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FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINES
William H. Overholt and Marylin Chou
Hudson Institute

Throughout most of American history, U.S. foreign policy
has been guided by various succinct "doctrines": the "No
Entangling Alliance" doctrine of Washington's Farewell Address,
the Monroe Doctrine, the Open Door Policy, and the Truman
Doctrine. Likewise, the basic foreign policy principles of
foreign states can usually be summarized in a few concise
slogans analogous to American doctrines. From "Carthago
delenda est" in Cato's Rome to "Self-Reliance" in contemporary
China, the foreign policy doctrine has proved a useful form of
expression.

The simplicity with which policy doctrines are typically
stated leads some observers to dismiss them as banal, as minor
forms of public relations, but close examination reveals evi-
dence that policymakers regard them as important. Presidents
repeatedly appeal to doctrines to justify current difficult
decisions; for instance, in 1962 and 1965 Presidents Kennedy
and Johnson appealed to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, to justify
decisions on Cuba and the Dominican Republic. National security
bureaucracies spend substantial money and time interpreting doc-
trines and drawing detailed policy conclusions. Recent presi-
dents and their supporters have consistently, but unsuccessfully,
attempted to elevate their policies to the status of "doctrines":
Examples are the so-called Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson
Doctrines, all of which were only rhetorical variations on the
Truman Doctrine, and the Nixon Doctrine, which significantly
altered the Truman Doctrine but lacked the stature to replace
it. The omnipresence of foreign policy doctrines and their
analogues suggests they possess some fundamental importance.

Doctrines are typically unilateral declarations of policy,
designed to elicit domestic public support, to serve as axiomatic
policy guidelines for domestic decisionmakers and bureaucrats,
and to announce basic policy to foreign governments. These pur-
poses, and especially the first two, explain the principal
characteristics of doctrines discussed below.

Simplicity, Conciseness, and Lucidity. Statements in-
tended to serve as axiomatic guides to policy must by definition
be simple, concise, and lucid statements of purpose or strategy.
Simplicity at this level facilitates complexity and nuance in
the elaboration of subordinate policies--as one can easily per-
ceive by trying to imagine an arithmetic based on complex,
convoluted axioms. The audiences toward which policy doctrines
are targeted reinforce these requirements for simplicity,

conciseness, and lucidity. It has long been a rule of thumb for experienced administrators that huge bureaucracies cannot balance more than a few policy imperatives. Likewise, students of political movments have emphasized the necessity of goals which are understandable, visible, and simple (e.g. Weber, 1947: 427; Lipset, 1968: 64,83). Simple slogans like "Restore the Emperor" and "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" can mobilize mass public support in Tokugawa Japan or revolutionary France, whereas complicated analyses would be ignored; to mobilize mass support for foreign policy, equally clear invocations (to avoid entangling alliances, to defend free people, to remain self-reliant, to export in order to live) are required

Abstractness and Flexibility. Doctrines rarely dictate the details of subordinate policies and decisions; instead, they provide flexible abstract contexts for subordinate policies. Thus the Truman Doctrine of providing support for free peoples threatened by communism provided no detailed guidance for designers of NATO or the Marshall Plan or for U.S. presidents confronted by Soviet challenges in Berlin. But the doctrine does provide an overall rationale and cohesion for decisions.

All enduring doctrines are subject to serious reinterpretation and variation of emphasis as domestic and foreign exigencies change. Thus, for instance, the Monroe Doctrine began as a doctrine of nonintervention, then with the Roosevelt Corollary in 1904 became a rationale for U.S. intervention. In 1928 the Corollary was repudiated, and subsequently the emphases of the Doctrine have continued to vary greatly. Such flexibility and abstractness are necessary characteristics of doctrines; first, because doctrines serve as axiomatic statements in a complex world; second, because a doctrine is expected to guide policy over long periods of time and therefore through diverse historical exigencies; and third, because doctrines appeal for support from a broad and amorphous public with many conflicting interests and attitudes. In other words, doctrines are abstract and flexible because they must be simple and yet cope with complexity, change, and diversity of opinion.

The abstractness and flexibility of doctrines draw the unwary observer toward two fallacies. First is the view that doctrines are banal public relations devices of little significance. But as noted above they are banal only in the sense that all axioms, all ultimate principles, are banal. They are self-evident only <u>after</u> they have been tested and annealed by history.[1] Since they succeed or fail, and since they can become disastrously obsolete (cf. Overholt, 1974)--as the "No Entangling Alliances" doctrine did in the late 1930s--they are not trivialities. Second is the view that doctrines have continuity only in name, that because of drastic reinterpretations there was not one Monroe Doctrine, but many, not one Open Door Policy, but many. But in every case, despite flexibility and abstraction, the major American doctrines have retained a core of hard meaning; despite varying interpretations, the Monroe Doctrine has continuously prohibited firm European assertions of hegemony over South American states.

