I. M. Destler

MAKING FOREIGN ECONOMIC POLICY

Brookings Institution

I. M. DESTLER

Making Foreign Economic Policy

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Foreword

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, U.S. policies would be derived from explicit domestic and international goals; specific government actions would be calculated steps to advance these goals. But in reality officials find themselves coping with situations as they arise, choosing as choices present themselves. Hence policy often turns out to be little more than an accumulation of ad hoc decisions. Is there a better way?

This book explores the process by which U.S. foreign economic policy choices are made. It begins by asking broad questions about the nature of foreign economic issues and how they should be managed. It then analyzes the making of recent U.S. food and trade policy, concentrating on such episodes as the grain sales to Russia during the 1970s, the soybean embargo of 1973, and passage of the Trade Act of 1974. Drawing on his analyses, the author then offers prescriptions for managing the food and trade issues—and for improving the focus and coherence of foreign economic policy generally.

I. M. Destler is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. He completed most of the research for and writing of this book as a member of the Brookings Foreign Policy Studies staff. He is coauthor (with Priscilla Clapp, Hideo Sato, and Haruhiro Fukui) of *Managing an Alliance: The Politics of U.S.-Japanese Relations* (Brookings, 1976).

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BRUCE K. MACLAURY
President

October 1979
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CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

THE CORE OF THE PROBLEM of foreign economic policy is the need to balance domestic and international concerns. Particular decisions inevitably affect both. But policymakers do not always address these concerns in a balanced way.

Domestic–International Trade-offs

In June 1963, a democratic reformist government came to power in Peru, espousing many of the goals of President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. But it was "greeted by the U.S. with a partial embargo . . . on new AID loans,"[1] to induce it to settle its dispute with the International Petroleum Company, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. The Kennedy administration initiated this embargo in response to strong congressional concern about possible expropriation of American investments; when no settlement followed, the embargo was maintained for three years. The embattled Peruvian government was replaced in 1968 by a military regime far less responsive to either Alliance for Progress goals or other U.S. economic and political interests.[2]

On January 21, 1969, Richard M. Nixon's administration embarked on a frustrating three-year effort to negotiate limits on exports of synthetic

1. Gregory F. Treverton, "United States Policy-Making Toward Peru: The IPC Affair," in Abraham F. Lowenthal and others, "The Making of U.S. Policies Toward Latin America: The Conduct of 'Routine' Relations," *Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, June 1975: Appendices*, vol. 3, app. I (Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 205. The full report and its appendixes are referred to hereafter as *Murphy Commission Report*.

2. For further detail see ibid. and Jessica Pernitz Einhorn, *Expropriation Politics* (Lexington Books, 1974), chap. 2.

and wool textiles from Japan to the United States. This drive was undertaken not for general trade or foreign policy reasons but to deliver on a presidential campaign promise to the U.S. textile industry. That goal was ultimately achieved after the administration threatened to impose import quotas under the Trading with the Enemy Act. But the whole effort seriously impaired overall U.S. trade policy and U.S. relations with Japan.[3]

In June 1973, the United States imposed temporary export controls on soybeans as part of an effort to dampen sharp rises in the prices of domestic feed and meat. But the main effect was to provoke widespread European and Japanese concern about America's reliability as a supplier of agricultural commodities, thus undercutting the long-standing U.S. effort to increase overseas markets for these products.[4]

On March 12, 1975, assistant to the president Donald Rumsfeld reported to President Gerald Ford: "On that business, yesterday, of the countervailing duties on European cheese and so on [Secretary of the Treasury William] Simon went ahead on the basis of domestic pressures—no contact with State, which has to deal with the repercussions in the European Economic Community. Something to think about."[5]

These four episodes in U.S. foreign economic policy differ in specifics. But each involved U.S. actions taken for domestic reasons, economic and political, which had significant international economic and political consequences. Each involved *trade-offs* between domestic and foreign policy interests in which the latter were given short shrift. In one case, the problem was apparently an overly restricted conceptual or policy framework: the soybean controls in 1973 seem to have been decided upon by officials who thought overridingly about domestic economic stabilization. In another, the problem was that actions were

3. For a full analysis of this episode, see I. M. Destler, Haruhiro Fukui, and Hideo Sato, *The Textile Wrangle: Conflict in Japanese-American Relations, 1969–71* (Cornell University Press, 1979).

