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Directions in U.S. Foreign Policy Interests and Ideals

Anthony Lake



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Seventeenth Morgenthau Memorial Lecture
on Ethics & Foreign Policy

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Introduction

With this lecture, we celebrate an anniversary and a remarkable achievement. Precisely fifty years ago, in 1948, Professor Hans Morgenthau published his magnum opus, *Politics Among Nations*, a book that would change the study and understanding of international relations. In that book Professor Morgenthau interpreted the realities of international politics for an entire generation, the cold war generation, seeking to make sense of the often baffling relationship between morality, reason, and power. Although the cold war is now over, many of Professor Morgenthau's lessons remain relevant, a remarkable achievement indeed.

In today's world of short attention spans, passing fads, and celebrities who enjoy or withstand their fifteen minutes of fame, it is refreshing to stop and consider something enduring. Professor Morgenthau's legacy is indeed lasting, for he raised the great and timeless themes of ethics and politics, conscience and power. Because he did this with such audacity, conviction, and brilliance, we are still able to bask profitably in the afterglow.

In September 1922, as an eighteen-year-old senior in a German gymnasium, the young Hans Morgenthau was required to write a composition with the title "What I Hope for My Future and the Foundations of That Hope." Here is a brief excerpt from that composition:

Thus to be able to work in the service of a great idea, on behalf of an important goal; to be able to commit every

nerve, every muscle and every drop of sweat to a work, to a great task; to grow with the work, to become greater than oneself in the struggle with one's betters and then to be able to say at the end: I die, but here remains something that is more important than life and will last longer than my body; my work: that is my hope, worthy of tremendous effort to realize it, that is my goal, worthy to live for and, if need be, die for.

The standing-room-only attendance at the seventeenth annual Morgenthau Lecture signifies that the hope of the young Hans was not in vain, that Morgenthau's goal is worthy of lasting attention. In this spirit we renew our commitment to the great struggle for understanding, under the guidance of, as the young Hans would put it, one of our betters, Anthony Lake.

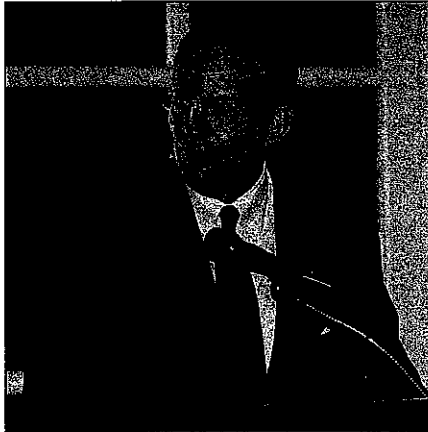
Anthony Lake has devoted his life to education and public service. His career as a foreign service officer, a foreign policy analyst, a college professor, and National Security Adviser to President Bill Clinton has brought him face to face with some of the most difficult foreign policy issues of the United States. He has had first-hand experience making tough decisions on policies relating to Vietnam, Bosnia, North Korea, Haiti, NATO, and China—the list goes on. History will no doubt show that he deserves a place in the pantheon of American statesmen who have combined great intellect with compassion, honor, and strength.

Like Morgenthau, Lake has as one of the great unifying themes of his life's work the quest to understand the relationship of ideals and interests and to harness American power in the pursuit of both. As part of this lifelong quest, it must be

noted that he served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Council and on the Editorial Board of our journal, *Ethics & International Affairs*, from 1986 until 1992, when another opportunity came along. All of us at the Council remain grateful to Tony for those years of service. We were delighted to have him back—home, so to speak—as the seventeenth lecturer in the Morgenthau series. This booklet contains the edited transcript of his remarks on that occasion.

Joel H. Rosenthal
President
Carnegie Council
on Ethics and International Affairs

**Directions in U.S. Foreign Policy:
Interests and Ideals**



Anthony Lake

I am truly honored to be speaking on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Politics Among Nations*, which I read as an undergraduate. Although I did not, even then, agree with everything in it, I wasn't sure how to disagree, because the lines of argument in the book are so clean. It did affect me, like so many students—more than I realized at the time.

As I mulled the topic “Directions in U.S. Foreign Policy: Ideals and Interests,” I was struck by how impossible it is, whatever the elegance and internal consistency of the arguments written by anybody on the issue, actually to live a professional life dedicated wholly to either interests or ideals, to be simply a realist or a Wilsonian. This certainly was true of a life as complicated and rich as that of Hans Morgenthau.

Now, when the world is so new, it is time for those who are debating realism and discussing ethics and international affairs to stop caricaturing each other—for realists to stop referring to the Wilsonian impulse as “foreign policy as social work” and for Wilsonians to stop referring to realists as amoral, power-hungry, un-American analysts—and for all involved in this enterprise to try to reconcile the two schools of thought and put American power behind our principles. It is time to argue proportions and priorities, not caricatures and absolutes.

