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William T. R. Fox

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HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF U. S. FOREIGN POLICY

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
in academic year 1954-1955 by
Professor William T. R. Fox

I have been asked to speak this morning on the development of American foreign policy. If there is any one continuing theme which will run through my remarks, it is that the basic attitudes which Americans bring to perplexing problems of foreign policy has changed remarkably little since the early days of the Republic. The world, however, and especially the United States itself, has changed a good deal, and it is therefore hardly surprising to find that American foreign policy has changed along with it, for if one applies old ideas to new situations, one is likely to get new policies.

The viewpoints toward foreign policy which keep recurring in our public debates in this second half of the 20th century were all familiar in the second half of the 18th. Isolationism, what we now call Wilsonian Internationalism, and the emphasis on a rational calculation of the national interest were all evident, although the labels were somewhat different.

18th-century Americans had never been pleased by the fact that war in Europe was pretty sure to mean trouble in North America too. What we in America call the "French and Indian War" was, in European eyes, simply the North American part of the Seven Years War. The colonists resented being involved in skirmishes along the frontier with marauding Indians each time diplomacy reached an impasse' in Europe. When, in 1759, colonial soldiers suffering great privations finally conquered the inaccessible fortress at Louisburg on Cape Briton Island, only to have it restored to the French at a conference table in Europe,

some now familiar attitudes — that America has a separate set of interests all her own, that she should be allowed to stay out of European politics and to keep Europe out of American politics, that European power politics is evil and no fit game for honest Americans to participate in — all these attitudes were probably intensified by such experiences as that at Louisburg.

The natural irritation of the colonists at being pawns in the inter-dynastic chess game of European great power politics was reinforced by some ideas which were coming across the ocean from France, where revolutionary ideas were preparing the way for France's own Revolution. One classic formulation of the relationship between domestic and foreign politics must have seemed especially pertinent to the intellectual leaders of the American Revolution: "The flatterers persuade princes that the internal welfare of the people should be subordinated to the requirements of an expanding foreign policy. Duty tells them the opposite." Here is the notion that a republican government concerned with the public good is naturally isolationist, while a monarchical government concerned with the glory of the reigning prince is naturally interventionist. One student of 18th-century international affairs has written on this point that "the logical consequence was that in a reformed world based on reason, foreign policy and diplomacy would become unnecessary and that the new world would be a world without diplomats". It is interesting to note that the fear of European diplomacy and of secret diplomacy, which has been so prevalent in the United States in our own generation, has such deep roots. The notion that in any diplomatic negotiation our honorable but apparently not over-bright Uncle Sam would necessarily come home from the international poker game in a barrel because he had lost not only his shirt but his trousers as well is perhaps not quite so old, but it is a related idea.

The Utopians of the 18th century were isolationist. They believed in private international trade between individuals but

not in public international politics between sovereign states. In the 20th century, for reasons that I will discuss later, the utopian is likely to be internationalist. He brings to his zeal for reforming the organization of the world another 18th-century idea derived from America's internal political experience. The startling success of the United States in creating an instrument of government, the U. S. Constitution, simply by bringing together the leaders of the country and convening them in a constitutional convention has made it easy for Americans to believe that the political system of the world and especially that of Europe, could also be reformed by holding a conference, drafting a document, and getting it ratified. It is because so many Americans thought of the San Francisco Conference, which wrote the Charter of the United Nations, as a world constitutional convention which would usher in a whole new era of international relations unmarred by "power politics," that there is so much professed dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the accomplishments of that oversold organization. The extraordinary importance which American diplomacy attached to the ratification of the European Defense Community agreement and the excessive gloom which followed its defeat in the French Parliament seem to me to reflect a little of the same great faith in the possibility of changing a whole political system by a single act of constitution-making. Woodrow Wilson and John Foster Dulles may have much more in common than either the Republicans or the Democrats now care to admit. (Incidentally, in these days when it is so fashionable to associate Wilsonian internationalism with naiveté in foreign affairs, we ought to note that Woodrow Wilson was not quite so Wilsonian as some of his contemporary detractors would have us believe. He was quite willing, for example, to embark on a naval race with Great Britain, because he was as unwilling to see United States naval power menaced by the unchecked naval power of Britain as by the unchecked land power of Germany. Furthermore, in 1919 he accepted the necessity for an Anglo-American-French guarantee of France's German borders as an essential un-

