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NATIONAL SECURITY AND NEW FOREIGN POLICY

by

THE HONORABLE LESLIE H. GELB

This article is adapted from the address given by Mr. Gelb during the 23d Annual National Security Seminar at the US Army War College, 8 June 1977.

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I have been asked to discuss national security and the international environment. Since that allows me considerable leeway, I would like to fulfill my assignment by giving you my perception of how the new Administration differs from those of the past in its approach to foreign policy.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

As you know from having followed foreign policy over the past several years and what has been said about it, there have been some very different views between those on the outside and those on the inside, in government, about the nature of the foreign policy universe.

To those of us who were on the outside, it seemed that international relations, or international politics, had changed in a much more fundamental and secular way than had been granted by recent Administrations. There was a tendency to see Soviet-American relations as the center of the universe and to cast Soviet power not only as on the rise, but as beginning to put us, in overall terms, at a serious strategic disadvantage. I think it is beyond question that Soviet power has increased, strategically and conventionally: strategically to the point where they are at virtual parity with the United States; conventionally to the point where some who know a great deal about the subject believe that, in Europe, the Soviets have an edge.

Nevertheless, when you consider power in the 1970's, you do not begin and end the discussion with military force, but rather you look at a nation's capability to manage its foreign policy in the larger sense. Thus, when those of us on the outside looked at the position of the Soviet Union, we saw not only the very real global military reach that was being developed, but also a nation that was taking its lumps, so to speak, and having a great deal more difficulty than the United States in adjusting to the world of the 1970's.

One could see this in the Soviet economic situation, where they turned increasingly toward the West for credits and for technology, and where even this serious compromise did not result in the real rate of growth the Soviets were seeking. It brought them instead to greater dependence on the West for money, for technology, and for food as their own crops failed year after year. In short, they developed real dependence on us in basic areas of their economy.

For another example, take the question of the Soviet position in the Middle East. While it seemed at the height of the Middle East war that they were about to profit greatly from yet another Arab-Israeli conflict, the net result was a severe weakening of the Soviet position in the Middle East. The major Arab states began to turn to us rather than to the Soviet Union for help in arranging a settlement in the area. We began to see their cultural affinity for the West and disaffinity for the Russians. I count this as a very real accomplishment on the part of the previous Administration.

The Soviets also were not doing very well in the Third World. They had very little to offer the countries of Latin America, Africa, and even Asia, because those countries were primarily interested in economic development, the promise of which came from the West. Just as the Russians had to turn to the West, so did the developing world.

Then there was the question of the Soviet Union's relationship to the Communist parties of Western Europe. If you think that the Communist parties in Western Europe are causing the United States to worry about the prospects of their coming to power, imagine the difficulties that their assertion of independence from the Soviet Union is causing the leaders in the Kremlin. It is a fundamental issue of power and control, unprecedented for the Soviet Union, but inescapable.

When you add it all up, the United States seemed to be in a far better position to take advantage of the situation of the 1970's than the Soviet Union, and yet the policies of the United States—indeed, the West—seemed so focused on US-Soviet military competition that we did not seize the opportunity to benefit from Soviet inability, or incapacity, to exercise power and influence beyond the strategic buildup.

There was also a recognition by people looking in the window from the outside that the ability of any external power—be it the Soviet Union, the United States, or even China—to exercise a great deal of traditional colonial power in the Third World was waning, if not nearly extinct. Against the American experience in Vietnam, there was an enormous reluctance in Congress and in the Executive Branch to see ourselves getting involved in similar situations. Other countries began to take their bearings from this, realizing that they would have to find other ways to meet their security needs. And the Soviet Union, while it was developing a much greater capacity to project force abroad, was still not in a position to do any of these things unopposed, as we were in the 1950's and 60's.

There was also the China factor. Just as the United States for two and a half decades faced two major strategic opponents—the Soviet Union and China—now the Soviet Union has to contend with two major opponents—the United States and China.

Another factor was the emergence of regional powers—countries which, because of their command of resources and their large populations, began to have considerable influence as the influence of the US and Soviet Union was being constrained. These regional powers included Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Nigeria, and Indonesia. How were we going to relate to this? What was going to be the security connection, given the fact that we were not going to be able to establish a traditional treaty relationship with these countries? How could we deal with the situation evolving in Africa, with its volatile mix of competition among external powers, strong regional powers, tribal conflict, and deep racial divisions? Could we manage that by focusing on our relations with the Soviet Union?

