Vance, Whitehead, Holbrooke:

Profiles (In Crisis) of the American Globalist Establishment

A Study in American Foreign Policy from 1979 – 1995

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Abstract

1979 – 1995 was a remarkable period in the history of U.S. foreign policy. This period witnessed the breakdown of the Cold War dichotomy, the rise of global neoliberalism, and an all-around re-framing of the world political economy. By the end of the twentieth century many theorists were ready to proclaim, “the end of history” brought on by the full ascension of a new hegemonic American-led liberal world order. A growing body of historians, political economists, corporate leaders, and others now argue that the global capitalist order and neoliberal ideology that was set in place from the late 1970s through the 1990s was critical in spawning a world of vast income, health, and environmental inequality. This thesis examines a select group of individuals – Cyrus Vance, John Whitehead, and Richard Holbrooke – who helped to create the institutions and amplify the ideas and systems of global capitalism in this period. Each of these three individuals brought significantly different character attributes, skills, and perspectives to foreign policy leadership, yet all three are united by a shared set of underlying core values. These core beliefs include a recognition of the importance of global political and economic institutions, multilateral foreign policy, and – while embracing American exceptionalism – a recognition that American power, must be tempered and bound by an ethic of global responsibility.

This thesis was interrupted – along with the rest of life – by the Coronavirus. Though the project diverged from the original plan for its structure, the resulting, reframed document, carries out a deep analysis of these three figures by examining their response to moments of intense crisis. This serves as a proxy for holistically understanding their broader approach to foreign policy. In turn, additional subjects that are discussed include: the specific qualities of this period’s global political economy and foreign policy, and the extent to which this period is specifically connected to the moments which precede and which follow it.
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In 1961, Hannah Arendt published a series of essays titled, *Between Past and Future*.\(^1\) Living in a moment when she was still trying to make political and philosophical sense of the history of totalitarianism, fascism, the role of ordinary individuals in the death of millions of Jews and others, and the adolescence of the nuclear age, she writes that we are living in a paradoxical time “between past and future.” Arendt describes this time as “an odd in-between period which sometimes inserts itself into historical time when not only the later historians but the actors and witnesses, the living themselves, become aware of an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet.”\(^2\) In this in-between period, we are torn from our normal existence as thinking creatures surrounded by a world with standard rules, traditions, and order, and into a world in which we are only left with action (or in our case, inaction). In writing about the *Resistance* in occupied France during World War II, Arendt quotes René Char who writes, “Notre héritage n’est précédé d’aucun testament.” (“our inheritance was left to us by no testament”).\(^3\) To research and write a history thesis which started a year before the COVID-19 pandemic, was abruptly interrupted as the project was nearing its conclusion, and then was restarted and completed during the acute phase of the pandemic has the intellectual and emotional feel of what Arendt describes as a moment stuck between past and future.

Arendt writes of France in WWII that extraordinarily unexpected and unprecedented change had “emptied from one day to the next” the normal scene of their country and – in an uncannily similar experience to what we are witnessing now – has left “it to the puppet-like

\(^2\) Ibid, 8.
\(^3\) Ibid.
antics of knaves or fools.” The *Resistance* was thus composed of those who, “as a matter of course, had never participated in official business, [who] were sucked into politics as though with the force of a vacuum.”4 We, in America, in a similar sense, have all been sucked into this moment – each playing some sort of role on the “frontlines” of the fight – via the force of a vacuum. Arendt then takes a turn that is seemingly less analogous for the purposes of this discussion in her depiction of the experience of revolutions and revolutionaries as being profoundly elevating for those involved, but regardless, the analogy stands that this experience is totally world- and life-shaping for everyone involved. We are stuck between two moments, knowing that this current experience will end at some point but not knowing when, and everything that occurs in this in-between stage feels as if it is something from another world – something that is only temporary and that could just as suddenly cease to exist. Such moments call for some kind of rethinking and I have tried to do this with my approach to this thesis.

The week I restarted this thesis, the start of Passover and the beginning of Easter, 779 individuals died in New York City in one day by one count; the U.S. death toll passed 10,000 (a number that is now six times higher); and the British Prime Minister was admitted to the ICU to be intubated. To say we were and are living in a world turned upside down is an understatement. On a vastly smaller scale, rather than finish this history thesis in the cozy confines of Haverford College, I “shelter-in place,” separated from my community of friends and professors, in Berkeley, California, avoiding all contact and anxious about my parents and grandparents. With that context in mind – and while trying to avoid sounding overly melodramatic – I have thought and felt hard over the last few weeks about what the right way to reframe this project is in order to both make it meaningful, authentic, and relevant to the world as it stands now.

This thesis is written in two parts. Part one, the first __ pages, was written and essentially completed pre-coronavirus. Part two, was written during the coronavirus. In the second part of this thesis I have reframed the focus of my investigation to look at the way in which the key figures I have focused on – Vance, Whitehead, and Holbrooke – responded to great near existential moments of crisis, and what their response tells us about their character and belief systems. This felt like a way in which I could authentically honor, for lack of a better term, living through the early phases of the pandemic. It was also a manageable way in which I could approach the figures I had sat with for the last twelve months and re-engage and re-motivate myself with the work. It also served to ameliorate the loss of access to substantial amount of my notes and primary source, now inaccessible two thousand five hundred miles away in my dorm room.

I have left the first half – Pre-Coronavirus (and labeled “Original”) – of this thesis essentially as is. The reader will see outlined a number of methodological approaches and ambitions which I will not be able to complete. In the second half of the thesis – during the Coronavirus (and labeled Post-COVID to represent the onset of disease) – I begin by providing an update on my reframing and approach to completing the thesis. I note as well that I have narrowed my focus from four figures to three. Lawrence Eagleburger, for whom there was far less primary source materials and who stood as a kind of proxy for Henry Kissinger, is left on the cutting room floor. Putting these two halves of the thesis together in this way may be somewhat jarring, but it serves the purpose of not only representing the original effort and of finding a pragmatic way of completing this work, but as a representation of (re-)writing history in a moment between past and future.
SECTION ONE: (Original) INTRODUCTION

I. The Shuttle

In the mid-1980s, starting at 6:30 am every weekday, the first of 14 daily flights on the Pan Am “shuttle” took off from Washington National Airport en route to LaGuardia. Referred to as “the corporate jet” in Pan Am advertisements, the shuttle became a standard ride for businessmen and politicians alike as they traveled between the two power centers of the country, Washington, DC and New York City. While the Boeing 727-200s were fitted with in-seat telephones so that passengers could “make connections in high places,” gregarious passengers would have been able to expand their network by simply turning their head left or right and speaking with the fellow bigwig likely seated next to them.

On one such flight on the morning of September 14, 1988, John C. Whitehead, then the Deputy Secretary of State in the Reagan administration and only two years before the Co-Chairman of Goldman Sachs, settled into his taupe leather seat. Tucked into his breast pocket was a check for $90 million dollars from the United States government to the United Nations. Whitehead, a committed advocate for the global importance of the United Nations and the duty of the US to support this institution, had recently won a political skirmish in the highest levels of the Reagan Administration over paying long overdue dues to the United Nations, and was on his way to personally deliver this $90 million-dollar check to United Nations Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar. Seated directly next to Whitehead on that particular flight was Richard Holbrooke, long-time member of the Foreign Service and former Assistant Secretary of State in the Carter administration, now out of office and currently moonlighting as a partner at Lehman

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Brothers. Like Whitehead, Holbrooke was also passionate about the importance of United States involvement with the United Nations and in the general value of the UN as a critical institution of global democracy. While neither gave their typical impassioned spiel about the institution’s importance this time, they both appreciated the coincidence of the moment when Whitehead reached for his breast pocket and pulled out the biggest check that either man had seen.

“Want to hold it?” asked Whitehead.

Holbrooke refused for fear of fumbling the check midflight, and they both continued to chuckle over the chance encounter.

While the banker-turned-diplomat and the diplomat-turned-banker flew to New York that day, we can imagine that Cyrus Vance – the former Secretary of State under President Jimmy Carter and one of only three Secretaries of State to resign from office on a protest of principle – may also have been working (now as a private citizen) to promote the same cause that the two men felt so strongly about. After returning to his law practice at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, Vance continued to advocate for the principles he had cared deeply for during his time as Secretary of State, especially the value and importance of the United Nations. Only now he advocated for this institution of global cooperation as the head of the United Nations Association of America (UNA-USA) from his law offices on Lexington Ave, instead of from the Secretary’s room on the 7th floor of the State Department.

As these three men likely worked in one way or another that Thursday morning to ensure the United States would remain a contributing member of the United Nations, the fourth and final character in this examination, Lawrence Eagleburger, would also have been busy in New

8 Ibid.
York City. Although much more familiar with the world of Washington by this point – after having spent the past 23 years in various roles in the Foreign Service – Eagleburger, too, mirrored the other three men in establishing his own anchor points along the New York-to-Washington axis. As Henry Kissinger’s protégé and right-hand man both within and outside of government, it was no surprise that after taking a few years off of the Foreign Service, Eagleburger would become president of Kissinger Associates in 1984. It is easy to picture Kissinger sitting with Eagleburger on this same morning plotting out the next corporate clients to sell their geopolitical insights to – perhaps even answering the question, “will the US ever pay its UN dues?”

II. What is the story? Who are the people?

This thesis is a story told through these four individuals: Cyrus Vance, John Whitehead, Lawrence Eagleburger, and Richard Holbrooke. More than just a collection of moments from each of their lives, though – no matter how interesting it is that Holbrooke and Whitehead used to ride the same plane together – I want to tell the intellectual and political history of these four foreign policy, globalist leaders. Spanning the Carter through the Clinton administrations, from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, each individual is emblematic of a different important strand and tradition within American foreign policy. Though they served in very different administrations, they all possessed a similar set of broad overlapping worldviews and values; breathing the same air and possessing a similar ethos. They can be thought of as being the second generation of the American foreign policy establishment, taking over from the original American establishment figures who were prominent from the end of World War II through Vietnam. They
are a kind of amalgamation and continuation of David Halberstam’s “best and the brightest”\(^9\) and Walter Isaacson’s “wise men”\(^10\) – though they are harder to pin down with the same sort of pithy labels.

While establishment-like, this group had a distinct experience in government service. By the time they came into power, beginning in the late 1970s, this group experienced a much less morally clear global picture that, after Vietnam and the political, economic, and cultural schisms of the 1970s, changed the nature of their roles and limited their ability to carry out foreign affairs with the same unrestrained élan as the group that had preceded them. This late 20\(^{th}\) century moment, thus, is particularly unique for both this group of people as a group, but also unique in terms of being a moment of change and challenge for the values and institutions they cherished and promoted.

While all four individuals are a part of a shared sea of values, they were each – as individuals – members of different generations and represented different specific cultural, political, and intellectual viewpoints. I have given an intentionally stylized and, in some cases, preliminary tagline, of sorts, to each individual in order to make these differences and traditions clear and digestible. The taglines are as follows:


**John C. Whitehead** (1922-2015) “The Ethical Globalist Banker as Foreign Policy Leader”

**Lawrence Eagleburger** (1930-2011) “The Ascendency of the Pure-Power Realist – the Kissinger Tradition”


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III. Why is the story interesting?

The 20th century has been an extraordinary period for the history of political economic systems across the globe. The entire world order of the 19th century was repeatedly turned on its head through two world wars, the ascension of Marxist Leninism, the Great Depression, the rise of global neoliberalism, and finally, with the collapse of the Cold War dichotomy the emergence of the hegemonic U.S. global economic system. By the end of the twentieth century, many theorists and politicians were ready to proclaim “the end of the history”11 and the ascendency of a globalized, neoliberal “new world order.”

Twenty years later, the new world order of the late 1990s has come crashing down. Today, when we think about these four individuals, their shared values, and the institutions they championed, we get a drastically different picture compared to that of the end of the last century. The shared values that they are emblematic of as a group have been under direct attack in the last five years as America – and the entire world – undergoes a kind of deep existential crisis. The fundamental way that the American globalist establishment looked at the world is actively being challenged. Digging deeply into these administrations, traditions, and individuals gives us insight into the most important years of the formation of the core logic of a nascent global order, which is now being thrown fully into question.

