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POLICY PROPOSALS:
AMERICAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY RESPONSE

BY

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AMERICAN POLITICAL AND MILITARY RESPONSE

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POLICY PROPOSALS

American Political and Military Response

Patience may well be a virtue that goes unrewarded when practiced by political leaders. The use of force and its antecedents, the threat to and capability of use are hallmarks of superpower status globally and even of the petty principalities who may be number 3. The distinction between super - and regional powers rests but upon their capacities to extend their reach. Conceived of as concentric circles, superpower influence may radiate globally while regional powers extend but within limited radiants.

Since their reach is so extensive, superpowers tend to assume that all areas within reach are subject to control. Such assumptions are seductively attractive, tempting assertions of claim and success for events unaffected such as the asserted success of US policy in the revolution

against Sukarno and American prowess at Sadat's eviction of Russian personnel.

Having reached superpower status following World War II, the US was virtually alone until the USSR began expanding her role in the mid 1960's. Starting rather hesitantly with the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Containment policy (1974), we followed with North American Treaty Organization (NATO, 1949). The Korean War (1950-4) demonstrated the fragility of America's domain which was subsequently shored up under Secretary Dulles' alliance expansion policy. NATO was to be cloned as Central Treaty Organization (CENTRO), Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Australia, New Zealand and the US (ANZUS) and myriadic siblings in the guise of bilateral alliances and myriadic siblings in the guise of bilateral alliances and mutual assistance pacts (with Japan, Taiwan, Israel, South Korea, Iran, etc.).

Russian reluctance to challenge US policy directly provided the United States with a clear road devoid of obstructions. US policy was only to be limited by logistical

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requirements and latent nationalism in the affected areas, which was hardly an effective barrier to US military power. Officials of the Eisenhower administration learned that Soviet power could be contained by (the threat to use) American nuclear superiority while demonstrably weak conventional military forces were sufficient for the tasks of intervening in distant places. Suez (1956), Lebanon (1958), and Iran (1954) proved that a relatively small mobile force could regulate the defense perimeter to the end that America's strategic and military position was projected and protected cheaply and bloodlessly.

This is not to say that there were not frustrations: France's refusal to ratify her own proposal for creating a European Defense Community; the debacle of French policy in Indochina, Indian hostility to creating a South Asian Treaty

Organization and Egyptian opposition to a Middle East Treaty Organization were signal defeats of US policy. But we recovered from each setback with what was considered skillful aplomb. We virtually restored Vietnam to antebellum status replacing the French; the Baghdad Pact replaced the projected Middle East Treaty Organization (METO) only to be replaced by CENTO headquartered in Turkey. While the plan had been to forge an Arab equivalent to NATO, no Arab states joined. [Iraq withdrew following her revolution (1958), resulting in the beheading of King Faisal and his Prime Minister Nuri-as-Said.]

The projected South Asia Treaty Organization was to be a NATO-like entity organized around Nehru's India. As SEATO, its linch pin was Pakistan leading Nehru to conclude that it was targeted against India, not Russia or China.

EDC's defeat followed immediately upon Dulles' "Agonizing Reappraisal" speech and helped pave the way for nationalist resurgence in Europe. Coupled with the Anglo-French debacle in Suez, the end to French and British imperial designs were hastened by an American policy which had not set out to discourage those designs.

Throughout this period (1953-60), United States military capability for engaging in low intensity conflict was declining at the same time that American nuclear superiority was increasing apparently. But appearances can be deceptive and we tended to deceive ourselves as being uniquely safe from serious challenge because of our overwhelming nuclear superiority in terms of instruments and delivery systems. That the Russians were not all that far behind us was made crystal clear with the launching of Sputnik in 1957 demonstrating an ability to better us in space and

signalling an end to America's unique role.

