PART TWO

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The Vietnam War as a Guide to Future American Policy in Asia

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Abstract: There is a long list of arguments that the American government and media use to justify the position of American militarism and intervention in Vietnam. They range from the necessity for containment of China to upholding the integrity of SEATO, and even to upholding the credibility of American commitments. Similarly there are three very contrasting interpretations on the status American involvement in the Vietnam War. These three interpretations are that the Vietnam War has been a success, an immeasurable failure, or a qualified failure. The latter of these arguments includes the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which outlines three guidelines for future American involvement in Asia so that the mistakes that were made in American policy with regard to Vietnam would be prevented in the future. However, this article proposes a fourth interpretation of the Vietnam War. This interpretation does not comment on the relative success or failure of the United States in the Vietnam War, because it argues instead that American involvement in Vietnam is wholly unjustified. This fourth position opposes American militarism in Vietnam on political and moral grounds, and argues that a position of non-intervention would follow better with historic trends in Asia as well as American traditional values of self-determination.

Since 1950 five American presidents have supported a series of policies designed to maintain a pro-West, anti-Communist government in control of South Vietnam. The persistence of such policies exhibits remarkable continuity, given the great difficulties encountered in pursuing this objective. There have been many efforts to explain the origins and durability of this American commitment. None has proved entirely satisfactory. It seems clear that the impetus for the policy had at least three principal foundations:

- The containment of the world Communist movement;
- The more specific containment of mainland China;
- The containment of revolutionary nationalism.

But such goals can be pursued in a variety of ways, and it remains unclear why over the years the United States was prepared to make such immense sacrifices in blood and treasure and prestige for such negligible, and at best, illusive returns.

On a higher level of abstraction there was the recollection that policies of appeasement - what might be the “lesson of Munich” - had not prevented World War II. Prominent American policy-makers in the period during which the buildup of a military commitment to defend the Saigon regime was made seemed to accept as wisdom the idea that the international Communist movement was monolithic and committed to world conquest and that the choice was between “standing up to aggression” and provoking World War III. Such a notion of “containment” or “holding the line,” arising out or reaction to Stalinism and persisting into the 1960’s, long after the death of Stalin, and the evidence of a deep Sino-Soviet split, was accompanied by an image
of “falling dominoes,” that is, if South Vietnam falls to Communism, then the rest of Indochina, then Thailand, then the Malay peninsula would also fall in almost inevitable succession. Therefore, although the stakes in Vietnam, if taken in isolation might appear small and remote, a large commitment was nevertheless justified it has been argued, because of these larger concerns—namely, the geo-political stability of South Asia and the implementation of the world-order prohibition against a Communist aggressor as a precedent.

Such reasoning is abstract and ideological, and does not fit too well the concrete facts of conflict in Asia, and especially not in Vietnam. When the original economic commitment to the French was made in 1950 the struggle for Indochina was a typical anti-colonial war of independence of the sort that developed in Asia and Africa after World War II. True, the leadership of the Vietnamese independence movement has a Communist background and might be suspected of bringing a liberated Indochina within the Communist orbit of influence. But true also, the pro-colonial Vietnamese were politically isolated in their own country and without any capacity to govern effectively or humanely; as a result the anti-colonial movement in Vietnam developed into a broad united front effort that by the end of the first Indochina War in 1954 had attracted support from many non-Communist elements in the population and Ho Chi Minh had emerged as a national leader of immense stature, commanding respect and allegiance from all segments of Vietnamese society.

In subsequent years the United States involvement—shaped and facilitated by the divided-zone solution adopted at the Geneva Conference of 1954—deepened and became increasingly associated with the techniques of counter-insurgency warfare. The American objective since 1954 has remained constant: a non-Communist South Vietnam as a permanent sovereign state.

Since the Nixon presidency, the tactics of American involvement have emphasized the replacement of American combat forces by Vietnamese combat forces—so-called “Vietnamization”—reinforced by fantastic levels of air support and accompanied by the spread of the zone of violence to Cambodia and the intensification of the America military involvement in Laos. The Vietnam War remains unresolved as of late 1970, negotiations in Paris are stalled on two issues:

- Refusal by the American government to make a commitment to total withdrawal by a definite time;
- An American unwillingness to accept a provisional government for South Vietnam that represents a fair coalition of contending forces.

American support for these principles would probably lead rapidly to peace in South Vietnam and to the likely emergence of a government in Saigon that was neutralist in foreign policy and reformist in domestic affairs, in other words, to an ideological compromise between the goals of the United States and of the National Liberation Front. As well, reunification of Vietnam would be put off for a number of years and the longer-term future of South Vietnam would be allowed to reflect internal forces of national self-determination. The balance of these internal forces would and should lead during a period of several years to the emergence of a pro-NLF government, but one that governed by coalition politics and was quite autonomous in dealing with North Vietnam.
On the basis of the background it seems possible to speculate about what lessons American policy-makers have learned from the long and anguished experience of the Vietnam involvement. Future American policy toward Asia is likely to be guided by which of several interpretations of the Vietnamese experience proves dominant. Already much attention has been given in American intellectual circles to the question “beyond Vietnam” and there are a variety of strenuous efforts being made to present the most influential statement of guidelines for the future. An examination of this debate seems especially important as all of the positions being seriously considered carry forward into the future the mistakes of policy and perspective that prompted the Vietnam involvement.

Before discussing these lines of interpretation, it is necessary to take account of a major caveat in relation to the analysis. Both the debate on “the lessons of Vietnam” and my analysis of it proceed on the assumption that there is a good faith connection between the course of governmental policy and the persuasiveness of alternative lines of argument. With respect to matters bearing on both interventionary diplomacy and national security planning, I have become increasingly skeptical about this connection.¹ In my judgment, the debate may even function to obscure the real bases of national policy and operate as a mystification; that is, the explication of a rationale serves to confuse and distract public opinion rather that to enlighten it. Anyone who has followed closely the evolving annual American debate on the deployment of an ABM system has seen that the rationale is expendable, but the policy is not. As I have already indicated, the American involvement in the Vietnam War has seemed to have the same quality.

Such a hypothesis is implausible without some fuller explanation of why the real bases of policy must remain obscure and tend to be excluded from explicit mention. This is a complicated question that can only be superficially discussed in this setting. It would appear that policy-makers are carrying out a set of policies that contradict popularly held attitudes about why America uses military power in foreign affairs. These attitudes center around a self-righteous conception that whereas other governments have interests, the United States only has responsibilities.² As a result it is an unwritten rule that no responsible defense or criticism of U.S. foreign policy positions takes account of self-interested economic motivations and pressures. Only radicals of the right or left, by definition outside the policy-making elite, give some attention to issues of economic self-interest or, as the left puts it, the dynamics of economic imperialism.³

Similarly, it is not considered reasonable to attribute foreign policy positions to the pressures or momentum of domestic political forces. Yet, in the Vietnam setting there is considerable evidence of a bureaucratic momentum that carried forward the policies independent of any rational assessment of their merit. The extent to which the government is itself an unwitting (and perhaps unknowing) captive of the military-industrial complex is part of the problem that is almost always excluded from “responsible” discussions on the future of American policy in Asia. The relevance of the bureaucratization and militarization of American national security policy planning efforts are treated like intellectual ghosts.

Such matters must be kept in mind. The influence of these economic and governmental forces on policy-making may very well be decisive in the years ahead. If so, the dialectics of intellectual debate are misleading as the outcome of the debate depends on considerations other than degrees of evidence and persuasiveness. Indeed the actual situation may be the reverse—namely, that argument will be appropriated that seems best calculated to uphold a pre-selected policy. Surely during the Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon period of Vietnam involvement, the official search has been for a plausible defense of the interventionary policy rather than for an assessment of its plausibility. Thus, the various lines of explanation relating to deterring wars of national liberation, containing China, upholding the SEATO commitment, avoiding a bloodbath in South Vietnam, insisting that no solution may be imposed on South Vietnam, protecting the honor of the United States, upholding the credibility of its commitments, and so have been relied upon, dropped, revived with no particular qualms so long as the rationale of the moment seemed to develop the best case—given the present context of the war and the criticism of it—for maintaining the policy.

Thus the policy debate is a puppet show of sorts and it may be dangerous to challenge it on its own grounds, because it tends to lend credence to the seriousness of the overall inquiry by acting as if evidence and reasoning are likely to shape future American policy in Asia. Nevertheless, it seems important to explicate the debate, demonstrate why the contending positions are inadequate, and why a position so far excluded from serious attention provides a better guideline for future American policy in Asia. Several kinds of uncertainties could influence the course and explanation of American policy in Asia. These uncertainties may in the end make the present debate seem very time-bound.

1) The way in which the Vietnam War will end remains obscure; thus, it is unclear whether the outcome of the war will be generally understood as an American victory, a stalemate or compromise, an NLF victory, or indeed whether there will be any American consensus at all. The actualities of the domestic balance of forces in Vietnam make it already clear that the NLF and North Vietnam have scored an extraordinary success against overwhelming odds, although at a very high cost to themselves in death and destruction. But it remains impossible to tell whether the war will eventually end because the Saigon regime collapses, because domestic dissent in America causes a rapid and total withdrawal, or conversely, because the U.S. launches some kind of desperate reescalation, or even because changes in the political climate induce a negotiated compromise at Paris. Future American policy in Asia will depend heavily on how the final outcome in Vietnam is actually perceived by policy-makers.

2) The presentation of American foreign policy during the 1970’s will depend heavily on the domestic and foreign stances of a number of key countries, especially Japan, China, the Soviet Union, and India. Whether Japan turns out to be a partner or a rival of the United States remains in some doubt. There are already indications that Japan’s continuing economic growth is beginning to hurt the American economy, and some respected analysts expect a revival of fierce economic competition and even trade wars between the U.S. and Japan in the 1970’s. Similarly, whether the Soviet Union decides to remain largely aloof from Asian politics is likely to influence U.S. choices in very definite ways. Whether China remains preoccupied with domestic

4 I intend to develop this linkage between domestic political forces and the course of foreign policy in subsequent writing.
concerns, or reaches an accord with either the Soviet Union or the United States or both, or whether China engages in a avowedly expansionist foreign policy is likely to shape the U.S. response. Finally, whether India is reasonably successful with a moderate government and remains nonaligned is likely to be important. These kinds of uncertainties are accentuated by their interactive character—China’s response to Japan may influence the Soviet relationship to India, and so on. Also these uncertainties and complications will be effected by what goes on in other regions of the world. A revolutionary surge in Latin America or Soviet pressure in Europe or the Middle East may lead to an American withdrawal from Asia, especially if Japan assumes the American role as surety for the political status quo on the Asian rimland.

Even more important than these external contingencies, are the uncertainties of the future course of domestic politics in the United States. It now appears that domestic social and economic forces are likely to determine the overall orientation of American government, including its foreign policy. In other words, imperialists, isolationists, or world order advocates are likely to be swept into power by reference to issues of employment, inflation, campus unrest, crime control, and even pornography. The substance of foreign policy positions has little independent salience for the American voter at present. Such a situation may change, but that is not likely to be soon.

3) It is even more difficult to assess the consequences for American foreign policy of the increasing significance of ecological strains. Serious forms of environmental decay, population pressure, and resource shortages are almost certain to emerge as the decade proceeds. But it is not clear whether this deepening ecological crisis will lead to more moderate forms of political competition or will induce recourse to desperate political strategies by those governments under the greatest pressure from over-population, poverty, urban crowding, or mass unemployment. The recent upsurge of interest in environmental matters in the United States may lead in the years ahead to a lessening of national concern about maintaining influence in Asia and may even induce a partial reversion to isolationism, especially if the costs of maintaining clear air and clean water are mostly deducted from the defense budget rather than from the welfare budget. Although their impact cannot now be anticipated in any useful way, these three sets of uncertainties are of great political significance, and it is important to bear them in mind in order to underscore the speculative character of the argument and to encourage a willingness to revise one’s sense of the future when appropriate.

