

1958

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### Recommended Citation

Rostow, W. W. (1958) "The National Interest and Objectives," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 11 : No. 4 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol11/iss4/2>

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# **NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW**

**Issued Monthly  
U. S. Naval War College  
Newport, R. I.**

## THE NATIONAL INTEREST AND OBJECTIVES

A lecture delivered  
at the Naval War College  
on 20 September 1957 by  
*Professor W. W. Rostow*

Admiral Ingersoll, Gentlemen:

I shall try, in the course of this hour, to define the national interest in terms which transcend any particular period of time, and then to consider the objectives which flow from that definition of the national interest under three historic circumstances: *first*, during the classic century — that is, the period of so-called “American isolation,” which runs, let us say, from Washington’s Farewell Address to the Spanish-American War; *second*, in the half-century of direct American involvement in massive ground force struggle for the balance of power in Eurasia, a phase which perhaps began to draw towards a close in 1953 with Stalin’s death, the end of the Korean War, and the achievement by the Soviet Union of fusion weapons; and, *finally*, the transitional period through which we are passing into a third phase of national objectives, whose character I shall now conceal in best cliff-hanger fashion, to be revealed in the final section of this lecture.

Only here in Newport at the Naval War College, in this famous place built, against dour opposition, by the remarkable line of men from Luce and Mahan to McCormick and Robbins — an institution built on the faith that abstract ideas and the analysis of history are important to the nation’s security — could a man feel at home in trying to cover so much of importance, so bluntly, in so little time.

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First, then, a definition of the abiding national interest and a definition of two fundamental problems which flow from it. It

has been — and remains — the American interest to maintain a world environment for the United States within which our form of society can continue to develop in conformity with the humanistic principles which are its foundation. This definition, in terms of the progressive development of the quality of American society would, of course, include the physical protection of the country. But, on this definition the protection of American territory is viewed essentially as a means to a larger end: the protection of a constantly developing way of life.

The operative meaning of this definition derives from the geographic position of the United States. The United States — even if strengthened by close ties to Canada in the north and by its looser ties within the hemisphere to the south — must be viewed essentially as a continental island off the greater land mass of Eurasia. Various combinations of power in Eurasia have been, and remain, a potential threat to the national interest. A united Britain and France could have stifled the American effort at independence. During the nineteenth century, we expanded and consolidated American power in the Western Hemisphere only by systematically exploiting the power conflicts of Eurasia. In the twentieth century, we have been thrice placed in mortal jeopardy when a single power, or a combination of powers, threatened to dominate Western Eurasia, Eastern Eurasia, or both.

If this definition of the national interest is correct, the concrete objectives of American military policy and diplomacy have centered around two distinct — but connected — problems. Since, throughout our history, the combined resources of Eurasia could pose a serious threat of military defeat, it has been an abiding objective of American external policy to ensure that no dominating single power, or group of powers — hostile or potentially hostile to the United States — crystallized against us in Eurasia.

The second problem of objectives was to ensure that the ideological trend of events in Eurasia did not yield either a direct

or indirect threat to the survival of American society. An ideological threat to the United States can take several forms. It can mean that the ideological loss of an area results directly and immediately in a strategic loss and increased military danger for the United States. This is the most straightforward kind of ideological threat. But, in addition, the quality of American society would be damaged if the bulk of the world's peoples turned against the values of the democratic creed, leaving us an island in an autocratic or totalitarian sea. We would be forced to defend or to barricade our society politically, and this cannot be done without losing some of the essential qualities of an open society, which we are committed by faith and history to be. We would be further diminished if we were to lose the sense (with our nation since its birth) that its success and destiny had a meaning for the world beyond our shores. As in military affairs, so, ideologically, the national style is at its best on the offensive.

The concept of an American ideological objective must, however, be clarified and limited in three respects. *First*, our interests have never required, nor do they now require, that we seek societies abroad built in our own image. We are legitimately concerned that societies abroad develop and strengthen those elements in *their* respective cultures which elevate the individual as against the claims of the state. *Second*, the democratic process which we wish to see extended abroad must be viewed as a matter of aspiration, of trend, of degree — not as an absolute. The legitimate American ideological objective is not that all societies become immediately democratic in the degree achieved in the United States, but that they accept as a working goal a version of the democratic value judgments consonant with their culture and their history and that they move towards its realization with the passage of time. *Third*, the American interest does not require that *all* societies at *all* times accept democratic values and move towards their achievement. We are concerned with the balance and trend of ideological forces in Eurasia, not with total ideological victory, somehow defined. Given our geographic circum-

stances, our history, and the quality of our society, abiding American interests and objectives demand that we be ideological crusaders; but our crusade must be tolerant, long-term and selective, directed towards areas of importance, where our margin of influence may be effective.

