

Beyond Global-Regional Thinking

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The globalization of American foreign policy, including national security policy, is not mainly a product of having a single “global” *idea*—a unifying “world” view, a “large” economic outlook, a “grand” military strategy. It is not, essentially, *ideological*, whatever its scale. It is, rather, *logical*—a continuing rational process of seeing and, consequently, making connections between and among the diverse situations overseas in which the United States, through different periods, has been involved, is currently involved, and might soon become involved. In a word, policy globalization is a dynamic of linkage—not only outward linkage across space (geographical linkage) but also backward and forward linkage over time (historical linkage). It is the *text*, or reasoned articulation, of the defense of American interests and the promotion of American values in a progressively more international *context*, an ever-bigger, indeed ultimately globe-wide setting for the making and the carrying out of American policy.

Globalization, it thus here will be emphasized, is not only an “external” historical process of changing technological, economic, social, and political conditions, but it is also an “internal” process of constant policy transformation—a development of the policy world itself. It proceeds when issues that “come up” in one issue area, functional as well as geographical, are connected, or linked, with issues arising in other areas; and thereby, progressively, the space of policy discourse is extended. Eventually, this sphere of policy ratiocination becomes worldwide in scope and comprehensive in content—“global” in both the spatial and the substantive senses of the word.

This is not to suggest, however, that “links” are completely arbitrary. Nor are they just imaginary. “One of the principal tasks of statesmanship,” Henry Kissinger has written, “is to understand which subjects are truly related and can be used to reinforce each other. For the most part, the policymaker has little choice in the matter; ultimately, it is reality, not policy, that links events. The statesman’s role is to recognize the relationship when it does exist—in other words, to create a network of incentives and penalties to produce the most favorable outcome.”¹ Indeed, the most effective foreign policy “linkage” normally is that which is based on real-world relationships, on cause-and-effect patterns that, when understood, show how the world “truly” works. Ideally, diplomatic “linkage” is self-enforcing, for the operation of the

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world-system itself will provide the incentives and impose the penalties. Issues are thus connected subjectively because they also may be related objectively, in a deeper historical causality.

The enlargement of the geographical scope and the functional span of American national policy—ultimately, its globalization—is historically, and very powerfully, connected with the expansion of the world-system, including the technological, economic, social, and political factors that continue to produce international interaction. That is to say, external or *objective* globalization drives internal or *subjective* globalization. To a lesser, but increasing extent, there is a reverse influence as well. The reciprocal effects—those of American policy and policy action on world processes—have become more and more pronounced, although it is very difficult, analytically, to distinguish the effects of deliberate state action, or U.S. policy moves, from those of America’s emanations abroad in general.²

At the very beginning of the 20th century, when the United States first began to be spoken of as a “world power,”³ there was much international speculation, both hopeful and fearful, about the possible “Americanization” of the world.⁴ America’s influence was clearly felt. Globalization is sometimes treated, though too freely, as virtually the same as the Americanization that long has been remarked on.

Globalization is, first and foremost, a process of the development of the world-system, not the actions of a single country. This is the context within which American policy has been conducted, if sometimes in ways that interact with and modify the global system. It has been argued that what we today call globalization means not merely the expansion of the world-system, but its *closure*. This argument, first advanced in a policy-relevant way by the British political geographer Halford Mackinder, produced a profound new complication for policymakers, one whose implications still are not well understood. Thenceforth, action taken in, or with regard to, one part of the world reverberated in others, and around “the globe” at large, and created a new, unprecedented need for statesmen to take into account these globe-wide effects, including the policy reactions of other governments. Merely local or even regional policy, in a geographical sense, became impossible thereafter. Policy, even if focused on localities, had to be global.

The intricacy of the American “global” concept reflects the actual history through which it has emerged. The story proceeds, logicohistorically, from what will be termed the intercontinental phase through the multiregional phase to the present global-regional phase to a coming global-local phase to a conceivable global-global phase, which though not likely, provides a conceptual capstone and a measure for all the rest. The historical stages described, though successive, naturally overlap somewhat. Moreover, and very important to note, the earlier stages are not forgotten. They remain influential as residues and recollections of policy—traditions, precedents, and also ambitions and aversions—that, over time, become an intellectual and emotional composite rather than a single, simple thing.

Origins of the “Post-Columbian” World System

From the discovery of the New World to roughly the turn of the 20th century, as Mackinder observed in a 1904 lecture before the Royal Geographical Society, “the outline of the map of the world has been completed with approximate accuracy, and even in the polar regions the voyages of Nansen and Scott have very narrowly reduced the last possibility of dramatic discoveries.” The preceding 400 years, foreshortened, might come to be seen, Mackinder suggested, as “the Columbian epoch.” The essential characteristic of that almost half-millennium, he argued, was “the expansion of Europe against almost negligible resistances.”⁵ To Europeans, and by extension Euro-Americans, the world was fundamentally an open place, and its horizons had seemed, and for most practical purposes were, unlimited.

