

CHAPTER ONE

Ideas and Foreign Affairs

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Ideas are nebulous things, and often trade at a discount in the material world of international affairs. “How many divisions has the pope?” Stalin sneeringly asked, exemplifying what that generation’s high priest of historical materialism thought of the power of ideas detached from the tools of force. Yet the fact that the question came up illustrates a deeper truth: if force is the final arbiter of international affairs, ideas are the trigger of force, the governor of force, the measure of whether force has accomplished what its authors desire. Force may be *how* international affairs are waged; ideas are *why*.

Consequently, any study of international affairs must start with a study of ideas. *Whose* ideas need to be studied depends on the regimes, politics, and societies examined. A student of Soviet foreign affairs during Stalin’s long reign might credibly concentrate on what Stalin and perhaps a few of his closest henchmen thought about the world and Russia’s place therein. Dictatorships have advantages – for those who study them if not necessarily those who live under them. By contrast, in a pluralist democracy such as the United States, the larger number of actors influencing foreign affairs necessitates a broader field of inquiry. Historians have entered this field from various directions. Some have taken important individuals – presidents, secretaries of state, influential legislators, the occasional executive of a multinational corporation – and probed their minds. Other historians have assessed the *Zeitgeist* of generations – Manifest Destiny, the Munich syndrome, the shadow of Vietnam – to establish the boundaries within which policymakers have been constrained to operate.

On account of the diversity of approaches to the ideas that drive US foreign relations, it is impossible to identify a literature of the subject in a way that includes all and only what deals with ideas and foreign affairs. Every study of Thomas Jefferson or Woodrow Wilson treats their ideas and motivations; no serious account of the 1840s or 1960s ignores popular attitudes toward the world beyond American borders. This said, though, certain historians have placed the ideas of foreign relations front and center.

Any student of the subject ought to start with Norman Graebner’s *Ideas and Diplomacy* (1964). The book combines essential documents from the history of American foreign relations with Graebner’s insightful commentary on those documents and the way they reveal American thinking about the world. For readers at the start of the twenty-first century, the principal drawback of the book is that it was published too soon, leaving out lots that happened since. Even so, it serves as a

model for sensible analysis of the intellectual wellsprings of foreign policy; an aspiring young scholar could do far worse than essay an update. Brands (1998) covers some of the same ground, although from a different angle. Identifying key thinkers during two centuries of American foreign relations (but concentrating on the twentieth century), Brands hangs what might be called an intellectual history of American foreign policy on the question of the title.

The stepsister of ideas is ideology – a term that once meant the innocent study of ideas but has long since shifted to denote a system of ideas, especially a rigid system into which reality is forced. The ideology of American decision-makers is discussed in nearly every study of American foreign relations; the best book devoted to ideology on its own terms is Hunt (1987). Dallek (1983) employs a different lexicon but investigates many of the same phenomena.

The ideas of American foreign relations have typically arisen from questions regarding the national interest: to wit, what is the national interest, and how might it be promoted? During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the national interest was competitively defined as supporting the republican ideals of the French Revolution, opposing the terror and eventual Bonapartism of the same revolution, or steering clear of the whole mess. The Jeffersonians and Republicans leaned in the first direction, the Hamiltonians and Federalists in the second, and President Washington in the third (to the extent that neutrality could be considered leaning). Jeffersonian thinking is traced authoritatively in Kaplan (1967) and more recently and impressionistically in O'Brien (1996). Because Hamilton was less literary than Jefferson, more commercially minded, and died relatively young (in the infamous duel with Aaron Burr), he has never, as an intellectual, attracted the kind of attention Jefferson has. But his thoughts are vigorously presented in Brookhiser (1999). They also appear in treatments of Washington's thinking on foreign affairs, which though it gave rise to an official neutrality between Britain and France, drew more heavily from Hamilton than from Jefferson; the best of these treatments is Gilbert (1961). With no disrespect to Gilbert, it is fair to say that subsequent scholarship in the period of the early republic, including the publication of new editions of the papers of the founders, as well as a wonderful documentary collection entitled *The Emerging Nation* (Giunta 1996), makes this field a promising one for students of the intellectual origins of American foreign policy.