*The Three Lessons of Vietnam*

Despite these imponderables, three different interpretations dominate the Vietnam debate at the present time: that the war has been

Position 1: A Qualified Success;

Position 2: A Failure of Proportion;

Position 3: A Qualified Failure of Tactics.
Position 1—that the war has been a qualified success—is the view of most professional military men and the American Right. They see American involvement in Vietnam as a proper exercise of military power, but feel that the effort has been compromised by Presidential insistence on pursuing limited ends by limited means. They criticize Washington for seeking “settlement” rather than “victory,” and join the Left in condemning President Johnson for his failure to declare war on North Vietnam. They argue that the armed forces have had to fight the war with one hand tied behind their backs, pointing to the refusal to authorize bombing the dikes in North Vietnam, restrictions on targets in Hanoi and Haiphong, and the failure to impose a blockage on shipping to North Vietnam.

Even though victory has been sought by all means at our disposal, this view does not regard the Vietnam War as a failure. In a characteristic statement, Colonel William C. Moore of Bolling Air Force Base, writing in the *Air University Review*, argues “there is reason to believe that Ho Chi Minh would never have initiated action in Vietnam had he vaguely suspected that U.S. determination would escalate the war to its current magnitude. There is also reason to believe that this lesson has not been lost on other would-be aggressors.” Such an interpretation of the lesson of Vietnam relies on two assumptions: first, that the Vietnam War was similar to the Korean War in which the United States may also have shrunk back from the complete execution of its mission, but in which it at least displayed a willingness to defend a non-Communist society against attack by a Communist aggressor. According to Position 1, the Vietnam War is not a civil war, but a war of conquest by one country against another, and the NLF is a mere agent of Hanoi whose role is to pretend that the war is a civil war and thereby discourage an effective response in defense. Thus Position 1 accepts fully the image of the war develop during the Johnson Presidency by Rusk and Rostow. The implication for the future is that the United States is not about to be fooled into treating Communist-led insurrections any differently than outright Communist aggression against a friendly state.

The second assumption of Colonel Moore’s assessment of the Vietnam War has an even greater implication for the future because it purports to find in the experience of Vietnam a demonstration that deterrence works in the counter-insurgency setting as well as it has worked in the nuclear setting. In Colonel Moore’s words, “This willingness to escalate is the key to deterring future aggression at the lower end of the spectrum of war. This, I think, is why history will be kind to President Johnson and Secretary of State Rusk because if we continue to stand firm in Vietnam as they advocate, then the world will have made incalculable progress toward eliminating war as the curse of mankind.” Thus the key to the future is the American willingness to escalate the conflict to high levels of destructivity—so high, in fact, that no right-minded revolutionary would ever initiate a war if confronted by such a prospect. Position 1 is critical of Johnson’s war diplomacy only insofar as it failed to carry the logic of escalation to higher levels on the battlefield and at home.

This interpretation also claims that the American decision to fight in Vietnam gained time for other anti-Communist regimes in Asia to build up their capacities for internal security and national defense, assuming that the American effort in Vietnam created a shield that held back the flow of revolutionary forces across the continent of Asia. More extravagant exponents of this line of interpretation even contend, on the most slender evidence, that the Indonesian generals

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6 Ibid, p. 63.
would not have reacted so boldly and successfully to the Communist bid for power in Djakarta in October 1965, had not the American presence in Vietnam stiffened their resolve.

Advocates of Position 1 tend to admire the Dominican intervention of 1965, where massive force was used and results quickly achieved with little loss of life. The domestic furor over the Dominican intervention disappeared quickly, mainly as a consequence of its success and brevity. Sophisticated adherents to Position 1 admire the Soviet intervention of August 1968 in Czechoslovakia for similar reasons. This model of overwhelming capability (rather than the slow escalation of capability as in Vietnam) is likely to influence the doctrine and future proposals of those who favor interventional diplomacy.

The second position—that the war is a failure of proportion—is widely held among moderate and influential Americans, especially among civilians of a liberal cast of mind. They feel that the Vietnam War became a mistake at the time President Johnson decided to bomb North Vietnam and to introduce large numbers of American ground combat forces. Position 2 also, by and large, rejects the notion that war was caused by aggression of one state against another, but views Vietnam instead as an international civil war with both sides receiving considerable outside support. One of the most revealing formulations of this position is found in Townsend Hoopes’ book, *The Limits of Intervention*. Mr. Hoopes, who served in the Pentagon from January 1965 to February 1969, first as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and then as Under Secretary of the Air Force, explains the failure of Vietnam as a result of a loss of a sense of proportion by the men at the top. He builds a convincing insider’s case that Johnson and his principal advisers were locked into a rigid and ideological view of the war and hence were unable to moderate the objective to conform with the costs in blood, dollars, and domestic cohesion. Writing of the situation prevailing in Washington late in 1967, just a few months before Johnson’s withdrawal speech of March 31, 1968, Mr. Hoopes writes that “The incredible disparity between the outpouring of national blood and treasure and the intrinsic U.S. interests at stake in Vietnam was by this time widely understood and deplored at levels just below the top of the government. But the President and the tight group of advisers around him gave no sign of having achieved a sense of proportion.”

Such a view of the lesson of Vietnam had no quarrel with the effort to defend Saigon or to defeat the NLF, but urged that the effort be abandoned if it could not be made to succeed within a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost. Many members of government during the Kennedy period who originally supported America’s role in Vietnam came later to hold similar views, concluding either that the war was weakening our ability to uphold more significant interests in Europe and the Middle East, or that the disproportionate costs resulting from the Vietnam War deprived the country of the energies and resources that were desperately needed to solve America’s own domestic problems.

Former Ambassador Edwin Reischauer, a respected figure among liberal groups, has carried this kind of analysis to a more general level of interpretation: “The ‘central lesson’ of Vietnam—at least as the American public perceives it—is already quite obvious…the limited ability of the United States to control at a reasonable cost the course of events in a nationally-aroused less-developed nation…I believe,” Reischauer adds, “that we are moving away from the application to Asia of the ‘balance of power’ and ‘power vacuum’ concepts of the cold war, and the process we no doubt will greatly downgrade out strategic interests in most of the less-developed world.” According to Reischauer, the means used in Vietnam were disproportionate.

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to the end pursued, and, in general, a country like the United States cannot effectively use its military power to control the outcome of Vietnam-type struggles.

David Mozingo takes this argument one step further, recognizing the need for a perspective on Asia that is suited to the special historical and political conditions prevailing there, a perspective that might even suggest the end of a rigid policy of containment of China. “Since the Korean War,” he argues, “United States policy in Asia has been modeled after the containment doctrine so successfully applied in Europe after 1947…Washington has seen the problem of Chinese power in Asia in much the same light as that posed by Soviet power in Europe and has behaved as if both threats could be contained by basically the same kind of responses.”9 Professor Mozingo argues as follows on the essential difference between Asia and Europe: “In Asia, the containment doctrine has been applied in an area where a nation-state system is only beginning to emerge amidst unpredictable upheavals of a kind that characterized Europe three centuries earlier…The kinds of American technical and economic power that could help restore the historic vitality of the European system would seem at best to have only partial relevance to the Asian situation.”10 Such a view of the Vietnam experience supports a policy that emphasizes a much more specific, less abstract, appreciation of how to relate American economic, military, and political power to a series of particular struggles for control going on in various Asian countries.

Among the lessons drawn from Vietnam is the futility—perhaps worse than futility—of aiding a foreign regime that lacks the capacity to govern its society and the conclusion that certain types of intervention, if carried too far, help produce results that are the opposite of the goals of the intervenor. The American failure in Vietnam is partly laid to ignorance about Vietnamese realities and partly to exaggerated confidence in the ability of massive military intervention to fulfill political objectives. This is essentially the view of Stanley Hoffmann.11 Again, as with Hoopes, the search is for an effective foreign policy, combined here with a sense of proportion and an awareness of the inherent limits imposed on American policy. But like Colonel Moore’s interpretation, this liberal critique does not repudiate American objectives in Vietnam. The main guideline for the future, according to Professor Samuel Huntington who served as the head of Humphrey’s Vietnam task force during the 1968 Presidential campaign, is to keep Vietnam-type involvements in the future “reasonably limited, discreet, and covert.”12

The third and currently dominant interpretation of the Vietnam war—that it is a qualified failure of tactics—is the one favored by President Nixon and important foreign advisers such as Henry Kissinger, William Rogers, and Melvin Laird. The Nixon Doctrine, announced at Guam on July 25, 1969, is an explicit effort to avoid repeating the mistakes of Vietnam, as these leaders understand them, without renouncing the basic mission of American policy. The Nixon Administration is critical of the Vietnam effort to the extent that it believes the same ends could have been achieved at lesser cost in American blood and treasure, and, as a result, with less strain on American society. In his November 3, 1969 address on Vietnam, President Nixon explained the Nixon Doctrine as embodying “three principles as guidelines for future American policy toward Asia”:

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12 Ibid, p. 255.
First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments; Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security:

Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.\textsuperscript{13}

The “central thesis” of the doctrine, according to the President is “…that the United States will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but that America cannot—and will not—conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in our interest.”\textsuperscript{14} Thus the Nixon Doctrine backs a step away from the world order absolutism of Johnsonian diplomacy and instead advocates specific assessments of each potential interventionary situation in terms of its strategic importance to the United States and the ability of America to control the outcome.\textsuperscript{15} It is difficult, however, to extract much sense on concrete policy from the rhetoric of Nixon’s State of the World Message to Congress: “The fostering of self-reliance is the new purpose and direction of American involvement in Asia.”\textsuperscript{16}

In practical terms such a position remains ill-defined and midway between those of Colonel Moore and Mr. Hoopes: uphold all treaty commitments, give all allied regimes our help and advice, but get fully involved in a direct military way only when vital interests are at stake and when the military instrument can be used effectively, which means successfully, quickly, and without losing too many American lives. “Vietnamization” as one expression of the Nixon Doctrine, leaves the main burden of ground combat to Saigon’s armed forces, without any reduction in logistic support from the air via B-52 strikes and long-distance artillery support. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker is reported to have said that the policy of Vietnamization involves only changing the color of the bodies. Another expression of the Nixon Doctrine seems to be an escalation of American involvement in Laos, increasing our covert role in training and financing government forces and engaging in saturation bombing of contested areas, thereby causing a new flow of Asian refugees and thereby depriving the Pathet Lao of its population base.

These three positions identify the present boundaries of serious political debate in the United States. It is likely that the early seventies will witness a struggle for ascendancy between the advocates of the liberal view (Position 2) and the advocates of the Nixon Doctrine (Position 3). Extending the doctrine of deterrence to counterinsurgency situations (Position 1) could gain support if the political forces behind George Wallace and Barry Goldwater gained greater influence as “a third force” in American politics of significantly increased their already strong influence with the Agnew-Mitchell wing of the Nixon Administration.


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.