What are the factors that generated this dynamic expansionary process, centered mainly in Europe but not focused there exclusively, which worked to complete, and to end, the “Columbian” world-system? Among the most important factors are, surely, the advances of science and technology. These made physically possible the overspreading of the world in terms of time and space. The steam engine, applied both to shipping and to rail transport, made distant seas and remote lands not merely more accessible, but more accessible on a regular, even commercially scheduled basis. Nonetheless, in the latter half of the 19th century when many of these developments occurred, transport and travel were not easy. They were, by present-day standards, slow. Communication between countries did speed up. The electromagnetic telegraph, especially when submarine cables were laid across the Atlantic and through the Mediterranean and Indian Oceans into Asia and part way across the Pacific Ocean, began to facilitate almost real-time communication, but only for a limited number of people in the right places. The radio, though its messages were widely broadcast, did not have anything like comparable range.

Despite their restrictions and incomplete coverage, these particular applications of new forms of energy did make possible, indeed necessary, some of the earliest forms of international organization. Some business magnates, notably the American financier Edward H. Harriman, had synergistic dreams of “girdling the earth” with a unified railroad-steamship system that would connect the Americas and Eurasia via the Bering Strait.⁶ But while they were the main planners and participants, shipping and railroad companies like White Star Line and the Union Pacific and communications operators like Cable and Wireless were not the only ones that profited from and promoted the technological innovations.

Governments, too, were involved in earth-girdling, even though this was an era of *laissez faire*. The International Telegraph Union (forerunner of the present International Telecommunication Union) was formed by an international convention signed in Paris in 1865. In order to standardize time, which became an issue especially in those countries (for example, the United States) having a vast east-west geographical extent and a number of railroad firms that each kept time according its own individual clock, the U.S. Congress authorized an International Meridian Conference. This was held in Washington, DC, in 1884. An international gathering of some 25 countries, the Washington Conference adopted a “universal day” to begin at midnight at

the meridian running through the Observatory of Greenwich in the United Kingdom. Thus, with somewhat competing reference centers, the earth was divided into 24 world time zones of 15 degrees each.^{7,8}

The naval and military implications of not merely the new technology, but also the national and international standardization efforts that accompanied it, made possible strategic planning and coordinated tactical operations on a larger scale. Many examples are provided by history. The French adoption of steam-powered ships of war able to cross the Channel in almost any weather created invasion scares in Britain. The skillful use of railroads by the Northern side in the American Civil War enabled General Ulysses S. Grant to overcome the Southern geographical advantage of interior lines of communication. Signaling, too, became easier. The telegraph, as the historian William McNeill has pointed out, "allowed an advancing army to keep contact with a distant headquarters simply by playing out wire as it advanced." During Prussia's war against France, for instance, King Wilhelm and his Chief of General Staff, Helmut von Moltke, thereby "could maintain accurate check on large-scale military movements."⁹ On April 25, 1898, when the United States declared war against Spain, Commodore George Dewey, whose Asiatic Squadron lay in Hong Kong's harbor, received (via Europe) a cabled message to "proceed at once to the Philippine Islands." After destroying the Spanish fleet in the bay at Manila, which was linked to Hong Kong by cable, Dewey asked the Spanish Governor General of the Philippines to allow him to communicate with Washington. "When the Spaniard refused," as Robert Love relates the story, "Dewey cut the cable, and thus was on his own."¹⁰ The importance of the geopolitics of control over telegraphy quickly became evident to all nations. A subcommittee of the British Committee for Imperial Defence, quoting from A. Roper's *Die Unterseekabel*, published in Leipzig in 1910, recognized with Roper that "the course and result of a naval war may depend on the opportune arrival of commands and information by submarine cable." The British report also quoted an essay by Captain George Owen Squier of the United States asserting that in time of war submarine cables would be "more important than battleships or cruisers."¹¹

The sheer industrialization, especially of the Western world, during the 19th century and the concomitant increase of trade with markets overseas profoundly altered the international security field. It repeatedly tipped power balances. David Landes in *The Unbound Prometheus* points out that "when the Prussian coalition defeated France in 1870, numerous Britons, including the Queen, rejoiced to see the traditional Gallic enemy and disturber of the peace humbled by the honest, sober Teuton." This was an outmoded perspective. Very soon, Germany's industrial and other growth had raised it "to Continental hegemony and left France far behind." Landes adds, "This was one of the longest 'double-takes' in history: the British had been fighting the Corsican ogre, dead fifty years and more, while Bismarck went his way."¹²

