

Hamilton Fish Armstrong, the "American Establishment," and Cosmopolitan Nationalism

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The early months of John F. Kennedy's presidency were glory days for "the best and the brightest" in America.¹ A large contingent of men from the most distinguished families and the most respected universities entered positions of policy-making power in Washington, D.C. They included McGeorge Bundy, W. Averell Harriman, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Self-made men who had climbed, by education and tenacity, into positions of national distinction were also present in large number around the president: Robert S. McNamara, Dean Rusk, and Walt W. Rostow, among others. This was the "New Frontier"—a renewed energy for national leadership among those who seemed most qualified to lead.²

Many writers have chronicled how the progressive assumptions of the intellectual and social elite were shattered during the 1960s, especially in the context of the Vietnam War.³ Certain conclusions

¹ See David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972). The author would like to thank Ben Primer and Daniel J. Linke of the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, for all of their valuable assistance. He would also like to thank Gretchen Oberfranc for her superb editorial suggestions and Sean Gillen for his research assistance.

² On the "New Frontier" see: Walt W. Rostow Oral History, 1964, page 149, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 61–64, 103–21; Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 237–41; Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 15–25.

³ See Kai Bird, *The Color of Truth: McGeorge Bundy and William Bundy, Brothers in Arms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time of War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995); Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*; Suri, *Power and Protest*.

about the nature of American leaders grow out of this work. Insularity, ignorance, and cultural prejudices narrowed American views of the wider world, according to some authors.⁴ Obsessions with anticommunism blinded policy makers to international diversity, according to others.⁵ Most damning in the view of some recent writers, inculcated assumptions about honor and toughness produced pathologies of violence.⁶

Each of these conclusions carries some truth. The American intellectual and social elite after World War II was prejudiced (frequently racist), anticommunist, and, sometimes, obsessed with power. Nonetheless, these failures are only one part of a larger and more complex history. The best and brightest who surrounded Kennedy also drew on a long tradition of international engagement and public service. They were cosmopolitan nationalists—men who sought to promote the security and prosperity of the American nation through wider interactions with foreign societies. For all of their faults, these cosmopolitan nationalists prepared American society for what we now recognize as a more “global” vision. Despite their many mistakes in Vietnam, they made it possible for contemporary Americans to see themselves as integral parts of a broad and diverse international community.

THE AMERICAN ESTABLISHMENT

Historians have neglected the evidence of cosmopolitan nationalism because of simplistic assumptions about the existence of an “American Establishment.” Writing soon after Kennedy entered the White House, journalist Richard Rovere was most responsible for spreading this phrase. He argued that a small group of Northeastern professional men in finance, business, law, and academics

⁴ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁶ Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of a New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993); Frank Costigliola, “‘Unceasing Pressure for Penetration’: Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan’s Formation of the Cold War,” *Journal of American History* 83 (March 1997): 1309–39.

exerted powerful behind-the-scenes influence on policy. These men, according to Rovere, had strong interpersonal connections that transcended political party. Through organizations like the Council on Foreign Relations, they carried influence beyond their region to parts of the entire nation: “[I]t can, I think, be said that the Establishment maintains effective control over the Executive and Judicial branches of government; that it dominates most of American education and intellectual life; that it has very nearly unchallenged power in deciding what is and what is not respectable opinion in this country.”⁷

Rovere was careful to differentiate his conception of the American Establishment from C. Wright Mills’s famous depiction of an economically self-interested and militaristic “power elite.” Scholars have, however, conflated the two into a general assumption that a relatively uniform “Establishment” existed and that its members shared the insular and provincial assumptions described by Rovere and Mills. Both authors and most of their followers juxtaposed this American Establishment against a more diverse wider world.⁸

With regard to foreign policy, the Council on Foreign Relations and its widely read journal, *Foreign Affairs*, stand at the center of presumptions about the American Establishment. Financed privately, meeting secretly, and communicating directly with those in positions of power, the Council appeared to be the perfect site for the men in the know to coordinate their plans over afternoon sherry. An organization founded at the end of World War I by men who belonged to the same social and economic circles, the Council was where the privileged made policy.

Again, there is some truth to these claims, especially with regard to the influence of the Council on American diplomacy. During World War II, for example, the Council produced a series of government-sponsored studies on the postwar world that contrib-

⁷ Richard H. Rovere, *The American Establishment and Other Reports, Opinions, and Speculations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), 3–21, quotation on 9. Rovere initially published parts of this essay in *The American Scholar* 30 (Autumn 1961): 489–95.

⁸ Rovere, *American Establishment*, 9–10; C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). See also Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 282–336; Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 73–106; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91–116; Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9–42.

uted to U.S. policy in Europe and Asia.⁹ George Kennan's "X" article—probably the most widely read essay on American foreign policy in the early cold war—was published, not coincidentally, in *Foreign Affairs*. The Council was not an aristocratic cabal, but during the cold war it came closer to being an Establishment organization than any other in America.

From the time of the Council's creation in 1921 through the end of the 1960s, Hamilton Fish Armstrong (1893–1973) oversaw many of the organization's important activities. He served as managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* from 1922 to 1928, and then as editor-in-chief from 1928 to 1972. He was also a director of the Council for this entire period. No one else played such a consistent role as a leader within the organization, and the American foreign policy community in general, for such a long time. Armstrong was one of the long-standing pillars of the American Establishment.¹⁰

To his great and lasting credit, Armstrong kept a typed journal describing many of his activities during his years at the Council. Along with Armstrong's copious correspondence and other materials related to the Council on Foreign Relations, this journal is held among the Public Policy Papers in the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University. It provides an unparalleled resource for understanding the nature of the American Establishment and its evolution from the frustrating end of World War I to the exuberance of Kennedy's presidency and the disillusion of the Vietnam War. The Armstrong journal presents clear evidence that the insularity criticized by Rovere and others went hand-in-hand with a remarkable cosmopolitan nationalism. Armstrong and his colleagues had a broader view of foreign relations, and politics itself, than historians generally give them credit for. The Council on Foreign Relations and the American Establishment led the United

⁹ Robert D. Schulzinger, *The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs: The History of the Council on Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 81–112; Peter Grose, "War and Peace," in *Continuing the Inquiry: The Council on Foreign Relations, from 1921 to 1996* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), available at: <http://www.cfr.org/about/grosse00a.php> (16 September 2002).

