

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: THE PROBLEM OF OBLIGATION

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More than any other nation in history the United States carries a burden of obligation toward the oppressed of mankind. To be sure, it is a burden that has never been recognized or shared by all Americans. Indeed, through most of this country's history the preponderance of political influence has decreed that the United States limit its obligations abroad to serving its own requirements. But there have always been Americans—often distinguished and highly placed—who have demanded in times of revolution and crisis that the United States dare pursue no less than the cause of humanity.

This sense of obligation has stimulated every important foreign policy debate within the nation since the presidency of George Washington; it explains the magnitude of the disagreements which have characterized the American outlook on world affairs. Unlike spokesmen of other nations, be they democratic or totalitarian, American leaders have seldom confined their arguments to varying interpretations of the national interest. Rather the debates they have launched have ranged over two fundamental and totally divergent concepts of acceptable national behavior.

Those who have denied that the United States carries any special obligation for the people of other nations have accepted what might be termed the *analytical* approach to external affairs. This concept suggests that a foreign policy serves the nation. It discovers the ends of prudent action in the country's historic traditions, its geographical location, its security requirements, and the economic, social, and political welfare of its citizens. These, taken together, create the national interests which foreign policy seeks to defend. But only for the omnipotent are ambitions synonymous with achievement. For this reason national leaders must distinguish between the essential interests of the nation, upon which hinge its security and welfare, and demands of secondary importance which are always questions for negotiation and compromise. The primary task of leadership consists, then, in determining the hierarchy of the country's interests, measured always against the traditional interests and calculated strength of other states. Diplomacy and power, according to this approach to foreign affairs, serve as the necessary and only means

available for defending a nation's interests abroad in a world of everlasting conflict and change.

Those who believe that the United States must and can do more have accepted a competing approach to foreign policy—the *ideological*. This school of thought views external affairs largely in philosophical and psychological terms. Measured by this standard, foreign policies reflect, not a nation's hierarchy of interests, but rather its prevailing political, social, and religious beliefs. Diplomacy thus becomes one function of a political system; it serves an idea, not a nation. It looks beyond nations to individuals, not to the multistate system in which all nations are suspended, but to the world community and the people who compose it. Its accent is less on specific questions than on the common interests of mankind—peace, freedom, justice, and self-government. This school of thought seeks, not to understand and control the use of power with countering power, but to eliminate it from world affairs completely. It reflects, therefore, a deep faith in reason and progress, and anticipates in every crisis the creation of a peaceful and stable world order, based on liberty and justice, beyond the elimination of any enemy of the moment.

Although such notions as these have been shared by few people in history, their origin and strength in America are not difficult to discover. They rest in the American concept of mission—a conviction that the United States, as the most fortunate and blessed of nations in both its democratic institutions and its amazing productivity, carries a responsibility to extend its beneficence to other, less fortunate peoples of the globe. These ideas, at least superficially, find their rationale in the American Declaration of Independence, for this document assumes a sort of international rationality and abhors oppression and all irrational uses of power. It proclaims notions basic to American nationhood—freedom, justice, equality, and harmony of interest.

Thomas Paine, the author of *Common Sense* which rationalized the concept of independence, had no interest in the use of force. Once the tie had been broken with England, he was convinced, the United States would enjoy universal friendship. Security would reside in American detachment from world politics; power was not to be sought or husbanded.

From the Declaration of Independence, with its high idealism, stemmed the American sense of mission. If all men are born free and equal under natural law, then why should not the United States, having engrafted such assumptions to its national life, accept the obligation to extend them to other nations? With time this sense of mission would cause some Americans to identify the national interest

of the United States with the cause of freedom everywhere and to insist that this republic underwrite every revolution abroad.

Yet from the beginning those who would, on the one hand, deny the efficacy of power in international affairs and, on the other, accept the obligation to reforge human society faced the thought encompassed by the American Constitution. This document proclaimed no universals, no language of world mission. The Constitution was built on the concept of power, and so Alexander Hamilton viewed it in *The Federalist*. For Hamilton the United States existed in a world of conflict in which nations had no choice but to define and protect their interests by wielding what he termed "the engines of coercion." Standing among the earth's powers meant that the United States enter into relations with them on their terms.

