INSTRUMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Can we discover ethical strictures in the practical, political order?

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The starting point for any serious attempt to relate ethics to foreign policy is the examination of the phenomena of international politics. Once a few very general principles and concepts have been set out by the theologian or ethicist it becomes necessary to turn to the subject matter to which international ethics addresses itself, international politics, in order to make normative goals concrete and meaningful and in order to identify at least the more prominent obstacles to the infusion of ethical values into the conduct of international relations.

The study of international politics is a very broad and complex affair. It includes the analysis of the nature of politics, the components of political power, the principal alternatives of policy in international affairs, and the limitations which may reduce foreign policy choices whether these limitations be intrinsic to the power political process itself or whether they be introduced specifically for the purpose of curbing the naked interplay of power politics, e.g., international law, organization, and morality.

I am not here concerned with the reasons for setting foreign policy goals, e.g., whether they be based on purely selfish, power-political goals and drives or whether they be the expression of a high degree of altruism. Rather I intend to examine the means that are available in the execution of any policy, given the world in which we live. However, as suggested at the outset, this morally neutral analysis has deep normative implications since the means available to international decision makers and the conditions under which these means may be used obviously tend to determine the ways in which both positive and negative ethical strictures may be observed in the practical order.

Traditionally, the instruments of international politics have been categorized approximately as follows: diplomacy, military force and economic force. To this list there was generally added some sort of catch-all category to cover sub rosa activities such as propaganda, subversion, intervention in the domestic political affairs of another state; in short, activities not formally acknowledged in the world of diplomacy. This ill-defined category has today become in many respects more important than the others; it is certainly as important. I shall refer to it as “police-military coercion short of war,” with the understanding that both the “political” and “military” components of the rubric are to be very widely construed.

To these four categories I shall add a fifth which may cause surprise: normative institutions as political instruments. The principles, rules and institutions of international law, organization and morality limit international politics but they are also instruments of politics. Indeed, on this fact must rest a good part of our hope that normative values will be honored in international relations. While one hopes that statesmen will sometimes respect normative values for their own sake one expects that statesmen will more often respect such values because they see that it is in the enlightened self-interest of their nation.

Diplomacy

Hans Morgenthau, perhaps the leading modern interpreter and advocate of diplomacy tells us that “Taken in its widest meaning, comprising the whole range of foreign policy, the task of diplomacy is fourfold: (1) Diplomacy must determine its objectives in the light of the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. (2) Diplomacy must assess the objectives of other nations and the power actually and potentially available for the pursuit of these objectives. (3) Diplomacy must determine to what extent these different objectives are compatible with each other. (4) Diplomacy must employ the means suited to the pursuit of its objectives. Failure in any one of these tasks may jeopardize the success of foreign policy and with it the peace of the world.”

It is difficult, however, to distinguish these four tasks. Basically, this paper is only concerned with the last, the choice of means, but it appears to be impossible to disengage this subject from the other three. Morgenthau proceeds from this categorization of the tasks of diplomacy to an analysis of what would appear to be our subject matter here, the

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“instruments of diplomacy.” He says that there are basically two “organized instruments of diplomacy,” “the foreign offices in the capitals of the respective nations and the diplomatic representatives sent by the foreign offices to the capitals of foreign nations.” These two instruments perform the functions of "symbolic representation," ‘legal representation,” and “political representation.”

However, it is necessary to point out that Professor Morgenthau's exposition, although perhaps prudently simplified for purposes of introductory instruction, does not really give the full picture. Today the United States is “represented” abroad not only by the Foreign Service but by the military, AID, USA, CIA, the Peace Corps and, from time to time, by a great variety of governmental officials from agencies concerned with some aspect of international affairs. It remains notorious, of course, that American diplomacy can speak with many voices.

The first point, then, that is to be made about diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy (and this is particularly true of American foreign policy with which we are all most immediately concerned) is that it is by no means the sole function of the Foreign Service or even of the Department of State, but that it has come to involve the diverse activities of a great variety of departments of the executive branch. To say, for example, that GI's are potential “ambassadors of good will” is also to raise the spectre of their being “ambassadors of ill will.” Thus the near-monopoly on symbolic representation of the United States earlier enjoyed by the Foreign Service has now been broken.

Nor is the Foreign Service the sole source of legal representation of the United States today. The military may well have the predominant role in status of force agreements and an AID official will often negotiate an agreement providing for complicated forms of assistance in exchange for even more complicated forms of internal reform which might well leave an old-fashioned diplomat gasping. Or, in a very real sense, it should be pointed out that the political representation of the United States is no longer the sole function of our diplomatic representatives. Neither the function of reporting facts and trends in foreign countries nor that of explaining and furthering the American point of view is limited to the Foreign Service. Many agencies' representatives report; many, in one way or another, represent.