Position 1 accepts “victory” as the proper goal of the American involvement in Vietnam and regards the means used as appropriate to the end of defeating the insurgency in South Vietnam, whether that insurgency is viewed as a species of civil war or as an agency of North Vietnamese aggression. In contrast, Position 2 shifted away from victory as a goal and moved toward the advocacy of some kind of mutual withdrawal of foreign forces and toward some effort to reach a settlement by non-military means once it became evident that the means required for the more ambitious goal were so costly in lives, dollars, and domestic support. Position 3 specifies the goal of the involvement as obtaining conditions of self-determination of South Vietnam and its present governing regime, a position that seems to imply an outcome of the war that is close to total victory; however, there is a certain ambiguity as to whether the real goals are not more modest than the proclaimed goals. In any event, Position 3 regards the means used to have been unnecessarily costly, given the goals of the involvement, and accepts, at least in theory, the desirability of a non-military outcome through a negotiated settlement of the war.

Position 1 seems to interpret Vietnam as a qualified success and to favor, if anything, a less constrained military effort in the future to defeat any Communist-led insurgencies that may erupt on the Asian mainland in the 1970’s. As with the strategic doctrine, the deterrence of insurgent challenges rests on the possession of a credible capability and on a willingness to respond with overwhelming military force to any relevant challenge.

Position 2 is much less tied to an overall doctrine, views the post-Kennedy phases of the Vietnam involvement as a clear mistake, and argues for a much greater emphasis on non-military responses to insurgent challenges. This position also seeks to restrict overt intervention to situations in which its impact can be swift and effective. Position 2, therefore, depends on having a fairly secure regime in power in the country that is the scene of the struggle. It also emphasizes keeping a sense of proportion throughout such an involvement, either by way of a ceiling on the magnitude of the commitment or by way of a willingness to liquidate an unsuccessful commitment.

Position 3 is midway between the first two positions in tone and apparent emphasis. It develops a more globalist strategy, emphasizing that the U.S. has far-flung treaty relations with Asian countries and that it is important to the overall preeminence of the United States in world affairs and to the continuing need to resist Communist pressures everywhere in the world that these commitments be honored. The merits of the particular case are thus tied to a global strategy, but there is an effort to shift more of the burdens of response to the local government. What this means in those cases where the government cannot meet these burdens, as was surely the case in Vietnam all along, is very unclear. What happens under Position 3 when self-reliance fails? The prevailing response to this question may well determine the central line of American foreign policy in Asia throughout the 1970’s. Both Positions 2 and 3 look toward Japan as a more active partner in the development of a common Asian policy. President Nixon’s decision to return Okinawa to Japan by 1972 arises out of this hope for sharing the geopolitical burdens of the region with Japan in the mid- and late seventies.

What is most surprising about these three positions is the extent to which they accept the premises of an American counter-revolutionary posture toward political conflict in Asia. To be clear, however, this espousal of counterrevolutionary doctrine is applicable only in situations that appear to be revolutionary. Where there is no formidable radical challenge on the domestic scene, as in India or Japan, the American preference is clearly for moderate democracy, indeed the kind of political orientation that the United States imposed upon Japan during the military occupation after World War II. However, where an Asian society is beset by struggle between a
rightist incumbent regime and a leftist insurgent challenger, then American policy throws its support, sometimes strongly, to the counterrevolutionary side. As a result, there has been virtually no disposition to question the American decision to support the repressive and reactionary Saigon regime provided that support could have led to victory in Vietnam at a reasonable cost. In fact, the last four American presidents have been in agreement on the political wisdom of the decision to help Saigon prevail in its effort to create a strong anti-Communist state in South Vietnam, thereby defying both the military results of the first Indo-China War and the explicit provisions on the reunification of Vietnam embodied in the Geneva Accords of 1954. Positions 1 to 3 also share an acceptance, although to varying degrees, of the basic postulates of “the domino theory.” Position 2 is least inclined to endorse the image of falling dominoes, and some of its adherents (such as Donald Zagoria)\textsuperscript{17} indeed argue that the prospects for Communism need to be assessed on a country-by-country basis, and the success or failure of Communism in Vietnam or Laos will not necessarily have much impact upon the prospect for revolution in other Asian countries.

McGeorge Bundy, a belated convert to Position 2 (after an earlier allegiance to a moderate form of Position 1) gave up on the war because its burden was too great on American society. Nevertheless he took pains to reaffirm the wisdom of the original undertaking: “I remind you also, if you stand on the other side, that my argument against escalation and against an indefinite continuation of our present course has been based not on moral outrage or political hostility to the objective, but rather on the simple and practical ground that escalation will not work and that a continuation of our present course is unacceptable.”\textsuperscript{18} Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has said: “The tragedy of Vietnam is the tragedy of the overextension and misapplication of valid principles. The original insights of collective security and liberal evangelism were generous and wise.” Actually, adherents of Position 2, while sharply dissenting from the Vietnam policies of both Johnson and Nixon, still maintain the spirit of an earlier statement by McGeorge Bundy, made at a time when he was rallying support for Johnson’s air war against North Vietnam: “There are wild men in the wings, but on the main stage even the argument on Vietnam turns on tactics, not fundamentals.”\textsuperscript{19}

Unfortunately, from my perspective, these so-called wild men still remain in the wings, if anything further removed from the center of the political stage, for positions 1, 2, and 3 all affirm the continuing wisdom of two American objectives in Asia: first, to prevent Chinese expansion, if necessary by military means, and second, to prevent any anti-Communist regime, however repressive, reactionary, or isolated from popular support from being toppled by internal revolutionary forces, whether or not abetted by outside help.

\textit{The Excluded Fourth Position}

There is another interpretation which has been largely excluded from the public dialogue thus far. It repudiates our present objectives in Vietnam on moral and political grounds. It holds, first, there is no reason to believe that China has expansive military aims in Asia; second, even if China were militarily expansive, it would not be desirable or necessary for the United States to defend China’s victims; and third, there is neither occasion nor justification for aiding repressive

\textsuperscript{17} See Ping-Ti Ho and Tang Tsou, (eds.), \textit{China in Crises}, Chicago, 1968, Vol. II.


governments merely because they follow anti-Communist policies. I favor this fourth position for several reasons. There is no evidence that China needs containing by an American military presence in Asia. Of course, countries in the shadow of a dominant state tend to fall under the influence of that state whenever it is effectively governed. This process is universal and has deep historical roots in Asia. But there are important countervailing forces.

First, China is preoccupied with its own domestic politics and with principal foreign struggles against the Soviet Union and Formosa.

Second, many of the countries surrounding China have struggled at great sacrifice to achieve independence, and their search for domestic autonomy is much stronger than any common ideological sentiment that might tempt Asian Communist regimes to subordinate their independence to Peking.

Third, China’s foreign policy may often have been crude and ill-conceived, but it has rarely exhibited any intention to rely on military force to expand its influence beyond its boundaries; its uses of force against India, Tibet, and the Soviet Union have been to support its claims to disputed territory, and its entry into the Korean War seemed mainly motivated by a reasonable concern about danger to its industrial heartland.

The evidence thus suggests that the American effort to contain China in Asia is a determination to contend with a paper tiger. More significantly, the multifaceted conflicts in Asia, and elsewhere in the Third World, cannot be comprehended in abstract or ideological terms. Asia is undergoing a two-phase revolution that began as a struggle against colonialism and will continue for at least another decade. The first phase is concerned with the struggle to reacquire national control over the apparatus of government by defeating foreign rule. This struggle is largely completed. In most parts of Asia the colonial system has collapsed and foreigners have been removed from power. But in most Asian countries, including South Vietnam, the native groups allied with the colonial system have held onto political power, stifling social progress and economic reform. Thailand, although never formally a colony, continues to be governed by a traditional elite that is ill-inclined to initiate the reforms needed to relieve the mass of its population from ancient forms of inequality and exploitation.

After formal independence is won, the second phase of these national revolutions involves continuation of the struggle against the residues of the colonial system, including the more informal patterns of domination that result from large American donations of military equipment, foreign aid, covert “presence” (i.e. CIA), and political and economic advice. Most governments in Asia today are composed of conservative forces that hold onto their positions of power and privilege with the aid of such donations and advice, usually at the expense of their own people. Therefore, the second phase of the revolutionary struggle involves wresting political control from traditional ruling classes and instituting a mass-based program of land reform, education, public hygiene, social equality, radical consciousness, and economic development. In most of Asia, aside from India, the United States is allied with regimes that are trying to hold back this second surge of the revolutionary energy that has swept across the Third World to crush the colonial system.
Position 4 accepts this analysis of political conflict in Asia and adjusts American policy accordingly. First of all, it seeks accommodation with China through a flexible compromise of outstanding issues, including the future of Formosa. What is implied here is the removal of the American military presence from the area, especially the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet and the elimination of our military bases on Formosa. Such a course would leave the outcome of the Chinese civil war, which has not yet been fully resolved, to the contending forces on both sides. It would encourage the possibility of negotiations between Peking and Taipei as to the governance of Formosa, perhaps allowing for semi-autonomous status within the Chinese Peoples Republic, with guarantees of a measure of economic and political independence for the island.

An American accommodation with China would help the United States handle an increasingly competitive economic relationship with Japan in the 1970’s and give Washington more bargaining power in relation to the Soviet Union. More importantly, accommodation with China could make it possible to proceed more rapidly with arms control and disarmament, to denuclearize world politics, and to resist pressures to proliferate weapons of mass destruction to additional countries.

Position 4 entails the total abandonment of America’s counterrevolutionary foreign policy in Asia. This would mean renouncing all treaty relations with governments that are repressing their own populations and holding back the forces of self-determination. Clearly such a revision of policy would require the renunciation of American treaty obligations to promote the security of the regimes now governing South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, South Korea, Formosa, Thailand and the Philippines. The only commitment that should be reaffirmed is our obligation under the UN Charter to resist overt military aggression of the Korea-type. Position 4 would also imply an end of large-scale military assistance and covert interference in the affairs of Asian countries. Civil strife is likely to occur in several Asian countries and displace present governments, but to the extent that it tends to reflect the true balance of political forces within these national societies, it would be beneficial for the welfare of the population and for the stability of the country and the region. At present, several regimes are being maintained in power only through a combination of domestic oppression and American support.

There seems virtually no prospect for adoption, or even discussion, of Position 4 during the 1970’s unless major shifts in American political life occur. Only extraordinary domestic pressure, fueled perhaps by economic troubles at home and foreign policy setbacks abroad is likely to produce a change of leadership and change of world outlook in America.

Yet in historic retrospect, it is important to appreciate that Position 4 once was close to being our foreign policy. Its rejection by today’s American leaders is not an inevitable outcome of American foreign policy in Asia after World War II. Franklin Roosevelt was opposed to restoring the French colonial administration in Indochina at the end of the war. If Indochina had been allowed to become independent after the Japanese left, then Ho Chi Minh would clearly have emerged as the leader of a united Vietnam, and perhaps of a united Indochina. In his initial Proclamation of Independence of September 25, 1945, Ho Chi Minh explicitly referred to the French and American Revolutions as the main sources of inspiration for the Vietnamese struggle for national independence. The Communist response to Ho in the West was not altogether enthusiastic—the Soviet Union withheld recognition from Ho Chi Minh’s Republic of Vietnam and in 1947, Maurice Thorez, the French Communist leader who was then Vice-Premier of France actually countersigned the order for French military action against the newly-proclaimed Republic. As O.E. Clubb points out: “In 1945 and 1946 the Ho Chi Minh government looked
mainly to the United States and Nationalist China for foreign political support.” In the period since World War II anti-colonialism probably would have been a better guideline for American foreign policy in Asia than anti-Communism. And even now it makes better sense. It would work better because it accords more closely with historic trends in Asia, with the dynamics of national self-determination in most non-Communist Asian countries, and because it flows more naturally out of America’s own heritage and proudest tradition. But to recall our earlier discussion, the whole idea of debate may well be irrelevant, or virtually so. The policy may be merely continuing evidence of the potency of economic and bureaucratic pressures. In this eventuality, those who wield power and are sensitive to the parameters of acceptable variation, are correct to ignore lines of argument that would have to be rejected. But also correct are those who say that no amount of working within the system can secure a humane and rational foreign policy for the United States because its basic orientation is set by those who would maintain an empire abroad for the benefit of its rulers at home. And indeed it appears to be the case that those who stand outside the debate—the adherents of Position 4—are dissociated from any political base that might be used to gain lawful access to power in the near future. It is their dissociation from power, and not the poverty of their analysis, that explains the irrelevance of their plea for an end to empire and the diplomacy of counterrevolution.

