Self-interest, national interest and the political leader's responsibility

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SELF-INTEREST, NATIONAL INTEREST AND THE POLITICAL LEADER'S RESPONSIBILITY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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ABSTRACT

Self-interest, National Interest and the Political Leader's Responsibility

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The two major schools of thought on international relations in the United States are the realists and the internationalists (often called utopians). Both have a long history in Anglo-American thinking on foreign affairs but the internationalists have taken a back seat to the realists since World War II. Internationalists have called for international cooperation in the interests of humanity while the realists have emphasized self-interest and national power. An examination of the formation of the Panama Canal Treaties shows that neither school is adequate in explaining how national interest is defined. Instead, national interest is the result of a more complex political process.

According to Aristotle, the supreme virtue of a political leader is prudence. Diplomatic prudence addresses political complexity, because it is a thoughtful balance of the moral and strategic goals of the statesman. The author examines the notion of prudence and its application to international relations.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Those who delve into the literature on international relations encounter writings that differ in their approach and prescription. National interest is the common thread that runs throughout these debates, along with the eternal dispute over whether ideals or selfish interests should shape American foreign policy. Of course, the choices are rarely posed so starkly and alternatives are not presented as mutually exclusive. Still, these alternatives have served as polar positions around which people tend to gravitate. Comparison of the two positions results in a steady stream of rebuttal and counterargument in a series of inconclusive exchanges and does little to advance the understanding of national interest or how it should be used to formulate policy.

This thesis acknowledges the connection between national interest and politics, ideas and values. In Chapter 2, the notion of national interest is examined as well as the realist and utopian points of view of American foreign policy. Chapter 3, contends that the output of a process that is made of the aforementioned components does not lend itself to a neat and comprehensive definition of the 'national interest.' The political leader should therefore acknowledge the complex mixture of ingredients that make up national interest and
exercise the virtue of prudence in the spirit of Aristotle. The political leader who cultivates this virtue will move out of his role as a conflict mediator to a more fundamental role of helping citizens realize their fullest potential. A case study examining the development of the Panama Canal Treaties is presented in Chapter 4 to show the complex nature of foreign affairs and how a specific foreign policy evolved and responded over a 70 year period to the changing configuration of domestic and international interests. Finally, the notion of prudence is examined in light of the Canal Treaties and recommendations for statesmen are provided.
CHAPTER 2

NATIONAL INTEREST AND SELF-INTEREST

National Interest

Perhaps the most readily accepted tenet of the American foreign policy establishment is that reflection on available resources leads to a recognition that power, though limited, is necessary to achieve foreign policy goals. The statesman must abandon those ends for which power is missing or unusable and preserve and increase power for those ends determined as indispensable. Kenneth Thompson defines national interest as a given set of needs and requirements that lie at the root of the survival of every political group. Constraining the fulfillment of these needs and requirements are the nation’s resources and its national capacity which require statesmen to choose the most effective of several actions.

The question for political leaders is how to best determine national interest and develop policies that promote it. Oppenheim attempts to distill a definition of national interest. He focuses on the state’s security, economic well-being, territory, and independence as a whole, and not of a particular individual or groups within a state. Excluded from his notion of national interest are values held by "some,

many, and perhaps all members of a given society."² For him, there is an underlying assumption that it is possible, at least in principle, to determine the national interest by objective criteria.³ Joynt and Corbett correctly counter Oppenheim, showing the objectives of states are various and complex - security, prestige, prosperity, liberty and so on. They, too, argue that conflicts are common because of scarce resources. The allocations of these resources will vary and will be a function of the ethical values of decision-makers combined with estimates of the nature and extent of international dangers and opportunities.⁴

As the above debate shows, national interest is a vague as well as a controversial term. But when used as an instrument of political action, the expression serves as a means of justifying, denouncing or proposing policies.⁵ The term "national" can be misleading, for example, when applied to a people such as the Kurds or the Palestinians because they have no national sovereignty but do share a common heritage and a sense of being a nation. This "political socialization"

implies that people receive politically-oriented education that encompasses inculcation of political information, values and practices. On the international level, national interest is the conglomerate of human attitudes and behavior with high priority on the defense and assertion of the values, interests, and the institutions of a particular people usually defined in terms of such common traits as culture, ethnicity, or ideology.  

Broad domestic policies such as health reform are sometimes referred to as in the "national interest"; the term 'public interest' may be more appropriate in these cases because of their internal nature. For this thesis, national interest will be limited to the actions, interactions and external interests of existing states on the international level. External interests refer to the interests of a unitary actor as it relates to other unitary actors that are states. Even with this clarification, national interest is still a clouded term. If policy makers could declare a certain course of actions to be in the national interest and by mere declaration it was so, then it would be impossible to act contrary to national interest.

National interest is difficult to directly define, and I believe that it is impossible to conceive of national interest in terms outside the political process. As we shall later

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see, a state's national interest and its foreign policies will be influenced by ideas, internal and external politics, and circumstances.

**Self-interest and Political Thought**

The concept of national interest, for some, is based on the concept of individual human self-interest. Plato's rivals argued that human beings came together in political association for the narrow reason of balancing mutual fear with safety. They believed that human nature was self-centered and thus grounded their theory of political life for apolitical man. During the time Christianity dominated Western thought, the notion of self-interest-based behavior was thought as evidence of sin and not as a foundation of potential political order. Christianity developed a notion of an intangible, eternal soul within us and for many people this soul was more real than their own flesh and blood. Late Medieval Christian thought was characterized by the synthesis of Aristotelian and Augustinian thought developed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Western political thinkers influenced by the Christian tradition have often aspired to universal moral codes that have the tendency to abstract from certain contingent factors of social relations, as if entirely removed from all contingency.

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Renaissance humanism rekindled the classical notion that humans were responsible and rational. Da Vinci, Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo developed the natural sciences with their stress on observation and mathematics. The new science secularized human knowledge and established that human reason was competent to fashion fundamental laws of the universe. This reasoning eventually carried through to political science, law, psychology, economics and ethics.

In England, contract theory that reflected a competitive individualism developed for the preservation of property and the enforcement of justice. Morality had been thoroughly secularized and "the good" was no longer an intrinsic source of attraction. Thomas Hobbes drew an analogy between human nature and the discoveries of Renaissance physics which replaced the Aristotelian telos with unending motion. Aristotle had argued that all human activity has a purpose, a function. According to Hobbes, the human "appetite" is for things that help us survive, and human "aversion" is for things that threaten. Good and evil are similarly defined. Hobbes, using Galileo’s work in dynamics, the science of moving bodies that states objects never stop once set in motion, suggested that people, like objects, will interact when they come into contact. He saw no remedy for conflict between nations in the absence of power to enforce peace and agreements. In Hobbes’ "state of nature" every man had an unlimited right to everything, so there was no justice or
injustice, and self-preservation was the only rule. From this universal structural position of vulnerability and initial equality, Hobbes proposed that survival depended on submission to a superordinate authority, the sovereign. He thought awareness of the vulnerability of men would bring them to seek peace and to pledge against violence. In this state or commonwealth, people relinquish a part of their unlimited rights on the condition that others do so as well. This contract with others bonds political society and produces civic morality. Third-party control was an effective way for rational self-interested individuals to produce collective outcomes that were not favoring some individuals' interests above others. Hobbes was emulated by some but attacked by many, especially church-minded Royalists. Many also recognized the importance of issues he had raised: the arbitrary and conventional character of morality, its embodiment in the social contract, and the character of popular consent.8

In political science, a theory of "adversary" democracy founded on both conflict and self-interest has been evolving since the seventeenth century. This theory incorporated a legitimate role for self-interest in the polity. The new argument justified the vote as a means of protecting one's interests. Cromwell's Long Parliament witnessed the departing

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from a tradition that consensus seeking was the best way to ascertain the good of the whole, and made the first step toward the claim (by now a full-fledged adversary theory) that moral neutrality existed between one set of interests and another.\(^9\) Mansbridge posits that the adversary theory rests on the idea that man is asocial because the pursuit of power and self-interest will eventually lead to clashes. As Mansbridge explains it, this model of democracy reduced human motivation to self-interest with no moral dimension. In other words, a community is not a place where friends come together to seek the good life, but a process through which each person seeks his or her own particular good.\(^{10}\) But Tong argues that even if the processes of conflict-oriented politics such as bargaining, adapting and compromising do not have the community’s interest in mind, the theory has a moral dimension insofar as it requires the acceptance of consequences and the ascription of responsibility.\(^{11}\)

Adam Smith felt that a nonrational element, "the invisible hand" (i.e. the market), was needed to guide selfish men to the general good as outlined in *Wealth of Nations* in

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1776. Smith and other champions of free trade attempted to promote their point of view as a method of world-wide harmony. Many thought that free trade was the "international law of the almighty" and free trade and peace were one and the same. In America, the framers of the Constitution wrestled with the constant danger of corruption from self-interest while they tried to rally the public spirit. John Adams held that self-deceit was the "spurious offspring of self-love" and was the root cause of the ease with which men attack one another, all the while mistaking the impulses of their own "swarms of passions" for the dictates of conscience. Hamilton worried about men obsessed with self-promotion. Madison’s constitutional proposals always had two prongs: one based on using self-interest and one on repressing it.

For some, the effort to expand social welfare within the framework of liberalism in the eighteenth century would reconstruct the classic communitarian model of social interaction. The symbols of liberalism were constitutions, parliament, representative government, individual liberty,


rule of law, and rights of man which displaced the symbols of authoritarianism, monarchism, and despotism. Free elections replaced mixtures of ascription, conspiracy, mob endorsement and brute force. Liberalism preferred political styles such as dialogue, debate, deliberation and compromise majoritarianism instead of decision making by cabal and rule by executive decree. During this period, analysis-as-argument was introduced as part of the democratic system as we know it today. This process raises relevant issues, probes assumptions, stimulates debate and educates citizens. The winners of the debate are exposed to the same forces over and over again. Kant believed that as the number of states based on liberal principles grew, people would progress and gradually come closer together toward a greater agreement on the basis for peace and understanding.\textsuperscript{15} Organizations to control the international use of force did develop in 1918 (the League of Nations), but national governments were, however, unwilling to accept limitations upon state sovereignty (self-interest) to endow the collective security organization with the authority and ability to make it successful. The League of Nations dissolved before the second world war; its successor was the United Nations which had a charter that promised to correct major weaknesses of the

League. The difference between the old League of Nations and the new United Nations was that the latter established a global power structure and that collective security would be enforced by the four Great Powers acting in concert as the "Four Policemen." The problem though, in addition to Great Britain's weakness, was that not all foreign leaders, especially Stalin, saw international politics through the lens of a similar moral or empirical framework.