The "New Empire" of the United States after the Civil War, argues Walter LaFaber, also was basically a product of the Industrial Revolution, reinforced by a political power shift from the planters of the South to more progressive Northern industrialists and financiers. The distinctive manifestation of the "New" as opposed to the "Old" kind of Empire was not the conquest of more territory abroad but the

search for foreign markets—that is, commercial rather than territorial “expansion.”¹³ Government leaders in Washington, like the political authorities of other industrializing nations with insufficient domestic markets, were expected in one way or another to provide outlets for the surplus product. The writings of the American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan are eloquent testimony to the power of this industrial-commercial motive and resulting expansionism. His concept of “sea power” appropriately included a civilian merchant marine as well as naval forces proper, which were considerably enhanced by the Navy’s shipbuilding program that his advocacy helped to inspire.¹⁴

Social processes, including demographic growth and overseas migration, also fundamentally changed the international field of force in the 19th century. “To many of the migrations in ancient and modern times the adjective, ‘great,’ has been applied,” reflected the historian of the subject Marcus Lee Hansen. “It *aptly* describes that westward movement of Europeans which began with the discovery of the New World and has continued until our era.”¹⁵ Toward the end of the 19th century, the sources of transatlantic migration shifted somewhat, from western and northern to eastern and southern Europe. This fact caused anxieties in the United States, fearful about its identity as well as its economy. Yet this population influx proved to be another source of strength for the United States vis-à-vis the Old World. In an era such as that one, when ideas about race supported claims about national superiority and inferiority, and worries about the “mongrelization” of America or submergence in a social “melting pot” were frequently expressed, immigration in fact produced many benefits—in the context of international competition as well as internally. Not the least of these was a constant downward pressure on wage rates, which, paradoxically (as it seemed to some theorists), increased employment—and production—levels. “Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life,” as President John F. Kennedy years later affirmed. He quoted with approval the lines of Walt Whitman appropriate to a more international age: “The States are the amplest poem,/Here is not merely a nation but/a teeming Nation of nations.”¹⁶ The United States, like Canada, Australia, Brazil, and rather few other immigrant-absorbing countries, brought “the world” into itself. It is therefore, despite isolationist tendencies in its policy, “global.”

The Darwinian Age of the late 19th and early 20th centuries has too often been interpreted only in terms of a “power struggle,” narrowly defined in terms of armies and battleships. “*Weltpolitik*,” “imperialism,” and, in the American lexicon, “world power”¹⁷ included much more. These catch-all notions were a summation of the many forces at work in the world. Yet geopolitics and geo-economics arguably were at the core. Historian William L. Langer has epitomized the complexity and sequences of such forces in terms of Europe’s alliances and alignments and the diplomacy of imperialist rivalry during the 1890s. The story of European international relations in that decade, he posits, “is the story of the assault of Russia and France upon the territorial position of Britain in Asia and Africa, and the story of the great economic duel between England and her all-too-efficient German rival.”¹⁸ The United States enters the world picture mainly via Latin America and the Far East. America’s arrival was announced by the victory over Spain in the Spanish-American

War and President Theodore Roosevelt's dispatch of his "Great White Fleet" around the world—from Hampton Roads around Cape Horn to the West Coast and then across the Pacific to New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, and China, and from there across the Indian Ocean to Suez and on through the Mediterranean to Gibraltar and back to Hampton Roads (December 16, 1907–February 22, 1909).¹⁹

The "world powers"—that is, the European Great Powers with overseas interests, the United States, and Imperial Japan—competed in what they increasingly felt was a "contracting" world. Mackinder, concluding in his 1904 Royal Geographical Society lecture that it was no longer possible for Europe, as it had done during the Columbian age, to expand "against almost negligible resistances," then proclaimed, "From the present time forth, in the post-Columbian age, we shall again have to deal with a closed political system, and none the less that it will be one of world-wide scope."²⁰ For the first time, world history was, in a new and literally true sense, global. International activity had reached its ultimate geographical limit—the opposite end, approached from all directions, of the round Earth. There was nothing—no horizon—anywhere beyond it, thus no place farther to go. (Of course, Mackinder could not then realistically imagine the possibility of space exploration, though his imagination soared.)

It was the "closure" of the new global situation of mankind, not just the widened scope of it, that seemed to Mackinder the most profoundly significant—and potentially disruptive—fact. From that point on, the outward energies of the Western civilized powers would be turned back, and their forces would be directed against each other—and across everything in between. For Earth had become, not only physically, a vast echo chamber: "Every explosion of social forces, instead of being dissipated in a surrounding circuit of unknown space and barbaric chaos, will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe," warned Mackinder, "and weak elements in the political and economic organism of the world will be shattered in consequence."