A growing body of historians, political economists, corporate leaders, and others now argue that the global capitalist order and neoliberal ideology that was set in place from the late 1970s to the 1990s has now spawned a world of vast income, health, and environmental inequality. In response to these profound inequities, we see citizens across the globe turn several ways, in search of a narrative and practical solution: to nationalistic-authoritarian populists,

nostalgic fantasies, and/or socialist alternatives. A historical examination of representative individuals who helped to create the institutions and amplify the ideas and systems of global capitalism is not only of historical significance; it can also give us clues and frameworks to follow as we think about the characteristics of another path forward and the types of leaders of the future who will be necessary in order to build the institutions and ideas of a new, vastly improved democratic global capitalism.

IV. Modes of Historical Examination

The kind of topics and questions I have just now posed have previously been examined by political theorists, journalists, and academics along the following lines: (1) as a work of intellectual and biographical history about the lives, events, thoughts, and correspondence of these individuals over time; (2) as a history of foreign policy via a strategic foreign policy lens; (3) as a piece of political economic theory that traces the nature of global political economy as influenced and shaped by the United States; and, (4) as a more sociological and cultural analysis that examines this group of Americans as being emblematic of a particular subsections of the American globalist elite that existed in a specific historical moment.

The intellectual and historical biographical methodology is especially valuable to this examination as it deals in terms of tangible characters and traceable stories – bringing diffuse sets of foreign policy decisions into the realm of easily graspable individuals to examine. Though it is easy to get carried away with a “great man” approach to history, this methodology brings foreign policy from a space of abstraction to the level of the intimate and personal. In fact, this may be the most common means through which to tell this kind of story. Walter Isaacson’s The
Wise Men and David Halberstam’s *The Best and the Brightest* are two especially notable examples of this historical-journalistic approach that examines historical moments through a detailed profile of the major individuals involved.

A strategic foreign policy analysis takes the flipside to the aforementioned historical biographical approach. Removed from the actual individuals and characters involved in policy decisions, the core of this method is a more of a systems-based or formalistic approach towards thinking about foreign policy stratagem and diplomatic decisions. This political scientific approach is valuable in terms of tracing changes in the nature of policy over time – to see movements from hawkishness to dovishness (by extension: from realism to human rights), or to assess the effectiveness of containment, or to see the diplomatic effects of a trade war – but is less valuable for understanding the personal and institutional backdrop from which policy and diplomatic decisions occurred. When we think about this analytic lens, works like Stanley Hoffmann’s *Primacy or World Order*,12 Samuel P. Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies*,13 or Thomas Schelling’s *The Strategy of Conflict*14 stick out as archetypical examples.

The theoretical political economic approach is similar to the analytic foreign policy lens, but steps back even further into abstraction and distances itself from individuals, even those who seem to wield outsize influence and power. Though clearly the most abstract approach of the four, the political-economic lens can inform the other three methodologies by establishing the paradigm within which each individual actor and decision exists within. These works can be broad-sweeping historical and theoretical political economic examinations such as Karl Polanyi’s

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The Great Transformation\(^\text{15}\) or they can more explicitly explore specific political economic issues/moments, such as in Paul Collier’s *The Future of Capitalism*\(^\text{16}\) or Robert Kuttner’s *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?*\(^\text{17}\)

The fourth and final approach, the sociological and cultural, provides a snapshot of a particular subsection of a population and enables a different set of observations and insight from the other three. This lens is tied to the historical biographical approach in that it focuses on the kind of people who are involved in this historical examination, though it is removed from specific individuals and focuses more on the nature of groups. The sociological or cultural approach seeks to provide a “snapshot” of a particular group in a particular moment. This “snapshot” provides us insight in a way that a roster like Mrs. Astor’s “400”\(^\text{18}\) would, but with a deep sociological, social-scientific analysis. When we think of useful works within this realm for this study, we might consider C. Wright Mill’s *Power Elite*\(^\text{19}\) or a more cultural historical assessment like that of *The Culture of Narcissism*\(^\text{20}\) by Christopher Lasch, which sought to capture the broad and deep shift of the 1970s “me-decade.”

These lists of references are by no means exhaustive but are included as a point of reference and as an illustrative guide to help tease out the nuance and benefits of taking one path of analysis versus another.


V. A Framework for This Examination

All four of these approaches are relevant to this study and offer useful lenses for the sake of the examination. My approach will involve taking particular aspects of each of these four approaches and blending them together. Primarily, though, I will be drawing from the intellectual and biographical historical approach as well as the political economic lens. The central goal of this examination is to establish a clear picture of four divergent, yet overlapping, takes on the nature of American foreign policy and the role of America within the global order during this period. The historical-biographical lens is critical for understanding these four individuals as being emblematic of broader currents – as each representing a specific set of American globalist cultural, intellectual, and political traditions that they are shaped by and shape. To move this examination from just a study of four individuals as people, and take it to the scale of individuals as being emblematic of broader traditions, values, and approaches, I will draw heavily on a specific set of political economic frameworks so as to situate this group within a particular political economic paradigm. This will involve tracing the development of a certain set of ideas about how to think about political economy over time. I am particularly concerned with exploring how to think about the transition occurring in 1979 that marked a clear shift away from the post-war global paradigm to the world of neoliberalism and America-led globalization. I also want to think about the nature of these four individuals as a group – per the sociological lens – as a means of viewing the four individuals in relation to one another and as being emblematic of larger societal and intellectual changes/movements. Finally, at a number of points I will draw on the foreign policy analytic lenses, but that methodology will be used as a sort of icing on the cake of my story.
VI. **Outline for Thesis Going Forward**

Thus, my thesis will proceed according to the following schematic.

In Section II, I will address a set of theoretical and broad historical frameworks. I will, first, take a step back and discuss the ways to think about this period from a political-economic lens. As discussed earlier, this will involve tracing the development of a certain set of ideas about how to think about political-economic history over time. I am particularly concerned with exploring how to think about the transition in 1979 away from the post-war global paradigm. I will discuss how scholarship and theory on this period has changed and developed – paying special attention to changes in scholarship post-9/11 and post-2008. Finally, I will conclude this section by thinking about the basis for the quasi-sociological framework I am introducing in the next section in terms of placing the four individuals within a broader group – the American globalist establishment – with a variety of component strands and traditions beneath it that they are each a part of.

In the following four sections, Sections III – VI, I will carry out a kind of deep dive into each individual. These sections will be by far the largest of the thesis and will be split clearly into four one section for each individual. I will proceed in chronological order (Vance to Holbrooke) and – through using specific archival material – will seek to produce a complete picture of each individual by answering the following high-level questions:

1. **What worlds do they come from? What professional, political, and intellectual routes did they develop in?** Here I will draw on personal archival material from each person’s path to power while applying a quasi-sociological framework in order to tease out the
differences – and the roots of their differences – politically, ideologically, and otherwise, between the four individuals.

(2) *What are the intellectual and theoretical traditions and worldviews that they represent?* This section is especially critical to my examination. I seek to draw heavily upon personal correspondence and journal entries – as well as upon interviews and testaments – in order to understand how each person imagined the way in which the world order ought to exist. Each person is in a way representative of a larger intellectual tradition.

(3) *What are their perspectives on the institutions and theories of global democratic capitalism? What systems did they prioritize? How did that manifest in their action?* As a direct extension of the previous set of questions, the natural follow-up is to examine the ways in which each individual actualized their views and in what ways their ideologies became manifest through action. I will reflect on their particular arguments, correspondence, and reflections on action they undertook or advocated for when they were in power – as well as consider the effects of said decisions on the formation of the global democratic capitalist system.

Finally, in Section VII, I will take a step back to reflect on and consider the contemporary significance of this examination. I want to conclude with one of the shorter segments of this thesis. Though the questions I am asking here will in some ways be bringing my thesis into the present (and the future) it is imperative to this exploration to consider the after-history of this period. By looking back on this period with a modern lens and tracing the ways thinking has developed over time, we can uncover much about our current state of global affairs. We have left the historical moment as imagined and shaped by these proprietors of global capitalist preeminence and reentered a phase in which nationalism and populism have reemerged as a
threat to the globalist systems put in place at the supposed “end of history.” The pillars of liberalism and global (globalist) capitalist democracy are under scrutiny and under fire. This examination of these key figures and their involvement-in and reaction-to global decision-making three decades ago may shed light on how we got to this situation and what we might be missing.
SECTION II: (Original) POLITICAL ECONOMIC FRAMING

I. Table Setting

Before diving into the story of these four men, I want to first situate them within the particular political economic paradigm that they operated within. It is impossible to think of these American foreign policy officials without considering the global political economic context at the end of the 20th century. That said, one cannot just consider this time period, 1979 – 1995, in a vacuum. To get at the true nature of this period, I will trace and follow the shifting arc of political economic systems across the entire 20th century (though I primarily will be thinking about the world post-WWII).

This group’s predominance begins in tandem with a critical shift in the state of global political economy. The reason I want to tell this larger view of history is that I want to talk about the political economic set of ideas and values that these senior officials grew up and came to age in as a key factor in understanding them both as a group and as individual actors and thinkers. This is not just a history of what was going on, but is a history of the ideas and values that infused these individuals, beginning at the end of the depression and start of WWII and continuing through the growth of the American liberal world order. I am going to break this chapter out into two main sections: (1) the political economic context of the generation that preceded them, and (2) the paradigmatic global perspective that they themselves were all situated within while in power. Foreign policy does not exist in a vacuum. Each foreign policy actor operates within a particular broader lens. All aspects of foreign policy – on both an individual level and a group level – are shaped by this lens. I want to propose that political economic backdrops in foreign policy can be thought of as similar to a metaphysical backdrop in epistemology. Just as we would say all thought is – to borrow a term from Heidegger –
“enframed” (Gestell)\textsuperscript{21} by the metaphysical lens each individual operates within, I want to say that every foreign policy decision is filtered through a lens of political economic enframing, which each official operates within. Thus, to understand this group of individuals, it is critical to establish the political economic backdrop that enframes their perspectives and foreign policy decisions – as well as to think about where this particular historical moment exists along the arc of global political economy over the course of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

II. 20\textsuperscript{th} Century High-Level Commentary

The 20\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed enormous political economic change in a way unseen before in the modern world. One can break down 20\textsuperscript{th} century global political economy into three main periods: the turn of the century through the two world wars, the conclusion of WWII through the mid-to-late 1970s, and 1979 through the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

I draw heavily on a number of contemporary political economic theorists in this section: Robert Kuttner, Thomas Piketty, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Collier, Robert Skidelsky, and Joseph Nye. In particular, though, I borrow the language of “embeddedness”\textsuperscript{22} and the “double movement” from Karl Polanyi’s \textit{The Great Transformation}, which predates the aforementioned political economists by nearly a century. These ideas are enormously useful for tracing the “flow” of


\textsuperscript{22} I want to be abundantly clear that “embeddedness” and “enframing” are two related, but distinct terms. “Embeddedness” describes the state of political economy by speaking in terms of the extent to which the market and economy are or are not closely tied in with society. “Enframing” describes the extent to which we all exist within overarching worldviews, which we are so engrained within, that we cannot even see how much our perception is affected by said worldview. In this case, I am suggesting that we can be “enframed” by our political economic backdrop. Our political economy, then, could be described in terms of “embeddedness.”
political economic systems as they provide a clear set of terminology to delineate between different political economic paradigms.

In an effort to avoid rattling off a drawn out and insufficient “history” of all of U.S. political economy in the 20th century, I largely omit my discussion of the pre-WWII world, other than to say that the conditions of the early 20th century and two world wars set the stage for the particularly unique period that immediately followed.