The Kennedy administration took office in 1961 with the self-proclaimed mandate to restore US prominence (close the "missile gap") and to develop the technology and skill for (1) combatting Soviet "indirect aggression" by means of counterinsurgency warfare, and (2) promoting liberation wars to build nations who would be friendly to the U.S. Without shirking our burgeoning nuclear stockpiles, the administration launched a massive space program (NASA, et al.) increased expenditures for conventional weapons and forces, initiated combat operations in South Vietnam, created the Green Berets (patterned after the French Algerian forces), developed its laboratory for counterinsurgency warfare in Vietnam, undertook the task of building a new nation in South Vietnam and launched the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. This litany

only recounts some of the developments in 1961.

The missile crisis in Cuba (1962) proved to the administration that it was on the right track. The administration spread the word that had the gauntlet been thrown by the Russians during the previous administration, the US could not have mounted a blockade, that American military might had been in such a low state of readiness as to preclude chances for a limited response to limited challenges.

Eisenhower's reliance upon nuclear deterrence posited threat escalation to the nuclear threshold to compel Soviet acquiescence to limits set by the U.S. Thus John Foster Dulles became known for his brinkmanship and the favored account of his term was titled Duel at the Brink. "Brinkmanship" became the fashionable

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topic of discourse among policy and academic elites including mathematically sophisticated games of chicken and multiple prisoners dilemmas demonstrating the choices available given limited information about and adversary's choice.

While it is still too early to size up the Carter administration, it might be said that each US administration since World War II was interventionist. But the style and mode of the interventions varied significantly as did the scale of various interventions. If style, mode, scale and loci for interventions differ, it might be quite difficult to generalize intelligently from the different cases. It may well be that like "war" and "peace", intervention is too broad a term to be studied with precision.

Comparing one administration's interventions to another is somewhat analagous to comparing apples and oranges.

Conditions change over time sufficiently to make each case almost unique; however, it may be possible to discern trends. It is quite important to bear in mind that foreign policy makers may be accountable for what they do, not what they say they do, especially what they say they do while doing. Official statements made at the time of an incident always must be considered self-serving, misleading and dissembling. Such statements are public relations events, not analytically meaningful documents. If one wishes to study Truman - Acheson foreign policy, one must examine what they did not what they claimed to do. Examining speeches may be rhetorically interesting; it rarely tells much about events.

From the standpoint of their rhetoric, presidents from Truman through Ford exhibited remarkable similarities;

however, the similarities tend to fade when the rhetoric is put aside. The triumph of Truman-Acheson policy, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was largely a European creation (ex Brussels Pact) designed to compel American participation in European renaissance to (1) deter the Soviet Union, (2) police Germany, and (3) guarantee an American hegemony which was expected to be more beneficent than any likely European hegemony. The Truman Doctrine, stripped of its rhetorical flourishes becomes merely the first in a long line of military and economic assistance programs entered into by the US in succeeding decades. The fading away of Greek communist activity resulted more from serendipity than from American acuity. And even the Marshall Plan now appears to have accompanied European recovery rather than to have caused it.

Aside from Korea, which would have been an unqualifiedly successful intervention had the Chinese not been drawn in, Truman's interventions had largely indeterminate influence upon events. Eisenhower's policies were similarly indeterminate save for Guatemala, Iran and Suez. In Guatemala, leftists were overthrown and have been denied a governing role since their ouster in 1954. In Iran, the ouster of Mohammed Mossadegh may have contributed to more recent events rather significantly. Twenty-five years later, ouster of Mossadegh's protege, Bakhtiar, was certainly not an outcome preferred by the US to Khomeini. Restoring the Shah to his throne in 1954 was anachronism triumphant. That the Shah was overthrown eventually was not remarkable; his survival for 25 years was. King Khaled, Prince Fahd and the shiekhs of Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, et al., should

tremble for they too are anachronistic for this epoch.

In Suez, we intervened against two allies (Britain and France) and a client state (Israel) that was promised far more than we would or could deliver. Israel's voluntary withdrawal from Sinai rested upon American guarantees of free navigation through the straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal. As Israel should have known, such guarantees are rhetorical flourishes, not policy indicators. They are statements of hope, not intent. The effect upon Britain and France may have been even more serious than upon the Middle East.