derpinning to the general security arrangements in the League Covenant. Thus the North Atlantic Pact had its precursor two decades before, one which was unfortunately abortive, since Wilson's tripartite guarantee failed with the Senate rejection of the Versailles Treaty.)

The twin conception that America has a set of interests different from Europe which makes our foreign policy naturally isolationist, and that the old diplomacy of European monarchies is evil and must be replaced by a new diplomacy of democratic peoples, now seem to me to be incompatible; for the first point, toward withdrawal from European politics and the second toward participation in international organization. In the 18th century they reinforced each other to support the characteristic aloofness of the United States from European politics. But the two ideas are still alike in their antipathy toward what some people now call the game of power politics. For the doctrinaire internationalist is a potential isolationist. Conceiving of European politics as a "dirty game" and demanding that it be reformed as a condition to our participation is to suggest that we are willing, if our demands are not heeded, to withdraw altogether. Thus the isolationist and the doctrinaire internationalist are alike in believing that American non-participation is feasible, in believing that the United States can have some measure of security in the modern world by withdrawing from it and pretending that it does not exist. Warren G. Harding was elected President partly on the basis of his assertion that he was for a League of Nations but happened to be opposed to some of the details in the Covenant of *the* League of Nations, the only League which the United States happened to have the opportunity of joining at the moment. Thus, for all practical purposes, he was an isolationist, even during the campaign period when he was so assiduously cultivating the votes of those who wanted an even better League than the one which Wilson brought home from Paris. Today when we suggest that certain kinds of American aid may no longer be available unless our European allies behave in specified ways, that we may have

to undertake some "agonizing reappraisals," there is the implication that it is only out of generosity that the U. S. has helped Western Europe in the post-war period and that we on this side of the Atlantic are not really threatened at all and can stay home any time we choose, and may well do so if our European allies do not find a substitute for the EDC which satisfies us.

Before we turn to consider how changed world conditions have changed American foreign policy, even though some of our basic attitudes have not changed at all, it may be worth mentioning one other characteristic American foreign policy position — that the proper way to settle disputes with other sovereign states is by treating them as legal disputes and arguing them as if they were cases at law. Beginning with the Jay Treaty of 1794, the U. S. has been party to a long list of arbitration treaties. Perhaps it has been because, through most of our history, the United States has been well-separated from the cockpit of European power politics, perhaps it has been because American Secretaries of State have almost without exception been lawyers, as have indeed a very large proportion of our statesmen and politicians, that a variety of distinctive American policies have been stated in international law terms. During the century or so when it seemed feasible to plan to stay out of European wars, we took the lead in asserting neutral rights and arguing the virtues of a short contraband list. With the rise of American naval power, there came a noticeable de-emphasis in our insistence on neutral rights, and it is ironical that in the current exchange of acerbities regarding trade with Iron Curtain countries, the U. S. and Britain have exchanged their historical roles with the United States favoring much more extreme limitations on that trade during this cold-war period. Another historical legal position of the United States has been the *de jure* recognition of successful revolutionary governments. As a country which had successfully won its independence from monarchical Britain, we had little reason to deny recognition to other countries which had broken away from their imperial masters. As a republic which had abolished royal