The post-war 20th century world can be divided into two distinct periods: 1945–late-1970s and 1979 onward. From 1945 to the late 1970s we see an unusual period in the history of capitalism: the market is embedded; there is a full adoption of Keynesianism; and social democracy harnesses the market and produces a remarkable period of upward mobility and economic growth. From 1979 onwards we then witness the emergence of globalized neoliberalism, which in turn brings about the resurgence of unbridled and unregulated capitalism and the consequent return of profound income inequality.

### III. Political Economy from 1945 until the mid-to-late 70s

The U.S. political economy from the conclusion of WWII until the mid-to-late 1970s is a distinct, exceptional political economic period. At a high level this period can be categorized by: a core belief in and embrace of the values of Keynesianism; a wide sweeping acceptance of the merit of redistributing wealth; a pursuit of full employment; a coordinated international creation of systems and institutions of global democratic capitalism; and an embrace of a “socially-

23 “Global” being different from “globalist,” which I want to disambiguate as a concept that would emerge later and which is much more in line with economic ideas of “globalism.”
embedded” market with an accompanying socially-embedded approach to politics to match (I will address that later).

Polanyi’s “socially-embedded” markets and “double movement” theories provide a critically important lens for thinking about and understanding this period. Polanyi diverges from the traditional, siloed, economist’s approach and moves into the realm of thinking in terms of a wholistic, historical political economy. He is not so caught-up in the ideal world of mathematics, nor does he try to encase the world of human behavior in a set of abstract formulae. Instead, Polanyi intentionally and directly considers the day-to-day effects of political economic systems on the lives of humans living within societies. “Embeddedness,” at the most basic level, is the idea that money and the exchange of goods are integrally tied-up within social-relations, politics, culture, religion, etc. For Polanyi, humans are first and foremost concerned with social standing – rather than material gain – and money can simply act as a proxy or complementary factor to social standing. Humans “value material goods only in so far as they serve this end [of social standing].”24 We must then consider political economy on social terms. When we think of policy decisions, we do not want to be trapped in the world of pure economic analysis, but instead should think on a systematic level about the social effect of policies on human lives. Embeddedness, thus, is a means of describing the extent to which systems of exchange of goods relate to mechanics of social interaction.

Polanyi employs a deep historical approach to his analysis. Tracing the last 200+ years of the history of economics since the onset of capitalism, he illustrates the nature by which markets oscillate between periods of being increasingly and decreasingly embedded within society. This pattern is what he describes as the “double movement.” This concept is foundationally built on

two ideas: (1) that the so-called “auto-regulating” market is inherently at odds with human societal structures, and (2), that *laissez-faire* and auto-regulating markets are in themselves necessarily planned. Though purporting *laissez-faire* systems as being “planned” seems like an inherent contradiction, Polanyi points out that it really requires significant government intervention to preserve the free, auto-regulating, market.

To create the environment for a market to function on its own governments must put into place a strict set of controls, for example by enforcing rules regarding monopolies, establishing labor rights, eliminating unions, ensuring open trade, and preserving private property. Each step towards the auto-regulating market – each increasingly “disembedding” movement – incurs increasing societal and cultural damage for populations as they are forced to more intimately interface with the harsh reality of the market, alienated from social considerations.

The other side of the coin of the “double movement” theory is that in the absence of significant government intervention, restraints on free-market systems ‘naturally’ – spontaneously – arise in an effort to move back towards a state in which markets once again are embedded. Society will inherently try to claw back rights for people and move away from the cold, auto-regulating market. Though this sounds abstract, it really is quite intuitive: disembedded, rapidly changing, unpredictable markets put humans at constant risk of unemployment and emotional and physical suffering. Markets are harsh and unrelenting. The effects of markets – even if they are “efficient” – can be devastating to society. “More billionaires and more bankrupts” may signal an effective market, but it certainly does not necessarily signal a healthy or “effective” society. The planned market-oriented forces tugging apart at society demand a kind of spontaneous response back towards embedded structures due to
the dialectic relationship between traditional societal structures and systems that favor unregulated markets.

Polanyi pioneers an extraordinarily useful lens for thinking about political economic systems in the right way. That is not to say that we can stop at Polanyi, but rather that his method of moving past the ineffectual use of economics in a vacuum and beginning to truly think in terms of political ‘intersectionality’ (by engaging with the social effects of policy decisions) is the right approach for addressing questions of political economy on the level of vast systems.

When we think about this period of political economy that the global leaders such as Vance and Whitehead function within, we ought to consider where on the swinging pendulum of embeddedness we are situated, in order to frame and assess approaches to foreign policy.

In considering the period from 1945-late 1970s in the history of 20th century political economic thought, I also want to draw from Robert Kuttner’s 2018 book, *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* Kuttner, inspired by Polyani, grapples with many of the same concepts and brings them to the present. Kuttner, thinking in a Polanyi-inspired lens proclaims that, “[this] era was exceptional in the history of capitalism.” I rattled-off some of the features of this “exceptional” era at the start of this subsection, but now I want to break out in more detail some of the most important characteristics that define this paradigmatic period of political economic thought.

Firstly, the view that working-class prosperity is something that is valuable in itself.

Highly motivated by the horrors of WWII, Western leaders were incentivized to build systems

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25 Think: some sort of interwoven political economy including race theory, behavioral economics, feminism, psychology, anthropology, etc.

26 Kuttner, xx.
that would “reinforce support for liberal democracy and reduce the risk for war.” The previous two world wars had exposed the immense danger of systems that do not adequately prioritize all members of society. This claim follows along the Polanyian hypothesis that the planning involved in making manifest the “autoregulating market” is inherently at odds with many aims of society. Laissez-faire systems, while they may be efficient, are efficient in a socially-destructive way – i.e., the unrestricted market is too dangerous and harmful for society to stomach.

The second point, which naturally follows the first, is the idea that intentionally redistributing wealth became societally necessary in this period. This idea is a complete embrace of the New Deal era principles laid out shortly before 1945. In addition to prioritizing full employment, the U.S. government signaled an embrace of the value of redistributing wealth via policy, e.g. the top-end of the marginal tax rate remained at what seems like astronomically high levels to someone looking back in 2020. As the national economy grew, there was a true concern for ensuring that the entire spectrum of society reached prosperity alongside it.

The market during this period was a genuinely embedded. This is the height of labor unions, regulation, and of policies in general that curbed the socially harmful aspects of unrestricted laissez-faire systems. Economic intervention was restricted to Keynesianism’s relatively-crude ‘spending in downturns and cutting-back in upswings.’ This, as compared to technocratic dominance of economists in the period that followed, sits firmly within the perspective that the market is not some intangible being that must be addressed on its own terms. Instead, it embraces the embedded outlook that markets simply are tools of exchange designed and carried out by people for purposes chosen by people. When inequality and employment were prioritized as values to be addressed, the forms of the market followed suit and reflected those

27 Kuttner, XVI.
priorities. Democratic principles were extended from the domain of politics into the world of economics. The resulting system was one that was equitable\textsuperscript{28} and effective and brought about the longest period of prosperity and income equality across all levels of society witnessed in modern times.

Finally, on an international scale there was widespread comprehensive cooperation between countries throughout the West. This was not just in terms of systems of international trade, but also in terms of embracing the same shared set of values that define this paradigm of global political economy. This is a period in which international high finance and banking were severely limited relative to what was to follow in the 1980s and onward. The United States acted as the world’s reserve currency (pegged to gold) and every other currency was afforded enough wiggle room to adjust monetary policy according to Keynesian principles. Currency speculation, and the complex manipulation of money markets across international borders, was severely limited via capital controls such that countries could be confident in their ability to fund social programs and provide economic stimulus without being punished on the bond or currency markets. Caleb Crain aptly quotes Thomas Piketty in describing this period as, “capitalism without capitalists.”\textsuperscript{29}

Many of the pioneering institutions of global democratic capitalism were thought-up and made manifest during this time. The early institutions of the eventual European Union come into being (first the ECSC, and later the EEC); the World Bank is created to carry out the principles agreed upon at Bretton Woods alongside the IMF; and the United Nations was built out of the

\textsuperscript{28} That is, for citizens who were fell under the purview of these systems. I will leave the discussion of blatant racial, gender, etc. inequities in this period to other writers who have already done these issues justice in a manner that this paper surely could not.

ashes of the failed League of Nations. These global organizations were the institutional embodiment of the values of this period – codifying and making manifest a truly shared commitment to a set of economic, social, and political values on a mass international scale.

IV. Political Economy from 1979 through the End of the 20th Century

The transition that occurred starting in the mid-to-late 1970s – which coincides with the ascension of the next generation of U.S. foreign policy leaders – consists of a fundamental paradigm shift in terms of thinking about how systems of political economy ought to exist. That is not to say that this is a sudden shift that immediately occurred in mid-1970s, for example. Instead, this was something that began in the mid-1970s and slowly but dramatically unfolded and developed over the following two decades. There was a gradual, yet complete, re-enframing – a metaphysical lens shift – such that the core logic (and core ideology) which made up the global political economic system was centrally altered. The magnitude of this shift would have been hard to discern at the time, but looking back 20, 30, or 40 years later we can see just how distinct this period of global neoliberalism was when compared to the 30 years prior.

To understand the political economic shifts that occurred in this period, I want to draw out and trace a number of developments that are key in understanding both the causes and effects of this time period. From a policy lens, this period was witness to a plurality of landscape altering changes: drastic drops in marginal tax rates; removal of regulation on investors and financiers; slashing interest rates and eliminating usury laws; a de facto demolition of Bretton Woods; and a reframing of the goal of economic intervention from maintaining full employment
to preventing inflation. These are all specific policy measures, but much of this shift is at its core a shift in terms of the general ideology that governed these systems.

One of the key moments of change in this political economic story is the crisis of stagflation and the confluence of a set of particularly challenging geopolitical circumstances. Stagflation in particular, but not entirely on its own, shook the foundation of the Keynesian liberal democratic Rooseveltian global worldview – this worldview, and the establishment figures who ran it, can be thought of as having been at least partially “asleep at the wheel” while undercurrents of a return to *laissez-faire* political economic structures began to rise and rise. The inability to handle the crisis of stagflation – among other issues – opened the door for attacks from the Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek camp, which was now suddenly given drastically increased legitimacy after having formerly been effectively relegated to academic safe havens of economic reformist thought.

The economic challenge brought on by stagflation, though, was not enough on its own to fully bring about the slew of changes that occurred in the following twenty or thirty years. Key to these shifts was the particular cultural moment that was going on in the mid-70s, largely as a reaction to the enormous social change that had been occurring over the decade prior. Everything from the Civil Rights Movement to the Women’s Rights Movement to the counterculture movement put intense strains on the social fabric which made up the post-WWII order. The pull-back (backlash) in response to that widespread social disruption, combined with the baby boomer generation coming of age and beginning to wield political influence, set the stage for the kind of disembedding political economic changes that would follow.

Riding the wave of this reaction to social change came the embodiment of the fundamental challenge to the dominant liberal political worldview in the form of the election of
Ronald Reagan. Reagan in a sense represents all the political and economic critiques that stretch back even to the 1920s and 1930s with the “cult of the businessman” of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. These strong ideological traditions, diametrically opposed to the state having much power at all, never subsided even while the post-war Rooseveltian liberal democratic establishment was solidly in power.

Finally, it is critical to not overlook the central importance of the Cold War dichotomy during this period. Especially towards the start of this period – in the mid-to-late 70s – America is still fully situated in the global Cold War paradigm. That said, as we move into the early and mid-80s, the early fracturing of both the political economic and social structures of the Soviet Union began to become visible. Especially by the mid-80s it began to feel like everyone around the globe “wanted” to be a capitalist – that democracy was going to win out. By 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and indications that the Eastern Bloc would join the rest of the Western world, the neoliberal political economic worldview looks as though it will be adopted globally. Truly, then, it appears as if Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” was approaching – and if that were the case, why then should we not have this global capitalist order where “greed is good” and all the rest?