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I turn now to the manner in which these two interacting problems — one military, the other ideological — were translated into national objectives and related to each other in Washington's Farewell Address and in the subsequent century which was, in effect, dominated by his wise counsel.

The American Revolution had been fought partly as a colonial revolt in the name of national independence and of universal principles of human freedom and partly through a balance-of-power alliance with France. The Constitution had been drawn up and accepted in part to achieve a more viable internal balance between liberty and order and in part because of external threats to the national interest. Against this mixed background of military danger and ideological commitment, the new nation faced a peculiarly searching test during the 1790's in defining its relation to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, mingling, as those wars did, the worlds of national power and universal political concept.

What was the American interest in the outcome of these wars? Should that interest be determined by an assessment of its ideological content; by memories of past assistance from the French; by revulsion from the excesses of the French Revolution and a continued sense of racial and cultural connection with the British Isles; by the impact of the belligerents' actions on special economic or regional interests? Or, was there a distinctive American national interest that transcended instinctive ties of race, ideology, gratitude, memory, and, even, short-run economic advantage?

Washington, of course, answered the nation's questions by asserting and defining a distinctive American national interest. In his Farewell Address, he approached the matter in the context of a general theme which embraced domestic as well as foreign policy. His central objective was to strengthen the precarious sense of American nationhood. His method was to define, on the domestic scene, an area of national interest beyond region and party; also, to define a distinctive American interest in relation to the world. His military assessment asserted that in the short run the American nation could be protected by its own strength, combined, as opportunity required and offered, with that of other powers whose interests temporarily converged with ours. In the long run, he sensed that the rise in American military potential relative to others — if translated into a reasonably substantial defensive force at readiness and with a well-trained professional group at its core — could cope with whatever threats might arise over the foreseeable future.

Washington did not deny or ignore the reality of the American commitment to a distinctive set of values in political and social life. He spoke movingly of the nation's attachment to liberty. But he counseled that the nation exploit thoroughly the military possibility of a security achieved and maintained without taking up fixed positions in the European power struggle, and work out its ideological destiny within its expanding borders. The alternative course he regarded as both unnecessary and dangerous in the 1790's.

Accepting isolation, in Washington's sense, as a working formula, the nation from Jefferson's administration forward devoted itself to the living process of building and consolidating a continental structure. The United States managed to acquire the requisite territory and to neutralize the hemisphere from any increase in major power influence at remarkably little diplomatic or military cost. All this was done, step by step, with shrewdness and skill, systematically exploiting the conflicts and cross-purposes



of the major European Powers, none of whom was ever free enough of Eurasian conflicts and rivalries to challenge the hegemony of a virtually unarmed United States in this hemisphere.

The cumulative myth of American isolation was, however, a quite different affair than Washington's thoughtful prescription, or, in fact, the way our foreign policy evolved. A gap emerged between the concept of a virtuous, isolated America, uniquely free of involvement in wicked, balance-of-power politics and the way American relations in the world were actually conducted. We practiced balance-of-power politics abroad just as we did at home in party politics, conducted on a continental basis. When we used military force in the classic century, we used it for relatively clear and limited political and geographical ends, as in Florida and the Mexican War — not for unlimited crusade in the pursuit of absolutes. But the ideal concept of the nation made it difficult to articulate to ourselves or to others what in fact we did. By and large, the nation in its first century accepted its fortunate relation to the Eurasian power balance as a permanent gift of God and history, not as a transient accident of geography, communications, military technique, and the peculiar state of affairs in Eurasia.

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I turn now to the momentous set of changes in the nation's external environment and in its attitudes and concepts about the national interest, which began to take shape around about 1900 and which set the pattern for the nation's security problems and objectives for about half a century. As befits the definition of the national interest presented earlier, my thesis is two-pronged: military and ideological.