prerogatives, we had little interest in denying recognition to other governments established illegally after successful revolution in the name of democracy. It is only since 1917 that we have felt the inconveniences of our traditional legal position which would have forced us to recognize regimes which our government has regarded with disfavor. It took us 16 years to agree to the recognition of Soviet Russia. From present appearances, Communist China may still have a long time to wait. Finally, there has been one other legal position which reflected our special position in the world. Lacking colonies of our own in the 19th century, it was hardly surprising that we tried to make international law do for us what colonial expansion did for others. We sought to give the American trader and investor the same kind of security of life, liberty, and property in underdeveloped areas that he would have had in the American West or that an Englishman would have had in a Crown Colony. We no longer put so much emphasis in our diplomacy on the enforcement of private rights, and, more particularly, on the regular payment of interest on the bonded debt, if only because, in the era of the cold war, we value the good-will of the governments and peoples from underdeveloped areas far too much to drive them into the arms of the Soviet Union by too harsh insistence on fair treatment of American traders and investors. As the United States has moved from the edge of European politics to the center of the world stage, it is no longer possible to treat each separate American grievance as a case to be argued solely on its own legal and moral merits.

Americans have always nourished isolationist dreams as if they could forget about the world, and utopian dreams that power politics and war could somehow be eliminated from international relations by changing the rules of the game or by treating every dispute as a case of law. But they have always had a capacity for hard-headed calculation of the national interest. Even the idealistic Jefferson, a francophile and an anglophobe who loved France for the ideas which it produced in the Age of Reason and hated England for the events that led to the American Revo-

lution, could say that the day the French flag flew in New Orleans, the United States would have to marry itself to the British fleet. For he saw as clearly as did Alexander Hamilton that America's safety lay in Europe's strife. He saw that the tiny maritime republic on the Western fringes of the Atlantic was safe from the predatory powers of Europe only as long as these powers had to keep their major forces in Europe and European waters in order to protect themselves against each others. The too great victory of any one of them might have spelled the end of the American experiment in republican government. The first generation of American statesmen saw clearly what the conditions were under which the new country would have a chance to grow to maturity.

The American Revolution had proved that such a great power as England could not easily put down rebellion in North America and finally chose to give up the struggle.

Each passing year would make it still more difficult for a European power to destroy American independence, once orderly central government was established and the normal processes of growth in population and production were allowed to operate. But if time was on the side of an independent United States, this was true only so long as the European powers were kept occupied in guarding against each other. It was this condition which led the authors of the *Federalist* Papers to describe the object of American naval strength as being "so to incline the balance in this part of the world as to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the new world. Alexander Hamilton, in one of the *Federalist* papers, wrote that "our situation invites and interests prompt us to aim at an ascendant in the system of American affairs . . . The superiority she (Europe) has long maintained has tempted her to plume herself as the mistress of the world and consider the rest of mankind as created for her terms . . . But Americans disdain to be the instruments of European greatness. Let the thirteen states . . . concur in

erecting one great American system superior to all trans-Atlantic forces." But note that these statesmen who were so ambitious for America felt no desire and saw no possibility of dictating to Europe regarding the course of European affairs. Thus, a tough-minded calculation of the national interest pointed toward the same kind of policy as did our isolationist and utopian sentiments. The culminating point in this early diplomacy to establish American paramountcy in the new world was perhaps the Monroe Doctrine, enunciated in 1823, a foreign policy clearly based on taking constructive advantage of Europe's strife to develop America's strength.

The European-American relationship has undergone drastic modification in the century and a half since the first generation of American statesmen passed from the scene. In their day, there were never less than five great powers, and as recently as 1914, there were eight. Today, there are only two powers of the first rank, whatever honorific status may be given to Britain, France, and that other holder of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, the Nationalist Government of Chiang Kai-shek. In an earlier day, there were enough great powers so that a primitive collective security system operated almost automatically. Louis XIV, Napoleon, Bismark, the Kaiser and Hitler were each in their turn to discover that expansion could only go so far without provoking a grand alliance against a great disturber. And of these, only Bismark learned in time to save the fruits of early aggression for his Fatherland. Today, there are not enough powers of the first rank for this self-operating collective security system to work. Two, unhappily, is too few to collect, for if one of them breaks the peace, there is only one policeman left.