Early in the twentieth century dominant political thought moved away from the dual approach combining interests and the common good, and by the 1930s New Deal intellectuals struck out against "moralists" and shifted toward a more hard-boiled, detached approach. Realism, as it became known, developed a political science theory based on conflicting self-interests. After World War II the descriptive theory of adversary democracy developed, grounding government totally in self-interest. The concept of majority rule as a measure of good of the whole changed to an approach to sum competing individual preferences. In an atmosphere where interests of citizens diverged and a unanimous citizenry was untenable, adversary democracy allowed the modern democratic nation-state to flourish. The new concept did not require people to be correct or moral but placed a burden upon them to promote their interests while not expecting them to resolve underlying
conflicts."\(^{16}\)

The theory also had a normative side. The theory is only legitimated when each individual’s interests are weighted equally, by accepting the moral worth of each individual’s interests and by the notion that all interests deserve equal weight. For this theory to be fully operational citizens must have access to the political system and choose to exercise it.

**Self-interest and International Relations**

The concept of self-interest has also prevailed in United States international relations since World War II in the realist tradition. In this tradition, egoistic assumptions dominate over the humanist interests of idealism. Within this framework, Hans J. Morgenthau argued in *Politics Among Nations* that power is the "immediate aim" of countries in foreign relationships. Power to Morgenthau was "man’s control over the minds and actions of other men...[as] a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised."\(^{17}\)

Two schools of thought make up the long-standing debate on the role of self-interest in international relations. This debate has been conducted in many different terms. The


predominant realist theory, sometimes called the consequentalist theory, is pitted against the opposite side, who usually refer to themselves as internationalists. Other names for the internationalists (usually used by the realists) include idealist, utopian, and deontologist. The two sides describe each other in various ways. The following are some examples:

James Schlesinger - "[One side] tend[s] to be rather romantic. [To them] the world seems a benign place, with a natural harmony among peoples only intermittently disrupted by evil men or hostile ideologies... [The other side has] far tougher attitudes... hardened by centuries of conflict, defeat, suppression, and national humiliation. [To them the world] is marked by power politics, national rivalries, and ethnic tensions."\(^{18}\)

Robert G. Kaufman - "Realists... [argue] that U.S. foreign policy should not give prominence either to the promotion of human rights or to democracy... Internationalists... believe that promoting and maintaining democracy abroad will remain vital to national interests... .\(^{19}\)

Colin S. Gray - "One coalition of beliefs may be labeled the consequentialists, the other the absolute or deontological. The former coalition holds that the dominant ethical argument over a policy must pertain to


its actual consequences. The latter coalition of beliefs... adheres to an absolute ethic that purportedly should govern behavior.\textsuperscript{20}

Robert W. McElroy - "The realist tradition... stresses the roles of necessity and anarchy in the politics of nations... . [It leaves] little room for meaningful choice on the part of state decision makers, and even less room for meaningful choice of moral values that conflict with the national interest...The internationalists believed firmly in the notion of human progress....[They believe] human beings in all parts of the world share a destiny that is increasingly interconnected on the economic, political, cultural, and technological planes."\textsuperscript{21}

Thompson explains the contrast in diplomatic terms.\textsuperscript{22} He compares two approaches to diplomacy as: the warrior-heroic and the mercantile-shopkeeper models. The first resembles a military campaign with aggressive tactics and without the pursuit of trust or fairness. The mercantile-shopkeeper model is based on compromise emphasizing mutual understanding and honesty.

McElroy contrasts these two tendencies as different views


\textsuperscript{22} Kenneth W. Thompson, \textit{Morality and Foreign Policy} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 12.
of human nature. He explains that liberal internationalist thought dominated the field of international relations from 1918 to 1945, the interwar period. World War I and the cataclysmic events surrounding it were seen as the ultimate indictment of the power politics that governed Europe. The internationalists saw the opportunity to transform politics among nations into a more cooperative and transnational process to create a stable, peaceful era. They believed that war arose not from the nature of man "but rather from patterns of state interaction that could be altered through moral education and the collective action of the peoples of the world." The internationalists saw how terribly under-equipped the Allied statesmen were to deal with the tangled problems that victory had left at their doorstep. They realized the vast distance that separated popular expectations from practical realities and how important it was for the future peace of humankind that judgement on foreign affairs should be formulated on a basis of widely shared expert knowledge. They emphasized the common interest all nations had in preserving peace and creating a stable international order. Common to the internationalists was the assumption that they knew what a better life would and could be and how that knowledge could be justified and implemented.

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24 Ibid., 6.
During the interwar period, borders were being broken down as economic and health issues spanned across many states and were no longer centered in individual countries. Internationalists were looking for a true international morality that would include peaceful resolutions of conflicts, humanitarian aid to the needy and a commercial regime with just international trade rules.

The realists argued that the struggle for survival and power leaves little room for the motivations of conscience to provide a role in state decision making. Internationalists countered that most foreign-policy decisions generally do not involve survival but lesser objectives such as economic advantages, treaty rights, preservations of bases and national honor. Thus, there are many opportunities for conscience-based decisions in foreign policy matters.

Internationalists believed there were three channels through which morality could influence the formulation of foreign policy. First, they believed mankind was ripe for more education and involvement in political affairs and the informed masses would check actions of state leaders that contradicted moral principles. Secondly, the internationalists believed that publicity generated by the League of Nations and other interest groups could pressure states to comply with moral standards to avoid international condemnation. Thirdly, political leaders were expected to have a moral standard themselves and follow those standards.
The internationalists advanced the view of human nature that stressed rationality and community. Realists, on the other hand, were filled with cynicism, underscoring conflict and the drive for power. Realists found a prophet in Reinhold Niebuhr, who developed a Christian interpretation of the nature of man. Niebuhr believed that all of man's "intellectual and cultural pursuits... become infected with the sin of pride [and] Man's pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation." Niebuhr's ideas emphasized man's needs for security, which leads him to a desire for domination over others. Also characteristic of Niebuhr's writings is a claim that all of mankind's knowledge has an "ideological" taint and pretends to be more true than it is. Niebuhr believed it was his duty "to take all factors in a political and social situation which offer resistance to established norms, into account, particularly the factors of self-interest and self-power."

E.H. Carr, a veteran diplomat, took the baton from Niebuhr to launch an attack on the centerpiece of the internationalist argument in his book The Twenty Years'  

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26 Ibid., 2.

Crisis, 1919-1939. Carr contended that the assertion that every nation was interested in banning warfare from the earth was merely a projection by predominately British and American scholars of their hope that Anglo-American dominance could be maintained without the necessity of war.\textsuperscript{28} The internationalists had argued that it was in the rational interest of all nations to pursue peace and economic cooperation, but Carr pointed out that not every state was pursuing the utilitarian concept of the greatest good for the whole world. "To make the harmonization of interests the goal of political action is not the same thing as to postulate that a natural harmony of interests exists, and it is this latter postulate which has caused so much confusion in international thinking," cautioned Carr.\textsuperscript{29} Indeed in the 1920s when war was outlawed some nations found their goals were only attainable through war. Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and the Japanese attacked Manchuria. From the vantage point of 1939, Carr called into question the idealist action plan to educate the masses based on his observation of the sophistication and control of the propaganda campaign of the Fascists and the Nazis.

But as strong as was Carr's response to internationalist


thought in the field of foreign affairs, he does not rule out
the role of morality completely. Quoting Niebuhr's dictum
"politics will, to the end of history, be an area where
conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive
factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their
tentative and uneasy compromises," Carr goes on to say that
"the compromises, like solutions of the other human problems,
will remain uneasy and tentative. But it is an essential part
of any compromise that both factors shall be taken into
account."30

The "realist" tradition came into full bloom with
Morgenthau's Politics Among Nations, published in 1948 at the
zenith of American hegemony. McElroy asserts that all postwar
literature dealing with the role of morality in foreign policy
is either an elaboration of, or a response to, themes
presented by Morgenthau.31 Morgenthau spoke out against the
dangerous delusions of utopianism and behavioral approaches to
statecraft. He argued for diplomacy that recognized the
interests and power of all states. Morgenthau staged a
crusade against crusades; that is, he counseled against the
identification of a nation's goals with the moral purposes of
the universe:

It is exactly the concept of interest defined in terms of

30 Ibid., 100.

31 Robert W. McElroy, Morality and American Foreign Policy
power that saves us from both moral excess and political folly. For if we look at all nations, our own included, as political entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all of them.32

Political realism, like internationalism, is a philosophical disposition and set of assumptions about the world as well as human nature; in other words, it is an attitude regarding the human condition. Gilpin, a realist, writing in 1986, explains that there are three general characteristics connected to the realist tradition.33 [1] Realists feel that anarchy is the rule; order, justice, and morality are the exceptions. Realists, according to Gilpin, do not necessarily forgo the pursuit of these higher values but they feel the final arbiter of political associations is power. [2] The second foundation of realism is the concept of "conflict groups." Man, according to Gilpin, is a tribal species and will compete for scarce resources as member of a group. Over time man has been a member of city-states, kingdoms, empires, and nation-states. Today nationalism is the name of the loyalty connected with our states. [3] The final characteristic of realism is that security is the


linchpin of human motivation. Without security, no other values, such as beauty, truth or goodness, can come into play.

If Gilpin's realist view of human nature is accurate, why was international idealism, with its attempts at international cooperation and war prevention, dominant during the interwar period? The answer lies in the fact, as I shall argue later, that it is ideas that enable us to orient ourselves to life and they are subject to an discursive process. Morgenthau speculated that power-hunger was held in check by a European-wide moral and intellectual consensus:

It is this consensus, both child and father, as it were, of common moral standards and a common civilization as well as common interests, which kept in check the limitless desire for power, potentially inherent, as we know, in all imperialisms, and prevented it from becoming a political actuality.\textsuperscript{34}

Morgenthau explains that the deterioration of our sense of moral limitations is the result of two factors: "the substitution of democratic for aristocratic responsibility in foreign affairs and the substitution of nationalistic standards of action for universal ones."\textsuperscript{35} As Morgenthau saw it, it was democracy and nationalism that destroyed the moral strictures of international relations. No longer were foreign


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 22.
minister posts filled for life by nobles who knew and had relations with nobles of other states. In a democracy these posts were filled by those in power and their only allegiance was to their nation or their status. Thompson concurs and explains that the diplomacy of the eighteenth century was between monarchs or members of an aristocratic elite. Since then, envoys, whom Thompson calls "amateurs", have replaced the "professionals." These professionals had enjoyed the moral improvements since the fifteenth and sixteenth century when the sanctity of human life was less than today and it was as common to kill foreign statesmen who were particularly obnoxious. It was during the Hague Conferences (1899, 1907) and Geneva Conventions that the signatory nations laid down intricate legal rules of conduct which are reflective of moral rules of conduct to the effect that only soldiers ready to fight shall be the subject to confrontation, and civilians shall be exempt from participation. According to Morgenthau, it was not until the end of the Second World War that the destruction of major German cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki could be accepted with any equanimity.