Eric A. Belgrad’s Comments

These comments are not specifically directed to American foreign policy with regard to Asia, but rather to the general question of the premises of foreign policy as it will be pursued in the 1970’s. Most particularly I would like to begin by asking a number of questions to which Professor Falk might possibly reply. First of all, is our entire experience in Vietnam—particularly since 1965—representative of American diplomacy toward the under-developed areas of the world? Or instead, should this particular experience be seen as representing an extraordinary set of circumstances which we not faced previously and to which we responded in an extraordinary manner, that is to say, a manner in which we would not be likely to respond again in the future? Is this, as Herbert Butterfield would say, a unique, pathological kind of situation to which we made a unique, pathological kind of reply? My own idea on this question is that indeed this is the case. In my view, the entire massive military intervention of the United States in Vietnam was more conditioned by the will of the Johnson administration than by the general popular will, or for that matter, the persuasion of American diplomats. Having dispensed with the Johnson administration, and with its persistently willful response which to the greatest failure of the American interventionism, the Nixon administration will make no such commitment to intervention as was made in 1965. Certainly, I would question whether “containment” as applied to Asia is still a viable policy or is identified by American policy-makers as a viable policy. The fact of the matter is that the Nixon doctrine, to which Professor Falk referred in some detail, clearly seems to imply that the “fight against Communism” is an old fight, which is not to be repeated over and over again, and that the doctrine of containment as applied to China represents an exercise in futility, when it takes the form of massive American military intervention in those areas which are identified as being threatened by “Communist” subversion, either internal or external. Hence, I would question whether we should not regard Vietnam as an experience to be taken outside of the line of general continuity of American foreign policy. If this form of containment policy is no longer the accepted standard of American response to challenges labeled as “Communist,” the determination of the direction of foreign policy and of expectations to be achieved thereby will be formed in terms of traditional views, and most particularly the criterion of well-defined national self-interest will presumably be the dominating factor in guiding such foreign policy.

One somewhat tangential point to which I would like to respond is the question of ecology and foreign policy which Dr. Falk has discussed at some length. I wonder whether this ecological concern which Professor Falk expressed represents the beginning of an abiding American interest which will over-shadow all of our traditional concerns with the rest of the world. I suspect that this may be just one more fad which will run its course of public exposure and vanish, as all other fads have vanished in the past. My own view is that this ecological concern, as important as it is, obviously cannot maintain the kind of dynamic militancy which marks it now at its inception. Popular interest in this concern is bound to abate, and more traditional interests will regain their accustomed prominence; whereas the rhetoric of ecology will remain with us for some time, the substance of policy will again address itself to the essentials of defense and foreign policy. If we were to look at the question of identification of national self-interest, we would come rapidly to the conclusion that the Nixon doctrine indeed seems to address itself not to ideological concerns, nor to the establishment of a new version of a blockade of Chinese expansionism in Asia, but rather to the identification of active American
interests from point to point along the Asiatic mainland; furthermore this identification is in terms of the quality and quantity of American response where these interests may be challenged. It is all too facile to dismiss the Nixon doctrine as a rather shabby political trick when it may be in fact one more point in the evolution of a continuity in foreign policy based upon the recognition that confrontation with communism no longer is feasible or desirable as the sole rationale for global intervention. On the basis of the espousal of these new limits to the exercise of American military power, American foreign policy may abandon its ideological basis of the past twenty-two years and turn to a greater degree of realism as expressed purely in terms of national interest. In fact one might very well say that the Nixon doctrine isn’t a doctrine at all but rather it is the application of Dr. Kissinger’s insights in the needs of realistic foreign policy, an approach in which I have a good deal of confidence. Therefore, I would argue that the American position with regard to Asia in the 1970’s must be based upon flexibility both as to the identification of American national interests in the area, taking as a basic premise that there probably are no major American national interests which require massive intervention of the Asiatic mainland.

My criticism of Professor Falk’s paper is that there is a necessity to avoid tautological, ideologically-premised positions with regard to American foreign policy. I feel that the extended criticism of intervention on the Asiatic mainland is in fact akin to beating a dead horse. The trauma of Vietnam has been lived through. No purpose is served by forecasting a bleak future on the basis of a deviation from realism in foreign policy. The evidence at hand is that the lesson has been learned; now we must carefully avoid the other extreme, a sort of political neo-isolationism in which the very idea of any kind of intervention, political, military, or economic is regarded as sinful or immoral.
Five Decades of Humanitarian Aid: The Case of UNRWA

Nitza Nachmias and Eric A. Belgrad

Abstract: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is an anomaly in the list of United Nations agencies. It is the oldest temporary agency of the United Nations, created in the wake of Palestinian refugee crisis in the late 1940s. Its sole purpose is to deal with the Palestinian refugee crisis, a much different mandate than that of other UN agencies, which have a broader and more global focus. Everything down to its modus operandi, requiring constant contact with clients as opposed to the detached modus operandi of other agencies, makes this agency significantly different from other UN agencies. And that is perhaps why the UNRWA seems to be in a constant state of flux regarding its operations, its goals, and its future. Since its inception, the UNRWA has changed from an agency providing relief and repatriation to Palestinian refugees to becoming the sole provider of education, housing, and other forms of aid to these refugees. Initially conceived as a temporary solution to the refugee problem, the UNRWA has become a problem in solving the plight of the Palestinians. This paper analyzes the mandate and operating methods of the UNRWA, discusses its transformation over the last fifty years, and theorizes about its uncertain role in the future with the increasing authority of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

As United Nations peace-keeping operations grow in number, intensity and complexity, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) presents a fifty year record of peace-servicing, an invaluable body of experience to analyze and study for both academicians and practitioners in the field. During the past five decades, the work of UNRWA has been carried on against the backdrop of dramatic changes in regional and global environments. Globally, the post-Soviet era introduced new opportunities for peace, as the Middle East ceased to constitute a theater for playing out East-West tensions. Regionally, the most important changes consisted of the various disengagement and peace agreements concluded during the period under consideration between Israel and its antagonistic neighbors, including the September, 1993, Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles (DOP). However, none of these agreements contained concrete provisions or specific procedures to resolve the most intractable of all the issues dividing the parties, that of the Palestinian refugees, so as to obviate the need for continued interventions by UNRWA.¹

It is the purpose of this article to examine the anatomy and evolution of UNRWA in the context of the global and regional environments within which UNRWA has functioned; to evaluate the Agency’s organizational and substantive contributions to the promotion of peace and the resolution of the Middle East refugee problem; and suggest how similar organizations may be useful in the future, when they will have to operate under entirely new and different regional and global arrangements. More particularly, analysis will focus on structures and procedures controlling UNRWA’s activities; UNRWA’s original mandate, and how it was

¹ The DOP did not deal with Palestinian refugees directly. It declared that the negotiations during the five-year transitional period “shall cover the remaining issues, including: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements…” (Article V, No. 3).
changed (formally or informally) to adjust to new environmental realities; UNRWA’s unique status within the United Nations system; past and present support systems undergirding UNRWA; and, conversely, limitations and constraints within which the Agency had been forced to operate. The underlying assumption is that UNRWA’s experience, while ostensibly unique, is, in fact, applicable within broader political, social, and economic contexts.

General Observations

From the start, UNRWA has been unique, both as to its mandate and its modus operandi. It is the oldest and largest temporary United Nations humanitarian agency, created by the United Nations General Assembly on December 8, 1949 (General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV))\(^2\), as a temporary relief agency in response to the urgent problem of the Palestinian refugees. UNRWA replaced the short-lived UNRPR (United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees), a stop-gap agency created by the General Assembly in November, 1948, to provide emergency services to a small number of homeless and hungry Palestinians who had recently fled their homes and were crowded together in squalid make-shift camps. By June, 1949, it had become clear that the refugee problem would not be solved quickly, and that UNRPR lacked the means and authority to deal with this growing problem.

A Palestinian refugee, as defined by the General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of December 11, 1948, was a person whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years before the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and who lost both home and livelihood as a result of the conflict and took refuge in one of the areas which today comprise Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.\(^4\)

Direct Descendants of registered refugees were also deemed eligible for UNRWA’s assistance. The two-year residency provision enabled transients to be treated as if they had been permanent residents of Palestine, permitting them to acquire refugee status and rendering them eligible for resettlement, repatriation or financial compensation. When UNRWA was founded in 1949, United Nations officials estimated the refugee population to be between 330,000 and 500,000.\(^5\) Between 1949 and 1993, the number of refugees increased by about 500 percent; by 1993, 2.8 million refugees received UNRWA’s assistance. In 1992-93, 393,000 pupils attended

\(^2\) In 1992, UNRWA was authorized by the General Assembly to continue in operation through 1996.
\(^3\) General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) was legally binding on all parties within its operational intent. By contrast, most other General Assembly resolutions do not automatically acquire such a binding character. Rather, they are not unlike United States Congressional resolutions – more in the nature of advisory policy statements.
\(^4\) The validity of the two-year residency standard may well be questioned, given the migratory patterns of populations in the Middle East and that recent emergence of many of its population groups from their historic nomadic existence. The two-year standard would appear to be more appropriate to settled populations occupying well-defined boundaries for many generations, such as those in Western Europe. This issue is particularly worthy of consideration in light of the documented massive migrations of populations from Syria, Lebanon, and Transjordan to Palestine a few years before the 1948 partition. See, e.g., Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row), 1984. The wording of Resolution 194 deserves more attention than has hitherto been accorded to it, namely, its three qualifying requirements (residence, livelihood, and the abandonment of same) which collectively define refugee status. No mechanism was put in place whereby refugee claimants were required to provide proof that they could satisfy all three jurisdictional elements before they could acquire the official status of refugees. Instead, a mere self-declaration of refugee status, asserting the existence of all or just some of the three qualifying requirements, has been accepted by UNRWA from the beginning as the sole necessary condition for granting refugee status.
UNRWA’s elementary and preparatory schools. The Agency’s forecast for 1994-1995 is for over 416,000 students.\(^6\)

UNRWA’s 1993 regular budget exceeded $250 million (not including $20 million for various emergency programs). A United Nations task report of September, 1993, asked for a 55 percent increase in UNRWA’s 1994 budget, or an increase in $138 million, to develop new support programs for the interim period of Palestinian autonomy “that will be vital in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”\(^7\)

UNRWA has not attempted to modify its role in light of the Declaration of Principles or, as it is sometimes known, the Israeli-Palestinian Accord of September, 1993, which provides for a measure of Palestinian autonomy and which, therefore, would warrant a transfer of authority from UNRWA to the new Palestinian Council for carrying out essential educational and economic activities.

