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Foundations for a Moral Foreign Policy

By Christopher Manion

Editor's Preview: The conduct of American foreign policy, notes Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff member Christopher Manion, is full of moralistic rhetoric and empty of genuine moral principle. The key to a sound foreign policy must be a reintroduction of genuine morality and a better understanding of the economic, cultural and ideological basis for our diplomacy and defense. This lecture was presented in November 1987 during the Center for Constructive Alternatives (CCA) seminar, "The Morality of Defense."

The conduct of foreign policy today is full of moral language. There is much more moral language than there is morality, or true moral inquiry. Why else would the Communist State of East Germany call itself the "German Democratic Republic" than to stake a claim on the good vibes that flow to the modern world from the word "democratic"? For that matter, why else would the one-party dictatorship in Mexico go through the charade of "elections" every six years, even though both the winner and the vote totals are determined months in advance? Clearly because the word "democracy" symbolizes a moral standard, and they want to wrap themselves in it. It is the duty of serious foreign policy analysts to unwrap such symbols, empty them out on the floor, so to speak, and study their content. At times that can be a very unsettling experience. And also a very unpopular one, if you pick the wrong targets. But, above all, it requires an intellectual foundation that is sorely lacking in today's foreign policy community.

It's clear that a lot of international charlatans want to take advantage of the



existence of a moral language and gullible so-called "world opinion" in the West to disguise their own lust for power with the lexicon of the free society. The vocabulary of freedom is a very powerful ornament: think of all the work that's gone into the word "democracy" and how its very mention conjures up all sorts of good feelings, even when it's used to refer to some far-off unknown land like Tanzania or Uruguay. If a country gets the democratic label, that's good; if not, well, too bad, but don't mention it, please, in polite conversation.

"Ah," say the international policy-makers, "we're onto *that!* No one can fool us by the mere use of words. We're not about to be duped. We're experts!"

Oh, really? Then why, for instance, have we heard so little condemnation from the self-appointed "court of international public opinion" about the corruption, drug

dealing by government officials, and election fraud in Mexico? It is, after all, a lot closer to us than, say, Chile, or South Africa. Yet, we hear not a peep about Mexico, even though bogus elections there last July reaffirmed the dictatorship of the ruling party for another six years. On the other hand, we have heard so much about the regime in Chile that you'd think it was about to invade Texas. Yet Chile since Allende has never been accused of corruption, drug dealing by government officials, or fraudulent elections. In fact, Augusto Pinochet, the favorite target of the international moralists, who threw out the Communists 15 years ago, just allowed himself to be voted out of office in a recent vote, honestly counted and reported, and will retire exactly as his constitution requires. But did he get any accolades for this? Not quite; instead, he is denounced much more routinely than is Daniel Ortega, whom the international moralists are trying to keep *in* office.

So why do these contradictions seem to thrive in international politics? I think the answer is simple: the true moral nature of a regime has very little to do with the way that nation will be perceived in the international arena. Unfortunately, a new morality—that is, a new set of moral standards—has gained supremacy in the international community today. That's not to say that the battle is over, just that a lot of people in the free world seem to have given up on the assumption that, if they can't beat the other side, they may as well join it.

This brings to mind the story that Otto von Habsburg tells about his discussion with Chou En Lai back in the days when Chou and Mao Tse Tung were still battling

for control of China. Archduke von Habsburg, the heir to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire and a very intelligent man, asked Chou En Lai, "What do you think of the French Revolution?"

Chou En Lai was silent for a moment, but finally answered, with finality: "It's too soon to tell."

Well, there are many who believe that in order to understand the moral battle now being waged throughout the world the French Revolution is the best signpost, to them, the Revolution is still raging, the old order against the new, each with its own moral standards.

Diplomacy and the Marketplace

For some, all this is just too ponderous, so they go about their "business as usual," leaving the moral discussions to those who can't have any effect on the outcome. It's an interesting paradox, because the enemies of freedom think about these questions all the time. They're very intent on winning, gaining and keeping power, period. Yet many in the free world just go on their merry way as though morality were a mere encumbrance, or just a state of mind.

For instance: the United States Treasury Department just completed top-secret negotiations for a loan to Mexico of some \$3.5 billion from the U.S. Treasury, without bothering to inform the U.S. taxpayers—who will foot the bill—or the Congress, until it was already a *fait accompli*. In fact, most members of Congress learned about it from the *New York Times*. Here is a situation that, even according to the rules of democracy, should have come to the attention of the elected representatives of

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the taxpayers. You know, "We the People," and all that. Yet the court of public opinion was virtually silent. You can imagine the uproar had they given a fraction of that amount to Chile, or South Africa.

