New Forces Old Forces and the Future of World Politics

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For the descendants
of Benjamin Brown,
pioneer builder of communities

Preface

Political leaders and social scientists alike want to know which patterns of politics are highly resistant to change and which are rather easily transformed. And they want to know precisely what forces have the most impact on established norms and institutions.

Success or failure in political life often depends crucially on assessments of what it takes to protect, reform, manipulate, or do away with prevailing institutions and regimes—on correctly anticipating who will win out in confrontations between the new forces and old forces. Similarly, the social scientist's power of analysis depends on an ability to distinguish the "constants" from the "variables" in a particular field of human behavior and to describe and explain the paths of change—that is, how and why alterations in one variable do or do not affect the other variables. But whereas policymakers frequently think they know (or feel compelled to act as if they know) which are the new forces and which are the old forces and who will be the winners and losers in the contests between them, social scientists characteristically resist coming to such conclusions "until all the evidence is in."

Policymakers were the main audience for this book's precursor, *New Forces in World Politics*, written while I was a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. Brookings is preeminently in the business of offering policy advice, as indeed I had been in my professional career up to then, and the Brookings study, published in 1974, reflected this emphasis. Although trained as a social scientist, I considered it to be my calling to "speak truth to power" in a way that would be relevant to the power holders. The book therefore went out on a limb, identifying the new forces and guessing who would be the winners and losers—before all the evidence was in. It also prescribed certain foreign policies for taking advantage of the presumably ascendant new forces.

If I may be allowed an immodest reflection on my own past work—looking back with the advantage of more than a decade's experience—it is now clear that a number of particular assessments were mistaken or premature; but the central prognoses of the fragmentation of the cold war coalitions and the rise of subnational and transnational challenges to the nation-state system have been validated by events. The fact that many of the policy recommendations have not been followed by statesmen is perhaps as much an indication of the inability of particular leaders to constructively adapt to the main currents of change in world society as it is an indication that the proposed policies were untimely.

However, it is not my purpose here to restate or defend judgments made more than a dozen years ago. Rather, it is to make a fresh attempt, informed by continuing observations in the "laboratory" of actual events, at understanding why the world works as it does and its potential for transformation. The compass of the inquiry is the same, but the nature of the probes is somewhat different, and the results also are somewhat different in form and substance.

Many of the observations presented in these pages were undertaken from a different vantage point than those reflected in the earlier *New Forces* book. My current writing is the product of having resided more in the academic community than in the policy community in recent years—though I still straddle both worlds.

The theoretical apparatus is a bit more elaborate than in the Brookings study but once again purposefully kept from dominating the exposition. The analysis delves back into history more, but the historical forays still are constrained by the purpose of gaining insight into what is more or less durable or changeable in the contemporary world. The spectrum of alternative futures is wider and more differentiated, but this is balanced by a greater effort to assess their plausibility and likelihood. In the spirit of academic detachment, the analysis is less ethnocentric and oriented toward the needs of *US* policymakers; yet I have retained a final chapter on the implications of the analysis for US interests, and again offer suggestions for a foreign policy responsive to these implications.

In short, despite the valuable insights about international relations and world politics I have gained from my fellow academics, my writing here still is less about how scholars think about the subject than about what is going on in the world "out there." I intend in the near future to write a book about theory, theory-building, and methods of analysis in this field (graduate students in my seminar on international relations theory know that I have strong views on these matters); readers should be alerted, however, that the present work—by design—is not yet that. The writing, rather, is more directly about the challenges facing contemporary statesmen and stateswomen, in particular the need to reduce today's unprecedented threats to the survival of the human species.

Being less determined to make an original contribution to a particular academic "discipline" than to contribute relevent knowledge to the imperatives of constructive statecraft, I have borrowed liberally from the ideas of others—I hope with sufficient acknowledgment (in the endnotes) of the writings that have influenced my analysis. I could not even begin to give sufficient acknowledgment to all the insights I have absorbed in addition in seminar and corridor dialogs with colleagues in the policy community as well as academia.

I would, however, like to give special thanks to those scholars who generously reviewed and commented on the manuscripts, in particular: Steven Burg, Brandeis University; James E. Harf, Ohio State University; Alex Roberts Hybel, University of Southern California; Charles Kegley, Jr., University of South Carolina; Robert Paalberg, Wellesley College; Randolph Siverson, University of California at Davis; Herbert Tillema, University of Missouri–Columbia; and Paul Watanabe, University of Massachusetts–Boston.

