Is There a Relation Between Domestic Morality and Foreign Policy?

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All choice takes place in a world of fact, what philosophers call "hard stubborn fact." In foreign affairs the facts are of extraordinary dimension, macroscopic in size, infinitely diverse and complex. Centuries of historic tradition, encrusted popular attitudes, diverse levels of civilization, diverse potentialities and rates of economic and political development are apt to be involved. Facts impose limitations upon policy, just as the fact of the money in one's pocketbook imposes limits upon what one can buy. It was his acute awareness of the factual limitations on policy that led Bismarck to define politics as the "art of the possible."

Choice applies in foreign policy because foreign policy is primarily action of a state in relation to other states. What determines the action of states? Decision, human decision—and it doesn't matter what the form of government, whether a king, president, cabinet, legislature or a Politburo decides.

Moral principles throughout the ages have been formulated in terms of the individual and, when accepted, have been accepted as guides to individual conduct. The Ten Commandments are addressed to individuals and express principles or guides for an individual in family life and in social life. "Thou shall not kill" is not a commandment that a soldier can safely embrace. There is a body of informed theoretic opinion in contemporary political science that regards it as a mistake to apply moral principles to the affairs of states. They are the "realists" for whom the key concept is national self-interest, "enlightened" of course. For the realists, the national state is the ultimate fact in world politics. The reality of the state lies in its power—through which it attains its interests. Power aspirations and interests are taken as existing and inalterable human forces, neither good nor bad. To carry over into the affairs of state the concepts of right and wrong is regarded as a great mistake. A nation, according to this theory, cannot afford to operate in the moral climate of individual ethics.

Contrary to this body of opinion, I believe that ethics does apply to the affairs of states, to foreign policy. The key is the factor of choice, of human decision. If the actions of states were bound by necessity, were determined ultimately by something other than humans and human decision, then it would not make sense to lay a moral yardstick on their doings. But states are communities of men, constituted and guided by men. Through these men, states acquire a certain freedom to choose, through these men states can know the difference between right and wrong, and through them states can do right or wrong.

Many years ago the great American philosopher, William Ernest Hocking, enunciated the thesis: "The fundamental principle of right is the same for states as for individuals." It should be recognized, however, that there is no direct correspondence between specific ethical principles that apply to specific situations involving individuals and those that apply to states. States are different from individuals. For example, while it may be right for an individual to sacrifice his life for other individuals or for the state, there is no comparable directive for a state to sacrifice its "life" for other states or for mankind.

Nevertheless there is a relation between ethics for individual action and ethics for actions by the state. Indeed I would say there is mutual reciprocity between the domestic morality within the state and the morality, or lack of it, in the state as it conducts its foreign relations.

Can domestic morality be maintained if the state practices the "law of the jungle" in its foreign relations? Hocking gives an illustrative example: when Athens dealt as pure egoist with her allies, Athenians began to deal as pure egoists with one another and the democracy was ruined. On the current scene, if the Soviet regime ever begins to treat its own citizens more in accordance with ethical standards, it will likewise begin to conduct its foreign relations along more moral lines and vice versa.

There have been significant changes in the Soviet Union in the past ten years. A high watermark in
the destalinization campaign, which arose in the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc after Stalin's death in 1953, occurred with Premier Khrushchev's speech during the 20th Party Congress in February 1956. In that talk Khrushchev criticized Stalin's crimes against brother Communists only; ordinary citizens were not mentioned. Five years later, however, at the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961, Khrushchev cited Stalin's crimes against ordinary citizens as well. This was an important change. Our whole policy toward the USSR is based on the possibility of such evolutionary development in the Soviet Union along moral lines. This is usually stated in other terms, such as, we hope that the Soviets will achieve a certain well-being and hence be unwilling to sacrifice this well-being for abstract ideological goals. Without dismissing this argument one can say that a growing recognition of ethical standards coupled with increased individual freedom would create a more reliable basis for mutual understanding.

George Kennan has advised us to confine the concepts of international law and morality "to the unobtrusive, almost feminine function of the gentle civilizer of national self-interest in which they find their true value." National interest thus comes first in his view, and morality has a sort of secondary existence. This seems wrong to me. Indeed, the inverse would be more accurate. Moral principles are first, but their relevance and application in particular situations are subject to corollary considerations of self-interest. Does it matter which is regarded as primary? From a metaphysical standpoint it matters, and men are metaphysical creatures whose lives and actions are governed, directly and indirectly, by the world views which prevail in their minds and in their societies. In Nazism we saw the terrible consequences of a world view oriented exclusively to power and national self-interest.

