THE NEW STYLE IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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There is a curious unreality about the way in which Americans have been discussing foreign policy: they seem to be speaking in terms having only tenuous relationship to reality. This partly explains why many people find discussions of Vietnam awkward and frustrating; their vocabulary is not equipped to cope with their country's behavior. This poverty of vocabulary stems from a more serious conceptual vacuum.

Part of the responsibility for this conceptual inadequacy lies in academia, where in the last two decades foreign policy has slipped sharply in appeal. In contrast to other areas of social science, foreign policy studies have adopted a non-theoretical—almost anti-theoretical—posture. There has been strikingly little systematic effort to develop a theory (or theories) of American foreign policy. There are many interpretations of American foreign policy, to be sure. There are also discussions of approaches to the study of foreign policy—even checklists of variables that presumably impinge on the policy process. But these do not add up to a self-conscious attempt to construct a theory of foreign policy.

This conceptual vacuum is due also to a communica
tions gap between the American people and the architects of American foreign policy. Concepts and terminology used by the foreign policy elite have undergone such a rapid transformation that they are unintelligible to the general public: a Thomas Schelling or a Samuel Huntington talks over the head of the ordinary citizen when he discusses military deterrence or economic assistance. The current foreign policy forum lacks a commonly shared vocabulary and a set of concepts through which elites and citizens can communicate on specific issues. Much of the misunderstanding and the resultant distrust growing out of the Vietnam controversy, for example, flows from a situation in which public dialogue is carried on in one language and the decision-making process in another.

Traditional ideas which once expressed the options of American foreign policy now prove irrelevant or inadequate. Such notions as "containment," "liberation," and "making the world safe for democracy" do not satisfactorily explain the current operation of American foreign policy. Nor do they throw much light on the changing nature of the world political context. Which of these ideas, for example, provided a meaningful basis for discussion in the aftermath of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia? For the general public—as well as for the policy maker when he steps into a public forum—"containment" usually implies anti-communism and "liberation" implies both liberation from Communist totalitarianism and the simultaneous spread of democracy. Measured against the actual behavior of the American government and the actual working of American foreign policy, these terms fall sadly short in explanatory power.

A relatively unsophisticated society can perhaps have a sense of meaningful public dialogue while it is actually practicing Orwellian double-think: e.g., professing the goals of liberation and global democracy while lending aid to military juntas. Such double-think is not politically dangerous until the community becomes more analytic and self-conscious about its politics. But such sophistication is, in fact, characteristic of the "new politics" in the United States. Moreover, its meaningful expression presupposes a fresh conceptual outlook and a revised public vocabulary. The alternative is widespread political cynicism, anxiety, and alternating moods of apathy and violence.

The components of a new conceptual framework are already at hand. They have been overlooked thus far because they are fragmentary, do not look like the familiar stuff of American foreign policy, and have been used almost exclusively in intra-elit
communication. It is a striking characteristic of our time that the men who are most responsible for shaping the foreign policy of the American people seem to leave their "natural" professional vocabulary behind in their M.I.T. or Brookings offices when they enter the public arena.

The makings for a new conceptual orientation and a new public vocabulary reside principally in two intellectual spheres: development theory and international conflict theory. In scholarship as well as in day-to-day operations, the men in these two

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fields have relatively little interaction with each other, a situation which obscures some of their most important similarities. The proliferation of research institutes in these two areas, the frequent tension between Pentagon and State experts, and even the mutual suspicions between the Congressional armed services and foreign affairs committees—all testify to the inadequate cross-fertilization between the two fields.

What are the fundamental assumptions the two groups share—assumptions which tie together policies so seemingly disparate as foreign aid and the A.B.M. programs? Perhaps most important, both groups have adopted the "systems" perspective for explaining and predicting patterns of movement, change, and interdependence in the international environment. The systems approach does not necessarily reject notions like containment and liberation; it simply makes them seem simplistic and irrelevant.

The New vs. the Old Vocabulary

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The new vocabulary represents far more than simply new semantic wine in old bottles. The new terms are not just synonyms for the old; they symbolize new perceptions of the world.