There was silence as well when a major U.S. bank—later joined by bankers in Western Europe—gave loans at very favorable rates to the Soviet Union. Roger Robinson, a distinguished former member of the National Security Council Staff, identifies these loans as indispensable to the Soviet funding of KGB activities throughout the world, because those activities require

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hard currency. Yet this news produces no international uproar. As a matter of fact, there are quite a few U.S. businesses quite willing to give the Soviet bloc a lot of business—on the best of terms, too.

This situation introduces a new wrinkle; the relationship between diplomacy and the marketplace. It also makes for all sorts of interesting questions about the morality of doing business with our adversaries and the desirability of protecting our technology from appropriation by our enemies. The most recent well-known incident of such a transfer was the Walker case, in which an American, working as a spy for the Soviets, gave them detailed information about our ability to detect their nuclear submarines. Now these submarines, if undetected, can launch missiles which will destroy American coastal cities—you know, New York, Washington, Miami, L.A.—in about 5 minutes. Well, once the Soviets found out their propellers were too noisy, they went to the Toshiba Corporation's machine-tool subsidiary, which complied by selling them state-of-the-art lathes which made their propellers more quiet—not twice as quiet, or three times, but more than *ten* times as quiet.

Now the U.S. Congress has been forced to address that issue. I raise it here because

of its moral quality: whether or not it was legal (in fact it was not) for Toshiba to have supplied those machines, was it moral? What standards do you judge by?

From the business point of view, Toshiba did get a substantial premium on its usual price in exchange for its willingness to conduct this sale on the sly (and it was helped by a Norwegian firm which supplied the computers to operate the machines). Toshiba might have made as much as several million dollars from the deal. Yet general unclassified estimates suggest that the cost to the United States to repair the damage—so we can hear

the Soviet subs when they're 200 miles away, say, instead of ten—will be anywhere from \$30 to 50 *billion*.

Now, back to the problem. And it *is* a problem, because many U.S. companies are anxious to do business in the Soviet Union; are *they* interested in the moral dimension of their enterprise there? Well, maybe, and then again, maybe not. Apart from the security angle, there are other factors—the Soviet subjects who will be working for them, for instance, to consider. Now, in that regard, the Slepak Foundation was recently founded to foster minimum moral standards for workers employed by multinationals doing business behind the Iron Curtain. The so-called "Slepak Principles" are modeled on the Sullivan Principles, which brought considerable benefits to South African workers employed by multinationals doing business there. The Helsinki Commission recently hosted a meeting for U.S. businessmen who plan to open operations in the Soviet bloc and featured a presentation by the Slepak Foundation to explain the plight of workers behind the Iron Curtain. They discussed religious, family, and labor rights that were routinely denied to Soviet workers. They warned that many of those going to work for the Soviet subsidiaries of the U.S. com-

panies might actually be slave laborers.

Here was a great opportunity for an American business about to expand into the Soviet bloc to learn the lay of the land. It was free of charge. Yet not one business sent a representative. Not one . . . even though a meeting the same week sponsored less than a mile away by the Commerce Department about trading with the Soviets attracted thirty heavy-hitting officials of major U.S. corporations who could have attended the Slepak meeting merely by walking up to Capitol Hill.

This is all mentioned in order to raise questions. It isn't necessary to condemn anyone in order to show the need for the business community to contemplate the moral dimension of its activities, along with all the other factors that are so important to maintaining a profitable enterprise.

The diplomatic community needs to make the same kind of assessment. I scarcely need to mention the tired trail of diplomatic malfeasance, and worse, which has cast so much of the world into totalitarian darkness. Munich, Yalta, Hungary, Berlin, Kennedy-Khrushchev, U.S. complicity in the murder of President Diem in South Viet Nam, the Paris Peace Accords, Lancaster House, the Arias Plan—all of these represent diplomatic failures which delivered suffering people into the arms of their totalitarian masters. And there are strategic failures as well—Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia, Angola, Nicaragua, to name just a few in recent years.