Militarily, the nature of these changes quite suddenly required the United States to leap from a situation where a favorable balance of power in Eurasia could be ensured, with virtually no military effort by the United States, to one where the national

interest required the nation to accept as a regular operating objective the holding of the ground force balance on the Eurasian land mass. After a fashion, this leap was made. It was made in the sense that when placed in mortal peril in 1917, 1940-41, 1947, and 1950, the nation responded with vigor. But the leap was not made in men's minds. Neither the nation as a whole nor any substantial group within it has had a working military concept of the world we came to confront in the first half of the twentieth century which fitted the case and permitted us effectively to anticipate our problems.

Ideologically, this new military relation to the world, combined with the rise of antidemocratic States and new techniques of communications, forced the nation to redefine its nonmilitary objectives. The days had passed when we could concentrate on building democracy on the American Continent while the democratic faith progressively advanced from one end of Eurasia to the other almost by natural law. We faced in Communism and Fascism explicit and dedicated opposition to the values of our society as well as to the military security of the United States. In short, Washington's fundamental assumption altered: namely, that an indecisive balance of power in Eurasia was self-perpetuating and that it was safe for the United States to concentrate its ideological interest and energy at home. What happened to alter Washington's assumption, and how did the gap develop between what happened and what Americans thought had happened?

Without undue violation to the complexity of history, it is possible to embrace the major changes both in the United States and in its world environment over the latter decades of the nineteenth century within a single phenomenon: the spreading process of industrialization. Each country touched by this process underwent a transformation in its political and social life, as in its economy. But, while the impact of industrialization on each particular nation — including the United States — was relatively gradual, its impact on the balance of the World's power was to

prove quite rapid, so narrowly had that balance been held by Britain in the century after 1815. Notably after 1860, almost simultaneously, Germany, Japan and Russia began to surge forward, as well as the United States.

Industrialization transformed the world arena of power in two distinct ways: *first*, it altered and extended the shape of the arena which had emerged at the time of Napoleon's defeat in 1815; *second*, it altered the relative military potential of the States within the new enlarged arena of world power. The world that Britain held in balance for the century after Waterloo consisted mainly of Western Europe and the maritime fringes of Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Russia, it is true, lurched from one side of its Eurasian cage to the other — first to the west and then to the east. But, down to 1914, it could be held within that cage with reasonable economy of force, as the Crimean and Russo-Japanese Wars indicated. The Western Hemisphere emerged as a special sphere, closely related to — but still separated from — the major power game by the Monroe Doctrine.

Industrialization and all that went with it brought not merely the United States but Germany, Japan and Russia into the arena in new active roles. The twentieth-century decline of Western Europe is thus mainly an optical illusion, caused by the spread and unification of the world power arena and the active entrance into it of a group of powers hitherto impotent, self-isolated, or neutralized.

Within this twentieth-century arena, clearly beginning to form up in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Eastern Europe and China — two vast regions which lagged behind in industrialization — were to provide peculiar difficulty. Why should this have been so? Each of these two regions, if attached to any major power, had the geographic location, population, and long-run potential capable of shifting radically the Eurasian power balance. But, lagging behind their neighbors as they did, they

lacked the political coherence and economic strength to assert that potential independently; or, to avoid, down through the first half of the twentieth century, a high degree of dependence.

It was this differential alteration in the power balance — traceable to differences in the timing of the stages of economic growth, caused, in turn, by more profound noneconomic factors — that was to provide a terrible temptation to Germany in Eastern Europe, and to Japan in China. It was to serve ultimately as a source of fear and temptation to Russia in both regions. It was to offer chronic danger to France, Britain and the United States, whose strategic status was radically and permanently altered by both consequences of industrialization; that is, by the creation of a single interacting world arena of power and by the emergence of soft spots within it which made the pursuit of Eurasian hegemony appear possible and attractive at various stages to Germany, Russia and Japan.

In the three decades after the Civil War, the great areas of Germany, Russia, Japan and China — whose modernization was to reshape the world's balance of power in the next century — were at stages which did not lead to major aggression. The balance of power which had marked the classic century was being rapidly undermined. But this fact could be largely concealed, except from the most perceptive and imaginative men. In the 1890's, despite occasional gunfire from the Yalu to Cuba and from South Africa to Manila Bay, it was not too difficult to view the world as still held in balance by a British relationship to Eurasia which prevented any one power or coalition from dominating or threatening to dominate that area.

