

THE GAME OF NATIONS, THE AMORALITY OF POWER  
POLITICS. By Miles Copeland. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969) 9

Miles Copeland's book on the life and philosophy of a "crypto-diplomat," consultant to the mighty, and player in the "game of nations" quickly sold out its first printing in England and has prompted varied reactions.

The Arab press and radio and the "anti-imperialist" press and radio elsewhere have noted it, more or less hysterically, as another evidence of the deviousness of American methods and purposes.

C. L. Sulzberger, in the *New York Times* of 10 August 1969, wrote that "the degree of involvement" of the US in the Middle East plots and counterplots and the "specific details" are "now for the first time exposed."

The reviewer for *The Economist* (6-12 September 1969) observed that "looks like this must be 'looked at warily,' because 'one has to wonder if there is, embedded in this elegant compound of reminiscence and didacticism, somewhere something that some higher percentage than Mr. Copeland actually wants exposed to the light of day.'"

Indeed, there are things of which to be wary and things which cause one to wonder, even if one has some knowledge of the events described and long acquaintance with their narrator and interpreter. This review is not intended to set the record straight, a much too lengthy and complicated task, if not an impossible one. It is offered simply as an account and an evaluation of this book from the perspective of an intelligence professional.

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The reviewer must begin by stating that he thinks the book violates the confidences of a great many people who did not and do not look on politics or intelligence as a "game" and did not consider that they were playing games with Miles Copeland. The reviewer is aware that his harsh judgments on the book, which *pari passu* reflect inevitably on the character of the author of so personal a document, may, by some be interpreted as a violation of confidence on his part. He can only say that Copeland, by writing the book, put it and himself up for public discussion, and certainly ought to have known that it would arouse interest and comment by former colleagues.

*The Game of Nations* is a readable, though often confused, and ultimately incomprehensible book. It reflects Miles Copeland's faltered charm and nimbleness of mind. It is also replete with his special brand of jargon which has so often beguiled and disarmed both colleagues and antagonists. Despite the many curious turns of language and thought, the book gives a memorable picture of the world of Miles Copeland.

There has seldom been so revealing a title: *The Game of Nations, The Amoralty of Power Politics*. The author means every word of it. His basic proposition is that international politics is a game in which morality and principle are stupidities and which only the devious and unprincipled can win.

He explains his own role in the game by quoting Edmund Wilson to the effect that F. Scott Fitzgerald was once inspired by Emily Post's *Etiquette* "to write a play wherein the dramatic conflict would arise from stalemates between Gentle People all trying to do the Right Thing. The conflict would only be resolved by the intervention of a cad who would bound on to the scene and set things right by behavior such as is totally outlawed by Mrs. Post." (p. 11). Miles is the cad, and proud of it--or at least so he insists almost but not quite to the last.

The villains of the piece are the "goo-goes," i.e., those "who believe that, even in a country like Syria, Good Government is not only desirable but possible" (p. 43). There are also harsh words for those who follow the "High Road of Statesmanship and Diplomacy," which Copeland informs us was known in the Pentagon and CIA as "HORSESHIT." (p. 126). Toward the end of the book Copeland expresses a growing disillusionment with those who make and influence US policy overseas. He refers to a distressing "distaste for violence" which became evident in the US business community and Government about the time of the Lebanese crisis of 1958 (p. 198) and says that the ability of the US to play the game was curtailed by the fact that "high morality" became the "in thing" in the State Department in the early sixties. (p. 222).

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Throughout the book Copeland harps on the subject of amorality, which he advocates, and morality, which he regards as foolishness. Moralists in the State Department and elsewhere, he explains, are always thwarting the efforts of the hard-headed realists in international politics. However, he says in one of the most revealing passages of the book, we Americans can "sleep more easily at night from knowing that behind this front (of high morality) we are in fact capable of matching the Soviets perfectly for perfidy." We "do indeed believe in honesty," says Copeland, "although not so much as a great moral principle as because, as Benjamin Franklin said, it 'is the best policy.'" (p. 131).

It is presumably to help Americans sleep more soundly that this book has been written, though this reviewer is uncertain whether the overall effect will be more sleep for Americans and their friends and less sleep for their enemies, or the other way around. Any reader who approaches this book cold is going to have a difficult time figuring out who the author is and how to evaluate what he says. His principal problem will be to decide whether the book itself is not a ploy in some game, the limits and rules of which are unknown to him.

It is worth noting briefly here how the author does represent himself. He says he "helped set up CIA." Later he was a "crypto diplomat" in the US mission in Syria involved in activities which included bringing about a change of government. Except for these acknowledgements of an intelligence connection, an effort is made throughout the book to establish the author's identity as a private citizen with "companies" and business interests around the world. This private citizen is, however, said to have been in constant demand to play war games in Washington, and to serve on task forces and special committees set up by Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, and others of their eminence. A number of diplomats—Jefferson Caffrey,<sup>1</sup> for example—are said to have called on him for advice and service from time to time. No mention is made of employment by CIA, and Allen Dulles is referred to only once, care is taken in the mention of names of active intelligence officers; and it is suggested that the CIA men the author worked with were on detached duty. The CIA and CIA attitudes, policies, etc., are, however, referred to with an insider's seeming familiarity, on almost every page.