We have to bear in mind how much these diplomatic and strategic failures *encourage* our adversaries to be more adventurous in their schemes to undermine the West. It was President Kennedy's failure to resist the building of the Berlin Wall, I believe, which led Khrushchev to test him with the Cuban missile crisis a year later—an incident which brought the world closer to the brink than we have ever been before, or since. It was the willingness of the United States to seal the Panama Canal treaties with the Torrijos-Noriega government in Panama ten years ago which encouraged Castro to go for broke with his revolutionaries in Nicaragua and El Salvador. In Nicaragua, he won; in El Salvador, he came close, and it isn't over yet.

Competing World Views

Now, an aside: In days gone by, the examination of such distressing indulgences on the part of Western businessmen, diplomats, academicians, and

the media were often met with cries of "McCarthyism"; this has nothing to do with who McCarthy was, but rather, with the assumption, implicit in that label, that these are questions which you cannot ask without being branded with an unpopular label.

Like all popular myths, this one has a foundation in truth, or at least a half-truth. Early on, based on the exposure and conviction of spies like Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs, U.S. losses to the communists were blamed on an "international conspiracy," because nothing else could explain the seemingly cavalier, invincible ignorance which motivated our diplomatic efforts to acquiesce in schemes that would weaken the West and strengthen the Communist Bloc.

Frankly, I think more people ought to be aware of the plans that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has for the free world. Clearly, the modern-day sons of Lenin *are* part of a great conspiracy, one which has found remarkable success, and even support, in the West for decades. Yet I don't think that the Westerners who applaud and assist these efforts in so many major and minor ways have bought into the conspiracy. Rather, the relatively small number of conspirators who *do* desire domination on a world scale have found allies in some very petty, venal personalities. There are some unhappy aspects of human nature which are very prevalent in Western society, that are susceptible to manipulation by these very expert practitioners, who have discovered that life in the free societies of the West seems to encourage many individuals to test the limits of self-indulgence.

This represents nothing more than a basic moral observation: the personal failings of the individual, long recognized by political philosophers from Socrates to America's Founding Fathers, are a gold mine to be plundered by the big-time operators of modern totalitarianism. Properly orchestrated by disinformation, propaganda, diplomacy, and careful manipulation of Western opinion, the millions of small-time operators with petty schemes of self-importance, self-promotion, and self-aggrandizement constitute a pool of petty conspiracies on the part of millions of individuals, each striving to defy the limits which basic morality places on his own actions, for the true powermongers to seize upon. Hillsdale College no doubt offers many courageous alternatives to the development of this modern mentality of

amorality, so I will not dwell on it here. What must be pointed out, however, is how permanent a fixture is this fallen nature of ours, and, thus, how we must fight its consequences no matter who is in the White House, or what treaties we have with our enemies, or how economically successful our country, our community, or our family may be.

Yes, I believe Chou En Lai was right: I think that the French Revolution is still going on, and at the root of the struggle lies a battle between two views of human nature. One of them, the traditional view, recognizes man's fallen nature, his limitations, and thus the limitations of political power; it recognizes the value of history, tradition, what Chesterton called "the democracy of the dead." As George Washington, Tocqueville, and so many others observed, it reflects man's dependence on Divine Providence, and bases our individual freedoms on that faith. As Thomas Jefferson wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are *created*." All the talk about equality, rights, and the rest would follow, but the Creator was central to the whole enterprise. And, in the words of William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, "Those who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants."

That is the traditional view. The modernist view is quite different. We have seen its roots in the writings of Machiavelli, of Thomas Hobbes, of Rousseau; we have seen its fruits in the lives of Robespierre and Condorcet, both of whom were sacrificed on the revolutionary altar they had built. The modern view proclaims man's perfectibility; the past is not *good*, it is the cause of most of the evil in the world. The modernist puts his faith in the future, and in the hands of men powerful enough to shape it. And the potential of government in this enterprise is unlimited, as long as the right people—that is, men of the modernist creed—are in power.

Well, in brief, that is the lineup. The modernist tendency denies the existence of the moral vicissitudes of man's nature. Now, since that denial does not make them disappear, they flourish, unchecked by any lingering understanding of the need for personal caution or endeavor, in the nature of those who embrace the modernist creed. The beauty of the Soviet ideology in this regard is its ability to nicely co-opt all petty venalities and use them for its own purposes, all the while stroking the vocabulary built up by the "new morality" so those

co-opted will congratulate themselves even as they are subjected into servitude. When it's too late (and here consider the silence of the one-time antiwar activists concerning the horrors of Southeast Asia *after* the war was ended) they will not apologize, or change their minds; rather, with Prufrock, they will merely murmur, "That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all."

