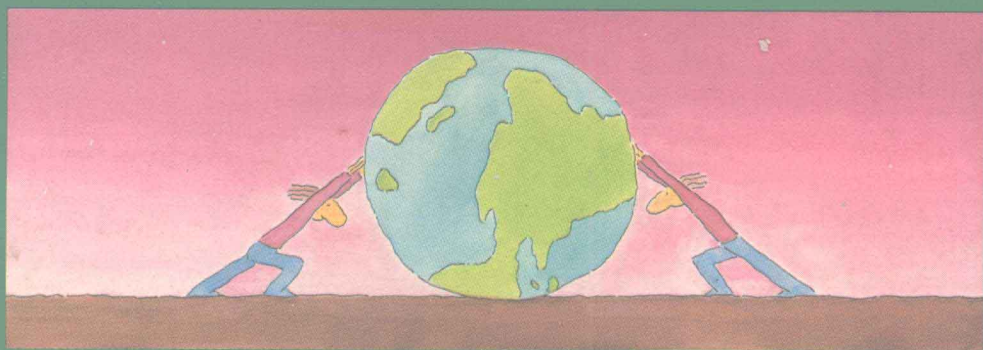

TAKING SIDES



**Clashing Views on Controversial
Issues In World Politics**

John T. Rourke

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Controversial Issues in World Politics**

**Edited, Selected and with Introductions by
JOHN T. ROURKE, University of Connecticut**

**The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc.
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**For my son and friend—
John Michael**

STAFF

**Jeremy Brenner
Brenda Filley
Lynn Shannon
Libra Ann Cusack
Diane Barker**

**Program Manager
Production Manager
Designer
Typesetting Coordinator
Copy Editor**

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We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.

—Thomas Jefferson

PREFACE

The radio news recently broadcast an interview with a woman belonging to a policy advocacy group based in Washington D.C. She had given a talk on the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly known as "Star Wars." The woman was saying that *nobody* but President Reagan believed that SDI would work and that *everybody* but the president knew that SDI would result in nuclear space war. Nonsense! The woman was just flat wrong—not necessarily about SDI, but about who supports it. SDI may or may not work, it may or may not be too expensive, and it may or may not be a good idea even if it does work. Those issues are undetermined. What is certain is that there are many bright and responsible people who agree with Reagan and support SDI. There are also bright and responsible people who disagree with the president and do not support SDI. So, while I was appalled by the woman's charlatan debating technique of asserting that everyone agrees with her position, I am grateful to her for giving me a perfect example of why a book that debates vital issues is valuable and necessary. Her attitude helps to make clear how important it is to recognize that world politics is usually not a subject of absolute rights and absolute wrongs and of easy policy choices. We all have a responsibility to study the issues thoughtfully, and we should be careful to understand all sides of the debate.

None of the debates in this book is one-sided. Each of the authors believes in his or her position. And if you read the debates without prejudgment, you will see that each makes cogent points. They may or may not be right, but they should not be dismissed out of hand.

There are two other important considerations to bear in mind about the debate approach to studying world politics. One is that objectively considering divergent views does not mean that you have to remain forever neutral. In fact, once you are informed, you *ought* to form convictions. Even more, you should try to influence international policy to conform better with your beliefs. Write letters to policymakers, donate to causes you support, work for candidates who agree with your views, join an activist organization. *Do* something, whichever side of an issue you are on!

The second point is to remain tolerant of those who continue to hold beliefs that are the opposite of yours. Some years ago, the Rolling Stones made a record, "Have Sympathy with the Devil." That theme was picked up in a wonderful essay of the same name by Marshall Berman (*New American*

Review, 1973). The theme was based on Johann Goethe's *Faust*. In that classic story, the protagonist gains great power and attempts to do good. In the end, however, he commits evil. Does that then make Dr. Faust evil, or merely misguided, in his efforts to better the world as he saw it and imagined it might be? The point that Mick Jagger and Marshall Berman make is the importance of not falling prey to the trap of many zealots who condemn those who disagree with them as stupid or even diabolical. Don't become too convinced of your own omniscience.

Finally, a brief word is appropriate about the criteria for article selection. The most important was clarity in presentation. Given that, two other standards were used. The most important was to try to use articles by actual decisionmakers or by advisors and activists within decision-making settings, such as congressional hearings. By examining these articles, you will see how the issue is actually being heard and argued within the decision-making organizations. Where appropriate, articles were also selected to bring out the views of non-Americans. World politics is more than just American foreign policy, and it is important to see what Europeans, Africans, Asians, South Americans, and others think.

I would also very much like to hear the suggestions of professors and students about how future editions might be improved, in terms of the topics selected, how they are organized within the book, and/or the articles that represent the clashing views. Please write to me in care of the Dushkin Publishing Group, Sluice Dock, Guilford, Connecticut 06437.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The singular term, editor, belies the reality that any book is the project of many individuals; I especially want to thank my editor Jeremy Brenner for helping me to reshape and refine my initial ideas. Indeed, the entire staff at Dushkin Publishing Group has made this effort both more professional and more enjoyable.

John T. Rourke
Hartford, Connecticut

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INTRODUCTION: ELEPHANTS, BLIND MEN, AND WORLD POLITICS

There is a classic allegorical tale about several blind men who attempt to describe an elephant. Each touches the animal, and, depending on whether he is feeling the trunk, ear, leg, or tail, each man describes the elephant respectively as a snake, a fan, a tree, or a rope.

