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PART I

Values and Policies in American Foreign Affairs

In Part I of *American Foreign Policy and Process*, we survey the beliefs and values that have been the basis of America's foreign policy actions. Although we provide an overview of the beliefs that have shaped American foreign policy throughout its history, we place special emphasis on the period from the end of World War II to the present – the era of America's greatest global involvement. Values and beliefs have been chosen as the basic organizing scheme because policy actions are always taken within such a context. The beginning analyst who can appreciate how belief systems influence policy choices will be in a good position to understand the foreign policy actions of a nation.

Values and beliefs cannot be understood in isolation, however; their importance is useful only within the context of actual foreign policy behavior. Thus, as an aid in appreciating how beliefs and attitudes have shaped this behavior, we provide a narrative of foreign policy actions that reflects the underlying belief systems during various periods of US diplomatic history. It is our hope that by understanding both beliefs and actions, the reader will come away better able to interpret the foreign policy of the United States.

To accomplish these ends, Part I is divided into seven chapters and analyzes the foreign policy approaches during differing periods of the American Republic and for several administrations, particularly those over the past five decades.

- Chapter 1 analyzes the effects of two important traditions in the history of American foreign policy, a commitment to isolationism and a reliance on moral principle as foreign policy guides, and how those values and beliefs continue to influence American policy today.
- Chapter 2 discusses the emergence of the Cold War and the components of the containment policy that was developed against the expansion of

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international communism. This chapter also outlines the values and beliefs that shaped American policy during these years (the Cold War consensus), and the international events that challenged this consensus.

- Chapter 3 analyzes the effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War in stimulating new foreign policy perspectives to replace the Cold War consensus. The chapter also compares the values and beliefs of the realist approach during the Nixon administration with the idealist or liberal approach during the Carter administration
- Chapter 4 analyzes the Reagan administration's bipolar approach to the world, one closely reminiscent of the Cold War policies, and the George H.W. Bush administration's approach, a combination of realism and idealism as the Cold War was ending and a new era beginning.
- Chapter 5 continues this assessment of the values and beliefs of recent administrations by comparing the foreign policy approach of the William J. Clinton administration after the end of the Cold War and the foreign policy approach of the George W. Bush administration after the events of September 11, 2001.
- Chapter 6 outlines the foreign policy approach of the Barack Obama administration and the degree of change and continuity that he brought to American foreign policy during his tenure in office and compares it with the Donald Trump administration and the "America First" approach that he sought to pursue in foreign policy.
- Chapter 7 introduces the reader to the foreign policy approach that the Biden administration initiated, its efforts to restore some traditional roles to American foreign policy, and address the new challenges from emerging powers and the new forces of technology.

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1 America's Traditions in Foreign Policy

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

Secretary of State John Quincy Adams
July 4, 1821

Do not think … that the questions of the day are mere questions of policy and diplomacy. They are shot through with the principles of life.

We dare not turn from the principle that morality and not expediency is the thing that must guide us and that we will never condone iniquity because it is most convenient to do so.

President Woodrow Wilson
October 1913

Politics, at its roots, deals with values and value differences among individuals, groups, and nations. Various definitions of *politics* attest to the central place that values play in political life. For example, political scientist Harold Lasswell has written that politics "is the study of influence and the influential.... The influentials are those who get the most of what there is to get."[1] What there is to get, he continues, is values, such as "*deference, income, and safety*."[2] Robert Dahl, drawing on Aristotle and Max Weber, notes that what seems to be common across these definitions is that they deal with values such as power, rule, and authority.[3] David Easton's famous definition of politics is even more explicit in its assessment of the relationship between politics and values as "the authoritative allocation of *values*."[4] According to this definition, authority structures (e.g., governments) distribute something, and that something is values.

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Values refer to "modes of conduct and end-states of existence" that guide people's lives. They are "abstract ideals" that serve as an "imperative" for action.[5] Further, they are viewed as "goods" (in an ethical, not a material, sense) that ought to be obtained or maintained by a person or a society. In the Declaration of Independence, for instance, the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were explicitly stated as reasons for founding the United States, and they came to serve as guides to political action in the earliest days of the nation. Indeed, these values remain important to this day. Liberty, or freedom, is emphasized again and again by American political leaders as one value that differentiates this nation from so many others.