Suez proved the vacuousness of the much vaunted "special relationship" of Britain and the U. S. Prime Minister Anthony Eden's political position was destroyed, and the Anglo-French attempt to undermine Nasser's control of Egypt was frustrated by the American

government which had encouraged it. The French government survived but not for long. The coup de grace had been delivered to the Fourth Republic. The seeds of what was to be called Gaullism were planted, to be fertilized by the General in 1958, since which time France has been a most contentious ally.

The Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations came to be dominated by American involvement in Indochina, which must be described as having been counterproductive since South Vietnam has been absorbed by the North which also controls communist Laos and Cambodia successors to the neutral governments in place when our interventions began. One is tempted to suggest that the domino principle was stood on its head. Only the intervention in the Dominican Republic can be proclaimed an unqualified success. Our intervention in Cuba (1961 and 1962) helped to solidify

Castro's position not weaken it.

Real changes occurred in Soviet foreign policy since the war. Until his death, Stalin pursued a very sober, conservative policy resulting in a net withdrawal of Russian military forces (Iran, 1946, and Korea, 1948). Stalin avoided intervening in Greece, Turkey, and most significantly Yugoslavia. To be sure, the coup de Prague in 1948 was aided and abetted by the USSR but Soviet troops had remained in occupation since the war and Soviet hegemony was acknowledged de facto by the Western powers.

The Russians did intervene in East Berlin (1953), Poland (1956) and Hungary (1956); however, each was in the sphere of influence conceded by the West. Significantly, Albania's split did not result in Soviet military involvement despite the bitterness of the dispute. And the Russians did not intervene in China despite the potential

danger posed by Chinese disaffection.

The Cuban missile incident (1962) was the watershed. For the first time, the USSR intervened in a place which was not only distant but in an American sphere. While they failed to obtain bases or station missiles in Cuba, the Russians secured American acquiescence in Cuban territorial integrity and sovereignty. Certainly, this was the primary goal of her intervention. Kennedy's triumph was shared by Khrushchev.

It remains somewhat unclear whether the Russians led or were pushed by their Warsaw Pact allies to intervene in Czechoslovakia in 1968; however, the outcome was unambiguous. Dubček's regime offered no resistance and was replaced by a more compliant government.

Soviet interventions beyond her sphere have had rather more indeterminate results. Soviet military personnel were

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evicted from the Sudan (1971), Egypt (1972) and Somalia (1977)

and one might well be presumptuous to assume that the

Russian-Cuban roles in Ethiopia and Angola are unambiguous.

It is too soon to conclude that Neto and Mengitsu are "safely"

in the Russian camp; they may discover, as Somalia and Egypt

earlier, that Russian/Cuban support is dispensable. Indeed,

it is most unlikely that Russian influence will overcome

national pressures in any of the areas affected by Soviet

and/or Cuban troops. Afghanistan, South Yemen, Iraq, Syria,

Ethiopia, Angola, etc., are ruled by nationals who will place

their national self-interest above Russian or Cuban or any

non-national interest if push comes to shove.

If the results of intervention are as indeterminate as

this review indicate, why do nations intervene in the

affairs of other nations? The possible range of answers

might be unlimited, but some may include:

- (1) Modified machismo--states intervene to reassure themselves and others that they are there, with little concern for matters of cost, benefit, risk.

The Mayaguez Affair is an example.

- (2) Capability--states intervene because they can intervene. US in South Vietnam in 1961 is an example.

- (3) Inverted machismo--states intervene to deprive an adversary of a modified machismo intervention. Dominican Republic, 1965, for example.

- (4) Displaced animosity---states intervene against a target to punish or frustrate an adversary not participating in the fighting. China in Vietnam, 1979, to discredit the USSR.

- (5) Control--states intervene to determine specific political choices in the target. USSR in Hungary, 1956.

(6) Deflect dissent--states intervene to deflect criticism from political leadership to an adversary. Mayaguez also illustrates this point.