The resulting collection of changes which unfolded over this two-decade period – sometimes rapidly and sometimes gradually – brought America back to a political economic paradigm in which the markets were largely disembedded, to return to Polanyi’s language. Though there were specific events and circumstances that acted as catalysts, the overall shift follows the pattern laid out in Polanyi’s “double movement” theory. Effectively, a series of changing circumstances – political, social, and economic – arose such that the “auto-regulating” market was able to be put back into place after a long period of markets having been largely
embedded in society. Whether that be the inability to handle the crisis of stagflation, the election of Reagan, the persistent anti-government ideology, the post-Vietnam war malaise, the backlash against the civil rights and feminist movements (and the government institutions that had legitimized them), the drum beat of the anti-union movement, and the emergence of the “me” generation of individualistic narcissism, or all of these factors combined, the resulting paradigm that emerged no longer demanded the same kind of embedded focus, ultimately taking the wind out of the sails of Keynesianism and the previous social-welfare political economic paradigm. These cultural and societal factors, along with an underlying political economic outlook of Chicago School neoliberalism, together coalesced into a new all-consuming *laissez-faire* “greed is good” lens.

The “metaphysical lens” through which political economic policy was considered was altered such that it was logically sound to structure these systems along an entirely different set of values. For when the baseline axioms of a system shift, the metaphorical “goalposts” that one aims for necessarily shift alongside with it. Now, the goal became maintenance of the “health” of the structures of neoliberal economic systems, rather than the health of society.

Finally, I want to bring in a semi-anecdotal note, but one that nonetheless I think epitomizes the kind of shifts that occurred during this period—compared to the 30-year order that preceded it. One unique aspect of the period that emerges after the transition in the mid-to-late 70s is the absolute elevation and ascendency of the role economists and the field of economics in general. Binyamin Applebaum in “Blame Economists for the Mess We’re In” shares a brief anecdote that expertly gets at the nature of this shift:
In the early 1950s, a young economist named Paul Volcker worked as a human calculator in an office deep inside the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. He crunched numbers for the people who made decisions, and he told his wife that he saw little chance of ever moving up. The central bank’s leadership included bankers, lawyers and an Iowa hog farmer, but not a single economist. The Fed’s chairman, a former stockbroker named William McChesney Martin, once told a visitor that he kept a small staff of economists in the basement of the Fed’s Washington headquarters. They were in the building, he said, because they asked good questions. They were in the basement because "they don’t know their own limitations".30

This charming story reads as something that is immensely alien to an onlooker in 2020. The fed now is the bastion of economics and economists – how could it have ever been otherwise? This transitionary period marks the moment in which central banks fully adopted principles of monetarism starting with Margaret Thatcher’s Bank of England and through various policy changes of the “Nixon Shock” (e.g. eliminating convertibility to gold, price freezes, increases in import taxes). The actual policy shifts that rose to prominence in the 1970s, though, had been bubbling beneath the surface in economics departments across the U.S. for decades prior – especially, for example, in the Chicago School.

The macro-economy became a new entity altogether. Instead of being the sum of its microeconomic parts, the macro-economy was now treated as something to be grappled with on its own terms. This period is marked by the emergence of mathematizing models that are designed to cover all aspects of human life – moving economics from a rough study of actors within markets, to an all-encompassing set of theories about the essential reality of human behavior. The rational man model, rational choice theory, perfect information parity, efficient markets and utility maximization – among other concepts – all created an air of scientific certainty in which economic claims could be treated as empirical scientific fact. This

mathematizing of economics (and by extension, political economy) was effectively an assault on the ideas of statecraft. No longer did society or the everyday experiences of citizens have to be taken into account, for the autoregulating market – enabled by the narrative of empirical scientific certainty – became the ultimate institution to be prioritized. Humans were no longer complex social and cultural beings with a rich array of values, irrational responses, feelings, and the like, but instead became rational utility maximizers devoid of ethics and devoid of humanity.

These shifts were not contained to the United States. For how could they be when the U.S. had for nearly 40 years been the reserve currency of the world? Now, the global democratic institutions that had once been agents of Keynesianism were transformed into champions of Chicago School neoliberalism. Loans from the IMF and the World Bank that had once been run by Keynesians now came along with a metaphorical ball and chain, forcing free-market policies and doctrine upon developing countries receiving their funds. Countries receiving lines of credit were forced to limit taxes (and, subsequently, government spending), lift tariffs on imports, allow involvement from global financial markets, and aim to increase international trade. Effectively, the policies of neoliberal globalism were embedded in the structure of the institutions that had once carried forth the values of the previous paradigm.

Though we can look back now and remark upon the insufficiency of post-war Keynesianism in being able to properly handle stagflation and other global economic challenges of the 1970s, it is hard to say that the resulting neoliberal-dominated system was particularly effective either. The enframing axioms of political economy were fundamentally shifted from considering the health and prospects of society, to one that is entrapped within the lens of a mathematically contrived form of economics. Thus, the great and profound growth of income
inequality was set on course for 40 years of unfettered social distortion.

(Note: this is the end of the Pre-COVID section)
SECTION THREE: A (POST-COVID) ACCOUNT

I. An Updated Framing and Approach

Now, in the midst of the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, I pause and take a step back to re-frame how I will explore the stories and histories of Vance, Whitehead, and Holbrooke.

First, living through this moment of acute, existential global crisis has urged me to think about the ways in which the individuals I have been studying for the duration of this project faced and handled (and might have handled) intense moments of crisis. Instead of the detailed analysis of each historical figure that I was planning on carrying-out, in the following section I will examine each individual and ask how they handled moments of great crisis, whether moral, existential, personal, genocidal, etc. I still want to say something about the traditions and values that each person comes from – as well as something about their character – but simply not in the same kind of detail I laid-out in my opening chapter.

Second, I will still assess the nature of the period that I am looking at, albeit at a high level of abstraction. In the previous section – which was initially intended as an introductory chapter – I described the extent to which this period at the end of the 20th century was paradigmatic in terms of the worldview which enframed foreign policy and systems of global diplomacy. This period is unique both from the 30 years that preceded it and the nearly-30 years that have occurred since.31

Third, I want to think about the way in which this period has informed (and will continue to inform) our current world order and paradigm. We live in a radically different world from that of the 1970s-1990s, particularly in the last three to four years, and it is shocking to look back on

31 For example, the hollowing of national and global institutions that is the goal and consequence of hard-core, free-market anti-government ideology has left public health in shambles.
this period and witness the extent to which everything, not just policy but our entire ethos and the structures and institutions of our world order, has changed and shifted.

II. Cyrus Vance

The moment of great crisis that most distinctly defines Cyrus Vance is his resignation as Secretary of State immediately after the public failure of the Carter Administration’s response to the Iran Hostage Crisis. Vance, in his memoir *Hard Choices*,\(^{32}\) writes the following about his decision to resign from the Carter administration:

I had disagreed with policy decisions in the past, but accepting that men of forceful views would inevitably disagree from time to time, had acquiesced out of loyalty to the President knowing I could not win every battle. The decision to extract the hostages by force from the center of a city of over five million, more than six thousand miles from the United States, which could be reached only by flying over difficult terrain was different: I was convinced that the decision was wrong and that it carried great risks for the hostages and for our national interests. [I] knew that I could not honorably remain as Secretary of State when I so strongly disagreed with a Presidential decision that went against my judgment as to what was best for the country and for the hostages. Even if the mission worked perfectly, and I did not believe it would, I would have to say afterward that I had opposed it, give my reason for opposing it, and publicly criticize the President. That would be intolerable for the President and me. That day, I told Carter I would have to resign if the mission went forward.

Vance, on April 28, 1980, became only the third Secretary of State to resign on principle, with the only other two instances occurring in the lead up to war, first prior to the Civil War and second prior to World War One.

The pre-history of that moment, though, is the story of the Carter campaign and the Carter presidency – in particular, it is the story of the relationship between Vance and Carter. In

fact, this relationship (surprisingly) got off on very much the right foot. At first reluctant to accept his appointment, Vance, a man who is so centrally oriented around morals and principles, decided that it was his duty as a citizen to at least explore the position (and, to be fair, it had been the position he had always hoped he would one day hold). To determine if he could work with President Carter, the two men met at Carter’s home in Plains, Georgia. Carter was largely able to quell any concerns Vance had about accepting the role – which primarily circulated around the anti-establishment bent under which the campaign had been run – and Vance was pleased with the extent to which Carter truly seemed to be a moral figure, someone who would share the same kind of deep concern for human rights and for a diplomacy-based foreign policy as he held.  

For however vague and ambiguous the “establishment” label can be, the northeast liberal “establishment” values were truly bequeathed to Vance by the generation of American foreign policy leaders, such as Dean Acheson, John McCloy, Bob Lovett, and Averell Harriman, that preceded him. Though Vance attended Kent School (rather than Groton, Deerfield, St. Paul’s, or Exeter) he held dear the same values of a notion of duty and honor of the “Groton Ethic” – a kind of gentlemanly and noble style of leadership that was altogether distinct from the “ambitions power players who hold similar positions today.” That is not to say that Vance was of the exact same ideological stance as all other establishment figures – nor is it to say that the establishment was entirely homogenous in their views – for a defining quality of these kinds of statesmen is in their lack of adherence to a single ideology. They, and Vance alike, were centrists whose chief ideological leaning can be viewed simply as having a distrust and distain for populism and demagoguery. They were simultaneously aloof and overtly pragmatic while also being distinctly nonpartisan: equally opposed to the extremes on the left and the right. Vance, more so even than

others in the northeast establishment, embraced and advocated for America’s role as a global leader. America was held in an aspirational position in which it ought to act as a kind of purifying moral force in the world. America, like the establishment figures who determined much of American foreign policy in the post-war period, was to be a nation which maintained the same kind of obligation for service and the betterment of others that these men held themselves to.

As an individual and as a diplomat, Vance straddles the line between two worlds: the post-WWII Rooseveltian democratic “establishment” of McCloy, Lovett, Kennan, Harriman, Bohlen, and Acheson; and the new, post-Vietnam neoliberal globalist foreign policy operators of the end of the 20th century. He was just barely in the next generation after the “wise men” who ran American foreign policy before him – he could have, for example, been George Kennan’s much younger brother, with a thirteen-year age difference between them. He marks a clear and sharp transition point in the history of American foreign policy. As a classic “establishment” figure, he was able to flow unhindered between political appointments in Washington and successful ‘big law’ practices on Wall Street. That being said, his crowning political appointment as Secretary of State was for a self-proclaimed political outsider, Jimmy Carter, who railed directly against the apparent dominance of the American “establishment” which Vance was a part of. Hamilton Jordan, campaign manager and eventual chief of staff to Carter, was quoted during the campaign as saying, “If, after the inauguration, you find a Cy Vance as secretary of state and Zbigniew Brzezinski as head of national security, then I would say we failed. And I’d quit.”

Aside from the fact that both Brzezinski and Vance were appointed almost-immediately upon inauguration, the broader point stands: that Vance – the establishment exemplar – primarily operated in a world which was beginning to shy away from the apparent “wisdom” of the “wise men.” Vance truly embodied the ideas of Wilsonian liberalism, implemented through the institutions of the global liberal order. Vance was not just concerned with the outcomes – the ends – of foreign policy and diplomacy. He was deeply concerned with the way – the means and the methods – by which diplomacy was carried out. In an eleven-page memo titled, “Presidential Leadership and Foreign Policy,” as part of a three-piece series Vance produced in 1970 on foreign policy and the executive branch, Vance spends the first six pages discussing his high-level views of the world and the way in which foreign policy and diplomacy ought to fit into the global picture as carried out through the role of the president. The next five pages, though, were dedicated entirely to discussing presidential “style.” This memorandum encapsulates the Vance approach, which he carried through his entire life: the right kind of diplomacy, carried out in the right kind of way. Vance’s discussion of presidential “style” very clearly illustrates this point:

Style must not be regarded as a cosmetic. On the contrary, it has a significant effect on substance in that it establishes relationships, molds opinion, and can create the confidence and spirit in which solutions to problems are worked out. The style of the president… should be calm, confident and persuasive. It should eschew the hectic, angry, day-to-day crisis-type of leadership which has marked the past. It should combine idealism with pragmatism, and principle with fact.36

In the same pages, he goes on to discuss the “arrogance of power”:

A president… must be prepared to comment on this issue, and a few fundamental principles are worth noting. The United States must demonstrate that it is prepared to listen, as well as to talk. We must be prepared to work through multilateral agencies, not merely through bilateral arrangement… We must make it clear that we are prepared to

live as a part of the world community, accepting certain rules and organizations, whether this is to our benefit or not.”