After 1815 problems with Britain and France diminished, largely because Britain's principal problem with France, Bonaparte, disappeared (to St. Helena and beyond). Americans turned to the issue that would preoccupy them for the rest of the nineteenth century: Western expansion. Most Americans assumed expansion to be in the national interest, but the nature and extent of expansion occasioned considerable debate. The Mexican War, for example, was the most controversial conflict in American history until the Vietnam War (excluding, for obvious reasons, the Civil War). Many Whigs and northerners decried it as a conspiracy of slaveholders, while Democrats, southerners, and assorted others defended it as nothing less than God's will afoot. The arguments on both sides are thoroughly aired in Weinberg (1935), and Merk (1963). As one might guess, Merk was reinterpreting Weinberg; considering the time that has passed since Merk, a reinterpretation of him is in order. Stephanson (1995) briefly addresses the subject, but a more comprehensive account is needed. To some extent the spirit of Manifest Destiny is present in every

generation of Americans, and studies of the subject reveal at least as much about the generations doing the writing as about the subject itself. (This is true of most histories, but particularly of those dealing with continuing issues.) At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Americans are feeling rather full of themselves, making the topic of Manifest Destiny all the more natural for a new study.

The Spanish–American War – or, more precisely, the Philippine war that followed the war against Spain – pricked the bubble of American territorial expansionism. The anti-guerrilla action in the Philippines killed far more Americans than the conflict against Spain, and it disabused Americans of the idea that their hegemony would be readily embraced by foreigners. American expansionism would subsequently take more subtle forms, but not again the ambitious territorial kind that had marked American history since the nation’s birth.

This change of thinking came just in time for Americans to revert to their preoccupation of the early national period. In 1914 the century of European peace (or almost peace) ended, and Americans once more had to pay close attention to transatlantic affairs. The historically minded among them might have concluded that America’s long isolation from Europe had more to do with Europe than with America, and some did. But others disputed the issue, provoking an aspect of the debate over the national interest that has persisted to the present – namely, how closely is America’s fate tied to Europe’s? At the time, Europe seemed the world to many Americans, and the debate soon ratcheted slightly upward to become one about how closely America’s fate was tied to that of the world. This question has been the hinge of all discussions of American foreign policy ever since.

Woodrow Wilson had one answer, at least after the 1916 election. Although the Democratic president avowed neutrality at the outset of World War I, by early 1917 he became convinced of two things: that the United States couldn’t thrive in a world that included a triumphant Germany, and that the world couldn’t survive without an engaged United States. Wilson’s ideas are analyzed with subtlety and sympathy – but not uncritical sympathy – in Knock (1992). The ethos of Wilsonianism is described in Kennedy (1980). Wilsonians – especially Wilsonian intellectuals – are portrayed in Forcey (1961). The star of that trio, and an ardent Wilsonian before becoming disillusioned at the Paris peace conference, was Walter Lippmann, the subject of Ronald Steel’s outstanding life-and-times (Steel 1980).

Many besides Lippmann grew disillusioned with Wilsonianism, which came to mean a belief that both American interest and world welfare required a continuing American commitment to international institutions, preeminently the League of Nations. The term “idealism” was attached to this belief, by critics as often as by supporters; the implication of the critics was that Wilson’s acolytes were woolly-minded theorists out of touch with the world’s hard realities. Yet the Wilsonians were not necessarily less in touch with reality than self-proclaimed “realists”; the two schools simply interpreted reality differently. The “idealists” – often but not always liberals in domestic politics – believed humanity could learn from its mistakes and do progressively better. The “realists” – often domestic conservatives – had little faith in human betterment. Human nature was essentially flawed, they said; prudence consisted in expecting the worst, and preparing to deal with it. Typically this meant building warships and other weapons and girding to use them. Wilson may have lost the argument in his day (when the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles and

American membership in the League of Nations), but he framed the debate for decades to come. Two of the best treatments of the debate are Smith (1994), by a latter-day Wilsonian, and Kissinger (1994), by the high priest of realism among American policymakers. (Readers who desire more of Kissinger can get their fill in his three-volume memoir (Kissinger 1979, 1982, 1999). Whatever one thinks of Kissinger's policies, these massive tomes are a *tour de force* of a keen mind in action – both in real time and in retrospect.)