In rebuttal, Joynt and Corbett maintain Morgenthau has oversimplified and distorted history by positing a kind of

36 Kenneth W. Thompson, Morality and Foreign Policy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 12.

golden age that started with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which marked the end of the Holy Roman Empire and inaugurated modern Europe, to the end of World War I. They assert that, during the period in question, reason of state ruled as the supreme principle of foreign policy and cynicism, deception and fraud dominated diplomacy. The only limits to the struggle for power were primitive technology and the lack of communications, and in spite of these limitations, large areas were devastated and many lives sacrificed. They also argue that there is no evidence that a universal moral code existed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Craig also contends that the relatively peaceful time in the eighteenth century was less a result of shared values and physical equilibrium than war fatigue and low levels of armament.\textsuperscript{38}

As I have said at the start of the chapter, the literature on international relations has been preoccupied with the debate of national interest defined as national self-interest, and national interest as prescribed by following moral imperatives. And so it is that realists assume morality is just an attempt to legitimize actions taken out of self-interest. Internationalists argue that just because "self-interested" morality is frequently used for the legitimization of foreign policy, that does not mean it is always used in that manner. They argue that many people and nations express

genuine commitments and deeply held beliefs and strive to instruct people in what they believe is right. Morgenthau himself admits that the pressure of shaming high public officials has had positive results in changing policy on particular issues.39

A second area where internationalists and realists disagree is on what Morgenthau called sentimentalism, or moralism or monism as it is sometimes called. Sentimentalism is the tendency to focus on a single moral value without regard to time and place and the acceptance of all the negative baggage that follows in the pursuit of that value. Examples of such sentimentalism include the single-minded pursuit of liberty or democracy. McElroy contends that the realists have no corner on the attempt to eradicate one-dimensional and absolutist approaches to complex international issues. He objects to the realist notion that since sentimentalism is value-related and has led to tragic consequences, all moral reasoning will lead to the same result.

The dispute between the two parties appears to be irresolvable. Realism takes self-interest for granted. In practice, the realists have focused on a relatively narrow idea of U.S. interests and a military-based definition of

power. Theodore Roosevelt is a prime example of an unabashed realist. He believed that international politics was highly competitive and only the strong and agile succeeded in protecting their interests and way of life.

In general, international approaches are those which look for conditions and solutions which are supposed to overcome and eliminate the selfish instincts of humans. Internationalists give higher priority to the moral dimension and look at the social and economic causes of the issue and rely on multilateral, diplomatic approaches. Woodrow Wilson could represent the internationalists. He embodied the tradition of American exceptionalism, the belief that America was different from other nations and could base its foreign policy on the standards of universal law and morality.

It is legitimate to ask if this debate helps to bring order and meaning to the study of international relations, or do the concepts of other political scientists who view national interest as politically defined by both self-interest and values coming into play (at both the national and international levels) offer a valid alternative? It is these theories that recognize that terms like national interest in the political arena become objects of endless contention, rationalization and self-deception. It is, however, the area I believe holds the most potential for advancement in the field of international relations.
CHAPTER 3

SELF-INTEREST AND POLITICS

Self-Interest as Defined by Politics

This chapter will explore alternatives to the traditional realistic and utopian schools of thought regarding international relations. It is argued that national interest is the result of a political process and that the political leader must balance elements of both schools.

Keohane argues that the search for power takes many different forms depending on the ultimate goals of the actors and the context of the particular situation. He also explores the pursuit of self-abnegation that places a high value on international solidarity, lawfulness and rectitude. For Keohane there is no clear distinction between egoism and altruism because egoism can be farsighted as well as myopic. We can turn to Hobbes himself to see the elasticity of the concept of motivation. When asked why he had just given sixpence to a beggar, Hobbes answered, "I was in pain to consider the miserable condition of the old man; and now my

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alms, giving him some relief, doth also ease me." Depending on one’s point of view, Hobbes’ action may have been an act of altruism or self-interest. If international relations were to be based solely on self-interest defined narrowly and satisfied immediately, however, one may question whether this emphasis would not be self-defeating in the long term. This counterproductive approach would have a tendency to destroy common devotion to principles of justice and established mutualities in a community of nations as it does with individuals.

In this chapter I have chosen to argue that egoism and altruism are not mutually exclusive categories, but contend that the important issues are how people and organizations define self-interest and what beliefs and values they take into account. More importantly, we could ask how the actors see their own interests relative to those of others. For Keohane, four relationships may develop between actors depending on the extent of the independent interests and their interdependency. In a pure egoist world, two actors may be indifferent to the welfare of others. Instrumentally interdependent states consider the welfare of others only insofar as others can take action against them. These states are not concerned about the welfare of others for the other’s sake, only possible retaliation for their actions.

Situationally interdependent relationships become more prevalent in the close-knit trade and financial networks of the contemporary world. In this relationship, as the welfare of one state improves, so does another. For instance, improvement in the Brazilian economy directly increases the probability that they will pay their debt to the U.S. This type of interdependency has effectively kept in check egoistic attitudes of actors. Violation of commitments, disregard for the rights of other states and unrestrained use of force lead to instability in the environment and ultimately react upon the interests of the violator. This view is often described as "enlightened self-interest" which is another way of introducing values into political decisions. The final relationship examined is that of empathetic interdependence. States may act to the benefit of others even if such actions have no apparent effect on the material well-being or security of the actor. A realist may argue that all relationships may be grounded in self-interest and the argument may hold up for major players in world affairs, but the argument loses steam when considering the foreign aid programs of Sweden or agencies such as CARE.

Keohane is arguing that there is something missing from the self-interested or the globalistic account of the world.

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He does not deny the power of self-interest but contends that there are other goals or motivations that drive international relationships in addition to self-interest. In other words, self-interest is not a wrong but an incomplete account of motivation. The notion that nations seek only power rings hollow because different regimes may have different foreign policy goals. Nations and actors act as if their choices were real choices. Choices are not mere whims but are made for reasons with objectives and purposes. The ends decided upon, whether security, peace or war, are the results of ethical questions based on values. A student from the Realpolitik (realism) school of thought might argue that ethical decisions are made by and large in connection with the pursuit of power. If this were true nations would be in the position of having to define power. Is it the size of their army? their ability to protect themselves? their population? revenue? trade value? or area of the state? Even if an index was created values would have to be assigned.

On the other hand, a few simple moral principles do not exist which can be applied with assurance as guides to action in complex situations. International situations by nature consist of a wide combination of circumstances and no general rule can be derived which shows the ethical necessity of applying a particular principle.

Any attempt to portray the realists as amoral or the internationalists as moral zealots amounts to nothing more
than a strawman argument. Indeed, the realism/internationalist framework is not sufficient to make sense of political life, politics and foreign policy. Politicians deal with what Stone calls "strategically crafted arguments." Political reasoning is by metaphor and analogy, and paradox and ambiguity are the hallmarks of human existence. It is trying to get others to see abstract concepts such as national interest as one thing rather than another. Policy making in the political arena is a struggle of ideas. Political leaders struggle to interpret the collective will of their constituents and this abstract concept is then interpreted as national interest. Influence, cooperation and loyalty become powerful forces, and groups develop to take sides on the issue. Power is derived from a combination of all of these forces. To paraphrase Stone, power is used in conflicts over the ideas of fairness, justice, rightness and goodness. Powerful ideas such as colonialism, civil rights, environmental protection, and feminism have changed the course of history. Therefore, self-interest and ideas are inextricably intertwined.

Kingdon argues convincingly that self-interest is not only an incomplete explanation for behaviors or outcomes, but that the self-interest theoretical basis for policy is unsound. He points to studies that show narrowly focused

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interest groups have difficulty in determining what was in their best interest.\textsuperscript{44} Even prominent realists, George Kennnan, Dean Acheson, Hans Morgenthau and Walter Lippman often took contradictory stances on the national interest in issues such as development of the H-bomb and antiballistic missile defense systems.\textsuperscript{45} Self-interest, whether applied to a person, group, or nation is expressed and defined in terms of ideas because people have ideas about their self-interest.

Kingdon also argues that ideas have a life of their own. As politicians use ideas to persuade others, ideas often become part of their identity. As the living idea evolves, the course of the idea may take a turn that works against the material self-interest of the promoter. For instance, recently many politicians have embraced the idea of term limits and argue that a policy generated from this idea will foster the public good, therefore his or her interest may include both the promotion of the idea for their own political advancement and concern for the public good even though it may not be in their self-interest if they want a long-time political career.

\textsuperscript{44} John W. Kingdon, "Politicians, Self-Interest, and Ideas", Chapter 3 in George Marcus and Russel Hanson, eds, Reconsidering the Democratic Public, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 77.

\textsuperscript{45} See Joel H. Rosenthal, Righteous Realists (Louisiana State University Press, 1991) 89, 115.
Ideas, Politics and the Common Good

Politics and policies can only occur within a community: public policy attempts to achieve something as a community. Even though conflict within a community exists about its goals, national foreign policy must assume both a collective will and a collective effort to achieve certain goals. Foreign policy goals have generally centered around suppressing hostile foreign powers and maintaining markets and travel lanes. National security, like national interest, is an ambiguous phrase that is not a guide for action but a concept that is subjective, relative, and dynamic. Factors involved in defining national security are the personality of the definer, the country’s size, power and self-concept, and the nation’s economy (rich nations have more to protect than poorer nations). Defining national security, as well as national interest, is a goal-oriented activity accomplished through political deliberation in our democratic society. Deliberation on fundamental goals cannot take place without shared values and understandings because there must be widespread agreement about the nature of the central problems the policy addresses. This agreement takes the form of shared moral and intellectual assumptions. In other words, there are norms and standards of what is morally and politically acceptable. Without these standards the discussion degenerates into an unending dispute. Therefore, policy deliberation is not only a function of goal setting but also
of norm setting that determines when certain conditions are to be regarded as problems. Deliberation can uncover both conflict and commonality and can help citizens decide what they want and then influence the content of those wants. Deliberation or public discussion of the public good is the essence of normative democratic theory. In understanding that motives are manifold and that certain conflicts are not irreconcilable, citizens and their representatives can both discover and create a common good through deliberation. There is no question that included in this deliberation are some people pursuing their own narrowly defined self-interest, but in our nation and in international politics they are not allowed to do it blatantly and exclusively.

This thesis suggests that there are two methods to define the role of national interest in the formation of policy; one makes national interest the result of the political process and the other contends that it is its precondition. The former has self-interested players determining policy that, in theory, is best for the greatest number. Although political resources are unequally distributed, individuals are allowed to pursue their interests as they see fit. Standard pluralist doctrine declares that there is no objective standard by which to measure the wisdom of any particular policy. The procedural process of determining policy is the only thread that ties the participants together. The results of this process are that no policy can be evaluated as contrary to the
national interest. This approach does not look upon the nation as a whole but sees a framework that allows self-interested people or groups to pursue their desires.