Obviously, we should discard as unworkable and unrealistic a sole focus on nations and power when in an age of globalization the very nature of both nations and power is

changing—when globalization is reworking not only the international system but our conceptions of geography itself. But, at the same time, as Hans Morgenthau always knew, the geography of the human heart has not changed. Even in the wake of the cold war, power relationships, and military power especially, still matter—as do the lessons of realism about the necessity of prudence and clear thought when we are pursuing our national ideals. In any event, the lessons of realism—that power, prudence, and clear thought are essential in the pursuit of ideals—are no less valid today than they were during the cold war. Similarly, without a clear, principled star to sail by, our ship of state will be without a rudder. As I shall argue, our fundamental beliefs in democracy, broadly defined, and in open markets with an emphasis on justice as well as growth, not only deeply reflect our national character, our history, and our national purpose—they are in our national interest as well.

In short, principle without pragmatism becomes disembodied, or even dangerous, idealism; and pragmatism unharnessed to principle becomes, in personal terms, simply opportunism. For a nation, unprincipled pragmatism is a recipe for policies of static reaction, especially at a time of change like today, when the possibilities for acts of creation are truly immense.

Why is the spread of democracy, and the rule of law on which it depends, both in our interests and an expression of our ideals? Because, as has often been said, democracies tend not to wage war on one another; they tend not to support terrorism; and they are more trustworthy in diplomacy since their decisions are more transparent. The same democratic transparency is the enemy of the kind of “crony capitalism” that has done such damage in Asia.

And, of course, it is only democracies that can with justice allow people properly to decide the distribution of public goods, so long as these decisions are based on the rule of law, constitutionalism, and the protection of minority rights. In addition, democracy offers the best way—admittedly, not the one always chosen—to resolve ethnic disputes. The only alternatives to democracy in resolving them are either the redrawing of borders around the world, or authoritarian government as in the Soviet Union, which repressed rather than resolved ethnic tensions.

Clearly, we have to make distinctions. We have to concentrate our efforts where our geopolitical interests are the greatest. We have a greater stake in democracy in Russia than we do in democracy in, say, Burma. The essential principles of democracy can be expressed in different cultures in different ways, and should be. But in the end, a democratic evolution is in our interest everywhere.

Those are arguments that have often been made in favor of democracy. I would now like to make a less traditional argument in terms of the impact of globalization on democracy.

In general, globalization—based on the communications revolution—reinforces democracy. The personal computer with the power it gives individuals, and the Internet with the power it gives individuals to work together, are probably the most important forces for personal freedom and democracy in the world. But I want to explore some *dangers* that globalization has for democracy because of its impact on national sovereignty around the world. I want to do so by examining three ironies or paradoxes. They are as follows:

First, through the global democratic revolution, more people than ever before in human history have an opportu-

nity to affect the decisions of their governments. The irony is that, at the same time, the ability of national governments to affect the course of events—especially economic ones—in their own societies is eroding. As a result of globalization, the democratic power of the people is eroding because of the erosion of the sovereignty and authority of democratically elected governments.

Second, in order to retain that authority domestically, democratic governments will increasingly have to cede authority to international organizations, since no government acting alone can effectively protect its people from problems that are global in scope. In order to retain authority and sovereignty at home, they will have to give some of it up beyond their borders.

The third paradox is that democratic politics—small *d*—may be the greatest barrier to saving that democratic sovereignty.

The first paradox, that as democracy is increasing the ability of democratic governments to work for the welfare of their people is decreasing, leads to this observation: from a democratic as well as realist perspective, sovereignty matters. The nation state matters. Nations coming together and opposing aggression are the primary basis of international law, and, at least for the foreseeable future—or until, for example, the elected European Parliament has more power than the unelected European bureaucrats—the nation state is the primary focus of democracy. International organizations are not.

Thus, the erosion of national sovereignty means the erosion of the sovereignty of *people* in a greatly expanded democratic sum around the world.

It is not a theoretical point that globalization is undercutting the authority of governments. Let me list a few traditional functions of governments that are being lost:

- Governments used to be able largely to control the values of their currencies. They have lost that power now to the markets.
- Diplomats used to be the chief interlocutors among nations. Arguably, they no longer are.
- I can remember when high-resolution satellite photography was not only a monopoly of certain governments, but was a secret. You will soon be able to purchase almost the same kinds of high-resolution photographs on the open market.
- A growing proportion of international trade takes place within the same corporations, not among nations. Governments not only cannot regulate it, they sometimes do not even know what it is.
- Another striking example: groups can now use technology not just to communicate among themselves, but to affect decisions of governments or of societies in ways that were previously unimaginable—running a land mine campaign out of a farmhouse in Vermont, on the one hand; or, on the other, laundering drug money through cyberspace in an instant, far outpacing the ability of governments to track the transactions of international criminal cartels.
- In addition, if you look at modern geography in economic terms, regions are in many ways as important as nations, whether it is the east coast of China, or Wales, or the Silicon Valley.