For all their differences, the idealists and the realists concurred on one fundamental premise: that the United States must continually engage the world diplomatically, politically, or militarily. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, there were many Americans who rejected this idea. Watching Europe and Asia slide toward fascism, they contended that the appropriate American response was disengagement. Dubbed (pejoratively) “isolationists,” this group held that every people must save itself; the best America could do was keep the democratic beacon burning till the rest of the world was able to appreciate its light. Charles A. Beard was the most penetrating thinker among the disengagers; his political works from the period, especially *The Idea of the National Interest* (with G. H. E. Smith, 1934), still bear reading. (H. W. Brands (1999) stole Beard's title for an essay evaluating varying interpretations of the national interest during the twentieth century: “The Idea of the National Interest.”) During his prime one of America's most respected intellectuals, Beard fell into dark disfavor after Pearl Harbor made his skepticism of foreign engagement seem unpatriotic, if not downright seditious. His reputation never recovered; at least partly for this reason he has never received satisfactory biographical treatment.

Pearl Harbor changed everything about American thinking about the world, and Hiroshima changed everything again, but in the same direction. By the end of World War II it was almost impossible to advocate the kind of standoffishness that had been both conventional wisdom and American policy during the 1920s and 1930s. In an egregious example of post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc thinking, American leaders and the American people assumed that their country's complacency regarding the rise of Hitler and the Japanese militarists had been responsible for World War II, and that similar complacency toward communism in Eastern Europe and China would bring on World War III. As it applied to Hitler and the Japanese, this conclusion was not implausible, although it was hardly conclusive; its application to Stalin and Mao was little more than a leap of frightened faith. Yet it was a leap Americans made because they *could* make it. Emerging from World War II as the world's sole superpower, Americans were uniquely situated to attempt a kind of security vouchsafed to no great power since imperial Rome. Americans could afford to arm themselves against nearly every conceivable threat, to cajole or purchase the cooperation of allies around the world, and to encircle the one country – imperial Russia – that seriously threatened American security, and then solely by Russia's possession of nuclear weapons.

Curiously, perhaps, America was led into the era of postwar realism by intellectuals, whose native country lies closer to the realm of theory than to practice. On the other hand, George Kennan, the most visible of the Cold War intellectuals, was a foreign-policy practitioner before making a name as an intellectual. Kennan cut his diplomatic teeth at the American embassy in Moscow during Stalin's 1930s reign of terror – an experience that would have knocked the Wilsonianism out of anyone.

Long before Kennan returned to Moscow after the war, he concluded that the US–Soviet alliance was one of convenience only: anti-Hitler convenience. Kennan allowed the Kremlin a brief period of grace – in which to condemn itself by its own actions – then wrote home a long telegram declaring that the only appropriate attitude for Americans to adopt toward the Russians was one of trenchant opposition. After this hard line appealed to his superiors in the Truman administration, Kennan went public, in a briefly anonymous article in the establishment organ *Foreign Affairs*. Soon the Kennanesque lexicon, including the catchword “containment,” was the lingua franca of American policy.

Kennan’s emergence as intellectual icon of the Cold War is traced in his *Memoirs* (Kennan 1967–72). Kibbitzers include Mayers (1988), Stephanson (1989), and Miscamble (1992). Kennan has been a darling of historians and other students of the early Cold War, partly because he was peculiarly literate and partly because he subsequently disavowed his early hard line. (By the time Kennan became fair game for historians, most of them had grown squishy on the Cold War. One who hadn’t, and whose biography of Kennan was still in the works in 2000, was John Lewis Gaddis; for this reason, in addition to Gaddis’s preeminence in the field of Cold War studies, his Kennan was eagerly awaited.)

