

Interview Hans J. Morgenthau, Director of the Center for the Study of American Foreign and Military Policy of the University of Chicago

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Hans J. Morgenthau, a renowned political scientist and distinguished writer, fled Nazi Germany and came to the United States in 1937. He began his teaching career at the University of Chicago in 1943, and has directed the university's Center for the Study of American Foreign and Military Policy since 1950.

In perspective, this era was, in Dr. Morgenthau's own opinion, the most important time in his life, and the most pertinent to the present time. "Students were strongly pro or con, due to my influence, on the issues of the day," he said. "No one could be passive at that time. They were either very pro or con on the issues of the time which had to do with power versus some scheme of world improvement or world government."

A prolific writer, Dr. Morgenthau has contributed widely to scholarly periodicals as well as to popular newspapers and magazines. His articles and reviews cover such fields as law, philosophy, history and political science. He is also a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Dr. Morgenthau's major full volume works include "The Purpose of American Politics" (Knopf, 1960), which examines the roots of the American culture, as well as the basis for diplomatic and political decision-making. Revolutionary in purpose, America's religious and ethical foundations are the basis for all foreign-policy decision-making, Morgenthau says. He believes the spirit that originally made America has declined due to the "degeneration of government to a mere instrument of the majority, the excessive role of public opinion and the pressures of conformism."

Throughout his career, Morgenthau has criticized what he views as "an undue American concern with world opinion. This world opinion we pay so much attention to is largely a myth."

Morgenthau expresses pessimism about the future of international relations in "Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace" (Knopf, 1948, 1953, 1960), but his conclusive position, as expressed in the following interview, is that America's first obligation is basically to solve the problems besetting the American nation at this time.

On a gray afternoon on the last day of August, Dr. Morgenthau greeted me in his office, which is part of his home in East Eighties in Manhattan. The walls are lined with books, many of which he wrote himself. A scholarly spirit was all-pervasive. Dr. Morgenthau spoke across his huge desk, and the following interview took place:

Question: Should we pursue the human rights issue at the sacrifice of detente?

Answer: The question of whether or not we should pursue the human rights issue at the sacrifice of detente is a loaded one. Detente is, of course, a condition which has existed for decades, and in the nuclear age, there is no choice to detente. The pursuit of human rights by means of foreign policy is fundamentally mistaken because it will not be a means to alleviate negative conditions wherever human rights are presently impaired. What one actually has is something which looks good and is popular. It has no positive effect on foreign policy.

So I would dispense with the pursuit of human rights through political means and would leave it to informal diplomatic pressure and popular pressure which have proven to be successful in the past.

Question: What do you think of Eurocommunism? Is it a threat to the free world or to Russia?

Answer: A threat to both Russia and the free world, Eurocommunism can lead to Communist dictatorship and it can lead to the absorption of the Communist dictatorships by more moderate socialist parties.

Question: How do you evaluate Carter's "trilateralist" conception of foreign policy?

Answer: Trilateralism is a slogan which has very little meaning. Trilateralism is a condition and fact which has to be recognized. There are three power centers: Washington, D.C., Western Europe and Japan. This is a fact; it is not a question of policy.

Question: An important aspect of Carter's conception of foreign policy affects the use of the breeder-reactor in Japan which generates plutonium, a byproduct of atomic energy. Carter is against this energy because it could create atomic bombs. But actually, it is creating more fuel for Japan. How do you view this problem?

Answer: The non-proliferation policy is going to be unsuccessful in the long run because one state after another -- the U.S., the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, France, Israel and many other nations will ask if nuclear weapons are important and if so, why not for themselves. If they have not acquired nuclear weapons, they will eventually.

Question: Could you comment on the American initiatives working in South Africa, especially Rhodesia?

Answer: You have a problem which can easily be solved by demagogues, but which may not be easily solved through practice, because there are no real colonies in South Africa in the usual sense. White South Africans came hundreds of years ago, and as they settled the country from the beginning, they cannot be called colonists.

On the other hand, the policy towards the black South Africans is so outrageous that it cannot be maintained. Either it will be abolished voluntarily or by force of arms. You have a problem here which you can talk about very easily, but which is very difficult to deal with in practice.

I think it is correct to stand on the side of the black people in their battle with the South African government. We should also recognize that we are facing very difficult moral and political problems in regard to the white minorities which, after all, have acquired a certain position in the course of centuries.

Question: Carter and Young have expressed that it is more a problem of the racism rather than Ideology, but is not Marxism the real issue as seen in such phenomena as "freedom fighters" and weapons from China?

Answer: No, it is not a question of Marxism; but Marxism will eventually be the problem if racism is not solved.

Question: In "The Purpose of American Politics" you write extensively about the purpose of America in the world and her religious and ethical foundations in foreign policy decision-making. What can America do at this time to be an example for the world?

Answer: Basically, America can keep her own house clean, or put it in order. The United States, as it were, can act as an example for other nations to emulate.

We must demonstrate the exact opposite of the Carter policy, which is bringing the defense of human rights to the fore of foreign policy, because this means that you force another nation to do what you want it to do, instead of acting as an example for other nations to emulate. Along with the general corruption of America, there is a profound misunderstanding here concerning America's position to other countries as well as to her own problems.