¹⁰ Armstrong was personally uncomfortable with the phrase "American Establishment" and its connotations of behind-the-scenes power. See journal entry, en route from Barbados to New York, 7 January 1965, Hamilton Fish Armstrong Papers, box 104, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library (hereafter cited as HFAP).

States into Vietnam, but they also contributed to the humanistic forces that motivated international opposition to the Vietnam War.

LIBERALISM, HUMANISM, AND DIPLOMATIC CULTURE

During the nineteenth century European diplomats shared a common culture that emphasized aristocracy of birth, cooperation (“concert”) among the largest states, and military restraint.¹¹ World War I destroyed this “old diplomacy.”¹² Diplomatic historians have argued that a world of national antagonisms and economic expansion occupied center stage in the twentieth century,¹³ while cultural historians have emphasized the extension of racial and ethnic prejudices in imperialist advances across the globe.¹⁴ Liberalism has received scant attention in this context. Yet, the end of the “old diplomacy” was also the beginning of a liberal moment in international culture.¹⁵

President Woodrow Wilson articulated the liberal vision of the twentieth century, and Hamilton Fish Armstrong embodied it. Wilson, more than any of his contemporaries, understood the interdependent nature of modern economies and societies. His call to “make the world safe for democracy” was not an idealistic clarion, but instead a realistic judgment that inherited aristocracies could no longer rule in an age of mass communication, global industrialization, and total war. Wilson envisioned a network of cooperation and consultation among educated leaders, chosen by their peoples,

¹¹ See Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹² See Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939); Arno Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

¹³ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987); Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*; N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Lloyd C. Gardner, *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Akira Iriye is one of the few historians to analyze this phenomenon. See two of his books: *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

to solve collective problems. This was the goal of his “league of nations.” It would ensure stability among states and an evolving “new freedom” for citizens across the globe. American liberalism—defined by Wilson to include democratic compromise, individual rights, and free markets—would serve as a model for the rest of the world.¹⁶

In 1912, during his freshman year at Princeton University, Armstrong first met Wilson, then New Jersey’s governor and the Democratic nominee for president. The young college student quickly discarded his inherited New York Republican Party affiliations to work for Wilson’s campaign. Armstrong’s attraction to Wilson’s New Freedom stayed with him after he graduated from Princeton. Following America’s entry into World War I, Armstrong served as a military attaché in Serbia, helping to implement Wilson’s vision of democracy, economic development, and political stability in what became the postwar state of Yugoslavia.¹⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s Armstrong used his position as editor of *Foreign Affairs* to keep a Wilsonian vision alive in the face of rising European antagonisms and American disengagement from foreign politics. Beyond consistent advocacy of Wilsonian positions, Armstrong nurtured a wide network of thinkers and policy makers throughout the United States and Europe who worked, often despite their governments, to encourage cooperation. Many historians have written of the businessmen, financiers, and philanthropists who expanded their foreign economic operations during this period.¹⁸ Armstrong’s activities point to a Wilsonian set of international political-philosophical connections that also came of age beneath the veneer of interwar “isolationism.”

¹⁶ Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, *Peace and Counterpeace: From Wilson to Hitler* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 9–95.

¹⁸ See Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America’s Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918–1928* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).



Hamilton Fish Armstrong in uniform, ca. 1918. Armstrong Papers, box 145, folder 2, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

These connections were as much about culture as about politics. During frequent trips to Europe, Armstrong enjoyed long conversations with prominent figures like Eduard Beneš of Czechoslovakia, King Alexander of what would become Yugoslavia, Raymond Poincaré and Léon Blum of France, and Anthony Eden of Great Britain. Their discussions focused not only on contemporary events, but also on the sustenance of a set of values these men strongly embraced: freedom of speech, economic openness, and, perhaps most important, fair and deliberative adjudication of international differences. This liberal vision, inspired by Wilson, dominated the hopes and fears of Armstrong and his European interlocutors. A March 1934 meeting between Armstrong and Beneš, for example, highlights the importance of these values. Armstrong recorded the following comments from the Czechoslovak leader:

[A dictator] cannot deal with an enlightened and progressive and efficient democracy already engrossed in the work of remedying the economic defects of the world situation without sacrificing the liberties of free thought, and free speech prized by every human who has known them. That sort of democracy does indeed offer a third alternative to a world which seems destined otherwise to conclude that there are only two alternatives, the fascist dictatorship and the bolshevik dictatorship.¹⁹

Fascist and communist threats were not merely military in nature. They were philosophical assaults on the kind of learned, integrated, and congenial world that Armstrong sought to nurture among thinkers from various societies: "The problem is how to let the masses come gradually into their own, without being deceived into using their power to set themselves back under the heel of new exploiters. This is the task of what is left of the élite of the Western World."²⁰

This vision was surely antipopulist, but it was also deeply humanistic. Armstrong and his foreign contacts sought to protect what they perceived as reason and justice against illiberal attacks from leaders and citizens in search of quick solutions to economic and social problems. In a revealing handwritten comment from late

¹⁹ Memorandum of a conversation, Prague, 20 March 1934, HFAF, box 99.