The two branches of the systems approach to foreign policy are symbolized by the most recent Presidential foreign policy advisers: Walt W. Rostow, the development theorist, and Henry A. Kissinger, the conflict strategist. Although there are important points on which these critically influential men and the large number of scholars and analysts that each represents are likely to disagree, what is significant is that they share certain basic assumptions which form the new—but still largely latent—intellectual foundation for American foreign policy. This situation is analogous to the relationship between the interventionists and the isolationists of an earlier era: They shared fundamental assumptions about the American mission and about the relevance of democratic norms to foreign affairs, but they clashed, often acrimoniously, over whether involvement or withdrawal was the best strategy for realizing these aims.

We can expect the Rostows and the Kissingers to be frequently at odds, despite their common acceptance of the systems approach to foreign policy. It is likely that the development advocates will come mainly from liberal or Democratic circles and that they will lean toward an interventionist posture—though not necessarily and not always. Some systems-developers will emphasize national self-confidence and political identity as requisites for economic development. They are apt to become wary of an American foreign policy which presumes that economic development is best fostered by direct, large-scale U.S. financial assistance. In contrast, those development advocates who see political maturity as an outgrowth of economic strength may argue against severe financial cutbacks. Their attitude toward intervention or non-intervention will thus depend on systems-derived conclusions regarding the interaction of numerous factors in the development process. And among the systems-developers today there is a growing emphasis on the political requisites of economic development. One witness to this trend is the widespread circulation of Samuel P. Huntington's "Political Development and Political Decay" (World Politics, April, 1965). Huntington argues that socio-economic reform will have little value if political institutions are not strong and firmly established.

The second group of U.S. foreign policy experts, symbolized in Kissinger, is apt to look at foreign relations in terms of conflict strategy. Although development and conflict are not mutually exclusive approaches, the development group tends to see conflict as a single variable in a broader configuration, while the conflict strategists portray development as just one variable in explaining and predicting international conflict. The conflict theorists come largely from moderate conservative or Republican circles, but this does not necessarily mean that they will be advocates of aggressive, militaristic policies. In fact, the hawk-dove, interventionist-isolationist labels have been so unsatisfactory in recent debates precisely because they do not do justice to the actual divisions among major policy groups today.

Just as a development advocate may be either an
The New vs. the Old Breed

The New Breed
Naum Chomsky
Samuel Huntington
Herman Kahn
Henry Kissinger
Lucian Pye
Walt Rostow
Franz Schurmann
Thomas Schelling
Albert Wohlstetter

The Old Breed
Dean Acheson
McGeorge Bundy
Chester Bowles
Averell Harriman
George Kennan
John McCloy
Edwin Reischauer
Dean Rusk
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Several of these men would be surprised, if not dismayed, to find themselves on either list, rubbing shoulders with men they frequently criticize. What distinguishes the two groups (of which these names constitute but a convenient sample) is not policy position but policy approaches. In the case of Chomsky and Schurmann, they have actually attacked the approach itself but, unwittingly perhaps, both have helped create it.

It is not surprising that the traditional spokesmen come out of diplomacy (cum business or law) or history, whereas the new types are almost entirely from the social sciences.

It should be clear by now that the new mode of foreign policy debate will not usher in a new era of public harmony and consensus. Instead, it can introduce a new platform for meaningful disagreement.

On the other hand, it is important to understand the assumptions shared by the development and conflict groups. Essentially, the Rostows and the Kissingers hold four attitudes in common, attitudes which distinguish them from earlier foreign policy spokesmen. These are (1) a self-consciousness about the process of analysis itself; (2) an acute sensitivity to the non-policy environment and its impact on definitions of goals and strategies; (3) a less national or "we"-oriented perspective on world conditions (this as evidence of a certain analytical outlook rather than of a growing selflessness); and (4) an emphasis on the ongoingness of international relations and a corresponding impatience with apocalyptic goals.

The systems-oriented experts are not only concerned about the decisions that have to be made but also about the kinds of questions that need to be raised in preparation for decision-making. For the new breed of foreign policy advisers, the pre-decision stage of analysis becomes as politically critical as the final choice made among alternative options. This partly explains the growing influence of the President's personal assistants and the various extra-governmental institutes contracted to conduct research. More and more it is being realized that the way a policy question is posed initially can determine the final policy outcome. This realization raises serious questions about the timing and relevance of public participation in governmental decision-making. It also throws doubt on the principle of political accountability. In other words, it is not simply the "increasing complexity" of foreign policy decisions which gives non-governmental experts greater influence; it is the very character of the systems approach to policy which expands their role and undermines accountability.

