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From a Scandinavian point of view, four chapters are of special interest in this book, dealing with the question of how to define women's interests and needs. A shift seems to have appeared during the last decades where organized feminists have left equal rights demands and turned to a recognition of women's special needs in society. The link between women citizens and the welfare state is especially analyzed in these chapters. Women's increased dependence on the welfare state as recipients of transfer payments and as professional employees partly explains the gender differentiation in support for the welfare state spending that began in the mid-1970s. The important point of this book is that it could contribute to solving the misunderstanding held by some social scientists concerning the connection between influence and group homogeneity in relation to the women's voting bloc. This book indicates that establishing a political group is a complex and fluid social process – not an outcome of survey research. Group differences that may satisfy social scientists, away from their existing data, are not meaningful as social or political distinctions as long as these differences are not validated within the political system.

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Christopher Coker: *Reflections on American Foreign Policy Since 1945*. London: Pinter Publishers in association with John Spiers, 1989, 176 pp.

In the spring of 1990 the post-war world is in fundamental change. One of the two superpowers that together have dominated international politics for so long appears to be falling apart. If the Soviet Union is thus in the process of becoming a fundamentally different country, this will profoundly affect also the other superpower, the United States. A process of change in American foreign policy seems already to have begun. The appearance of the volume reviewed here can assist the interested in understanding several aspects of the history of US foreign policy, and, in so doing, it can also help better predict what may happen to future American external policies. Dr Christopher Coker is a lecturer in international relations at the London School of Economics and he brings to his subject an impressive range of readings on widely differing aspects of his topic. He defines this as '... a set of reflections about some of the key developments of the post-war period, anchored to an interpretation ... that the past continues to inform the present' (p. ix). One fundamental theme is that in American foreign policy the past, defined as the historical lessons that suit the moment, has been important to an extent that is true in no other country. Coker's essential point here is that the ways in which the past has been used have been flawed. The author brings this basic focus to bear on four

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themes: the relationship with the Soviet Union, the legacy of the Vietnam War, the relationship with the Third World, and the question of whether the US is in decline.

There are, in the author's view, three 'historical sanction(s) of the United States' past' (p. 11): exceptionalism, redemptionism and exemplarism. The first means that the US political system is one which is not intended for export. It is a unique case which is structured in such a flawless way that it need not, in the same way as other nations, subject itself to scrutiny from outside judges, such as international organizations. To this reviewer, the concept identifies an important strand in what may perhaps be called the foreign policy ideology of the US. This way of thinking is, for example, an important explanation of periods of withdrawal into isolation, as opposed to a continuation to sully the country in relations with other, less pure nations. But when it comes to the claim that this example is not intended for export, it is more difficult to follow the argument. Coker claims that it is a recurrent thought in US foreign policy that the American example is not one for export, that the wisdom that the people on this 'blessed continent' has reached is something that other peoples, like the Americans, have to learn only through 'moral enlightenment'. On the contrary, it seems to me that there are several occasions in the history of American foreign policy where the policy has indeed been to bring the US example to other 'less fortunate' peoples and lands. The examples of the Philippines and China before 1949 come readily to mind.

Redemptionism is tied to exceptionalism. The former is defined as 'a historical mission to redeem mankind from tyranny' (p. 4). The 20th century crusade to save the globe from the expansionism emanating from the men in the Kremlin are but the most modern manifestation of this fundamental strand in American history and politics.

Exemplarism is defined as 'a secular form of redemptionism, a belief that by setting an example that other nations may eventually follow, the United States can save mankind from its follies' (p. 20). It is hard to argue against the author's view that all these three basic strands of US foreign policy are unfortunate when it comes to serving as a basis for action in the external environment. They are based on parochialism, in the case of the first, 'delusion about the extent of US power' (p. 21), in the second, and 'the illusion that non-intervention is itself a viable policy' (ibid.) in the third.

The chapters on Vietnam and the general relationship with the Third World likewise contain many interesting observations. The essential problem with the War, as a military conflict, was, says Coker in quoting General Westmoreland, that it was a 'disynchronic' conflict. In other words, it was not a question of a campaign against an insurgency, but instead a war that simultaneously took place against the National Liberation Front and against regular North Vietnamese forces. It was never conceivable that the US and the South Vietnamese could militarily win such a conflict without 'going to the source', that is, without directly attacking North Vietnam and stopping the flow of materials and men down the Ho Chi Minh trail. But this was precisely the military strategy that was politically impossible. Consequently, whatever other political and military strategies the American side used, they could never reach their goal of defeating the enemy.

The chapter on the relationship with the Third World focuses on the role of foreign investments in determining US policy toward individual countries, and the reasons why the US finds 'itself so vilified by the Third World' (p. 116). In looking at three cases of US intervention, Guatemala in 1954, Cuba in 1961 and Chile in 1973, Coker argues, convincingly, that it was political considerations, not economic,

that determined the policy chosen by the administration. This does not mean that economic forces are unimportant, but that the singular importance as a driving force for US foreign policy toward the Third World that they are given by many radical critics is clearly exaggerated. The problems that Washington has had in its relations with the Third World during the last three decades is, writes Coker, due to several factors. Chief among them are an inability to understand the need for revolutionary change in some countries and, linked to this, an obsession, at least up to now, with equating any more radical process of change with Soviet-backed Communism.

In an otherwise perhaps too short and simple treatment of the issue of whether and, if so, how, the US is in decline, Coker nevertheless manages to capture what, in this reviewer's eyes, is one important part of the transition the US is now going through in its foreign policy: 'In its rite of passage from a superpower to a great power the United States will have to transform its relations with its allies and its enemies alike' (p. 138).

The sections of the book that I found most reason to question were those dealing with relations with the Soviet Union, and particularly with the characterization of George Kennan in this context. Now, it is of course true that Kennan's analyses of many aspects of international politics, particularly when it comes to developments in the Third World, betray a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of their problems in the modern world. But, when it comes to the area of Kennan's expertise, developments within the Soviet Union, its external policies, and the proper strategies that the US ought to pursue towards Moscow, Coker's analysis seems deeply unfair and, at least from the perspective of early 1990, wide of the mark. Even if I refrain from making too big a point of the common mistake, also committed by Coker, of characterizing 'containment' as a 'policy', Coker is wrong about Kennan on two fundamental points. First, to state that 'all [Kennan's] writings since he left office have essentially been a justification of his break with the Truman administration . . . a series of *pièces justificatives* which have convinced few but his most ardent and unthinking admirers' (p. 24) is simply incorrect. Second, and even more important, though perhaps slightly unfair to Coker, isn't what we are experiencing now in 1989 and 1990 precisely what Kennan predicted in the 'X' article in 1947? 'But the United States has it in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years, and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.' Coker is right in identifying many peculiarities in the American approach to foreign policy, but a state which has been following the fundamental strategy described in this quote for four decades must have been doing something very right as well.

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