

AMERICA: ITS PURPOSE AND ITS POWER

Our Difficulty Is That We Have Tended to Equate the Two

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The supranational ordering of atomic power is the indispensable precondition for survival, but it tells us nothing about the purpose for which we want to survive. And while this problem has been the object of protracted negotiations, the United States, as the leading nation of the non-Communist world, was called upon to act as though that problem were on the way to solution, as though mankind and, more particularly, Western civilization would survive, and to fashion out of its power and leadership a common purpose for the whole non-Communist world.

The United States was expected to use its predominant power on behalf of the purpose that would be not only its own but also one in which the non-Communist world could recognize its distinct character and in whose achievement it could experience a common destiny. What would America do with its power? What purpose would it make that power serve? More particularly, would America be able to connect organically its traditional purpose with that power and, if need be, to reformulate that purpose so that the power could serve it? The answer to these questions is determined by the nature of American power, on the one hand, and the nature of the American purpose, on the other.

America became a world power, as it had become the most productive and technologically most advanced nation on earth, by putting its human and material resources to the tasks at hand rather than by design. These two achievements are of course closely interrelated; for American productivity and technological proficiency provide the material foundation for American political and military power. America marshaled its human material resources for the purpose of winning the Second World War by destroying the power of Germany and Japan. And when the war was won, it found itself in lonely pre-eminence among impotent enemies and enfeebled

allies. It had not sought the power with which it emerged to win the war quickly, cheaply, and completely.

As a result of its effort and of the distribution of power at the war's end, the United States awoke one morning to find itself the most powerful nation on earth. Thus, when America was at the pinnacle of its power, purpose and power were divorced; its power had far outstripped its purpose, and it had no purpose commensurate with its power. This disproportion made the purpose uncertain and diminished the effectiveness of the power.

America as a world power, once it had met successfully the Russian military threat to its and the non-Communist world's survival, had to achieve certain basic tasks. First of all, out of the makeshift arrangements aimed at meeting the Russian military threat America had to create a viable international order that would translate common interests into a common purpose, fuse the power of individual nations, and assign to them responsibilities commensurate with their interests and power. Second, it had to create a relationship with the uncommitted new nations of Africa and Asia which would further a new domestic and international stability of peace and freedom in the image of the stability achieved by the United States. Third, it had to establish a relationship conducive both to peace and to freedom with nations which were unwilling objects of Communist domination, such as the nations of Eastern Europe.

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These three tasks were not a matter of choice for America. It could reject them only by being unfaithful to its purpose and oblivious of its power. Its purpose—equality in freedom to be preserved at home and expanded and emulated abroad—requires for its achievement at home an international environment that at the very least, does not threaten the existence of the United States. From the beginning of American history to the Second World War, natural isolation and foreign policies maximizing these

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advantages of nature provided exactly this kind of environment. With these advantages irretrievably lost, the United States had to create an international environment as a political and social artifact within which it could securely pursue its domestic purpose.

The other two tasks are less vitally tied to the purpose of America, even though without them that purpose would be substantially diminished. For without them the American purpose would lose its dynamic expansionist quality, and its realization at home could not serve as a model for other nations. The United States, with its territorial expansion at an end, had now for the second time to find a substitute for its subsidiary purpose of expanding the area of equality in freedom. When it was first faced with that necessity, it tended under the guidance of Woodrow Wilson to find that new purpose in the transformation of the world through the establishment of democratic institutions. The United States could then afford to indulge in the experiment of making the world safe for democracy, for the whole world then appeared to present itself as a kind of gigantic experimental stage on which the universal validity of democratic institutions could be demonstrated.

The aftermath of the Second World War precluded a repetition of this experiment. For the failure of the Wilsonian experiment destroyed the simple faith in the universal validity of democratic institutions which had inspired that experiment, and called forth more sophisticated approaches and more cautious expectations. Furthermore, most of the nations in search of a political identity are manifestly unsuited for a democratic system after the American model. And, most importantly, the international environment in which the search takes place offers in Communism an alternative to democracy and, hence, puts strict limits on democratic forms of experimentation.

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How has America pursued its purpose under these novel conditions? How has it endeavored to achieve the three tasks which the conjunction of purpose and environment set before it? What kind of viable international order did it try to create as a precondition for its own survival? What kind of relationship did it try to establish with the new nations of Africa and Asia and with the unwilling objects of Communist domination?

The answer to these questions is simple, and the very simplicity of the answer is the measure of America's failure. The United States conceived of

these tasks primarily in military terms—that is, in terms of actual or potential alliances to defend the territorial status quo. By doing so, it identified its survival with its purpose. It came to think that what was necessary and sufficient to assure its survival was also sufficient to achieve its purpose. In the process it lost the vision of its purpose and contributed nothing to its military security and that very survival to which it had sacrificed its purpose.