In the earlier period, great powers were all located in Europe. Today, Europe is no longer the home of the great Powers but the major arena in which they contend. Western Europe has come to play in American diplomacy a role something like that which Low Countries have historically played for England. It

is a buffer area whose independence we greatly cherish. Formerly we could count on the states of Europe to preserve their own independence in the operations of the European balance of power. Today we find that Western Europe will be very likely overrun unless we ourselves take active and costly steps to prevent it.

The reason for this is fairly simple: the same technological advances which made it possible for the United States to span a continent and grow strong also permitted the emergence of another great land power in Eurasia — the Soviet Union. It was the development of more efficient overland transport which permitted the rise of these two great land powers. The invention and spread of the railroad, of the automobile and truck, and of the airplane, and of telegraph and radio, have made the efficient administration of great land areas possible, which, in another era, would have broken apart. In Europe, on the other hand, where national boundaries hardened long before the revolution in overland transportation, the former great Powers are still about the same size as was appropriate to a more primitive state of overland transportation. If the power of Western Europe overcomes to be used as a single unit, it would provide some very effective competition for both the United States and the Soviet Union. But the record of effort toward unity shows how slow and painful progress is likely to be along these lines. Still another difference between the world politics of our own decade and that of the early days of the republic is the political awakening of Asia, where more than half the population of mankind is in a state of revolt against the existing order. With the two superpowers the United States and the Soviet Union, apparently so evenly balanced, we are likely to see a great many efforts to cultivate the good will of these newly awakened masses. Thus we seem to have moved into an era of inverted imperialism in which the underdeveloped areas are likely to be able to make successful demands upon the advanced Western powers, and particularly the United States. Finally, developments in military technique have made modern war a much less precise instrument for

achieving national objectives. Even victory may involve near-annihilation, and the all-around distaste for general war in an era of thermonuclear weapons is so great that the advantage in cold war and limited war may be decisive.

For more than a century, the United States enjoyed almost cost-free protection from any prospective European aggressor. It used its army to bring law and order to the American West, and its navy and Marine Corps to protect the American trader and investor from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, to say nothing of Commodore Perry's opening up of Japan. Americans like to believe that colonial wars were fought in other countries by imperial exploiters. Just as the colonial powers of Europe were bringing law and order to Kipling's "lesser breeds beyond the law", whether they liked it or not, in India and in Africa — so were our armed forces preoccupied with making the American West a fit place for white men to live in, and the Navy and Marine Corps making the shores of foreign countries a fit place in which to trade, travel, and invest. It was almost as if we had decided that the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution was to be made to apply the world over except of course in Europe, where the legal systems for the protection of private rights were as advanced as our own.

Our armed power was not used in Europe, but it is not quite true that we stayed out of any European wars into which we could possibly have entered, for there was a century of absence of general war in Europe from 1815 to 1914, and we had gotten into the Napoleonic Wars, once for either side, first in the French Naval War of 1798, then again in the War of 1812. There we found ourselves, in effect, the allies of Napoleon, or so it must have seemed to our British enemy, who had to ration his armed force between two threats. Our experience in the 20th century, where there was again general war in Europe, suggests that we are likely to continue to get into every large war that occurs in Europe, and therefore must find some way to prevent war if we are to have peace.

You will remember that we have already said that American security has always depended on Europe being able to keep itself in balance. If it cannot, we have an interest in preserving the independence of the states of Western Europe against any challenge from the East, whether it comes from the Soviet Union or Germany or the two together. It is similar to that of the historic British interest in preserving independence of Holland and Belgium. This is perhaps why we are almost certain to be involved — and for three centuries practically every great power has been involved in every war in which there was a great power on each side, so that there have been something like 12 or 13 wars in which all or all but one of the great Powers were involved. We can, then, only have peace by appearing strong enough and ready enough to meet any challenge to the European order. It took American power to break the stalemate in the First World War. It took American power to check the advance of Hitler in the Second, and it is taking American power to counter Soviet expansionism before it finally results in a Third World War.