(7) Camouflage--states proclaim hostile intervention to justify "retaliation". North Vietnam's "attack" on the Maddox and the Turner Joy in 1964, for example, resulting in the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Low intensity conflicts (limited wars) are risky enterprises for all parties because they easily become protracted and they may become unlimited. The conflict can become protracted because the adversaries may not be exhausted by the struggle. US-North Vietnam 1961-74 and Israel--Egypt, Syria, Jordan, et al., since 1948 are examples. It was apparent to many that the Vietnam war as fought from 1965-68 or after 1969 could have continued indefinitely with indeterminate results - neither side

winning or losing. Resources available to the US and to Vietnam would have permitted indefinite continuance so long as the conflict remained limited.

Similarly, resources available to Israel and her Arab adversaries permit an equally protracted conflict. Left to their own resources, the parties would long since have exhausted their resources and would have been more restricted in the level of fire-power available.

Indefinite Russian and American resupply promoted renewed and intensified hostilities.

The homily that all wars must end is but a homily. It is not accurate historically to conclude that wars always result in an end that permits maintenance of the integrity of each adversary in whole or in part. Wars may result in the virtually complete eradication of a nation or even of a civilization.

Low intensity conflicts may even be more dangerous for superpowers than for less powerful targets. This follows because the superpower projects its global role and may be drawn into multiple conflicts. And some multiple may deplete resources available for prosecution of such wars, or propel escalation to unlimited warfare which would be profoundly unsatisfactory. Given American predispositions to assume that the Russians ordered or seduced North Korea to invade South Korea, had China chosen the moment to attack India and the USSR to invade Yugoslavia, American officials might well have concluded that the U.S. must go to war against the Soviet Union. Committing large military forces to war in Korea and Vietnam heightened American vulnerability to hostile actions to which the response would likely have been inadequate or excessive.

It is always dangerous for political leaders to provide adversaries with options that may back them into corners. This is why it is always better for superpowers to find proxies to front for them. Thus, the USSR could terminate its support for Angola with little embarrassment for Cuba. Indeed, Cuban forces could (hence might) be abandoned at scattered points in Africa if such abandonment were necessary or useful for Soviet purposes. Such action by the USSR would be consonant with her status as a superpower and with the use of the Cuban proxy. Obviously, abandonment would not occur capriciously or frivolously, but if and only if, such abandonment were deemed necessary by reason of Soviet national interests. Numerous illustrations of such abandonment may be cited; including: Soviet abandonment of communist parties in China in the 1920's and in Western

Europe during the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939, Iranian abandonment of the Kurds in Iraq (1977), and Yugoslav abandonment of Greek communist guerrillas in 1947.

Abandonment should not be viewed as dysfunctional; indeed, inherently reserving the option to abandon a proxy justifies the use. After all, the Russians were not fighting in Angola and in the Ogaden, Cubans were. The Russians can assume a posture of innocence with some degree of credibility, low though it might be. Were a major Islamic rebellion in Central Asia to occur, the Russians might find that they need their transport, supplies and personnel at home. Given short enough notice, returning Cubans might have to seek spaces on commercial flights, or seek alternative means of returning home. Their position in Africa would likely become tenuous relatively swiftly. Obviously, Cuba is aware

of the risks involved in playing her role and considers them worth taking. It would be unseemly to suggest that Castro might underestimate his risks.

In light of considerations advanced earlier in this paper, what lessons pertain to American policy as we enter the eighties? Neither relatively nor absolutely has US military power been diminished significantly despite Iran, Vietnam and diverse African developments. Perceptions of American power have diminished as has the bluster and swagger of American deportment. Nurtured by Truman's and Dulles' oratory and Kennedy's adventurism, domestic and foreign publics tended to view the US as well nigh omnipotent and invincible. Czechoslovakia, China, and Korea should have proved the lie to such perceptions but it took Vietnam and Iran to make the point and US prestige plummeted from its

fancied position. It had to fall, only the timing was in doubt.

Exaggerated notions of a state's influence and control interfere in planning, implementing, assessing and understanding its foreign policy. Thus the Truman Doctrine has been adjudged an astounding success even though such claims are baseless and ill-informed. It has suited presidents and satraps to pay homage to the claim, and the myth continued to grow until the success became part of conventional wisdom, to find its place alongside NATO'S salvation of a Europe that likely was not even threatened by Stalin's hordes. Similarly, we conceded Russian monolithic control over East Europe before such control was "established". And we then exaggerated such influence by thinking of the East European states as satellites, a rather preposterous notion politically.