Moral principles and the national interest are constant factors in the formulation of foreign policy and both must be present in actual political decisions. There is a third major factor that enters into, or should enter into foreign policy decisions. That is the factor of knowledge, rational calculation or intelligence—not intelligence in the C.I.A. sense of the word, but in the sense of a man using his intelligence in making decisions.

How these three factors enter into actual policy may be better discussed if we look at some concrete cases. The cases themselves are of course subject to different interpretations and I acknowledge my own to be only one of a range of possible interpretations.

The United States decision to use the atomic bomb against the Japanese cities in 1945.

This is a decision that has troubled millions of Americans. There were, in a sense, precedents in World War II. We sent as many as a thousand bombers in one raid on a German city and Dresden suffered more in one giant bombing attack with conventional explosives than Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the atomic bomb. But we used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki a new weapon of mass destruction. It was a concern of conscience for many of us. Also there was a certain element of anxiety, historic anxiety, anxiety lest we reap some day what we had sown.

In 1949 when I was a student at the National War College I took occasion to study the matter of the United States decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan. What I investigated particularly was the question: "Was it necessary?" At that stage of the war against Japan, after the Japanese Navy had suffered grievous defeat at the hands of the U.S. Navy, after we had captured in bloody combat island after island and retaken the Philippines, was it necessary? The American leaders who made the decision believed there was a grave danger that the Japanese armed forces would fight a bitter last-ditch battle in Japan and in Manchuria; that they might not even obey instructions from the Emperor to lay down their arms; that the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans might have been lost; that the use of the atomic bomb on two Japanese cities, selected because of their role in the Japanese war effort, would demonstrate to the Japanese leaders, the Japanese military and the Japanese people that their cause was hopeless and that they had no alternative to unconditional surrender. It was thought that the explosion of an atomic bomb over an uninhabited Pacific island would not have had sufficient psychological effect, that it was necessary to use the atomic bomb on a Japanese city.

Was it necessary? My study brought me to the conclusion that it was not necessary. It was not necessary primarily because of the effectiveness of U.S. submarines. By the summer of 1945 American submarines had decimated Japanese shipping. The Japanese economy, Japanese potential, the physical sustenance of the Japanese population were dependent upon shipping, upon the receipt of raw materials and goods from abroad. The Japanese leaders knew at the time that they could not con-
tinue the war because of the lack of ships. They were getting ready to surrender and looking for a way to do it. We were capable of carrying out our submarine warfare with undiminished vigor against the remaining Japanese ships. Our continued submarine effort would have brought the Japanese to their knees. Is it any wonder that the decision in the Joint Chiefs of Staff to use the atomic bomb was a split decision, two to one, the Navy representative claiming that it was not necessary.

Now I have cited this case because in my opinion faulty intelligence was involved. Faulty intelligence perhaps from the C.I.A. standpoint but also—and more importantly—faulty intelligence from the standpoint of rational calculation. Human impatience may have been involved too; Americans dislike war so much they want to end it as quickly as possible. The moral aspects could be rationalized, the national interest in saving American lives could be put forward, but if it wasn't necessary to accomplish the surrender of Japan, the atom bomb should not have been used on the two Japanese cities.

President Truman's decision of June 1950 to defend South Korea against North Korean Communist aggression.

This case illustrates, to my mind, the primacy of moral principle in a particular foreign policy decision. South Korea was not essential to the security of the United States. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council had previously made a thorough study, finding that South Korea was expendable and that the power equation between the Communist and free world blocs would not be so seriously altered by Communist possession of South Korea that the United States must seek to prevent it. We had withdrawn our armed forces from the Korean peninsula pursuant to this appraisal. We had even failed to leave behind a token American force as an indication that a free South Korea had a certain significance to us. No wonder the Russians felt that we had deceived them and Vishinsky citing Korea could say "the Americans can't be trusted." Of course, one can say that it was the mise-en-scène of open aggression that triggered the violence of the United States reaction. If the Communists had attempted to seize South Korea by covert means, by subversion, by a mob uprising and armed attack only secondarily, perhaps the United States would not have acted.