Hamilton, as Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, soon had occasion to reinforce his concepts of the national interest. When France and England went to war in 1793 the nation divided immediately between those who favored a pro-French involvement on the side of France and those who preferred a pro-British policy of official neutrality. President Washington submitted a circular to his cabinet for advice. Jefferson, as Secretary of State, argued that the United States was obligated by its alliance treaty to support France. Hamilton retorted that the United States had no obligation to support the French revolutionary government. When Washington's proclamation of official neutrality provoked the condemnation of the powerful pro-French elements in the country, Hamilton rushed to the defense of the administration with his famous "Pacificus" papers. In this classic statement of national policy in external affairs Hamilton wrote:

[T]he rule of morality . . . is not precisely the same between nations as between individuals. The duty of making its own welfare the guide of its actions, is much stronger upon the former than upon the latter; in proportion to the greater magnitude and importance of national compared with individual happiness, and to the greater permanency of the effects of national than of individual conduct. Existing millions, and for the most part future generations, are concerned in the present measures of a government; while the consequences of the private actions of an individual ordinarily terminate with himself, or are circumscribed with a narrow compass.

Whence it follows that an individual may, on numerous occasions, meritoriously indulge the emotions of generosity and benevolence, not only without an eye to, but even at the expense of, his own interest. But a government can rarely, if at all, be justifiable in pursuing a similar course; and, if it does so, ought to confine itself within much stricter bounds. Good offices which are indifferent to the interest of a nation performing them, or which are compensated by the existence or expectation of some reasonable equivalent, or which produce an essential good to the nation to which they are rendered, without real

detriment to the affairs of the benefactors, prescribe perhaps the limits of national generosity or benevolence.

Washington and Hamilton established the principles which guided the nation's behavior during the first century of its history. "In every act of my administration," Washington wrote in 1795, "I have sought the happiness of my fellow citizens. My system for the attainment of this object has uniformly been to overlook all personal, local, and partial considerations; to contemplate the United States as one great whole . . . and to consult only the substantial and permanent interest of our country." He warned the nation to aspire to no more than this, declaring that "it is a maxim, founded on the universal experience of mankind, that no nation is to be trusted further than it is bound by its interest; and no prudent statesman or politician will venture to depart from it." Regarding as dangerous the intrusion of morality and ideology into affairs among nations, the Federalists committed the United States to a genuinely flexible, amoral world view, which would maximize the country's freedom to pursue its own requirements. Washington again warned the Republic in his Farewell Address: "The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest."

Washington's Farewell Address, despite its intrinsic brilliance, did not settle the nature of American foreign policy. The sense of obligation was already too deeply entrenched. Between the two poles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution the dialogue continued, but until the end of the nineteenth century it was limited to theory and sentiment, not policy. Even those American idealists who on occasion acknowledged the potential contribution which American civilization might make to human society thought less of involvement in revolutions abroad than of the creation of a society in America that might be worthy of emulation. For such noted leaders as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Henry Clay, and Abraham Lincoln the United States was never more than an example setter for the world.

In actuality all basic American foreign policy in the nineteenth century was preoccupied with finite goals which served the national interest. When revolutions in Europe or Latin America raised the appeal at home and abroad that the United States pursue the cause of liberty, conservative Americans denied with equal vigor that the United States carried any special load of responsibility for the victims of repression. Without exception, those who prior to 1898 demanded American involvement abroad in behalf of liberty were not in posi-

tions of power or responsibility. Never did they succeed in framing policies which might achieve their alleged purposes abroad.

