the U.S. already had a 55 percent unfavorable rating, it soared to 84 percent. (Pew: Global Attitudes Project.)

"The massive loss of goodwill among our European allies" has lots of "negative consequences." Among them: "We can no longer count on our traditional allies to help dispel the poisonous anti-Americanism in the Muslim world."

Summary research conclusion from the Pew project: "The war [in Iraq] has widened the rift between Americans and Western Europeans, further inflamed the Muslim world, softened support for the war on terror, and significantly weakened global public support for the pillars of the post-World War II era – the UN and the North Atlantic Alliance."

The sudden turn in "the general opinion of Mankind" is even more serious than the reluctance of so many governments currently to cooperate with the United States in so many ways. Governments can and do change their policies and their international behavior much more rapidly than bodies politic typically change their minds.

Within the United States, the mind-shift was equally sudden. "Before Saddam's capture, a majority approved the direction of the war on terror." The military action in Afghanistan was approved by 71 percent of Americans, and 59 percent approved going to war in Iraq. Were things going well in the war on terror? Sixty-five percent of us said they were.

Indeed, "Saddam's capture raised public hopes, because the public linked him directly

to 9/11." "War with Iraq has made the U.S. safer," 56 percent told Gallup. Capturing Saddam spiked Bush ratings, according to both NY Times/CBS News and Gallup polls in December 2003. "Saddam's capture also greatly elevated voter expectations." For example, 70 percent of Americans thought it would "restore peace and stability in the Middle East," and 54 percent even thought "WMDs [weapons of mass destruction] will be found."

BUT: "These expectations have now been dashed, damaging public support for the war in Iraq." Support for the proposition that "going to war was 'worth it'" slipped from 59 percent in December '03 to 45 percent in May '04; the view that the "war is going badly" jumped from 43 percent to 57 percent in two months, March to May '04; and the judgment that the country is "on the right track," which drew 56 percent approval in April '03, plummeted to 30 percent by May '04.

In consequence, says Yankelovich, "the public's fears have been aroused." (In an ABC News/Washington Post poll 65 percent agreed in May '04 that "the U.S. has gotten bogged down in Iraq.") Approval of "Bush handling the situation in Iraq" dropped from 77 percent in April '03 to 39 percent in May '04; also in May of this year, 59 percent of Americans judged that Bush does not have "a clear plan for Iraq."

The international fallout of the mostly unilateral decisions that have produced "the mess we are in" contrasts dramatically and sadly with the instant, almost universal "rally 'round the United States" reaction in world opinion (including the opinions of governments) just after the 9/11 attacks. For the U.S. government to have blown that golden opportunity to keep building international institutions with "the capacity to act" runs directly counter to what eleven U.S. Presidents, of both political parties and with mostly bipartisan support in Congress, had been aiming to accomplish ever since before the Second World War was even won.

A dozen years ago, I tried to sum up in a paragraph the kind of “world order” that seemed to be developing – if we kept working at it:

The real-life management of peace worldwide seems bound to require a Madisonian world, a world of bargains and accommodations among national and functional factions, a world in which peoples are able to agree on what to do next together without feeling the need (or being forced by global government) to agree on religious creeds, economic canons, or political credos. A practical pluralism, not a unitary universalism, is the likely destiny of the human race.

Working toward this goal consisted largely of initiatives born in Washington and backed by U.S. willingness to pay what they would cost. Other nations mostly followed suit because they lacked the resources or the power or the will to generate alternatives.

We could lead like this because we could afford it. Our economic locomotive kept moving ahead without too much sputtering – though we meanwhile opened up the widest rich-poor gap ever. Our military technology was still dominant even if our volunteer troop strength came to be thinly spread on many static fronts. And our nuclear stockpiles, though largely irrelevant once the Cold War was over, provided an illusion of overwhelming strength.

(Continued on page 8)

A B O U T T H E A U T H O R

Harlan Cleveland, political scientist and public executive, is chairman emeritus of The American Forum. A Princeton graduate and Rhodes Scholar at Oxford in the 1930s, he was executive director of economic operations for the Allied Control Commission in Italy during World War II, and later chief of the UN's relief and rehabilitation mission in China. Returning to Washington in 1948, he joined the Marshall Plan agency, first managing its aid programs in Asia, and later becoming (as Assistant Director for Europe of the Mutual Security Agency) the Washington-based supervisor of the fourth and final year of the Marshall Plan for European recovery.

In early 1953 he left Washington for New York to become Executive Editor, and later also Publisher, of *The Reporter* magazine. In 1956 he was appointed Dean of the Maxwell Graduate School for Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. He was a delegate from New York State to the 1960 Democratic National Convention which selected John F.

Kennedy to run for President. In 1961 he moved back to Washington to serve in the Kennedy Administration as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed him as Ambassador to NATO (first in Paris, then in Brussels). From 1969 to 1974 he was President of the University of Hawaii, then joined The Aspen Institute to create a new Program in International Affairs. From 1980 to 1987 he was the founding dean of the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, a new graduate school and research institute and one of the nation's early centers for leadership education.

Harlan Cleveland had been a Fellow of the World Academy of Art and Science since 1977; during the first decade of what he called his “nonretirement,” he served as its President, from 1991 to 2000. He has authored hundreds of magazine articles and 12 books, mostly on executive leadership and international affairs. He has received 22 honorary degrees, the U.S. Medal of Freedom, Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson Award, the Peace Corps' Leader for Peace Award, and decorations from the Republic of China (1947) and the government of Italy (1946 and 1988). He was the 1981 co-winner (with Bertrand de Jouvenel of France) of the Prix de Talloires, a Switzerland-based international award for “accomplished generalists.”



This old-style leadership has lost its magic and mislaid its checkbook. It can be replaced only by what, pragmatically, works: leadership constrained by genuine consultation, initiatives burdened by burden-sharing, the pluralistic management of uncentralized systems.

The net effect of this half-century was thus to dwindle – relatively – America’s capacity to call the tune by paying the piper. That was, indeed, the unannounced and mostly unconscious purpose of American foreign policy. The more weapons we export, the more successful economic tigers we help develop, the more information hardware and software we invent and promote worldwide, the more we open our graduate schools to bright and feisty young people from five continents – the more we help other societies find power where we have found it: in lively minds, in innovative processes and products, and above all in the capacity, by thinking hard, constantly to do what’s never been done before.

Even so, until recently, whether some Americans liked it or not, the United States was still the only

available chair of the executive committee for an informal club of democracies that called the shots for world order, prosperity, and development. But our government appears to have left the committee, indeed abandoned belief in committee-work, by acting so unilaterally in Iraq.

Both the American electorate and the political leaders they elect are having to climb a steep learning curve about the new game of post-cold war politics. It’s no longer good enough to lead by strutting our military stuff without thinking hard about where that will lead. It is no longer feasible even to lead by imagination backed by the power of the purse, Marshall Plan style.

Acting alone does not serve the U.S. interest, does not serve our global presence, does not win friends or partners or allies; it can win a war but makes a mess of the peace that should follow.

Our imagination now has to be matched, more and more, by the capacity to consult and the power to persuade. It’s a difficult style to master. Much will depend on the quality of its mastery.

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