What does all this add up to? The uninformed reader can assume that the author was a CIA officer who thinks his cover story will hold water, or that—as most of the Arab commentators and the reviewer in *The*

<sup>1</sup>The book, incidentally, is dedicated to Caffrey, Harp, and Wadsworth, three "ambassadors of the old school" whom Copeland apparently believes were gamesters, not moralists, a judgment which these gentlemen might not have considered complimentary.

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*Economist* appear to think—he is a CIA officer whose superiors have some devious purpose in allowing the book to see the light of day. Some uninformed readers have also demonstrated that it is possible to read this book and conclude that Copeland has explained his role exactly as it was, difficult though that seems to this reviewer. The explanation that Copeland wrote this book without official approval or collaboration seems unlikely to occur to many readers.

It is hard to say what the message of this book will be for most uninitiated but believing readers. One of the strongest impressions will probably be of a US Government straight out of science fiction and some of the wilder mail order courses on management. One gets an impression of foreign policy being made and implemented the way P & G makes and sells soap. One sees the Secretary of State and the President waiting with bated breath to find out what the oldest continuing floating war game in Washington has made of some new bit of intelligence before they order that formula so-and-so be fed into the computers, which will then tell them what to do.

There is a considerable amount of circumstantial detail cited to support this picture of the government. The first chapter begins with a colorful account of a Games Center in operation in Washington which fed its results directly into the policy-making process. There is also an account of a team set up to fight the Cold War which developed intelligence assets, decided that since it had them they ought to be used, and then, by a process of elimination, decided on Syria as the best available practice ground (pp. 35-36). The same formula is repeated in account of a highly secret committee of specialists set up in 1951 by Dean Acheson to study the Arab world, which "when we thought ourselves ready for a major operation," decided that "Egypt was the place to start." (pp. 48-49).

Another strong impression on the reader is certain to be made by Copeland's solemn lucubrations on his political philosophy and his system for successful gamesmanship in a very restricted area of international politics. At the end of the first chapter he says he wants to "dispel any remaining notion that this is a book about Nasser. Rather it is a case history—hopefully teaching lessons of general applicability—of relations between the United States and a 'non-Western' leader of a particular kind which is likely to become increasingly prominent in international relations of the future. Although I have devoted much space to Nasser, I have tried to concentrate on aspects of his behavior which might be expected of any Afro-Asian leader, to the extent that he is the Nasser type. . . ." (pp. 26-27).

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It is just possible that if a reader discovered another non-Western leader who was enough of the Nasser type to suit Copeland's definition he might find something in the book that would further application, but only just.

Urgent insistence is made throughout the book that the reader is being given the most succinct and practical instructions for playing the game of nations. Rules of the game appear at the chapter heads. For example: "The first prerequisite for winning the game is to know that you're in on it; if you can't change the board, change the players... but settle for a true player, not a pawn; the strategy of the weak player is to play off the strong players against one another..." and so on. When Chairman Mao produced these sayings, or whether it was Chairman Mao or another, is not made clear, but the message to the reader is obviously intended to be that this is choice stuff and, more impressive, that this kind of stuff is taken seriously at high levels in Washington.

It is possible that a few readers will react as John Crosby did in his column in the *London Observer* (21 December 1969). His comment was: "I have always felt strongly that you can't beat a man at tennis by tying your shoelaces at crucial points... I can't escape the conviction that if you play war... you are going to lose." They may, however, make this judgment on the validity of Copeland's approach to international politics and still, as Crosby apparently does, accept his picture of the way things are done in the US Government as an accurate one.

Miles Copeland's book will make a lot of serious and devoted US Government servants wince, particularly those who are already nervous about this kind of thing making headway in Washington. It will frighten a lot of outsiders, friends of the US and of the US Government, who have on occasion suspected that things inside the Government might be as weird as Copeland says they are.

On the other hand there may be some little consolation in the knowledge that Copeland's book is going to confuse the dickens out of the real enemies of the US. They will make some obvious propaganda use of it, but surely most of them will hold back, fearing that they are being put on, that some ingenious trap has been laid for them.

What must the professional intelligence officer's judgment on this book be? He cannot ignore the fact that the book is not an entirely fanciful description of Miles Copeland's world. One of the most interesting things about the book is Miles' acknowledgement of disillusion with the whole business of the intelligence game as he has played it.

One is reminded of something he says Nasser said to him: "The genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves, only

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complicated stupid moves. . . ." (p. 105). In the reviewer's opinion he was saying this to the right man. Not that Copeland isn't a man with a great natural talent for dealing with people, but, as *The Game of Nations* shows, he has tried to rationalize and solemnize his role and his formulae for international politics to the point that they become exactly as Nasser said, a complicated nonsense. Miles Copeland has dealt a mortal blow to the theory that gamesmanship is the key to success in international politics. And a good thing, too. For his own sake, and for the sake of those of his former associates who are still active intelligence officers, however, it would have been better if he had not written this book.