Another reason for the great interest in the early Cold War is its easy accessibility, especially via the State Department’s ongoing collection, *The Foreign Relations of the United States*. This venerable series shifted into high gear for the period after 1945; in many respects the volumes for the years from 1945 to the early 1950s are the best in the entire series. (By the early 1950s much of the record of American diplomacy was being generated by agencies beyond the State Department; some such agencies – notoriously the Central Intelligence Agency – resisted seeing themselves in print. Too often for scholarly preferences, and for democratic accountability, their resistance succeeded.)

Much of Kennan’s cachet came from having been inside the policy apparatus (he left the government in 1953); by contrast, the influence of Hans J. Morgenthau derived from his sheer intellectual power. Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* (1948) became the manifesto of an entire generation of Cold War realists, and the phrase he offered as an all-encompassing explanation, prescription, and justification of international behavior – the “balance of power” – became their mantra. The book, which went through numerous editions, bears reading today both for its theoretical power and as a window on that generation of realists. Morgenthau sketched a few notes toward an autobiography but got sidetracked; oddly, no biographer has taken up the thread of a life that was fascinating (flight from German anti-Semitism in the 1930s, etc.) even apart from the unfolding of a first-class mind.

Realism sometimes sat uncomfortably with Americans who had long considered their country exceptional, for Morgenthau’s balance of power was nothing more or less than what Europe had been practicing during all those years Americans had disdained Europe for its anachronistic – even atavistic – ways. Reinhold Niebuhr solved the problem by bringing God explicitly into the equation of international affairs. The foremost American theologian of his day, Niebuhr crafted a kind of Christian realism (identified as such in *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 1953) that allowed an end run around the moral equivalency (or perhaps amoral equivalency) between democracy and communism implicit in the Morgenthavian

version of realism, which treated all polities as black boxes, the moral and other contents of which had almost no bearing on the practice of diplomacy. Niebuhr was a deep and subtle thinker who reveled in irony (for example in *The Irony of American History*, 1952); his depth and subtlety were what made him appealing to a couple of generations of American intellectuals (“The father of us all,” Kennan called him). But it was his reassuring conclusion – that whatever the systemic sins of the democrats, they were merely venial next to the mortal transgressions of the communists – that won him the imprimatur of the Cold War establishment.

The realists reigned through the 1950s and into the 1960s, although certain cracks in their intellectual hegemony developed. Part of the problem was that realism (like idealism) operated better at the level of strategy than at the level of tactics. It was one thing to say, as the realists did, that the Soviet Union must be contained; it was another thing to determine whether, for example, containment required a nuclear policy of “massive retaliation,” or whether it dictated an open-ended commitment to defend Indochina against communist guerrillas.

Questions of nuclear strategy gave birth to an entire intellectual industry during the Cold War. In certain respects, the nuclear theologians (as they were often called, derisively) were the purest intellectuals, the dealers in ideas least sullied by application, of the whole postwar period. Like the schoolmen of medieval Europe, they argued endlessly about questions that couldn’t be answered short of Armageddon – which in their case had a very real meaning. Would it take ten hydrogen bombs to deter a Soviet attack on Washington, or a hundred? If the United States suffered 50 million dead in a nuclear war, and the Soviet Union 100 million, who would be the winner?

At the time, the theorizing seemed worthwhile, although some of it – particularly by the irrepressibly outrageous Herman Kahn – struck many readers as distastefully ghoulish. “Thermonuclear pornography,” one reviewer called Kahn’s *On Thermonuclear War* (1960), a book that provided the plot-pivot (the “doomsday machine”) of Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove: or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Yet whether all the analysis accomplished anything is hard to say, even decades later. The nuclear war theorized about never befell humanity; whether it would have occurred had such capable intellects as Bernard Brodie (1946, 1959), Henry Kissinger (1957), Thomas Schelling (1960), and many others devoted an equal number of mind-years to more peaceable pursuits must rest in the realm of all historical imponderables. On the other hand, a student unfazed by imponderables might interestingly try to calculate the intellectual cost of the Cold War, in terms of individuals and institutions drawn into defense work at the expense of other endeavors. Needless to say, the accounting isn’t all on one side of the ledger; numerous technologies, from jet aircraft to the Internet, have spun off the Cold War scientific–defense complex – which means the student who takes on this assignment must be open-minded and ecumenically educated, in addition to being bold.