Thus, when Americans first felt impelled to play an enlarged part on the world's scene they could conceive of doing so in terms of an enlargement or an extension of familiar concepts and commitments. After all, the Monroe Doctrine could be extended to embrace quite a lot of enterprise in the Atlantic and the

Pacific; and, in principle, the nation had always recognized that it needed a navy.

There was very little understanding that the whole foundation of the American security position in the Eurasian power balance was about to collapse and to confront the nation with problems vastly more serious and substantial on the world scene than even the most ardent advocates of Captain Mahan and a large view were prepared to envisage in the 1890's.

The writing and influence of Captain Mahan presents a peculiar problem, for his total perception of the nation's security problem transcended the character of his public influence or even the naval doctrines associated with his name.

With reasonable legitimacy, the principal elements in Mahan's thought can be rearranged and summarized in the following sequence of six points:

- (1) The balance of the world's power lies in the land mass of Eurasia, and it is subject to unending competitive struggle among interior and exterior nation states.
- (2) Although the balance of world power hinges on the control of Eurasian land, the control over the sea approaches to Eurasia has been — and can be — a decisive factor, as the history of many nations (most notably, Britain) demonstrates.
- (3) In the end, naval power consists in the ability to win and to hold total dominance at sea, which, in turn, requires a naval force in being capable of meeting and defeating any likely concentration of counterforce. A naval power must, therefore, maintain as a concentrated tactical unit at readiness an adequate fleet of capital ships with adequate underlying support.
- (4) Support for such a force includes forward bases, coaling stations, a merchant fleet adequate for overseas'

supply, and perhaps certain territories whose accessibility — if not friendship — is assured at times of crisis. It follows, therefore, that a naval power should be prepared actively to develop an empire, as well as substantial foreign trade and an ample pool of commercial shipping.

- (5) The United States stood in the 1890's at a moment in its history, and in its relation to the geography of world power, when its full-scale development as a naval power was urgent.
- (6) The pursuit in times of peace of the prerequisites for naval power would have the following ancillary advantages: the challenge of commercial and imperial competition would maintain the vigor of the nation; acceptance of responsibility for Christianizing and modernizing the society of native peoples within the empire would constitute a worthy and elevating moral exercise; and the whole enterprise would be commercially profitable.

In Mahan's writing, however, the full significance of propositions (1) and (2) — concerning the meaning of power in the land mass of Eurasia — were obscured and slighted. For if they were taken seriously what was called for was not an exuberant American effort (mainly a naval effort) to assert itself unilaterally on the world scene, but an expansion of our total military power in alignment with those other nations which shared our interest in avoiding a concentration of power on the Eurasian land mass. Mahan was, it is true, steadily an advocate of Anglo-American understanding. Later, as the First World War approached, he helped to articulate the nature of the American power interest in its outcome. But, generally speaking, propositions (3) through (6) became detached from (1) and (2), leaving Mahan, in his net influence, mainly a propagandist for the expansion of the

American Navy and its forward bases, for the creation of the Isthmian Canal, and for the concentration of the battle fleet. He was less of a philosopher of the American interest and expositor of its strategic position on the world scene than he could have been, given his extraordinary acute insight.

The ambiguity between what we might call "Mahanism" and a correct interpretation of Mahan's insight was symbolized by the somewhat bitter joke played on the Navy in the First and Second World Wars. A force whose thought was systematically focused around a decisive, direct engagement of capital ships had to devote itself overwhelmingly to convoying, antisubmarine patrol, submarine operations, and amphibious operations. History in the twentieth century required, in short, that the United States, in its own interest, exert power directly on the Eurasian mainland with massive ground force units. The American Navy played an indispensable and effective role in supporting this process; and this outcome was in no way inconsistent with Mahan's fundamental propositions. But as "Mahanism" gained ground, toward the end of the nineteenth century, there was little premonition of the trenches of 1917 and 1918; of the battles of North Africa, Italy, France, and the Pacific Islands from 1941 to 1945; or, of Korea.