The second method, W. David Clinton argues, is a method of defining national interest based on the common good of a society with a common sense of shared history and destiny. Clinton acknowledges clashes of immediate interests of individuals or groups but contends their interests coincide in a common good:

Because individuals find their highest fulfillment in communion with others, the preservation and perfection of their common enterprise, the society, forms their highest interest, to which other, more particular, interests, desires, and wishes may justifiably be sacrificed. This method allows for a role to be played by justice. It is the statesmen who must determine whether justice demands conformity to some abstract formula or a tolerable harmony between competing forces. Those who attempt to obtain the latter by acting solely from self-interest would choose not to discover mutual interests or act with a sense of obligation to a wider community. In either case though, the political process, defined as either competition and bargaining among groups or debates over first principles, determines the national interest. The internal domestic debate is performed among participants within the nation. The components of this

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process are well-known and include the media, Congress, public opinion, domestic politics, the influence of interest groups and the bureaucracy.

Howard J. Wiarda explains that the internal political debate does not take into account what goes on beyond the borders of the state in question and therefore only represents part of the equation that amounts to national interest. Outside the borders of the state are the influencing factors of international politics.

Politics and Morality Among Nation-States

This political process outlined above is limited to participants internal to the nation. We have seen that the political process to determine the national interest is not simply a clash of particular interests nor is it a disinterested search for impartial justice. It can be argued that nations who share common values or a spirit of justice can share an "internal" process but global rivals with no authoritative institution create many, usually conflicting, national interests. On this level a commonly accepted system of justice among parties is inconceivable; therefore statesmen must not rely on the concept of justice but that of prudence.

International politics, as opposed to municipal or national politics, is sometimes unyielding to the restraints

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of laws and norms because of the status of national sovereignty. International agreements are subject to ratification of the nation’s political bodies and subject to change by those bodies. Lawmaking bodies on the international scene often lack authority to impose sanctions. Therefore, individual nations or alliances are left to decide on the level of participation in international sanctions. As a result of these characteristics, the international system has been driven to flexible rules and norms. Agreements between major powers have taken on the form of implied agreements, not solemn contracts. These types of agreements allow political leaders to vacillate between positions, respond to changing circumstances or repackage their image when the public or opponents question their stances. Through these agreements and international conferences, informal international norms are developed, not in a formal sense but as precepts and practices broadening out from one precedent to the next.

In international politics, states press for many different claims in hopes that they will attain their own overall national interest. These claims may include the involvement with other states or may be in objection to the interests of them. International politics, like internal politics, must submit to influences. The state’s geopolitical position is influenced by many factors: its resources,

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location, size and relationships with other states. Those in strong positions can devote some of their resources to the promotion of their ideals, for instance when the United States intervened in Vietnam. Other influences that can serve as a restraint or motivation on United States policy are international constraints such as world opinion, social movements and notions such as manifest destiny. Internal interests of states must be brought to the global arena and be effectively argued to achieve the good of the nation. Each state then determines what constitutes a good argument and what interests can be justified by argument and what must be imposed by force. In this sense a common rationality exists and national interest becomes a force of reciprocity and restraint.

W. David Clinton argues that there is a kind of conversation between the domestic and international forces of international relations. He maintains that the external debate may intrude on the internal debate. This intrusion may take place when restraints are placed on personal interests to allow the state to compete in the world arena. Participants in the internal debate may also seek to influence national interest by appeals to world opinion. In this case, general international consensus is used as a source of authority in the argument to move that state's definition of its national interest in a certain direction.

The internal debate can also influence the external
debate. A state’s argument for a gain at another state’s expense would be considered more readily by others if the first state was fundamentally satisfied with their status as opposed to a nation whose leaders were calling for conquest or an expansion of power.

On the international level, states invariably attempt to make justice the foundation of their arguments, although there is no obligation to do so. Commonly accepted ethical standards play a guiding role in the effectiveness of arguments. These norms do not prescribe what nations must do for each other but what they may do to one another. In this political atmosphere, bounds are not fixed but move with time and circumstances and consequences. The political leader and policy maker must recognize the nature of these norms and how they effect his or her national interest. The practice of statecraft is conducted in a fragmented world with many states, each with its own system of government, cultural tradition and national purpose. Transnational moral consensus is virtually nonexistent; however, states are frequently compelled to stand for principles beyond self-interest and appeal to more than the calculus of power.

Moral absolutism, though, asserts the existence of universally binding, absolute moral laws that can tell us which acts are right and which are wrong. When considering even the most noble goals such as justice and freedom it becomes clear that these are sometimes competing and opposing.
Aristotle saw that all forms of government were not the same but that the best one was developed for the environment in which it was formed. In other societies, for instance, excessive profit in business is theft, and Marxists believe the institution of private property is immoral. To compensate for this incongruence, options would be to ignore the variation, consider them variations with the same general root or reject the idea that there are universal moral principles.

Relativists do the latter. They argue that either there are no moral laws of any sort, or else that if there are moral laws, they could have force only relative to a particular cultural group and within a particular historical context. Morgenthau insisted that relativism is essential in the relation between moral principles and foreign policy. He cites two relationships; a relativism in time, when certain principles are applicable in one period of history and not applicable in another, and a relativism in terms of culture -- of contemporaneous culture -- in that certain principles are obeyed by certain nations or political civilizations and not in others.\(^{49}\) Hence, relativism claims that there are no universally valid moral laws and that all standards of evaluation are contingent and culture-specific. Another approach, and one that I advocate, would be to put the

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emphasis on character and virtues of individuals and not rules and obedience. In this sense, morality is thoughtful and reflective and we could consider people moral who are not necessarily adhering to rules, but who show good judgement.

Statesmen are confronted with choices and, as Thompson observes, "we deceive ourselves in supposing that every choice does not involve gains and losses or benefits and sacrifices for those who are principally involved." Moral reasoning is the arena where ethical imperatives and political realities reconcile each other.

Prudence and Political Leadership

The concept of self is at the heart of ethics. The self is an agent, a doer of deeds, the actor, who reaps rewards or suffers the consequences of those actions. The concept of self with its many facets is irreplaceable in discussions of national interest and ethics. Satisfying one's personal desires immediately at the expense or in neglect of all others is called selfishness. Prudence, on the other hand, is the longer term, more circumspect satisfaction of oneself. The emphasis on oneself, in this sense, is on the whole self, and not merely one's desire. Aristotle defines the prudent man as one who is able to deliberate well and determine what is good and advantageous as a means to the good life. Prudence is "a

truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to things that are good and bad for human beings."\(^5\) We expect our political leaders to exercise prudence or practical wisdom in public affairs and to discern what is good for themselves and the rest of the nation.

Aristotle explains that prudence and the moral virtue temperance are closely related. More specifically, he says the word 'temperance' means preserving prudence. Aristotle's definition of temperance is the observance of the mean in relation to pleasures and pain.\(^5\) He contends that a person who has a distorted view of life because of excessive pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain cannot exercise the practical virtue of prudence. According to Aristotle, correct actions are based on nonrigid principles that speak generally, and individual cases require a sensitive and fair reading of the circumstances felt to be involved by those "on site."

Prudence is in what Aristotle calls the Calculative Faculty of the rational soul. However, its close ties to temperance remind us that it is not a purely rational quality because a purely rational quality can be forgotten but a moral lapse is not attributable to a lapse of memory. Prudence deals with the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be determined by intelligence alone. A perception or intuition


\(^{52}\) *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107b.
is necessary. Therefore, Aristotle has determined that prudence is a moral as well as an intellectual virtue. The results of prudent activities, especially among people in policy formulating positions, extend to the affairs of one's family and community. People who make laws and set policy deliberate and act. The process of deliberation requires a mixture of reason and emotion. The emotional investment amounts to the policy maker's understanding their own needs and the needs of others in the decision. Policy makers need to understand their own fears, hates, loves, and pride as well as engaging in emotional sympathy, identification and judgement of others.

We are told in book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* "that the good of the state [as opposed to the individual] is manifestly a greater and more perfect good, both to attain and to preserve" and that the proper role of the politician is to be concerned with his own happiness and that of mankind.

A question for those who examine political leadership and international relations is whether an objective basis exists for a comparative evaluation of ethical standards of one

53 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1142a.

54 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b.


56 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b.
statesman to another other than ascribing good or evil to their basic goals. We can further ask if a statesman should do or tolerate evil things in carrying out the duties of his office if they are a means to an intended good. To some, the answer is an ethic of neutrality. This is the notion that leaders ought to act neutrally in the sense that they should follow not their own moral principles but the demands of their constituents. The ethic of neutrality portrays the ideal political leader as a completely reliable instrument of the goals of the nation, never injecting personal values into the process of furthering these goals. The definition assumes that the political leader has only two choices; obey the demands of constituents or resign. In other words, the leadership style of those who practice the ethic of neutrality, if indeed this is possible, is no leadership.

Those who defend leaders who perform acts that would normally be considered unacceptable if done by the average citizen usually call upon the "dirty hands argument." This argument holds that it is inevitable that statesman will be required to do unethical actions to accomplish ethical ends and therefore cannot be condemned for engaging in conduct that is functionally inherent to the position. This two-moralities viewpoint was developed by Max Weber in his essay "Politics as a Vocation." Weber makes a distinction between two standards

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of morality: one for the ideal world or the way the world ought to be, and one for the real world—the world of politics. According to Weber, successful political leaders do not confuse the two realms. He calls the former world the ethic of ultimate ends which asks only about the purity of intentions in considering the moral intention of an action. Opposed to this ethic is the ethic of responsibility that asks only about the foreseeable results of one's action. To accept the former, the political leader would run the risk of being an ineffective leader when outcomes are measured. To accept the latter, in other words, that political leaders do indeed have dirty hands, is to make them essentially immune from moral judgement, allowing leaders to commit crimes without the fear of denunciation. This thesis contends that moral principles cannot be dismissed as having no real connection to, or impact on foreign policy decisions, but neither can specific moral criteria be established to use as a yardstick to evaluate political leaders.

Efforts to establish such moral criteria usually emphasize certain moral precepts as self-evident. In this method, moral conclusions are established initially and then details of the situation are compared to these moral absolutes. Some ethicists have pointed to a few distinctive attributes of moral absolutes that set them off from other aspects of ethics:

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(New York, 1958), 77-128.
1. Moral rules have great importance and they override all other considerations including self-interest.

2. Morality is universal and rule-governed. Moral rules apply to everyone everywhere and without qualification or exception.

3. Moral rules are rational and objective and are not formulated to anyone's advantage or particular person's interests in mind.