"There is a vast difference of effect," this early British globalist added to make his point more immediately geographical, "in the fall of a shell into an earthwork and its fall amid the closed spaces and rigid structures of a great building or ship." Probably some "half-consciousness" of this, he speculated, had begun to divert the attention of statesmen around the world from "territorial expansion" to the "struggle for relative efficiency."²¹ (We would today say "competitiveness.") Although formulated in metaphorical language, and not readily subject to scientific analysis or careful measurement, Mackinder's deep insight, made at the beginning of what may be called the Global Age, merits contemplation today. It is historically wrong to think that globalization is just now beginning.

From the beginning of the 20th century, the basic sphere of human affairs, within which everything would of necessity thereafter have to be apportioned, was the "globe." For scientific purposes, this meant, as Mackinder further suggested, that "we are for the first time in a position to attempt, with some degree of completeness, a correlation between the larger geographical and the larger historical generalizations." That is to say, with events taking place "on the stage of the whole world," we may "seek a formula which shall express certain aspects, at any rate, of geographical causation in universal history."²²

While this may seem excessive, it is the historical-geographical dimension of the *globalization* phenomenon that should be emphasized. It is the bedrock of all else. Within this new context, the “westward march of empire,”²³ of which the movement of the western frontier of the United States was but one small part,²⁴ was destined also to come to an end. The U.S. conquest of the Philippines, which was the high-water mark of American physical imperialism, seemed to confirm this perception. The weight of this American policy move, though somewhat “accidental” in the sense of being a by-product of a conflict over Cuba, had an impact on the overall global equilibrium. Mackinder himself remarked, “The United States has recently become an eastern power, affecting the European balance not directly, but through Russia, and she will construct the Panama canal to make her Mississippi and Atlantic resources available in the Pacific. From this point of view the real divide between east and west is to be found in the Atlantic Ocean.”²⁵ From the perspective of Europe, and America, too, it seemed as if the frame of the world-system had shifted somewhat.

The Historical-Geographic Dialectic of U.S. Foreign Policy

When did the United States of America acquire a foreign “policy,” in the sense of a body of guidelines for taking future action in defense of American interests in a consistent and coordinated way? Although it is generally assumed that the U.S. Government has had foreign policies from almost its beginning, notably Washington’s Farewell Address (1796) with its counsel against permanent alliances and the Monroe Doctrine (1823) with its assertion of American hemispheric separateness, there is good reason to place the beginning of U.S. foreign policy proper, especially that of an incipiently “global” shape, in a much later period. Not until approximately the year 1890 did American political leaders and government officials begin to make decisions regarding U.S. relations with the world that were required, not just by the many and varied circumstances that Americans happened to encounter abroad, but also by the imperative, which is here emphasized, of policy consistency, or greater coherence, among those decisions.

The historian Robert Beisner, using this stricter definition of the term *policy*, writes in *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865–1900*, that around 1890:

the old reactive and unsystematic conduct of U.S. foreign relations was replaced by the formulation of a real “policy” in international affairs and its more-or-less systematic execution. Thus hypothetically speaking, while a Secretary of State in 1880 would probably have reacted separately and disjointedly to events in, say, Mexico, Canada, and China, his successor in 1900 would have anticipated the need for decision before events overtook him, perhaps pondered both events and decision in a framework calculated to advance a general foreign policy, and then acted accordingly.²⁶

It is thus perhaps no accident that Secretary of State John Hay’s “Open Door” notes in 1899 and 1900, calling for nondiscrimination by other powers against American interests in the China market (and by implication markets elsewhere in the world), quickly became known as the Open Door *Policy*.

There is a dialectic—a weighing and reconciling of juxtaposed facts and arguments about them—in the development of policy. The consideration of one case leads, logically and progressively, to the consideration of others, actual and hypothetical; and a constant refitting of formulations to ever-wider and more complicated reality results. Thus, American foreign policy—national security policy as well as economic and other kinds of policy—became “globalized.” This process has occurred by stages. So far, three historical phases of policy expansion, in this sense, have been experienced. We may now be entering a fourth phase. These stages are chronological, though they do overlap to some extent.

The first stage in the globalization of American foreign policy extends from the late 19th century to World War I. This was a period dominated by intercontinental reasoning. In this interval, and for some time afterward, American leaders and officials, basing their thinking on the geographical premise of the American “continent” (a concept often used to cover the whole Western Hemisphere), argumentatively juxtaposed their policy ideas regarding the Americas (*viz.* the Monroe Doctrine) with prospective thoughts about involvement on other continents. These tentatively held visions, because of the Monroe Doctrine, were considered, by some policymakers and certainly many commentators, as quite illicit. The Monroe Doctrine—“America for the Americans”—obviously implied “Europe for the Europeans” and, more remotely, “Asia for the Asians.” How, then, could it happen that the United States, though by the turn of the century it had become the predominant power in the New World, legitimately became engaged in the affairs of any part of the world, particularly the Old World? Something, it seemed, had to “give” logically—either American geographical self-restriction or the Monroe Doctrine itself. Underlying this issue was a comparison of continents, and of the appropriateness of American involvement in the affairs of different continents—the comparative “base” always being “this hemisphere.”^{27,28}