The relationships within an alliance are determined by the interests and the power of its members. The interests that tie the United States to its European allies are more profound, more comprehensive, and more stable than the interests upon which alliances have traditionally been based. Far from concerning nothing more than a limited territorial advantage against a temporary enemy, these interests enclose the national identities of all its members within a common civilization threatened by an alien and oppressive social system.

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Thus, this alliance was not formed, as alliances typically are, through a process of haggling and horse-trading among suspicious temporary associates looking already for more advantageous associations elsewhere. Rather, this alliance sprang naturally and almost inevitably from a common concern with a common heritage whose only chance of survival lay in common support. The members of the alliance had to choose between the alliance and the loss of their national identities and cultural heritage; that is to say, they had no choice at all.

The cement that kept the alliance together was the paramount power of the United States. In the past there had been alliances in which power was unequally distributed and one ally was predominant; but rarely had there been such a concentration of paramount power in one ally, with all the other allies, even collectively, being in a subordinate position. And rarely had so paramount a power been at the same time commensurate with the all-persuasiveness of the concerns of the alliance. For the United States was paramount not only in the military and economic fields, but also in the intangible spheres of the values of Western civilization.

Had the institutions and operations of the alliance been commensurate with the comprehensiveness and intensity of the interests underlying it and had the influence exerted by the United States been commensurate with its power, the alliance would have fallen very little short of, if it had not amounted to,

a confederation of states merging their most vital activities in the fields of foreign policy, defense, finance, and economics. Nothing of the kind evolved. For the United States, again faced with a conflict between the historic manifestations of its purpose and the demands of novel tasks, could not break out of the fetters with which those manifestations confined its freedom of thought and action. It proved incapable of playing the role it should have played as the paramount member of the Western alliance.

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Three inherited patterns of thought and action prevented it from adapting the traditional conception of its purpose to the new needs and opportunities: the limitation of the direct exercise of American power to the Western Hemisphere, the principle of equality in freedom, and the military approach to foreign policy.

The two previous occasions that carried American power beyond the limits of the Western Hemisphere were peculiar in that they allowed American power to retreat into its traditional limits after it had failed to establish itself firmly beyond them. The liquidation of the conquests of the Spanish-American War, in view of their accidental and peripheral connection with the American purpose, could begin virtually as soon as the conquests had been made. The failure of Wilson's attempt to make the world safe for democracy rendered pointless the presence of American power in Europe. The nature of the Russian threat after the Second World War left the United States no rational choice but to establish its power in permanence at the circumference of the Russian empire.

But in what terms was that power to be established? Should it be the supremacy of American power, which in its consistent application would reduce America's allies to the status of satellites, or was it to be the freedom in equality of all members of the alliance, which, in its ideal realization, would issue in the harmonious cooperation of like-minded nations? These alternatives confronted the United States with a dilemma that could not be solved through the consistent realization of either alternative without denying one or another essential of the American purpose.

American power had to operate not in conquered territory where the conqueror could rule as he saw fit, but in the territory of friendly nations whose consent, if not desire, provided the sole title for the American presence. The purpose of that presence was the defense of the freedom and territorial

integrity of the allies. The United States, in reducing allies to the status of satellites, would have defeated the very purpose for the sake of which the European nations had become its allies. On the other hand, the establishment of the alliance on the basis of complete equality was feasible only on the assumption that the identity of interest among the allies and their awareness of it was so complete that they would be capable of pursuing common ends with common measures through free and equal cooperation. In the degree that this cooperation would fall short of the ideal expectation, the purpose of the alliance as a cooperative effort on behalf of the common interests would be defeated.

Of these two alternatives, the United States chose the latter. It refused to bring its superior power to bear on the alliance on behalf of common interests that were naturally inchoate and were competing with divergent ones. Thus it forewent the creation of a common framework of permanent and organic cooperation among allies who would relinquish their equal status in return for the alliance's protection of their essential freedoms. When the United States left the Western Hemisphere, it carried with it its military and economic power, but not its creative imagination or its constructive will. Significantly enough, this imagination and will were applied—and rather abortively at that—in the one sphere which is closest to the American tradition in foreign affairs: that is, in the military sphere, and NATO is presently the rather forlorn and brittle monument to this tradition.

The United States emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful nation on earth by chance, and it assumed the leadership of the coalition of free nations by virtue of necessity. In consequence, its will and mind were not equal to its power, responsibility, and opportunity. Had these attributes of America been the result of conscious choice and deliberate aspiration, America would have been intellectually and morally prepared when what it had chosen and aspired to came to pass. Since it was not so prepared, it approached the tasks incumbent upon the paramount power of the Western alliance with unbecoming humility and unwarranted self-restraint.

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America continued to see itself and its relations with the world very much as it had, say, fifty years earlier; a great nation that had accomplished great things in the material sphere and had achieved a unique political and social order, bringing happiness

to itself and offering it to the world. It had achieved great things—military and political—outside the Western Hemisphere not by deliberate purpose but by force of circumstance. Had it not been for these circumstances, it would have been content to be left alone, and it would have left others alone. And only the intractability of the Soviet Union, so the United States thought, prevented the world from corresponding to this state of mind.