During the great revolutions of 1848 American idealism seemed to burn with unusual brightness. In Congress the noted Jacksonian, Lewis Cass of Michigan, claimed for the United States the obligation to underwrite the cause of liberty in Europe. On one occasion he declared:

While we disclaim any crusading spirit against the political institutions of other countries, we may well regard with deep interest the struggling efforts of the oppressed throughout the world, and deplore their defeat, and rejoice in their success. And can any one doubt, that the evidences of sympathy which are borne to Europe from this great Republic will cheer the hearts, even when they do not aid the purposes, of the downtrodden masses, to raise themselves, if not to power, at least to protection?

Cass would involve the American people emotionally in the revolutionary struggles of Europe, but questions of policy he ignored entirely. When in the campaign of 1852 one Democratic faction devised the "Young America" movement to exploit whatever sentiment the faltering revolutions of Europe had excited among the American people, Cass again took the lead. That year he told one New York audience:

I do not advocate going to war . . . but the time is coming when the voice of this nation will be potential throughout the world. I trust the time will soon come when not a hostile drum shall roll, and not a hostile cannon be fired, throughout the world, if we say, "Your cause is not a just and right one."

European liberals eventually discovered to their disillusionment that Young America was always aimed more at the German vote of the Middle West than at the success of European revolution, and it was the movement's total unconcern with the formulation of policy which might achieve its purposes that exposed it to the ridicule of American conservatives.

Without question the real break in the history of American foreign policy came in 1898 when President William McKinley defended the annexation of the Philippines in humanitarian terms. If Americans in previous decades had sought to affix American foreign policy to sentiment, it was McKinley who, as President of the United States, brought such notions to the center of the policy-making process. During his speaking tour of the Midwest in October 1898, to test the nation's support for annexation, McKinley dwelt only on the theme of the country's responsibility to the Filipinos. His remarks at Columbus, Ohio, were typical: "We know what our country is now in its territory, but we do not know what it may be in the near future.

But whatever it is, whatever obligation shall justly come from this humanity, we must take up and perform, and as free, strong, brave people, accept the trust which civilization puts upon us." The President simply refused to dwell on the burdens of empire at all. McKinley's final decision to annex the islands was rationalized, like the Spanish American War itself, with appeals to sentiment. There was nothing left to do, he explained to a group of visiting clergymen, "but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellowmen for whom Christ also died. . . ."

In destroying the nation's historic political isolation from the Eastern Hemisphere, all in the name of humanitarianism, McKinley divorced the foreign policies of the United States from their established course. The country thus deserted, in the process of acquiring the Philippine Islands, those principles of statecraft which had guided it through its first century of independence. The splendid victory over the Spanish fleet at Manila merely obscured the magnitude of the departure.

Yet the expansion of the American commitment to the *status quo* in the western Pacific was only beginning. At the turn of the century the McKinley administration announced the famous Open Door Policy for China, establishing in the process an American interest in the economic and territorial integrity of a vast, amorphous nation located in a region of Asia where other nations—especially Japan and Russia—possessed greater power and greater interests than did the United States. Again this vast commitment was undertaken thoughtlessly in the name of humanitarianism, reflecting a strange sense of obligation—one which the American people could never escape—toward the downtrodden Chinese.

This trend toward overcommitment in the Far East met the determined opposition of those realists who recognized the immensity of the nation's rejection of its deepest diplomatic traditions. Early in his second term as president, Theodore Roosevelt expressed a fundamental criticism of the new direction of American foreign policy in a letter to the noted British historian, George Trevelyan:

I wonder if you will agree with me when I say that it seems to me that the England of Palmerston and Russell, like the United States today, is too apt to indulge in representations on behalf of weak peoples which do them no good and irritate the strong and tyrannical peoples to whom the protest is made. It seems to me that the protest on behalf of the Poles to Russia in '63, and the protest on behalf of the Danes to Germany about the same time, were harmful rather than beneficial. Out in the west we always used to consider it a cardinal crime to draw a revolver and brandish it about unless the man

meant to shoot. And it is apt to turn out sheer cruelty to encourage men by words and then not back up the words by deeds.