Mahan, himself, came as close as anyone to seeing the shape of the future when he perceived that for his generation of Americans the defeat of the German threat to the Eurasian power balance and to the democratic creed was the central task; but that the next generation might well have to deal with a parallel Slavic threat. That perception did not mesh well, however, with "Mahanism." Although Mahan left a powerful imprint — even a permanent imprint — on the nation's thought, his victory was incomplete. Many who accepted in some part of their minds the reality of the nation's expanding objectives were not prepared to accord them an overwhelming or even a very high priority in the period after 1900. What followed the Spanish-American War was

not an era of American military expansion, but the progressive period — focused, primarily, on domestic policy problems. And, in addition, a part of Mahan's doctrine was flatly rejected. What the nation rejected was Mahan's ideological rationale for the development of an American empire — a rationale in which a sense of Christian mission and commercial advantage converged. His views in this respect were very close to those of contemporary British Conservatives — for example, Joseph Chamberlain.

When the nation began soberly to assess the pain, the cost, and the inner conflict required to deal with the Philippines (so lightly acquired in 1898), it turned its back against further such imperial acquisitions. The nation's fundamental ideals and values made it difficult, if not impossible, to undertake in good conscience the burdens of empire. The rejection of a quasi-British concept of empire did not, however, end the matter. The nation was forced to articulate its ultimate purposes as it moved beyond the confines of Washington and the Monroe Doctrine.

In the First World War, Wilson substituted for it, and for Mahan's hard-headed view of power, an extreme ideological rationale for American participation; and he presented an equally ideological rationale for the American interest in the postwar settlement. Wilson had deep, personal, almost religious inhibitions against acknowledging the reality of power in the equation of foreign policy. He moved directly towards a solution of the nation's security position in terms of such general principles as national self-determination and collective security, principles authentically embedded in the nation's history and in its thought — and he did this without careful or explicit attention to the conditions of power and politics which would make such a world system workable.

Wilson was closer than Mahan to the ultimate purposes which our nation and society would in fact pursue on the world scene. Mahan, however, understood and did not shy away from the medium of power in which these purposes would have to be



expressed and executed. In speaking to his countrymen, Wilson denied the realities of power as vigorously as Mahan had asserted them. When, in the postwar years, the ugly facts of power did emerge to the surface, the nation was confused; it felt cheated and a little naïve.

In 1919 and 1920, the two interpretations of the nature of the American interest on the world scene struggled in the persons of President Wilson and Senator Lodge in the heightened context of party politics. Tragically, both Wilson and Lodge lost. Lodge defeated Wilson, it is true; but it was Harding and Borah who took over the field of action — not Lodge, Root, Stimson, and the others who belonged, broadly speaking, in the Mahan tradition. Power was left in the hands of men who did not understand, or who refused to understand, the deep historical forces which in the three decades before 1920 had been steadily drawing the nation into the expanding, shifting arena of world power.

In terms of this view, Franklin Roosevelt sought — in the “destroyer deal,” “lend-lease,” and the “shoot-at-sight” policy in the Atlantic — to limit the extent of the American engagement, while preventing British defeat. In his maneuvers of 1939 to 1941, there are many respects in which Franklin Roosevelt appeared as a disciple of “Mahanism.” But the power position in Eurasia had been permitted to disintegrate much too far to permit a peripheral policy to protect American interests. From Pearl Harbor, we turned at last to the problem of bringing to bear directly on the Eurasian land mass sufficient American strength to defeat the Axis bid for hegemony.

Instinctively, the nation repeated this pattern of reluctant, gradually increasing commitment of strength when a Soviet threat to the Eurasian power balance promptly emerged in the wake of the Second World War — a threat whose roots lie in part in the nation's lack of grasp on the power contours of the Eurasian land mass and in a consequent underestimation of the strategic significance of the Polish and Chinese issues during the war years.

There is, however, an interesting progression. Just as Franklin Roosevelt sought to avoid Wilson's errors (as he understood those errors), Truman sought to avoid the errors (as he understood them) of the interwar statesman. Truman's duel with Stalin and with Mao was consciously an exercise in seeing whether a forehanded policy — in which the Eurasian aggressors were made to feel at an early stage the presence of active American strength and will — might prevent a major war.

In the Middle East and in Western Europe, by and large, this policy worked: from the warning over Iran — late in 1945 and early in 1946 — to the Berlin airlift. But the cutback in usable ground force strength in 1945 to 1950, combined with the somewhat casual military attitude towards the Korean Peninsula, proved too great a temptation for Stalin and Mao; and the Korean War resulted.