As the United Nations’ largest humanitarian operation, UNRWA employs over 20,000 local Palestinian people and is managed by about 135 international civil servants; it is far larger than the other two United Nations sponsored humanitarian relief agencies, UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).\(^8\)

Inevitably, the population of the refugee-clients has come to include large numbers of second and third generation refugees. Most of these consider the camps the only homes they have ever known. Some 940,000 refugees still live in 59 refugee camps in four countries—Israel (West Bank and Gaza), Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. In addition, UNRWA has provided services to between 600,000 and 800,000 displaced people (exact number not available). The category of “displaced people” was added to UNRWA’s mandate after 1967\(^9\), to accommodate the Six day War refugees who fled mainly to Jordan\(^10\) and Lebanon. These included some 200,000 refugees from 1948, who were displaced for the second time.\(^11\) A smaller number of Palestinians became displaced when they fled from Jordan in 1970, following clashes Jordan and the PLO (“Black September”). The protracted civil war in Lebanon during the 1970’s and 1980’s made still more refugees charges of the already overburdened Agency.

As a general rule, most United Nations humanitarian operations are carried out by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), which was established shortly after UNRWA but which, instead of replacing or incorporating the earlier agency, operates on a level that is parallel to it. The rationale for this separate status derives from the fact that the General Assembly saw it fit to single out the Palestinian refugees from all the other refugee categories by taking direct responsibility for the Palestinians: it created UNRWA as the protecting agency

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\(^7\) Ibid.


\(^9\) UNRWA distinguished between “refugees”, that is, people who lost their homes and livelihood in 1948, and “displaced” people, that is, people who fled the West Bank after 1967 mainly to Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

\(^10\) Over one million refugees live in Jordan, the largest refugee concentration in any Middle Eastern country. Jordan’s indigenous population is about 3.5 million.

\(^11\) The General Assembly gave special attention to Palestinians displaced as a result of the Six Day War. In its Resolution 32/90 B.4 of December 13, 1977, the General Assembly endorsed UNRWA’s humanitarian efforts on behalf of displaced persons. The Secretary-General issued a report (United Nations Document A/32/263) which supported this assumption of responsibilities. Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 32/90 E, reaffirming the right of newly-displaced persons to return to their homes, and placing them in the same category of eligibility for UNRWA assistance as the Palestinian refugees.
especially dedicated to this class of refugees. UNRWA was formed to be an autonomous United Nations agency that is directly accountable to the General Assembly. It is an operational agency, incorporated under Article 22 of the United Nations Charter rather than being based on an international treaty or convention, as are most other United Nations agencies. At its inception, it was assumed that establishing UNRWA by treaty would necessitate the unwarranted delay of a lengthy ratification process.

The “W” in UNRWA reflects the General Assembly’s original intent to create public works operations to provide permanent employment for refugees while at the same time building infrastructures essential to the camps. When the public works plan failed (see discussion below), UNRWA shifted its focus to education, with health services and relief as second and third priorities.

UNRWA’s modus operandi has been unlike that of UNICEF or the UNHCR. The latter two global United Nations welfare agencies have focused on formulating and coordinating programs requiring the maintenance of minimum contact with their clients. They have also avoided direct contact with their own local personnel, leaving the implementation of programs to host governments and to various private agencies. In contrast, UNRWA has not only kept close contact with the recipients of its services, but has preferred to have its own personnel carry out its programs. Consequently, UNRWA has become the second largest employer in its theater of operation. By working through its own people, UNRWA risks conflicts of interest that other agencies avoid by acting through the instrumentality of host governments or private charitable organizations.

As an international humanitarian agency, UNRWA provides support services to refugees by attempting, not always successfully, to regulate and coordinate the functions of various host governments, private organizations, and local enterprises; as a non-elected, non-accountable bureaucracy, it employs thousands of people and performs functions usually rendered by elected local governments.

In its fifth decade of providing refugee services, UNRWA has failed to help the refugee camps evolve local government capable of implementing measures essential to their own well-being. The agency appears to have followed a path that had the effect, by design or inadvertence, of encouraging continuing dependence on the part of the refugees. The very existence of UNRWA may have discouraged the local residents from assuming responsibility for their own welfare. The lack of local autonomy may have also induced the shifting of responsibility for the refugees from Arab countries and from Israel to the international Agency. This situation could not help but foster misunderstanding and friction between the agency, the host governments and the clients.

The General Assembly’s persistent efforts to foster and expand UNRWA’s role arose out of stubborn belief that the United Nations was responsible for the events that led to the refugees’ flight from Palestine and should, therefore, accept the refugees as its wards. Accordingly, the United Nations undertook to provide its protection and its support until such time that the refugees should no longer need the umbrella of its agencies. In this, the United Nations was strongly influenced by its first mediator in Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte. In his 1948 report to the General Assembly, Bernadotte asserted “that both in origin and disposition the refugee problem entailed a United Nations responsibility.” Bernadotte’s argument was primarily legal,

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12 UNICEF and the UNHCR, also set up by the General Assembly, provide interesting contrasts. By contrast, UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was founded by treaty (1943).

not humanitarian. He contended that, since the Palestinians were without citizenship and were residents of a former League of Nations mandated territory, the international community had a continuing responsibility for them until a final settlement was achieved.

Adopting Count Bernadotte’s argument, General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) of December 11, 1948, reached a profoundly influential political conclusion, proclaiming that dispossessed Palestinians had a right of repatriation or compensation. This resolution has had a long-term political effect, defining the political context within which problems concerning the refugees have been debated. The creation of UNRWA was an unprecedented consequence of these political conclusions. The Agency was given the unique assignment of supporting and protecting the rights of a particular national group. “No other [such] intergovernmental international organization exists.”

Only when the protracted nature of the Palestinian refugee issue became evident, after the failure of numerous efforts to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict, did the United Nations replace its initial legalistic approach to the issue of the refugees with a more humanitarian one. This was reflected in changes (discussed later) in UNRWA’s mandate and duties. However, the raison d’être of UNRWA remained unchanged: to endeavor to bring about a political solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, namely, repatriation, compensation, or settlement of refugees in countries of the first asylum. UNRWA has insisted that even the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the PLO in September 13, 1993, did not change the Agency’s status or obligations. Indeed, Ilter Turkmen, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, asserted that “in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, the situation in principle will be no different.” Commissioner Turkmen’s position seems to confirm that UNRWA, like most established bureaucracies, is attached to its power base and is reluctant to yield any part of its authority.

A review of UNRWA’s operations reveals major political and administrative dilemmas which have not been resolved and which evidently affect its work. First, as a non-territorial entity operating within the territorial boundaries of sovereign states, the Agency performs tasks normally carried out by governments: it has become virtually a non-territorial government. However, unlike sovereign governments, UNRWA has no jurisdiction over either the territory in which it operates or over the inhabitants which it services. As an autonomous international body, it cannot be subjugated or subordinated to the authority of any sovereign government; conversely, no sovereign government would debase its sovereignty by submitting to the authority of UNRWA. This situation often impedes the performance of UNRWA and leads to inevitable clashes with host governments and with clients. In short, on the issue of the powers, authority, and accountability of international “non-territorial administrations,” the case of UNRWA deserves particular attention.

15 Statement of the Commissioner-General to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (the Fifth Committee), November 15, 1993. See also, Don Peretz, Palestinians, Refugees, and the Middle East Peace Process (Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), p. 107, in which Commissioner-General Turkmen is quoted as saying that when the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza achieve autonomy, “The agency will be dissolved, transferring its facilities, structures and services to the emerging Palestinian institutions.” The contradictory positions taken by the Commissioner-General on this vital issue clearly reflects unresolved stresses within UNRWA occasioned by developing Palestinian autonomy and the Agency’s reluctance to relinquish power. 16 The term was used Buehrig, p. 7.
Second, as a United Nations agency, UNRWA and its functionaries might expect to enjoy corporate and personnel immunity from territorial authorities. However, this has not always been the case. For instance, acting on Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intelligence reports that UNRWA’s camps were being used to train PLO members and harbor terrorists, Israel has occasionally raided and searched UNRWA’s offices and compounds. No international authorization of doing so was ever requested or granted.17

Third, it has been argued that UNRWA was not actually helping the refugees, but that its operations were counterproductive. The Agency’s existence “has reified, for Palestinians, their refugee status… [T]he refugee camps… have been breeding grounds for national violence…and… [their] facilities have been used for military purposes.”18

Fourth, some have contended that UNRWA’s operations, by enhancing the refugees’ living situation, have made them more comfortable, and thereby reduced the refugees’ discontent and their motivation for a permanent settlement of their status. It has been argued that UNRWA might actually have alleviated the need for a permanent solution.

On the other hand, continued and ever-growing discontent of large numbers of refugees suggests that UNRWA’s humanitarian and social operations have been irrelevant to the refugees’ attitude toward their political and social situation. Indeed, the growing feelings of animosity, frustration and anger in the ranks of UNRWA’s clientele, culminating in the 1987 outbreak of Intifada in the Gaza Strip, indicate that UNRWA has had little, if any, effect on the temperature of the political climate among refugees.

Fifth, UNRWA’s critics have also argued that the Agency has succumbed to major bureaucratic pathologies. They have alleged that UNRWA has become a self-serving, work-generating agency with little regard for the real interests of its own clients. Its employment of refugee-workers is said to be suffused with favoritism and patronage, and its services inefficient and ineffective. UNRWA vigorously denies these charges, using healthcare and education records as proof of its effectiveness. UNRWA asserts that, due to its efforts, the refugees are better housed, better fed, healthier, and better educated. Furthermore, UNRWA takes pride in its record of protecting the refugees’ human rights. The Agency contends that it accomplishes all this with a minimal overhead: headquarters personnel account for only 2 percent of the total number of area posts (20,592 total posts for 1992).19

Finally, UNRWA’s critics have argued that it has habitually exceeded its mandate, which was limited to the humanitarian aspects of the conflict, i.e., that since UNRWA’s mission did not contemplate the Agency’s direct involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli political conflict, the Agency should not have aspired to affect the outcome of that struggle.

During UNRWA’s years as a temporary humanitarian agency, the General Assembly never sought to enlarge the Agency’s role to that of a permanent political institution. UNRWA, however, contends that its mandate is sufficiently broad for it to fulfill its part in the international commitment to the final settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: providing Palestinian refugees with the proper relief, education, and health care was to be UNRWA’s contribution to

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17 In June 1982, after it invaded Lebanon, Israel announced that it had discovered documents proving that UNRWA’s school at Siblin was used by the PLO to train terrorists. Reports published in Israel’s Ha’aretz daily, June 27-30, 1982.

18 Schiff, p. 364.

19 The cost of the international posts for 1992-1993 (two years) was $20,605,000. Projected cost for 1994-1995 (two years) is $20,440,000. This cost is covered by the regular budget of the United Nations. UNRWA paid its international staff $6,108,000 out of its budget. The projected cost for the next two years is $5,601,000. This decline in overhead contrasts with the increase in the number of refugees eligible for services.
the peace process. Nevertheless, it can be shown that UNRWA’s activities did not, in fact, merely play the positive role it claims in furthering the peace process nor that the Agency limited itself to the humanitarian ventures which were entrusted to it, at its formation. If the United Nations hoped to encourage the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the activities of UNRWA, it was bound to be sorely disappointed.