4. This decision is analyzed in detail in chapter 4.

5. Quoted in John Hersey, "The President," *New York Times Magazine*, April 20, 1975, p. 50. The decision to which Rumsfeld alluded was apparently not final, because on April 24 the Treasury Department waived imposition of countervailing duties in return for European removal of export subsidies on those cheeses most directly competitive with U.S. production. *New York Times*, April 25, 1975; and Richard S. Frank, "Regulatory Report 10/New Trade Talks May Reduce Government Role," *National Journal*, May 10, 1975, p. 700.

tailored to accommodate a narrow domestic interest, the textile industry, at the cost of the broader welfare, domestic as well as international.

In two instances—aid to Peru and textiles from Japan—the domestic-international trade-off involved a question of tactics: how much the United States would employ coercive instruments, which might weaken long-term international ties, to win concessions to domestic interests. In all of the cases the United States gave too little weight to the legitimate economic interests and the domestic politics of other countries. And in all of them the United States responded to current domestic interests, either industry-specific or economy-wide, at some cost to the maintenance and strengthening of institutions for international cooperation from which Americans derive considerable long-range benefits.

These cases reflect broader trends. The growing intractability of the U.S. economy, with the combination of inflation and unemployment at levels without postwar precedent, increases pressure on presidents and congressmen to enhance welfare at home notwithstanding the international costs. The decline in U.S. grain stocks in 1972–75 exposed American consumers more directly to fluctuations in international grain prices and simultaneously made such fluctuations more acute. The growing American dependence on oil imports subjects foreign economic policy to other powerful domestic pressures. The decline in international competitiveness of some U.S. labor-intensive industries brings an additional source of political pressure, reflected in organized labor's altered trade policy stance and its denunciation of the "export of jobs" by multinational corporations.

And not only do such domestic economic factors and pressures seem to be gaining force; the standard postwar counterargument and source for counterpressure—that domestic economic interests be subordinated to the exigencies of the cold war and the maintenance of the free world alliances—carries far less weight. The postwar presumption of the "priority of foreign policy," in George F. Kennan's phrase, survives in highly diluted form if at all.[6] Similarly diluted is the unusual postwar preeminence of the U.S. economy, which helped Americans bear any apparent sacrifices of immediate economic interests.

Thus there is evidence to support a conclusion that there is a per-

6. 1963 memorandum published in *Administration of National Security*, Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Security Staffing and Operations of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, 88 Cong. 1 sess. (GPO, 1965), p. 363.

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sistent bias in U.S. foreign economic policymaking, as Graham Allison and Peter Szanton put it, "in favor of immediate domestic concerns over broader foreign policy objectives."[7] Yet there are also recent episodes that point in the opposite direction:

In July 1972, six weeks after the Moscow summit conference, President Nixon announced a three-year agreement providing credit to sell $750 million in grain to the Soviet Union. And even as that agreement was being completed, the Russians were making record grain purchases in the U.S. market. Here the prime impetus was international—a strengthening of détente on the political side, a major sale on the economic. And the prime cost was domestic. Because they depleted American grain stocks, the sales contracted that summer were an important contributor to the food price inflation of 1973 and 1974. And this inflation was exacerbated when the Department of Agriculture failed to relax acreage restrictions until January 1973, several months after the winter wheat crop was planted.[8]

When he came to office in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter was determined to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. He ordered his chief energy official, James Schlesinger, to prepare a comprehensive program for submission to Congress within ninety days of the inauguration. Schlesinger met the deadline by excluding other senior advisers from the process as long as possible. Though his program proposed tax and price changes with substantial overall economic impact, senior economic officials did not weigh in until late in the process, and only when they finally insisted. Thus the program was poorly coordinated with the administration's macroeconomic policy proposals. (Since the program was not adopted as proposed, this process failure had little practical impact.)

In these two cases, like those cited earlier, the trade-offs between U.S. domestic and foreign policy interests were anything but simple. A major economic interest at home, grain producers, stood to gain from the Russian sale. And among the domestic interests affected by the Carter energy program, some saw themselves as gaining and some as losing. But in both cases, domestic economic stabilization was neglected —disastrously in the first case, potentially in the second. In light of these cases, the problem for foreign economic policymaking is to assure not

7. Graham Allison and Peter Szanton, *Remaking Foreign Policy: The Organizational Connection* (Basic Books, 1976), p. 151.

8. This decision is analyzed in detail in chapter 3.

just international consequences a full hearing but domestic consequences as well.

And yet, the picture is still more complicated, as two other major episodes show:

On August 15, 1971, President Nixon announced a number of unilateral steps to buttress the domestic economy and strengthen its international payments position; these steps included a suspension of the dollar's convertibility into gold and a temporary surcharge on imports. In the months that followed, the secretary of the treasury led an aggressive, high-pressure drive to win very large economic concessions from our European and Japanese allies. This push was popular at home, as were the immediate economic benefits from the program—higher employment and temporarily lower inflation. But it shook relations with Europe and Japan and undermined confidence in the international economic order which U.S. statecraft had nurtured since World War II.