²⁰ Journal entry, September 1938, HFAF, box 99.



*With the best wishes
to Mr. H. Fish Armstrong*

Prague, 17. 7. 1937

Eduard Beneš

Eduard Beneš. Photograph inscribed: "With the best wishes to Mr. H. Fish Armstrong, Prague 17.7.37." Armstrong Papers, box 146, folder 3, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

The League of Nations has failed. Its only achievement, in the face of the fait accompli, is to provide a respectable coffin for the corpse. ~~They~~^{It} did this in Vilna and ~~are~~^{is} now doing it in Manchuria.

Statesmen, financiers and economists are all behind in the procession. The people as a whole, in most countries, without indulging in any reasoning processes, move ahead. Their leaders have lost the art of directing them, because problems are so vast and complicated that they cannot understand them and therefore cannot decide what solutions to favor.

to A countryⁱⁿ which a handful of people are interested in politics is a monarchy; where a number of people are interested in politics is a democracy; where all the people are interested in politics it is a revolution.

Hamilton Fish Armstrong, "Memorandum of H.F.A.'s talk with Paul Scheffer, New York," 5 November 1932. Armstrong Papers, box 99, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

1932, Armstrong condemned countries where only “a handful of people are interested in politics.” This was “monarchy.” He also criticized countries where “all the people are interested in politics.” This was, Armstrong lamented, “revolution.” He embraced circumstances where “a number of people are interested in politics.” Enlightened, humanistic leadership without demagoguery was, for Armstrong, the real source of “democracy.”²¹

Armstrong’s contacts with European leaders reflected this shared humanistic commitment. He was, in fact, contemptuous of men who sought overseas connections for economic purposes. The resources and markets that drove foreign expansion, according to some historians, encouraged a kind of crass materialism that Armstrong found corrupting.²² When Italy attacked Abyssinia in 1935, for instance, he advocated strong sanctions that would sacrifice American economic interests for the purpose of making a moral statement against aggression.²³ Decency, order, and honor trumped profits for the diplomats in Armstrong’s European-American milieu.

International affairs were not, according to this view, anarchic or immoral. To the contrary, Armstrong interacted with men who believed that peoples and nations constituted a single international society, bound by common rules and obligations. International organizations, like national governments, were a natural step in protecting “civilization.” Despite the U.S. Senate’s rejection of Wilson’s League of Nations, Armstrong amassed a multinational cohort of thinkers who lobbied for some mechanism to reconcile national sovereignty with the needs of international society. Their proposals included tough sanctioning against aggressive regimes and collective military action—both of which became key elements of post-World War II United Nations activities. Armstrong helped transform former skeptics of internationalism, like Henry Stimson and Arthur Vandenberg, into cosmopolitan nationalists like himself.

²¹ Handwritten comment on journal entry, 5 November 1932, HFAP, box 99.

²² On the economic motivations behind foreign expansion, see William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963); Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America’s Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967).

²³ Armstrong to Walter Lippmann, 19 September 1935, included in Armstrong’s journals, HFAP, box 99.

Armstrong and his closest confidants—including Allen Dulles, Felix Frankfurter, and Walter Lippmann²⁴ in the United States—recognized the Nazi threat to world peace as early as 1933. Meeting with Adolf Hitler three months after his accession to power, Armstrong observed:

I should say he is an honest man, as fanatics are often honest, but untrained and mystical and obscurantist. He is probably past the age when he can learn the things about what the world is like which most people who come to high office have learnt in school and college, in travel and literature. Today, moreover, he has come to such a degree of power, is so much the idol of Germany, is so occupied with the day-by-day developments of the struggle to get all the state machine within the Nazi grasp, that he probably will not have time or feel the need to learn. Brashness and self-confidence take the place of experience.

Armstrong referred to Hitler and his followers as a “steam engine” that produced “mass force” and promised to create many “explosions” in Europe and elsewhere.²⁵ The Nazis did not have a clear foreign policy in 1933, Armstrong noted. They did, however, “know what they want.” In response to a question from a radio interviewer, he elaborated: “They want armaments. They want to absorb Austria. They want the Polish Corridor and Silesia back from Poland. They want Danzig back, and perhaps Alsace-Lorraine back. They want to make sure that when the Saar votes the year after next it will vote for reunion with Germany.”²⁶

Armstrong disagreed with European and American statesmen who argued that foreign powers could guarantee cooperation and stability

²⁴ Armstrong and Lippmann were close friends and collaborators until 1937, when Armstrong's first wife left him for Lippmann. See Daniel J. Linke, “Hamilton Fish Armstrong: The Diplomatic Editor and Anti-Nazism in the 1930s,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 61, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 153n, 157.

²⁵ Journal entry, Berlin, 27 April 1933, HFAF, box 99.