Of equal importance was the fact that we now found ourselves in peacetime in almost a wartime situation with respect to resources. It had become far less than certain that we could have easy access to essential raw materials—oil in particular, but other commodities as well. How could we deal with the impact of this situation on our security, when we were not in a position simply to impose our will by encouraging coups if we did not like the local leaders? What kind of relationships could we develop in the world to protect our basic economic interests in an environment so different from the 50's and 60's?

DEVELOPING A FRAME OF MIND: PRAGMATISM VS. DOCTRINE

The general approach of this Administration in the first four months was not to try to mass this disparate, diverse, and sometimes incomprehensible foreign policy universe into a new strategy. There is no Carter Doctrine, or Vance Doctrine, or Brown Doctrine, because of a belief that the environment we are looking at is far too complex to be reduced to a doctrine in the tradition of post-World War II American foreign policy. Indeed, the Carter approach to foreign policy rests on a belief that not only is the world far too complex to be reduced to a doctrine, but that there is something inherently wrong with having a doctrine at all.

The whole issue of doctrine goes back, I am sure, to a lot of things you are familiar with, namely, the components of the struggle in American foreign policy after World War II between the so-called school of realism and the so-called school of idealism. You remember Hans Morgenthau's book, written in 1947, *In Defense of the National Interest*; it contended that we had to abandon traditional American idealism and moralism in the conduct of foreign policy—that we faced a different situation. His idea that we had to grow up was echoed by George Kennan and Winston Churchill. We moved very quickly into a phase of having one doctrine after another: the Truman Doctrine, the Eisenhower Doctrine, the McNamara Doctrine, the Nixon Doctrine, and so forth. It was said that we needed to encompass reality this way in order to bring coherence to the world through American purposefulness. I think there were a number of consequences for foreign policy arising from a set doctrine or particular perception of the world.

First, to have a doctrine, it is inevitable to fit facts selectively to your theory, to judge the importance of everything that happens in terms of what your theory tells you is important. We may have very different views about the good sense of the Vietnam War. I was one of those, I hasten to add, who thought it made sense for a long time and then stopped thinking it made sense. I had no special wisdom prior to 1967—the doctrine was in my head, too. My views just changed. It is very hard, looking back at it, to see how Vietnam was important, save in terms of that doctrine. I think it is easy to see that its importance was attached solely to our sense that everything happening in the world would impact directly and severely on US-Soviet relations. It was a zero-sum game. So, we fit the fact of Vietnam into the theory of containment and the world view it represented.

I think that during the 25 years of the Cold War our foreign policy was pretty good; it made sense. But it came to make less and less sense by the 1970's because the fact of the matter was that fewer and fewer things

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had to do with the Soviet-American connection. I think that without doctrine, you have a better chance to view reality in a clear way, both bureaucratically and politically. You do so bureaucratically because, as all of you who have served tours on staff are quick to realize, once you have a doctrine, it is almost impossible for those in the foreign policy establishment to disagree with the kinds of policy conclusions it leads to and remain in the game. Once you accept that framework, it becomes the corners of your life. You cannot dissent; you cannot disagree. Even if things are going very badly—and I am not referring just to Vietnam—the notion is that we have to try harder to do more because the doctrine demands it. This has a particular impact on those of you in the military service, who are encouraged to try harder to meet an established objective, not to question that objective. A doctrine locks you in—it locks the political leadership in—because it restricts vision and colors reality. Doctrine takes on the quality of revealed scripture, and you have to defend it at every step. You are less free to accept criticism, even if it is constructive. The commitment to doctrine makes nearly impossible a real dialogue between those who direct policy and those who question both policy and doctrine.

I think there has been a conscious effort on the part of this Administration's leaders not to develop an all-embracing doctrine. Rather, a more pragmatic approach has been taken. Some have said, and will say in the future, that the approach has been too pragmatic, too case-by-case, too oriented toward situations as they arise. That is a real danger—there is no question about it—and we may find that things are falling through the cracks because we are being too pragmatic. But saying that the orientation is pragmatic does not mean that decisions are being made without objectives—quite the contrary.