VALUES, BELIEFS, AND FOREIGN POLICY

Because the essence of politics is so closely related to achieving and maintaining particular values, the analysis of **values and beliefs** is a deliberate choice as the organizing theme for our study of US foreign policy.[6] Further, because values and beliefs are the motivation for individual action – and because we make the assumption that foreign policy is ultimately the result of individual decisions – their importance for our analysis becomes readily apparent. By identifying the values and beliefs that American society fosters, we ought to be in a good position to understand how they have shaped our actions toward the rest of the world.

Social psychologists have analyzed the relationships among values, beliefs, and the behavior of individuals. Milton Rokeach, for example, defines beliefs as propositions "inferred from what a person says or does" whose content "may *describe* an object or situation as true or false; *evaluate* it as good or bad; or *advocate* a certain course of action as desirable or undesirable." Individuals thus may have numerous beliefs, but some are more central than others in accounting for their behavior. These core beliefs are values. As Rokeach notes, "A value is a type of belief, centrally located within one's total belief system, about how one ought, or ought not, to behave, or about some end state of existence worth, or not worth, attaining." Although these values are likely to be few in number, they are crucial to an understanding of the attitudes and behaviors that an individual expresses.[7] By extension, nation-states operate as individuals do because they ultimately comprise individuals.

The use of values and beliefs (or "ideas," as Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane call them[8]) as our organizing scheme fits broadly within the constructivist tradition in the study of foreign policy and international relations. This focus contrasts with that of other principal models of analysis offered in recent years: the rational actor or realist model, the

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organizational process model, and the governmental or bureaucratic politics model.[9] However, although each of these has something to offer in helping us analyze foreign policy, none centrally emphasizes the role of values and beliefs in the behavior of nations.

- The **rational actor model** begins with the assumption that nations (like individuals) are self-interested and seek to maximize their payoffs (or outcomes) when making foreign policy decisions. The key to understanding foreign policy is to identify a state's policy preferences and their rank orderings. The source of these state preferences and their relative ordering, however, has not been well explored, but the preferences are surely related to the values and beliefs held by key policy makers within a society.
- The **organizational process model** focuses more on identifying the decision-making routines of policy makers. Thus this approach sees foreign policy behavior less as the result of clear choices and more as a function of organizations following standing operating procedures (SOPs). In large measure, the values and beliefs of the policy makers are assumed and not fully analyzed.
- The **bureaucratic politics model** pays some attention to values and beliefs (because each bureaucracy has institutional beliefs that it seeks to maximize). Still, the primary explanatory focus here is on the competition among bureaucracies, based on their relative power and influence.

The foreign policy models just described have much to offer (and careful readers will note that we use them in various ways throughout the book). However, an initial focus on values and beliefs of the American society and key policy makers will enable a fuller understanding of US foreign policy decisions.

Some Cautions

There are potential difficulties in focusing on values and beliefs and in assuming a direct analogy between individuals and nation-state behavior:

- Factors such as the idiosyncratic personality traits of some leaders, the dynamics of the bureaucratic environment, and the restraints of the governmental process will intrude on a complete identification of a nation's values and beliefs.[10]
- The very definition of national values is likely to be problematic. Whose values are we to identify? Should they be those of leaders or the public? With both the public and the elite, the array of values – religious and secular – in a pluralist society is considerable. Our analysis focuses

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primarily on the values held by political elites, but the values and beliefs of the public, by necessity, will be considered from time to time.

- By focusing on values and beliefs, and using them as an explanation for US foreign policy, we are close to relying on the national character (or, more generally, the political culture) explanation of behavior.[11] As A.F.K. Organski has written, the national character approach makes several key assumptions:

  > (1) that the individual citizens of a nation share a common psychological make-up or personality or value system that distinguishes them from citizens of other nations, (2) that this national character persists without major changes over a relatively long period of time, and (3) that there is a traceable relationship between individual character and national goals.[12]

- Such assumptions are difficult to maintain, and thus there are limits to the national character approach as a meaningful explanation of foreign policy, and it cannot be relied on completely. However, in a more limited sense, to identify the "basic attitudes, beliefs, values, and value orientations" of a society as a beginning point for analysis, its use is appropriate, because individuals (and hence, nations) make decisions within the context of a particular set of values and beliefs.[13]

Rationales for the Values Approach

Although we acknowledge and recognize the difficulties just described, we believe that the values approach is a sufficiently useful first step in policy analysis that it warrants more coverage than it has received. Moreover, our analysis does not contend that certain values and beliefs are unchangeable, although surely some are less changeable than others. Rather, we will assess the changes in value emphasis and consistency, especially in the past eight or so decades, during which the United States has been an active and continuing participant in the global arena.