In the short run, international values were sacrificed to domestic gains. But in the years that followed, the policy had international benefits. The realignment of currency values led to improvement of the U.S. trade balance in 1973, which facilitated the enactment of new trade legislation calling for comprehensive negotiations with our major trading partners. The subsequent move to flexible exchange rates put the world economy in a better position to absorb the shock of the 1973 increase in the price of oil by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). And to further complicate the story, the implementation of Nixon's new economic policy also had important domestic (and international) costs, for the expansionary U.S. monetary and fiscal policies of 1972 helped fuel the worldwide inflation that followed.

When the Carter administration came to office in 1977, it adopted a stimulative national economic policy and encouraged the other major allied governments with strong economies, Germany and Japan, to do likewise. The aim was to strengthen national—and world—economic recovery from the recession which began in 1974. And as a consequence of this policy, U.S. leaders were willing to accept, in the short term, a moderate *U.S. trade deficit and some downward floating of the dollar.*

This policy was a sophisticated effort to maximize both domestic and international welfare and thereby to buttress political ties as well. And U.S. growth performance was in fact strong in 1977. But consumer demand in Germany and Japan grew less rapidly, in part because their

governments pursued more conservative economic policies. When this growth imbalance plus higher U.S. oil imports led to a *massive* American trade deficit, several times the previous record, the dollar fell sharply in value—and continued to fall. Europeans and Japanese grew increasingly alarmed about this fall and about the will and capacity of the United States to call a halt. A rise in our inflation rate compounded this concern. By November 1978, U.S. policy had generated a crisis of international confidence, which forced the president to take strong action to support the dollar in international markets. But this action was bound to dampen American (and world) economic growth and increase the prospect of recession in 1979 and 1980.

In neither of these two cases did policymaking favor either international or domestic considerations in any simple sense. In the Carter administration case, moreover, domestic and international economic officials were initially in basic accord and felt that policy would serve the goals of both. But foreign nations saw things differently. And when their economies did not play the roles the United States had cast for them, the scenario written in Washington became economically unrealistic and politically counterproductive.

Domestic–International Coordination

Substantive complexity brings with it organizational complexity. Tensions among domestic and international objectives are hardly new to U.S. experience, but their apparent increase both offers evidence that domestic–international interdependence may be growing and illuminates the problem in American policy management that results.[9]

9. Analysts of interdependence and transnational relations emphasize that the contemporary combination of (1) high domestic demands on governments to maintain general economic welfare and (2) the impact of international transactions on their ability to meet these domestic demands is what makes international economic relations so important (and frequently so intractable) for these governments. As Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein put it, the "horizontal interaction of transnational processes is higher than at any point since World War I" at the same time that "vertical" (domestic) pressure for policies enhancing national economic welfare has "moved to a new peak." "Interdependence: Myth or Reality?" *World Politics*, vol. 26 (October 1973), p. 21. See also Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Harvard University Press, 1971); and Edward L. Morse, "The Transformation of Foreign Policies: Modernization, Interdependence, and Externalization," *World Politics*, vol. 22 (April 1970), pp. 371–92.

The increased importance of economic issues in foreign relations widens official participation in foreign policymaking. Such central foreign policy institutions as the State Department must share responsibility with institutions traditionally labeled domestic. A similar broadening of responsibility takes place among congressional committees. The central foreign policy institutions must increase their sensitivity to domestic policy problems and interests if they are to represent foreign policy considerations effectively in internal government debates. The converse is also true—domestic actors must become more sensitive to international concerns. But what specific prescriptions for U.S. foreign economic policymaking can serve these goals? How can government act more carefully, more wisely, in addressing the complex trade-offs which today's foreign economic issues inevitably bring?

Defining the Terms

What is foreign economic policy? The simple answer is that it encompasses government decisions and actions that affect both foreign and economic concerns. But then we must ask whether the term excludes any actions, since in this age of interdependence it is hard to find policy actions without some impact beyond U.S. borders and even harder to find actions without significant economic content. One must retreat to the unsatisfying ground of relativity: *foreign economic policy, for purposes here, includes government actions with important impact on U.S. relations with other governments and on the production and distribution of goods and services at home and abroad.*

Many matters covered by this definition fall into one of three functional policy areas: trade, monetary, and aid. But to treat foreign economic policy simply as the sum of the actions within these "tracks"[10] risks inadequate treatment of issues like food, energy, and domestic economic stabilization. Decisions on acreage restriction programs or taxes, for example, affect international economic relations but may not technically fall within these tracks.