In the end, of course, it was more mundane matters, most conspicuously the American intervention in Indochina, that forced a change in American Cold War thinking. Since the onset of the Cold War, a dissenting school had challenged the communists-are-coming view that undergirded containment. The skeptics included, at one time or another, Walter Lippmann, by now the dean of American pundits;

Robert Taft, the Ohio senator who warned, accurately, that a North Atlantic alliance would lead to the garrisoning of Europe by American troops; and the later George Kennan, who complained that he had been misunderstood and his subtle concepts hijacked by the military-industrialists.

The skeptics also included such neo-Beardians as William Appleman Williams, the author of *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959, 1962), who contended, as Beard had a generation earlier, that the United States was using foreign affairs – in particular, the alleged communist threat – as a way of avoiding its problems at home. The habit hadn't started with communism. Since the late nineteenth century American leaders had insisted on establishing an "open door" for American products, investment, and values overseas; by opposing this open door, the communists had simply situated themselves in a long line of groups defined as enemies of the American way of life. Again like Beard, Williams wrote more in sorrow than in anger. He thought the open-door obsessives were wrong; American civilization would not collapse if certain portions of the planet were cut off from the American sphere. He called on Americans to come home, to allow other countries to find their own way to their own fates.

For Williams and others on what might have been called the soft left of criticism of the Cold War realist school, the link between ideas and policy was direct; by simply swapping wrongheaded ideas about America's purpose for sound ones, American leaders and the American people could put American policy on the path of righteousness. For Gabriel Kolko and those on the hard left of Cold War criticism, however, the connection between ideas and policy was indirect. Kolko was a Marxist, and with other Marxists he perceived policy as reflecting a certain set of property relations – in the case of the United States, reflecting the capitalism that constituted the American political economy. The capitalists who controlled American foreign policy acted as they did not because they had bad ideas, but because they were capitalists. (Actually, they did have bad ideas, but those too followed from the fact that they were capitalists.) As the dominant capitalist power, Kolko explained in such works as *The Politics of War* (1968) and *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (1969), the United States sought economic stability above all. Stability had been challenged by Hitler in the 1930s and 1940s; hence the war against Germany. Stability had been threatened by Stalin and Mao in the 1940s and 1950s; hence the Cold War. Stability was being challenged by Ho Chi Minh in the 1960s; hence the war in Vietnam. Where Williams and the Beardians believed struggle might end once American leaders got their heads straight, Kolko and the Marxists judged struggle inevitable and endless – at least until the great revolution that got property relations straight once and for all.

If the Vietnam War prompted a challenge to American thinking about the Cold War and about the world generally, that challenge – in a dialectic Marx would have appreciated, despite his dismissal of ideas as secondary to property relations – in turn prompted a counter-challenge. Many of those who became prominent as neoconservatives during the 1970s had been Marxists during the 1930s. For many of them, the intellectual migration commenced with the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact of 1939, which demonstrated how cynical Stalin, until then the only reliable anti-fascist, could be. By temperament true believers, the zealots of the Old Left became zealots of the New Right, requiring only a suitable issue to rally around. They got

their issue in détente, the Nixon administration's effort to end the Vietnam War and rationalize American relations with the Soviet Union and China. Détente was widely popular: after Vietnam seemed to have revealed the bankruptcy of containment, most Americans were willing to try something new. But the neoconservative personality thrived on adversity, and the initial unpopularity of their message – that détente was a snare and a delusion, making the communists more dangerous than ever – merely intensified their convictions. Norman Podhoretz, the archetypal neoconservative, regularly assaulted détente in the pages of *Commentary* magazine (which he edited), and although he spared no epithets regarding Nixon, he reserved his special vitriol for Henry Kissinger, who, as an intellectual, should have known better.