This fact has serious implications for the whole subject of ethics and foreign policy. The essence of moral responsibility is rational control. However, in the increasingly complex world of foreign representation, control is more and more difficult to pin down.

Just how may one characterize and judge—in terms of primary control by the Department of State—our "diplomacy" with respect to Laos, or Vietnam? Is a call to the Department of State sufficient if one wants to know how United States policy with respect to a particular area or problem is developing? How much control did the Department of State have over the decision to make the U-2 flight over the Soviet Union just prior to a scheduled summit conference in Paris?

Obviously, what I am suggesting is that the Morgenthau plea for a return to diplomacy in the nineteenth-century sense wherein there is a kind of personal responsibility and, beyond that, the responsibility of “the system” of diplomatic intercourse, pleads for a state of affairs which no longer obtains. We live, not in a world of bon mots and knowing exchanges by Metternichs, Talleyrilds or even Churhills but in a world wherein the diplomatic, military, technical assistance and "do-good" representatives of a government are all reporting on events abroad, recommending policies and representing their country. To say, in these circumstances, that the diplomatic service is the sole—or always the principal—instrumentality of diplomacy is, I am afraid, no longer accurate.

If this point be conceded, we may move on to the question as to what techniques are open to "diplomatic" personnel, whatever their formal designation, in order to advance the position and goals of their country. Theoretical analyses of this question have yielded such alternatives as isolation and neutrality, maintenance of balances of power by alliances and/or abstention from alliances, imperialism, policies of prestige and intervention in the internal affairs of other states.

Since we are concerned here almost exclusively with American responsibility and American power we may reject the techniques of isolation and neutrality, or neutralism out of hand. These are utterly unacceptable. But alliances seem to be inevitable for a great power that seeks to unite many states in the face of a supranational threat. Immediately we encounter the classical problems of effectuating political compromise, problems that are found in the United States Senate as well as in the United Nations General Assembly or the inner councils of NATO. The diplomacy of political compromise, in turn, means realism, the subordination of dogmatism of whatever kind, and staying power. Surely it is clear that the diplomacy of the Free World in our time requires an objective appreciation of facts and a willingness to compromise within reasonable limits. But this, of course, has its repercussions in the realm of ethics.

May 1963 3
Returning, then, to traditional techniques of international politics, we may pass immediately beyond imperialism, the very mention of which would suffice to bring unbearable censure upon the great non-Communist powers of our day, and investigate policies of prestige and of intervention as instruments of international politics. A policy of prestige seeks to create an impressive image of a state, regardless of its objective power or of its objective power relationship with another state. The rivals in the current protracted conflict are engaged, inter alia, in a contest for prestige which ranges from achievements in outer space through reports of educational accomplishments to the success of basketball teams. It is vital to understand the magnitude of this encounter. Often proponents of peace, disarmament, international organization or unilateral self-abnegation advocate "concessions" in the interest of the particular goals they support. But one cannot divorce such concessions from the game of "one-upmanship" which inevitably results from the competing policies of prestige which the great powers must maintain. One can only mention in passing the contrast between the cold, reasonable calculations of the Morgenthau variety of diplomacy and the subjective, nerve-racking calculations in the "don't chicken out" psychology of policies of prestige in the Cold War.

Coercion Short of War

Apparently the primordial instinct of man is to settle differences, whether personal, local, national or international, by direct recourse to physical conflict. This fact has dominated international relations immemorially. Today the impulse to resort to force in order to settle disputes is confronted by the greatest limiting considerations that man has ever known.

The much maligned Clausewitz observed that war was simply the extension of policy by other means. This expresses the classical role of force in international relations. War was a perfectly permissible, legal, moral, alternative of foreign policy. Moreover, given the state of military technology, particularly before the first world war, it was a very rational alternative. Today, war qua war is prima facie illegal and immoral, as well as irrational. Thus the instrument of international politics par excellence, recourse to military force, has been largely, if not totally, denied.

Today, war is legally permissible only as a measure of individual or collective self-defense or as part of an international police action. Morally, it seems that about the same justifications are necessary, although their elaboration may be somewhat less mechanical and constrained in the realm of morality than of law. Rationally, war in the fullest sense appears to be self-defeating, anarchical, suicidal. Yet one has only to reflect upon the public temper of the United States in the Cuban crisis to confirm the belief that the reflex to resort to armed force to "solve" a fundamental problem of foreign policy is deeply rooted, even in the most enlightened citizenry.