For the most part, though, foreign policy nowadays is conducted quite apart from these considerations. Or, rather, the modern pragmatists reject all such talk as *ideology*, which is the enemy of all reasonable men, and which constitutes a roadblock to all diplomacy because it makes people so, well, *rigid*.

sultants) "these guys don't care about the candidates, or the platform, or *anything*. They just want to make sure they get a lot of lobbying contracts during the next administration." Ah, such heartening news, now that the elections are over!

This dark cloud has a silver lining: if you want to be involved in policymaking, and you are driven by principle, having duly subjected the weaknesses of your nature, there will be many in your circle of colleagues who will be quite willing to let you have your way, if *they* can have the titles, the promotions, the invitations to the White House, more subordinates—the trappings of power. All of this is nicely summed up in one word, "turf"; and what goes on while the substance of policies dies

once imparted a sense of substance, with which you are all familiar. "Human rights," "democracy," and "national interest" used to be terms which carried a certain weight because they implied a substance, a history, a content which was common to all those who used them and heard them. Now they are each up for grabs, for use by totalitarian countries in their attacks on the free world. And they are often abdicated as moral positions by their Western advocates. In El Salvador, for instance, in the early 1980s, so-called human rights" advocates would trot out thousands of allegations about the sins of the anticommunist government there, but would refuse to address the human rights abuses by the communist guerrillas. The United States trumpeted "democracy" there, but, according to reports which the State Department never denied, wound up funneling almost a million dollars—a huge sum—to one side in an election which the U.S. had insisted upon, and had brought about. And the notion of national interest, when used by a positivist diplomat devoid of any historical dimension in front of a hostile congressional committee, conjures up the worst caricature of the last resort of a scheming scoundrel, even when used in nominal defense of a very solid, powerful position advocated by a conservative president.

The Key to a Sound Foreign Policy

So substance, not process, is the key to the formulation of a sound foreign policy. But where should that substance come from? Let me refer to three specific areas of education which I strongly advocate as indispensable for those preparing to work in the foreign policy field. Unfortunately, training in these areas is woefully lacking in our present generation of policymakers.

The first of these is an elemental understanding of economics. The problems of development around the world have too long been addressed by foreign aid programs. These programs, all conducted by governments, are supposed to help poor people get richer. But they have several internal contradictions. First of all, foreign aid would never pass the Congress if it did not have the attraction of being, among other things, a reward, an inducement, a support, for a friendly *government*. Yet, when we give aid to a *government*, and



The trouble is, when people dispense with the overarching questions, making them forbidden territory, only the petty leftovers remain: personal venality, the lust for power, and all the other psychological attributes which Thomas Hobbes nicely captures as "the war of all against all," once he denies any moral foundation for political order. In the contemporary world of foreign policy, that problem presents itself as a Hobbesian version of positivism, which denies the value of discussing the *content* of any given foreign policy, and concentrates instead on the *process*.

This is rampant in Washington. Everywhere there are people who are more interested in their careers than they are in the substance of the policy which they are charged with carrying out. Just recently a very highly placed campaign worker—a Republican, I am afraid—told me: "Chris, these guys" (he was referring to the 1988 presidential campaign con-

on the vine is called "turf battles." Constantine Menges' *Inside the National Security Council*, is but one example which details how petty venalities and the culture of self-promotion in our foreign policy community sealed the defeat of President Reagan's abiding commitment to help the freedom fighters in Nicaragua.

It is a sad tale. Because, in the end, even those who were not interested in substance because they were so absorbed in the process recognized that substance is the enemy. A substantive demand during a negotiation can shut down the negotiations until one side or the other gives in. That is unseemly. Diplomats pride themselves in concluding *agreements*. If a negotiation breaks up because someone insists upon some *substance* or other—freedom for Eastern Europe, for instance, at Yalta—why, they have *failed!* All because of some supposed rigid, unbending ideologue.

I will briefly point to three terms, which

tell them to use it to promote free enterprise—that is, to make the government less powerful, we should not be surprised when the government, wherever it is, squanders the money instead on centralized enterprises, corruption, capital flight, and all the rest. I am mindful, for instance, of the practices brought to light by the problems of the Marcos, formerly of the Philippines. But that is not the worst of it; at least Mr. Marcos was friendly to the United States. Most countries receiving such aid pride themselves in flaunting their *independence* from America, and thus wind up voting against us in the U.N., joining in various condemnations of U.S. policy around the world, and generally joining the “blame America first” chorus. Unfortunately, the usual reaction from Foggy Bottom (that’s what they call the State Department inside the Beltway) is to give them more.