The issue was posed in a prominent way by the unprecedented U.S. participation in 1884 in the Berlin Conference concerning the Congo. In the opinion of some critics at home, this involvement was a clear violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Worse, assuming that there is an in-built reciprocity in the Monroe Doctrine (though this logic is not spelled out in Monroe’s text), the critics warned that American official participation at Berlin, especially if it resulted in the acceptance by the United States of political obligations regarding the Congo, could release the European powers from any obligation to respect the political independence of the American republics (excepting their own remaining colonies in the Western Hemisphere). They had, of course, never acknowledged the validity of the Monroe Doctrine in the first place. The thought of Europeans proposing “a conference to settle American affairs, especially the problem of an isthmian canal” caused the U.S. Government to shy away from further involvement.²⁹

The Harvard professor Archibald Cary Coolidge, writing some 20 years later about the U.S. participation in the Berlin Conference (and also American participation in the 1906 Algeciras conference concerning Morocco, as well as Secretary Hay’s protests against Romania’s oppression of Jews in Romania and the Kishinev massacre in Russia), asked, rhetorically but compellingly, “[I]f the United States is going to abandon that portion of the Monroe Doctrine which forbids interference in

European affairs, how can it insist that Europe shall not meddle in those of America?" Giving his own response, he suggested how a doctrine of "paramountcy" might be used to preserve the core of the Monroe Doctrine (that is, its prohibition on European meddling in American affairs) while asserting, on the general theory of the "national welfare," the right of the United States to address situations outside the Western Hemisphere to which its "interests" may have spread. The actual growth of American power and interest, he was in effect arguing, gave the United States "legitimate" reason to protest against abuses of freedom elsewhere. He explained:

Logically, perhaps, it can not; but, on the broad ground of national welfare, it might maintain that its interests were "paramount" in one region without necessarily being nonexistent elsewhere. An attitude of this sort would, however, be somewhat weak morally, and would give the European powers a legitimate cause of complaint against the restrictions now imposed upon them. This is one reason why the Americans are anxious to keep out of purely European questions. Whether they will be able to do so is another matter.³⁰

Continentalism was already in conflict with globalism. The received notion of the political separateness of "hemispheres" was at odds with the growing, and spreading, economic and even security interests of the United States. The Monroe Doctrine did not preclude formal American annexation of the Hawaiian Islands in 1898. Nor, although some influential people argued that it should, did it stop the United States from establishing a protectorate in the Philippines. Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts warned that American intervention in Asia would invalidate the Monroe Doctrine, encourage "every European nation, every European alliance" to "acquire dominion in this hemisphere," and, moreover, change America into "a cheapjack country, raking after the cart for the leavings of European tyranny."³¹ His reasoning did not prevail, for American control of the Philippines was a *fait accompli*. "Asia," at least island Asia, was henceforth not beyond American bounds. The U.S. involvement in World War I showed that the "American" and "European" spheres were not completely separable either, though the U.S. Senate's rejection of membership in the League of Nations restored a semblance of the traditional separation of the Old World and the New World. This image lingers today, though it is usually drawn rhetorically, and in official policy terms, in the language of "regionalism."

The second major stage in the progressive globalization of American foreign policy, encompassing World War II and most of the Cold War, is that of multiregional reasoning. During this period, U.S. policymakers began to think in narrower and somewhat better defined terms of "regions," rather than whole "continents" (or more abstract "hemispheres"). This conceptual approach was more generic; it could embrace a larger number of situations in a comparative, juxtaposing way. Rather than comparing possible American relations with other parts of the world only with the "base" pattern of the Western Hemisphere, including the continental United States, they began to see possible connections and to draw analogies between distant regions themselves, without, necessarily, any reference to the U.S. continental or hemispheric base. Their focus had shifted outward.