President Carter, I think, has been extraordinary and quite unprecedented in the degree to which he has publicly stated a broad range of objectives on almost every foreign policy issue. It is not at all a question of purposelessness. If you look at the last four months, you will find that the President has told the public and the bureaucracy more about what he expects of it than any President has done in a comparable period of time—or maybe even in a four-year stretch. He has laid down his marker on almost every arms control issue, on the Middle East, on the developing world, and on many other issues. He has made a very clear statement of purpose. But having laid down those markers, his approach has been to look at each situation as it arises and decide what can be accomplished in each case. There's also a third quality: if the decisions are not working, try another course. Do not keep trying to batter down the door when it is apparent that things are not being realized the way you would hope.

Again, there is an important advantage in having a pragmatic approach, in that doctrine makes it difficult to alter the course. If you have a sense of objectives and you allow yourself freedom in moving toward those objectives, then it is easier to say, for example, we tried to talk to the Germans about not proceeding with their sale of a reprocessing plant, a uranium enrichment facility, to Brazil. It did not work, so we shall try another approach. Let us not push to the point where we jeopardize our fundamental relationship with West Germany. It is easier to recognize mistakes. I submit to you that this is the single most fundamental principle in the conduct of foreign policy.

Let me return to the one experience that has most shaped my own mentality on this, which is Vietnam. Some people look back at Vietnam and say that the basic lesson of the war was that if you get involved in a situation like that, you simply have to use all the power necessary to win it quickly. I do not agree with that conclusion, because in situations like Vietnam, I do not think one can establish any stability over the long term, even if one achieves a short-term military victory. Furthermore, to say we should use all-out force once we are involved ignores a prime issue in making foreign policy: that is, the sense of objectives. In other words, it places sole emphasis on achievement of objectives, whether or not the objectives make sense.

There has been another equally invalid

lesson drawn from the Vietnam experience, namely that you should avoid doing anything that has any chance of involving you in military conflict. The basic liberal criticism of Vietnam can be reduced to the proposition: do not make mistakes. This is preposterous! Because we lack real and complete information about what is going on in the world, as well as the wisdom to deal with it, mistakes are inevitable. It seems to me the real genius of foreign policymaking—if there is any genius to an exercise that I regard as fundamentally commonsensical—is first, being able to recognize when you have made mistakes, and second, having the courage to change course.

ORDERING PRIORITIES

Basically, this Administration has established three roughly equal foreign policy priorities: our relations with industrialized states, particularly Western Europe and Japan; US-Soviet relations; and our relations with the developing world. Let me discuss each briefly.

Relations with Industrialized States

There has not been a single American Administration since the end of World War II that has not held that our first priority is relations with the industrialized world or Western Europe. It would be indefensible to hold otherwise. How is the situation different today? My answer to that is that hopefully this time the priority is real. It has not been in the past.

By and large, this has been a dilemma of Democratic and Republican Administrations alike. We found ourselves espousing a foreign policy based on the US-Western European connection, but then not really acting accordingly. It was difficult because the Europeans had caught us in a kind of diplomatic conundrum. On the one hand, they would tell us they expected the United States to lead. When we did take the lead, they would tell us the United States was trying to cram its own foreign policy down European throats. We had no way out of that conundrum, especially when Europeans realized that we were dealing over their heads with the Soviet Union, that US-European relations were derivative of US-Soviet relations.

I think we have done a good deal in just four months to begin to convince the Europeans that we are serious about basing our relations with the Soviet Union and the developing world upon real cooperation among Western powers. I must say that when we started this enterprise, I was not sure it would work. But I had easily the most pleasant experience of my four months in government coming back from Geneva a couple of weeks ago. At the end of the Vance-Gromyko SALT negotiations in Geneva, I broke off from the party to debrief some of our major allies. I had done this earlier, after the Moscow trip, and the conversations with European allies were really quite sterile. This time around the response was really extraordinary. At every stop I made, they were prepared to talk about SALT, about arms sales, about other arms control issues, and about nuclear proliferation, and they had something to say. They were not merely being critical; they were being constructive. I learned something at each stop. There was a clear sense that they understood that what they were telling us made a difference.