For the special purposes of this lecture, however, the main point is this: down through the Korean War and its settlement, both Truman and Stalin were thinking primarily in terms of the possibility of one power or tight coalition cleanly capturing the Eurasian power balance. Stalin, building on the enormous base he acquired from the Second World War, sought to succeed where the Kaiser and Hitler had failed — and to do so without a major war. In pursuing his purpose, Truman could act with a more mature consensus behind him in the nation than his predecessors had enjoyed.

In their own way, the citizens of the United States had come to make their own synthesis of Mahan and Wilson. The Communist threat was widely understood to be a threat both to the nation's military survival and to its way of life. In the Marshall Plan, we exhibited ability to sustain a policy which was based on a subtle appreciation of the connection and interaction between the two threats. In the end, the acceptance of the need to fight for South Korea was based more on a commitment to the

Wilsonian principle of collective security, including the commitment to NATO, than on any narrow national military purpose in Korea.

What I am asserting, then, is that in the first half of this century the nation on three successive occasions faced threats to the Eurasian power balance arising from the vulnerability of Eastern Europe and China to attachment by more advanced powers. In each case, the nation sensed — late in the day, but progressively less late — that a threat to our society was involved; and the nation's reaction was progressively more mature in the sense that it reflected a progressively better balance and blending of American power and ideological interests on a world basis in substitution for the more restricted formulae of George Washington, John Quincy Adams, and the others of the classic century whose assumptions had become outmoded by the spread of the industrial revolution.

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We come now to my alleged next stage in national objectives — a stage whose beginnings, I have suggested, might be dated from about 1953.

Let me first state that, of course, history does not turn corners in any such sharp and clear fashion. The forces which led to a change in national objectives around about 1900 had, for example, been developing since at least the 1860's; and this new stage has equally long roots. More than that, in real life stages overlap. We are even now living in a nation where the concepts — and even some of the concrete problems — of the classic century of isolation still exist. For example, there are American relations with Latin America; and, surely, the problem of preventing a recurrence of a direct Hitlerite or Stalinist bid for the balance of power in Eurasia has not been completely solved.

Nevertheless, I shall be most useful to you this morning if, for the moment, I set aside the protection of professorial re-

finement and caution and present as sharp a picture as possible of the setting in which the third stage in national objectives will have to be pursued: the world of diffused power.

Like most important historical changes, this one is coming about because a number of quite separate forces push in the same direction, the direction being a situation where it will become increasingly difficult for any single power or tight coalition rationally to envisage as an operating goal the dominance of Eurasia and the world. Specifically, there are six such forces now at work, all of which interact on each other to produce a new situation:

*First*, the gradual spread of the conviction in Eurasia that the United States will not again withdraw into isolation. There are still doubts, of course, as Adenauer's reaction to the announcement of American ground force cutbacks indicate. But it is increasingly reckoned in Eurasia that the presence of the United States is a permanent feature of the scene. Both our friends and our enemies in Eurasia have come to this conclusion much more recently than we Americans are likely to believe. It is easy to forget that the basic decisions of the Kaiser and of Hitler were predicated on American abstinence or impotence in Eurasia; and that a good deal of Stalin's hope must have been based on Roosevelt's assertion during the course of wartime diplomacy that the United States was prepared to stay as an occupying force in Germany and elsewhere in Eurasia for only a few postwar years.

*Second*, the presence of forces within Soviet society — not yet fully reflected in Soviet policy-making for a decline of aggressive ambition in external policy and a dilution of centralized absolute power internally. This is not the occasion — nor is there the time — fully to consider the nature, power, and limits of these forces. They include at least the following: the costs and probable indecisiveness of the arms race; the political and ideological bankruptcy of Communism in Eastern Europe; the ambition of the Russian peoples for improvements in material welfare

and the evident capabilities of the Russian economy to provide them, if freed of the pathological ambitions and domestic institutions of Communism; and, above all, the groping of an increasingly literate and well-informed population for status as a dignified citizenry. As I say, these forces are real and active in Soviet society but by no means dominant.

*Third*, the hardening-up of the two great soft spots of the first half of the century — China and Eastern Europe. At the moment, of course, Eastern Europe is in effect under Soviet military occupation and China is bound to Moscow by an alliance that I, at least, would judge firm for the immediate future because of certain believed mutual interests in Moscow and Peking. Nevertheless, the trend in Eastern Europe is clearly towards a situation where Soviet power to act freely is being restricted — and I believe, as a matter of historical trend, that the same is likely to be the case with China as its industrialization proceeds.