A "system" is a pattern or network of interrelated and interacting variables. For the systems expert, the policy itself and the particular nation acting upon it are merely parts of a larger configuration. If it is to be meaningful, the systems analyst will argue, any policy must take into account a broad range of variables and interrelationships over a fairly long period of time. Ad hoc agreements, short-term tactics, expedient quid-pro-quo bargains—these maneuvers blind one to the complexities of political reality. At a conference of experts prior to his White House appointment, Kissinger voiced an opinion on this "pragmatic" tradition that would be shared by most of his professional colleagues: "When one is asked for advice, the constant American tendency has been to respond by looking for a gimmick" (in Richard M. Pfeffer, ed., No More Vietnam? New York, 1968, p. 13). Americans have always been superb tinkerers and short-term tacticians in foreign affairs, but this is no longer tolerable.

The systems perspective makes the analyst hypersensitive to any environmental conditions that may affect policy decisions, and it renders him highly skeptical of the simple "we-they" view of foreign relations. Variables such as technological innovation,
trade and information flows, cultural transformation, etc., cut across national boundaries and cannot be squeezed neatly into a nation-versus-nation picture. Consequently, the new policy advisers of both the development and conflict schools sound less nationalistic or parochial than their predecessors. At the same time, however, this dilution of nationalism may go hand-in-hand with a greater tolerance of violence and aggressiveness. The old assumption that nationalism and tolerance of violence were natural bedfellows no longer holds. What is one to think of such an analyst as Herman Kahn, for example, who seems to have a high threshold of tolerance for violence and, at the same time, a reluctance to couch his analyses in nationalistic terms? In the new foreign policy arena Kahn is at least fathomable, even if not acceptable.

The example of Herman Kahn serves as a warning to those who might wish to judge the new foreign policy breed: It would be a mistake to view the experts' "tough" realism and "cold" calculation as hawkishness and a mistake to see their objective, analytical style as personally neutral and detached. (One's labels can thus err, it seems, to both the Right and the Left.) Scientific jargon, the reliance on computers, a preference for quantitative expression—all these lead laymen to suppose that these men are unemotional, even inhuman, and thus unconcerned about the spiritual values that motivate less calculating men. But, the systems analyst would contend, it is because human existence is so complex and because the expert is subject to all human frailties that he needs to employ methods capable not only of coping with a multitude of variables, but also of transcending personal prejudice. It is quite clear, on the other hand, that the systems approach does incline one toward certain biases: a preference for political order, a belief that conflict and violence are "dysfunctional" and "deviant," a desire for tight integration of societies, and a conviction that long-range planning is requisite for development.

Their sensitivity to the environmental context of policy formulation also leaves the systems analysts uneasy by, and less optimistic about, policy-by-statesmanship. The statesmanship notion of foreign policy assumed that the governmental decision-maker and his discrete choices could be the most crucial factors in shaping the course of international affairs. Systems analysis underscores instead the numerous factors over which statesmen have only marginal control.

Finally, both development and conflict strategists are less preoccupied with the achievement of ultimate goals. "Systems" may be imbued with objectives, but these objectives are not defined in terms of "mission." Rather, they are directed toward survival—and survival requires continuous growth and adaptation, not the mere persistence of a status quo.

Put another way, systems theorists may set goals but these goals will always be intermediate in some sense, since their very achievement only generates new relationships and opportunities—which in turn demand new choices and policies. Dispassionate analysis and messianic idealism have always been in a state of tension in American political thought, and the tension has surfaced repeatedly in foreign policy discussions. The present trend toward a systems approach may reduce this tension but it will not eliminate it entirely; and it may create new tensions.

One may call the new platform for foreign policy dialogue part and parcel of a broader intellectual development in post-New Deal America: a preference for attacking problems in terms of approaches and frameworks rather than ideologies. We are witnessing in the United States today what has been called prismatic change: We are behaving according to one set of premises and evaluating that behavior in terms of language derived from another, earlier set. This sort of discontinuity may be helpful at first, since a sudden transformation of symbols can alienate an unprepared citizenry—especially in a democracy, where individuals must feel capable of forming and expressing opinions on government policies. In the long run, however, the gap between word and action will be dangerous. The widespread frustrations surrounding the Vietnam debates suggest that we have reached a point at which the perils of prismatic discontinuity outdistance their temporary benefits. Unless academics and foreign policy experts can be understood by the general public, we are likely to witness an intensification of cynicism, apathy, and distrust in the foreign policy arena.