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THE ROLE OF INTERDEPENDENCE IN  
UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE THIRD WORLD

DONALD F. McHENRY \*

Earlier this year, during one of those periodic flaps that public officials learn to endure, a nationally known columnist referred to me as a "low-keyed Andy Young." Another columnist called me a "third worlder." Neither columnist intended his characterization as a compliment.

I, however, take such descriptions as a badge of honor. Under the leadership of President Carter, and with the assistance of Andy Young, the United States has markedly improved its ability to communicate and work with the nations of the Third World. We have come to realize that, in foreign affairs as well as in domestic affairs, we must be sensitive to the needs, the problems and the aspirations of all.

The challenge of the 1980's is to build on the new, improved relationships we have forged over the past four

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years. We cannot do so in simplistic terms, for the issues that mark United States/Third World relations are not simplistic issues. They are among the most complex and troubling this country has ever had to face, dealing with the most fundamental human problems: poverty and hunger; the hazards of economic development; political instability, even in nations that seem stable; rising expectations; racial, religious and ethnic prejudice; national pride and the desire for self-sufficiency.

To improve our relations with the Third World, we must deal with these difficult and delicate issues in ways that lead to some improvement in the quality of life in the Third World without trampling on emerging nationalist sensitivities. I cannot minimize the difficulty of such a task. But difficulty must not be allowed to sway us from our goal of improving United States/Third World relations. We really have no choice but to improve them. The greatest danger to world peace in the coming decade arises from the amalgam of economic, social and political problems that make the developing countries a tinder-box and invite outside powers to fish in the troubled waters of Third World instability.

There is another important reason why we must continue to give high priority to United States/Third World relations. It will not be possible to deal effectively with many of our own domestic difficulties unless we give due consideration to their international aspects. This point is often overlooked by those who seek answers for the problems that the United States faces. Yet it is imperative that we not ignore it. For it is a fundamental truth of our time that political, social and economic interdependence underlies everything we do as a nation.

Interdependence is not a new phenomenon. The family, the community -- these are familiar social units that embody principles of interdependence. But in times past, international interdependence was circumscribed by the limits on contact between different groups of people. The United States,

for example, was once geographically isolated from the rest of the world. Transportation and communications were slow and difficult. We were blessed with an abundance of resources with which we could meet most of our needs. To be sure, we were not independent of either economic or intellectual ties with other countries, but we were a remarkably self-sufficient people.

Today, our contact with the other peoples of the world has increased markedly. The speed and ease of modern transportation and communications means we are no longer isolated from the world around us. Indeed, our own security and the security of much of the world are dependent on close relations with countries around the globe. We have learned to make productive use of resources we can obtain only from foreign lands. We have found the people of other nations to be a receptive market for American goods and services. As our society has grown more complex, it has become increasingly clear that our own continued progress and prosperity depends on an ever greater exchange of goods and ideas.

This phenomenon of world-wide interdependence means that many of our nation's problems transcend international boundaries. Vietnam proved how quickly and extensively a far-away conflict could affect every aspect of our lives. The Arab oil embargo of 1973 demonstrated that support for an ally could lead to hardship and sacrifice for the average American citizen. Today, we are relearning that lesson, not only as a result of the crises in Iran and Afghanistan, but also because there are international aspects to our domestic economic and social difficulties.

Harlan Cleveland, a former Assistant Secretary of State and Ambassador to NATO, aptly summarized the dilemma posed by interdependence:

Durable though the nation-state has proved to be, interdependence has caught up with most of the difficulties that used to be regarded in the United States as primarily "domestic" -- energy, pollution, human rights, racial troubles, poverty, education, research, science, technology, business, labor,

food, transportation, population, culture, communication, terrorism, revolution, law enforcement, arms, narcotics, religion, ideology.

No nation now controls even that central symbol of national independence, the value of its money. Inflation and recession are both transnational.

Cleveland dubbed interdependence "foreign policy's missing link." He might also have called it "domestic policy's missing link."

Interdependence is an economic reality. Perhaps the most dramatic change that has taken place over the last twenty-five years is the shift from American economic self-sufficiency to the intertwining of our prosperity with that of the rest of the world. In recent years, interdependence with the developing world has grown dramatically. An increasing proportion of our trade is with developing countries. We ship 35 percent of our exports to the Third World, more than we send to Western Europe and Japan. We import from the developing world 100 percent of our tin and natural rubber, 90 percent of our bauxite, 79 percent of our cobalt. We were an energy-independent nation in 1950; today we live in an oil-and-gas guzzling country that must import 43 percent of its petroleum. As a result of this interdependence, the rate of economic growth in the industrialized nations is closely linked with the rate of growth in other countries, both developed and developing.

Until recently, most Americans did not realize how inextricably our economy had become intertwined with that of the rest of the world. However, our dependence on imported oil for everything from gasoline to plastics provided us with one painful object lesson in interdependence. Gradually, Americans are becoming aware that the availability and the price of products at home depend on such diverse factors as the weather, the political situation, or the economic climate abroad. Frigid weather in Brazil caused the price of coffee in the United States to soar. The availability of cobalt, which we use to treat many forms of cancer, was adversely

affected by events in Shaba, Zaire. A shortage of rain in the Soviet Union affected America's supply of grain and, hence, the price of grain and meat and poultry products here at home. Soviet military aggression in neighboring Afghanistan led to formulation of a foreign policy that had domestic impacts ranging from a grain embargo, to an Olympic boycott that frustrated our fine young athletes, to draft registration for our sons.

