

# David Kay's Misconception of My Theoretical Concepts

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BECAUSE of my own concern with the subject I turned with interest to David A. Kay's article in the Summer 1969 issue of this journal on "United States National Security Policy and International Organizations: A Critical View of the Literature."<sup>1</sup> To my surprise I found my recent study of *The United Nations and United States Security Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1968) selected as "a major example" of one type of theoretical perspective in that literature, which in point of fact is not my approach at all. Anyone rash enough to commit views to a book is, of course, fair game for all honest criticism and the rules of the game require that such criticism be accepted with good grace. It is a little harder to be gracious about an unfavorable judgment on the usefulness of one's brain child; but that is, after all, a matter of opinion with which one can disagree. It is mildly frustrating to find one's efforts criticized for not being some other kind of book, but that (judging from many reviews in scholarly journals) is an occupational hazard that one learns to accept. To be interpreted as having written from a theoretical perspective that is the opposite of one's viewpoint is, however, a much more serious matter; and the rules of the game in this case would seem to permit the defense to be heard since the issue is not one of opinion but of fact.

Kay's concern was to assess the contribution of two different theoretical perspectives to the study of the role of national policy in the United Nations. He was thus not reviewing my study (as he notes on p. 758), which is a historical rather than a theoretical analysis of the relationship between the United

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Kay, "United States National Security Policy and International Organizations: A Critical View of the Literature," *International Organization*, Summer 1969 (Vol. 23, No. 3), pp. 755-765.

Nations and the United States, so much as evaluating its usefulness for the development of international organization theory. If he had merely consigned all such historical analyses to the wastebasket as far as theoretical development is concerned, I would be content simply to disagree with his view on the matter. I can share his wish to see more concern with the development of theories of international organization; and if I am less impatient than he is with the present situation in this respect, it is probably because I feel that there has been too much hasty jumping from an inadequate basis of experience to generalized conclusions that—annointed with the oil of academic lingo—then parade as organizational theories. Not infrequently they prove to be inaccurate since the organizations in question obstinately refuse to develop as the theories tell them to. (I think, for example, of some of the more optimistic forecasts of United Nations peacekeeping development.) My own chief concern was to analyze what had happened in terms of United States policies affecting, and affected by, the United Nations which seemed to me inadequately understood. (I think here of the still frequent assertion that the Security Council veto was based on an assumption that the permanent members would agree within the United Nations system.) My relatively modest objective, however, I hope has its value both for the initial step in inductive theory building and for the essential testing of hypotheses in deductive theorizing.

I can also agree with Kay that the inclusion of a systematic analysis of “the nature of the United States policymaking process” in relation to American participation in the United Nations would have been an important addition to my volume, especially if I could have done it as well as Annette B. and William T. R. Fox did their study of that process in connection with United States membership in NATO<sup>2</sup> which Kay rightly praises. I would think it enough, however, merely to contemplate the three-hundred-plus pages of the Fox type of analysis integrated with the four-hundred-plus pages of my analysis to understand one important reason why I made no such attempt to combine the two types of study in one.

Kay’s interpretation of my underlying theoretical perspective, however, amounts to an error of fact that I would like to correct. He finds that my study belongs to a body of literature in the field that

assumes or postulates that the international political system is developing in a particular direction and then proceeds to evaluate how well United States policy toward the organization conforms to the requirements of the postulated development of the system. [Kay, p. 756.]

This perspective, furthermore, “with its assurance that it knows the shape of international politics—past, present, and future,” he declares, has concentrated on the question: “How well has United States policy served the United Na-

<sup>2</sup> William T. R. Fox and Annette B. Fox, *NATO and the Range of American Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

tions?" (P. 756.) Other studies that he may include in this category are not listed, so I cannot say whether my own work could be grouped with them on some other basis; but as I am in no sense a historical determinist or a kind of Calvinistic historical predestinationist, my book should certainly not be categorized with other books in his group on that basis.

The only thing "inevitable" in history, as I see it, is the immediate consequence of each proximate cause, which leads only to the "inevitable" logic of cause and effect; and, though "history never reveals its alternatives," they were normally there, all along the way. On this same reasoning, neither can I subscribe to any inevitable development of the present system, however defined. In fact, I agree completely with Lawrence Finkelstein that the present is "indeterminate" and that "the period is one of transition, and while one can say 'from where,' no one can tell 'to where.'"<sup>3</sup> If I were asked to place a bet at this point in history, I would find it impossible to decide whether to put my money on a victory for man's lemming instinct for self-destruction or on his instinct for self-preservation through rational action. As I neither bet on the future nor indulge in crystal ball gazing, however, I contented myself in my book with pointing to the kind of policies that the United States should be following if it really means what it says are its policy objectives in connection with the United Nations, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the developing countries in general, and other important subjects. As of late 1967 when my manuscript was completed, I did not find much evidence to indicate that Washington was likely to adapt its actual policies to what I saw as the logical requirements of its policy objectives. (See Russell, pp. 429ff.) I see no significant change in this respect since then, but I do not feel confident to predict any certain line of American policy or of United Nations development in this period of revolutionary uncertainty.