So, national governments are losing power. They are losing power to international forces, and this is not good for democracies. But I am especially concerned about the effect of globalization on new democracies in Africa, in Asia, and elsewhere.

Over the last ten years we have seen two great revolutions. One is the economic revolution of globalization, based on

technology and therefore irreversible. It has created a global marketplace that imposes its discipline on national economies and governments. It is not that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) made it so. It is that the global marketplace requires this kind of discipline.

The second great revolution is the democratic revolution. The prospects for those democracies depend in large part on the answer to a question posed succinctly by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., when he wrote: "In the world at large, can capitalism, once loosed from national moorings, be held to social accountability?"¹—and, I would add, be held to democratic accountability, for the fact is that through globalization, the political power of those who hold capital is now greatly advanced within democracies compared to that of those who do not hold capital and who cannot play in the global marketplace.

Let us examine this problem through two lenses—first, the lens of the leaders of newly elected democratic governments—in Africa, in Asia, and elsewhere—and then through that of the people they are serving.

If you have just been elected the ruler of a new democracy in the first election ever held in that nation, you are then required to do two things. First, you have to prepare for the nation's second election, and it is the second election that decides whether a democracy is taking hold or not. Presumably, you want to run in it and win. The second thing you must do is to carry out the economic reforms that will allow your country to succeed in the global marketplace.

The problem is that in the short run the economic reforms are going to hurt a lot of people, especially the poor, costing you a lot of votes. So your choice may appear to be to back off from the economic reforms, which is not good for the econ-

¹ "Has Democracy a Future?" *Foreign Affairs* 76 (September/October 1997), p. 12.

omy of your country in the long run; or, to cheat in the election or cancel the election and decide that democracy is not such a hot idea after all.

Thus, the clash of two revolutions can pose a threat to democracy from the top down. It also poses a threat from the bottom up. In Haiti, in Russia, in South Africa, and elsewhere, people want to see the tangible economic and social results of democracy, the benefits that they were promised by the winning candidates in the first election. They want to see democratic bread on the table. When that doesn't quickly happen, they may blame the IMF, they may blame the United States, they may blame capitalism to some degree. But they will also blame democracy.

This is why one of the crucial challenges before us is to make economic reform politically sustainable. The international community—and James Wolfensohn at the World Bank is starting to do this—must do much more to marry economic reform with employment-generating programs, with education programs, with housing programs, thereby cushioning the impact, especially on the poor, of economic reform. This is the right thing to do, because the poor are otherwise going to get hurt. It must also be done for the sake of democracy, and thus our own interests as well.

This brings us to paradox number two: to preserve sovereign authority within, governments are going to have to cede some sovereign authority outward. As governments lose domestic sovereign control to the communications revolution in the ways I have described and more, they also lose sovereign authority with their own publics, the authority that comes from the approval of the people, for if governments do not deliver the goods, the people are not going to believe, not just in those governments, but in that system.

The only way to deliver the goods will increasingly involve all governments' ceding some domestic authority to international regimes and institutions. If they do not, globalization will force them in the end to give up all the more. This is not a theoretical point. We can see it on the economic side, in the necessity now of cooperating more with the programs of the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund. Even Henry Kissinger, who has seldom been accused of being a raving Wilsonian, called recently for "an early warning system with sanctions to oblige both lenders and borrowers to prevent crises and make setbacks more manageable."² That is very strong stuff.

It must happen, I would argue, just as rapidly in the security sphere as well. Think for a moment about some of the security threats we are now facing that flow largely from globalization, because of more porous borders, more instant communications, and so forth.

First, consider the problem of the very dangerous nexus of terrorism, international crime, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. What is happening here is twofold: the character of terrorism is changing, and the ability of terrorists to lay their hands on a variety of weapons of mass destruction is increasing. I believe that it is only a question of time before something truly terrible happens. I fear that we cannot prevent it; but five years from now we should be able to look back and say, "We did everything we could to prevent it." We are not.

Terrorism is changing. Today we are at a twenty-five-year low in the number of terrorist incidents. But this is not as good as it sounds, because those terrorist incidents that are taking place are different. It was once the case that terrorists were primarily members of organized groups that had very clear

² "The Asian Collapse: One Fix Does Not Fit All Economies," *Washington Post*, February 9, 1998, p. A19.

political agendas. They were often sponsored by states. Today, terrorists seem more to be angry, disaffected haters. Their acts of terror are almost existential, produced by that hatred.