Balance among Conflicting Principles. Doctrines are above all declarations of purpose, and only under rather special circumstances do a nation's foreign policy objectives become so simplified that they can be summarized in a single coherent sentence such as "Carthago delenda est" or "No entangling

alliances" or commitment "to support free peoples who are
resisting subjugation." In these situations a single over-
whelming fear (of Carthage, of foreign intervention, of Soviet
expansion) has come to dominate policy. In "normal" situations
where policy is not dominated by a single overwhelming fear,
doctrines state two or three principles which may appear con-
tradictory. The Open Door Policy, which dominated U.S. rela-
tions with Asia for two generations, demanded equal access to
the China market, supported China's territorial integrity, and
acknowledged that the U.S. would do little to support these
principles.[2] The latter point did not contradict the others;
it merely qualified them. Likewise the promise of the Nixon
Doctrine to honor U.S. commitments did not contradict its later
insistence on relying on local manpower; it merely qualified
the commitment in some cases (e.g. Thailand) and reflected con-
fidence that local manpower would prove adequate in others (e.g.
Taiwan). The men who cried "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" were
not contradicting themselves; they were stating their values.
That tradeoffs exist is understood. To mention them in a doc-
trine would be to transform the doctrine from invocation to
analysis.

In addition to these basic characteristics, which derive
from the axiomatic character of doctrines and from the needs of
doctrines' audiences, doctrines exhibit a distinctive life
cycle (Overholt, 1974). Initially some crisis, often a rela-
tively minor one, forces policymakers to cut through the inertia
and incrementalism of everyday decisions and enunciate a funda-
mental principle. The Open Door Policy responded to a series of
mini-crises in U.S. relations with China, Britain and Japan;
the Truman Doctrine to limited crises in Greece and Turkey; the
Monroe Doctrine to erroneous fears of French-Spanish intrigue;
the "No Entangling Alliance" Doctrine to feared involvement in
the European turmoil over the French revolution; the Nixon
Doctrine to Vietnam.

But if an aspiring doctrine merely responds well to a
single crisis, history forgets it. Successful doctrines are
those tied directly to the great historical relationships of an
entire era: to U.S. ascendance and European decline in Latin
America (the Monroe Doctrine); to the peculiar and awesome power
of the U.S. when her allies were still lost in the ashes after
World War II (the Truman Doctrine); or to the trembling weak-
ness of a young America in a world of European giants ("No
Entangling Alliances"). Sometimes doctrines must even wait for
history to catch up with them; the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 came
to center stage only in the British-Venezuelan dispute of 1895.
Thus doctrines transcend their origins, and a response to Greek
and Turkish problems becomes a worldwide policy for a generation.

Once formulated and found consistent with historical rela-
tionships, doctrines become institutionalized. Bureaucracies
become restructured to implement the doctrines; for instance,
the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry was
designed to stimulate exports and retard imports, in response
to the doctrine of "We have to export in order to live," and
persisted in these purposes even when they had become counter-
productive. Individual reputations become tied to the policies.
Major social groups and even the intellectual community reach
near-consensus on policy axioms and penalize continued skepti-
cism with sanctions ranging from urbane disagreement to
McCarthyite attacks. Policy analysis becomes focused on

incremental rather than synoptic issues, on means rather than ends. Legal and other commitments are made, so that altering the doctrine causes crises of credibility. The great abstractness and flexibility of doctrines inhibits perception that historical changes have rendered the doctrine obsolete. As a result, the world of the doctrine and the real world of history diverge until a new crisis (World War II, Vietnam, Japan's 1972 currency crisis) forces a reexamination of basic purpose and strategy. Then the cycle begins anew.

Doctrines or their analogues are requirements for integrated policy and public support. But vices accompany their virtues. For impoverished minds simplicity brings rigidity rather than flexibility. For political opponents balance appears self-contradiction. For perceptive individuals who foresee the obsolescence of a doctrine, and for nations that employ obsolete doctrines, the doctrines' institutional inertia brings tragedy. To borrow Thomas Kuhn's terms from another field, a foreign policy paradigm is necessary, but eventually conceptual revolution becomes necessary.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Note that, despite their acknowledged brilliance in foreign affairs, Secretary Kissinger and President Nixon failed in their Nixon Doctrine to deal with ends as well as means, failed to provide a balanced view of their policies, and failed utterly to provide inspiration and clarity. Their brilliance was adequate to discern an historical turning point and the need for a new doctrine, inadequate to discern the nature of the turning point and to enunciate inspiring and enduring purposes for the new era.

[2]Historians have generally dwelt upon the first two parts of this policy, but the third was stated with equal clarity, and understood and acted upon by policymakers.

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