

AMERICA AS A WORLD POWER

Foreign Policy in a Constitutional Framework



Loch K. Johnson

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FOREIGN POLICY
IN A CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Loch K. Johnson

University of Georgia

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AMERICA AS A WORLD POWER

FOREIGN POLICY
IN A CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

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(with Charles S. Bullock III)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Loch K. Johnson, Regents Professor of Political Science at the University of Georgia, was born in Auckland, New Zealand, and holds a Ph.D. from the University of California—Riverside. He has been an American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow and has served on four U.S. House and Senate committees, including as staff director, Subcommittee on Oversight, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Since joining the University of Georgia faculty in 1979, he has received numerous awards for outstanding teaching, including the 1988 Josiah Meigs Award (the university's highest teaching honor).

For Kristin, diplomat

*Confidence is everywhere the parent of
despotism—free government is founded in
jealousy; . . . it is jealousy and not confidence
which prescribes limited constitutions
to bind down those we are obliged to trust
with power. . . . In questions of power, then,
let no more be heard of confidence in man,
but bind him down from mischief by the
chains of the Constitution. . . .*

—Thomas Jefferson

PREFACE

Books traditionally begin with a preface and an introductory chapter. The purpose of the preface is to state the broad objectives of the book; it should provide the reader with a brief road map of the route the author intends to travel. The opening chapter then offers a more substantive and detailed guide to the author's subject, in this case American foreign policy in the aftermath of World War II. This sensible tradition is followed here.

OBJECTIVES

This book's objectives can be stated succinctly. In Part 1, the author introduces:

- the ends (or goals) of American foreign policy, as well as the means by which they are pursued (Chapter 1);
- the key dimensions of the foreign policy milieu and how they affect the conduct of America's external relations (Chapter 2);
- how U.S. foreign policy goals have been shaped by American and world history (Chapters 3 and 4);
- why the nation's constitutional framework continues to exert a strong and, from the author's point of view, a laudable influence over foreign policy making in the modern era (Chapter 5);
- the institutional frictions that arise from this constitutional framework (Chapter 6); and
- the human dimension of foreign policy, from the lofty decision making of presidents and legislators to the important role

that you, the reader, and other individual citizens can play in the fashioning of America's ties abroad (Chapter 7).

Then, in Part 2, the book examines:

- the conduct of American foreign policy across a range of important responsibilities, from gathering information about global threats and opportunities (Chapter 8) to the application of power and principle in the defense of the nation's interests and ideals around the world (Chapters 9 through 13)—that is, how the United States *learns* about events beyond its borders, and how it then *acts* upon this information—and
- new directions for America as a world power on the eve of the twenty-first century (Chapter 14).

Stated another way, the first half of this volume (Chapters 1 through 7) offers a primer on the fundamentals of American foreign policy—why this country must concern itself with the rest of the world and how America's external relations are forged. The second half (Chapters 8 through 14) moves from this backdrop to front stage, with a shift in focus toward U.S. foreign policy in action: the challenge of gathering and analyzing information collected from around the world (strategic intelligence), in an effort to guard against surprise attacks like the one that shook Pearl Harbor in 1941; the shadowy use of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its hidden hand to manipulate events overseas (covert action); the overt deployment of force—sending in the Marines—to achieve America's foreign objectives; the pursuit of more peaceful, diplomatic approaches to the settlement of international disputes; the application of economic inducements (trade and aid); and, last but not least, the evocation of moral principle to guide America's relations with other lands. Here, to draw upon the political scientist Harold D. Lasswell's spare yet venerable definition of politics (*Politics: Who*

Gets What, When, How, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1936), is where the book addresses the who gets what, when, and how of global affairs. Last, the concluding chapter examines ways in which citizens might choose to refashion and strengthen this nation's global ties as the world approaches a new century.