But foreign aid does more than encourage countries to be corrupt and more anti-American. It has the same effect on those who are hired to pass out the largesse, especially in the international, so-called multilateral agencies—The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, regional banks, and so on.

There is an internal contradiction in these institutions as well, for, if they ever succeed in bringing a country out of poverty that makes their work that much less necessary. So these international bureaucrats, some of the most highly paid residents of Washington, New York, Rome, Paris—you get the idea—*hate* the United States and everything that the free economy stands for, because they fear the free market would quickly make demand for their services—which are paid for in tax-free salaries, by the way—decline.

And these people are the masters of turf, of the perk. Recently the World Bank was forced to let some people go—“tightening the belt,” it was called—and the poor folks who left were given a severance pay averaging \$250,000 *apiece*. And these were the incompetent ones! Yet, when the World Bank came and asked Congress for \$14 more *billion* from the American taxpayer over the next five years, it was due only to the struggle of a small number of members that the request was pared down to only the first annual installment. So pony up, because you’ll be paying the bill.

Finally, in regard to economics, one wouldn’t want to complain so much about these programs if at least they had decent results. But they don’t. The documented

failures of the World Bank’s disasters are legion; the consistency with which the U.S. foreign aid establishment has espoused socialism in foreign countries that would never pass muster here at home is distressing. In El Salvador, for instance,

not fundamentally political, but giants of culture and of history. Our American policy community is absolutely incapable of understanding or interpreting these figures because they are primarily non-political—they manifest the whole culture and

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Jimmy Carter insisted on the “land reform” that nationalized the most productive farmland in the country. Today, after a billion dollars of U.S. aid, the program has proven to be a miserable failure, the guerrillas are still active, and the corruption in the program during the 1980’s is so massive as to defy calculation.

So, first, economics. Second, culture. I shall never forget the story of a U.S. Congressman on a visit to El Salvador who was taken to see an important Bishop of the Catholic Church. This Bishop, who told me the story, was trying to tell the Congressman of the views of the Episcopal Conference, the governing body of the Church in that country and a very important institution indeed. The Congressman, who spoke no Spanish, was accompanied by the U.S. Embassy officer whose specialty was the Church. This officer, in translating the Bishop’s comments, kept telling the Congressman that the “Episcopalian Church” took this position or that position. Finally the exasperated Congressman said, “Why does he [the Bishop] keep talking about the *Episcopalians*?” The Bishop, finally understanding the problem, leaned over to the Congressman and said, mustering all the English he knew, “No, Senor, the *Episcopal* Conference, the Catholic *Bishops*.” So much for the expert.

It is that basic understanding of the cultural institutions of the societies with which we deal that is indispensable to knowing what *their* society is like, what *they* need from the United States, as well as what we *can’t* expect of them. Witness the phenomena of Solzhenitsyn, John Paul II, and the Ayatollah—figures who were

history which has produced them. And often we have to pay the price for such ignorance.

Lastly, we come to ideology, especially communist ideology. If you watch *Nightline*, you know how well the Soviet communists—frequent guests of Mr. Koppel—understand *our* country’s strengths and weaknesses; they are highly trained, urbane and polished. On the other hand, you can see how *little* Mr. Koppel understands communism, but that is not really a cause for alarm, since most of his American guests don’t either. And you just can’t negotiate with a government if you do not understand its vocabulary and its true aims. Saint Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, had a fundamental maxim for his spiritual soldiers: “Know your enemy’s arguments better than he knows them himself.”

A sound foreign policy cannot exist in a value-free, amoral context. No matter how elaborate the processes devised by those who dodge substance at every turn, eventually the processes will have content, supplied from somewhere. If you hold high the values of freedom, family, faith, and other fundamentals dear to our society, then you have to become familiar with the sources of those institutions in the history, culture, and moral tradition of the West. If foreign policy is conducted by those who consider the moral dimension an irritant if not an obstacle, then we should not be surprised by the victories of our enemies. It would be much more surprising if they sat by patiently, postponing their schemes of conquest waiting for us as we tried to make up our minds exactly what it was we were here for in the first place.



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