The danger and the difficulty here is that, first, it is harder to track such individuals if they are not members of organized groups. Second, if you are a member of an organized group with a clear political goal, then to some degree you are self-deterred: you are not going to take actions that would damage the standing of your group with the public. But if you simply hate, then you blow things up, you kill people, you don't take responsibility for it, you are hard to catch, and you are all the more dangerous.

Add this to the fact—this is not a theoretical proposition—that there have been more and more incidents over the past few years here in the United States in which, unlike at the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City, terrorism did not succeed, but in which potential terrorists sought weapons of mass destruction. For example, people associated with the Aryan Nation ordered bubonic plague bacteria over the Internet, and people associated with militia movements tried to bring Ricin into the country and plotted to put chemical agents on doorknobs of federal buildings.

There is a debate among the experts as to which would most likely first be used in a terrorist attack—nuclear weapons, bacteriological agents, or chemical agents. Nukes have the biggest bang, obviously, but they are the most difficult and the most expensive. Chemical weapons are the cheapest and easiest, but they are less destructive. Bacteriological warfare, most people agree, is the most likely because it is relatively cheap, if you can figure out how to spread it around, and it has a huge impact.

There is a second area that is even cheaper and easier, and

that is information warfare and the potential for “cyberterrorism.” This is not something only for computer geeks to think about; it is very large and growing. Foreign governments or terrorists or criminals could shut down a significant sector of our infrastructure. The U.S. information system is more integrated than that of other societies and is therefore especially vulnerable to cyberterrorism.

One of the great issues before us is how to get American companies to cooperate more with the government for the common good in trying to figure out where cybercrime attacks are coming from and to deal with them. Companies are naturally loath to do so because they don’t trust the government to keep their proprietary information private.

No nation, by itself, can deal with such threats. This means that, just as on the economic side, governments are going to have to act together to find new legal and political regimes that can address them. This means ceding sovereignty—for example, in amending domestic legal codes in order to conform to effective international regimes.

It sounds pretty simple. We have to cooperate more internationally if we are going to retain our ability to act nationally, for the sake of our democracy. The problem is the third paradox, and that is that democratic politics may be the greatest barrier to democracies’ being able to make this tradeoff.

Globalization brings change, very rapid change, and any time there is change you have winners and losers—and, in fact, a lot of people who are actually winners think they are losers. When that happens, the losers will blame their plight not only on their own governments, but on vague international forces as well. This creates a backlash in the necessary national debate about, in effect, the ceding of some authority to the international institutions that can deal with these problems.

We are seeing the same debate, and the same backlash, in different forms and on different issues throughout Europe, Southeast Asia, Korea, and, most certainly, in Washington.

This raises a fundamental question of responsibility. It seems to me that to the degree that raising issues—for example, about the environment and labor standards in trade debates—is really about those issues, it is perfectly appropriate. But to the degree that those issues are being raised as a kind of a code for simple nationalist—it is not isolationist, it is nationalist—reaction against the necessity of ceding sovereignty outwards for the sake of preserving sovereignty within, then it is irresponsible and terribly damaging to our ability over time to create a widening zone around the world, not only of what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye have called “complex interdependence,” but of a positive *democratic* interdependence that serves our ideals and our interests as well.

This vision, I believe, of an increasingly democratic world—including the peaceful, undivided, and democratic Europe of which President Clinton has so warmly spoken—can and should be pursued in practical, careful, realistic, but determined ways.

We are not at the end of history. As we promote this vision of the world, we can make history. To do otherwise would be to miss the challenge and the opportunity of our generation.

About the Speaker

Anthony Lake served as National Security Adviser to President Bill Clinton from 1993 to 1996. He served as Senior Foreign Policy Adviser to the Clinton/Gore campaign in 1992. In advising the President and in coordinating implementation of some of the toughest decisions the United States has made since the end of the cold war—on such issues as Bosnia, North Korea, Haiti, NATO enlargement, and China—Lake has been known for his advocacy of extending the reach of democracy and open markets around the world.

Lake graduated from Harvard in 1961 and in 1962 joined the State Department, where he served until 1970 as a Foreign Service Officer. During that time his assignments included U.S. Vice Consul in Saigon and Hue (1963-65) and aide to Henry Kissinger (1969-70). After work with the Muskie presidential campaign, the Carnegie Endowment, and International Voluntary Services, Lake returned to the State Department in 1977 to serve as Director of Policy Planning for President Jimmy Carter, a position he held until 1981. He was a Trustee of the Carnegie Council from 1986 through 1991. At the time he was Five College Professor of International Relations, based at Mount Holyoke College.

Throughout his career, Lake has written and spoken about the necessity of harnessing U.S. power to the pursuit of both American interests and American ideals. He is the author of *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy*, and was a contributing editor to *Legacy of Vietnam: The War, American Society, and the Future of U.S. Foreign Policy*.

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