What we did with NATO before and after these last two SALT rounds is something we have never done before. Before we went to Moscow, we stopped at NATO and told them what our SALT proposal was going to be, having already prepared the ground for that by briefing allies bilaterally. That had not been done before. When we came back from Moscow, we returned to NATO and debriefed, again following up with bilaterals. We did the same thing with regard to the negotiations in Geneva. We have also developed a running dialogue on the critical issue of cruise missiles, which relates not only to SALT, but also to the whole question of the conventional force balance in Central Europe. The conversations have been substantial and different from those in the past. I hope this will continue.

It is difficult to seriously challenge the need to base our foreign policy on our relations with the industrialized world. Our primary economic ties are there; our heritage is, by and large, from those parts of the world; our values are in common. In fact, values are something I cannot just mention and walk away from. This aspect has caused a great deal of comment, both outside and inside this Administration. There are a lot of people who feel uneasy that the United States is taking such a bold and direct position on human rights issues. Let me confine myself to making two points.

First, I think it was absolutely essential to reestablish the confidence of the American people in the Executive Branch of government–in its conduct of foreign policy–to make clear that the Administration shares the basic values of most Americans. The feeling had developed that foreign policy had become the special preserve of a President who was prepared to do whatever he wanted–Democrat or Republican.

Second, the statement of human values and human rights was absolutely necessary to remind us of what foreign policy is all about. I think we had reached the point where foreign policy experts in the United States were being conditioned to believe that this was an area of special morality, special preserves, and special information, and the American people had to trust whatever the Government did, regardless of the values behind those actions. Although, as I said earlier, I think that most of the things we did in foreign policy over the course of 25 or 30 years were right, some things clearly were not. The statement on human rights has been a reminder that foreign policy is not simply a game of kings, that it is conducted to promote the welfare of people, and that it is conducted not for its own purposes, but as an extension of the very reason for government.

US-Soviet Relations

The second area of priority is US-Soviet relations. I have talked already about perceptions of Soviet power. I would add that there is no single position in this Administration on exactly how strong the Soviet Union is and what it can do abroad. There are many views, particularly on the extent of Soviet ability to translate its military power into diplomatic advantage. There is, however, a consensus that not everything that happens in the world must be viewed according to how it fits in the US-Soviet connection.

President Carter has done two basic things that affect our relations with the Soviets. First, he has continued to increase defense spending in order to make it clear that we do not intend to reduce military strength, whatever our foreign policy orientation. Second, he has opened a wide range of arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union, not only on SALT but on many other issues. Eight working groups were established in the Vance-Gromyko meeting in Moscow.

What is different about the way the relationship is being handled now in contrast to the way it was handled in previous years is not so much the specific content of policy, but the context. The Soviet Union is now being treated as one of three major priorities, not as the overarching one.

In SALT, the approach of this Administration has been to look at the policy as a continuum, that is, to avoid making agreements in SALT II that foreclose on real opportunities for serious arms control in SALT III. President Carter has made some very strong statements about his goals and attitudes toward strategic arms. He stated flatly that he wants to reduce dependence on nuclear armaments. He stated flatly that he considers the present situation not only dangerous but immoral and, because of that, he has directed two tacks in our approach to SALT. First, we are to seek real reductions, not simply codification of forces on each side. In other words, we should look at what each side has and agree that this will be the concern of SALT III. Second, we should seek real, qualitative constraints on the development of new forces.

We took these positions to Moscow in a comprehensive agreement and, as you know from all the good publicity we got on our way home from Moscow, it did not work. The Russians turned us down flatly. The approach that we have taken since then has been not to abandon this comprehensive approach to SALT, but to blend everything we put on the table in Moscow with the Soviet position that SALT II would confirm the Vladivostok principles.

In effect, what we have presented is a three-part approach to SALT II: the first part deals with the Vladivostok ceilings–2,400 strategic delivery vehicles, 1,320 missiles with MIRV's; the second part is a deferral proposal to set aside for a short period, say three years, those issues we could not settle on a basis that would last until 1985; and the third part is a statement of general principles to govern the conduct of SALT III, namely, significant reductions and qualitative constraints on the development of new strategic armaments.

In Geneva, as Secretary Vance said, there was general agreement between ourselves and the Russians on this three-part approach to resolving our differences. There nonetheless remain real differences over which SALT items fit in which of these packages and what the substance of a number of the items will be.

The five-year Interim Agreement on offensive missiles runs out in October, but there is still a lot to negotiate. From the beginning, we have maintained that even though the Interim Agreement runs out in October, time is not the governing factor. We are more interested in an agreement that makes sense.

