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978-0-521-35790-6 - The Fate of Nations: The Search for National Security in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Michael Mandelbaum

Excerpt

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Introduction

The subject of this book is the impact of the international system on the sovereign states that comprise it. It is the fate of every independent nation to have to protect itself against the possibility of external attack, because there is no supreme international authority to protect all states as government protects individuals within states. But the fate of every state is not the same; the problem of national security, and thus the policies that address it, take several basic forms. One of this book's two main purposes is to identify and illustrate the basic varieties of security policy. They are created by variations of the international system itself. The six chapters that make up the book illustrate one or another of these basic varieties. The book's second purpose is to reinterpret a number of well-documented and extensively analyzed historical episodes in order to show that they were responses by particular states to the demands and constraints of the international system. The aim is to demonstrate the ways in which security policies were shaped by the character of the international system and by the positions of particular states within it.

The international system varies in two fundamental ways. One involves its organizing principle, which is anarchy in the literal sense of the term, meaning the absence of formal organs of government, rather than chaos. It is anarchy that creates the insecurity that is the fate of every country. Although they have never wholly abolished anarchy, on a few occasions states have tried to cooperate to make the international order less anarchic and more like –

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although never exactly like – the state itself. On these occasions the members of the international system have practiced security policies that are here called collective because they involved the participation of all states, or at least all of the important ones.

The other way that the international system varies is in the distribution of power within it. The security policies of very strong states are different from those of very weak ones, and both differ from those of states that are neither very strong nor very weak. Like its organizing principle, the distribution of power within the international system is a property of the system itself, not of its individual units. It is true that it is the member states of the system that possess the military might and economic power on which strength depends. Population, resources, and geography are characteristics of particular countries. But no state is strong simply in the abstract. The strength of one state has meaning only in relation to the strength of others. In 1980, for example, Britain was a much stronger military power in absolute terms than it had been in 1880, but it was a weaker member of the international system than it had been a century earlier because other countries were comparatively stronger in the twentieth century than they had been in the nineteenth.¹

It is a fundamental assumption of *The Fate of Nations* that a state's security policy is determined in the first instance by the features of the international system, not of the state itself. Thus two states that are similarly situated in the system but have different domestic orders will tend to pursue similar security policies. In contrast, states that are alike in domestic terms but different in their relationship to the international system will carry out different security policies.

Two chapters of this book are devoted to periods during which collective security policies were undertaken. Chapter 1 reviews relations among the great powers of Europe from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the aftermath of World War I, a time when they intermittently engaged in deliberate although limited cooperative efforts to keep the peace. While the chapter scrutinizes

¹ On this point, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 98; the conceptual framework of the present volume owes a great deal to this book.

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Europe as a whole, special attention is given to the perspective of Great Britain, which had a singular role in the establishment, operation, and decline of the collective European order between 1815 and 1919.

The other case study, Chapter 6, stretches the definition of collective security to include the realm of economics. It concerns the international economic order that was established after 1945, an open one in the sense that goods and capital could move relatively freely across national borders. Like the efforts of the great powers after 1815 to promote political tranquility in Europe, the open economic order was the work of more than one sovereign state. Both involved cooperative efforts not to abolish but to mitigate the anarchy of the international system. The country that is singled out for special attention in Chapter 6 is Japan. Like Britain and the international political arrangements in nineteenth-century Europe, Japan received extensive benefits from the international economic order after 1945 although making modest contributions to its maintenance.

Most sovereign states have not been able to depend on others to help ensure their security. Most have had to cope with the universal problem of insecurity on their own. They have practiced “self-help” rather than collective security policies. It is these self-help policies that vary according to the strength of a state. The representative strong state examined in this book is the United States during the years from 1945 to 1980 (Chapter 3); the weak state is the People’s Republic of China between 1949 and 1976 (Chapter 4).

Most states have been neither very strong nor exceptionally weak. The case studies in this large in-between category are France from 1919 to 1940 (Chapter 2) and Israel from 1948 to 1979 (Chapter 5). France was roughly equal in strength to Germany in 1940 in the sense that neither country was so overwhelmingly weaker than the other as to have no chance to defend itself successfully. The same was true of Israel and its Arab adversaries from 1948 to 1979. Neither pair was precisely matched, of course, and the differences proved decisive in the Franco-German war of 1940 and in the various Arab–Israeli conflicts. But those crucial discrepancies were not self-evident in advance; they did not become apparent until the wars themselves were fought.

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Chapter 2, on France in the interwar period, illustrates the range of strategies available to a state that pursues a self-help approach to national security. The choices that such a state makes invariably involve a particular kind of uncertainty, which is here, as elsewhere in the literature of international politics, called the security dilemma. That dilemma was especially important for Israel's policies from the 1967 war to the peace treaty with Egypt in 1979; it is the subject of Chapter 5.