Vance brought along the patrician grace and élan of the previous generation of foreign policy officials naturally and as a matter of course, with a deep and abiding commitment to building a “world community” through the binding and interlocking obligations of multilateral institutions. He represented the previous generation’s values, traditions, and diplomatic styles during a period in which the role of America on a global scale was starting to be redefined and re-understood. This dichotomy was most clearly illustrated in his eventual resignation at Carter (and, more importantly, Brzezinski’s) handling of the Iran Hostage Crisis.

The reality of Vance’s time as Secretary of State quickly departed from the path imagined at Jimmy Carter’s farm in Georgia at the start of the Carter presidency. Almost from day one on the job (in fact, from before the time the job started, as calls between Holbrooke and Carter indicate) this reality became apparent. Firstly, Brzezinski, through his daily meetings with Carter as National Security Council (NSC) Advisor, established a rapport with Carter that Vance simply was not able to match. While Vance diligently fulfilled his role as Secretary of State, Brzezinski operated with a kind of ferocity and tenacity and aided all things foreign policy at the president’s beck and call. As a result, very soon into the presidency, the administration’s foreign policy decision-making and power dynamics shifted in favor of the Brzezinski camp, as opposed to flowing primarily through the State Department. This was intended by Brzezinski as he saw himself as occupying a similar role as Kissinger had to Nixon and Ford.

37 Ibid, 8.
38 Carter, asking for Holbrooke’s thoughts on Brzezinski as NSC, received some pushback from Holbrooke, who thought Brzezinski and Vance were too different of figures (Vance was already selected as Secretary of State). In response, Carter is said to have very coldly reaffirmed his support of Brzezinski as the man he wanted and, largely, cut off his relationship with Holbrooke as a result of not supporting his vision. Per: Richard Holbrooke, “1976 – I did not see JC clearly,” 1980 memoranda book, December 12, 1980, Richard C. Holbrooke Papers. Harry S. Truman Presidential Library.
Additionally, Brzezinski, though in a completely different ideological camp compared to Carter – being much more concerned with power for power’s sake rather than the morally-motivated Wilsonian use of power – supplied the kind of foreign policy solutions that Carter was looking for. This brings us back to the idea that Carter was ultimately running an outsider’s campaign and that his presidency reflected that. Carter was fundamentally frustrated with the way things have been run in previous administration at the level of the president. A central aspect of his approach, thus, was to come in as a figure who could change the nature of some of these processes and functions. While Carter’s foreign policy worldview had a starkly different telos than Brzezinski, Carter, in fact, very much favored the means by which Brzezinski operated. He appreciated the novelty of Brzezinski’s realpolitik and the intensity and aggressiveness which he brought to the game, especially in the face of increasing aggression from the Soviets, culminating in the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

That is all to say that Vance, relatively early on in the administration, did not have nearly the amount of sway on foreign policy decision-making via the President as he may have imagined when he accepted his role. Additionally, given the lackluster track record of the Carter presidency, by the time the hostage crisis emerged, Carter was very much primed for a showy act of heroism, versus the kind of collective and patient approach which Vance put forth and stood by. I want to bring in a quick quote from *Foreign Affairs* which summarizes this relationship very well:

“Vance's biggest problem was that Carter liked Brzezinski immensely and relied on him to spin out a broad range of options and analysis – even jokes and wild ideas – that Carter found helpful in forming his judgments. Carter did not agree with Brzezinski's loopier ideas, but he liked their range… But more, Vance was too much the Wall Street lawyer, too much the restrained Presbyterian elder to connect with Carter in the same way. Carter clearly felt a little more comfortable with a brilliant rogue like Brzezinski, and Vance
would never be that; he had too much Yankee rectitude. One had only to look at the young men around the president – say, Hamilton Jordan, Jody Powell, and Gerald Rafshoon – to see that Carter was imbued with that southern gene that placed churchgoing virtue alongside an appreciation for mischief.39

With regards to the hostage crisis, Vance very strongly held the view that as long as the U.S. was patient and continued to apply soft-force through coordinated international sanctions, then the hostages would not incur further risks to their wellbeing. He viewed the hostages as serving a political purpose in Iran, and that once their political purpose was complete it would be much easier to negotiate their release. This was a situation that called for diplomacy, not brute force. Vance argued for this approach by referencing previous hostage situations in which the U.S. had been involved in, namely the Angus War incident at the tail end of WWII and the Pueblo Crisis in 1968. In both cases, patience and diplomacy were effective solutions.

It is interesting to note that Vance, who had been a former Secretary of the Army and a Deputy Secretary of Defense, was profoundly against the use of military intervention. His position can be broken down into two clear component parts. First, Vance thought that the prospect of dragging 60 Americans out of the center of a city of 5 million was virtually impossible from a logistical standpoint. Second, and most importantly, he was steadfast in his viewpoint that the safety of the hostages and of the American servicemen performing the rescue mission was of paramount importance and must not be jeopardized for political purposes. Although in terms of United States’ perceived strength and prestige, it was certainly not ideal that the hostages were being held in Tehran for such an extended period of time, it was the situation that they had to deal with. They had to act with the hostage’s well-being as the chief concern in mind. Diplomacy, for Vance, the establishment lawyer, was always to be the first approach.

Vance was not a person to often expound in detail upon his world view or his approach to diplomacy, so I do not have an explicit nor emphatic quote to illustrate his approach to foreign policy or his moral backing. There are innumerable examples, though, of people who, having worked closely with Vance, lauding his integrity and ability as a diplomat and as an individual. Vance was fully committed to “fair-play professionalism” in all areas – in terms of his professional relationship with Carter and Brzezinski and in terms of his interactions with the Soviets, etc. – and thus, in his view towards Tehran he was entirely committed to carrying out traditional diplomatic approaches in the “right way.”

This is something Brzezinski was highly critical of, stating, that while he recognized that Vance was a decent man in terms of character, he, “seemed to be the quintessential product of his own background: as a member of both the legal profession and the once-dominant Wasp elite, he operated according to their values and rules, but those values and rules were of declining relevance not only in terms of domestic American politics but particularly in terms of global conditions.” When we think about the Iranian hostage rescue operation and Vance’s subsequent resignation as an acute moment of international and personal crisis we have to take in to account both sides of the story. Vance was “right” in the end, the Carter/Brzezinski approach was a doomed plan in an otherwise doomed presidency. But could Vance have done more in the lead up to the hostage crisis to (1) establish a better rapport with both Carter and the American public such that his perspective was the one that was followed, or (2) “played dirty” even just a little bit more, such that Brzezinski and the rest of the Carter administration would not have been able to bully him out of the process so easily? Was Vance, as Brzezinski would say, operating according to values and rules of “declining relevance” from another time that were no longer fit for

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American foreign policy and the global conditions of the day? Surely, these days, we hope to again see a return to a more principled, moral, Vance-like approach to government and to American foreign policy.

III. John Whitehead

Initially, when thinking about a moment of deep crisis to describe John Whitehead, I struggled to find an analogous example in his illustrious life. Unlike Vance and Holbrooke, who both have clear-cut, dramatic moments of diplomacy in action, for Whitehead, that moment is much less obvious. He served as the Deputy Secretary of State in the Reagan administration during the second half of the 1980s, a period in which the Soviet Union increasingly looked primed to fall, the Berlin Wall came down, and the U.S. more and more appeared as if it were going to be the only remaining global superpower. Whitehead, though, was not particularly involved in negotiations with the Soviet Union, for example. That was, for the most part, the domain of Secretary of State George Shultz and other cabinet members with more traditional foreign policy backgrounds (Jeane Kirkpatrick, John Poindexter, Caspar Weinberger, to name a few).

It would be unfair to say, though, that Whitehead was uninvolved with this period of intense negotiation, change, and shaping of the new global world order. In fact, this kind of moment is the precise reason why Shultz so adamantly desired to have Whitehead join the Reagan administration as his deputy. Whitehead’s background, business and social network, and quiet skills were completely conducive to success in this type of position.
Whitehead began his education at Haverford College in the lead up to World War II, then, after serving as an officer helping to land boats on D-Day, completed his post-graduate education at Harvard Business School, where he had previously trained soon-to-be officers in military accounting when it was taken over by the navy during the war. His story is that of rising up from middle-class beginnings in New Jersey, to being gradually inculcated into the true Northeast upper-class establishment. Most of this socialization was carried out as a junior employee at Goldman Sachs – which as a firm had undergone the same kind of process of “breaking in” to the elite circles a decade prior – where he, and a generation of other young men fresh out of the war, collectively experienced the kind of economics and social upwards mobility that a fast-paced Wall Street career offered in those years.

Whitehead describes an emblematic sartorial moment in his early journey to join the ranks of the New York banker elite in which, on the heels of his first promotion to be an associate at the bank, he bought a brand new seer-sucker suit to better cope with the summer heat and humidity in the office bullpen where junior employees sat. At the time, “the Goldman Sachs way” consisted of almost exclusively wearing woolen suits, as was the style. Whitehead describes how he, “felt quite snappy as I passed through the Goldman Sachs entrance’s revolving door, and then boarded the elevator [in a] light-weight cotton seersucker suit that I thought very handsome.” Next, though, “Walter Sachs… the grandson of the cofounder [and] one of the great eminences at the firm” walked in behind him as the doors were closing and asked, “Young man, do you work at Goldman Sachs?” Whitehead, not yet seeing the issue, replied proudly, “Yes sir,
I do.” Only to get the response, “In that case, I would suggest that you go home right now and change out of your pajamas.”

Whitehead, many years later as a senior partner at Goldman Sachs, would go on to reflect on the ways that Haverford played a foundational role in enabling him to be prepared to find and forge his own place in the world.

How can I explain [my education at Haverford]? It’s not just having knowledge ready at command. It’s a feeling that whatever it is that I am now, started then; that whatever basic principles or beliefs I now have, whatever thoughts about issues or problems of the day, somehow were planted and began to sprout in the Haverford years.…. It is an education that prepares one to cope with a rapidly changing world, to understand political, social, economic and scientific developments, and in my own case, to gauge their impact on the business world. The generally educated person, the one with broad views and broad interests, seems best able to cope with change…. Part of it has to do with Haverford’s Quaker heritage. There was the feeling that each individual was important, an atmosphere that led to unusual tolerance for the views of others. And there was the feeling that every individual had an obligation to do more than live his own life, an obligation of service, of participation, of helping those in some way less fortunate…. It was at Haverford that I began to develop the first threads of a personal philosophy that has guided everything I’ve done since and given sense and meaning to me.

When we think of the values of Vance or others from the world of the Northeast establishment, noblesse oblige in general, Whitehead, while not being raised in that same kind of aristocratic prep school background, was eventually similarly indoctrinated to, if not the same community, at least a community with an analogous set of values, through Haverford and through Goldman Sachs. At the same time, unlike the distance that those from Groton-Yale often felt towards others in the world, the Quaker ethic at Haverford may have opened Whitehead to

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41 Whitehead, A Life in Leadership, 76.
“the feeling that each individual was important … [and] to unusual tolerance for the views of others.” Values that served Whitehead extraordinarily well.

Whitehead brings a different dimension to the issue of leadership in times of crisis: he is the solid wing-man, the man who stands on the side or behind the curtain and works comfortably with everyone to get things done, the “co-head” who does not need to be the boastful or moral figurehead, the highest-level quiet bureaucratic “jungle fighter” who you want by your side. He is the man who can seemingly help with the everyday and with the existential. That being said, he is also a figure who is desperately needed in times of great crisis. As I searched and thought about what I could frame as a moment of crisis to analyze for Whitehead, I realized and was struck by how many moments he was the man called to help.