²⁶ Interview with Drake deKay, 23 August 1933, included in Armstrong journals, HFAF, box 99.

with Hitler's regime through traditional policies of appeasement. In 1933 Nazi Germany was still a weak state, with high unemployment and limited military means. Armstrong, however, recognized that Hitler's violent rejection of humanistic values at home presaged aggression abroad. The Führer had "swallowed up" centuries of accumulated learning, entrepreneurship, and creativity in Germany, replacing them with a "roaring cataract of Nazi fury."²⁷ Xenophobia, violence, and conquest were so central to Nazi behavior that Armstrong could not imagine the regime peacefully integrating itself into international society.²⁸

Extreme Nazi anti-Semitism was the clearest indication of Hitler's mortal threat. Although scholars of *Realpolitik* have a tendency to downplay the importance of domestic behavior for the prediction of foreign policy, Armstrong and those he corresponded with—including President Franklin Roosevelt—understood the influential role of ideas in the international system.²⁹ Speaking to the Colony Club in New York City on the first anniversary of the Nazi rise to power, Armstrong explained:

Hitler's real strength . . . lay in the weariness and misery of the German people; in their traditional liking for words of command uttered in a loud and harsh voice; in the restorative effect of appealing to their pride by saying that they had lost the war only because of a "stab in the back;" and, finally, in offering the Jews and republicans and liberals of all sorts as a sacrifice on this altar of personal and national racial pride.³⁰

Armstrong emphasized that the Nazi attacks on Jewish citizens were not just assaults on a religious and ethnic group. They marked the beginning of a war on the humanistic values—the "accepted standards"—that made freedom, cooperation, and peace possible among peoples. All of civilization—including those interests represented by the blue-blooded audience at the Colony Club—was under siege:

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Journal entry, Berlin, 20 April 1933, HFAP, box 99.

²⁹ Armstrong to President Franklin Roosevelt, 15 February 1934, and memorandum of Roosevelt's conversation with Norman Davis, 20 February 1934, Armstrong journals, HFAP, box 99.

³⁰ Speech to the Colony Club, New York City, 30 January 1934, included in Armstrong journals, HFAP, box 99.

I think it reasonable to assume that in a club such as the Colony Club, made up of Americans with a long tradition of American life and customs, the fathers, husbands and sons of a large percentage of the members, if they were living today in Germany, and if they truthfully said what they thought, and really practised what they believed, would find themselves in retirement, in concentration camps, or driven into exile. With them would be the presidents of most of our great universities, our leading writers, our philosophers and poets, our outstanding scientists, our most notable clergymen, and many of our great surgeons and doctors.³¹

The Nazi threat was alarming not because of its military and strategic foundations, but primarily because its "primitivism" imperiled the liberal Wilsonian vision that Armstrong and others endeavored to implement.³²

Armstrong called for international moral and financial pressure on the Nazis and other fascist regimes. He envisioned a muscular democratic peace, enforced by the concerted actions of governments responsive to humanistic values and true popular interests:

[T]he governments which are organized on a democratic basis, which permit free discussion and a free press, are all peaceably inclined. . . . [F]or the time being the nations which want peace still have the upper hand both physically and financially.

I imagine the financial problem is going to become more and more serious both for Italy and Germany. If public opinion in the democratic nations takes a firm stand against loans or credits to help the Italian and German Governments meet the blank checks which they have been drawing for military purposes, we may see the capacity of those governments to undertake aggression considerably reduced.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. For a similar analysis, see Linke, "Hamilton Fish Armstrong," 152-57.

³³ Journal entry, ca. March-April 1936, HFAP, box 99.

This was the Wilsonian model of collective action for principled purposes.

An organized Nazi pogrom against Jewish citizens during 9–10 November 1938—*Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass)—spurred Armstrong to organize more specific initiatives. With the assistance of Frankfurter and Robert Messersmith in the State Department, he convinced President Roosevelt to issue an official American protest against German barbarism. When Washington recalled its ambassador from Berlin on 14 November 1938, Armstrong worked with the White House and the State Department to make certain that this action received prominent attention in American newspapers.³⁴

Reactions to Nazi aggression—especially among the British and French representatives at the infamous Munich summit of September 1938—remained feckless. President Roosevelt was also inclined to avoid direct conflict with Germany. Hesitation and cowardice in the face of what had now become both a military and a moral threat to the international order led Armstrong to write that 1938 “was the year of catastrophe.”³⁵ He publicly doubted “whether it is possible for us to protect the American method of working, trading, doing business, and living fairly free lives, without putting the weight of our country more heavily into the world balance than we yet have been willing to do.”³⁶ Throughout the next seven years, as fascist aggression tragically confirmed Armstrong’s earlier predictions, he firmly supported Allied military activities for their strategic and moral purposes. Armstrong believed that World War II was an opportunity to complete Wilson’s liberal agenda. In this context, the Grand Alliance against fascism became the basis for a more promising United Nations.

The overwhelming evidence that Armstrong saw opposition to fascism as a moral cause has important implications. Although the American Establishment was notoriously closed to Jews—with the notable exception of Frankfurter—Nazi anti-Semitism became a central concern as early as 1933. Armstrong did little to help open U.S. borders to Jewish refugees, but he argued strongly for American condemnation of Nazi brutality. German attacks on Jews assaulted

³⁴ Journal entries, 13–14 November 1938, HFAP, box 99. See also Linke, “Hamilton Fish Armstrong,” 163–67.

³⁵ Journal entry, 7 October 1938, HFAP, box 99.

³⁶ Notes (dated 25 October) for a speech in Detroit, 1 November 1938, included in Armstrong journals, HFAP, box 99.



*For Ham Armstrong, whom John Quincy Adams
would have selected as one of the most effective educators
of the American people on their foreign affairs, from his
devoted friend
November 21, 1949.
Felix Frankfurter*

Felix Frankfurter. Photograph inscribed: "For Ham Armstrong, whom John Quincy Adams would have selected as one of the most effective educators of the American people on their foreign affairs, from his devoted friend, November 21, 1949." Armstrong Papers, box 146, folder 3, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

the humanistic values of freedom, openness, and tolerance that many American and European thinkers placed at the center of their desired liberal international order. Hitler's virulent racism was a fundamental motivation for war against the Nazi regime because it threatened the underlying assumptions of the emerging international society. Although Armstrong and his colleagues did not themselves truly believe in ethnic and racial equality, they clearly rejected aggression propelled by racial and religious hatred.