The limitations of US policy facing the US today are not different appreciably from those that faced it in the fifties and sixties. Controlling events in one's own jurisdiction is neither easy nor well executed normally. Johnson, Nixon, Khrushchey and the Shah learned this lesson but recently. Controlling events abroad, beyond the reach of jurisdiction is a will-o'-the-wisp, a fantasy, an invitation to self-deception. American policy can exert some influence upon foreign leaders but usually such influence is so slight as to be difficult to detect. Else the US could compel Israel and Egypt to make choices they otherwise would not make. And Somoza would depart Nicaragua.

Perhaps a sign of maturity, experience has finally demonstrated that US policy is not so controlling or influential as we have pretended it to be. Such a lesson

can have salutary effects if we elevate our claims a little lower and pretend not what we cannot achieve. If our newly found humility is excessive, adventures may prove too tempting to resist in order that we may restore pride and prestige.

American power is best projected indirectly -- indirection makes possible the optimization of flexibility while offering some protection against overextension and overexposure. Maintaining flexibility is of paramount importance in political situations if actors are to be in control of events. Politics is an eclectic process, an ad hoc decision process wherein occasionally reliable information competes with much which is less reliable and more that is unreliable (noise). [Doctrine, cant and shibboleths have little relevance to the decision process. Thus, Yugoslavia's communist status did not impair US aid program when relations with the USSR were

severed. Predetermined responses to unanticipated events are not political but ideological responses. Foreign policy concerns, in large measure, dealing with unanticipated events.] Well-informed choices are difficult to make because reliable information is so scarce. Such scarcity makes it necessary to maximize flexibility thereby permitting modifications of policy to fit events. The Soviet shift from Somalia to Ethiopia may prove to have been an adroitly flexible response to shifting events but also might have resulted from inadequate or unreliable information. Somalia's eviction of Soviet personnel may also prove to have been adroit or inept.

It is quite easy for states to overextend their resources by intervening in diverse disputes. Relatively, all resources are scarce and should be managed prudently, else the consequences may prove more disadvantageous to the intervenor

than to the intervened. Had Nationalist Chinese troops played the role taken by the U.S. in Vietnam, costs for the US would have been substantially reduced even if the US had provided financial and material support. Most American goals in Vietnam could have been accomplished better by Chinese than American forces. More important, policy failures which were legion and probably inevitable would not have been borne directly by the U.S. and that will-o'-the-wisp, prestige, would not have plummeted quite so radically. And, of course, shocks to the American economy and "psyche" would have been reduced significantly.

The implication for Taiwan would have been significant but would have resulted from Nationalist policy and would have had less profound significance for world politics.

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US economic and military resources would have been husbanded and flexibility maintained. As things developed, the US became ensnared in a trap largely self-constructed leading to a general buffeting by events beyond American control. We manoeuvred ourselves into an indefinite war that virtually monopolized our attention and diminished our resolve. Of course a proxy war by ROC forces might well have drawn Communist Chinese direct involvement thereby intensifying the war. The rational choice for the PRC would have been to remain aloof, permitting the Nationalist Chinese to become mired in South Vietnam as the US eventually sank into the bog.

In addition to maintaining flexibility and avoiding overextension, states should avoid overexposure. An empirical term, overexposure is used here to mean the