**Structures and Procedures**

In order to allow UNRWA broad freedom of action in the field, the United Nations General Assembly shaped it as an operational organization with a unique corporate status, “capable of engaging in the commercial transactions and establishing legally defined relations with governments, other international organizations, and employees.” UNRWA has provided a large array of municipal services to a vast population located in five different states, and it has had to manage and control a large administrative and professional apparatus, while being left to fend for itself, both in policy-making and in collecting its own voluntary contributions. It has operated on two-year budget cycles, with the United States as its major contributor ($68 million for FY 1993). The Agency is headed by the Commissioner-General (originally titled a Director), who is appointed by the United Nations Secretary General. No process of approval or confirmation is required for appointment. The Commissioner-General, whose term of office is five years, reports directly to the General Assembly by way of the Fifth Committee (Political and Decolonization). After the Commissioner-General’s report has been discussed in the Fifth Committee, it is forwarded to the General Assembly for resolution and voting.

In 1991, the autonomous authority of the Commissioner-General was further broadened. The General Assembly agreed to eliminate the provision in UNRWA’s mandate requiring the Commissioner-General to reach decisions “in consultation with the Secretary General.” While the Commissioner-General no longer needs to consult the Secretary General, he is still expected to consult and work with an Advisory Commission. This body, which was originally comprised of representatives from France, Britain, the United States and Turkey, was later enlarged to a membership of ten nations by adding representatives from Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Belgium, and Japan.

In order to facilitate negotiations, Advisory Commission members receive accreditation to each of the host countries, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Contrary to expectations, the addition of host Arab governments to the Advisory Commission did not improve the Commission’s work: it alienated Israel and led to development of friction between itself, contributing governments, and often even the Commissioner-General. The structure of the enlarged Commission also impeded the development of minimum consensus essential for the Advisory Commission to be effective. In fact, UNRWA became almost self-contained, with its staff appointed or removed solely by the Commissioner-General. This official promulgated his own rules and regulations without interference, as long as these did not expressly conflict with United Nations rules and regulations.

Because UNRWA assumed full responsibility for Palestinian refugees in almost all spheres of life, it has had a virtually free hand in setting policies and priorities, and in allocating

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20 General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of December 8, 1949, said: “Continued assistance for the relief of the Palestinian refugees is necessary… to further conditions of peace and stability.”

21 Buehrig, p. 6.

22 Original resolution establishing the Advisory Commission, General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV), paragraph No. 8.
resources. Indeed, UNRWA’s far-ranging administrative bureaucracy has been the source of political decisions affecting the lives of millions of people. Notwithstanding its operational autonomy, UNRWA has had to give considerations to terms of relevant General Assembly resolutions, the limitations imposed by its own financial and operational capabilities, the priorities and preferred policies of the Advisory Commission, when it chose to make these known, and, finally, the burgeoning needs of its clients. Except for salaries of United Nations international staff members, who are on the regular United Nations payroll, UNRWA has depended entirely in voluntary contributions to fund its budgetary needs.

Budgetary constraints have always played a major role in UNRWA’s operations and development programs. Unlike UNICEF and UNHCR, UNRWA’s expenditures “are not subject to formal approval either by its Advisory Commission or by the Special Political Committee of the General Assembly.”\textsuperscript{23} This is because UNRWA’s founding resolution did not include provisions for formal consideration and approval of its budget: “its fund-raising techniques and budgetary methods developed idiosyncratically within the UN family.”\textsuperscript{24} In recent years, the Advisory Commission has declined to review UNRWA’s budget without providing justification for its failure to do so. As might be expected, such broad budgetary discretion can have a negative effect on contributors and encourage them to condition the amount of their pledges on desired policy concessions: “Consequently, a contributor is well positioned to use the pledging conference—the final stage of UNRWA’s annual appearance at the General Assembly—as an occasion for attaching conditions to its contribution.”\textsuperscript{25}

This awkward situation is a consequence of the resolution which founded UNRWA. Because the Agency’s resolution was loosely drawn, UNRWA was denied the authority and support systems needed to define its mission clearly, the appropriations to fund its budgets, the administrative structure to recruit and supervise its personnel properly, and the leadership to be held accountable before appropriate United Nations bodies. Moreover, the lack of a Board of Governors resulted in a lack of political guidance. Realistically, the annual review of UNRWA’s report by the general assembly could not serve as an adequate policy forum. Unlike the annual reports of UNICEF and UNHCR, which are first considered by the Economic and Social Council and which are then transmitted to the General Assembly with the Council’s recommendations, UNRWA’s annual report is submitted directly to the General Assembly (the Fifth Committee) by its President. UNRWA’s Advisory Commission, which has the right to scrutinize the report prior to submission, has traditionally refrained from making any recommendations, probably because the commission itself has not been able to develop a consensus on controversial issues. General Assembly reviews of annual reports do not usually lead to resolutions providing detailed operational instructions. The General Assembly’s abdication of supervisory authority has left UNRWA virtually autonomous in all of its policy-making process, such as in policies underlying establishment of its extensive educational system. In short, in fulfilling the principal parts of its mandate, UNRWA has received scant guidance from appropriate General Assembly resolutions, and no financial support.

It is difficult to reconcile the acutely sensitive political context in which UNRWA must operate with the demonstrable lack of guidance and control from either the Advisory Commission or the General Assembly. The Commissioner-General and his staff are left with the burden of making all the decision and paying all the bills.

\textsuperscript{23} Buehring, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{24} Schiff, p. 370.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 53.
The lack of a governing or an overseeing body for such a vital organization as UNRWA is troubling. The miscalculation at the time of the formation of UNRWA—that it would be a temporary, very short-lived agency—led to the mistaken assumption that a responsible, business-like oversight apparatus would not be necessary. It is unclear why the General Assembly has subsequently failed to fill this administrative and policy-making vacuum. It should be noted, however, that UNWRA’s officials have made no secret of the fact that both the Commissioner-General and the staff have come to enjoy their autonomous status and feel that additional bureaucratic controls are unnecessary.\footnote{Interview with William Lee, UNWRA’s liaison in New York, November 20, 1993.}

And yet, UNRWA’s freedom of action carries with it a heavy price. The lack of guidance and control has discouraged the much needed backing and support that an active Board of Directors or a resolute Advisory Commission could have provided. The failure to establish a legitimating backdrop is especially troubling when one considers the hostile environment in which UNRWA must operate and the almost total lack of cooperation that it receives from most host countries. Had the Agency been able to marshal the broad political reinforcement and resources needed to operate successfully under such adverse circumstances, it might well have been able to match the relative success of the UNHCR.”\footnote{“UNHCR has been remarkably successful in healing political rupture [the reference in mainly to Europe after World War II] while UNRWA has not.” Buehrig, p. 58.} As it is, however, UNRWA has been accused of a lack of accountability, inefficiency, and even of corruption. Its very isolation has led allocations that, by becoming embroiled with the disputing parties, it has limited its ability to provide essential humanitarian services in a neutral, disinterested manner.

UNRWA’s budgetary practices have also been called into question. Until the mid 1980’s, UNRWA used to submit artificially inflated budget requests in the hope of increasing its funding. By doing so, UNRWA jeopardized the trust of its donors. At the end of the 1980’s, UNRWA found itself in a severe financial crisis. While the number of dependents for which it cared had increased, the voluntary contributions needed to pay for this care had shrunk. UNRWA had to reduce its work force and to overhaul its budgetary and fund-raising procedures. It realized that it had to consult the Advisory Committee and to develop a greater degree of financial accountability. In 1986, the first informal meeting of the donor states was held at UNRWA’s Vienna headquarters, and, for the first time, budget proposals and long-term plans were introduced. The tactics of submitting inflated budgetary requests was abandoned, while new financial controls were instituted. Since 1986, these informal meetings have become established practice. Moreover, a closer working relationship has developed between UNRWA’s officials and representatives of the donor states. Such closer contacts have made it easier for the United States government, UNRWA’s largest donor, to induce Congress to respond more positively to UNRWA’s financial needs.\footnote{In 1993, the United States contributed $68 million out of a total budget of 300 million.} The fact that, for almost five decades, UNRWA could function without proper financial accountability and control standard shows: (a) how autonomous United Nations agencies can become, (b) the vast power and authority that the head of a United Nations agency can exert, and (c) the effects of a lack of administrative regulatory mechanisms within the United Nations system.

Of the three main UNRWA operations, education has become the most important, with relief occupying last place on its priority list. UNRWA provides education to about 20 percent of its clientele, with the intent of making them productive, “socially useful human beings who
contribute to society rather than impose a burden on it.” An Agency staff of approximately 10,000 provides education to over 390,000 elementary and preparatory school children in 641 UNRWA schools. Eight vocational and technical training centers provide over 5,000 training places for refugees. In 1993, the distribution, by place of residence, of UNRWA’s clientele was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>328,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>314,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>1,072,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bank</td>
<td>479,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza Strip</td>
<td>603,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNRWA assumes that the actual number of refugees is higher, as some of the refugees have failed to register.

In 1993, 392,757 students were enrolled in educational or training programs. UNRWA also provided university scholarships for outstanding students. The number of aid recipients rose in 1993 from 661 to 746 students. Educational programs have followed the curricula of the host countries in which they are offered, namely, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt (in Gaza), in cooperation with and guidance from UNESCO, which supplied 12 staff members to UNRWA. However, growing criticism about inadequate supervision, inappropriate authority exercised by local teachers to promote political agendas, and a lack of integrated educational objectives prompted the introduction of reforms in UNRWA’s educational system. As of July, 1993, UNRWA decided to reorganize the education department by integrating all divisions into one institute, the UNRWA Institute of Education, located in Amman, Jordan. At the same time, the office of its Director of Education was moved from Vienna to the same location. Due to a lack of job opportunities for its graduates, UNRWA’s two-year teacher-training program was phased out. Instead, Jordan now requires a full four-year academic degree in education of UNRWA-trained teachers. In 1993, UNRWA reported the following statistics for students registered in its schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>33,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>60,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>152,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bank</td>
<td>42,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza Strip</td>
<td>104,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>392,757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of future budget restrictions, the number of students in educational institutions is to be cut in half.

About half of the total operational budget of UNRWA is spent on education—in 1992, $137.5 million out of a total budget of $274.9 million, in 1993, $141.3 million out of a total budget of $298.7 million. The proposed budget for 1994 allocates for educational purposes $150.4 million out of a total budget of $309.1 million.

While it is clear, from the large share of the budget and large proportion of employees assigned to it, that education has been UNRWA’s most important operation, this function has also given rise to the greatest degree of controversy. Criticism has been mounting from Israel and

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30 UNRWA Update, April 1993. All statistical information cited herein regarding populations and UNRWA educational enterprises rely on this source.
from several of the contributing states that, because UNRWA’s school curricula replicate those of Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon, they include, perforce, anti-Israeli propaganda and slander. Israel has charged UNRWA with knowingly allowing the Palestinians in its employ to use the Agency’s educational system to promote an anti-Israel agenda to an extent that clearly violates UNRWA’s mandate.\(^31\) In addition, Israel has maintained that UNRWA should not be permitted to contest Israel’s right to use security measures as a prerogative of Israeli sovereignty.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, have charged UNRWA with cooperating with their enemy (Israel), accusing the Agency of failing to protect their human rights, especially by virtue of failing to prevent Israel from what they see as arbitrary closing of schools.