The neocons cultivated the ground for Ronald Reagan, who rode into office on their present-dangerist message. (*The Present Danger: Do We Have the Will to Reverse the Decline of American Power?* (1980), was Podhoretz's contribution to the Reagan campaign.) One neocon who did yeoman – in this case, yeowoman – service was Jeane Kirkpatrick, author of *Commentary*'s most noticed article, and perhaps the piece most influential for foreign affairs since Kennan's "X" article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947. Entitled "Dictatorships and Double Standards" (Kirkpatrick 1979), the essay argued that there were dictators, and dictators. Neither were folks you'd want to bring home to dinner, but where dictators of the right ("authoritarians") allowed private life to continue largely undisturbed, dictators of the left ("totalitarians") claimed control over every aspect of existence. The former – such as the Shah of Iran and Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua – deserved American support in this less-than-ideal world; the latter – the rulers of communist countries and fellow-travelers across the Third World – deserved America's undying opposition. Kirkpatrick's reasoning so impressed Reagan that he picked her to be ambassador to the United Nations, where she had a chance to parse repression on a daily basis.

Much has been written about both the New Left and the New Right, but for the student of ideas and foreign relations, most of it is unsatisfactory, focusing on the politics and personalities of the movements, and in any event being written by people too close to the movements to do them justice. A single intellectual thread runs through the story of the breakdown and attempted resuscitation of the American Cold War consensus; the story itself has yet to be written. John Ehrman (1995) tried, but much more remains to be done.

The resuscitation was mightily attempted by Reagan and the neoconservatives who staffed his foreign-policy team. In terms of rhetoric and defense spending, the effort succeeded: while Reagan railed at the "evil empire" of the Soviets, production lines at America's arms-makers hummed as they hadn't since the heyday of Vietnam. But Cold War II never really caught on among the American people, who had been hearing that the communists were coming for forty years and wondered where they were. In one memorable speech Reagan contended that the Marxist Sandinistas of Nicaragua were only a two-days' drive from Texas – an estimate that brought laughs to Brownsville and other border towns where people had actually *driven* the roads of Central America and Mexico. Americans generally yawned at Reagan's threat-mongering; Congress went further, banning American aid to the anti-Sandinista *contras*. (Which ban the Reaganistas ignored, undertaking the efforts that produced the Iran–contra scandal.)

But what really killed the new Cold War (and flummoxed Kirkpatrick and other neoconservatives, who had said that such could never happen) was the emergence of fundamental reform in the Soviet Union. For months and then years, American analysts inside government and out debated whether Mikhail Gorbachev was the genuine article, a Peter-the-Great wannabe, or a shill for closet reactionaries. It was a glorious time to be a pundit, since no one knew any more than anyone else, and events regularly raced ahead of everyone's expectations. All jockeyed to be first to spy the end of the Cold War – or to reveal that the end wasn't even close.

George Kennan called it over in the summer of 1988. "The Marxist-Leninist ideology is a stale and sterile ritual to which lip service must be given because it is the only ostensible source of legitimacy for the Communist Party in Russia," Kennan wrote in *New Perspectives Quarterly*. "Beyond that, nobody takes it seriously." To Kennan, ideology was the defining characteristic of the Cold War; having lost its ideological way, the Soviet Union had lost the Cold War.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Democrats' answer to Henry Kissinger, agreed with Kennan that ideology was the key to understanding what was happening in the Soviet Union. Describing what he called *The Grand Failure* (1979), Brzezinski saw the layers of communist rule falling away one by one. First went Brezhnevism: the pretense that the Soviet Union might ever match the West in the production of consumer goods and other elements of a decent life for the Soviet masses. Next went Stalinism: the apparatus of state security that rendered everyone in the country insecure. Leninism – the claim of the communist to exclusive wisdom and right to rule – would be the last to go. But given the rate of change in Russia under Gorbachev, it couldn't hold on much longer.