In the given case, I submit that Truman's decision was motivated by ethical principles, by the elementary moral response that the North Korean action was not right and that the United States could not tolerate this breach of right and that the United States was thus morally involved with South Korea. I believe that President Truman's decision was understood in this way throughout the free world and that the enthusiastic response of free world public opinion at the time was derived from a moral resonance to a moral decision.

I made this point in an article which I wrote many years ago. With the habitual zeal of an author, I sent a copy of the article to President Truman, asking him what he thought of the accuracy of my interpretation. I received a reply in his inimitable manner, stating that he did not feel that it would be proper for him to comment on my interpretation—but with a handwritten postscript which said "look up my memoirs on this point." I have done so. He puts the decision in different terms, refers to the failure of democracies in the past to act against aggressors and states that communism was acting just as Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese had acted years earlier. If this was allowed to go unchallenged it would mean a third world war, just as similar incidents had brought on the second world war. Also the foundations and principles of the United Nations, all the talk of collective security were at stake.

These reasons combine national interest and moral principles, and the national interest of the United States is viewed not narrowly in terms of power but is seen, rather, in a broad context of security which involves the security of other countries.

Even with President Truman's comment, I still believe that moral principle was involved in a primary way in the U.S. decision to fight in Korea.


This is an interesting case in the calculus of national interest. It also has a special significance as the first nuclear confrontation in the history of mankind.

The Soviets put nuclear missiles into Cuba for strategic reasons. By installing medium range and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba they hoped to redress the balance of nuclear power which persisted in favor of the United States. The Soviets probably believed that they could get away with it without effective challenge by the United States. They may well have believed that the Americans in the "epoch of imperialism" had already become too soft and decadent to respond with vigor to the challenge.

The United States had several alternatives: do
nothing, impose restrictions on shipping to Cuba, or invade. We chose to impose restrictions on the entry into Cuba of offensive weapons. At the same time we gave the Soviets an out by telling them that they should withdraw their rocket missiles from Cuba. The Soviets did so. Now it was not the restrictions imposed nor our summons to them to withdraw the missiles which led them to do so. For at the same time we had gathered together military forces necessary for an invasion of Cuba, and it seems quite clear that it was this threat of force which caused the Soviets to back down and withdraw their missiles. If the United States had proceeded to an air strike against the Soviet installations, killing Soviet personnel, or if the United States had gone over to military invasion of Cuba to destroy the Castro regime, the Soviets would have been faced with the decision of initiating nuclear war against the United States or accepting a greater defeat. They decided in effect to cut their losses. However, by acting quickly, and obtaining a U.S. commitment not to invade Cuba, the Soviets saved the Castro regime from removal by U.S. military force. They thus saved Cuba as a Communist bridgehead in the Western Hemisphere.

Was the United States action successful? Is Castro's Cuba of mortal danger to the United States through its potential effect on the Latin American countries, or for other reasons? If it were, then perhaps the U.S. should have used the occasion to overthrow Castro by force. Perhaps Castro in the long run will be overthrown by the Cubans themselves, although there is no sign now that such an eventuality is likely. Certainly Castro's self-inclusion in the Communist camp and his subservience to Soviet strategic interests have taken much luster from the image of Castroism throughout Latin America. If it could be demonstrated that Castro can only be removed by external force and that his removal thus would have a salutary influence throughout Latin America, then the U.S. may have missed a great opportunity in its national security interest. And the morality of such an invasion? Some will say that if the United States had invaded Cuba, that too would have led to general war and a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. I doubt it, but there is no doubt that this possibility weighed on the minds of the responsible American leaders at the time.

A new dimension of total threat to human existence has been created by nuclear weaponry. Nuclear pacifists have reacted to this in this country and in Western Europe by a plea that we abandon nuclear arms, and disarm unilaterally. They accept as a likely consequence that communism might be imposed on Western society. "Lieber rot als tot," the German nuclear pacifists say, and besides, as Bertrand Russell said, "Communist society will be entirely changed in 150 years."

I don't think most of us are ready to accept this alternative. Fortunately, it is quite clear that the Soviets, our rival in nuclear power, are as scared of the consequences of a nuclear war as we. We have arrived in our relations with the Soviet Union at a state of mutual deterrence in the use of strategic nuclear weapons. Whether mutual deterrence is a sturdy enough framework to prevent a holocaust is unsure. Certainly there is a whole range of bush wars, guerrilla wars, and limited wars which can and are taking place around the world within this framework.