We have reluctantly reconciled ourselves to the need for a more or less permanent semi-mobilization of our war potential, because we realize that the free ride in national security which the United States experienced in the 19th century seems to be gone for good, that that state of affairs that enabled us to get along without large armies and navies and to get along without allies is also gone for good, that the United States can never again look forward to staying out of the mainstream of history. We are prepared to develop the minimum armed strength necessary to guarantee security and ask that as much as possible of our productive energies shall be reserved for the satisfaction of civilian wants.

How different our viewpoint is from that of a bare half century ago, when the United States, flushed with the triumph of the Spanish-American war, first felt the pleasurable sensation of being taken seriously in world politics. For a half century we

have been struggling to discover how to use our enormous power and what are the sobering responsibilities that go with its possession. Already, 50 years ago our steel production was surpassing that of any other power. Already, at the beginning of the 20th century, our population was about that of the two largest powers of Western Europe. Our Navy, after a generation of neglect following the Civil War, was rapidly surging ahead and was shortly to become one of the two or three greatest in the world. The railroad, which, in the first decades after its invention, seemed to be a device for increasing the power of Bismarck's Germany, for Germany was centrally located in Europe and, with the railroad, could apply its power first in one direction, then in another — paradoxically in its second phase, took away from Germany and restored to the sea power the advantage which it had first conferred on Germany. For the railroad had as its second consequence an increasing European dependence on overseas sources of food and other raw materials and exposed the land powers of continental Europe to the slow strangulation of economic blockade by whatever powers controlled the oceans or the food and raw materials that lay on the other side. As long as Britain and the United States worked together, there could be no question as to who would win a protracted war. The League Covenant, with its emphasis on economic sanctions, reflected the profound respect for the efficiency of economic blockade which the statesmen of the First World War period developed.

With the British and American navies working alongside each other in two world wars, conflict has not taken the form of sea power vs. sea power but rather of land power vs. sea power. Whether the British planned it that way is a subject on which we need not tarry, but Britain has been retreating in her conflicts with the United States for many decades and long before American naval power reached parity with Britain's. The rise of Germany under Bismarck, Germany's rapid industrialization, her restless rulers and their apparently unlimited diplomatic ambitions caused

Britain after about 1895 to mend her fences above all with the United States, but also with Japan, France and Russia. To the Canadians, her surrender of Canadian interests in the Alaska-Canada boundary dispute was the final recognition of American paramountcy in the new world. The bitterness of the Anglo-American naval arms race just after World War I somewhat hid the fact that the fundamental clashes of interest had been eliminated by Britain's withdrawal. From the American point of view, an effective collaboration with Britain has finally come, since 1941, to seem the indispensable cornerstone of a European policy aimed at preventing the overturn of European order by either an aggressive Germany or an aggressive Russia. We have come a long way from the doctrine of no foreign entanglement which we associate with Washington and Jefferson to the intimate military collaboration with Britain that has been continuous since 1941.

With the implementation of the North Atlantic Pact by the most detailed political-military planning the world has seen in advance of actual war, we have gone even further. It is possible that in both the First and Second World Wars, the prospective German aggressor would have been deterred, had he known how surely American industrial potential was going to be applied to destroy his armed forces. We have certainly done a great deal since 1945 to make it easy for the Soviet Power Center not to make the mistake which Hitler and the Kaiser made in 1939 and 1914. We hope that, with a balanced rearmament capable of meeting general aggression by a devastating counter-blow and meeting local aggression locally, our prospective Communist opponents will come to believe that war with the U. S. cannot be won before American weight can be effectively thrown in the balance. It is taking somewhere between 15 and 20% of our national income to achieve this modest objective, and there is apparently almost complete national unanimity about the regulation of our defense expenditures. While the Democrats may be accusing the Republicans of cheese-paring in national defense, the amount of the alleged cheese-paring in question is only 5 or 10% of the total military budget.