For example, during the late 1930s, Secretary of State Cordell Hull was opposed to concluding a revised commercial treaty with Italy (even though doing so might

help detach Mussolini from Hitler) because signing such a document would entail treating with the King of Italy—who was formally also the Emperor of Ethiopia, Italian forces having displaced Emperor Haile Selassie—and thus would imply that the U.S. Government might also accept Japan's military takeover of Manchuria. Hull's concern, though he was formerly a judge, was not only law-like but also realistic. In a globalizing world, what was happening in one region or was being decided with regard to one region would quickly become known in other regions. In a more interdependent world-diplomatic system, to sign a new U.S.-Italian treaty seemingly at the expense of Ethiopia could be considered tantamount to recognizing the Japanese puppet regime of *Manchukuo* and condemning thousands of Chinese to permanent servitude. Journalists and others in Japan might even have interpreted a new U.S.-Italian commercial treaty as an American green light for military aggression against other territory in Asia. Thus, concluding a new treaty could even have been dangerous. At one point during the Ethiopian crisis, the Italian ambassador to the United States, Augusto Rosso, asked Hull, according to the Secretary's account in his *Memoirs*, "if we had taken up with Japan the situation in North China. I immediately jumped him and said that the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was the most serious single factor in precipitating the Japanese-Chinese crisis!"³²

What this shows is the new power, in a more communicative and closely organized world, of the logic of inter-regional comparison in the making of foreign policy. A new treaty of amity and commerce with Italy, seemingly at the expense of Ethiopia, which implicated politically the Mediterranean and Horn of Africa regions, could have spilled over into Northeast Asia and beyond. Hull's inhibition—though based theoretically on the universalist Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928), the Washington Nine Power Treaty (1922), and the Stimson Nonrecognition Doctrine (1932), pertaining specifically to the Far East—was also a pragmatic response to the stricter requirement of cross-regional policy consistency in a more globalized, and thus more complicated and perilous, geopolitical setting. The United States could not and would not condone an action in one region if it were afraid of the consequences of doing so in another region, even on the opposite side of the globe. Whether this fear was well founded in the international political realities of the time, Hull and many other State Department officials, in their own minds, could not be sure. But most of them felt they could not take the risk. Thus they further "globalized" America's recognition policy.

Somewhat similarly, following the war in June 1950, President Harry Truman decided, despite a Joint Chiefs of Staff determination that the Korean Peninsula was only of secondary strategic importance, that he could not afford to allow North Korea to succeed in its aggressive move against South Korea because that could suggest weakness vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in Europe as well as in Asia and risk the onset of World War III. Making a global geopolitical analogy, he even said, pointing to Korea on a globe, "This is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now there won't be any next step [anywhere]."³³ He had already, in the so-called Truman Doctrine of March 1947, declared it to be "the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."³⁴ In a way, that seemed to some officials, like George Kennan, to be too multiregional. Truman did not really generalize his earlier doctrine, in practical or theoretical terms,

until the Soviet-backed North Korean military drive across the 38th parallel made him see the need for consistency of action in support of a coherent policy worldwide. Region-to-region reasoning thus “globalized” American policy further.

The Eisenhower administration, too, was mindful of the interplay of region-centered issues and of the need to respond to threats in different regions in a weighing and reconciling fashion. One expression of this was the replication of “regional” alliances, on the model of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) and the earlier Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (1947). Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hopped the globe to build new regional security arrangements comparable and complementary to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He even sought to form these assorted regional pacts, including the very different Organization of American States (OAS), the newer Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact, later transformed into the Central Treaty Organization, into a loose multiregional arrangement. Reminding his fellow NATO allies at a North Atlantic Council meeting in Paris in December 1957 of the collective security roles of the OAS, SEATO, and the Baghdad Pact, Secretary Dulles suggested that the Secretary General of NATO, Paul-Henri Spaak, “explore closer ties between the various organizations.”³⁵ Nothing, however, came of his multiregional design.

During the next decade, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, also emphasized the inter-regional linkages of issues, particularly the possible ramifications, globewide, of the Vietnam conflict. Secretary Rusk, with youthful experience in Europe and military experience in Asia, had a strong sense of the political, moral, and legal interconnections of Cold War challenges in different regions, even those remote from the United States. If the United States did not meet these, its credibility would be at stake. Partly under Rusk’s influence, President Lyndon Johnson stated in his first speech to the Nation, “This nation will keep its commitments from South Vietnam to West Berlin.”³⁶ Secretary Rusk often relied on regional organizations, notably the OAS over Cuba and SEATO over Vietnam, for policy legitimization. Although this was done in part because the central world political body, the United Nations (UN), was handicapped by the near certainty of a Soviet veto, it also reflected a genuine sense of regional organizations as major building blocks of world order.

The third stage in the globalization of American policy, covering the post-Cold War era into the present, may be characterized as that of global-regional thinking. To some degree, this style of reasoning originated in the previous period, when the U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear rivalry overshadowed everything. American policymakers, notably Henry Kissinger, stated quite bluntly that the United States had “global” interests and responsibilities. The major European countries, though America’s close NATO allies, had merely “regional” ones.^{37,38} The American nuclear umbrella over-arched the globe.

