Since the second world war, tension has existed in this country between two schools of "internationalists." One camp has concentrated on the necessity of building and maintaining "positions of strength" in order to deter and to negotiate with the Soviet Union and Communist China. The second school has stressed the need for "constructive" policies such as foreign aid and liberalized trade in order to foster economic and social progress in the industrialized nations and to promote development in the Third World. Generally speaking, presidents from Truman through Nixon have combined the two approaches, although at various times more attention has been given to one or the other. Most students of American foreign policy would probably agree that power generally has been given priority over development politics since the Korean War.

Vietnam and the continuing nuclear arms race have caused many young people in this country to gravitate toward the development school. Most of them are primarily interested in the plight of the blacks in America and the Have-Nots in the Third World. They do not know the history of the cold war, and fail to understand the continuing challenge of Moscow and Peking to the West and the Third World. The Moscow-Peking rift and polycentrism in the world Communist movement are cited as conclusive evidence that the story of the cold war told by the Establishment is a fairy tale. The Soviet move into Czechoslovakia is dismissed as a defensive maneuver which in fact supports their notion that the men in the Kremlin are not expansionist. Accordingly, they applaud Nixon's slogan regarding a move from "confrontation to negotiation" in American-Soviet, and ultimately in American-Chinese relations.

Apparently many young people in Western Europe and in Japan share this mood. The developed countries of the "free world" therefore have a common problem of understanding. It is assumed in this essay that Moscow and Peking continue to be expansionist in purpose and long-run aim, and that Russia and China will be formidable centers of power which will need to be balanced by a combination of power and development politics by the West and Japan. Given the lamentable lack of an international community and of strong international institutions, the developed nations of the "free world" have no objective choice but to pursue balance of power as well as "constructive" policies for the foreseeable future. What Walter Lippmann once said remains true today: "Diplomacy fitted to the world as it is, which is not to expend itself in verbal declarations or crusades of annihilation, must deal with the balance of power."

Perhaps it would be helpful to restate the relation between power and purpose in international relations. "Power politics" as practiced by the United States since 1945 has not been an end in itself, nor a meaningless "game" played by old men at the expense of young men sent to Korea and Vietnam. Balance of power politics is a means toward several very important ends which are highly moral: (1) Deterring or if necessary defeating aggression. Needless to say, a nuclear war would mark the failure of the policy as well as catastrophe for mankind. But however uncertain, history suggests the indispensability of balance of power politics in dealing with expansionist, powerful nations and empires. (2) Preserving Western civilization as we have known it for three thousand years. Forestalling communization assumes the validity of this second purpose. (3) Providing a shield behind which "constructive" policies can be carried out both within the developed and the developing countries. (4) Assuring the necessary strength which experience shows is necessary in order to negotiate successfully with expansionist nations.

It has often struck me as curious that while Americans take pride in their political system, which places a high premium on "checks and balances" and other methods for preventing a concentration of power, the use of foreign policy techniques to achieve a similar aim is denounced as "power politics." Overwhelming power in the hands of aggressors would surely constitute a greater "clear and present danger" than, say, a strong president dealing with such crises as the great depression and the second world war. If Americans have generally feared a concentration of power in the hands of men of good will within this country, how much more valid is fear of great power in the
hands of expansionist leaders in Moscow and Peking. Isn’t it clear that during the most dangerous confrontation of the entire cold war, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the American strategic advantage was the best card in the hand of President Kennedy? Would not the Soviet Union’s strategic superiority in a similar crunch in the future be a very dangerous thing?

Several years ago Max Frankel wrote an article in which he noted that the cold war could only be ended by “substituting the political deal for religious zeal.” A genuine détente is of course desirable, and may become possible at some point in the future. Short of that happy outcome, and given the unreliability of the balance of power, accommodations in the fields of arms control and in European, Middle Eastern, and Asian affairs should certainly be sought. But it seems unlikely that Moscow and Peking will abandon their maximum ambitions in the foreseeable future, and any arrangements arrived at will be precarious and will require a balance of power. If we cannot rely on good will and a general consensus regarding the system within American democracy, it should be clear that more than expressions of pious hopes and verbal declarations are required in the disjointed and conflict-filled field of international relations. Genuine peace is of course the fruit of justice. But in this imperfect world, perfect justice cannot be achieved. Therefore, the gap between the ideal and real worlds requires attention to power as well as to development politics.

In this country much has been written and said, and some modest efforts have been undertaken, to put into effect what is called “cooperative federalism.” It has long been felt that both the system of separation of powers and federalism are incompatible with the needs of a twentieth-century technological, urbanized society. It is possible that the checks and balances in the American constitutional and political system may be replaced with more cooperative arrangements between both president and Congress, and among the federal, state, and local governments. In short, something like a “community of power” oriented toward fostering of the common good may evolve, with a systematic role for private as well as public centers of power. But in world affairs, lacking an international community and government, it will not be possible to avoid the care and tending of the balance of power. “Cooperative nationalism” akin to “cooperative federalism” is just not in the cards on a global scale, as opposed to possible regional developments.

Given the nature of international relations, the “old politics” of power is required alongside the not really “new politics” of foreign aid, Peace Corps activities, cultural and educational exchanges and so on. Anyone of good will wishes that it weren’t so. But wishing won’t change the objective realities of our Age of Conflict. Selective and prudential containment must continue to accompany “constructive” actions. Fanatical Communist and other revolutionary movements are still trying to subvert and capture the genuine revolution going on in the Third World. Moscow is still trying to divide the nations in NATO. The cold war and the Have and Have-Not conflicts are far from being over. Therefore, Pascal’s axiom is still relevant: “Justice without force is impotent. Force without justice is tyrannical. We must therefore combine justice with force.”

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