THE UNITED NATIONS, ATOMIC WEAPONS, AND THE COLD WAR

The end of World War II in 1945 inspired both hope and fear among cosmopolitan nationalists. Armstrong played a very influential role in the San Francisco conference that concluded with the signing of the Charter of the United Nations on 26 June 1945. For him and many others, the new organization marked the fulfillment of Wilson's vision. The nations of the world would not dissolve into a single whole, but they would come together for collective deliberation and security. Under the terms of the United Nations charter, the largest states—serving as permanent members in the Security Council—could endorse military action to protect long-term peace. U.S. membership in the United Nations assured broader American engagement with the wider world. It also helped to spread the humanistic values that Armstrong and others advocated.³⁷

The technology of warfare, however, directly challenged the liberal assumptions at the core of the United Nations. The atomic weapons dropped by the United States over Japan on 6 and 9 August 1945 pointed to a world where the exponential growth of military power would undermine collective security. America had a monopoly on atomic weapons after World War II, but Armstrong recognized that the Soviet Union—already suspicious of Washington's motives—would soon develop its own arsenal. He worried about a general proliferation of unfettered atomic power:

Our possession of the formulae for the creation of the atomic bomb and of the plant to manufacture it seems to place us in a position of unrivalled power in the world.

³⁷ Journal entry, 16 March 1946, HFAF, box 100.

This is subject, however, to the obvious limitation that in some respects at any rate this preferred position is temporary. There seems to be general agreement that the scientists of other nations will arrive in a matter of two or three years—some think longer, some think less—at the complete knowledge of how to release the energies which make the atom bomb so fearful.³⁸

The atomic bomb and its associated technologies had a disorienting effect on Armstrong and the entire liberal culture of diplomacy that had come of age between the wars.³⁹ He struggled to understand the new technologies of warfare and integrate them with a vision of cross-cultural humanistic interaction:

[T]he release of atomic energy is only one of many developments, scientific and other, which have transformed the bases of national power. The flying bomb and the rocket bomb, jet propulsion for airplanes, radar for detection, changes in industrial capacity and in many of the key materials which industries use, are only a few of the factors which have made it necessary to assess afresh all the previously accepted methods and instruments of national defense. But the atomic bomb is of a different order of importance from anything else which has come out of the war. It is, properly speaking, revolutionary in nature.⁴⁰

The secrecy and fear surrounding atomic weapons, Armstrong immediately recognized, encouraged nationalist mobilization and

³⁸ Journal entry, 10 September 1945, HFAP, box 100.

³⁹ For all of his years of international travel, Armstrong had never flown in an airplane until 16 March 1945—less than five months before the first public display of atomic power. See journal entry, 16 March 1945, HFAP, box 100. For evidence that the atomic bomb stiffened international tensions and undermined efforts at cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union, see Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 37–54; Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945–1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 71–99.

⁴⁰ Journal entry, 20 September 1945, HFAP, box 100. For a similar analysis, written at about the same time, see Bernard Brodie, “War in the Atomic Age,” in Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), 21–69.

alliance formation, rather than cosmopolitan cooperation. He worried that the United Nations would prove unable to restrain a Soviet-American arms race:

The problem seems to be a much greater one than to decide what absolute power the possession of the atom bomb gives us at the present time. It seems, rather, to consist of whether we can turn the possession of it to imaginative uses so as to persuade other nations that there is no necessity for feeling American aggression necessary and therefore no necessity for creating and retaining military power to resist possible American acts of aggression. How to achieve this result is debatable.⁴¹

Control of atomic weapons became an irresolvable issue that Armstrong and his generation of liberal thinkers never fully mastered. Atomic technology empowered a new set of scientific authorities—James Conant, Vannevar Bush, David Lilienthal, Robert Oppenheimer, Edward Teller, and others—who did not share Armstrong's Wilsonian assumptions and cultural connections.⁴² Some of these scientists believed strongly in the United Nations, but none of them possessed the experience to craft an international consensus around proposals to manage the new technologies. In late 1945 Armstrong lamented:

Nobody in Washington has been giving proper attention to the effect which the development of the atomic bomb has had on our own power position, and on the problem of international organization. With the best of intentions in some cases, and a complete lack of imagination in others, they have not given the subject even enough time, measured quantitatively.⁴³

⁴¹ Journal entry, 10 September 1945, HFAP, box 100.

⁴² Gregg Herken, *Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).

⁴³ Memorandum of a discussion with Felix Frankfurter, 7 November 1945, HFAP, box 100. Many American officials, including Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, worked on atomic arms control proposals in 1946. These proposals, however, failed to allay Soviet fears of American atomic power. See Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 114–16.

Armstrong wanted to create a new international “brain trust” to plan for atomic cooperation, but the scope of the effort exceeded his capabilities. The diplomatic culture that Armstrong had nurtured around humanistic values was out of touch with the new science and its accompanying emphasis on national separation, not cosmopolitanism. Armstrong and other figures at the Council on Foreign Relations struggled unsuccessfully to reconcile their long-standing hopes with countervailing military trends. No one ever proposed a truly viable arms control plan at the United Nations.

Moreover, recent scholars have concluded that the Soviet Union was not prepared for serious cooperation. Stalin’s suspicions and insecurities made it unthinkable for him to trust international limits on his atomic capabilities.⁴⁴ By 1947 Armstrong recognized this reality, writing that “the Soviet stand on atomic energy ha[s] done more than anything else to make this country feel that the Soviet Union really does not want peace.”⁴⁵ Hopes for peace and cooperation through the United Nations quickly gave way to a Soviet-American cold war, symbolized by the growing atomic (and soon nuclear) arsenals that both sides targeted at one another in the next decades.