THEMES

A dominant theme unites this book: the drafters of the U.S. Constitution envisioned a sharing of authority for foreign policy across the institutions of government—the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches. They sought, above all else, to guard against the dangers of tyranny; and—the central normative argument undergirding this book—their prescriptions are as valid today as they were in 1787. This sharing of authority across institutions has its frustrations. The power bestowed upon policymakers as a result of their positions of authority can become dispersed, Balkanized; overlapping jurisdictions may lead to inefficiencies and delay. Other countries, even America's allies, may become confused and dismayed by this open, sometimes unpredictable approach to international affairs. The nation's founders believed, nonetheless, that a concentration of power represented a far greater danger to the republic than whatever inefficiencies might be incurred under a system of shared authority. They opted for an imperfect democracy over attempts at perfect order. As Justice Louis Brandeis once put it,

The doctrine of the separation of powers was adopted by the [Constitutional] Convention of 1787, not to promote efficiency but to preclude the exercise of arbitrary power. The purpose was, not to avoid friction, but, by means of the inevitable friction incident to the distribution of the governmental powers among three departments, to save the people from autocracy [*Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52, 293 (1926)].

This constitutional blueprint for shared authority set loose powerful centrifugal forces within the government that continue to push the institutions of foreign policy making away from centralized control. By early design, the government of the United States consists of fragments of power that must be pieced together with skillful leadership—and luck—in order to make the parts move in harmony. Under such arrangements, Congress and the executive branch can find themselves in conflict over the proper direction of foreign policy—a system of governing quite different from dictatorships like the Soviet Union, where foreign policy is carved out with little consideration for public or legislative opinion; or even from Western parliamentary governments with their fused executive and legislative powers under the strong control of a prime minister or chancellor. Yet, a vigorous internal debate between the branches of government over the proper pathways for the United States to follow is precisely what the founders intended. They hoped for wisdom that would emanate from many heads, not just the president's; for open discourse, not regal command. Just as for the founders the nature of executive-legislative relations lay at the heart of foreign (and domestic) policy making, so, too, does it become the central focus of this book.

Embraced within the book's central theme, then, is the important notion extolled by the founders that the legislative branch has a vital, positive role to play in decisions of international affairs. Most volumes on American foreign policy are prone to exalt the presidency as the embodiment of those virtues often considered desirable for effective external relations: hierarchical organization, access to extensive information, quickness of decision, an intricate bureaucracy to carry out policy, and the like. This book, in contrast, maintains that no branch has a monopoly on wisdom for foreign policy. Rather, the government functions best when its various parts operate together, like an engine with all its cylinders at work. Comity between

the executive and legislative branches, a spirit of good faith, a willingness to work shoulder to shoulder, even as each branch remains cautious about possible abuses of power by the other—here, argues this book, is the key to an effective foreign policy in a system of dispersed authority.

Despite the brilliance of the insights on governing offered by the founders, Americans lost sight of these basic principles during the first half of this century. The twin catastrophes of global war and economic depression spurred a trend toward the concentration of power within the executive branch. This dangerous aggrandizement, culminating in the “imperial presidency” of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, represented a radical departure from American traditions. It would take a souring war in Indochina, along with the Watergate and CIA scandals, to trim back burgeoning executive powers in the 1970s and awaken within the citizenry a renewed appreciation for the virtues in foreign policy of shared authority across the branches.

A primary purpose of this book is to explore the advantages, as well as the disadvantages, that America’s constitutional framework holds for the conduct of foreign policy. Empirically, it attempts to shed light on the points of friction and cooperation in a system of shared authority; normatively, it tries to convey an appreciation for the safeguards put in place by the founders to protect the nation against one-man rule.

While the problems of power sharing between the branches occupy center stage in this book, a drama as large as American foreign policy has many subplots. An important secondary theme portrays the ambivalence of Americans toward their status as a world power—a persistent uncertainty about how to relate to the rest of the world. Citizens of this country have oscillated over the years between attitudes of isolationism, on the one hand, and interventionism, on the other.

Emphasized in this book, too, is the significance of the human factor in foreign affairs.

Some experts view foreign policy as essentially a product of broad historical or institutional forces. Certainly, these conditions must be taken into account, but the will or sometimes the whim of government officials and private citizens makes a difference as well and is given close attention throughout this volume.