Beyond its utility, the values approach is especially germane to the study of American foreign policy for at least three additional reasons.

First, the nation was explicitly founded on particular sets of values, and these values made it view itself as "different" (or "exceptional") from the nations of the Old World.[14] In this view, politics was to be conducted not on the principles of power politics but on the basis of democratic principles. In the view of many, then, America should act in the world only according to its moral principles or in defense of them, and at all times domestic values were to be the guide to political behavior.

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Second, because some American values toward international affairs have changed in recent years, understanding these changes is especially important for US foreign policy analysis. America, for example, moved from its isolationist past to an active globalism in the post–World War II years. Indeed, a particular set of values often labeled the Cold War consensus came to dominate American policy actions during this period. In the post-Vietnam period (roughly 1973–1990), for example, the value orientation of the various American administrations toward the world changed a number of times – from the realism of Richard Nixon to the idealism of Jimmy Carter and back to the Cold War realism of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In the post–Cold War era, Bill Clinton initially emphasized greater global and economic engagement and the promotion of democracy and then reverted to a focus on political–military concerns. In the post–9/11 period, George W. Bush made similar shifts in his foreign policy values and emphases, propelled most dramatically by the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. His administration started with a unilateralist emphasis, moved toward multilateralism (at least for a time) in its war on terrorism, and largely reverted to a unilateralist approach (although it was able to forge a "coalition of the willing") in initiating the Iraq War in March 2003. Largely as a response to the Bush years, Barack Obama called for a return to greater multilateralism and the creation of a "multi-partner world" to address pressing global issues. Yet again, America's value emphasis changed with the Donald Trump administration, in which a more nationalist and populist approach ("America First") became the principal foreign policy approach and served as a challenge to the liberal international order that the United States had long promoted. In turn, the Joseph Biden administration has sought to rebuild US global leadership while seeking to restore the liberal international order.

With such discernible shifts throughout the post–World War II history of US foreign policy and the current search for a definitive set of values to guide foreign policy, a familiarity with both past value approaches and their policy implications is important as the United States moves into the decades of the twenty-first century.

Third, the lack of consensus on foreign policy at either the elite or the mass level in American society today invites the use of a values approach. According to several national surveys, no foreign policy of the post-Vietnam, post–Cold War, and post–9/11 eras has been fully embraced by the American public or its leaders. Indeed, both are divided as to the set of values that should guide American policy in the future.[15] The domestic divisions between elites and the public and within the public over the Iraq War

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convey this gulf in the past decade as do the continuing divisions over the direction of foreign policy across party lines in the current era.

Finally, and on a normative level, there have been some efforts by prominent political scientists to revitalize the role of values in foreign policy and international politics and in the study of foreign policy decision making.[16] The constructivist tradition in the study of international politics, as well, invites an emphasis on ideas, values, and culture as core concepts in an understanding of the behavior of states.[17]

In this first chapter, then, we begin our analysis by sketching the historical values and beliefs of American society; we then suggest how those beliefs and values have influenced foreign policy, especially in the first century-and-a-half of the nation.

THE UNITED STATES: A NEW DEMOCRATIC STATE

Numerous scholars have noted that the United States was founded on values different from those of the rest of the world.[18] It was to be a **democratic nation** in a world governed primarily by monarchies and autocracies. Indeed, according to one historian, America's founders "didn't just want to believe that they were involved in a sordid little revolt on the fringes of the British Empire or of European civilization. They wanted to believe they were coming up with a better model … a better way for human beings to form a government that would be responsive to them."[19] In the words of Thomas Jefferson, the new American state was to be "the solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights … the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other regions shall ever become susceptible to its benign influence."[20] Because of its democratic emphasis at the outset of the nation, America developed with the belief that it was unique and possessed a set of values worthy of emulation by others. In this sense, the country emerged as deeply ideological (although Americans do not readily admit this) and as one not always tolerant of contrary views.[21] In short, **American "exceptionalism"** came to be a key tradition in guiding American actions abroad.