BEYOND COLD WAR DIVISIONS AND EUROCENTRISM

Despite the evidence of Soviet intransigence, Armstrong’s liberal inclinations left him deeply dissatisfied with cold war divisions that detracted from the power of the United Nations. He and his old friends in Europe and America criticized President Harry S. Truman in 1947 for having “overshot his mark” in calling for an aggressive policy of economic and military aid to countries threatened by communist insurgencies. Prominent liberal thinkers lamented that the Truman Doctrine militarized politics and justified violence against all communist sympathizers, even those who distanced themselves from the Soviet Union. Simple cold war dichotomies froze rigid Soviet-American antagonisms in place, elevating anticommunism

⁴⁴ See David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 364–71; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 36–77; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 85–112.

⁴⁵ Journal entry, 9 June 1947, HFAF, box 101.

and anticapitalism above the humanistic convictions that motivated Wilson's heirs. Contrary to assumptions about a cold war consensus within the Establishment,⁴⁶ Armstrong and other prominent figures sought more liberal and cosmopolitan alternatives.⁴⁷

After 1948 Josip Broz Tito, the communist leader of Yugoslavia, appeared to offer a counterweight to cold war rigidities. Critical of Soviet-sponsored aggression—especially in Czechoslovakia during February 1948—Tito broke with Stalin. Already deeply familiar with Yugoslavia, Armstrong immediately recognized that nationalism in this region could undermine Soviet hegemony and create new opportunities for cooperation with the United States. A new burst of cosmopolitan nationalism could, Armstrong hoped, inspire a liberal movement behind the Iron Curtain:

Nationalism, which has recently had a bad name among liberals, seems to be working in Eastern Europe not just for the preservation of national freedom but also the freedom of individuals. Nationalism (in distinction from chauvinism) is not in itself bad. It can be the basis for a peaceful system of international coöperation. Indeed, it has advantages in comparison with the supranational conception of a world state, which might well turn out to be oppressive, either Fascist or Communist. Whether the cooperation of national states is possible when some or all of them are Communist is an important point, one which our experience with the Tito Communist régime will do much to prove one way or the other.⁴⁸

During the next decade Armstrong frequently visited Yugoslavia and mobilized support among American policy makers for aid to Tito's government.⁴⁹ Armstrong clearly recognized Tito's dictato-

⁴⁶ Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*; Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–22, 463–82; Lefler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 495–518.

⁴⁷ Journal entries, Paris, 29 March 1947; Prague, 17 April 1947; New York, 16 October 1947, HIFAP, box 101.

⁴⁸ Journal entry, Belgrade, May 1949, HIFAP, box 101.

⁴⁹ Journal entry, 15 November 1949, HIFAP, box 101.



Josip Broz Tito and Hamilton Fish Armstrong, Belgrade, April 1953. Armstrong Papers, box 143, folder 2, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

rial and repressive tendencies.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, he saw this regime as an important antidote to cold war divisions that closed off the possibilities for broad international cooperation. He also hoped—perhaps naïvely—that a somewhat independent Yugoslavia would have a humanizing impact on the Soviet Union. Armstrong took the threat of Soviet aggression seriously, especially in Europe, but he never believed in a monolithic communist menace. Historians have exaggerated the extent to which simple categories dominated Establishment thinking. On his extensive travels within the Soviet bloc, Armstrong recognized resistance, innovation, and complexity beneath the rhetoric of the cold war.⁵¹

In his search for liberal alternatives to East-West division, Armstrong also expanded his geographical range far beyond Europe. Before the 1950s, and even during World War II, he traveled frequently,

⁵⁰ Journal entry, Belgrade, 7 April 1950, HFAP, box 101.

⁵¹ Journal entries, Warsaw, April 1949; Belgrade, May 1950, HFAP, box 101. On this general point, see also John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 147–94.

but almost exclusively to this continent. The emergence of newly independent states in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa drew Armstrong's attention.

Armstrong carried the condescending views typical of his time about the "lifeless, conforming, populous desert" found in much of the third world.⁵² Confirming Edward Said's description of the "Orientalist" assumptions common in the Establishment, Armstrong contrasted the emotionalism of the East with the rationalism of the West, the languor of the East with the efficiency of the West.⁵³ He showed a serious interest in non-European peoples, but he surely did not view them as his equals.

That said, he sincerely endeavored to build not just allies but also humanistic societies in the third world. Armstrong sought to connect non-European areas with a liberal international order that, he believed, would assure stability, prosperity, and social justice for all. This impulse was a logical extension of Wilsonian thought. The United Nations, Armstrong hoped, would become a truly worldwide forum for cosmopolitan nationalists of all races and religions. For this reason he consistently opposed regional alliances, preferring broader international cooperation.⁵⁴

In his travels after 1950—including visits to India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam—Armstrong met with foreign leaders in an attempt to construct the kinds of cultural connections that had knit together American and European liberal elites in earlier decades. Despite racial and ethnic differences, Armstrong clearly felt a commonality—born of leadership status—with third world counterparts. During meetings with men like Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, he showed respect and attentiveness, evident also in his journal accounts of these interviews.⁵⁵ Armstrong shared a class identification with prominent foreign figures, even those in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. For the liberal internationalist Establishment, class often meant more than race.⁵⁶

⁵² Journal entry, Amman, 3 April 1954, HFAP, box 102.

⁵³ Journal entry, Tehran, 5 April 1954, HFAP, box 102. See Said, *Orientalism*.