Ignoring the entire intellectual tradition of the Founding Fathers, Woodrow Wilson, following the outbreak of the war in July 1914, identified America's role in world affairs with the creation of a rational, peaceful international system. At the core of Wilson's thought was the conviction that the nation's political, social, and moral uniqueness had assigned to it a transcendent mission to serve humanity. America had been born, said Wilson, that men might be free. His exhortation to the nation on Independence Day, 1914, was characteristic: "America has lifted high the light which will shine unto all generations and guide the feet of mankind to the goal of justice, and liberty, and peace."

As the struggle after 1914 moved from trench to trench along the Western front, Wilson informed the American people that Europe beckoned, not for material aid, but for leadership in creating a better world. "Why is it that all nations turn to us with the instinctive feeling that if anything touches humanity it touches us?" he asked; then he answered his own question: "Because it knows that ever since we were born as a Nation we have undertaken to be the champions of humanity and the rights of men." Even in war, he said, the United States would struggle only for the rights of mankind. Thus Wilson could address a Chicago audience in January 1916: "America has no reason for being unless her destiny and her duty be ideal. It is her incumbent privilege to declare and stand for the rights of men. Nothing less is worth fighting for."

Eventually Wilson, in his effort to establish the intellectual bases of a new world order, warred on every vestige of the established international system. For him the special villains which kept the world at war were secret diplomacy, the balance of power, and the concept of national interest. His continued search for alternatives to these accouterments of power politics upon which to build the foundations of peace culminated in his message to the Senate of January 22, 1917. Future peace, Wilson declared, must be secured, not by the warring nations alone, but by the organized force of mankind. Having assigned to the silent masses of the world the power and the right to control world affairs, he committed the United States to the support of a new postwar organization which would carry out the universal interest of mankind in sustaining the peace. It was essential, therefore, that the European war be fought to achieve "a just and secure peace" and not "a new balance of power. . . . There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace."

Wilson's crusade for humanity reached its ultimate grandeur in his speech at San Diego, in September 1919, during his Western tour in behalf of the League of Nations:

We went into this war not only to see that autocratic power of that sort never threatened the world again but we went into it for even larger purposes than that. Other autocratic powers may spring up, but there is only one soil in which they can spring up, and that is the wrongs done to free peoples of the world. The heart and center of this treaty is that it sets at liberty people all over Europe and in Asia who had hitherto been enslaved by powers which were not their rightful sovereigns and masters. So long as wrongs of that sort exist in the world, you cannot bring permanent peace to the world. I go further than that. So long as wrongs of that sort exist, you ought not to bring permanent peace to the world, because those wrongs ought to be righted, and enslaved peoples ought to be free to right them. For my part, I will not take any part in composing difficulties that ought not to be composed, and a difficulty between an enslaved people and its autocratic rulers ought not to be composed. We in America have stood from the day of our birth for the emancipation of people throughout the world who were living unwillingly under governments which were not of their own choice.

Despite the emotional appeal of Wilson's charge to America—that it dare not rest in its conduct of foreign policy until all men were freed—the President simply defied all the assumptions regarding external behavior shared by the nation's responsible leadership from Washington to Cleveland.

Since Wilson's day the world has witnessed a variety of revolutions which have had a profound bearing on international relationships. The Soviet Union and mainland China have evolved into significant power centers and have vastly altered the traditional European-dominated balance of power. The emergence of new weapons has intensified the tendencies toward bipolarism in world politics by concentrating destructiveness in the hands of two nations, the United States and the U.S.S.R. The revolutionary upheaval of Asia and Africa has brought dozens of new states into being and thereby decreased the prestige if not the power of the old imperial nations of Europe. Lastly, the revolution in communications renders every world problem a matter of instantaneous concern everywhere and goads governments into statements and decisions ahead of their ability to comprehend. These vast changes have narrowed the margin for error, have increased the price of thoughtlessness, and have decreased the capacity of the once-great powers to manage the international system.