4. Morality is concerned with other people. This is generalized by the many different variations of the Golden Rule. Whether you consider Confucius’ "Do not unto others what you would not they should unto you" or Buddha's "Hurt not others with that which pains yourself" or Kant's "Act so that the maxim of your action can be willed as universal law" all variations are opposed to selfishness.58

Moral absolutism asserts the existence of universally binding moral laws that can tell us which acts are right and which are wrong. However, it would be impossible to live within an all encompassing set of religious or other principles and not uncover controversy. When we assume that morality is a set of impersonal rules and principles, and action is taken because of adherence to the rules and not to avoid punishment, we accept Kant's perspective: universalism. This theory contends that morality ought to give moral guidance concerning what is right and wrong, that it should provide moral laws.

By contrast, Mark Johnson describes our moral tradition as one of constraint and limitation founded on a metaphorical

conception that reason is a force and moral laws are constraints. These theories do not recognize the full complexity of situations that confront policy makers. They do not recognize that we do not live in a world of facts but we live in a world, as Martin Rein states "where values and purposes dominate and shape the facts we attend to and care about." If moral rules exist they do not act as "trump" over other principles. An obvious example is the moral principle of "thou shalt not kill." Many people who consider themselves moral, feel it is permissible to kill others trying to kill them. Even if specific morals could be agreed upon, moral systems might collide. Pro-life and pro-choice advocates both accept the principles of "thou shalt not kill" and "a person has a special right to his or her own body." The conflict occurs when these two principles are interpreted and applied. Morality allows for multiple framings of any given situation, and this leads to different moral consequences.

In a world of ambiguity and paradox, Aristotle’s notion of prudence or practical wisdom is a key element the political leader must rely upon to make decisions. This virtue, as Aristotle describes it, stands opposed to self interest and insures the rightness of the means adopted to the gains


desired in that specific situation. Man, for Aristotle, has a social nature and he believed that no person could live well without friends or associates. Aristotle acknowledged the dark side of human nature and politics but refused to succumb to the "that's the way it is" view of human nature. For Aristotle, politics was a world of variation, a world where things could be other than they are. Man is the originator of action, a union of desire and intellect, that could deliberate over things that are variable. Statesmen who are called upon to fulfill their idea of good must rely on character and habits of decision making. Contrary to the realist approach characterized as cautiously maneuvering for the survival of a particular community, and the idealists who refuse to mix moral imperatives with politics, prudence maintains a connection between the spheres of politics and morality. The result is a broad concept of the common good that allows for a great deal of diversity.

Prudence does not split the world of complex social and political realities from the concern for accomplishing good in practical daily life dilemmas. It focuses on a good attainable by action with equal weight given to the means and the ends. The political leader's role is complicated by the desire to pursue many goals, optimally coordinated, in some coherent pattern in and through time. Aristotle argued that it was an integrated and stable character that allowed one to form systematically related intentions that realized one's
general ends. The policy maker must look at a wide range of ends and provide reasons for a particular decision to promote or abandon a particular end. At the core of Aristotle’s concept of prudence were three character traits that the political leader needed to make prudent decisions. These component elements were: deliberateness, understanding and consideration.

Deliberation is a practical virtue concerned with the affairs of men. Deliberation implies the investigating and calculating of the means to achieve a particular good. Deliberative excellence, according to Aristotle, is the intellectual quality displayed in the process of correctly investigating the problem at hand. Particular facts are derived from experience. Experience leads to knowledge of the possibilities open for action and makes the statesman less likely to be caught off guard. Mixed with the other elements of prudence, statesmen can deliberate and arrive at the right conclusion on the right grounds at the right time.

Understanding is the ability to judge what another person says about matters, for to judge rightly is the same as good understanding. The subjects that Aristotle discusses are not the scientific fields but those that one may have doubts about and may deliberate. To understand someone else’s position requires putting oneself in their place. This way the prudent

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61 Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 1143a.
statesman also can assess their strengths and weaknesses and develop the proper policy toward them.

Finally, the third character trait or habit in Aristotle’s list of elements of prudence is consideration. This trait requires a person to be able to judge correctly what is equitable. By equitable, Aristotle does not restrict his meaning to legal justice but calls for the political leader to develop judgments himself. The reason for this latitude is that laws are general statements and can cover the majority of cases, but there are exceptions to the law because its absoluteness is defective. In such cases, equity is superior. This trait is especially important for international relations that lack formal strictures. This area of conduct is usually in the domain of free choice and it is characterized by nonenforceability. In this sense, the character of a statesman can be measured by his obedience to the unenforceable.

These three virtues require the prudent political leader to assess the situation at hand and make him responsible for omissions and distortions of the information surrounding the issue. His interests and dispositions as well as historical circumstance will influence how he sees the salient features of the issue. The prudent political leader decides ends and means by controlling his own character. In the words of Nancy Sherman, "To pursue an apparent good is just to construe
certain moments as occasions for acting for that end.\textsuperscript{62}

The Aristotelian notion of prudence consists of a process of moral reasoning that weighs and balances information. It also filters theoretical concepts through various components and serves as a remedy to mean-spiritedness, self-righteousness and the tendency to develop overly idealistic goals. Aristotle emphasized character including intellectual and moral skills and habits of the statesman as critical to the development of the prudent statesman. However, policies developed from moral principles are not sufficient to ensure that policies are morally sound. Moral principles are only realized through specific acts. It is clear that more than just a good and decent person of high morals is required to be an excellent statesman. Aristotle's definition of the prudent statesman does not require him to rule out consideration of economic necessity and power politics, nor require him to relentlessly hang onto unrealistic goals, but it does require him to develop ways of thinking and acting that cultivate intellectual and volitional habits and skills that include deliberation, sympathy and understanding.

Criticisms and Intuitive Values

Critics claim that the notion of prudence is inadequate as a guide to ethical statecraft. Aristotle's emphasis on the elements of spontaneity and personal freedom in exercising prudence may be interpreted as being a broad rationalization of selfish opportunism under which the grossest immoralities could be condoned. Alternatives to reliance on prudence usually attempt to create an ethical system of international relations, based on the validity of ethical imperatives derived from such issues as nuclear deterrence, distributive justice or a safe environment. While there would be little debate on the merits of these goals, prudence recognizes that moral principles are translated into actual policies through a complex process which depends, to a great extent, on human decisions. Other alternatives to the use of prudence include attempts at creating a technical decision making system or one based on Biblical literalism. These too ignore the uniqueness of every situation and agent.

Stephen A. Garret suggests that moral standards can be applied to political leaders in determining whether their "dirty hands" are only a regrettable but understandable function of their position and not an abuse of their power. Garrett makes use of what he calls "intuitive values" or what Aristotle called first principles. Garret identifies an intuitive value judgement as one in which a certain action can
be described as "invariably wrong or right regardless of its effects, and reflects the pure dictates of conscience."63 In an example, Garret sites the slaughter of noncombatants as an evil despite whatever utilitarian benefits may be obtained from ignoring the tenet. This yardstick may easily condemn Napoleon and Hitler but the method would not provide definitive results in cases not so obvious.

Aristotle argued first principles come to those who have adequate experience and are skilled in making deliberative choices. Through these choices, the virtuous statesman qualifies and refines ends and places them in priority among other ends. There is no doubt that Aristotle and most statesmen would place a high priority on the sanctity of life but prudence warns against the possibly dangerous yearning for moral simplification and certainty.

Statecraft using the tradition of prudence is more than simply affirming a noble aim or relying on balance of power. The founding fathers of the United States used this tradition in establishing the republic. They assumed that politics would bring out self-interest and called for a nation that balanced the rights of the states and that of the national government. Prudence in international relations provides the intellectual resources for approaching the theory and practice

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of statecraft and is an alternative to abstract moralism or hopeless cynicism.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: PANAMA CANAL TREATIES

Introduction

There have been few issues in the twentieth century American foreign policy that have been as persistent and controversial as the question of America’s role with the Panama Canal. The Canal issue represents one of the great battlefields in an ideological war over this nation’s proper role in world affairs and represents the conflict between advocates of the two fundamentally different philosophies discussed in this thesis. To some, the Canal demonstrates the economic and strategic benefits derived from power politics. To others, it is a symbol of shameful belligerence and exploitation that is morally wrong and practically anachronistic. Perhaps there is no better U.S. foreign policy issue that confirms that the notion of national interest is politically driven and dynamic.

Initially, when constructed, the canal was perceived as a great source of pride for Americans and was accepted by the international community, but as early as the 1950s the Canal proved to be a detriment to the image of the U.S. abroad and a point of discussion among U.S. policy makers. The discussion culminated with a debate on the Senate floor in February, March and April 1978 about a neutrality treaty which
would give control of the canal to the Panamanians in the year 2000. These debates took place at critical juncture in the history of American foreign policy. At the close of the Vietnam War, Americans were looking for explanation of past failures and guidance for new direction. The controversy initiated a dialogue over ideas of national interest placed in carefully crafted arguments. In a broad historical perspective, the evolution of American canal foreign policy provides an illuminating case study of the relationship of external and internal determinants exerting pressure on foreign policy. The case show how the internal debate, insulated for many years from the external determinants, finally had to recognize the significance of the global community.

Finally, the Panama Canal debates show the importance of deliberation in foreign policy development. Over the years since the Panama Canal first became a political issue, there have been numerous speeches, articles, and reports on all sides of the issue. These have served the interests of the polity by forcing participants to consider alternative points of view and to make a better case for their argument. In order to do this, messages had to ring true, tap shared emotions, and provide sound rationales for political commitments and actions. It is in this milieu that the political leader has to search for the significance or the deeper meaning of public debate over foreign policy. They
must make the distinction between words and deeds, between the symbolic and the concrete, in short the political leader must create meaningful perceptions abstracted from a complex bewildering world.

The intent of providing this case study is not to cut through the rhetoric of the Panama Canal debate nor is it to provide a framework for political leaders to work from in deciding which way to vote on this or any other issue. Instead, the case study is intended to demonstrate the issues reflected in and promoted by the debate, in hopes of gaining insight to the processes by which foreign policy issues are generally created, debated and resolved in America.

An attempt is made to present a balanced historical perspective of the Panama Canal issue. Substantial background is provided to give the reader a grounding to make sense of the arguments. It would not be surprising if, after reading this account of the Panama Canal Treaties and applying Aristotle's concept of prudence, the reader determines that the Senate made the wrong choice by ratifying the Treaties. The issue remains controversial because its decisions revolved around difficult issues of lasting moral and strategic significance. Conclusions cannot be proved correct or incorrect until the treaties are put to the test in the international arena after the year 2000.
Background

Legend has it that Panama received its name when Spanish conquistadors met a Cuna Indian nearly 500 years ago and asked where they could find gold. The reply was "panna mai - far away" in hope that the intruders too would go far away. If greed of gold gave birth to Panama, it was Panama's geography that has been both its historical blessing and curse. Panama stretches east and west for 400 miles, connecting South and Central America. It varies in width from 30 to 120 miles with the Caribbean Sea on the north and the Pacific Ocean on the south. At least since the Spanish ruled the isthmus in 1501, and probably earlier, the prospect of connecting the two bodies of water was envisioned. The Spanish had to settle for a footpath rather than a canal. The acquisition of California from Mexico in 1848 and the discovery of gold in California a year later prompted American entrepreneurs to build a railroad linking the two oceans in order to transport passengers and cargo. Some 400,000 gold rushers passed through the international shortcut en route to California.