⁵⁴ Journal entry, 2 August 1956, box 102; Armstrong briefing to Planning Staff, U.S. National Security Council, 23 June 1959, included in Armstrong's journals, HFAP, box 103.

⁵⁵ Journal entries, Cairo, 1 April 1953, HFAP, box 102; Phnom Penh, 27 February 1959, box 103.

⁵⁶ For a similar argument, applied to the British Empire, see David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).



Hamilton Fish Armstrong and Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Phnom Penh, 5 April 1968.
Armstrong Papers, box 143, folder 1, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare
Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

As early as 1956, Armstrong focused his efforts in the third world on developmental aid rather than strategic assistance or regional alliances. He argued that the United States should work harder to make capital and technical know-how available to local civil leaders—not military figures—who could build the infrastructures for social improvement. Cooperation among American and foreign elites, rather than immediate democracy, appeared the best route to long-term stability and freedom:

We are accustomed to think that democracy has innate advantages that must make it prevail more or less automatically provided only we don't let ourselves be overwhelmed physically by the brute force of totalitarians. In the foreign field this is becoming plainly untrue. [In] the backward countries where our contest with Soviet Russia and its satellites and allies is acute there is not a sufficient degree of education to understand what we mean by democracy.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Journal entry, Delhi, 7 April 1956, HFAF, box 102.

Richer connections between American and third world leaders would, Armstrong believed, allow the United States to escape the “straight-jacket” of cold war antagonisms.⁵⁸

This emphasis on economic development and liberal internationalism brought Armstrong to South Vietnam in 1959. Like many of his colleagues, he determined that this American ally had the potential to emerge as the “most progressive state in the area.”⁵⁹ Led by Ngo Dinh Diem, an American-educated Catholic who appeared to be devoted to humanistic values, South Vietnam became an alluring Asian showcase for the promises of the cosmopolitan nationalism long advocated by the Establishment.⁶⁰

Armstrong mistook Diem’s liberal rhetoric for actual practice.⁶¹ He viewed the South Vietnamese figure as a practitioner of “responsible Mandarinism” in a society that needed strong leadership en route to democratic self-government.⁶² Armstrong also followed the advice of prominent regional figures, particularly Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, who demanded greater American efforts to turn back communist advances in Southeast Asia.⁶³

In fact, the authoritarianism, corruption, and incompetence of Diem and his successors made the South Vietnamese regime a profound discredit to American ideals. Armstrong and his colleagues at the Council on Foreign Relations did not directly orchestrate Washington’s failed policies in Vietnam, but they generally supported American efforts. At the very least, they lent legitimacy to U.S. military endeavors in the region during this period. The slow and reluctant manner in which the Establishment came to recognize American mistakes in Vietnam contributed to what Armstrong bemoaned as a “generation gap” between traditional foreign policy experts and youthful critics in the late 1960s.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Journal entry, New York, 15 October 1958, HFAP, box 102.

⁵⁹ Journal entry, Saigon, 5 March 1959, HFAP, box 103.

⁶⁰ See Suri, *Power and Protest*, 131–51.

⁶¹ Journal entry, Saigon, 6 March 1959, HFAP, box 103.

⁶² Journal entry, Saigon, 19 February 1959, HFAP, box 103.

⁶³ Journal entries, Singapore, 17 April 1965 and 29 March 1968, HFAP, box 104. For similar pressures from Thailand, see journal entry, Bangkok, 18 March 1966, HFAP, box 104.

⁶⁴ Journal entries, 13 March 1968 and 6 March 1970, HFAP, box 104. For evidence of the reluctance with which members of the Establishment came to criticize American endeavors in Vietnam, see Armstrong’s discussion with *New York Times* reporter James “Scotty” Reston, included in journal entry, New York, 14 June 1969, HFAP, box 104. See also Suri, *Power and Protest*, 151–63; Schulzinger, *A Time for War*, 182–273; Gardner, *Pay Any Price*, 269–306; Young, *Vietnam Wars*, 124–231.

Armstrong's journals close with an account of a long and troubling meeting with President Richard Nixon's special assistant for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger. The two men recognized that the United States had gone astray in Vietnam, and they lamented the public damage done to the values of cosmopolitan nationalism long embodied by the American Establishment. Tragically, it appeared to Armstrong that the public anguish over Vietnam had reversed his life's work:

I visibly shocked him [Kissinger] by saying that not in my lifetime—since, at any rate, the days of [President Warren] Harding's "normalcy," when we retreated from responsibility and self-interest in our foreign relations and at home were in a slough of corruption and scandal—had the prestige of the United States stood so low. We have the military power and we have the economic power (today only temporarily in disrepair) to command the world. But we do not have the moral prestige, because abroad governments and people know what we know in our hearts ourselves, that our life forces, the forces that we felt made us great, are dispersed and sullied. Until we regain our own confidence in our integrity we will not inspire the love or fear that add up to world power and world prestige. Henry [Kissinger] looked sad but said that from the point of view which I expressed, the prestige of the United States was low.⁶⁵

CONCLUSIONS

If the Vietnam War displayed the shortsightedness of the American Establishment, it also hid some of the Establishment's more enduring accomplishments, as revealed in the career of Hamilton Fish Armstrong. His journals are a testament to his tireless work on behalf of a Wilsonian liberal vision and cosmopolitan nationalism in the twentieth century. Contemporary globalization is, at least in part, an outgrowth of Armstrong's efforts.

⁶⁵ Journal entry, Washington, D.C., 30 March 1972, HFAF, box 104.

