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THE UNITED STATES AS A RULE MAKER:
REFLECTIONS ON THE AMERICAN STYLE
OF FOREIGN POLICY

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Since the paper-givers are requested to refer to Professor Robert Dallek’s book, *The American Style of Foreign Policy*, as a point of departure, I would like to begin with a brief comment on his book. In this book, Dallek is interested mainly in arguing that American foreign policy since the Spanish-American War has been an irrational extension of domestic hopes and fears generated by internal changes in America. He tries to establish his thesis by accumulating case-by-case psychological interpretations of American foreign policy. No doubt domestic hopes and fears have entered into American foreign policy making, and most likely they have been more important factors in American foreign policy than in foreign policies of other countries. But Dallek does not discuss the American style of foreign policy and rarely uses the word “style.” Apparently he equates “presistent irrationality” with the American style. But American foreign policy as a product has not always been irrational, even though irrational factors have been involved in policy making. A degree of irrationality can be found in the foreign policy of any country, and irrationality itself does not constitute a style.

As I understand, a style of foreign policy is a country’s mannerism in conceiving, expressing and carrying out its foreign policy aims. If the substance of foreign policy is defense of national interest, then its style may be said to be the manner in which national interest is defined and defended. We can discern the American style by observing American foreign policy conduct in the past. Then we may speculate about why American foreign policy has developed such a style. It seems to me that the style of modern American foreign policy can be explained in terms of America’s geopolitical situation, growth of American power, the liberal values of the nation, and above all, its national experiences in foreign relations during the 19th century. As long as the American style of foreign policy is one’s theme, it does not seem necessary for one to delve into subtle psychological linkages.

Since I come from East Asia, I like first to discuss the historic American policy toward this region, that is, the Open Door Policy toward China.

East Asia is the only region in which the United States constantly involved itself since about the turn of century. The United States abstained itself from involvement in Europe, until the First World War and again during the Interwar Period, disliking the game of balance of power politics. In the Western Hemisphere, the United States imposed its own rules of game, the Monroe Doctrine, prohibiting external powers to extend their political influence. When the United States began to involve in East Asian international relations, the United

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States proposed its own rule of game, the principles of open door in China and of Chinese territorial integrity.

East Asian international politics focused upon China was "balance of power" politics among imperialist powers. In this type of imperialist politics, economic opportunities were closely related to political power. The United States was unwilling to play this kind of game. This was natural for a nation which had developed foreign trade without political involvement. The United States advocated instead such rules as would depoliticize competition for economic opportunities. Under these rules, the United States would be able to secure for Americans chances equal to other nationals without playing balance of power politics.

The depoliticization of economic opportunities, that is, separation of economic opportunity from political power, was also the American way at home. It was a tenet of American liberalism. The Progressive Movement strengthened the regulatory power of the government over business activities, but it was mainly to guarantee fair competition. Thus there may be some connection, as Professor Dallek alleges, between Progressive anti-monopolism and their advocacy of Open Door in China. But this connection was ideological rather than emotional. Both of them rooted in the same ideological tradition of free enterprise. Thus Americans regarded the Open Door policy as a fair policy. They could idealize that policy further, because it gave support to China's independence and its territorial integrity. It is part of the American style of foreign policy to define American interest in terms of certain rules or principles, and idealize them.

Because of the limit of American power in East Asia, the United States was not able to have the Open Door rules observed by other powers too literally. Even when the United States became influential enough to write the American principles into a multilateral treaty in 1922, it made implicit concessions to the vested interest of other powers. Nevertheless, the Nine-power Treaty established the rules for future international conduct in China. When the United States had established the rules or the framework of international relations in China, its China policy became less active. It may be said that "framework politics" was the traditional style of America's approach to international politics.

When Japan detached Manchuria and established a puppet state, the United States reacted with the policy of non-recognition. Since the United States had no direct interest in Manchuria, it did not take any stronger measure than moral condemnation of Japan's actions. But it was no longer possible for Japan to reach an agreement with the United States over China affairs after her outright violation of the agreed rules. As Japan expanded military action in the China proper from 1937 on, the United States gradually strengthened its effort to check Japanese domination over East Asia. Objectively, this was balance of power politics against expansionist Japan. For Americans, it was rather moralistic politics against an international outlaw. It was also an ideological struggle against an aggressive militarist-totalitarian state. Americans were willing to wage power politics only when it was conceived in moralistic and ideological terms.

The United States entered the global political arena during the First World War and has remained there ever since its entry into the Second World War. When Americans felt it no longer possible for them to remain isolationist, they wanted to reconstruct the world order so that they would be able to play their new global role in their own way. Like the Open Door order in China, the American global order was based on the principle of the
maximum depoliticization of economic matters. They wanted to make international economic relations as liberal as possible with the minimum of economic barriers between the nations. This desire was expressed in the Fourteen Points and the Atlantic Charter. In such a world order, international economic relations were to be conducted in accordance with the agreed rules, and economic matters would not be political issues. The Bretton Woods system and the GATT were the fruits of American efforts in rule making in international economic relations.