The six chapters that follow can thus be seen as three pairs. Each of them – Britain and Japan, France and Israel, the United States and China – illustrates the same type or complementary types of security policy. The first pair involves collective policies. The second emphasizes issues relevant to countries that are roughly equal in strength. The third concerns policies that are at the extremes of the spectrum of strength along which all states vary.

The chapters are presented in chronological order: nineteenth-century Europe and Great Britain, France, the United States, China, Israel, and finally the postwar international economic order and Japan.

Each chapter has a comparative aspect, to demonstrate that similar security policies recur throughout history and across the international system in states that, whatever their differences, occupy similar positions in the system. The comparisons are not uniform, however, and the differences among them reflect differences among the main varieties of security policy.

Collective approaches to security are not national policies at all. No state can carry them out alone; a number of states must adopt them. Such approaches have been prominent after wars involving all the great powers of the international system. There have been three in the modern era: the Wars of the French Revolution from 1792 to 1815, World War I, and World War II. The collective policies that are subject of Chapter 1 followed the Wars of the French Revolution. They are compared with the collective efforts made in the aftermath of the two world wars of the twentieth century. Chapter 6 compares Britain's relations with the other great powers in the nineteenth century and Japan's place in the open international economic order after 1945. Chapter 1 also includes a comparison between the collective policies of the nineteenth century, called the managed balance of power system, and a cartel,

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the cooperative arrangements among firms in the same industry. This is an analytical rather than a historical comparison, highlighting the logic of the formation and disintegration of the collective efforts of the great powers of Europe to achieve security.

In the chapters on self-help security policies the comparisons are more explicit for the very strong – the United States – and the very weak – China – than for the two countries in between – France and Israel. The reason is that the influence of the international system differs among states in different positions in that system.

Weak and strong states exhibit more regular patterns of international conduct than do sovereign states that are neither. Their behavior is determined to a greater extent by their position in the international system than is that of states in the “middle” category. For states such as France in the interwar period and Israel from 1948 to 1979, the anarchic international system imposes the need for self-protection and provides several broad approaches to achieving it. But neither the character of the international system, nor the position of such states within it, determines the combination of policies that these states will employ or whether their policies will succeed or fail. So numerous are the states in this intermediate category, and so modest are the effects of the system on them, that France and Israel are compared with general patterns of international conduct, rather than with other states.

In addition to including a comparison of some kind, each of the six chapters is written from a particular point of view. Each begins with the impact of the international system on its member states, thereby interpreting the particular historical period “from the outside in.” Each takes as its starting point the restraints and limits that the character of the international system and the state’s place in it impose on national security policies. Being subject to these restraints and limits is the fate of every sovereign state.

Such a view stands in contrast to interpretations of foreign policy as an outward expression of the internal features of states. “Inside-out” interpretations are often apt. In the twentieth century, domestic politics has intruded ever more extensively into security policy. In carrying out security policies, governments everywhere have become less independent of the societies they govern.

Inside-out accounts do in fact appear in the chapters in this book. Domestic divisions affected Britain in the eve of World War I and

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France in the face of the German threat between the two wars. Driven by conflicting views of the appropriate way to respond to worsening international conditions, both countries were on occasion unable to take decisive action to safeguard their interests. Similarly, the United States and the People's Republic of China have been motivated by ideology – anticommunism in the American case, the Maoist version of Marxism–Leninism in the Chinese – in their relations with the rest of the world. A feature of domestic society that is akin to ideology, national character – specifically stubbornness and anxiety rooted in historical experience – helps to explain Israel's policies toward the Arab states.

Domestic divisions have particular influence on foreign policy when they are acute, when a government is unstable, and when the legitimacy of a regime itself is in dispute. These conditions have been widespread in the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 5, on Israel's security policy, in fact refers primarily to domestic politics in explaining the conduct of the Arab states. Moreover, domestic influences are most pronounced when the power of the international system is least decisive, in the cases of states that are neither strong nor weak. Domestic influence on security policy has thus been considerable in the twentieth century.

The subject of this book, however, is the limits that membership in the international system imposes on states whatever their internal arrangements, limits that are as old as the anarchy of the system itself, limits that have shaped the history of international politics in the twentieth as in other centuries.

An approach that stresses these limits runs two related risks. One is the risk of suggesting that security policy is determined wholly by forces external to, and beyond the control of, sovereign states. It is the risk of implying that a nation's fate in one sense of the word – its basic condition, its lot in life – is determined by fate in another sense – a predetermined and unalterable plan. The approach thereby also risks excusing from responsibility those who carried out the policies in question.

No state is entirely free of external constraints, but neither is any wholly restricted by forces beyond its control, its policy determined totally by its position in the system. Even where the pull of the system is strongest, a margin of choice remains, and so therefore does the burden of individual responsibility.