In the context of war, let me return to my initial comments on choice. "Massive retaliation" was a poor policy, because it meant that we would use massive nuclear force to respond to minor and limited aggressions of our enemy. There was little choice in this policy; doing nothing or doing nothing effective, or massive retaliation. Of course, it was primarily a threat when our opponent did not have the resources to retaliate massively in return. American military doctrine and the American military organization have in the past few years been brought to a sounder basis by recognizing the need to have more choices than just massive retaliation, by developing a capability to meet guerrilla warfare with guerrilla warfare and limited warfare with limited warfare as need be, and in all circumstances devising tactics to avoid strategic nuclear warfare.

The nation state has never been a very clear concept nor has it been a readily definable entity. In recent years it has become even more irregular, as there are formed African states without ethnic or linguistic unity, established from previous colonies which were themselves formed as a result of haphazard circumstances.

Nevertheless, the basic unit in foreign policy is still the nation state, and the strongest loyalty for most men is the loyalty to the state. Regional groups have become increasingly important, but they are still groupings of states. The United Nations is a world organization composed of states.

Though the nation state may still represent the most real community in which the individual exists, during the past fifty years there has been a
decisive trend in the direction of more encompassing human communities. Modern technology which has created the possibility of world destruction, is also laying the foundation for a world civilization and creating the possibility of a world community of man. If accomplished, it would be in a sense the realization of a Christian vision.

One of the awakening experiences for people working in foreign affairs is the discovery that certain foreign policy problems are insoluble. I discovered this fifteen years ago on the German Desk during the Berlin blockade. A soluble problem is one which is amenable to reason, to reasonable settlement, perhaps by mutual agreement, or by unilateral action which removes the problem, with the interests of the contending parties properly respected. There are many soluble problems in foreign affairs, but there are also insoluble ones—history is the birthplace and graveyard of them. An insoluble problem is one in which reason is unable to bridge clashes of interest, where interests are so irreconcilable that no device of compromise or adjustment is conceivable. The Berlin and German problem is at present one example of an insoluble problem.

Now problems do not remain insoluble forever. Time and change are healers, and they may remove insoluble problems or make them soluble. For one thing, national interests may change as can the appraisal of a particular position. If the Soviets ever became convinced that their hold on East Germany was contrary to their national security interest and a liability to them, the German problem would become readily soluble. It does not now seem likely that this change will soon occur.

If the problems in foreign affairs are insoluble, how shall we proceed? We have first to learn to live with the problems. We have to accept the shortcomings of reason and accept the unreasonable structure of the historic process. We have also to keep trying to solve the problems and to widen the area where reasonable settlement prevails, and we have to seek to maintain both moral principle and national interest in this effort. If at the same time as we seek to maintain national interest, we are able to serve as well the interests of the larger community of man, we will be doing almost a superhuman job, and perhaps even a Christian work.

WESTERN INTERESTS AND THE NEW EUROPE

Can Our Assumptions about Europe’s Future Stand Close Scrutiny?

Lionel Gelber

There is need for a fresh look at some basic European policies which most of the Western Powers have, until recently, agreed on. Most utterances by Western statesmen, most comments in print and on the air have assumed, for instance, that the reunification of Germany and British entry into the Common Market would further the interests of the West. On these two focal issues the attentive public has, in general, heard only one side of the case. The principal reason is obvious. Dissent obtains fewer outlets when opinion media and policymakers see eye to eye.

The cold war has done much to determine the postwar world. But it is not cold war exigencies alone that have been reshaping Western Europe itself. There has been a genuine belief in the value of a more formalized unity between the Atlantic peoples, and in the more formalized unity of their European sector as a preliminary stage. But what if an integrated Europe actually made the West less cohesive? This was a possibility that few were willing at first to face.

Specific incongruities could, as a matter of fact, be detected throughout. A political union will, for example, have to be organized before Western Europe can get the most out of the Common Market. Such a union will register a welcome advance if it does not split the West as a whole. Such a split, it has been argued, can be forestalled by the entry of Britain’s into any European union. Yet what if it is better for the free world—and not just for Europe alone—that a separate role for Britain be perpetuated?

It has been hard to raise that question or to elicit from mentors of the thinking public any ac-

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