These vast changes, which should dictate caution in essaying the goals of national action abroad, have actually intensified the American

dialogue concerning this nation's proper role in world affairs. No longer, moreover, is the dialogue academic as in former times. Since the days of Wilson it has been related to hard choices and real events. National goals defined in terms of world mission and the deep-seated expectation of unity and harmony as the genuine norms in international affairs still arouse the expectations of Americans in the face of obdurate realities. Never before, it appears, has the national outlook been so thoroughly conditioned by the themes of the Declaration of Independence. Never has the American sense of mission been so limitless. In recent years all American actions have been justified in terms of the universal principles of justice and freedom.

Again the reason for this response to conditions abroad is clear enough. The enemy is communism, and because communism looms as a special antagonist and danger to values which lie deep in the American heritage, the war on it partakes of two objectives. The first is security against the enormous physical power of the Communist nations; the second is the freedom of those who live under the Communist system under the assumption that if the system is evil incarnate no one living under it (except the rulers) can be anything less than oppressed. The first objective has dictated and sustained the fundamental American policy of containment; the second, under the guidance of John Foster Dulles, encouraged the policy of liberation—of bringing freedom to the hundreds of millions of people residing behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains.

Indeed, much of the anticommunism in American policy since 1945 finds its clearest expression in the Atlantic Charter with its four freedoms—all of them universal. It is this dual purpose in American cold war policy, one aimed at the limited goal of security and the other devoted to the universal goal of freedom and justice, that has required the conduct of national action at two levels. At the level of day-to-day decisions the United States has sought and achieved, at least in Europe, the stabilization of the lines of demarcation which separate the Western from the Soviet world. At the level of rhetoric, if not of policy, the United States has pursued a variety of objectives which conform to the principle of self-determination. For many this rhetoric is the means of justifying the policy undertakings to themselves, not simply a way of making them more palatable to their followers.

Whatever the universals proclaimed by national leaders, the actual policies of the United States in the twentieth century have sought to maintain as much as possible the *status quo* that existed at the turn of the century when the United States enjoyed almost absolute security at little cost to itself. It is well to recall that Wilson at Versailles

applied the doctrine of self-determination of peoples only to the defeated powers, not the victors, of World War I. The British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and American empires emerged from the war untouched. It was the supreme historical accident that Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey were the defeated nations which permitted the triumph of self-determination in much of Eastern Europe. Ironically, self-determination, the ultimate expression of Wilsonian idealism, was the device which was employed at Versailles to weaken the power and influence of those nations which had threatened the balance of power as it existed in the opening years of the century.

Similarly, few Americans in the era of the cold war have sought to apply the doctrines of self-determination, with their emphasis on freedom and justice, to the weaknesses in human society which exist everywhere, but rather to specific repression which exists behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains. Again, the national sense of obligation has been directed less at the creation of a world-wide utopia than at the undoing of those powers which again have threatened the balance of world politics as it existed at the turn of the century and continued, at least superficially, until 1939. Thus, beginning with Wilson the American sense of mission has been aimed less at humankind than at the efforts of Germany and Japan, Russia and China, to alter the structure of international politics as it existed two long generations ago. In general the effort has failed. The Wilsonian appeal to peaceful change could not prevent the destruction of that secure world of the thirties; the postwar appeal to the Atlantic Charter has failed to bring back that lost world in which Germany, Japan, Russia, and China seemed to know their proper place in the world-wide hierarchy of power.