UNRWA’s health care and relief operations are less extensive than those relating to education, but they follow the same principles and procedures. UNRWA’s health department employs 32,203 professional and auxiliary health workers (1992-1993), including 207 doctors and dentists, 683 nurses, hygienists and midwives and 230 paramedical staff members. The Agency delivers services to 2.8 million eligible Palestinians. The program provides preventative, natal and clinical health care. The number of area health care workers in Gaza is high in proportion to the number of clients because of the special needs of the refugee population in its nine refugee camps.\(^32\)

UNRWA’s third function has been to provide temporary relief services to those refugees unable to support themselves. The relief program, which itself has given rise to some controversy, has disturbed some cash to eligible refugees, but most of the aid has consisted of food rations donated by the EEC from its surpluses. While UNRWA preferred granting food rations to granting payments, it found that barter among Palestinian refugees could not satisfy all of their needs. In 1982, when UNRWA experienced a severe financial crisis, hard decisions had to be made concerning reductions in relief programs, including the distribution of food rations. In determining priorities of categories of aid, UNRWA chose not to cut the education budget, but to reduce relief distributions, instead. Since the mid 1980’s, direct relief and food rations have been given only to the most vulnerable groups, especially to children from 6 to 36 months of age and to sick and handicapped refugees. The program for 1994-1995 has been further reduced: it includes 250,000 children (6 to 36 months), 143,200 pregnant women and nursing mothers, and several hundred chronically sick people.

UNRWA’s expenditures for relief for 1992-1993 were $62,525,000. The budget request for 1994-1995 is $71,791,000.\(^33\) The number of beneficiaries for 1992-1993 was almost 2.8 million people. The number of special hardship cases was 178,575. UNRWA predicts that the number of refugees eligible for relief might increase due to the deterioration in socio-economic conditions and the decline in support from oil producing Arab countries. Palestinian support of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War resulted in a sharp decline relief aid from Arab countries.

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\(^31\) Since 1988, the Israeli authorities have often ordered schools in the West Bank and Gaza closed, arguing that the schools “were a beachhead on which young Palestinians organize for trouble. It has fewer security problems when schools were closed.” Viorst, (Olive Branch), p. 16. See also Schiff, pp. 374-375. Schiff explains that since “the Jordanian curriculum is used in the West Bank, the Egyptian curriculum in the Gaza Strip, the political slant… is shaped by these governments.”


\(^33\) The persistent increase in the birth rate among refugees, the continued reductions in contributions from Palestinians following Gulf War, and the rising tide of Palestinian unemployment in Gaza and in the West Bank since the outbreak of the Intifada – all these have given rise to increased dependence on UNRWA’s welfare program, notwithstanding the Agency’s efforts to reduce its welfare budget.
In addition, the number of Palestinians employed in these countries and their essential money-transfers suffered a devastating decline which has not been fully reversed since the end of the Gulf War.

The Future Role of UNRWA

Because UNRWA is a unique organization in its structure, mandate and modus operandi, the evolution of its future operations is open-ended and difficult to predict. First there is every expectation that UNRWA’s operations in Lebanon (where it was headquartered until the late 1970’s) will probably continue without major changes. In 1992, UNRWA registered 319,427 Palestinian refugees there. It is highly unlikely that a significant number of them will be allowed to return to Israel or to territories turned over to Palestinian control. The DOP (Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO) provides that, during the interim five year period, negotiations will be held to cover remaining issues, including those concerning refugees.34 Clearly, neither Israel nor the PLO put the refugee issue near the top of their respective priority lists, as the DOP includes no specific provisions concerning the matter of resettlement or repatriation of refugees.

Second, UNRWA’s operations in Syria, serving 299,207 Palestinian refugees (1992), will probably not change in any meaningful way. On the other hand, changes may be expected in UNRWA’s operations in Jordan, in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. During 1992, UNRWA provided services to 1,010,719 Palestinian refugees living in Jordan. The high reproductive rate of that population (3.7 percent per year) increases the number of refugees in Jordan by almost 50 percent every decade. Over half of the population of Jordan is Palestinian, and, as UNRWA’s figures show, a third of Jordan’s 3 million people are registered Palestinian refugees.35 If the current incremental rate of increase of the refugee population is maintained, and if the nature of UNRWA’s activity does not change, UNRWA will have to greatly expand its operations in Jordan. Providing education, health care and relief to over a third of the country’s population would force the Agency to become a government within a government. In that event, UNRWA’s only option would be to gradually transfer its responsibility for the education, health care and relief of the refugee population to an appropriate political authority. If the October 26, 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace agreement includes some sort of interim or long-term settlement of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, the future of UNRWA’s operation in Jordan is likely to be altered.

The UNRWA areas of operation most likely to be affected in the near term by the Declaration of Principles and the resulting political changes are in the West Bank and in Gaza. It is as yet unclear what mechanisms will replace UNRWA’s services under provisions of an interim or a permanent political agreement between Israel and the elected Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority (the Council created pursuant to the terms of the DOP). Indeed, the question of UNRWA’s role was not specified in the protocol signed in Washington in September, 1993, as neither the Agency nor its activities and presence in the West Bank and Gaza are mentioned. And Yet, the DOP and the terms negotiated under its aegis are bound to form a vitally relevant basis for UNRWA’s continued existence and operations.

34 DOP, Article V, No. 3.
35 Statistics of refugee populations service by UNRWA are to be found in Viorst, Reaching for the Olive Branch, p. 83.
Under provisions of the DOP, the Council will assume overall responsibility for the well-being of the Palestinian people during a transitional period not exceeding five years. Although the contemplated creation of an independent Palestinian state is at least five years away, the elected Palestinian Council will exercise vast authority in areas currently served by UNRWA.

“Immediately after entry into force of this DOP… authority will be transferred to the Palestinians in the following spheres: education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism.” The omission of any mention of UNRWA or of a transfer of its roles and functions to the Palestinian Council was probably not an oversight; it would seem to portend a series of major changes to be visited upon UNRWA and its role in Gaza and in the West Bank.

The DOP provides further that the Council will exercise a number of economic functions, that it will “promote economic growth… establish a Palestinian Electricity Authority, Gaza Sea Port Authority, a Palestinian Development Bank,”. Again, the document’s failure to account for UNRWA, which has been in the forefront of economic activities in the area for almost half a century, implies a radical shrinking of the Agency’s future role.

Both the Palestinians and Israel have assumed that the developed countries will make available extensive resources necessary to ensure the successful implementation of this historic agreement. Indeed, about $2 billion was quickly pledged for the projects mentioned, including education, health care, job creation, law and order, security, trade and tourism, and, especially, for economic reconstruction.

It is unclear why UNRWA was neither mentioned in these plans nor asked to provide its services or experience to the planners, but it must be assumed that the Agency’s erstwhile patrons and clients have decided to develop alternative means of providing essential services in the area. Notwithstanding the fact that UNRWA’s present clients will undergo a dramatic change of status once they come under the control of the Palestinian Council, UNRWA does not envision its future fading away, either during the interim period (the five-year period of Palestinian autonomy during which the ultimate status of the Palestinians and of Israel will be determined), or during its aftermath.

The view of UNRWA as to its future role and the view of other significant parties on that subject do not coincide. The conclusion is irresistible that the DOP’s silence in the subject of UNRWA suited the needs of both Palestinians and Israel. For their own reasons, both wished to keep UNRWA out of the picture—Israel, because it does not trust UNRWA and the Palestinians, because of their need to assert independent authority and control over the pledged economic resources. UNRWA, which has been fighting for decades to get the kind of funding pledged in the aftermath of the DOP negotiations, has refused to bow out gracefully at this stage, but, rather has been quick to offer its help to the political newcomers. The Agency argues that it has rich and invaluable experience in the fields critical to a successful settlement: hands-on experience in Gaza and the West Bank in providing education, health care, relief and public administration.

UNRWA claims to be the Palestinians’ best ally in the new, developing situation. It feels that Israel and Palestinians ought to accept UNRWA’s contributions and allow the Agency to continue and even expand its operations.

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36 DOP, Article IV, No. 2.
37 DOP, Article VII, No. 4.
38 See, for example, letter dated October 6, 1993, from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to the Commissioner-General, saying: “In order to ensure the further progress of the peace process, it is imperative that a significant improvement in the social and welfare services and the daily life of the Palestinians be achieved... UNRWA had unique competence in these fields...[i]t is therefore essential to build a firm financial base for the
Immediately following the September agreement, UNRWA published the findings of a special task force, titled “Supporting the Transition: An Immediate Response of the United Nations to the Interim Period in the West Bank and Gaza Strip” (September 1993). In this report, UNRWA argued that it should increase its activities by 55 percent in the first year of the interim period, with an increase of $138,250,000 over and above the regular $250,000,000 budget. In essence, the report maintained that until the Palestinians are ready to assume complete responsibility for their lives, UNRWA should augment its ongoing programs because of its “capacity to launch immediately activities which will help create and sustain improved conditions.” UNRWA has also expressed the wish to serve as an intermediary agent between the Palestinians and the contributors, “to ensure a smooth transition to subsequent phases at which time programs run by organizations such as the World Bank, other organizations of the United Nations system and bilateral aid agencies will have become operational.” Furthermore, the Agency has offered to help “mobilize and support the coordination of the large international effort from the non-United Nations sources.” What remains unspoken in UNRWA’s offers is that since the Agency’s budget is almost entirely dependent on voluntary international contributions, and since the same contributors are asked to provide the wherewithal for Palestinian autonomy, UNRWA is likely to find itself without financial means unless it finds a way to gain control of the funds raised on behalf of the Palestinian Council. UNRWA’s vast bureaucracy is now evidently fighting for its continued existence, in clear contradiction of its charter which provided for a limited, temporary existence. Like most bureaucracies, UNRWA finds it difficult to adapt to unexpected changes; it thrives on permanent, predictable conditions. Faced with the unexpected Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, the Agency has myopically attempted to preserve a status quo which no longer exists. UNRWA clings to the improbable belief that it will continue to be “the second largest single employer, after the (Israel) Civil Administration…. [O]utlays [will] account for about one third of all public expenditures in the West Bank and about half in Gaza.” UNRWA has not come to grips with the realization that the inception of Palestinian self-rule, UNRWA’s situation will doubtless be suddenly and radically transformed. Like any other bureaucracy, the Agency recoils from relinquishing the vast power and resources it formerly commanded. In a somewhat condescending tone, UNRWA has claimed that “the capacity of the incoming Palestinian authority to assume responsibility for services in education, health, social services, income generation, hospital care, etc., should be supported.” Brushing aside that fact that an autonomous Palestinian rule will shortly be in place, UNRWA continues to proclaim that “United Nations assistance should address the needs of the health and education sectors, through upgrading existing facilities and constructing new ones where needed.” In a mood of “business as usual,” UNRWA appears ready to overlook the fact that the PLO has had a shadow government in place for many years, capable of providing well-established education, health and welfare programs to thousands of people. It would seem to behoove UNRWA to realize that the Palestinians could take over its operations in short order. Accordingly, instead of contemplating

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
expansion, UNRWA would now be well-advised to contract its operations, encouraging the Palestinians to take control over their lives and provide their people with those essential services for which they used to depend on UNRWA.

One of the most important lessons derived from the UNRWA experience concerns the issue of dependence. During its almost five decades of operation, UNRWA has created great dependence on its services: as much as half of the population in the West Bank and Gaza relies on the Agency for its livelihood. Instead of fostering its clients’ self-reliance, UNRWA actually did the reverse: it encouraged dependence and reliance on humanitarian aid and relief while failing to encourage the growth of private industry and business in the area. For example, the graduates of UNRWA’s education system could either work for UNRWA, leave their homes to find jobs in other countries, or remain in place and be unemployed. A third generation of Palestinian refugees is in the process of seeing UNRWA as an essential source of education, employment and social services; if UNRWA has its way, many more generations will become addicted to the Agency’s largesse.