The study of world politics is subject to some of the same distortions. There are many different approaches to the study of international politics and, as will become evident as you read this book, it is important to understand the perspective of the authors. Some political scientists and most practitioners specialize in substantive topics, and this reader is organized along topical lines. The first section deals with regional issues and actors. There are debates concerning Asia, Europe, Central America, Africa, the Middle East, and the two superpowers. Section two focuses on international economic issues such as foreign aid, trade, loans, and multinational corporations. Arms and disarmament are the subject of section three, and section four examines the conduct and future of international relations, including issues of morality, international organizations, and international law.

Political scientists also approach their subject from differing *methodological perspectives*. We will see, for example, that our subject can be studied from different *levels of analysis*. The question is: what is the basic source of the forces that shape the conduct of politics? Possible answers are world forces, the individual political processes of the specific countries, or the personal attributes of the leaders, the decisionmakers.

Another divergence in the way in which students and practitioners of world politics approach their subject focuses on what is called the realist vs. idealist debate. The basic issue here is whether to assume the world is permanently flawed and thus to follow policies which are strictly in our narrow self-interest. Or do we conclude that the world condition can be improved substantially by following policies that, at least in the short term, call for some risk or self-sacrifice?

The following debates will also reflect the fact that the nature of the world drama, including both its actors and its plot, is changing dramatically. States, that is, countries, were once almost the only international actors. Increasingly there are other actors, such as the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the International Monetary Fund, and multinational corporations.

The action on the global stage is also vastly different than it was just a few short decades ago. Technology is one of the causes of this change. Technology has changed communications methods, manufacturing processes, health standards, and many other aspects of the human condition in ways that have made economics a much more important aspect of international relations. Technology also created nuclear weapons and, some claim, is on the brink of creating a system that can defend us against the potential horror we have spawned.

Another change in the nature of world politics involves the axes of world politics. For about the first two decades after World War II ended in 1945, the primary axis was the **East-West Conflict**. That pitted the United States and its allies against the Soviet Union and its allies. For a variety of reasons that will be discussed in the issues, the dominance of that axis as a focus of world politics has lessened—although it remains very important. One change has been the added importance of the **North-South Axis**, a concept which emphasizes the tremendous economic disparity between the industrialized countries (North) and the much poorer, less developed countries (South).

Technological changes and the shifting axes of international politics also highlight the increased role of economics in world politics. Economics have always played a role, but, traditionally, the main focus was on strategic-political questions—especially military power. That concern still strongly exists, but it shares the international spotlight with economic issues.

PERCEPTIONS VERSUS REALITY

In addition to the general differences outlined, this reader explores the sharp debate that exists over many of the fundamental issues that currently face the world. Can the Russians be trusted? Can they trust the Americans? Who is worse (or better), Nicaragua's Sandinistas or its Contras? Is the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) meant to protect the United States or to enable a US attack on the Soviet Union?

The key to these debates is differing *perceptions*. There may be a *reality* in world politics. But very often that reality is obscured. In these cases, it is often the perception, not the reality, that is more important because policy is formulated on what countries *think*, not necessarily on what *is*. Thus, perception becomes the operating guide, or **operational reality**, whether it is true or not.

Perceptions result from many factors. One is the information that decisionmakers receive. For a variety of reasons, the facts and analyses that are given to leaders are inaccurate or incomplete. Perceptions also are formed by the **value system** of a decisionmaker, which is based on his/her experiences and ideology. The way such an individual thinks and speaks about another leader, country, or the world in general is called his/her **operational code**. Issue 3, for example, discusses the issue of US aid to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. In substantial part, that debate is based on differing perceptions of the Sandinista regime. Anticommunism is a strong part of President Reagan's value system and is easily observable in his operational code. He has, for instance, referred to the Soviet

Union as an “evil empire” and said the Soviets will lie and cheat to accomplish their goals. Given his visceral, negative perception of communism, it is, then, hardly surprising that the president strongly supports the Contras’ attempts to topple the leftist government of Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega.

Mirror image is another perceptual phenomenon. This means that countries tend to see one another in similar, or mirror, terms. Issues 6 and 14 clearly demonstrate this. In the former, US Secretary of State George Shultz argues that the Soviet Union represents the main threat to world peace. Reflecting the mirror image, the Soviet Defense Ministry claims that its country is peaceful and that it is, in fact, the United States that imperils world peace. In Issue 14, former US Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle argues that the Soviets cheat on arms control treaties. He is contradicted by Soviet General V. Obinyakov who accuses the United States of failure to live up to arms agreements.

Another aspect of perception is the tendency to see yourself as peacefully motivated and your opponent as aggressive. This can lead to perceptual distortions such as an inability to understand that actions which you perceive to be defensive may be perceived as a threat by your opponent and may therefore cause your opponent to take defensive actions that, in turn, seem aggressive to you. Issue 13, for example, deals with the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or Star Wars. The US administration argues that SDI is purely defensive, meant to ease the threat of a Soviet first strike against US land-based missiles and the nation’s command centers. But, as an American critic of SDI points out, the Soviets perceive Star Wars very differently. They see it as part of an offensive strategy that would allow the United States to launch a first strike on the USSR, then use SDI to destroy the enfeebled Soviet retaliatory strike.

Perceptions, then, are crucial to understanding international politics. It is important to understand objective reality, but it is also necessary to comprehend subjective reality in order to be able to predict and analyze another country’s actions.