For however monumental it was for Schultz and the rest of the Reagan administration to negotiate directly with Gorbachev regarding the dissolution of the Soviet empire’s stranglehold on Eastern Europe, it was equally important for the United States to establish an accompanying system to match this new emerging world order of the waning Cold War dichotomy. Whitehead, thus, was deeply involved with the creation of the systems, institutions, and the promotion of the ideas of the world political and financial order that grew to prominence in this run-up to the post-Soviet period alongside the deregulation of the American and global economy. He was the perfect figure to act as an ambassador – both domestically and abroad – to push forward the “Reagan Doctrine” and the accompanying broader ideas of globalization and neoliberalism. These changes were brought forth through a wide variety of channels, whether that be through the U.N., through speeches domestically, through direct discussions with foreign diplomats and leaders, or through working the strings of the global financial network. He has countless
speeches, lectures, and records of personal correspondence on these subjects. Here is just a sampling:

“Economic Cooperation in the Pacific Basin” 2/21/85
“South Africa: The Case Against Sanctions” 4/16/85
“Trade, Interdependence, and Conflicts of Jurisdiction” 5/5/84
“National Policies and Global Prosperity” 4/11/85
“Improving the Business Environment in Latin America/Policies for Adjustment and Recovery” 5/5/86
“Promoting Global Prosperity” 8/1/86
“Enhancing Global Prosperity” 8/7/86
“Openness: The Only Path to Progress” 6/10/88

These are just the first few I recorded on my list of speeches he delivered as Deputy Secretary of State. There are many, many others that all deal with the intersection of foreign policy and global neoliberal capitalism.

Whitehead worked all sides of the proverbial “coin.” Whether that be speaking before congress, addressing American foreign service officers, luncheons with executives here and abroad, engagements at the U.N., or diplomacy with the leaders of any number of the countries whom the U.S. was swaying to adopt open trade policies, Whitehead was an ambassador on a vast scale for the emerging system of globalized neoliberal capitalism that accompanied the changing scene of international power. From an internal perspective, too, Whitehead and Schultz championed changes in the State Department that particularly reflected the times in that they shifted recruiting away from the demands of the Cold War and towards the demands of the new world order America was busy creating. They now recruited foreign service officers with

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economics backgrounds (another sign of the rise of economics as the dominant social science), and they included macroeconomics training as a critical component of foreign service.

Whitehead, in an interview following Schultz’s curriculum/recruiting changes, states:

> It’s really quite simple. In the era we live in, our officers, to be good generalists must have a minimal level of economic literacy… The crises today aren’t just political or military. They’re just as often a debt crisis, or a balance-of-payments crisis, or an economic crisis of the kind we’ve seen in Africa… international economic policy, potentially, is one of the strongest diplomatic tools at our disposal for conducting relations with other nations, whether they’re allies or adversaries.”

Whitehead, both for Schultz and Reagan, fit the bill perfectly for this role. He is from the same generation as Vance and also saw combat in World War II, and so he shared many of the same high-level values of the “greatest generation.” But Whitehead comes from a solidly middle-class background and had nowhere near the same all-encompassing indoctrination to the American WASP northeast establishment as Vance did. While Whitehead is concerned with helping others and maintaining a kind of moral view towards the world, it would be incorrect to say that Whitehead’s background consisted of the same steeping in the “Groton ethic” – the training of the noblesse oblige – to the same extent that Vance or the “Wise Men” who came before them did. Whitehead was the true self-made Wall St. figure, the institutional man who worked himself into a position where he had innumerate connections. He was driven by a distinct ethical and moral approach, but it was one that was solidly grounded in principles of the American-economic way, so to speak. In a speech to the Securities Industry Association in 1985 as Deputy Secretary of State, Whitehead, in the same breadth discusses the “creative and constructive energy that is unleashed through free enterprise” and the extent to which America has a “moral obligation to help others who aspire to that standard [of human freedom and dignity

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which America has set].”45 This is the quintessential Whitehead package, that America must help others while furthering its own interests. Effectively, “doing good while doing well.”

Whitehead was someone for whom the American democratic capitalist system brought the utmost rewards, from relatively modest beginnings. It feels cliched to write about the “American Dream” so I will keep that at bay, but Whitehead, was the perfect figure to spread to the rest of the world the promise and gospel of the kind of prosperity that the American global(ist) system could bring about, for the individual and for the nation.

Whitehead is the quintessential connector and negotiator: always able to forge meaningful connections with people and to accomplish goals through these connections. To borrow Malcolm Gladwell’s taxonomy from the sociology of ideas in his book *The Tipping Point*, Whitehead is a Connector:

Connectors [are] people with a special gift for bringing the world together. [They] are the kinds of people who know everyone [and who] manage to occupy many different worlds and subcultures and niches.

They aren’t separate worlds, though. The point about Connectors is that by having a foot in so many worlds, they have the effect of bringing them all together.46

As I read through his archives, I found countless – literally countless – examples of people thanking Whitehead for advice from many years prior, quick notes that he would send people to check in with them, and many other records of correspondence that represented the extent to which he had an extensive network across all kinds of circles. As a fascinating aside, *Crain* and *RelSci* (a sociological consulting firm) partnered in 2014 to determine the “Most

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Connected New Yorkers™ according to an enormous relationship database they had amassed. *Crain* and *RelSci* ranked people on a composite of Reach, Reliability, Influence, Access, and Centrality. John Whitehead was ranked the most influential and connected New Yorker, ahead of Stephen Schwarzman at 2 and Henry Kissinger at 6. Though this is mostly anecdotal, it is another datapoint that portrays the extent to which Whitehead was immensely valuable to the administration as a connector on all fronts.

A great part of Whitehead’s strength was his ability to act as a support-man – he did not need to be the center of attention, in fact, that would have felt uncouth and against his character. He was a smooth talker, the ultimate operator, and an expert negotiator and relationship-man. He had an ability to bring multiple sides together, which was illustrated immediately upon his appointment in that many republican and democratic senators alike spoke in support of Whitehead at his confirmation hearing: Bill Bradley, Frank Lautenberg, Daniel Moynihan, and Al D’Amato. It is interesting to note, too, the extent to which Whitehead regularly served in a “Co-Head” capacity in his positions of power. At Goldman Sachs, Whitehead, instead of starting a leadership feud with the next most senior partner, arranged a situation in which he paired-off with John Weinberg (“The Two Johns”) as Co-Heads of the firm, which was a quite novel idea in corporate America, and especially on Wall Street. It proved remarkably effective and resilient. The same model applied at the State Department. While Schultz was undeniably his superior, both in title and experience, Whitehead was the perfect fit to act as Schultz’ replacement and proxy during the many diplomatic leaves he embarked on. This ability to

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gracefully step-in as a “co-head” Shultz explicitly notes in his rationale for Whitehead’s appointment as Deputy Secretary of State.49

In this sense, while Whitehead did not serve in the same capacity as Vance or Holbrooke in these clear, acute moments of intense negotiation and crisis – what one traditionally thinks of as the role of a Secretary of State or a high-level foreign diplomat – his role at the end of the 1980s was entirely in line with his skill set and his background. He would have been out of place had he been the chief arbiter of the winding-down of the Soviet stranglehold on Eastern Europe. He was completely in his own, though, when he was able to connect with other leaders, work behind the scenes, tap connections on Wall Street and the world of global finance, and glide between these vast overlapping circles such as to ensure that the “soft” side of the “Reagan Doctrine” slid into place smoothly.

Whitehead is the kind of figure who could act as an ambassador for the American vision of a new world order, which emerged fully in this period. He was able to capture the upside of this period, of the hope and the promise that global neoliberal economics and policies were supposed to bring about. In order to create a unified world order an administration greatly needs these kind of behind the scenes figures; power-brokers who can make the whole system of both domestic and international relations flow together, in normal periods and in periods of great change. In retrospect, we can see clearly how these policies were incomplete (at best), but it is unfair to ignore the power and true hope that these new radically connected economic systems, enabled by varying degrees of democracy, might generate for an improved wellbeing globally under the guidance of a new Pax Americana.

IV. Richard Holbrooke

Let’s turn now to Richard Holbrooke and his role in the resolution of the Bosnian Genocide. In the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia in 1995, we see one of the most intensely inhumane and horrible moments in world history since World War Two. This is a profoundly dramatic turn from the behind-the-scenes quiet negotiating and “fixing” of a John Whitehead-figure, and Richard Holbrooke’s blustering character, nearly like Shakespeare’s Falstaff, is as big a contrast as one might imagine. This contrast, though, in a way helps us to understand the history of the different approaches to foreign policy and diplomacy, as well as to explore the impact of great differences in character and leadership style.

The Bosnian Genocide, and ensuing conflict, was a repeat of the same kind of act that we thought we would never again see in Europe after the Holocaust, a horrific undertaking spurred on by an intense genocidal hatred. When this event of such ferocity, blood lust, and ethnic hatred began, it first appeared as if the global institutions of the new, post-Soviet world order were not fit to handle it. With the poor European response, and with NATO inactive without U.S. direction, there was over a year of stagnation and non-action. Thousands were murdered. This is the moment in which Richard Holbrooke’s character and strength, even his ego, were a perfect fit for the situation. In the face of unimaginable genocidal hatred, and multiple unrelenting dictators, the traditional diplomacy of the first half of the 20th century felt out of place and ineffective, in the same way that appeasement before WWII was clearly ineffective in the face of Hitler’s grand aspirations. General Wesley Clark, who accompanied Holbrooke’s mission in Bosnia, quite astutely assesses the situation by stating that, while he would not buy a car from Holbrooke, he thought:
“We have no one else I’ve seen in the US government who could pull this off. He is tireless, intuitive, fearless of Washington and those he deals with in the area. He is charming all the snakes and moving them in the right direction. This a big risk. RH has many enemies + detractors… Lots of courage and skill… A true character… He is something to watch.”

Richard Holbrooke was born in 1941, approximately twenty years later than Vance and Whitehead, and right on the verge of being a “baby-boomer,” though for sociological purposes he effectively can be lumped in with this generation. He was always a hyper-ambitious figure, having been quoted early-on in his career as outwardly describing himself as a “rising star in the democratic party.” To be fair, that really was the case, as he was able to attach himself to a number of highly influential people in the world of foreign policy and move up the ladder with remarkable ease in Vietnam, concluding with an assignment to co-author parts of the Pentagon Papers under McNamara towards the conclusion of the war. Part of Holbrooke’s success was in his ability to see the bigger picture, and cut through red tape and processes with the help of his unrelenting drive. To think of the Holbrooke approach is to consider someone who has the unlikely combination of being or aspiring to be highly moral and ideological – one of his core tenants was to “first, do no harm” – while also being overtly concerned with self-promotion and his own place in the world (a striking resemblance to another famous baby-boomer, Bill Clinton). Where someone like Vance may have been handed a quite high starting point in society and have been imbued with an obligation to help those who are less fortunate from his comfortable seat up top, Holbrooke was someone who started somewhere in the middle and constantly was clawing for more: more influence, more status, more important posts, simply more.

51 Douglas Davis, interview by author, Haverford College, December 17, 2019.
52 Packer, Our Man, 127.
When he took a post as head of the Peace Corps in Morocco from 1970-72, though he would have appreciated the moral cause of the Peace Corps, he was more concerned with being in a position where he could really influence things. In describing his position at the Peace Corps, he is quoted as saying it was “the least important American agency in a cultural backwater.”

This truly captures the Holbrooke ethos. For however effective and influential he was, there was always more wheeling and dealing to be done, always higher posts to strive for. He truly had a kind of compulsive drive to help others and improve the world, but to make sure that he was the one doing it.