By 1876 Panama had become a part of the nation of Colombia and the French obtained a concession to build a canal across the small country. With only one-third of the task completed, the project was abandoned with a staggering loss of lives and capital.

At the end of the 19th century, Theodore Roosevelt and his naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan concluded that naval
control of both the Caribbean and the Pacific was a virtual strategic imperative and a waterway through the isthmus was a prerequisite. Nicaragua was considered but rejected in favor of the shorter Panama route and fears about seismic stability. Twenty five years after the French failure and with the greater technical and medical expertise to protect the labor force from the ravages of malaria and yellow fever, the dream of building a canal through Panama was in sight. The dream started with a treaty between the United States and Panama that proved to be the source of deep resentment among Panamanians for seventy-five years.

A Frenchman, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, was involved in every step of the process of the 1903 Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty. Bunau-Varilla had been chief engineer of the private French company that made the first attempt at a Panama Canal. When he learned the United States was interested in another attempt to cross Central America with a canal, he saw a way to recoup his company’s losses by selling the company’s remaining assets and construction rights to the United States. His lobbying efforts in Washington helped reverse a Congressional vote for the canal through Nicaragua. When Columbia, of which Panama was a part, infuriated Roosevelt by refusing to give the United States the desired concessions, it was Bunau-Varilla who helped plan the revolution that made Panama an independent nation. The United States quickly recognized the new nation and declared its intention of protecting Panama
from Colombian efforts to reclaim it. Bunau-Varilla was then designated the temporary representative of the Panamanian government in Washington. His assignment was to start negotiations for a canal but not to enter into any negotiations that might injure Panamanian sovereignty. Bunau-Varilla had other ideas, and as the new president of Panama was sailing north to participate in the negotiations, the ink was drying on a treaty between Bunau-Varilla and Secretary of State John Hay.

The treaty was less favorable to Panama than the original treaty considered with Colombia before the revolution. The United States was given exclusive jurisdictional rights in perpetuity with a ten-mile-wide strip of territory where the Canal was to be dug. In return, the United States agreed to guarantee the independence of Panama, to pay the new government $10 million for the Canal Zone rights, and to pay an annual fee of $250,000. Bunau-Varilla's French company received $40 million for its rights and assets sold to the United States. When the treaty was brought before the Panamanians for ratification, Bunau-Varilla misled them into believing an angry United States would withdraw its protection. Fearful of their exposure, the Panamanian government gave its approval to the new pact.

64 The best historical account of this entire period is contained in David McCullough's *The Path between the Seas* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).
Thus the fate of 550 square miles of Panama's best real estate, including the nation's prime deep-water port locations, was sealed for perpetuity by an American and a Frenchman. The practical importance of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty amounted to the existence of a colonial enclave in the heart of Panama that was entirely under U.S. control. The Canal Zone had its own American court system and American police. Discrimination against Panamanians was high, all high-paying jobs went to Americans and until the late 1940s there were even separate drinking fountains for Americans and Panamanians.

Objections to the 1903 treaty began almost at once and although the Panamanian government would be dominated by elites loyal to the United States for the next forty years, the period was filled with periodic episodes of anti-American violence. The Panamanians were successful in obtaining a greater share of the canal revenues; however, no ground was gained on the sovereignty question.

Ideas, American Presidents and Panama

The first half of this thesis argued that particular policies, strategies, and actions are the result of a country's peculiar geopolitical dilemmas, foreign policy traditions, and the statesman's own belief system. Each statesman during each era provided a new take on Canal policy. Each U.S. president became preoccupied with protecting this
strategic asset from foreign powers and the surrounding area's instability. All chose, however, different ways to define U.S. interests and defend the Canal. Theodore Roosevelt tried to preclude instability and revolution by multilateral negotiations leading to international treaties. William Howard Taft used Marines and dollars to help the country remain solvent and stable. Woodrow Wilson replaced dollar diplomacy with the promotion of freedom but continued to use the Marines. Each president that addressed the Canal issue was forced to redefine the national interest and how to promote it. As discussed earlier, each approach was relative to one period of history and contemporary culture.

According to George Moffett, in his account of the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties, the period after the mid-1950s was characterized by three trends. The first was one of Panamanian nationalism ushered in by "flag riots" when young Panamanians tried to parade the Panamanian flag through the Canal Zone. The second trend was a growing sympathy of American administrations in favor of revisions in the 1903 treaty with Panama. The Kennedy administration searched for a substitute for the agreement. The Johnson administration policy shifted toward the restoration of Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone. By 1974, during the Nixon administration, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger

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and Panamanian foreign minister Juan Tack had penciled the outline of the treaty that would finally be approved in 1977. In total five drafts of a revised treaty were completed before the 1977 draft was completed, each one progressively compromising the U.S. position. The third trend was a growing American opposition toward any reform in the treaty. The opposition is characterized by Ronald Reagan's famous line, "We built it, we paid for it, it's ours!"

The rioting in Panama in 1958 was over the idea of sovereignty. No longer would the Panamanians settle for higher annual payments or mere modifications to their subordinate status. This period signified a turning point; realists would argue it signaled that the U.S. was at the beginning of the end of its world power status. Internationalists would argue it was the beginning of a new era in hemispheric relations. In either case it was the Panamanians tight grasp of the idea of sovereignty that initiated the change of U.S. canal policy.

It was the Eisenhower administration that began searching for changes in canal policy, which culminated in the ratification of the 1978 canal treaties. The first change was symbolic but marked (to many) the end of exclusive control over the Panama Canal. A new "flag policy" was announced on September 17, 1960. Four days later, a single Panamanian flag was hoisted just inside the Zone within sight of downtown Panama City. Eisenhower was not dissuaded from the policy by
a 390 to 12 House of Representatives vote condemning the policy. In this instance, Eisnerhower was reacting to an "external" argument made by the Panamanians instead of the "internal" recommendation made by the House.

Panama was not a matter of particular importance to the Kennedy administration. His task force to examine the growing problem recommended the construction of a new, sea-level canal across the isthmus and then placing it under an "inter-Americanized" jurisdiction. The latter recommendation was a painless concession to Panama since a canal without locks would obviate the need for the large U.S. military and administrative personnel. In the end, Kennedy too settled for adjustment to the flag policy and allowed Panamanian flags to be flown at all nonmilitary sites within the Zone, a minor but a further symbolic concession to the rising demands for sovereignty.

With Panamanian flags flying high over many parts of the Canal Zone, three days of violent riots erupted in 1964 that left 25 people dead and over $2 million of damage to American property in the Canal Zone. Panamanian President Robert Chiari strategically used the event to call external attention to U.S. occupation by allowing the riots to run their course, by not calling out the National Guard, and hinting Communist participation. Panama then appealed to the UN Security Council and the Council of Ministers of the Organization of American States for reprisal against the U.S. for an
unprovoked armed attack on Panama. Both organizations found both parties to blame.

President Johnson's reaction was to begin negotiations on a new treaty. This agreement would abrogate the 1903 treaty, recognize Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone and allow the U.S. to build a sea-level canal and control it until the year 2067. While the Panamanians held tight to the idea of sovereignty for Panama, U.S. citizens could not accept the idea. In 1967, before the treaty (that was two years in the making) could be signed, details of the pact were publicized and it was crushed by a wave of opposition in Congress, veterans groups, and patriotic societies and traditional right-wing groups.

During the Johnson years it became apparent that there were conflicting sets of domestic (internal) and international (external) pressures. Policy makers from the Eisenhower administration onward were more responsive to international concerns; however, the public and Congress resisted the positions taken by the executive branch. In the face of the widening positions of these two groups, it would be ten years before another treaty could be successfully negotiated.

**External Determinants**

Other factors outside the edicts of the 1903 treaty would also have a profound effect on Panamanian-U.S. relations. Racial and economic equality were being demanded in the
subject areas of Asia and Africa in the 1930s and the weakening of the European colonial powers during World War II gave rise to a new international egalitarianism that would spread around the world. The rejection of colonization was based on the Western principles of freedom and self-determination. The leaders of the nationalist movements in British, French, German and Belgian colonies had been almost all educated in the imperial countries. As they returned to their homelands they became aware of the contradictions between the tenets of Western political thought and the reality of imperial domination.

The idea of decolonization was developing and becoming a moral norm among the imperialist nations as well. By 1935 the only major argument remaining for retaining colonization was to allow time to nurture self-government among colonized peoples and to prevent chaos in the colonies. The turning point in the decolonization movement came in 1960 when forty-three African and Asian nations presented the Declaration on Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to the United Nations General Assembly. The declaration proclaimed that

1) the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation is a denial of fundamental human rights;
2) all peoples have the right to self-determination by

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66 Robert W. McElroy, Morality and American Foreign Policy, (Princeton, University Press, 1992), 120.
virtue of which they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development;

(3) the "inadequacy of political, economic, social and educational preparedness" should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence;

(4) immediate steps should be taken, in trust and non-self-governing territories, to transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire;

(5) any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.  

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously voted in favor of the declaration with ninety-three nations voting.

This declaration completed the reversal of colonization as an accepted practice in the twentieth century. During the 1920s colonization was considered legitimate in the international system, by the end of World War II it could be justified only as a step on the road to self-governance, and finally in 1960 it was seen as intolerable. The United States, as the vanguard of the movement, had been openly critical of the overseas empires of its European allies. Nevertheless, the Panama Canal remained an indispensable symbol of American power.

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67 Ibid., 121.
Panama Frames the Problem

In Panama, at the turn of the century, it was the manner in which the U.S. took the Canal Zone that produced the political counterforce. This force probably would have grown even if the first practical expressions of Woodrow Wilson’s principle of "self-determination" had not been signaling the beginning of the end of the great age of imperialism.

The gradual ascendancy of Panamanian middle class politics in the years after World War II fueled Panamanian nationalism. Opposition rose to the traditional ruling oligarchy and the special political and economic privileges that the United States enjoyed in the Canal Zone. The pressures were compounded with the sudden deterioration of economic conditions in Panama after 1945. Panama was no longer a favorite child of the U.S. and fewer of Latin America’s products were needed after the war effort. As George Moffett writes, "Latin America was set adrift to cope with economic problems that almost overnight assumed prewar severity." By 1950 no Panamanian government would demand less than some tangible recognition of sovereignty over the Canal Zone.