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Still, the outside-in approach does impart a particular bias to each chapter. That bias is sympathetic to the particular countries and to those responsible for conducting their security policies. Each chapter emphasizes the fate with which they had to contend. Each portrays them as responding, usually sensibly, if not always successfully, to the circumstances that the international system imposed on them. Whether and where this interpretation is appropriate is a matter of judgment, a subject for the endless argument that is the process of writing history. It does, however, represent the author's belief that, in the twentieth century, a bloody, contentious, and in many ways terrible era in world history, national security policies, especially in the democracies – and five of the six countries that are the subjects of this book are democracies – have been more sensible and prudent, even when unsuccessful, than they have often been retrospectively judged.

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I

Collective Approaches to Security

The Nineteenth-Century Managed Balance of Power System and Great Britain

I

In the eighteenth century there was a balance of power in Europe. Although the leading states were not precisely equal in strength, none so far outstripped the others as to be able to subdue them and dominate the Continent. Each state pursued its own interests, which meant that each strove to expand its power and influence, chiefly by increasing the territory and population under its control. None was so successful that it gained mastery over the others.

One or another of the European powers had from time to time threatened to achieve dominance: first the Spanish, then the German Hapsburgs, then Louis XIV of France. On each occasion the lesser states came together to thwart the power seeking hegemony. The threat of domination produced an opposing coalition, which, after defeating the state making the bid for mastery, dissolved into uncoordinated rivalries for territory and influence.

The European powers did not design their foreign policies so as to contrive equilibrium among themselves. The coalitions that formed to thwart efforts to dominate the Continent arose not from a grand Europe-wide scheme but rather from the uncoordinated pursuit by each power of its own interest, which was defined, even above self-aggrandizement, as independence. The balance of power was the unintended outcome of these individual strivings. Rousseau described it as a kind of mechanical marvel: "The actual system of Europe has precisely the degree of solidity which maintains it in

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a constant state of motion without upsetting it. The balance existing between the power of these diverse members of the European society is more the work of nature than of art. It maintains itself without effort, in such a manner that if it sinks on one side it reestablishes itself very soon on the other.”¹

The balance can be compared with the workings of the market in the classical version of economics. There individual selfishness – the search for personal gain – produces overall harmony, as resources are put to their most productive uses through the operation of the laws of supply and demand. In the eighteenth-century balance of power system, the self-assertion of sovereign states led to an outcome that, like the equilibrium of the market, was willed by none but was more or less acceptable to all.

The eighteenth-century system reflected similarities and differences between the international system and the state of nature that Hobbes describes. States, like men, are in competition with one another because of the absence of a governing authority. Structure determines behavior. But the result of the operation of the balance of power was precisely the opposite of the outcome to which Hobbes says men in the state of nature are inevitably driven. Individuals, according to Hobbes, give up their independence and form a commonwealth, a “Leviathan,” that is, a state. The states of the eighteenth century retained their sovereign independence. Individuals form the state because they find life without it, in the state of nature, unbearable. Because states are tougher, more resilient, less vulnerable to one another than are individuals, their common condition, anarchy, was not intolerable. To the contrary, it was desirable. To perpetuate it was the chief purpose of the policies of the individual states, or rather the consequence of the workings of the balance of power. Independence, with all its hazards, was deemed preferable to peace through subservience. The balance of power preserved precisely what Hobbes says men in the state of nature must escape. The European states were prepared to fight to preserve it, to avoid what Hobbes portrays as the salvation of individuals. For eighteenth-century Europe, anarchy itself provided a kind of order.

¹ Quoted in Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 43–4.

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Then came the Wars of the French Revolution. The conflict between France and a shifting combination of the other powers that began shortly after the overthrow of the French king and continued to the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 resembled the great wars of the European past. The strongest power sought to dominate the Continent. The others resisted and finally prevailed. This conflict differed from the campaigns against the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs, however, in its scale, its intensity, and most importantly in its political implications.

It ranged over more of Europe and the rest of the world and was bloodier and more destructive than its predecessors. The armies that France was able to put into the field were much larger than any that had existed previously because there were many more Frenchmen than there had been in centuries past and because the French Revolution rallied them to arms. France had a vast citizen army instead of the much smaller bands of mercenaries that had fought the preceding wars of the century.² The size of the "Grand Armée" made new tactics possible. Instead of cautious maneuvering while avoiding engagement with the enemy, which was the customary practice of eighteenth-century armies, the French generals moved their forces swiftly, concentrated them for battle, and attacked. Their conquests were more extensive than any since Roman times.

France was beaten, but only after a long struggle and at enormous cost. The balance of power system had worked, but its natural, spontaneous working had become much more expensive than ever before. For a different, although related reason, the eighteenth-century procedures also seemed dangerous to those who finally defeated France. The French carried with them the new ideas of nationalism and liberalism. Their victories advanced the causes these ideas inspired even when they were achieved under the leadership of Napoleon, who abolished many of the revolutionary liberties and proclaimed himself emperor.

The new dogmas posed a mortal threat to the three eastern great powers of Europe: Prussia, Russia, and Austria. None was either

² In 1789 there were 160,000 regular French troops. By 1794 France had 750,000 men under arms. Derek McKay and H. M. Scott, *The Rise of the Great Powers, 1648–1815* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 287.