Drawing on his social and political connections after World War I, Armstrong nurtured a rich series of European-American networks among prominent intellectual and political figures. These transatlantic interactions provided the foundation for a new diplomatic culture that emphasized liberal and humanistic values—especially free expression, economic openness, and military restraint. These values came to fruition during the interwar years, and they continued to exert important influence during the cold war. Armstrong and other members of the Establishment expressed skepticism about immediate democracy and unfettered social equality, seeking rather to create an international environment that would protect decency and civilization through enlightened leadership.⁶⁶

The violent anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime threatened this vision as early as 1933. Armstrong and his associates recognized the menace, consistently opposed appeasement of fascism, and supported a world war to eradicate illiberal regimes. During the war, Armstrong became an influential planner for a postwar environment in which Woodrow Wilson's dream—a "United Nations"—would ensure international cooperation and a cosmopolitan American commitment to the spread of humanistic values.

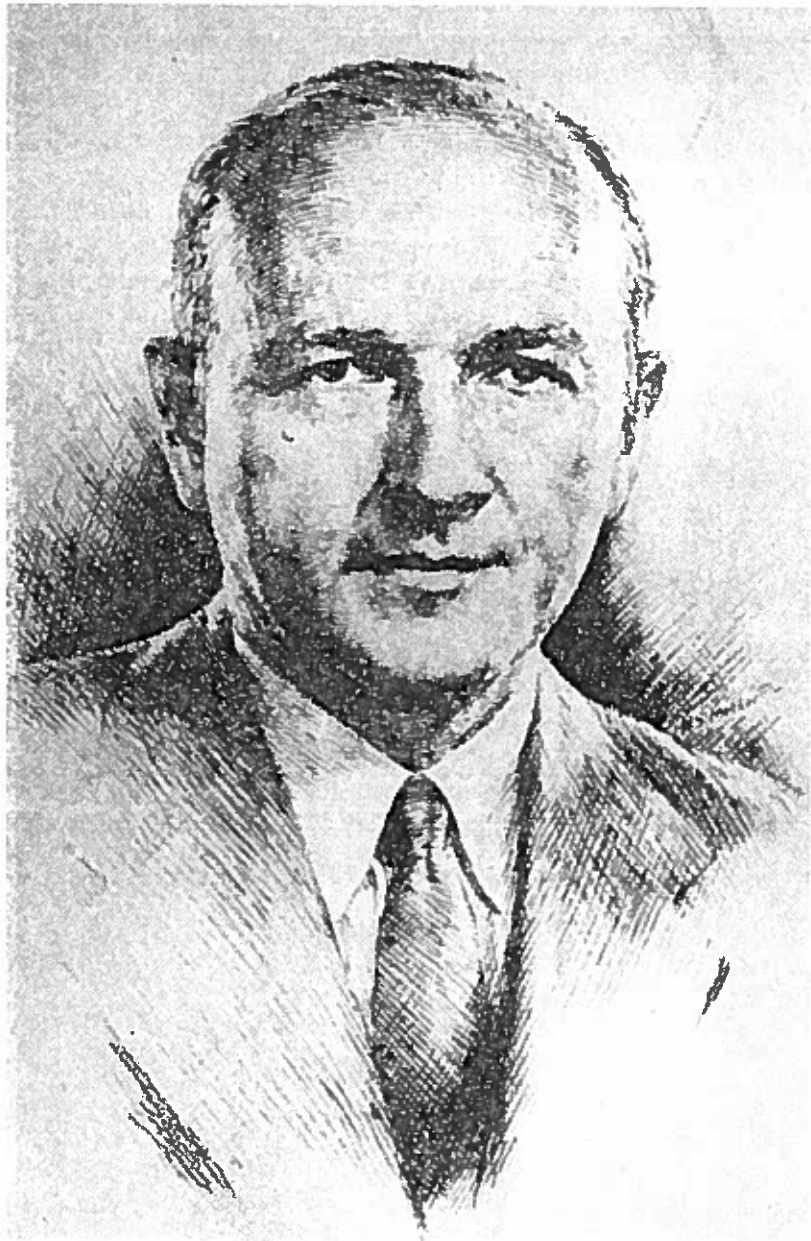
Atomic weapons and cold war antagonisms immediately undermined the power of the United Nations. The strongest postwar nations—particularly the United States and the Soviet Union—divided Europe and soon much of the globe into rival blocs. Attempting to bypass this cold war stalemate, Armstrong and other members of the Establishment sought to transcend U.S.-Soviet antagonisms by encouraging societies—especially those in the third world—to adopt a liberal and humanistic program for domestic improvement. Armstrong traveled frequently to Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, working to build strong collaborative connections with local elites. He believed that economic development in "peripheral" areas would inspire a new burst of liberal internationalism across the globe.

This same hope motivated "the best and the brightest" who surrounded President Kennedy in 1961. Their "New Frontier" would

⁶⁶ This is a perspective that continues to find wide appeal, especially within the remaining elements of the American Establishment. See the recent book by one of Armstrong's successors as managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*: Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton, 2003).

spread the virtues of economic liberty and humanistic society to areas with capable and willing leaders. South Vietnam stood out for its apparent readiness and its role as a showcase for Southeast Asia. Harkening back to the war against fascism and the reconstruction of postwar Germany and Japan, members of the Establishment combined force with idealism in distant lands.

The American debacle in Vietnam reflected the failure of tried-and-true principles in an unfamiliar place. It showed that the heirs of Woodrow Wilson, like Armstrong, needed to rethink some of their assumptions about domestic and international development. That reappraisal became, and remains, the central challenge for international leaders in the twenty-first century.



David E. Lilienthal, n.d. Frontispiece to the edition of *TVA—Democracy on the March* published in Zagreb, 1956. Lilienthal Papers, box 6, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.