Yet, if overt war is, by and large, legally, morally, and practically eliminated as an instrument of international politics, variations of traditional war are not. On the one hand, the threat of war, what our age has called "deterrence," is one of the foremost means of carrying out foreign policy in our age of conflict. On the other hand, the employment of coercion short of overt, avowed war between the major antagonists, is likewise a characteristic means of international politics in our age.

Thus, as against those who argue that military force became obsolete with Hiroshima, or even with the two world wars, as a rational instrument of foreign policy, we have the clear evidence that the military today participate in greater measure in the formulation and execution of foreign policy than ever before and that military strategies lie at the very base of our general foreign policy. Professional military men have noted with a hint of alarm the "debauch" of academicians into the realm of military science. This could only be expected in an age when it is impossible to study international relations properly without mastering the rudiments of military science and military history.

Having said this much, one may readily admit that Hiroshima and, indeed, the two world wars, changed the nature of war so as to alter, perhaps fundamentally, its status as an instrument of international politics. The consequence, as we have seen, is that war itself in the sense of direct confrontation between major powers in a more-or-less unlimited contest of armed force is seldom envisaged as anything other than a tragic failure of foreign policy. But the threat of all-out war is ever-present and "brinkmanship," however hard on the nerves, appears to be an indispensable instrument of international politics for a great power today. Moreover, under the umbrella of the balance of terror which results from the transformation of all-out war from an instrument of policy to a mutual suicide pact there persists a strong inclination to support foreign policy by military means. This may be done in two ways which are often used simultaneously.

First, a major power may use "proxy" forces of a lesser power, as in Korea. Second, some form of limited conflict may be employed. This may take the form of conventional war, guerrilla war or wide-
spread civil disorder and subversion, or some combination of all three. The essence of this kind of use of force is that it is limited to forms which are not likely to draw an all-out military reaction from the other side. The original massive retaliation concept was a brave one. It sought to cut through the ambiguities of war by proxy and by less-than-total means and say in effect, if Moscow challenges us seriously, no matter where or in what fashion, Moscow will risk nuclear annihilation. At Dienbienphu and many other places, some of which are probably unknown to most of us, this bold concept failed. And with its failures, I am afraid, the issue of the “no win policy” was born; for what has been termed a “no win policy” is, it seems to me, inevitable in a situation wherein recourse to direct, all-out military force is denied policy-makers except as a final, virtually hopeless gesture.

What are the implications of this evolution of the role of military power for international ethics? On the one hand we may point out that the foundation of the contemporary international political scene is the balance of nuclear terror and that this rests squarely on the credibility of the nuclear powers’ deterrent capability. For a nuclear power unilaterally to relinquish this capability there would have to be a clear recognition that it was capitulating its place as a great power. I am not concerned here with the pros and cons of such a decision but in any analysis of military power as an instrument of international politics it is necessary to underscore the fact that the ability to deter nuclear attack by the credible threat of nuclear retaliation is a sine qua non of continued existence as a great power.

On the other hand, war by proxy and non-nuclear war in a great variety of forms seem also to be indispensable instruments of international politics in the age of protracted conflict. Whatever Western preferences may be, this fact is thrust upon Western powers by others and their choice is, again, a narrow one between being prepared to retaliate in kind (or, indeed, to take the offensive in this kind of warfare) or to capitulate. All in all, then, it is clear that military force, far from passing into oblivion in the wake of the mushroom cloud at Hiroshima, is more than ever a central element in the execution of foreign policy.

**Economic Power**

Any reference to the use of economic power as an instrument of foreign policy brings to mind at once visions of Krupp, Standard Oil, the United Fruit Company and similar giants shouldering their way to the fore in a world in which a great corporation may possess more economic power than a would-be sovereign state.

However, the implications of economic power for foreign policy have undergone some rather drastic changes. In the first place, it is probably more difficult to win political successes through the use of economic power because of the existence of competitive “peaceful co-existence.” There is a very strong tendency for the antagonists in the Cold War to come to the assistance of states which are being coerced by the other side and this tends to be true in the economic as well as in the political and military realms. This in itself is not an entirely novel state of affairs; what is novel is the “reflex-action” form that assistance to an economically endangered state takes, e.g., Egypt, Yugoslavia.

Second, the use of political or military power to defend private economic interests abroad is becoming more and more rare. Since the first world war, the trend towards state socialism has eroded the once prevalent concept of the sanctity of private property. The risks of war are such today that gunboat diplomacy in support of an oil company is virtually out of the question. Moreover, the conditions of competitive co-existence in the Cold War preclude much overt support for private business abroad. The West and the Communists both jockey for the key position as the great supporter of economic and social reform in order to win friends in the new nations. In these circumstances, a state such as the United States has to lean over backwards to avoid the appearance of placing private American economic interests above the people’s aspirations for a minimum level of existence in one of the emerging nations.