With the end of the Cold War and the political collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the “sole surviving superpower,” with seemingly unlimited sway over world affairs. Its new global role has made possible, and perhaps even has required, the withdrawal of U.S. military assets from certain particularly heavy regional tasks it had long been performing—notably, the maintenance of large standing

forces in Western Europe, now unlikely to be invaded. The 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War accelerated this process of relocation, but by shifting assets temporarily to another region, one that was threatened internally. Following the success of Operation *Desert Storm*, many American troops were returned home, rather than to Europe, in part so as to be better placed for possible “global” action—anywhere. The focus had shifted back to the center.

The Gulf operation, a U.S.-led “coalition-of-the-willing” effort, was authorized, unprecedentedly, by a UN Security Council resolution supported by a Russian “yes” and enabled by China’s abstention. Collective security seemed to be working for the first time since the United Nations was founded. A strong presumption was created, from the very beginning of the 1990s, that, henceforth, any international military action including intervention in intrastate conflicts, in order to be considered legitimate, would have to receive approval of the UN Security Council—at least after the fact. The dialectic of international policymaking, including that of the U.S. Government, was working in that direction.

To some degree, regional organizations, notably NATO (though not formally a “regional” organization in the sense of chapter VIII of the UN Charter), became “subcontractors.” Some global idealists, and even reality-minded multilateralists, tended to favor the new dependence of military alliances on that world body for authority and direction. Others, opposing the hierarchical subordination to NATO, believed that alliances ought to be autonomous, as their members, alone or together, still enjoyed “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence” recognized in the UN Charter.

Both philosophically and procedurally, a kind of global-regional “partnership” was beginning to develop.³⁹ The United Nations, because its membership is universal (or nearly so), can express the will of “the international community.” NATO, however, plainly has more physical power to uphold international order than the global body, the United Nations, does. The United Nations has so far proved incapable of forming a rapid-reaction force, or even gathering sufficient resources to support small-scale peacekeeping operations in a logistically sustained way. NATO has neither the internal or the external support to become a “global NATO”—this despite some (mainly American) enthusiasm expressed for the idea around the time of the alliance’s 50th anniversary summit in Washington, DC, in 1999. To be sure, as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said before that meeting, her predecessor Dean Acheson had pointed out 50 years before that “while the Washington Treaty involves commitments to collective defense, it also allows us to come together to meet common threats that might emanate from beyond the North Atlantic.”⁴⁰ Yet the North Atlantic alliance clearly has no mandate to act (though its members can indeed strategically consult) globally.^{41,42} Objectively, the two organizations, the United Nations and NATO, need each other.

Subsequent experience has, however, revealed the difficulties of coordinating global and regional organizational action. The balance between the two levels is very difficult to maintain. The pattern of cooperation is also uneven. In some parts of the world—for example, Northeast Asia—there are no regional organizations even to strike a balance. The present global-regional “system” thus lacks substance as well as

uniformity. The logic of it—deriving from the policymaker’s demand for symmetry—makes a powerful case, however. It points not only toward a strengthening of the United Nations but also to the sponsorship of new regional bodies. Even so, to some degree, the historical-geographical “opportunity” for further globalization-regionalization in the security sphere may have passed.

The next, the coming fourth stage in the globalization of American policy, which could become clarified by around the year 2010, may be a period of global-local reasoning. Rather than relying largely on regional security arrangements such as NATO to keep the peace, the United States may find itself, even for the purpose of maintaining security broadly conceived, also working with global economic institutions, some of them affiliated with the United Nations. In many instances, the management crises that emerge all around the world will be geographically localized. These can be addressed only in an essentially ad hoc fashion. Action typically will be taken after the fact, when an outbreak of some kind occurs. The treatment of “hot spots” can in theory be preventive as well, however. Partly for that reason, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and even the informal Group of Seven/Eight may become the first recourse, in the sense that their timely general relief measures might preclude the incidence of violence or other disturbances. With this surely in mind, the leaders of the major industrialized nations, including Russia, at their July 2000 summit meeting in Okinawa, committed themselves to helping poor countries reduce their debt burden as well as to helping them develop by improving their access to education, health care, and information technology.⁴³

The problems that arise in the future may not fall neatly within the parameters of regional organization. The crisis in East Timor, for example, “fell between the cracks” regionally and finally was handled, fairly decisively, by the Secretary General and the Security Council of the United Nations, local security action being led by relatively nearby Australia, outside any formal regional-organizational context. “Policy” in the future may have to be customized to fit very particular situations. Some of these, like the East Timor case, may be on a very small scale, though their urgency may be intense. Regionalization, which requires known and knowable geographical parameters, may thus be challenged by hard reality and, as regards the policy dialectic, by localization as well as globalization.

