

PREFACE

by Gale W. McGee

For two decades, from the Marshall Plan to the Alliance for Progress, the United States had an overall foreign policy consensus that made possible great and constructive initiatives. Since Vietnam, however, U.S. foreign policy has proceeded from Administration to Administration without a common compass, undermining its coherence and reliability.

The need to rebuild a foreign policy consensus is already widely recognized. The difficulty lies in doing it. There are numerous interests and viewpoints to reconcile, yet mere reconciliation in a compromise is not enough. A real consensus—a consensus that can undergird meaningful policies and survive the turmoil of politics—must be based on an inner fire, an inspiration common to the American people and to the various constituencies that are involved in their foreign policy processes.

The old consensus was based on such a fire. This is why it was able to undergird programs that required imagination and tenacity as well as money. A new consensus must do no less.

The old consensus was built around two of the more fundamental of American political ideas: Democracy and Federalism. It congealed during the early years of my career when foreign policy elites were ready to recognize that the American people had been right, in view of the ever-deepening interdependence of the world, in insisting on something more than power politics and on striving toward a world of unity and peace, but had also learned vital lessons from the failures of the League of Nations and the shortcomings of the U.N.: That power and sovereignty were real and fundamental problems—that peace could not be built merely by establishing a universal forum but required something more—that this could be done best among peoples who were free honestly to unite with one another and whose societies were in some degree compatible.

An early prophet of the consensus was the *New York Times* correspondent at the League, Clarence Streit. His book, *Union Now: A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Leading Democracies*, encapsulated the entire experience of his generation with the First World War and the League and concluded that the hopes of the League could be salvaged and renewed only through an orientation toward uniting democracies. Few can imagine today what an impact it had when it was published on the eve of World War II. It rose above the barren choices of "utopianism" and "realism" and provided a clear-headed orientation for working for peace with freedom.

During the war itself, the United States was distracted by the hope that it could organize a world of peace in collaboration with Stalin. When this failed, thinking moved finally into the framework of inter-democracy unification which Streit had prepared. The U.S. set out on the enormously fruitful path of the Marshall Plan—of building unity in Europe and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and of fostering democracy, development, and regional integration in the various continents and subcontinents of the Third World.

This policy orientation has never been discarded but has come to suffer from neglect.

It is the provocative thesis of this little book that democratic federalism not only could undergird a new consensus but that it should and inevitably will be the foundation of any renewed American consensus on foreign policy.

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