National Guard Brigadier General Omar Torrijos came to power in Panama as a result of the country’s first military coup in 1968. He was left-leaning and reform-minded and his

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political base was anchored in the lower and middle classes. Torrijos saw the opportunity to take a new approach to the Canal Zone problem. He knew that military might was not the only powerful force in international relations. "To resolve a problem, the first thing you have to do is make it a problem," Torrijos said of his new approach. The problem of the Panama Canal was presented to the international community in hopes to build worldwide pressure against the United States.

In 1972, the United Nations Security Council held its first meeting with a regional theme in Addis Adaba to discuss problems of colonialism and security in Africa. Torrijos seized the opportunity to extend invitations to the Council to hold a meeting in Panama the following year. Many people saw Torrijos's plan in the making including the American ambassador to the UN, George Bush, but they couldn't divert it.

The offense started with opening remarks from Torrijos which in part stated:

Panama understands full well the struggle of peoples that are suffering the humiliation of colonialism, of other peoples that, like us, are suffering restrictions and subjection, of those men that do not [sic] allow political power to be exercised by a foreign Government over the territory of their birth, of those generations

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69 William J. Jordon, Panama Odyssey (University of Texas Press, 1984), 176.
that are struggling and will continue to struggle to root out from their country the presence of foreign troops, placed there without the consent of the occupied nation....[For Panama], which seventy years ago opened its arms for the benefit of the merchant fleet of the world, it becomes extremely difficult to understand how a country whose hallmark has been not to be colonists insists on maintaining a colony in the very heart of my country. Surely for that people this must be a shame, since they were a colony and they knew how degrading it was to be so, and they struggled heroically to achieve their freedom. I say to the representatives of the United States that it is more noble to redress an injustice than to perpetuate an error. From the world which is represented here today we ask for moral support in this struggle engaged in by the weak. This struggle can triumph only when it is assisted by the conscience of the world, and our people is already reaching the limit of its patience.⁷⁰

The speech led off six days of carefully orchestrated speeches and site visits for the fifteen member-nations that dramatized Panamanian dissatisfaction with the 1903 treaty. By the end of the session even long time allies of the U.S. including Australia, France, Kenya, and Canada were voting against the U.S. position in Panama.

The pressure that Torrijos and the international community were putting on the U.S. transformed the Canal Zone issue from a modest regional matter into a major global issue.

and a priority for the U.S. Other factors also made the discussion of a new treaty possible, including the end of the U.S. focus on the Vietnam War and the growing economic benefits garnered by favorable relationships with Latin America.

It was Henry Kissinger, national security advisor and secretary of state under the Nixon administration, that convened a task force to deal with the Panamanian issue. Ellsworth Bunker was appointed to negotiate new principles for a treaty and the task was completed in 1974. Kissinger explained the motives behind the new position of the United States recognizing the interdependency of nations and the international consensus against a remnant of colonialism: "a stable world cannot be imposed by force; it must derive from consensus. Mankind can only achieve community on the basis of shared objectives.... In the past our negotiation would have been determined by relative strength. Today we have come together in an act of conciliation. We recognize that no agreement can endure unless the parties want to maintain it. Participation in partnership is far preferable to reluctant acquiescence." The principles reflected the conciliatory tone of Kissinger and indicated the serious intention of the United States to relinquish the positions held since 1903.

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The agreement, known as the Kissinger-Tack agreement named after the American and the Panamanian foreign minister who negotiated it, provided that:

1. The treaty of 1903 and its amendments would be abrogated.
2. The concept of perpetuity would be eliminated.
3. There would be a termination of United States jurisdiction over Panamanian territory that would take place in accord with terms specified in the treaty.
4. The Panamanian territory in which the canal is situated would be returned to the jurisdiction of the Republic of Panama. The Republic of Panama, as territorial sovereign, would grant to the United States for the duration of the new canal treaty the right to use the lands, water, and airspace necessary to operate the canal.
5. The Republic of Panama would have a just and equitable share of the benefits derived from the operation of the canal.
6. The Republic of Panama would participate in the administration of the canal.

Negotiator Ellsworth Bunker explained the negotiations attempted to "lay the foundations for a new, more modern relationship which will enlist Panamanian cooperation and
better protect our interests." The interests Bunker was referring to here were the avoidance of conflict in Panama, improved international trade and reputational damage to the United States if United States continued to operate from a colonialist mentality.

The Carter Administration and the Move from Realism

The principles of the Kissinger-Tack agreement were developed within the prerogative of the executive branch and in an environment relatively free of the internal pressures of the Congress and the public. In order to secure a treaty, Senate ratification would have to be attained. This task was offered to Jimmy Carter's administration, which fully embraced it. The public and Congressional opposition to the conciliatory Canal Zone policies in the past paled to what the Carter administration was about to see. Later Carter would describe his Panama affair as "the most difficult political battle he had ever faced, including my long campaign for President." This section will show how a statesman can relate his or her moral values and public notions of common morality to the substance and style of their policies and actions.

In 1974, in direct response to the Kissinger-Tack

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Agreement, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina headed up thirty cosponsors for a Senate resolution urging that "the government of the United States should maintain and protect its sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Canal and Zone and should in no way cede, dilute, forfeit, negotiate or transfer any of these sovereign rights." Thurmond did the same in 1975, this time rounding up thirty-seven sponsors, three more than necessary to defeat a treaty. Public opinion against relinquishing control over the Canal was also growing. A Gallup Poll taken in 1964 after rioting in Panama found that of the 64 percent of the population aware of the issue, opposition to relinquishing control over the canal was at 60%. Thirteen years later, on the eve of the ratification debate, public opposition weighed in at 78%. Diplomacy and domestic politics were on different courses and were about to collide within the Carter administration.

The Carter administration was shaped by the liberal internationalists with their tolerance of political diversity and respect for the forces of global change. A new, more diverse, less lucid form of international policy was forming and was the first successful rebellion against the principle of containment. John Spanier describes President Carter as "president of the only administration after 1945 that

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76 Ibid, 44.
repudiated much of the traditional way of looking at international politics and to embrace a new vision of a more 'interdependent' world."\(^7\)

Containment professed a limited pie or zero-sum theory. Every piece of pie gained for world communism meant a loss for the U.S. Enough pieces of pie moving in the same direction would create a domino effect. Practice of this philosophy can make the distinction between central and peripheral issues difficult. For Carter, the policy represented a philosophy of international relations that eroded America's faith and prestige and produced the tragedy of the Vietnam War.

The willingness of the Carter Administration to return the Canal Zone to Panama indicated a change in U.S.-Latin American relationships. It demonstrated a new era of relationships based on equality and a move away from "big brother" paternalism. Carter moved away from the practice of containment in Panama for three reasons. The first was that Torrijos had convinced twelve Latin American countries to band together and express their views on the Panama Canal to President Carter. This convinced Carter that his approach to Panama not only involved the U.S. relationship with Panama but with all of Latin America and indeed all of the Third World. Carter chose not to invoke the deep animosities that continued

colonialism might instill. In his memoirs, Carter further explained that inaction on the part of the U.S. regarding Panama was "driving a wedge between us and some of our best friends and allies" by forcing them to take sides on the Panama issue.78

The threat of sabotage against the canal was the second reason why the administration moved toward a new treaty in Panama. The canal, a system of locks surrounded by jungles, provided an easy target for saboteurs. This fact was made very clear to many Senators during the ratification process with the use of helicopter rides over the Canal Zone. The U.S. may have been put in a position to defend the canal and the potential cost in human life and economic loss was estimated to be high on both sides.79 Carter decided that the best method of defending the Canal was not force but a "working partnership and good relationship with Panama."80

The third reason Carter chose the Panama Canal treaties as a center piece of his foreign-policy agenda was to show the role of morality in foreign policies. In June 1977, Carter outlined his idea of just and equitable foreign policies: "Our policy is based on a historical vision of America's role. Our

policy is derived from a larger view of global change. Our policy is rooted in our moral values, which never change. Our policy is reinforced by our material wealth and our military power. Our policy is designed to serve mankind."81 Thus, Carter had moved U.S. politics from the principles of realism, power politics and cynicism to an attempt to correct injustices through an equitable foreign policy. This attempt was in large part successful in the Panama issue by an enormous education effort to inform Senators and the general public of the issues surrounding the Panama Canal.

The Carter administration continued negotiations with Panama to solidify a treaty based on the Kissinger-Tack principles. Actually two treaties were formed in August of 1977. One, to expire in the year 2000, provided for the gradual full assumption by Panama of the management, operation and maintenance of the Canal (the Panama Canal Treaty); the other provided for the permanent neutrality of the Canal and for permanent U.S. rights to defend the Canal (the Neutrality Treaty).

The Internal Debate

The immediate plan to win approval for the new Canal treaties was to disperse administration speakers throughout the nation to explain why the treaties were needed. Their

81 Quoted in Robert W. McElroy, Morality and American Foreign Policy, (Princeton, University Press, 1992), 137.
focus was broad and nationwide but their primary target was a select group of local and national opinion leaders. Although the administration knew they faced an uphill battle, they maintained that the reason that most Americans were against the release of the Canal Zone was that they were not fully informed of the issue. The eight month campaign was kicked off with a grandiose, faultlessly orchestrated "Panama Week" in the nation’s capitol. During the next few months, speaking engagements were given the highest priority in states where at least one senator’s vote was undecided on the issue. Key to their campaign were community leaders, attorneys, business people, state officials, civic and religious leaders, educators and publishers. The media blitz took on the dimensions of a presidential campaign. Handled by the Department of State’s Office of Public Affairs, there were over fifteen hundred separate "events" encouraging the ratification of the treaties, an effort unprecedented in size and scope in the department’s history. The President himself, with other high-prestige salesmen, held ten sessions for opinion leaders from thirty states. Few who attended the sessions left unconvinced.

In the Congress, the administration practiced accommodationist policies in addition to the information offensive. Included in these tactics was an adequate supply

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of defensive information to combat arguments against the treaties and political cover necessary to make the vote for ratification as easy and free of cost as possible.

The debate over the Panama Canal Treaties in the Senate represents an example of Stone's analysis-as-argument (presented in Chapter 2) and portrays the complex situations that political leaders must sort through. Former Governor Ronald Reagan was the mainstay of the effort against the treaties. The opposition argued the treaties were illegal, unpatriotic, a cowardly yielding to black-mail, a boon to communism, and a threat to U.S. security. The debate over the Panama Canal Treaties centered around efforts to interpret history and to predict the future. The former effort consisted of debates over the issue of sovereignty in the canal zone and the issue of ethics. The attempt to predict the future focused on the economic debate and national security issues.

