1 Incentives for Analysis

FIRST EFFORTS

The purpose of this book is to provide perspectives on, context for and analysis of United States foreign policy in the contemporary international system. This study follows and is conceived as a companion to an earlier volume, *U.S. Foreign Policy and European Security*, which was designed to be a straightforward treatment of Atlantic area relations since the conclusion of the Second World War. The earlier volume was essentially though not exclusively descriptive in nature, undertaken to address the false but widespread assertion that Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and related crises in the Atlantic region in the 1980s were somehow either unprecedented or more threatening to Alliance cohesion than those in earlier decades. Entirely too much alarm was being generated by Alliance conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s; in fact the disputes which did occur were hardly unprecedented and in some ways seemed, at least from my perspective, less consequential and threatening to unity than some of the events of the 1950s and 1960s. The present study builds on that earlier one and is conceived primarily as an extended analytic essay, placing current and relatively recent political and economic developments in wider historical context, providing some of the reasons for policy choices, especially on the part of the US government, and endeavouring to describe ways in which the international system is changing in tandem with as well as because of the end of the Cold War.

I believe the first volume achieved the primary purpose of placing the conflicts animating Nato in the 1980s in suitable perspective. The tensions over deployment of cruise and second-generation Pershing nuclear missiles in Europe, the Soviet gas pipeline commercial arrangement with West European nations, and other matters that generated intense controversy in that decade were hardly mild misunderstandings. Yet in relation to such developments as the Suez Crisis of 1956, the intense competition of the early 1960s – involving image, ego and personality as much as policy – between Presidents John F. Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle, the extended Berlin crisis of 1958–61, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and others, these difficulties were hardly unprecedented in nature or sentiment.

The earlier work, like all books, had shortcomings; these became increasingly apparent and troubling to me with the passage of time following publication. First, despite some very preliminary discussion of Japan,
especially in the initial pages, there was an absence of systematic integration of that nation, already an economic superpower, in the body of the analysis. This was so despite reiteration in the text of the increasingly significant political and social as well as diplomatic roles of economic factors in international relations. A backward-looking examination of Atlantic area Alliance matters was by definition not only geographically restricted but focused on years when Japan was still only beginning to emerge from post-Second World War devastation to a major international role, and even then the role was more purely economic than was the case for any other main industrial power. This explanation, however, does not change the fact that the end product was too circumscribed. A major goal of the present volume is to relate traditional Atlantic-area concerns to evolving relations in the Pacific region, with comparative analysis of how the balance between Atlantic and Pacific interests defines and should be addressed by American foreign policy.

Second, the concluding discussion in the earlier volume regarding the evolving course of the international system quickly became dated. Here the main problem was timing. The volume appeared in 1987, at the start of genuinely ‘interesting times’ in international relations. The rise and decline of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, the end of the established communist regime and collapse of the structure of government, the growth of uncertain democracies in the former Eastern bloc, and the unification of Germany were extraordinarily significant, indeed profound developments. The map of Europe literally was transformed as Germany came together and the Soviet Union fell apart. The relentless ongoing economic growth in Asia – not just Japan – and the political as well as economic implications thereof, the impacts of the emergence of relatively conservative governments in the USA and in West Europe generally are other developments inadequately addressed in the earlier book. Conservative domestic political regimes in the Atlantic area have been important not only for pursuing a generally hard line in foreign policy during the Cold War years, at least directly vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but also for heavily favouring the private sector, through both active promotion of ‘privatization’ at home and emphasis on free trade internationally.

If the main theme of the initial study remained valid, and the Alliance relations of the USA had been at least as severely strained in the years before as during the 1980s, the extraordinary pace and character of recent international developments provided an incentive to retest the proposition while catching up with events. Because the Cold War so powerfully influenced and shaped international relations and American foreign policy, the sudden end of that fundamental conflict has provided an opportunity to