Many international and intranational crises today have more dimensions than do existing regional bodies. NATO, however, is more and more taking on broad peace stabilization functions, particularly in the Balkans. The European Union, in its origin (though perhaps not basic motivation) an economic organization, is now proceeding to develop a genuine European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI). These regionally based organizations, like others elsewhere, face a changed world, even within their own locales. “NATO’s new security vocation,” as Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy terms it, is to respond to new conflicts that are “accompanied by large-scale atrocities, violent crime, and terrorism.” The solutions to these “human security” problems, like the problems themselves, are complex. They must “rely on a variety of instruments—political, civilian and military.” Axworthy may be right in saying, “Only through a wider and deeper recognition of the importance of human

security to peace and stability will NATO retain its relevance and effectiveness in facing the diverse challenges of the coming century.”⁴⁴

A recurrent feature of these global-local predicaments, centered increasingly on small states and even on breakaway sections of larger states, is most likely to be extreme economic exigency, threatening social collapse. This is not insecurity that can be addressed only in politico-military terms. Therefore, American and international responses will, as suggested, have to become more multifaceted than ever before. The handling of “complex emergencies,” and of course their prevention, requires competencies of all kinds, from police training to electoral advice to legal assistance to public health provision—a task akin to “nation building,” or in many of the actual cases today, “nation rebuilding.”

Any consistency, let alone philosophical coherence, in this historically accumulating pattern of emergencies and international responses to them may be hard to find. Yet the “rationalizing” pressures of budgetary shortfalls and other stresses felt by national governments such as that of the United States and by international institutions such as the United Nations and NATO, and the “lessons learned” from repeated, hard experience may bring about more cogent policies and principles.

Toward a Full Globalization of American Policy?

An ultimate global-global model of reasoning—a full merging of the objective (real-world) and subjective (policy-world) processes of globalization, so to speak—is conceivable. Such a final dialectical synthesis of fact and fancy may be unlikely, but the logical development of American foreign policy over time suggests it nonetheless. The very notion of policy is to face the future, which cannot be certainly known. All trends in the development of political reasoning, including strategic thought and diplomatic craft, are “futuristic.” The concept of a global-global matching of the sphere of action with the scope of policy has, at the very least, a heuristic value.

This notion—a global-global culmination—would imply that all major problems abroad would be deemed to be global in character and to admit of, even require, global solutions. Those that did not rise to this level could, under a pure globalist doctrine, be safely ignored, for they would not have universal significance or systemic importance. Far from meaning that all problems everywhere would have to be dealt with, it means that some problems simply would not rise to a level warranting policy consideration. Indeed, this raises the specter of a “new isolationism,” which has always been “the other side” of a perfectionist global vision. The essential point here is that a distinction between “global” and “nonglobal” can be made and that such a distinction permits some freedom of choice as to whether to be involved or not to be involved.

As Secretary of State Albright, speaking before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Foreign Operations, observed, “To protect the security and prosperity of our citizens, we are engaged in every region on every continent”—quite a change from the historical beginning of American policy. “Many of our initiatives and concerns are directed,” as she noted, “at particular countries or parts of the world”—suggesting a localizing trend—“[while] others are more encompassing and can best

be considered in global terms.” In both cases, some selection—priority “targeting”—is in order. But it is hard to know exactly how to choose, for, as she affirmed from her historical perspective, “We must heed the central lesson of this century, which is that problems abroad, if left unattended, will all too often come home to America.”⁴⁵

The basic answer to the question of selecting—or prioritizing—surely must be to know globalization, and to address those situations and act on those issues that, through the known and predictable processes of globalization, really will “come home to America.” The difference between “then” and “now”—between the period a century ago when the United States was still on a periphery of world affairs and the present when it is at their center—is that its own actions can shape the world environment, affecting the very processes of globalization that can entangle and entrap it. Its “policy,” therefore, is at once national and global, though not to the same degree.

The lessons of the foregoing analysis, historical and geographical, with an emphasis on the logic of policy development in response to occurrences in places abroad, are not simple. They are rich in detail, more than can be presented in the necessarily brief account given. Nonetheless, certain points do stand out. One is that “global” policy does not develop in the abstract, but rather in concrete response to actual cases, juxtaposed for the policymaker’s weighing and reconciliation—in the American case, in a pluralistic governmental setting. A second is that a categorization of issues simply as “military,” “political,” or “economic” can be erroneous and can lead to inadequate or even counterproductive responses. A third is that projection into the future is needed, from the known and knowable into the unknown, lest policymakers constantly be “catching up” with the current events or, worse, “getting blind-sided” by historical trends.

Finally, there is the most difficult historical lesson of all. The story told in the foregoing pages suggests an alarming conclusion: Because of globalization, herein described, it has become almost impossible to make policy decisions pertinent to a particular case solely on the merits of that case, for the spatially outward and temporally backward and forward linkages of every policy decision act and “reverberate” globally—that is, in the echo chamber that Halford Mackinder described. Thus, in a sense, the only kind of comprehensive policy that is possible today is global policy. 🌐

Notes

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