The difficulty of drawing precise boundaries raises a broader question: whether foreign economic policy should be treated as a distinct,

10. Richard N. Cooper, "Trade Policy is Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, no. 9 (Winter 1972–73), pp. 18–36; and *U.S. Foreign Economic Policy: Implications for the Organization of the Executive Branch*, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Foreign Economic Policy of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 92 Cong. 2 sess. (GPO, 1972), pp. 121–23.

separable sphere of government activity for either analytic or organizational purposes. Analyses and prescriptions generally assume that it should but usually do not face the matter explicitly.[11] But are its components necessarily linked more closely to one another than to policy concerns outside the international economic area? Is international energy policy, for example, more closely related to international trade negotiations than to U.S. tax and economic stabilization policies or to Middle East diplomacy? Responding to this overall question requires careful examination of specific foreign economic policymaking experience.

The broad range of official foreign economic policy actions requires coordination. As the term is employed here, coordination involves above all (1) *the management of policy decision processes* so that trade-offs among policy interests and goals are recognized, analyzed, and presented to the president and other senior executives before they make a decision; and (2) *the oversight of official actions*, especially those that follow major high-level decisions, so that these actions reflect the balance among policy goals that the president and his responsible officials have decided upon.

In practice, these two tasks are closely related. It is often in reaction to an action that appears unbalanced that officials charged with coordination are able to bring a broader policy choice to the attention of senior officials. And both tasks require interagency communication—facilitated by committees, working groups, and so on—and analyses of the effects of alternative policy courses. Moreover, as the opening examples illustrate, coordination requires the consideration of nonforeign or non-

11. President Nixon's Commission on International Trade and Investment Policy used the following words to praise the establishment of the Council on International Economic Policy (CIEP) in the Executive Office of the President (EOP) in 1971: "This is the first time that a central coordinating body has been created to deal with all aspects of international economic policy"; thus it was "a significant step in providing a unified perspective." *United States International Economic Policy in an Interdependent World,* Report to the President submitted by the Commission on International Trade and Investment Policy, July 1971 (GPO, 1971), p. 277, hereafter cited as the *Williams Commission Report.* See also Harald B. Malmgren, "Managing Foreign Economic Policy," *Foreign Policy,* no. 6 (Spring 1972), pp. 42–63. Stephen D. Cohen does face the issue explicitly: he argues that, for organizational purposes, "international economic policy must be viewed as being a separate phenomenon," though he recognizes its critical connections to national security and domestic economic concerns. *The Making of United States International Economic Policy: Principles, Problems, and Proposals for Reform* (Praeger, 1977), p. xxii.

economic interests and goals (the soybean embargo, for example, affected domestic inflation and U.S.-Japanese relations).

Reviewing the Past

Successive administrations have made explicit provision, formal or informal, for coordinating the international economic policy activity of the many government agencies (over sixty by one count)[12] involved in foreign economic policymaking. In examining their experiences, one must distinguish between organizational form and policymaking reality.

Under President Dwight D. Eisenhower formal responsibility for policy coordination was vested in the cabinet-level Council on Foreign Economic Policy located in the Executive Office of the President (EOP). But the council seldom met and its staff, headed by a senior presidential assistant, was never effective in forcing a resolution of issues, though it was involved in many.[13] Instead, the Treasury Department dominated international monetary issues (as it generally does); leadership in other foreign economic areas, particularly trade and aid, was increasingly exercised by Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon.[14]

President Kennedy decentralized foreign economic policymaking both in form and in practice. He abolished the Council on Foreign Economic Policy, formally transferring its functions to the State Department. But in fact he reduced State influence over aid and trade issues by creating the semiautonomous Agency for International Development (AID) in 1961 and in 1963—at congressional insistence—the special representative for trade negotiations (STR) within the executive office. Under both Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, however, an important staff-coordinating role was played by the deputy special assistant to the president for national security affairs, first Carl Kaysen and later Francis M. Bator, who specialized in economic issues and U.S.-European relations. This deputy had intermittent direct access to the president and was able to communicate with the president through the special assistant

12. *Williams Commission Report*, p. 275.

13. A 1961 Bureau of the Budget report concluded that this council never became "the principal interagency forum for any [policy] area." Quoted in *The Coordination of United States International Economic Policy*, a report prepared for the House Committee on International Relations by the Congressional Research Service, 95 Cong. 1 sess. (GPO, 1977), p. 15.

14. For Dillon's description of how this worked, see *U.S. Foreign Economic Policy*, Hearings, pp. 92–107.

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