My own approach could well be described, in fact, by the second theoretical perspective that David Kay finds in the literature of the field (for which he uses Lincoln Bloomfield's *The United Nations and United States Foreign Policy: A New Look at the National Interest*<sup>4</sup> as his example), namely: that

while the changing international political system can be characterized at any given point according to key variables, it is always in a process of transformation with a range of alternative outcomes. [Kay, p. 756.]

It is this concept that informs my own study even if I did not spell it out in these terms and even though I undertook a different task than Bloomfield set himself. It is therefore difficult to see how Kay can find that I "equate" the development of the international system with "the development of American-Soviet relations." (Kay, p. 757.) On the contrary, I have stressed the

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Finkelstein, "Preface," *International Organization*, Summer 1969 (Vol. 23, No. 3), p. v.

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *The United Nations and United States Foreign Policy: A New Look at the National Interest* (rev. ed; Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967).

American government's prolonged failure to broaden its security policy vision beyond the single threat of International Communism (as capitalized by John Foster Dulles) so as to take account of the complex of decolonization-third world factors that were significantly altering the international system in the postwar years.

In more general terms, I developed the framework for my analysis from the various American approaches to the problem of national security as related to the goal of international peace and to United States membership in the United Nations, which this country was so active in establishing. Those approaches ran the conceptual gamut from preventive war to world government, but the actual range of United States policy has been within narrower limits. It appeared to me to follow two main lines, which I labeled containment-confrontation and containment-coexistence. (See Russell, chapter 1.) In broadest terms, the contrast is between the first approach that sees an unchanging and unchangeable communist threat to the United States security and world peace and which therefore requires unceasing resistance on all levels and the second which seeks to maintain a deterring power of resistance to aggressive action (for practical purposes also conceived as coming from communist sources) while seeking to influence potential aggressors gradually out of their more violent intentions through policies of constraint and collaboration wherever possible. The first—exemplified strategically by some Air Force and Navy thinking and theoretically by the protracted-conflict school—clearly assigns international organizations a purely supportive role in the conduct of the Cold War and the maintenance of nuclear deterrence. It hardly requires a detailed study of United States policy in the United Nations to figure out how best to relate the organization to that policy objective. The hardest-line policy prescriptions of this approach have not, in any event, dominated actual American policy since the Second World War.

The second approach comes closer to the direction of United States policy in the postwar world; it also conceives of international peace in the broader terms embodied in the standards of the Charter rather than as requiring little more than the maintenance of a stable deterrence relationship between this country and the Soviet Union. To meet Washington's declared standards an acceptable international society would thus have to be based on the same kind of positive purposes and pluralistic principles formally accepted by members and institutionalized in the United Nations. Theoretically, other agencies (or merely direct diplomatic relations without permanent organizations) could as well be the means of attaining such a world since it is the policies of governments, not the machinery of their intergovernmental relations, which fundamentally determine the peaceful, or nonpeaceful, state of affairs. In practice, however, the existence of the United Nations and the history of its foundation made it the natural, if not inevitable, focus of American political efforts

to bring about a world in which coexistence would be peaceful in the Charter sense.

The changes that have shaken and reshaped the world during the past 25 years have been reflected in the fluctuating importance of this United Nations role in relation to United States objectives. The twofold policy of constraint and collaboration, moreover, presented inherently difficult dilemmas in application whenever efforts to build strength against the enemy ran counter to efforts to change his intentions peacefully. Containment-coexistence, accordingly, has not had a clear field in practice; and it is the whole complex, inconsistent flow of United States security policies in connection with the United Nations—sometimes related to changes in the international system, sometimes to domestic factors, sometimes to the relative influence of opposing policy advocates, and so forth—that seemed to me to require some detailed analysis. I admit to assuming that readers of the study (it is not a textbook) would not need a “fully developed” description of the “present state of the international system” (Kay, p. 759); by the nature of my analysis I dealt with the realities of that changing system throughout the study. The question is not how the United States “serves” the United Nations since the organization should be viewed as filling the role Dag Hammarskjöld once described in the following terms:

The United Nations, in its aims, is the response of the Member countries to historical necessity. The record of the United Nations is determined by the sum total of the policies of its Member countries in relation to each other and the aims of the Charter. Thus the United Nations is not an institution set apart from and above the governments, and to be judged as such. It offers a meeting place, and a moral impetus, and institutional framework for the cooperation of these Governments in programs of common benefit.<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, the purposes and principles of the Charter are also the objectives of its signers. Policy prescriptions aimed to achieve these national objectives thus automatically enhance the chances of achieving United Nations objectives. It was within this broad context that I saw “no other way to develop the kind of international system that remains the United States goal” despite all the vicissitudes of the past quarter century (Russell, p. 23).

I regret that my theoretical perceptions did not come through clearly to David Kay and take what consolation I can from the fact that not all my readers have been so misled by my evident inadequacies of expression. I hope this explanation will persuade some who may have been turned off by his interpretations at least to give me the chance to prove myself by looking at what I really wrote.

<sup>5</sup> UN Press Release SG/406, November 17, 1954.