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S. B.

Contents

Introduction

Taken as a whole, this book is not only a set of analyses but a sustained argument. The presentation of material within each chapter and the sequencing of chapters are designed to present a coherent thesis about the historical and future evolution of world politics.

Part One, *The Inherited Foundations* (Chapters 1 and 2), shows how the contemporary configuration of the nation-state system is the evolved product of centuries of struggles between "old forces" and "new forces."

Part Two, *The Existing System in Crisis* (Chapters 3 through 10), argues that the struggles between old and new forces now taking place are not only destabilizing the post-World War II international order, but are undermining the most basic of the evolved structures of world politics: the nation-state system itself.

Part Three, *The Emergence of New Patterns of World Politics* (Chapters 11 through 13), examines the range of plausible outcomes of the contemporary struggles and concludes that the most likely outcome is a "polyarchic" configuration—in which there is no clear global pattern of dominance and subordination; political and economic power is widely diffused; international coalitions have overlapping and cross-cutting memberships; and national, subnational, and transnational groups compete for the loyalty of individuals.

The emerging global polyarchy, it is argued, could evolve into a dangerous variant threatening the survival of the human species or, alternatively, given enlightened statecraft, could evolve into a new form of world politics with structures and processes of effective conflict management and intergroup accountability.

Part Four, *Practical Applications* (Chapters 14 and 15), outlines the essential features of the enlightened statecraft required to assure that the emerging polyarchy evolves into a constructive variant, and it shows how the country in which the author lives, the United States, could assume some responsibility for assisting the constructive evolutionary process.

PART ONE

The Inherited Foundations

Will the human species destroy itself with its continually growing capacity to transform the natural world, or will it adapt positively to the terrible physical power it has created? The answers depend crucially on how inventive the species can become in the fields of government and politics.

As yet, the most highly developed structure of governance is the so-called *nation-state system*. Comprising some 165 countries of widely varying size and power, this world of nation-states has evolved over the course of human history into its present configuration. How the nation-state system reacts to forces very different from those that brought it into existence will determine whether or not the human species will survive or become extinct in the century ahead.

The nation-state system's persistence up to now is often credited to the international *power-balancing process*: Each nation, in order to sustain an independent existence as a self-governing state, will attempt to acquire sufficient strength, usually in the form of military power, to prevent rival countries from subduing it. The required national power is obtained either unilaterally or in alliance with other countries. Through this power-balancing process, generated almost naturally by the desire of nation-states to retain their independence, a would-be world conqueror presumably will be stopped in time from amassing sufficient power to establish a world empire or single world state.

The dominant contemporary expression of the international power-balancing process has been the global rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union for coalition partners. Each side has justified its accumulation of allies on the grounds that the other is engaged in an "imperialistic" drive to rule the world and that therefore one's own protective embrace is needed and sought by the smaller countries.

In addition to international coalitions formed explicitly to counter the power of presumably hostile countries, *regimes of limited international cooperation* have emerged from time to time, usually confined to particular regions of the

globe or particular fields of economic interaction. Even members of rival political–military coalitions have cooperated with one another in such regimes. Characteristically, however, these cooperative arrangements or institutions have been expressions of the nation-state system and prevailing power balances rather than attempts to restructure the system or transform the existing pattern of international alignments.

An appreciation of the durability of the dominant characteristics of the world's political order up to now—the nation-state system and the international power-balancing process—is therefore a necessary starting point for analyzing the prospects for a continuing evolution of the human species...or the quite plausible alternative: the violent destruction of the world.

Chapter 1 briefly capsulizes the inherited structure and norms of the contemporary nation-state system, highlighting the basic functions it performs for human society.

Chapter 2 provides a summary overview of the evolution of the nation-state system up through the bipolar pattern of the cold war. The purpose of the historical retrospective is twofold: One, it offers insight into how the structures and processes of international relations at the political level (hierarchies of power, balances of power, and regimes of limited international cooperation) have been determined by basic material and social forces; and two, it explores how the material and social forces have been shaped and channeled by the prevailing structures and the processes of international statecraft.

Part One thus lays the groundwork for the assessment in Parts Two and Three of the ability of the inherited structures and processes of international politics to deal adequately with today's "new forces."