*Fourth*, the peculiar nature of the weapons of mass destruction. As we all know, they have two revolutionary characteristics: first, it is difficult to define circumstances where it would be rational for any two powers to use them at full strength; second, as time goes on, more and more powers are going to acquire some atomic weapons' delivery capabilities — and, with them, a considerable nuisance or bargaining value. This value will exist because the delivery of a few of these weapons can do great damage. Thus far, only the first of these two characteristics has been strongly felt. Together, however, they tend towards a violation of the old rough proportionality between industrial capacity and military potential. It is no accident that the trend of recent years has been for small powers increasingly to tell major powers to go to hell. Tito started it, in a sense, but the list of his successors is getting quite long: Nasser, U Nu, Ben Gurion, and Gomulka. This does not mean, of course, that the small power always succeeds. Under certain circumstances, a major power can bring to bear its ground force capabilities, as the Soviets did in

Budapest. And, if we are so-minded, there are other ways to handle Nasser than those which tempted Eden so tragically last year. All I would assert is this: over an important range of issues, the peculiar nature of modern weapons in a stand-off arms race has given minor powers a bargaining position disproportionate to their industrial capacity and military potential — and this tendency may well increase.

*Fifth*, is the further enlargement of the world arena of power to include Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa — not as dependent or passive colonial areas but as increasingly assertive political units, with some kind of bargaining leverage in the world arena. In a sense, that part of Mahan's thought (and it is as interesting as anything he ever did), incorporated in *The Problem of Asia*, has now come fully to life. This enlargement of the world arena raises many new issues. But, above all, it adds to the number of effective powers at work; and it thus further diffuses authority. It does so, among other reasons, because the military approaches to Southeast Asia, to Africa, and even to the Middle East are by no means as easy, logistically, as the German or Russian approaches to Eastern Europe or the Japanese or Russian approaches to China.

*Sixth*, is the ideological problem posed by the coming to life of independent centers of power in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Since it is not easy for either the Soviet Union or the Free World to occupy these areas — due to the first and third factors in combination — they must be dealt with to some degree on the principle of overlapping interests. The interests of these areas are clear enough: they want political independence; dignity on the world scene; and, above all, economic and social progress. The existence of these vast areas in revolutionary transition does not, of course, rule out forms of action other than diplomacy, economic aid, cultural exchanges, and so on. There is ample play, as Moscow has long perceived, for subversion, guerrilla

operations, and even quite substantial war. Nevertheless, the nature of the aspirations and interests developing in these new and strategically important areas sets a limit on the kinds of force that are rationally usable; and it thus contributes — in conjunction with the other forces cited — to the further diffusion of power.

What are the operational implications of this new third stage, given abiding American interests? Even in a world more or less freed of the danger of atomic war, freed even of the danger of Communism, the national interest could be threatened. It could be threatened by a democratic failure in the underdeveloped areas; it could be threatened by limited wars; it could be threatened by new schisms in the world — as dangerous, perhaps, as that caused by Communism; for example, a split along color lines. Above all, and probably as a result of some combination of these threats, the United States could be threatened by the emergence of a new coalition which felt it both safe and profitable to violate the armaments control agreement which I am assuming in this third stage.

To protect the national interest, we would thus have to seize and maintain the ideological leadership in the transition of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to modern status; we would have to maintain a flexible range of military capabilities, short of all-out war, and the understanding and will to use them; and we would have to create and develop policies which prevent major conflicts from developing, either within the major regions of the world or between the underdeveloped areas and the industrialized areas. In short, we would have to continue to lead a world-wide coalition which shared our essential interests, including our interest in maintaining the assumed arms control system.

There is nothing in the forces which I have described that would again permit the national interest to be protected by a passive hemisphere policy. Taken all in all, however, the American problem in the third stage of diffused power, within a world arena which is for the first time truly global, appears less dangerous,

if more complex — but, I must say, more messy — than the problem of dealing with the three direct bids for Eurasian hegemony of the first half of this century. It is also a problem congenial to our native political gifts. Our whole society is, after all, built on the proposition that the diffusion of power is the basis for human liberty. Our domestic political skills and social habits are accommodated to achieving order and direction from situations of diffused power. We ought to do reasonably well in a world where history has imposed that proposition as a working basis for international life.