What, then, is the United States obligated to do by its history, its traditions, its interests? This cannot be answered without reference to a second question: What is the United States capable of doing? On one point the record is clear. The United States cannot do everything. It cannot create a world of universal freedom and justice, for such a world is far beyond human attainment. Its inaccessibility lies in human nature itself. Perhaps no American recognized the limits of national action more dramatically than did the conservative Yale sociologist, William Graham Sumner, when in 1899 he wrote in opposition to the acquisition of the Philippines:

There are some things that America cannot do. Americans cannot make $2 + 2 = 5$. You may answer that that is an arithmetical impossibility and is not in the range of our subject. Very well; Americans cannot collect two dollars a gallon tax on whisky. They tried it for many years and failed. That is an economic or political impossibility, the roots of which are in human nature. . . . So far as yet appears,

Americans cannot govern a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants so as to get comfort and convenience in it at a low cost and without jobbery. The fire department of this city is now demoralized by political jobbery—and Spain and all her possessions are not worth as much to you and me as the efficiency of the fire department of New Haven. The Americans in Connecticut cannot abolish the rotten borough system. . . . Americans cannot reform the pension list. Its abuses are rooted in the methods of democratic self-government, and no one dares to touch them. . . . Americans cannot disentangle their currency from the confusion into which it was thrown by the Civil War, and they cannot put it on a simple, sure, and sound basis which would give stability to the business of the country. This is a political impossibility. Americans cannot assure the suffrage to negroes throughout the United States; they have tried it for thirty years and now, contemporaneously with this war with Spain, it is finally demonstrated that it is a failure. . . . Worse still, Americans cannot assure life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to negroes inside of the United States. . . . The laws of nature and of human nature are just as valid for Americans as for anybody else, and if we commit acts we shall have to take consequences, just like other people. Therefore prudence demands that we look ahead to see what we are about to do, and that we gauge the means at our disposal, if we do not want to bring calamity on ourselves and our children.

Those who would cite Lincoln's famous words to warn Americans that the world cannot exist half slave and half free—that it must be all one or all the other—might recall that it has always been so. In fact, such an approach to world affairs reveals a total lack of appreciation for the vast complexities in human society. Whether the world is indeed half slave and half free is not clear. That portion of it which Americans choose to call free is no political, economic, and social utopia. Within the United States itself are enough unsolved problems to tax the nation's energy and intelligence for a century. Many governments allied to the United States are little but military dictatorships; not all political infringements on human liberty exist behind the Iron Curtain. That portion of the world which American idealists insist must be freed is not, by Western standards, a region of general attractiveness. Yet the deep human dilemmas with which its governments must deal are not the simple products of tyrannical or misguided leadership. Those problems have existed in one form or another for centuries; they lie deep in political traditions and unyielding physical environments. The power of the United States to create a utopia on either side of the Iron and Bamboo curtains is vastly limited, and this fact eliminates, in large measure, the nation's obligation to humanity. *No nation is obligated to do what it cannot do.*

No nation, whatever its power or ambition, has really ever succeeded in serving much more than its own interests. Washington's Farewell Address remains the only effective guide to national action.

Nor is any other required, for if the United States, as a satiated nation, serves its own enlightened interests, it can and will, in the words of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, defend the frontiers of freedom—those areas of vital concern to the United States in matters of national security and public welfare.

Most lines of demarcation have been well established through tradition if not through diplomatic settlement; few can be tampered with without setting off a war. The United States has coexisted with the Kremlin, the Peiping regime, and the satellite empire for over a decade—a decade of unprecedented material progress and almost untrammelled freedom. The nation has demonstrated its capacity to maintain the *status quo* where it seems essential; it has not demonstrated any power to alter it appreciably. The West, it seems, can have what it needs; it cannot have much more.

Thus the major unanswered challenges to America will lie in the gray areas of Asia and Africa where stability remains an illusive commodity. But if the West cannot have its way in the face of nationalism, communism, political chaos, or civil war in the turbulent subcontinents, quite clearly neither the Soviets nor the Chinese will exert any greater long-term influence short of actual conquest. Nationalism, indigenous and lacking any fundamental ideology, remains the driving force that will determine the course of Asian politics. Any external efforts to manage the development of Asia or Africa is doomed to failure.