An additional theme is the contention that the United States has been overly preoccupied with the “Soviet threat,” transfixed by the unlikely event that Russian tanks will come rumbling through the Fulda gap in Europe, quickly overrunning Western military defenses. As a result of this fixation, Americans have been insufficiently attentive to greater long-term threats to their future—from global pollution and runaway population growth abroad to declining economic competitiveness and moral decay at home.

Other themes are woven through the book, among them: that U.S. external relations over the years have been a blend of realism and idealism; that the United States is only one of many nations on the globe, all of which exist in something of an anarchical state with no higher authority over them to adjudicate disputes or maintain order; and that the study of foreign policy is devoid of any single dominant theory or methodology.

A NEW PARADIGM

Despite the importance of these various themes, the essence of U.S. foreign policy lies in how and why decisions are made. Consequently, this book concentrates on decision processes and institutions, on the people who hold positions of authority, and on the foreign policy views of citizens as they affect deliberations in high office. Its further central intention is to understand the objectives of American foreign policy, and how they are carried out. Following a review of fundamentals, this volume in its second half illustrates the importance—and the difficulty—of acquiring good informa-

tion (strategic intelligence) about the world in order to make informed foreign policy decisions. It examines how U.S. officials go about choosing which approaches to employ in the pursuit of America's goals from among the several means available—primarily, secret intervention abroad, open warfare, diplomacy, trade, aid, and moral suasion.

While most of this book is devoted to the scholarly marshaling of findings about how the United States makes its foreign policy decisions, the themes presented earlier indicate that normative undercurrents flow beneath the empirical analysis. This book calls for a new approach (or "paradigm," in social science jargon) to American foreign policy. The excessive deference paid to the president as an unerring architect of foreign affairs has failed (as the founders would have predicted); and so has the fixation of American officials on the threat of communism, as if the world were merely a Soviet-American chessboard. The new paradigm envisions a foreign policy based, institutionally, on an executive-legislative partnership and, ideologically, on a global perspective that extends beyond the shibboleths of the cold war. Whether this "fresh" approach (if a return to constitutional principles and a renewed friendship with the Russian people can be construed as fresh) is preferable to the formulas of the cold war era is for the reader to decide. The author hopes only that this work will contribute to the debate about how best to prepare the United States for its leadership responsibilities in the twenty-first century.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have had an opportunity to observe American foreign policy from vantage points within the government and, more recently, in the tranquility of the ivory tower, to reflect upon this experience while immersed in the scholarly literature on this subject. Within the government, I served as assistant to the chairman of the Sen-

ate Select Committee on Intelligence; staff director of the Subcommittee on Oversight, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence; aide to the ranking majority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and senior aide on the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade, House Committee on Foreign Affairs. I have also had the privilege to serve as a consultant to the National Security Council and to the Department of State. Following these chances for close observation of how foreign policy is made, I have studied, taught, and written about foreign policy for the past decade as a professor of political science, traveling back to Washington periodically for interviews with officials, the presentation of testimony before Congress, and archival research. This book is a blend of impressions gained from these various "hands-on" and scholarly experiences.

Along the way, I have had the benefit of many wise tutors, beginning with the scholars Arthur C. Campbell, David S. McLellan, Vernon Puryear, and Lambert N. Wenner, and continuing, within the government, with Senators Frank Church and Wyche Fowler and Representatives Les Aspin and Jonathan B. Bingham, as well as David Aaron, James J. Angleton, William E. Colby, Stephen J. Flanagan, Arthur S. Hulnick, Karl F. Inderfurth, Thomas K. Latimer, William G. Miller, F. A. O. Schwarz, Jr., Gregory F. Treverton, and Stansfield Turner. More recently, I have had the chance to exchange foreign policy views with several thoughtful former government officials, researchers, and educators, including Richard Ball, former Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett, Gary Bertsch, former NSC director McGeorge Bundy, Paul F. Diehl, Dorinda Dallmeyer, I. M. Destler, Richard Falk, Peter Fenn, John Lewis Gaddis, Jerome Garris, Michael J. Glennon, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Alonzo L. Hamby, Glenn Hastadt, former Ambassador Martin Hillenbrand, George Kalaris, Charlotte Ku, former Senator George McGovern, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Harry Howe

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