Are we doing enough to meet the present requirements of American foreign policy? It took the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia to win the Congressional approval of large appropriations under the Marshall Plan in 1948; it took the Korean aggression in June 1950 to bring about Congressional approval of the large-scale increase in force levels which have gone into effect. If we could always count on the Soviet leadership to shock us into the military and foreign aid policy that protects our national security, we are probably safe. But suppose that a more astute Soviet leadership fails to give us warning? Do we have the leadership to win public approval and adequate national security policies if Soviet behavior is moderate? It is this question which gives point to a continuing calculation of the requirements for adequate national security.

As in the 18th century, the isolationists and the utopians are still with us. Neither believes any longer that we can forget about national security and threats from the outside world. But the isolationist is apt to be as concerned with the threat of internal subversion as with that of foreign aggression. He is apt to be almost as distrustful of America's allies as of her enemies, especially of her larger European allies. So he may be a bit of an "Asia-lationist". He still believes in a "lone-hand" policy and may even for that reason alone want to stake America's primary defense on strategic air power.

The utopian is no longer sanguine about the possibilities of "utopia in one country". He wants international government, the four freedoms and full bellies everywhere in the world. Point Four and UNESCO — "peoples speaking to peoples" — would be his assurance for a warless future. He still believes that Uncle Sam can swear off power politics like an Alcoholic Anonymous swears off demon rum — by the laying on of hands.

An Alexander Hamilton or a John Quincy Adams, were he to revisit our troubled planet, would still believe that American security required the checking of any aspirant to universal hegemony in Eurasia, but he would recognize that this is a condition

we now have to work to maintain — by guarantee and military aid in Europe, by checking piecemeal aggression and by encouraging rising living standards in Asia, by mobilizing free world opinion through the United Nations and through our public information policies, but most of all by developing the balanced military strength to discourage the aggressor from making either big or little wars and to permit retaliation and recuperation if full-scale armed attack should nevertheless occur.

The past ten years have seen a revolution in American foreign policy. We have in this decade for the first time made an alliance in peace-time, for the first time built up our armed forces in peace-time to something like war-time levels, for the first time used economic aid and psychological strategy to support our military and political objectives. Some think it came thirty years too late, but it came. And it came on the basis of an interpretation of present-day facts which Hamilton and Jefferson would, I believe, both have approved.

What of the future? As a layman who finds astounding science fiction pretty pale stuff beside the reality of advancing military technology, I have only one concern — that in a day of rapid change, when the oceans no longer give us a shield of time and distance to mobilize after a war crisis occurs, when the military build-up takes longer than ever before with the increasing complexity of weapons and the ever more complete mobilization — that the critical decisions to keep our military and foreign policies in line may have to be taken several years before the actual war crisis, and that we may pass the point of no return without even realizing it. It is this that gives so much point to the serious study in our universities and in our war colleges of the common problems of foreign and military policy — so that threats to the national security can be identified in time to do something about them.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Professor William T. R. Fox

Professor Fox received his B. S. degree from Haverford College in 1932 and his A. M. degree from the University of Chicago in 1934. He was a Norman Wait Harris Foundation Fellow at the latter institution in 1935-36 and received his Ph. D. degree there in 1940.

From 1936 to 1941, he was an instructor in political science at Temple University and during the next two years he was an instructor and conference director in the School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. In 1943, Doctor Fox became associated with Yale University, first as a research associate in the Institute of International Studies and then as associate professor of political science. He joined the faculty of Columbia University in 1950, where he is currently Professor of International Relations and Director of the Institute of War and Peace Studies.

Aside from his professorial duties, Doctor Fox has served as a consultant to the Department of State at various times since 1944. He has been on the Board of Editors of *International Organization* since 1946 and Managing Editor of *World Politics* since 1948. He was a member of the International Secretariat at the San Francisco Conference, United Nations, in 1945.

Professor Fox is the author of *The Superpowers*; co-author of *Absolute Weapons (Part III: International Control of Atomic Weapons)*, and also co-author of *Technology and International Relations*.