This explains why the question of Asia's future has produced so much embarrassment for American policy. Nor is the end in sight. The dilemma is easily defined and is not unlike that which has faced the American people on other fronts and at other times in their history. It is simply that of finding some meaningful relationship between the policy objective—in this case the political stability of a vast and complex region—and the price which they are willing to pay for that stability, if indeed it is within the reach of American activity at all. Southeast Asia is too distant, the American strategic capabilities too encompassed by problems of population, terrain, and the absence of good military targets to permit any easy or definitive military or political solutions to the chaotic tendencies unleashed by the disintegration of the British, French, and Dutch empires in the Orient after 1945. Asia will be controlled by Asians. The price of defying this rule is apparent in the collapse and ultimate failure of almost every regime in Asia or the Middle East which has received the full moral and physical support of the United States. No government which is so narrowly based as to require such military backing has much chance of survival anyway.

What forces the United States into this persistent pattern of defying its own best political judgment is its self-imposed obligation to defend all of Asia against the expansion of Communist power. The tendency to see the spectre of Moscow or Peiping behind every uprising has had the dual effect of committing the United States heavily to the *status quo* in Asia and at the same time isolating it from its allies. All nations allied to the United States agree in the abstract that Communist aggression must be prevented; they simply cannot agree on its nature or on the time and place where aggression must be stopped. All countries of the world, in fact, are dedicated to the prevention of Communist aggression—and none more so than the Soviet Union itself, for no nation, whatever its strength or ideology, would willingly permit another to invade its borders or challenge its integrity. But under the oft-declared assumption that it is American policy alone that guarantees the freedom and independence of the Asian nations, the United States has tended to operate through any established regime which claims to be anti-Communist. This general policy has tended to polarize the political structure of such nations receiving American aid. The result has been civil war and the overthrow of the government or governments supported by American aid.

Fulfilling one's obligations to humanity in a region of economic backwardness and political turmoil is difficult indeed. The United States has not satisfied those nations and leaders whose demands and ambitions have required some alteration of the *status quo*, for American policies in Asia as well as Europe are based on containment, not liberation. Containment has contributed little to the unification of Korea or Germany. But inasmuch as the bulk of the world's population favors stability to change, it has lauded the efforts of the United States to define and defend the lines of demarcation, for these decisions have accounted in large measure for the postwar stabilization of world politics.

The nation's continuing problem is not unlike that which faced the first administration of George Washington. It is the unresolved question of national obligation toward the external world. The ubiquitous rhetoric of mission, because it is never attached to actual policies, misleads friends and enemies and elevates the expectations of the American people. It commits the country to what it cannot achieve and thus exposes the government, even when it defends the nation's interests with success, to charges that it has not done well enough. Having established goals that are unachievable, critics of the nation's limited policies are free to condemn the government for not achieving the successes demanded. This gap between what is held to be possible and what is actually possible creates a limitless field for partisanship.

In part it is the refusal of Washington officials to establish and maintain before the American public the concept of limited power and national interest that exposes the actions of government to endless review. Too often leaders fail not only to acknowledge the fact that national action abroad must of necessity be limited to the nation's legitimate interests but also to demonstrate that such behavior has comprised the essence of statesmanship throughout the ages. What has perpetuated the great debate over America's proper role in human betterment and has persistently caused the country to ask too much of itself has been, in large measure, the failure of leadership to play its educational role.

Many unrecognized arrangements in the world defy the principle of self-determination. No American takes any pleasure in their existence. If the primary obligation of any people must be to themselves, the United States means no harm to others, and if it possesses the wealth and determination to engage in policies of foreign aid, to sustain the Alliance for Progress, to dispatch a Peace Corps to the four corners of the world, so much the better. Even to Hamilton national interest was not to be identified with selfishness. But foreign aid, despite its humanitarian objects, must not be confused with any Wilsonian crusade for humanity, for foreign aid is a limited program which lies well within the capabilities of the United States.

Finally, the overriding American obligation must be to world peace and international stability, for only in that context can the interest of both the United States and the vast bulk of the world's population be satisfied. And to the extent that the nation's considerable physical power has contributed to that stability the fundamental and limited policies of the United States, if not always the rhetoric of its leaders, have served the country well.