It is not likely that the Palestinian governing Council will continue to accept the existing conditions of dependence, although UNRWA’s officials claim to have reached tacit agreements with the PLO to that effect.\footnote{Ibid.} It is even less likely that the Palestinian governing Council will relinquish authority to a United Nations agency over significantly sensitive political issues such as education and health care. The Council is even less likely to transfer financial resources under its control to a United Nations agency, for the “privilege” of managing the construction of new projects under the flag of the United Nations. An autonomous political authority like the Palestinian Council simply would not accept an international agency as the second largest employer in its bailiwick. In short, UNRWA is like an old dowager who seeks to compete romantically with a young bride at her wedding; UNRWA is the inevitable rival of the contemplated Palestinian Council and does not seem to realize it. Even Israel has acknowledged the fact that the time has come to transfer authority to the Palestinians. Perhaps it is time for UNRWA to come to the same realization.
A New Isolationism: Threat or Promise
By Robert W. Tucker

Book Review by Eric A. Belgrad

Professor Robert Tucker’s book, which was released during the height of the presidential fever amidst a welter of national publicity, attempts to re-examine the basic premises in which American policy has been based since the end of the Second World War. The endorsements on the back of the book by Senators Fulbright and Church indicate that Professor Tucker shares the doubts expressed by these critics and others of the fundamental perceptions of the American role in world affairs which have undergirded the foreign policies of the Nixon Administration and of its immediate predecessors: it promises “to think the unthinkable” about the validity of neo-isolationist thought.

Unfortunately, the Tucker analysis suffers from an abundance of straw men which are set up and brilliantly knocked down, thus weakening an otherwise valuable re-examination of American foreign policy. For example, Professor Tucker begins with a discussion of President Nixon’s recent contention, in 1971, that “the great internationalists of the post World War II period have become the neo-isolationists of the Vietnam War period and especially of the period accompanying the ending of the War.” Professor Tucker then poses the question as to whether presidential fears of a revival of isolationism is not in fact a rhetorical diversion to serve to obfuscate the real issue of American policy in South-East Asia. Dr. Tucker relates that critics of the president claim that to equate a redefinition of America’s role in the world with neo-isolationism is to confuse the issue. Since Professor Tucker makes no attempt to rebut this point of view, we must assume that he shares it, and in sharing it, he makes common cause with such critics as Professor Abram Chayes and other foreign policy brain-trusters who serve the McGovern camp. While it is true that these critics of the Administration’s foreign policy claim to advocate a “new internationalism,” their recommendations, which include a massive cutback in U.S. military capability, the unilateral withdrawal from various parts of the world without consultation, massive reduction in American troop levels in Western Europe contrary to the expressed desires of NATO – all these indicate that the “new internationalism” contains rather important elements of the old isolationism. As Professor Tucker points out, one of the hallmarks of isolationism is unilateralism and it is precisely this unilateralism, linked with an out of hand rejection of any mutual security arrangement based on old or new treaty commitments, which marked the hey-day of classical isolationism (from Washington’s farewell address to the America-Firsters) and which underlies one aspect of the new isolationism.

Professor Tucker states that “a new isolationism might well develop under the banner of a new internationalism. However, it is termed, it would still be isolationist if characterized by the refusal to entertain certain relationships and to undertake certain actions.” The problem here is

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that Professor Tucker confronts us with a fundamental semantic problem. If the new isolationism is different from the old, the only visible feature of that difference can be found in the name. Granted that isolationism today can be tolerated better than in 1940 by the United States because of the present nuclear stalemate and that traditional mutual security systems no longer hold the promise of deterrence by virtue of the decreasing credibility of the threat of retaliation, granted that economic necessities weight more heavily for those nations presently in the American sphere of influence than on the United States itself, the question remains whether the aspirations of America in securing a world which conforms to a particular desired image can be abandoned forthwith without creating incalculable changes within the very fabric of the American peoples.

More important, it can be argued that the new isolationism does not differ materially from the isolationism of the period 1919-1939. While it is true that the continued existence of strategic thermonuclear weapons in the hands of the United States would protect far better the physical security of the country than was possible in the Inter-War period, the conditions of strategic stalemate, whether involving two, three, or more parties, nevertheless recreate the possibilities of approximating the conditions of isolation of pre-nuclear days. If, as Professor Tucker admits, the old isolationism represented an unwise policy then, its lack of wisdom remains evident today, a problem which the Tucker argument does not meet. On the other hand, if the present nuclear context does provide some arcane variant to a policy of isolationism, then a further problem arises. Professor Tucker recommends neo-isolationism only because the physical security of the United States cannot come into question; underlying this contention are two highly questionable assumptions: (a) the threat of use of the thermonuclear deterrent in defense of the United States is entirely credible to an opponent and (b) the United States deterrent has achieved such a plateau of effectiveness that at no time in the future will it again be subject to challenge. The first of these assumptions implies a willingness on the part of the United States to respond to any threat to the national security with massive nuclear strikes at the challenger. Yet the evidence is clear that the United States is not willing to accept the onus of a nuclear first strike in defense of even a vital interest – and much less to protect a marginal one. If the United States no longer wishes to jeopardize New York or Chicago in defense of London and Paris, why would such a risk be assumed for San Juan or Pago Pago?

The second assumption is based on a dangerous conception of strategic realities. While Professor Tucker’s analysis of American first and second strike capabilities is correct (in fact, it is vindicated by the American position in the SALT I talks) for the present, it takes no account of future technological possibilities. If any of the members of the nuclear club should develop effective counter-measures against a missile attack, they will immediately gain an immense strategic advantage against the other members of the club in that they would no longer have to fear retaliatory strikes. While it is true that under these circumstances alliance would not be of any consequence, it is equally clear that active cooperating between the United States and its allies also provides the benefits of joint benefits from the kind of research which will prevent too great a technological gap from developing.
Finally, one of the benefits which Professor Tucker anticipates from any American policy of neo-isolationism is that erstwhile allies will be forced to look to their own security, thus realizing their own strategic potential instead of relying on the American nuclear shield. The difficulty here is that one cannot contemplate this broad proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery system with any degree of optimism. The greater the number of nations having a nuclear capability the greater the chance of political miscalculation in the use of these weapons. Therefore, the withdrawal of major powers from the international scene, which stimulates the development of nuclear capability on the part of smaller nations may be seen as a stimulant to the kind of adventurism which inevitably leads to the outbreak of cataclysmic world conflict.

If complete American isolationism does not seem advisable, what remains of the Tucker thesis? Most important is the insight that the alliance systems, which today ties the United States to all parts of the world, was designed in an earlier era, when the American strategic advantage was unquestioned, when the antagonism between East and West was total and implacable, and when Western Europe depended for its political, military, and economic survival on the United States. None of these circumstances hold true today, and yet the alliance system remains unchanged for all intents and purposes. Clearly, present circumstances require a review of United States commitments throughout the world. To the extent that the threat to Western security has lessened, the totality of American commitments to the defense of the West can be lessened. To the extent that the monolithic nature of Russian communism has eroded, the largely “anti-communist” position of the United States is subject to dilution. To the extent that the Western Europeans equal the United States in economic power, the cost of defense rightly becomes a matter of partnership in which the Europeans must assume their fair share. To the extent that the United States has come to realize that its resources are limited, it must measure more carefully the scope for development of these resources, and especially when contemplating any act of intervention in a marginal area. Professor Tucker’s thesis then should be seen as a catalyst to a re-examination of the premises of American foreign policy and not as a retreat from all the United States has represented in the post War world.

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Russia, China, and the West 1953-1966
By Isaac Deutscher

Book Review by Eric A. Belgrad

This book represents a collection of essays and newspaper articles dealing with Russia during the period of de-Stalinization and published posthumously, some three years after Deutscher’s death in 1967.

Penguin’s backleaf description of the book hints at both the strengths and weaknesses of the book. These can be best summarized as “the immediacy of contemporary journalism” and “an attempt to present the texts in a narrative sequence so that they form, in as far as is possible, a continuous commentary.”

The journalistic immediacy is indeed evident in every page of Deutscher’s text; the episodes of Russian internal and external policies are told with a startling bravado, since Deutscher claims knowledge of the deepest motives underlying the policy-making leadership in the Kremlin. The feeling of the book is of a chatty, frothy newspaper column, in which Khrushchev, Beria, Molotov, Kaganovich, Mao, Malenkov, Zhukov, and other Communist leaders cheerfully flit about, pirouetting this way and that, like so many marionettes on an historic string of Deutcher’s devising. No attempt is made to place Soviet policy in a serious historical or doctrinal framework. Instead, cheerfully confident tautological generalities leap at the reader from practically every page, striking an equal balance of astonishment and delight at the author’s courage. Early in an article dated 5 March 1954, Deutscher confidently tells us

Contrary to popular belief, the spectre of a rearmed Germany does not cause a single sleepless night to the men in the Kremlin, who know perfectly well how many sleepless nights that spectre must cause to Germany’s Western European neighbors. (p. 15)

Not very much later, (10 February 1955) he explains the dismissal of the “consumptionists” lead by Malenkov, by invoking the spectre of a rearmed Germany, which immediately causes the Kremlin to abandon its ideas of economic liberalization in favor of a massive armaments increase. He concludes that

Molotov apparently had this counter-coup to the armament of Western Germany in mind when he said at the last session of the Supreme Soviet that the ‘Western Imperialists’ would adopt a different language vis-à-vis Russia once they saw what were the Soviet counter-measures. (p. 33)

A similar ambivalence may be found in Deutscher’s description of the roles of individual members of the Politburo. In an article dated 26 February 1956, he described Mikoyan’s role at the Twentieth Party Congress, which was devoted to the denounced of the personality cult, as that of chief architect of a movement to re-establish collective leadership. Here Mikoyan is pictured “as the mouthpiece of militant anti-Stalinism” (p. 58), demolishing the person and the doctrine of his erstwhile master in a speech where “he consciously borrowed…terms, as well as many other ideas and formulas, from none other than Trotsky, who coined them.” (p. 59) Yet at

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the end of the book, Mikoyan, who is described as the architect of Khrushchev’s downfall, finds himself forced out of the Politburo “without even a vote of thanks for his forty years service.” (p. 325) This dismissal is then characterized as giving much satisfaction to “crypto-Stalinists,” who, in the same article, are shown to have been cast aside permanently: “The Congress did not rehabilitate Molotov and Kaganovich, the Stalinist die-hards whom Khrushchev had expelled from the Party.” (p. 324) The Twenty-Third Congress thus seems to cast aside the Stalinists and anti-Stalinists at the same time, and Mikoyan’s role in forty years of Party leadership is left in a miasma of contradictions.

The intrinsic problem of the book is that it is nothing more than a collection of articles written by Deutscher over a period of thirteen years, which have no unifying idea of or principle to hold them together. This episodic treatment is further aggravated by the fact that the editor of this collection was not sensitive to the all too obvious contradictions and confusions of these articles, so that the general chronological framework which is provided in no way alters the fact that the book is very confusing and quite unsatisfactory as a serious analytical work. Beyond this, Deutscher’s avowed Marxism, though framed in the guise of anti-Stalinism and anti-Khruschevism, makes a number of so-called insights in the role of such Western Marxist as Thorez and Togliatti highly suspect, from an ideological and historical viewpoint.

The book does contain a chronology of events which may be helpful to the reader who is not acquainted with the major events of the last two decades, but this chronology is not keyed to specific articles describing the events listed. A rather extensive index is also available, but there is no bibliography, and no authorities are cited by way of verification of Deutscher’s numerous controversial assertions. On balance, then, the book is of no intrinsic value to the serious student of Soviet affairs; but rather, it must be considered at best as a collection of dated articles suitable for casual bedtime reading.

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