Holbrooke is a character who is entirely distinct from both Vance and Whitehead. Firstly, he is of a different generation and his life-molding developmental moment is Vietnam (rather than WWII), a war that revealed the corruption and failure of American institutions. In terms of spirit, he feels diametrically opposed to someone like Whitehead. Where Whitehead could often conclude a conversation or a negotiation with everyone feeling satisfied with the result – and particularly happy with the negotiator who organized it – Holbrooke, seemingly intentionally, always ensured that someone left feeling like a winner and someone else feeling like they had lost. More often than not the winner would be Holbrooke, himself.

Holbrooke, like Whitehead, rose from a middle class (albeit, educated and upper middle class) background outside of New York, and after attending Brown University joined the Foreign Service at the encouragement of his quasi-surrogate father (his best friend’s father) Dean Rusk, Secretary of State to John F. Kennedy. Holbrooke, who normally was guarded about his upbringing, tells a revealing story of his idealistic biological father, a Jewish Pole, who

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53 Douglas Davis, interview by author.
immigrated to the U.S. in the lead up to WWII. In a speech he gave upon his appointment as Ambassador to the United Nations, Holbrooke speaks of his father taking him as a young child to the construction site of the future U.N. headquarters:

“These buildings, my father said, would become the most important in the world. They would prevent future wars. My father did not live to see how his dream for the U.N. dissolved in the face of the harsh realities of the Cold War… but I never forgot the initial visit and my father’s noble if overly idealistic dream.”

As he choked back the rare tear, Holbrooke was seemingly dismissive of his father’s idealistic dream, yet this is the same dream that Holbrooke himself was imbued with. This captures part of the tension inside of Holbrooke. That, and the relentless pursuit of becoming someone “great,” of being someone who would occupy a place in the history books, is part of the keys to understanding his character.

When we consider Holbrooke, both as a character but also in terms of his “moral profile,” it would be unfair to exclude him from the moral, Wilsonian foreign policy tradition that Vance was squarely a part of. He was truly a morally motivated figure, but this was only part of the story. He was a complicated, sometimes conflicted, multifaceted figure who was equally parts realist and pragmatist as he was morally motivated. His combination of narcissism, idealism, duty, and unrelenting drive made up the unique character that he was. He had Vance’s values with Brzezinski’s approach and policies.

Compared to the generation before, many of whom had this unrelenting faith in liberal institutions of power and in the American way, Holbrooke, who experienced firsthand the lying and power politics of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers, grew up as a foreign policy official in the world of realism and of a kind of hard-nosed, scheming, approach to operations.

Holbrooke is in some ways a tragic figure. He is at the same time intensely narcissistic and fiercely moral. He is not truly Wilsonian, but he is also not fully in the realpolitik camp. He operates in and through many worlds at once. Everything about Holbrooke was exaggerated. Instead of thinking of Holbrooke as floating and moving between these worlds and poles, which implies too much of a sense of fluidity and wishy-washiness, it would be more accurate to say that he was intensely pulled by multiple seemingly disparate camps at once. Regardless of the particular term for this viewpoint, because of his chutzpah, gargantuan self-confidence, and deep knowledge about world affairs – really, too, his emotional insight into how to match the energy of those he was negotiating with in tirelessly pursuing his goals – he was a foreign policy master when it came to dealing with bullies and dictators. He, arguably, was a bully himself. (His memorial service being titled, “The Unquiet American,”56 tells much that you need to know.)

All of these qualities came to fore in his negotiations in Bosnia with Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman, Alija Izetbegović, and – even (or, especially) with – Karadžić and Mladić. Bosnia was truly his moment. He knew how to bring together the structures of the new world order – via NATO, with the Europeans, even with the UN – and combine that with boots-on-the-ground diplomacy on the frontlines. The Dayton Accords, though certainly less august than signing a treaty at Versailles, was an expertly executed moment that truly illustrated the power and promise of these new institutions under proper directorship, and put forth an image to the world of an America that one could really be proud of. He was able to “cajole and bully and outlast the Balkan warlords until they sat down together for the initialing ceremony,” in a way that is hard to imagine anyone else pulling off.57 As George Packer quotes in his biography of

57 Packer, Our Man, 387.
Holbrooke, Holbrooke gave an interview with Martyn Lewis a few years after the Dayton Accords, stating that the way he pulled off such a feat was via, “relentless harassment of the parties into concessions that they were not ready to make unless pressured by the United States with the credible threat of the use of force.” This is the quintessential example of all of Holbrooke’s characteristics coming together in sync. His tireless pursuit of a moral solution was united with his undying desire to be the man at the center of it all, all executed through the use of American power, the institutions of the liberal world order, and via intense realpolitik-esque negotiation. That moment was the moment in which everything worked for Holbrooke. It is a time where it is actually fair to move towards a kind of “Great Man History.”

The Dayton Accords aside, there were plenty of other moments in his life when his intense character traits and his zealous moralism did not come together nearly as cleanly. Acting as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) under President Obama – though he was dealing with a problem that had existed far longer than his short tenure in this position – he ended up being completely ineffectual. He botched meetings with Presidents, was distrusted by the Europeans, and did not carry the same air of aptitude as in Bosnia. Perhaps he was past his time already then, or perhaps his personality and diplomatic style was simply more suited to Eastern European dictators, rather with Middle Eastern Presidents and rebels.

In his personal life, Holbrooke repeatedly threw aside and sabotaged relationships with friends, lovers, and colleagues. In the end, one cannot help but think this trait crippled his chances of reaching his goal of becoming Secretary of State. He had everything in place, the resume, the connections, many of the skills, and the track record of diplomatic success, but his personality – which so often led him to moments of success – also led to his greatest moments of

downfall. George Packer concludes his excellent biography of Holbrooke with the following lines:

“If he had climbed to the height that he and his admiring hoped for, his death would have been followed by honored burial in the fixed and serene place that history reserve for him… But in that unfinished space between, where the souls of the almost great clamor to be recognized, he was still struggling, striving, yearning for more.”59

Holbrooke was someone who was tailor made to handle certain kinds of intensely challenging situations of global crisis. His best moments were his most extreme: negotiating in Bosnia, being in the field as an advisor in Vietnam, co-authoring the Pentagon papers, or bringing large numbers of refugees from Indochina to America after the fall of Saigon. So much of the role of being Secretary of State – or even Deputy Secretary of State – involves much more than acting with undying tenacity in moments of crisis. While he was undeniably a force of nature – and, often, a highly moral one at that – the times in which he stumbled were those many ordinary moments that require a more nuanced, behind-the-scenes, and collaborative approach. These are often the moments that have the most lasting impact in building and sustaining the relationships, and most importantly, the institutions of a more effective and just foreign policy and global, multilateral world community. Clearly different crises require different character and skills. We can begin to see in looking at Holbrooke in contrast to Vance and Whitehead, elements of leadership and character that are needed not only to secure the peace in a moment like the Bosnian genocide, but to nurture the institutions and practices that will sustain the peace over time.

59 Packer, Our Man, 556.
SECTION FOUR: EPILOGUE AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Cyrus Vance, John Whitehead, and Richard Holbrooke brought significantly different character attributes, skills, and perspectives to foreign policy leadership throughout moments of great and recurring crisis. They also shared differing perspectives when it came to the weight they placed on human rights and legal process (Vance being predominant here), the role of global finance in foreign policy (Whitehead strongest here), and the application of power politics and personality (Holbrooke as the heavy weight here). At the same time, and this the first of two critical points I want to conclude with, they all shared a deep set of fundamental beliefs – a type of “enframing” as I alluded to earlier – about America’s exceptional role in a global world linked together by a set of robust multi-national institutions in which countries increasingly act as a world community. They are deep believers and practitioners of this kind of liberal world order in the domains of politics, peace, and global economics. Additionally, they believe that American power, in the end, must be tempered and bound by an ethic of global responsibility. The distinctness of this shared belief system is made even more sharp by the attack on these beliefs that happened in the last twenty years, starting with the second Bush administration and the Iraq War and culminating in the systematic attack on global institutions as carried out by the increasingly powerful and widespread nationalist and populist political movements that we witness today.

The second critical point I want to conclude with is that Vance, Whitehead, and Holbrooke helped to shape and were shaped by a critical and distinct period in our global political-economic history, a period that began in the mid-to late 1970s and perhaps came to a final, dramatic conclusion on September 11, 2001. This is a period in which the post-
Rooseveltian liberal consensus about domestic and foreign policy not only frays but begins to increasingly split apart under the attack and infection of a neoliberal worldview.

To hammer these ideas home and to illustrate even more directly the core characteristics of both this period and these people, let me provide a historical epilogue by looking at Holbrooke, Whitehead, and Vance in relationship to September 11, 2001, a moment of profound crisis, the beginning of the end of the “American Century” that started post-World War II, and in sense a dramatic and tragic ending point to the historical period I have focused on.

As the Twin Towers were struck in Manhattan, Richard Holbrooke drove out to La Guardia airport to catch a flight, which, like all others, was then cancelled. At the behest of one of his assistants, he was shepherded in front of television cameras and became one of the first foreign policy experts to be interviewed on television about the terrorist attacks. As a result, he continued to be one of the more-featured media experts over the following weeks. Feeling some guilt over taking advantage of these events for publicity’s sake while not being officially involved in the U.S. response effort at the time, he sat down to draft his thoughts on the events that were unfolding. I include a relatively long excerpt from George Packer’s analysis of Holbrooke’s resulting thinking, as Holbrooke developed an assessment that encompasses his lifelong approach to foreign policy and diplomacy and brings him back to his core set of principles:

In October, he used a long-planned speech in Holland to think through [his] position. The decade following the Cold War had been an “interwar period,” and now it was over. September 11 was a shock on the scale of June 28, 1914, and December 7, 1941. For a guide to action, Holbrooke turned, as he often did, to the Roosevelt and Truman years. Defeating Al Qaeda would require the same level of broad cooperation among democracies. “Today, we must put all our energy into creating the transatlantic community’s third great alliance, built around NATO, like the ones we established to fight World War II and the Cold War.” … Europe would be essential, and so would the
United Nations and other international organizations, but leadership would have to come again from America. Going at it alone – the default approach of the Bush administration – would fail, because the United States needed not just allies but legitimacy. The war on terror would be an unconventional war – a war of ideas, in part, like the twilight struggle against communism. The worst mistake would be to make it a war against Islam. After overthrowing the Taliban, America should apply in Afghanistan the lessons learned in the Balkans. NATO and its partners around the world would have to pour troops and money to rebuild the country and prevent the return of terrorists.60

This is the quintessential Holbrooke response. He uses the same tactics that he had employed throughout his life: applying force, when necessary, but within the constraints and legitimacy of alliances and institutions; hands on diplomacy and negotiation, employing realpolitik tactics in appropriate doses; defining a moral and ideological backing for action; and turning back to the leaders he admires the most from the past, mirroring aspects of the Wilsonian approach and of the Roosevelt and Truman years. To us looking back, this kind of proposed action sounds novel and unheard-of as a response in the moments immediately after 9/11 because it really was a plan from another time. Holbrooke was, in this moment, still operating within the framing of the previous foreign policy and political economic paradigm, while the Bush II administration was busy forging ahead with a set of post-9/11 tactics and approaches that would set the stage for and define the resulting paradigm of the next decade-plus to come.

Whitehead, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center, was charged by New York State Governor George Pataki with leading the effort to rebuild Manhattan as head of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. This type of role and response encapsulates Whitehead’s character just as directly as the previously mentioned response captured Holbrooke’s. Whitehead, as a great connector and coordinator, was the perfect man for this job. In his memoir, he discusses the extent to which raising funds and ensuring the

60 Packer, Our Man, 428.
rebuilding project became a bipartisan effort were the critical catalysts to an effective post-9/11 effort for a rejuvenated New York. Bush II immediately pledged federal funds to rebuild on a national scale, but Whitehead’s connections with Senators Schumer and Clinton, as Democrats, proved instrumental in ensuring the bill passed the Senate and that funding actually reached New York City. In his memoir, Whitehead, in typical fashion, consistently downplays the extent to which he was able to glide through various circles of influence and pull strings with key decision makers through this process. After describing his long history with Schumer, Clinton, Bloomberg, Pataki, and all the other parties involved, he casually states:

Schumer and Clinton did their work well. And I think that my particular brand of moderate Republicanism helped, too. A few days after my appointment, Congress voted to appropriate $2 billion of the $20 billion to the LMDC. We were in business.  