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repetitive use of political devices which repetition generates expectations for specific performance that may be inappropriate. The US readiness to dispatch military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey led to mutual assistance agreements eventually with 42 states in the Dulles era. States such as Iran, Korea, Israel, et al., were encouraged to build relatively massive military establishments without regard to the fact that such investment of and consumption of resources tends to foster inflation and destabilize local economies and politics. And overexposure has made the US hostage to local officials who may seek aid for private as well as political gain. During the Dulles era, the Shah was wont, occasionally, to threaten to turn to the Soviets if the US refused his requests. Tom Mboya, then Vice President of Kenya, told the author that third

world leaders (then still called underdeveloped) had but to invoke the Communist spectre to obtain what they wished from the US. More recently, states have developed expectations of American intervention or, at least, assumed the right to threaten American intervention when it suited their policies. Thus the credibility of American intervention policy rested upon American willingness to intervene on call. While this did not really occur, it encouraged foreign and domestic governments and publics to believe that intervention would occur upon demand. Congressional initiatives, such as the War Powers Act, and Carter's articulated nonintervention policies (particularly concerning Iran, Ogaden and Vietnam) appear to reverse policies pursued by previous administrations. The shock of US nonperformance would have had less noticeable impact had images of American omniscience not been so overblown.

Obviously, the US cannot permit its credibility to be determined by client or target states else the concept of credibility becomes incredible itself. The notion that client or target states can determine American response actually stands logic on its head because it makes the US the client or servant to the client as master. Pavlov's dogs certainly did not put Pavlov through their paces, quite the reverse. After the Treaty of Paris and during Watergate, Kissinger's importunings about US credibility implied that the test of credibility is exertion of such force as clients may require or demand. Kissinger moved far beyond the lengthy strides made by his immediate predecessors who failed to distinguish between allied and non-allied states. Dean Rusk proclaimed South Vietnam an ally when no alliance had been executed causing chagrin

among some of our allies.

It is important to bear in mind that an alliance is quite a specific instrument of policy. An alliance is a limited set of states acting in concert at a given time to enhance their military security against a common enemy. An alliance is a contractual arrangement entered into by the parties according to their constitutional practices; requiring from the US approval by at least two-thirds vote of the US Senate. No alliance substitutes for, or supersedes any constitutional practice of a member, nor does it diminish sovereign independence or national self-determination. Typically, alliance treaties provide that in the event of an enemy attack, each allied party will respond as it deems appropriate according to its national decision making practices. No alliance diminishes discretionary powers by government officials in crisis situations. Official

pronouncements justifying actions by reference to alliance are always dissembling. Such statements are designed to blunt criticism by pretending limited choice. Rusk's statements that we had to assist South Vietnam else we betrayed an ally was untrue in that there was no alliance and if there had been, US options were still free.

If alliances or client state dependency constrained US policy so effectively the US policy would be more system determined than are most states, and that would be logically untenable. As a superpower the US is system dominant, not system dependent and US policymakers act appropriately even if they do not always speak appropriately. Appropriate behavior requires maximizing discretionary power and avoiding entanglements that diminish flexibility or that deplete resources. US military power, or Soviet military power for that matter, are most effective instruments of policy when

held in reserve. Large scale commitment of military forces to low-intensity conflicts signals a failure of policy.

Vietnam had serious consequences for the US not because South Vietnam became communist or because of the unification of Vietnam, but because of the economic and political-military costs for the US. Principal economic consequences have been evidenced by US inflation and the dilemma of the US dollar. In the political-military sphere, North Vietnam demonstrated that the emperor indeed had no clothes or at least only rather transparent clothes. Emperors' raiments are always superficial artifacts but wise emperors do not expose themselves in public.

The lessons of the past do not always enlighten future behavior; frequently they provide a guide to future responses. We tend to respond as we or our predecessors responded to similar or analogous situations in the past; not as we might have responded rationally had perfect information been available. Despite their mocking of incumbents while

campaigning for office, presidents and their entourages tend to mimic those who served before them.

Learning from the past requires scrupulous honesty in evaluating prior events and in drawing analogies. Our historical lessons must be free from cant and our analogies must contain isomorphic behavioral properties. The Truman Doctrine did not stem the tide of Soviet expansion in Greece but coincided with Stalin's opposition to communist Greek insurrection. And the experience of the Vietnamese boat people bears little resemblance to the plight of the Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. Had Hitler driven the Jews into the sea, many more would likely have been rescued.

Learning correctly from the past is no more difficult than erroneous learning; it requires investigation nurtured by skepticism. We must learn to distinguish what really happened from conventional wisdom which is but rarely ever wise.