An innocent observer might have supposed the neoconservatives would have been quick to claim victory in the Cold War, but in fact they were remarkably slow. In part their hesitance reflected career considerations: having ridden into office on opposition to Moscow and all its works, they were reluctant to retire that hobby-horse. In part it reflected the curious circumstance that, for a bunch of intellectuals, they were skeptical of the power of ideas – at least ideas within a communist regime. Even if Gorbachev were sincere in his desire for reform at home and relaxation abroad – and the neoconservatives had grave doubts on this point – a turn of the political wheel in Moscow might oust Gorbachev and replace him with some old Bolshevik. If Americans put down their guard, they might never get it back up. Jeane Kirkpatrick, answering Kennan in *New Perspectives* (winter 1988–9), said she was watching events in Russia with "rapt attention" but meanwhile was keeping her powder dry.

When the Berlin Wall fell in late 1989, not even the neoconservatives could deny that the changes in Eastern Europe were genuine; when Germany was reunified the following year, the changes were admitted to be far-reaching; when the Soviet Union dissolved the year after that, the changes were reckoned to be irreversible. Ideas are always both lagging and leading indicators of reality. They lag events in that people require time to figure out what is happening and what it means. This is why, for all the punditry surrounding Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, almost none of it counted for anything six months after seeing print. No one has chronicled the response of American intellectuals to the revolutionary

events in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, and – not to put too fine a point on it – no one should bother. It was forgettable at the time, and hasn't improved with age.

Ideas are leading indicators of foreign policy in that they condition people to interpret events in particular ways, and thereby tend to shape those events. (It is when the ideas become so rigid as to straitjacket interpretations that they are called ideologies.) Ideas led the collapse of communism in Europe – but those ideas were European rather than American. Almost no one in America, and certainly no substantial school of American thinkers, foresaw the rapid demise of the Russian empire. On the contrary, political scientists for years had been fabricating models to explain the stability of the bipolar system of international affairs. When that system proved spectacularly *unstable*, the model-makers were forced back to their workbenches.

The foreign-affairs intelligentsia spent most of the late 1980s and 1990s trying to make sense of the new reality. Paul Kennedy (1987) suggested that large empires are vulnerable to “imperial overstretch” – when commitments outstrip resources – but all his evidence pointed to the problem afflicting the United States before the Soviet Union. “Decision-makers in Washington must face the awkward and enduring fact that the sum total of the United States’ global interests and obligations is now far larger than the country’s power to defend them all simultaneously,” Kennedy wrote. The model seemed compelling until the Soviet empire collapsed, enormously lightening the American burden.

Francis Fukuyama, as deputy director of the State Department’s policy planning staff (Kennan’s old shop), would have won career points for correctly calling events in Eastern Europe; having failed at that (along with everyone else), Fukuyama proceeded to predict something far more sweeping. In “The End of History?” (1989; later expanded into *The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992), Fukuyama suggested that the demise of European communism signaled the end of history itself. Fukuyama had a rather idiosyncratic definition of history; he meant the struggle between competing systems of ideas, lately represented, on one hand, by liberal individualism and, on the other, by various brands of collectivism. The collectivists – chiefly fascists and communists – had lost World War II and now the Cold War; there was nothing left for them but the ash heap of history. For someone on the winning side, Fukuyama was surprisingly subdued. Societies thrived on challenge, and the great challenge to American society was disappearing. “The end of history will be a very sad time,” he predicted.

Samuel Huntington didn’t think history had ended at all. But then Huntington didn’t buy Fukuyama’s premise that the only history that really counted was the history of ideas. Huntington didn’t dismiss ideas, but he wrapped them in the cultures that produced – or, as frequently, borrowed – them. In “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993) and *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington contended that the world’s struggles were only beginning. (Like Fukuyama, Huntington dropped the question mark from his title in moving from journal to book. Book publishers prefer certitude, if not certainty.) Moreover, though the liberal West had apparently won Fukuyama’s struggle of ideas, there was no guarantee it would win the clash of civilizations. Hindu India, the Muslim Middle East, and Confucian China were at least as good bets.

