

PROSPECT FOR

AMERICA

The problems and opportunities
confronting American democracy—in foreign
policy, in military preparedness,
in education, in social and economic affairs.

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Cultural Relationships

The United States' influence in the world is, of course, strongly affected by the impact of American ideas and fashions, by American books, plays, paintings, movies, science, and music. Yet reciprocal relationships, which have been emphasized in regard to economic policy, need to be equally stressed where intellectual and cultural matters are involved. The capacity of the United States to appreciate and enjoy intellectual achievements of other peoples not only enriches our own life but generates an important element of power. The United States as an absorber and mediator of diverse cultural strains is a force in the world that it could not be if it sought merely to promote the adoption of its own ideas by others.

The manifold and intricate quality of modern free society—its richness in the fields of nongovernmental group activity, of economic and cultural interests—thus gives to foreign policy a scope that goes far beyond the activities of small groups of officials or well-publicized negotiations. This is not to underestimate the need for vision and courage at the highest levels of diplomacy as an essential factor in a positive foreign policy. But we must never forget that the opportunities for effective action and influence are wide—far wider than the official channels through which a government's influence is exerted.

IMPORTANCE OF IDEALS

To stress opportunities is inevitably to come up against the problem of the relation between realism and idealism in foreign policy. The United States has been criticized both at home and abroad for its reliance upon what seems a purely idealistic formulation of the world's thorny issues. Nevertheless, whenever it has wielded effective power in the world, its ideals and its moral convictions have played a vital part in its decisions.

Whenever, on the contrary, the United States has tried to act without moral conviction, or in ways that went counter to its basic beliefs, it has found itself inhibited and has ultimately had to rechart its course. Proposals for an imperial venture in the

Philippines withered before the tendency to independence, which we instinctively favored. The attempt to be "realistic" in French Indochina—supporting a colonial power so as to contain communism—was a faltering effort partly because of the realization that we were going against our natural respect for national independence. A "settlement" with the Soviet Union that would legitimize Soviet rule over Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, and others would run counter to these same deeply rooted instincts. Examples could be multiplied. While it is true that every nation seeks to justify its actions in ways that conform to its image of morality, America is committed to the basic idea of the consent of the governed. It is bound, therefore, to a peculiar degree to act in accordance with what it believes to be its own character.

Those who mistrust idealism in foreign affairs maintain that a nation's self-interest is not to be confused with its preferences and desires. The world is what it is; regimes come and go, and we must deal with nations according to their relationship to the national security and well-being. There is for Americans a certain valuable corrective in this view. In extending and withholding diplomatic recognition, the United States has too often acted as if it were trying to insist that the world must conform to its liking or else be beyond notice and contact. In the granting of aid it has had recurrently to combat a temptation to make its gifts dependent on its recipients' conforming to our economic experience and preferences.

There is indeed an order of things fixed by geographical and other facts that endures beyond the surface changes of regime. Even so radical a transformation as Russia underwent at the time of the Revolution did not wholly alter the relationships that had existed between it and the United States through the nineteenth century. It had been, despite ideological differences, a potential ally in the rear of potential enemies. It remained so, as shown in World War II, after the ideological difference had been rendered even more profound by the switch from czarism to communism.

Yet when all that has been said, Americans continue to believe deep-down that force by itself is not power; that ideals and values are among the essential components of strength in a democracy. Our own actions are made what they are—effective or frustrated—in large part by the degree to which they are in conformance with what we basically believe to be right. Similarly, our relationships