This, in turn, leads us to another, more positive change that has occurred in the realm of economic power. It is fair to say that the motivation behind American abstention from old-fashioned economic imperialism is not solely, probably not even primarily, the negative fear of losing ground in the Cold War. There has been a moral revolution in the West, and above all in the United States. We have come to accept the proposition that on the international as on the national or local level, the possession of economic power carries with it the responsibility to assist the less fortunate. Foreign aid, not dollar diplomacy, is the hallmark of our time.

Yet even this new, positive, altruistic facet of economic power brings complications with it. Ultimately, foreign aid cannot seriously contribute to real economic and social progress unless it is intelligently given and intelligently received. More and more it becomes evident that many of the present recipients do not really know how to make the best use of the
aid that is given them. Then, it may be said, we must show them how. But this involves a very considerable intervention into the internal affairs of another sovereign state. Indeed, to the extent that we are sincere in desiring to assist the underdeveloped country we may feel an obligation to make our aid contingent upon evidence of a serious effort to reform fundamental institutions. Just how this can be done remains to be seen. It is a new and challenging problem which should occupy our thoughts much more than nostalgic thoughts of the “good old days” of United Fruit and the Marines.

Normative Institutions

As remarked earlier, studies of international relations usually contrast the instruments of international politics with the limiting institutions of international law, organization and morality. World opinion, although not an “institution,” is also a limiting factor which is generally discussed. It is important to understand, however, that these institutions are today important political instruments. Even the most callous totalitarian power uses normative institutions and normative concepts for its political purposes. International law is constantly invoked—the right of access to Berlin, the illegality of over-flights, the legal right of the United States to retain its base at Guantanamo, the charge of illegal use of bacteriological warfare in the Korean War, challenges to take a dispute such as that over the nationalization of the Suez Canal company to the International Court of Justice, protests against nuclear tests in the Pacific as violative of the concept of freedom of the high seas, the immunities of diplomatic personnel and the limits of abuse of such immunities—these are only a few of the subjects over which states contest in legal terms.

The professionally cynical first-year law student or the cocktail party pundit can elaborate many reasons why international law is not law at all and the self-conscious protagonist of “pure power politics” can deprecate international law as a factor in international relations. The responsible statesman, however, cannot indulge himself in this manner, at least not publicly. The fact is that there is a deep-rooted conviction in man that there ought to be some kind of law above the arbitrary wills of nations. True, there is likewise a deep-rooted disposition to violate or ignore that law when a nation’s vital interests are at stake. Yet the fundamental strength of the conviction that there is and ought to be an international law is so great that even the violator of the law acknowledges it by making some kind of legal excuse.

Closely related to this phenomenon is that of the more recent emergence of the conviction that there must be a global international organization devoted to maintaining world peace. Those who do not accept this as a fact of life cannot have an objective, comprehensive understanding of contemporary international politics. As President Kennedy has emphasized so often in the past year, there is no question as to whether the United States will participate in the activities of the United Nations. The only questions relate to how we will participate and to what goals we will seek. This is not to endorse without qualification the UN as an institution. It is facing a fact.

However, once we are clear on the inevitability of participation in some kind of a general international organization, we must analyze very critically the limits of such an organization as an instrument of international politics. The UN has as its first function the maintenance of peace through a system of collective security. The system demonstrably will not work in the way that was originally planned. Our security, then, remains essentially our concern, not the UN’s, and through imaginative use of Article 51 and Articles 52-54 the United States has managed to provide collective self-defense for itself and its allies without violating the Charter.

The UN is the focus for arms control and disarmament efforts but here again it is evident that any real progress in these fields must come as the result of the efforts and sacrifices of the major powers.

Finally, the United Nations is an institution that is supposed to settle disputes. Yet, as recent commentators have increasingly emphasized, the original image of the UN as a primarily adjudicating body has to be changed. The UN is a rather incoherent parliamentary body. It has neither the structure nor the underlying unity for the temper of a quasi-judicial institution.

There remain two other sources of limitation on international politics, international morality and world public opinion. Neither are “institutions” in the sense that international law and organization are institutions, nor are they potentially “instruments” of international politics in the same way that diplomacy, military force and economic power are instruments. Yet they are sources of political gain and loss, as well as sources of normative and political limitation on the conduct of international politics. Statesmen and whole nations, acting like men, not merely “political men,” do have a concern for international morality and for world opinion. If we do not take this into account all of our efforts to comprehend the use of the instruments of international politics will be of little avail.