The arguments of Kennedy, Fukuyama, and Huntington had policy implications for the United States, but on the whole they described rather than prescribed. Other authors devoted more attention to how Americans should deal with a world in which their country was the sole superpower. (Some now accepted the argument that the United States had been the only superpower since 1945 – the Soviet Union simply having grafted an elephantine military arsenal on a third-world economy. To the extent this argument was accurate, it raised the question – still unanswered, and a suitable subject for investigation – as to how Americans fooled themselves so long.) Joseph S. Nye (1990) took umbrage at Kennedy's contention that American power was on the wane. Maybe America overspread the globe less dramatically than in 1945, Nye conceded, but the American sun remained high in the sky, and of all the nations on earth, only the United States possessed the power to shape the future to its designs. Americans must not lose confidence, and must employ their power to the world's and their own benefit.

American power *was* employed in various regions during the 1990s, most notably in the Persian Gulf and, less confidently and decisively, in the Balkans. The Gulf War against Saddam Hussein promised – or, more precisely, the Bush administration during the Gulf crisis promised – to establish a precedent for American intervention on behalf of small countries mugged by their bigger neighbors. But what might have been a Bush doctrine of the early post-Cold War, perhaps comparable to the Truman doctrine of the early Cold War, never materialized, and the “new world order” of which George Bush spoke so confidently fizzled in the face of an alarmingly ubiquitous new world disorder. The principal question for American policymakers – and the principal point of debate for policy analyzers – was how to establish a framework for American intervention. None doubted that the United States would defend its own interests overseas, as it did in the Gulf, where Saddam Hussein threatened the oil supplies on which Western economies depended. The crux of the issue was whether the United States would defend the interests of other people overseas. Of course, there remained many who held that American interests couldn't be so easily divorced from the interests of others – that mayhem and anarchy anywhere would eventually reach American shores. Even so, almost no one contended that genocide in Rwanda (where the United States did not intervene) posed a serious threat to American security. The argument from security for intervention in the Balkans was stronger, although this argument was as often backward looking (“Here's where World War I started”) as forward looking.

The debate over American intervention unfolded in the pages of such specialized journals as *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*, and on the opinion pages of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*. Numerous conferences took place, some giving rise to compilations, on the order of *The Use of Force after the Cold War* (Brands 2000). But the muddiness of world affairs precluded much clarity in the intellectual accompaniment to policy-making, and readily discernible schools of thought were slow to develop. Robert D. Kaplan (2000) suggested that the mud wouldn't clear for some time.

At the dawn of the new millennium, the buzz word was “globalization.” The concept was slippery, but its economic emphasis – the growing interconnectedness of the world economy, resulting from trade liberalization and advances in telecommunications – underscored the degree to which traditional notions of security

continued to diminish. Proponents of globalization claimed the largest share of space in the published media; none spoke more cogently than Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times*, who gathered his thoughts into book form in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000). Skeptics followed themes set out earlier by Benjamin R. Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), but many of their complaints were registered on the Internet – which, ironically, was a principal agent of the globalization they decried.

By some measures, ideas mattered more than ever in foreign affairs. The end of the Cold War diminished the likelihood of armed conflict between great powers; the answer to Stalin's question about how many divisions the pope had was now, Who cares? The idea of trade liberalization was powerful – otherwise the anti-globalist protesters wouldn't have bothered disrupting meetings of the World Trade Organization and other global bodies. And ideas of another sort – the technical ideas behind the Internet and other forms of telecommunications – were rendering borders more permeable, in some respects, than invading armies ever had. The pope didn't need divisions as long as he had a broadband connection to the Internet.

Under the circumstances, the role of ideas in foreign affairs appeared a promising field of study. The present always influences perceptions of the past, and as ideas emerged more clearly as arbiters of here-and-now, it became easier to appreciate the influence of ideas in the there-and-then. The old questions – of ideology, of American exceptionalism or banality, of realism versus idealism, of American imperialism, of the exportability of democracy – remained as valid as ever. New questions – of technology and the dissolving of borders – offered fresh ways of examining the past.

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