He then goes on to detail how at this point, a few days into his appointment, he had $2 billion, but “no staff [and] no office space.” In the same low-key and matter-of-course manner, he describes how he had in his Goldman years previously “been a director of a previous company of [John Zuccotti]… the chairman of Brookfield Properties” and was immediately able to secure an office space at One Liberty Plaza, right next door to Ground Zero, fittingly. The rest of his memoir is dedicated to discussing two points: first, his decision-making around the redevelopment of lower Manhattan, and second, a summary of his leadership principles in a chapter he titles “Quiet Leadership.” Both points flow into one another, as it turns out that his handling of the rest of the LMDC project consisted of bringing on people with clear expertise, making sure that senators, congresspeople, governors, and the press, were all briefed and on the same page with the project, and, largely, delegating actual tasks to other people with specific expertise – in the same way as he had handled his time in the State Department. Whitehead’s

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61 Whitehead, A Life in Leadership, 262.
62 Ibid, 261.
chief concern was not to ensure that he was the person making the right decisions, but instead to ensure that the right decisions were made. Whitehead states:

The classic image of an American is someone like Teddy Roosevelt, leading his men up San Juan Hill in a hail of bullets. General MacArthur, Lee Iacocca, Bear Bryant, and Bobby Knight are all in that mold – brash, charismatic, compelling, and seemingly fearless. That has never been my style, though. I’ve always believed in the virtue of what I call quiet leadership. My models are people like President Dwight Eisenhower, General George Marshall, David Rockefeller, Kofi Annan, and Mother Theresa… A good leader also has to have a feel for the prevailing mood of the organization, and to counterbalance it… Another key part of successful leadership is a willingness to delegate tasks to others, rather than insisting on doing too much yourself… finally, I believe good, effective leadership has to have an ethical dimension…”

This kind of statement, aside from the last line about ethics, obviously would never be found in a description of Holbrooke’s approach to foreign policy or to leadership, for example. The point that connects the two figures, though, is exhibited shortly after stating his principles on leadership, as Whitehead comes back with a finding that is right in line with Holbrooke’s approach to handling the response to 9/11:

I was not so much concerned with who to blame for Iraq… But I was worried about our eagerness to take unilateral action without regard for the attitudes of other nations. I worried about our contempt for the United Nations and the fact that we have become so disliked, even hated, all over the world. I must admit disappointment with many of the policies of the current administration, both foreign and domestic… Now that the United States has emerged as the world’s sole superpower – not just in military terms, but in economic and technological terms, and in countless other ways, too – we can pretty much do whatever we like around the world. We have every right to be proud of our accomplishments as a nation, and a relatively young one at that, but we also have every need to be cautious about how we exercise our enormous power… History does not treat even the most vaunted empires kindly. They rise only to fall, often because they develop illusions about their strength… If we use our power infrequently, reluctantly, and benevolently – in the interest of other nations as well as our own – it will last for a far

61 Ibid, 277.
longer time. Shouldn’t we begin to think not only for what’s good for the United States, but of what’s good for the world as a whole?\textsuperscript{64}

I have intentionally included these long excerpts because I want to illustrate just how codified and thought out these approaches to global leadership, foreign policy, and diplomacy were for these individuals. Regardless of the differences in style – whether it be through hardnosed, protagonistic negotiation in the Holbrooke style, or behind the scenes “quiet leadership” in the Whitehead approach – these leaders were united by a very clear set of common values and approaches.

Unfortunately, I cannot conclude this summary with a statement about Cyrus Vance and 9/11 – though we might be able to make an educated guess at what his response would have been – as Vance, by the time of the attacks, had been suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and was nearing the end of his life. It was striking to note, though, that Vance spent the prior decade leading up to the attacks in the 1990s continuing his approach to diplomacy and foreign policy, even while not being in an official position in the U.S. government. Vance throughout his life maintained perhaps the broadest commitment of the three to human rights and democracy in a truly Wilsonian fashion. He spent a large portion of his life after his resignation from his post as Secretary of State as a negotiator and as an advocate for the United Nations via his post as head of the UNA-USA (United Nations Association of the USA) – capping off a career and life of having advocated and fought for the values and image of the U.S. he held dearly.

This picture of each individual, predicated on their responses to moments of crisis, leads us naturally to consider how their various responses differed drastically from the official approach that the U.S. took in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. I want to think about this U.S. response as being a distinct moment of divergence from the previous political economic and

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 279.
foreign policy paradigm. The decisions made by the Bush II administration marked a definite shift from the last 30 (or even 60) years and set the U.S. firmly down a new political economic paradigm on the path to the kind of unfettered global neoliberalism that we see today.

Instead of taking up the kind of “new grand alliance” of global cooperation that Holbrooke advocated for, the Bush administration’s response to 9/11 was to move forwards as a sole marauding global superpower, working with only a small coalition of allies, and without the support of the structures of the (now, previous) global liberal world order. By the time the United States invaded Iraq, we were going at it completely on our own.

This had two clear effects. For one, it undercut the U.S. effort in Iraq and Afghanistan. Regardless of how quickly the U.S. “won” the war against the Taliban, the U.S. occupation and higher-level goals of democracy, safety, and stability, were quickly undermined by the lack of moral and ideological legitimacy, stemming from an absence of unilateral international support. Additionally, this approach undercut the legitimacy of the global institutions which the U.S. had generally ignored. NATO, the United Nations, and all other diplomatic ties were relegated behind the bullheadedness of the United States’ unitary approach. All throughout the Cold War and the rest of the “American Century,” treaties and international institutions were used as structures to make manifest and amplify the strength of Western and global alliances – for when the United States utilizes these institutions and processes, they in turn further codify each institution’s legitimacy. To ignore these structures was not just detrimental to the cause in the Middle East, it also presented an existential challenge to the fundamental structures of the American-led liberal world order itself.

The period from 1979-1995 can be seen as the growing ascension of neoliberalism. A reasonable neo-liberalism, as exemplified by Whitehead, held some promise for sustaining the
institutions of liberal world order. Unfortunately in the period following 9/11 we see, especially in the second Bush Administration, the full opening of the Pandora’s Box of the worst aspects of this kind of policy, both in terms of foreign policy and in terms of economic policy.

The key neoliberal ideas of the primacy of the market, the detaching of the market from government control, deregulation, economic globalization, financialization, the importance of unfettered global corporations, and ultimately, the de-legitimization of government, grew and expanded from the late 1970s onwards, through the “greed is good” 80s-90s, to the point where even Democratic administrations embraced this world view under Clinton (and later, partially, Obama). Everyone – including Vance, Whitehead, and Holbrooke – is swept-up by this wave. We can see this exemplified by the remarkable ease of Holbrooke’s seamless transition to the world of high finance, during Reagan’s presidency, as he became a managing director in investment banking at Lehman Brothers. Though he was not exactly a “rainmaker” for the firm, the extent to which someone like Holbrooke became a valuable commodity for Lehman to have onboard, representing the firm’s global and deeply interwoven positioning, is indicative of the state of world political economy during this period.

We can especially see the themes of neoliberalism in Whitehead’s speeches given during his time as Deputy Secretary of State. Though this is not quite the full unfettered neoliberal approach that we might read in Hayek or Freidman, at times it comes quite close:

A revolution in economic thinking is spreading through the world. People are beginning to understand – or perhaps rediscover – two important realities: First, you can’t distribute wealth if you aren’t producing it. And second, the real source of economic vitality is the energy and creativity of the individual, not the government. It is becoming clear that ‘statist’ or ‘socialist’ economies… do not produce the kind of economic and social well-being that people once expected of them… the economic troubles of the 1970s have helped reawaken everyone to the basic realities: productivity and creativity don’t come from the state but from free economic forces, given free rein to operate…. Renewed
interest across the globe in free enterprise as the surest means of liberating people from poverty and economic deprivation has reinforced a second, closely-related drive toward democracy and political liberation. Economic liberation from the imprisonment that poverty represents, and political liberation from the tyranny and the denial of fundamental human rights go hand in hand. Economic freedom provides the foundation for genuine political freedom… As Americans, we take new pride in our role in the world, increasingly aware of the complexities of the problems we face, but also aware of the tremendous power of our ideals.\(^65\)

Whitehead, however, continued to balance his free-market policies with a liberal commitment to democratic liberation:

Democracy is on the upsurge throughout the world… the counterpart to political freedom is economic freedom. Indeed, political and economic freedom reinforce each other. Economic freedom allows private initiative to flourish, avoids excessive regulation, provides adequate incentives for savings and productive investment, and relies on markets to set prices. Economic freedom unleashes the full force of human initiative, creativity, and energy. They are the springboard for human progress and prosperity… A powerful wave of political and economic freedom is spreading throughout the world. The principles that have always formed the foundation of American society – human freedom, private initiative, an economic system free of government intervention – are increasingly being adopted and embraced by countries all over the world. If we can continue to keep those principles clearly in view as we chart our own course, we have a very bright future ahead of us.\(^66\)

Regardless of the specifics of any individual Whitehead speech, the fundamental tenants of the values and policies he promoted were consistent: economic and political liberation go hand in hand and ought to be encouraged globally. I do want to be sure, though, that in my portrayal of the period from the late 70s to mid-90s, that I am clear that this effort was truly carried out in earnest. There really was a kind of belief and hope that free market economic policies in the increasingly-interconnected world could lead to the “end of history” and to a new level of cooperation and freedom for people everywhere – both politically and economically. While we


can with hindsight see the deep flaws in radical forms of neoliberal economic policy – and in the kind of world order that was ultimately promoted in this period – to those that were living through it there truly was a sense of hope and inspiration about the kind of action being taken on a global scale by the United States.

Eventually, though, we are faced with the kinds of extremes that result from this approach to foreign policy and political economy. The most extreme version of this worldview that eventually emerges is witnessed in the Ayn Rand-inspired Alan Greenspan realm, the so-called great financial and technological “masters of the world” roaming completely free across the world stage. Even if Donald Trump himself is not an Ayn Rand aficionado, he has seemingly filled his cabinet with those who are (Pompeo, Tillerson, etc.). The administration appears to be the manifestation of the logical conclusion to many of the originally well-intentioned policies that were laid-out in the 1980s. We no longer see the Whitehead rhetoric of economic freedom being the “springboard” for political freedom and a catalyst for democracy. We no longer witness a discussion of America’s duty to the rest of the world. Instead, in the almost 20 years that have followed 9/11, we have moved further and further down the path towards a world which largely spurns the institutions and many core values of the former liberal global world order. After the last four years, we now are left only with the shell of former organizational structures after the deliberate hollowing out of most domestic and global public institutions. The consequence being of which being the profoundly dysfunctional global economic and public health system at the hands of a failing global superpower. The distinct ideological move that has taken place feels all-encompassing. The belief system which is not just neoliberal, but almost neo-libertarian or hyper-neoconservative, delegitimizes public institutions absolutely. In the same way that on the domestic front almost all of the federal government has been deeply
affected, there is also an attack on all global institutions that delegitimizes them under the notion that American power can and should be unfettered. The recent scapegoating of the World Health Organization is only the latest example. The concerted effort to attack government of all forms, to privatize in every way possible, and to move the world towards an “every man for themselves” sphere has never been more visible.

As we think now in this oddly compressed (but seemingly unending) moment in time about the past, we can gain a renewed appreciation for the value of global, public institutions and a newfound understanding of the kind of paths we have to take in the future in order to return these institutions to a state of proper operation. Finally, we also have a vastly greater appreciation for the ethos, values, character, and leadership in crisis that Vance, Whitehead, and the best sides of Holbrooke embraced and embodied. We see the deep value of a heartfelt commitment to the greater good of those public servants who saw their role in government, working towards a democratic world community, as a true calling. Such an ethos and such leadership will help us as we move forward from this strange present moment, reflecting on the past, to the future.
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