Interdependence is also a social reality. Many problems that affect the quality of life transcend national boundaries. The solution to these problems must be international in scope and implementation. Domestic policies cannot ignore the transnational nature of these challenges. In fact, domestic policies must be revised to take global interests and strategies into account.

For the past fifteen years, this country has waged an all-out war on drug abuse, which is a primary cause of crime in our cities. But an integral part of this war has to be fought in southeast Asia, the Middle East, Mexico, Pakistan, Turkey and Burma. Our ability to fight it depends in large measure on our relations with countries where opium poppies and other drug-producing plants provide flourishing cash crops for impoverished farmers.

Let me give you a particularly dramatic example. Political instability and social upheaval in the so-called "Golden Crescent" of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan have resulted in a dramatic increase in the growth of poppy crops and the flow of heroin into the cities of Western Europe and the United States. But the turmoil and unrest in those countries have seriously hampered the ability of governments in the Golden Crescent to monitor poppy growth and illicit smuggling of drugs. Poppy growers in the Golden Crescent more than doubled their output last year. The results of this uncontrollable drug production is an alarming increase in heroin addiction in the United States and Western Europe. In Western Europe, heroin overdose rates are up sixty-fold from a decade ago. In New York City

alone, heroin-related arrests rose 11 percent between 1978 and 1979, while drug related deaths increased from 248 to 439. Heroin overdose rates are also up substantially in Boston and Detroit, and in Washington D.C. they nearly doubled in just one year. These statistics are all the more tragic because the number of heroin addicts in the United States at the beginning of 1979 was the lowest in 25 years.

The statistics tell a sorry tale. We will not solve our narcotics problem without international cooperation, and cooperation may not be readily forthcoming where the problem is currently most acute.

Most of us think of the problem of unemployment as a domestic social and economic issue. But it is intimately related to questions of interdependence. Many American industries are urging Congress to save American jobs by restricting the import of certain products that can be made more cheaply or efficiently abroad -- shoes, for example, or cars. If it is easy to import less expensive goods, certain industries may have to cut back or even close down altogether. This could leave Americans out of work. In order to find new jobs in other industries, some of them will have to retool -- a task that is not always easy.

On the other hand, if we put up high trade barriers to keep out these cheaper goods and save American jobs, the results are equally problematic. We contribute to inflation by forcing the American consumer to buy more expensive domestically-produced goods. And, since one in twenty Americans has a job that depends on our ability to sell goods abroad, other Americans in different industries may find themselves out of work. For unless foreign nations can sell their products to us at a profit, they will not have the foreign exchange they need to serve as markets for American products.

Because the United States depends on other nations to maintain our own economic stability and social progress, we must be prepared to accommodate the interests of other nations, both in our bilateral dealings and in multilateral fora.

Interdependence will require flexibility in our foreign policy goals, and in our national life style as well. We must expand our definition of America's "national interests" to include goals that may require us to make sacrifices for the benefit of others in the short run, but that will ultimately yield benefits for all.

This presents Americans with a monumental challenge. But, because the effects of international interdependence touch each and every one of us, we cannot shrink from that challenge. The time has passed when the American people could limit themselves to expressing opinions on so-called "domestic" issues and leave foreign policy to the experts. Every American citizen must participate in order to make this country's foreign policy initiatives work. Every American citizen must participate if the United States is to retain its position of leadership in an interdependent world.

What will this mean for each of us?

We must come to an appreciation of the constraints that interdependence will place on our life style and on our behavior vis-a-vis the rest of the world. We must acknowledge that America cannot deal with its domestic problems from a purely domestic perspective. We must adopt a broader perspective, one that encompasses the interests and goals of nations other than our own. We must maintain and improve our relations with the countries of the Third World.

The people of the Third World have legitimate aspirations for a better life. We must be sympathetic to those aspirations. And we must demonstrate our sympathy by learning the fundamental lesson of the eighties -- that Americans cannot expect to maintain our current level of resource consumption, particularly energy consumption, without incurring international resentment and sacrificing much of the global flexibility we will need to deal with future world crises. Perhaps the greatest challenge that we face as a people is to bear the burden of interdependence without lessening our faith in the fundamental greatness of our country. That may be difficult

in a land where previous generations believed in the invulnerability and invincibility of the United States.

We must understand that interdependence is not weakness, and that the need to accommodate the interests of other nations as we seek solutions to our problems does not imply a loss of American power or prestige or leadership, or decrease the importance of historical relationships. Rather, it calls upon the United States to exercise a new form of leadership through cooperation.

Interdependence has provided the United States with many benefits. America's post-war economy could not have attained its tremendous strength without either the resources or the markets provided by other countries. Our cultural life has been enriched by the contributions of other nations. Interdependence even harbors some prospect of world-wide peace. For in an interdependent world, no nation can ignore the need to accommodate the interests of others. Pragmatism and necessity may thus propel nations to the cooperation, and ultimately the peace, that has eluded our world for so long.

There is no question that solving the problems of an interdependent world will present us with some novel and unexpected challenges. Solutions will not come easily. An international commission studying issues of interdependence set forth the criteria that we will need in order to solve the problems of our interdependent world: ideas to inspire us; hopes to encourage us; first steps to implement our plans; a belief in man, human-dignity and basic human rights; a belief in the values of justice, freedom, peace and mutual respect; a belief in love and generosity; a belief in reason rather than force. These criteria are nothing less than a catalogue of the aspirations of the human race from time immemorial. But there is reason to believe that the world will no longer excuse our inability to attain these ideals.