A Free Society

In 1776, the United States was explicitly conceived in **liberty and equality**, in contrast to other nations where ascription and privilege were so important.[22] It emerged as an essentially free society in a world that

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stressed authority and order. In large measure, this new American state was dynamic, classless, and free, in contrast to Europe, which was largely class bound and restrictive.[23] (Revolutionary France does not fit this description, but "class bound and restrictive" certainly describes politics under the Concert of Europe, the power arrangement dominated by the conservative regimes of Prussia, Russia, and Austria after the defeat of Napoleon.)[24] Thus, the American Revolution had been fought in defiance of the very principles by which Europe was governed. In this sense, there developed a natural aversion to European values – and foreign policies – which further reinforced America's belief in its own uniqueness.

The fundamental American beliefs that were perceived to be so different from those of Europe can be summarized as classical liberalism, especially as espoused by the seventeenth-century thinker **John Locke**.[25] In the liberal tradition the individual is paramount and the role of government is limited. Government's task is to do only what is necessary to protect the life and liberty of its citizens. Citizens are generally left alone, free to pursue their own goals and to seek rewards based solely on their abilities.

Equality before the Law

From such a concern for the individual, personal freedom and personal achievement naturally emerged as cherished American values. Yet equality before the law was also necessary to ensure that all individuals could maximize their potential on the sole basis of their talents. In a society that placed so much emphasis on the freedom of the individual, this equality for all was viewed not as equality of outcomes (substantive equality) but as equality of opportunity (procedural equality).[26] Although all citizens were not guaranteed the same ultimate station in life, all should (theoretically) be able to advance as far as their individual capabilities would take them.

Thus, although equality of opportunity was important, the freedom to determine one's own level of achievement remained the dominant characteristic of this new society. In his January 2005 inaugural address, President George W. Bush reiterated this core American principle: "From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth."[27] In his 2009 inaugural address, President Barack Obama reiterated it as well: "The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit … to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."[28] In his augural address,

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President Trump also invoked the belief that "all enjoy the same glorious freedoms" in the United States.[29]

One prominent visitor to the United States in 1831 and 1832 recognized these distinctive American values. In ***Democracy in America***, in which he catalogued his travels, **Alexis de Tocqueville** expressed amazement at the country's social democracy ("The social condition of the Americans is eminently democratic; this was its character at the foundation of the colonies, and it is still more strongly marked at the present day"); its equality ("Men are there seen on a greater equality in point of fortune and intellect, or, in other words, more equal in their strength, than in any other country of the world, or in any age of which history has preserved the remembrance"); and its popular sovereignty ("If there is a country in the world where the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people can be fairly appreciated, where it can be studied in its application to the affairs of society, and where its dangers and its advantages may be judged, that country is assuredly America").[30] To be sure, de Tocqueville raised concerns about this equality and its implication for governance in domestic and foreign policy matters; nevertheless, his admiration for America as a different kind of nation was indeed profound.[31]

During his inaugural address, and in light of the breaching of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, President Biden poignantly emphasized once again the centrality of democracy to the American experience:

> Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy. The will of the people has been heard and the will of the people has been heeded. We have learned again that democracy is precious. Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed.[32]

The Importance of Domestic Values

America's early leaders differed from their European counterparts in a third important way: their views on the relationship between domestic values and foreign policy. Unlike European rulers of the time, most American leaders did not view foreign policy as having primacy over domestic policy, or as a philosophy whereby the power and standing of the state must be preserved and enhanced at the expense of domestic well-being. Nor did they view foreign policy values and domestic policy values as distinct from one another, with one moral value system guiding domestic action and another, by necessity, guiding international action. Instead, most saw foreign policy as subordinate to domestic interests and values. According to an analysis of Thomas Jefferson's beliefs on the relationship between the domestic and foreign policy arenas, "The objectives

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