Opponents of the treaties argued that the U.S. had sovereign rights in the Canal Zone and took evidence from former treaties and judicial decisions. Citing the original Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty, they observed that the 1903 treaty granted the U.S. all sovereign rights in the Canal Zone "to the entire exclusion of the exercise by the Republic of Panama of any such sovereign rights, power or authority." Ronald Reagan argued that not only did the U.S. have sovereign rights over the Canal Zone but they owned real estate. In addition
to the $10 million the U.S. had paid for sovereignty, the U.S. paid almost $160 million for public and private land. To bolster their case, opponents insisted that treaty revisions of 1936 and 1955 reaffirmed the original grant of sovereignty. They also cited a 1907 Supreme Court case of Wilson v. Shaw that recognized "the Canal Zone as official territory of the United States." In short, opponents of the treaties made the case that relinquishing the Panama Canal would be like returning Alaska to the Russians or the Louisiana Purchase to the French.

Proponents of the treaties denied that the question of sovereignty was significant in the debate and did little more than resurrect old grievances or reopen old wounds. When forced to address the sovereignty issue, they cited a list of actions suggesting that the Canal Zone was something other than a U.S. territory. They noted that children born to non-Americans in the Canal Zone were not considered U.S. citizens as they would have been in a sovereign American territory. They submitted that goods coming from the Canal Zone passed through customs like those from foreign countries, and finally they noted that U.S. mail service considered the ports within the Canal Zone as foreign ports. Proponents also had their share of court cases that stated the U.S. did not have sovereignty over the Canal Zone. They also cited Wilson v. Shaw that called the Canal Zone a U.S. territory only for the limited, specific purpose of expending funds for construction.
Proponents of the treaties strongest case probably revolved around the regular payments to Panama, citing the similarity to paying rent the way a building owner would make lease payments to a landowner.

If the opponents of the treaties enjoyed an advantage when interpreting history in light of treaties written, they were back-pedalling in the moral clashes. Opponents had to answer charges that the United States had stolen the canal with an unfair agreement. They argued that the U.S. had little to do with the independence of Panama from Columbia and that the original treaty was ratified by the Panamanian government which was composed of only Panamanians. Proponents hinted at colonialism with the risk of the American public taking offense, by imagining that the French retained a five-mile zone along the Mississippi River following the Louisiana Purchase.

While there was much debate on how to interpret the history surrounding the Panama Canal, there was an equal amount of debate attempting to predict the future. Treaty opponents claimed that the American taxpayer will be required to pay millions of dollars, perhaps billions, in loans, aid, additional shipping costs, depressed farm prices, and loss of jobs if the treaties were approved. Those in favor of the treaties calculated that any payments to Panama would come from tolls paid by ships using the canal and that there would be no payment of tax dollars to Panama at any time.
The remaining aspect of the Panama Canal Treaty debate was concerned with America’s security and military interests. The opponents and proponents of the treaties both emphasized these issues over all others in the debate. Both considered the Canal primarily a strategic rather than a commercial asset. The opponents of the treaties theorized that U.S. security depended upon the control of that sea route and without it America’s freedom was in jeopardy. A point of contention was the canal’s usefulness with large warships. Opponents noted a trend in shipbuilding toward smaller ships that would be able to use the canal; proponents saw no such trend. The Carter Administration argued that the new treaties would best assure America’s continued use of the canal, citing how vulnerable it was to assault or sabotage by the Panamanians. Approving the treaties would reduce the chances of sabotage by giving the Panamanians a stake in the canal. In other words, the security of the canal did not rest on American power but the absence of hostility and support of the Panamanian population. Opponents of the treaties saw limited potential for cooperation between the Panamanians and the U.S.

There were many offshoots of these arguments such as those regarding the meaning of neutrality, or the American role in the defense of the canal, but all were under the rubric of national interest. Many senators needed to force the administration into some kind of compromise before they could justify a vote in favor of ratification. These
alterations centered on credit sharing and U.S. military intervention in the Canal Zone during labor strikes and other problems.

Many senators were torn on the issue. One such senator was Republican Henry Bellmon from Oklahoma. Bellmon wrote two speeches addressing the treaties; one supportive and one in opposition. He felt his argument against the treaties was hypocritical and finally voted in favor of the treaties. For Democrat Russell Long of Louisiana the choice was easy. "It is satisfying to be powerful," he said. "It is nice to be rich. We can cling to the past and the gunboat diplomacy it represents, or we can provide the leadership that this world must have if the hopes and prayers of mankind are to prevail."83

A surprising convert to the proponents of the treaties was Republican Minority Leader Howard Baker. Facing a re-election and a showdown with Senator Robert Dole for GOP right wing leadership, he had everything to lose by coming out in favor of the treaties. But after a visit with Omar Torrijos in Panama, Baker joined fifteen of his 38 colleagues endorsing the pact.

Months into the second longest treaty debate in the history of the Senate, the administration had only forty-eight

83 Quoted in "Panama: A Big Win" Newsweek, March 27, 1978, 45.
of the sixty-seven votes needed for ratification.\textsuperscript{8} It became clear that some Senators wanted more. Most concessions were non-treaty related. The administration dropped its long-standing opposition to a $2.3 billion emergency farm bill sought by Senator Herman Talmadge of Georgia which would pay farmers for not growing crops on 31 million acres of land. The United States agreed to purchase $250 million worth of Arizona copper. Senators received audiences with the president on many issues, mostly with favorable results. In other words, Carter, "the aloof and didactic technocrat had been forced to demonstrate that he could scratch and bargain for votes like any other mortal politician."\textsuperscript{85}

In the end, the administration was finally able to come up with the votes necessary for ratification of the two treaties with one to spare. The U.S. Senate voted in favor of the Neutrality Treaty on March 16, 1987 and the Panama Canal Treaty on April 18. The resolutions were passed by the same margin, 68 to 32, and with the same supporters and opponents. Fifty-two Democrats with sixteen Republicans voted in favor of the treaties. Ten Democrats and twenty-two Republicans voted in opposition. There were many reasons for the accomplishment; bipartisan elite support, political horse trading, and sympathy, among many undecided Senators, for a

\textsuperscript{8} Only the Treaty of Versailles took more time.

\textsuperscript{85} "Panama: A Big Win," Newsweek, 27 March 1978, 42.
new president who took on a difficult task and who would be politically crippled if defeated on issue so early in his presidency.

Analysis and Implications

The case study provides ample evidence that in the twentieth century, it is possible for statesmen to make a difference in international affairs even in the context of massive political forces and the limits that such forces place on their freedom of action. Statesmen can and do make individual choices that provide opportunities for affecting large number of lives in significant ways. This capacity to choose, to discern and seize opportunities, is one of the marks of a great leader. The concept of prudence is integral to the relationship of morality and politics. Prudence calls for moral principles to be translated into actual policies through the mediation of a complex process in which decision makers must consummate the process with specific acts.

The case study also shows a portrait of Jimmy Carter as a prudent statesman. He had a sharp sense of his limits and was willing to compromise selectively in order to advance his larger political purposes. These purposes were, in turn, shaped by profoundly moral concerns. His policies were rooted in a normative vision with a strong belief in traditional social and moral virtues and the role of the state as a nurturer of these. Carter recognized the that a balance
between ideals and practice must be met, as explained in the following excerpt of a speech:

Ours is a great and powerful nation, committed to certain enduring ideals, and those ideals must be reflected... in our foreign policy. There are practical, effective ways in which our power can be used to alleviate human suffering around the world. We should begin by having it understood that if any nation... deprives its own people of basic human rights, that fact will help shape our own people’s attitude toward that nation’s repressive government.... Now we must be realistic... we do not and should not insist on identical standards.... We can live with diversity in governmental systems, but we cannot look away when a government tortures people or jails them for their beliefs.\textsuperscript{86}

Carter’s accomplishment of getting the Panama Canal Treaties approved by the U.S. Senate was astonishing. He tapped the American people’s emotions with arguments that were morally elevated. He grasped that America’s instinctive ownership of the Canal could be overcome only by an appeal to its belief in the exceptional nature of its ideals. While many may disagree with Carter’s decision, it is hard to deny that he had a capacity of articulating a normative vision for the U.S. in the world, joined with a large amount of practical wisdom in pursuit of that vision. When faced with difficult decisions, he was animated by a moral purpose that did not

\textsuperscript{86} Jimmy Carter speech quoted in Robert A. Pastor, Whirlpool U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean, (Princeton University Press, 1992), 44.
degenerate into moralism and a framework of powerful ideas that should not be confused with ideology.

In this era of increasing democratization and growing influence of public opinion on foreign policy, I suspect that prudence will acquire vast practical influence rivaling that of traditional realism. Today states operate in an international system in which power is more widely diffused than it was when Morgenthau’s realism dominated international relations theory. Both realism and internationalism suffer from the tendency to overestimate one’s capabilities coupled with a refusal to recognize limits. Thus, even the goal of enlarging democracy must be pursued with moderation in conjunction with an awareness of geopolitical and strategic considerations.

An essential element of prudence is an interplay between realpolitik and a higher idealism animated by religion, ideology, or morality. The practice of pure realism is not possible by the United States or any other state because no one country can dominate the world so thoroughly. Prudence is not, however, an overestimation of human goodness with utopian delusions nor is it a brew of neopacifism with a reliance on collective security and international law that is vulnerable to aggression. The American public would not support promotion of pure idealism once they understood all of the required corollary commitments and involvements. The prudent statesman must strike a balance between the moral and the
strategic elements of American foreign policy. This balance cannot be prescribed in the abstract. The genesis of prudence is the recognition that a balance needs to be struck.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the two major schools of thought on international relations. The realist approach regards involvement in power politics as an inevitable part of a successful international strategy. The utopian approach expects a more cooperative attitude among states because of their interdependency. The national interest, what both schools claim to have as a goal, is an amorphous concept composed of interests and values, with political leaders assigning a priority to these interests and determining methods of implementation. There is no single answer or model that encompasses the issues or ideas of national interest and how to attain it. Rather, 'national interest' is a concept whose meaning is indeterminate, disputed, with its own dynamic and requires some intellectual and moral virtues. It depends largely on the character of the definer and is used as a foundation to build support for a particular program. The individual political leader must interpret history, weigh arguments, and predict the future. Since this is accomplished in a political environment, national interest is also politically defined. In the international arena, the political process operates on two levels; external and internal politics. The case study of the Panama Canal Treaties showed the complexity of international relations and
examples of the issues that political leaders must face. In this thesis, I have attempted to show that to align oneself solely with ideals or a cynical description of the nature of mankind would not prove useful. Skills needed to accomplish the delicate task of administering international relations were defined by Aristotle over 2,000 years ago. These skills, the ability to deliberate, to understand and to consider, are part of the tradition of normative prudence that bridges the world of morality and politics. Prudence allows the political leader to pursue and achieve moral objectives in the political world even if the objectives themselves have to be redefined in the political process.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