SALT is a long and arduous process, but it has been the most fascinating thing I have witnessed in this Administration because it gave me a much better sense of the bargaining process with the Soviet Union. It is a laborious process which has to be conducted, for the most part, at very high levels. Every time there is a high level meeting, there is tremendous pressure, especially on our part, to do things to agree.

As far as other aspects of US-Soviet relations are concerned, the answers are far from clear. For example, how should we perceive Soviet military strength? Do we portray Soviet military power as "the Russians are coming," if not already here, in order to justify a large defense budget? And what are the consequences of doing it this way? Do you not create the very situation which you most seek to avoid, the perception that the Russians are stronger than we are? Many people are more worried about the perceptions of Soviet power than about the hardware itself. If you paint the Russians as ten feet tall, you have accomplished the basic purpose of Soviet foreign policy without their having to lift a finger. Therefore, we must balance the need to maintain support in the United States for defense spending with the very real danger of convincing people in other countries that the Russians are winning.

Secondly, how do you relate the central bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union to things the Soviet Union is doing in other parts of the world? You remember the debate that took place over Kissinger's theory of linkage–from SALT to Soviet activities in Vietnam to Soviet actions in Angola. President Carter has said that he is not going to be indifferent to what the Russians do in peripheral areas of the world, that it *will* count, that the ability of any Administration to get a SALT agreement through the Senate will be affected by the political atmospherics of what the Russians do in other countries.

And what of human rights? We talk about our desire to stand up for human rights in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. What if they do not do much about this? Does this affect what we should do with them economically? Does this affect the course of the negotiations on mutual balanced force reductions in Europe? I do not think we yet have any clear-cut answers to these questions.

Another question revolves around how we deal with the China connection. I think in past years there was a tendency to use the US-China relationship as a lever on the Soviet Union. This Administration has much less of a tendency to meddle in Chinese-Soviet affairs, much less of a belief that we could control them.

Relations with the Third World

Finally, the third priority is the developing world. Let us look at how this Administration handled the recent situation in Zaire. We decided not to ship lethal items to Zaire during the fighting, although many of our European partners did so. This did not harm the Zairian Government at all, but rather was an advantage in that it avoided US-Soviet competition and allowed the situation to fade away without our losing face or the Russians losing face.

The course of events in Angola had an impact on how senior people in this Administration think about foreign policy. No sooner did the Soviet-backed Marxist regime in Luanda establish itself than it asked the Gulf Oil Company to come back in and start drilling once again at the Kabinda oil fields. Within weeks it made overtures to us to establish diplomatic relations. Now why is that? I think it comes back to the point I made earlier that these regimes—even those that differ ideologically from us—are interested in economic development and technology. These interests will assert themselves as long as we do not complicate fundamental economic influence with unnecessary military involvement.

Other Issues

Let me touch on several other issues briefly. First, President Carter has laid down one of his strongest markers in the area of nuclear nonproliferation. He has turned off domestic reprocessing of nuclear fuel, asked us to look very hard at the consequences of developing a breeder reactor cycle, and stated very clearly to other countries that we think this technology poses a real security risk.

Now we have undeniably had all sorts of problems in dealing with other countries on this issue. Perhaps we have not done our best in handling it. This will be a continuing severe problem over the next couple of years as we begin to reconcile security requirements with energy needs—with basic economics—in all these countries.

Second, on the subject of arms sales, I have spent two and a half months in this Administration leading a project to develop a policy. We now have one, although it is difficult to state it exactly and concisely. Basically, it involves a tricky balancing act between saying we need to continue arms sales for security purposes and a strong instinct among the political leadership of this Administration that arms sales should be an exceptional instrument of foreign policy rather than the rule. We now have to learn to walk the fine line between restraint and security interests.

IN SUM

Let me conclude by trying to relate all of this briefly to military force. In defense policy and strategy I do not think we will see major changes from what has been developing over the last eight to ten years. There will continue to be strong emphasis on deterrence, both with strategic and conventional forces; there will be strong emphasis on force readiness; and, in Europe, priority will be given to maintaining the technological superiority of the United States.

What I have been describing to you is new, but not revolutionary; it is humane, but not fanatically idealistic; it is pragmatic, but not without purpose. I think it is fundamentally American in its goals. I hope it will work, and I believe it will.