As for political matters, Americans hoped to solve them through peaceful procedures by introducing into global politics a semi-parliamentary system, such as the League of Nations or the United Nations. This reform would minimize the power political aspect of international relations. Thus the United States would be able to play the role of a leading nation without playing old-fashioned power politics. However, there was one dilemma for Americans in this scheme. The universal international organization might intrude into the political affairs of the Western Hemisphere and endanger the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine. There was conflict between this universal international scheme and the traditional American claim for regional political supremacy. How could such an international organization be made compatible with the defense of the Monroe doctrine? This was the central problem in the whole debate on the League of Nations. Wilson had a clause referring to the Monroe Doctrine inserted in the League Covenant. But the ambiguous reference to the Doctrine did not satisfy Henry Cabot Lodge and his associates. Thus Wilson's League failed to get approval from the Senate. When the United Nations was planned during the Second World War, this problem was solved by providing the United States with veto power in the National Security Council and by allowing the establishment of regional security organizations.

The nature of the global international order proposed by the United States reflected the American past. Having enjoyed a happy and simple international environment that had guaranteed them "free security," Americans hoped to recreate such an environment in a global scale. The American past experience in external affairs, rather than the American past experience in a simple, agricultural and individualistic society, seems to explain sufficiently the American style of foreign policy.

In the post-World War II bipolar world, however, the United States had to play "balance of power" politics against the Soviet Union in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. In order to shift American foreign policy toward this direction, Americans had first to envision the Soviet Union as an aggressive totalitarian power and considered the communist ideology inherently hostile and expansionist. The phrase "Cold War" a by-product of such an image of Soviet communism, psychologically helped them to project American power in a global scale. If the international situation was a quasi-war, then Americans were willing to use power political means to contain Soviet expansion. During the Cold War Era, the United States maintained the world order as the primary power, by containing Soviet expansion and any kind of communist expansion and by creating a liberal economic order within the non-Communist world.

The American people became accustomed to the global projection of American power and began to regard it as a normal condition for American foreign policy. Thus they were willing to intervene in Vietnam with military means in the mid-1960s. By that time, however, the sense of crisis which characterized the early Cold War years has been weakened,
due to a degree of detente with the Soviet Union and due to the Sino-Soviet dispute. The Johnson administration committed two miscalculations in the Vietnam War. Because of its underestimation of its adversary's resilience, it was compelled to escalate the war to an unexpected scale. Secondly, the administration sent a large number of conscript citizen soldiers to Vietnam, forgetting the fact that American citizens were willing to fight a long, big war only when they felt the existence of serious external threat. Thus his war policy failed both in Vietnam and at home.

After the Vietnam experience, Americans were no longer willing to play the role of a world policeman. In response to this situation, Nixon and Kissinger proclaimed the end of the Cold War and aimed at erecting a new "peace structure." They followed the American tradition in envisaging a framework of international relations. As their system was said to be modeled after the Vienna system, it resembled the traditional European international system. The major powers were expected to cooperate and compete within a legitimate margin of power balance. In this system realism and mutual restraint were the guiding principles for major powers' conduct. Their manner of conducting diplomacy was also un-American. Under an imperial President, such means as secret diplomacy, concealed military action, and linkage politics were adopted. Americans welcomed detente and the end of involvement in Vietnam. They accepted the Nixon-Kissinger framework because they had lost confidence in the morality of the Vietnam War and had been disenchanted from the Cold War idealism. But they soon began to reveal their uncomfortableness with the Nixon-Kissinger style of foreign policy. The Watergate affair doomed Nixon's imperial Presidency and weakened political basis for such a diplomatic style.

Rejecting Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy as an amoral one, Carter revived a moralistic approach to international affairs in the form of human rights diplomacy. Human rights diplomacy had considerable popularity since Americans could feel that the traumatic years of the Vietnam War and racial disturbances had become a past history. But Carter could not envision a new framework of international relations and his diplomacy lacked coherence. Meanwhile, detente turned out to be disappointing for Americans, because of Soviet expansion in the Third World. Reagan resurrected the image of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," and called for "Strong America" to counter growing Soviet power. At the same time, he endeavored to maintain a liberal economic framework within the Western bloc against protectionist pressures.

The United States has been confronted recent years with the two problems of balance: power balance with the Soviet Union and trade balance with Japan. Irritated by ever growing gap in U.S.-Japanese trade, American officials, Senators, and Congressmen have begun to condemn Japan's trade practices. Committed to the principle of liberal trade policy, the United States can take a protectionist measure only against an unfair economic power. This is the spirit of reciprocity. An American retaliative measure will be not only retaliation but also punishment. When Americans want to invoke the principle of reciprocity, they tend to transform an economic conflict into a moral issue. In the process, they may develop a harsh image of unfair Japan and react overly against the country. Retaliation is an unilateral action by nature. Unilateral actions have been quite common in American diplomatic history. When Washington decides to retaliate against Japan, Congress will most likely take the initiative. American diplomacy has two power centers: the administration and Congress. This dual initiative diplomacy, often contradictory and other
times complementary, has been one of the characteristics of American foreign policy. If "rule making politics" or "framework politics" is the American style in conceiving foreign policy aims as I have described, I may add that "dual initiative diplomacy" and impulse for unilateral action may be said to be the American style in implementing foreign policy aims.

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