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But, of course, we are not yet in the third stage. The Soviet Union has not yet accepted the status implicit in the third stage as merely one among a group of major national powers. It is still working along the paths which look to Eurasian and world hegemony. The arms race is still on. And the fundamental reason, in my view, is that any effective arms control agreement would end Bolshevism within Russia, converting Russia into a virtually open society, focused around the long-delayed expansion of consumers' welfare ardently desired by the Russian peoples and fully within Russian economic capabilities.

Men do not lightly surrender the dreams of their youth, nor the operating objectives and vested interests of heavy bureaucracies. The pattern of aggression, looking to Eurasian and world domination, is built into the minds of the present Soviet leaders and the institutions they dominate. We thus live in an exceedingly dangerous time; for, we are seeking the day when responsible Russians acknowledge that Communism is no longer a viable creed for their nation — and no less is required for the third stage fully to come to pass.

Why, then, raise the vision of this third stage in which we would be free of the two great nightmares — aggressive Communism and atomic warfare? The reason is this: in a curious



way, we have already half entered the third stage. We are half living in the sort of world we would have to face if an effective control of armaments agreements were to be negotiated with the Russians, for that agreement would not bring peace in any final sense; it would simply ratify and, with some continuing degrees of risk, would guarantee a situation where power and influence were pursued without the ultimate forms of military force.

The historic forces making for the third stage are already at work. They are at work, however, in a context where Moscow's ambitions remain unlimited. We are, therefore, observing a systematic effort by Moscow to use certain of these forces for its own purposes — notably, the confusion and ambitious fervor in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The protection of the national interest demands, then, that our objectives and day-to-day policy embrace problems of both the second and the third stages. We must both deter Soviet strength and atomic weapons' delivery capabilities and lead the transition of the underdeveloped areas along democratic lines. We must both maintain NATO and develop a mobile force to deter or to prosecute limited wars in other vulnerable areas. We must both maintain our old friendships with the Western European States and the new friendship with Japan, while also weaving the newer nations of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa into a meaningful Free World coalition.

This is a big, tough job. But if we relax or grow complacent, Moscow could achieve a dangerous and even decisive breakthrough in any one of a number of forms: possible, but least likely, a lead so substantial in relative delivery capabilities that it would be judged rational in Moscow to try and take out our retaliatory power at a blow; a major ground force assault on Western Europe, based on the assumption that the United States lacked the capabilities to meet such an assault on its own terms, or the will to exchange all-out atomic attack for anything short of direct assault on the United States; a successful campaign of atomic blackmail, leading to the break-up of NATO; the ideological loss of India

and Southeast Asia in general to Communism, should the Indian second Five-Year-Plan fail; a Communist breakthrough in the Middle East; and so on.

In the end, however, we have the fundamental assets — if we have the wit and the will to use them. There is no good reason why we cannot fully stay the course in the arms race. We have in being almost all we need, except the will and the airlift, to create an effective deterrent against limited war. Western Europe and Japan have now an economic vitality which even the greatest optimists failed to predict a decade ago, and they can bear an increasing weight in the alliance if we create the conditions for true partnership. In the Indian Peninsula — that is, in India and Pakistan — we have a foundation of institutions, plans, and ardent men and women who could, over the next decade, demonstrate that the technique of consent can be more efficient than compulsion in making the transition to self-sustaining growth if the United States throws its weight behind them. Algeria is a hideously difficult problem; but, south of the Sahara there are hopeful possibilities if we are reasonably forehanded.

The third historic stage in national objectives emerges, then, not as a fact nor as a prediction but as a goal for national policy over, say, the next decade. I believe it to be an attainable goal.

## BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

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Professor Rostow received his B.A. degree in 1936 and also his Ph.D. degree in 1940 from Yale University. He attended Oxford University from 1936 to 1938, receiving an honorary M.A. degree from that institution in 1946, and also received an honorary M.A. degree from Cambridge University in 1949.

In 1941, he joined the faculty of Columbia University for one year as an instructor. He was Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University during 1946 and 1947, and Pitt Professor at Cambridge University during 1949 and 1950. Since 1950, he has been Professor of Economic History at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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