America's image of itself and of its relations to the world, while taking account of the obvious facts of material power, superimposed the pattern of the past upon the contemporary world. As America has thus far been incapable of the Athenian pride in culture, so has it shunned the imperial attitude of Rome in political relations with the outside world. The political predominance required by its power was incompatible with its anti-imperialist tradition, which is the manifestation abroad of the principle of equality.

Confronted with the choice between assuming the position of leadership commensurate with its power and treating its allies as equals, the United States chose the latter alternative. Accustomed to expand its rule into political empty spaces but not to impose it, however gently and beneficially, upon existing political entities, it endeavored to establish within the Western alliance the same kind of consensus, by the same methods of rational persuasion and economic inducements, that had created, maintained, and developed the American commonwealth and its institutions.

Yet the application of the equalitarian principle of the democratic consensus to the relations among allies resulted in disintegration and anarchy. For as the integrating effects of the domestic equalitarian consensus depend upon a pre-established sovereign central government, so whatever equality there can be among allies that differ drastically in power and responsibility must be subordinated to a hierarchical relationship between the paramount power and the rest. This hierarchical relationship has been lacking between the United States and its allies. Two kinds of consequences have flown from this lack. Either the alliance has been incapable of pursuing new, positive policies in common, or else the most determined ally has been able to impose its will upon the United States.

Of the former consequence NATO is the outstanding example. The principle of equality among its fifteen members, applied to the political operations and over-all military planning of the alliance, put a virtually insurmountable obstacle in the way of new

policies to be pursued by the fifteen allies in response to new opportunities or new threats. The principle of equality would have been compatible with new departures in policy only if all members of the alliance had an equal interest in such departures, were equally aware of these interests, and agreed completely on the means to be used in support of these interests. Short of an open threat of military conquest or revolution, such as confronted the members of NATO in the late 1940's, these conditions cannot be expected to be present at the same time. In the absence of one or another of them, the best an alliance thus constituted can achieve is to translate the lowest common denominator of agreed interests into common action.

That denominator is likely to tend toward the irreducible minimum of common policies without which the alliance itself would cease to exist as an operating agency. Thus, while the objective conditions under which the fifteen allies live require a degree of unity in purpose and action far transcending that of a traditional alliance, and while NATO was designed at its inception to be the instrument of that kind of unity, in actual performance NATO has become less and less distinguishable from a traditional alliance, and a rather loosely knit and stagnating one at that.

The other consequence of the equalitarian approach to alliance has been most marked in the bilateral relations between the United States and its allies. Governments that govern only because the United States maintains them, such as that of Formosa, and governments that have no alternative to American association, such as that of Spain, have been able to play a winning game in which the United States holds all the trumps. The United States has not been disposed to play these trumps for two reasons. On the one hand, its commitment to the principle of equality prevented it from bringing its superior power to bear upon a weak ally on behalf of its interests. On the other hand, these interests were conceived in terms of what I have elsewhere suggested calling the collector's approach to alliances. That is to say, the United States has been primarily interested in the conclusion of alliances *per se*, regardless of the specific and concrete interests these alliances were supposed to serve.

An alliance thus conceived is a standing invitation, readily accepted, for a weak ally to make the alliance serve its own specific interests. Thus, the United States has paid for the willingness of weak

and even unviable nations to become its allies by underwriting the interests of these nations, regardless of whether their interests coincide with or run counter to its own.

This relationship, unhealthy even by the standards of traditional foreign policy, is a far cry from the new order through which the United States was expected to realize the common purpose of the nations of Western civilization in the atomic age. The factors that brought about this relationship are also responsible for America's failure to project the American purpose into the areas of the world which are either uncommitted or unwillingly committed to Communism. The United States was not able to free itself from the pattern of thought and action established both by its tradition and by its successful reaction to the threat of Russian power in the aftermath of the second World War—that is, to conceive of its relations to the outside world primarily in military terms.

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Thus, it saw itself surrounded by allies, by uncommitted nations that thus far had refused to become allies, and by satellites that Russian power prevented from becoming its allies. From this picture of the world, three militarily oriented policies ensued. The allies had to be kept in the American orbit, the uncommitted nations had to be drawn into it, and the satellites had to be liberated so that they could join it. The Baghdad Pact, SEATO, and the Eisenhower Doctrine were open-ended—and largely unsuccessful—invitations to the uncommitted nations of Asia and the Middle East to become allies of the United States or at least to accept military assistance from it.

These policies were by and large unsuccessful because the picture of the world from which they derived was at odds both with the facts of experience and with the interests of the United States. What the United States had to cope with outside Europe was not the threat of Russian military power but the promise of the new order of Communism. A policy of military alliances was irrelevant to the problems raised by that promise. It was also counter-productive; for by strengthening more often than not the forces of the status quo and the military establishments in the allied nations, it tended to identify the United States with those forces and with preparations for war and gave Communism in turn the opportunity to identify itself with the forces of progress and peace.

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