

Richard K. Betts

U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:
LENSES AND LANDMARKS

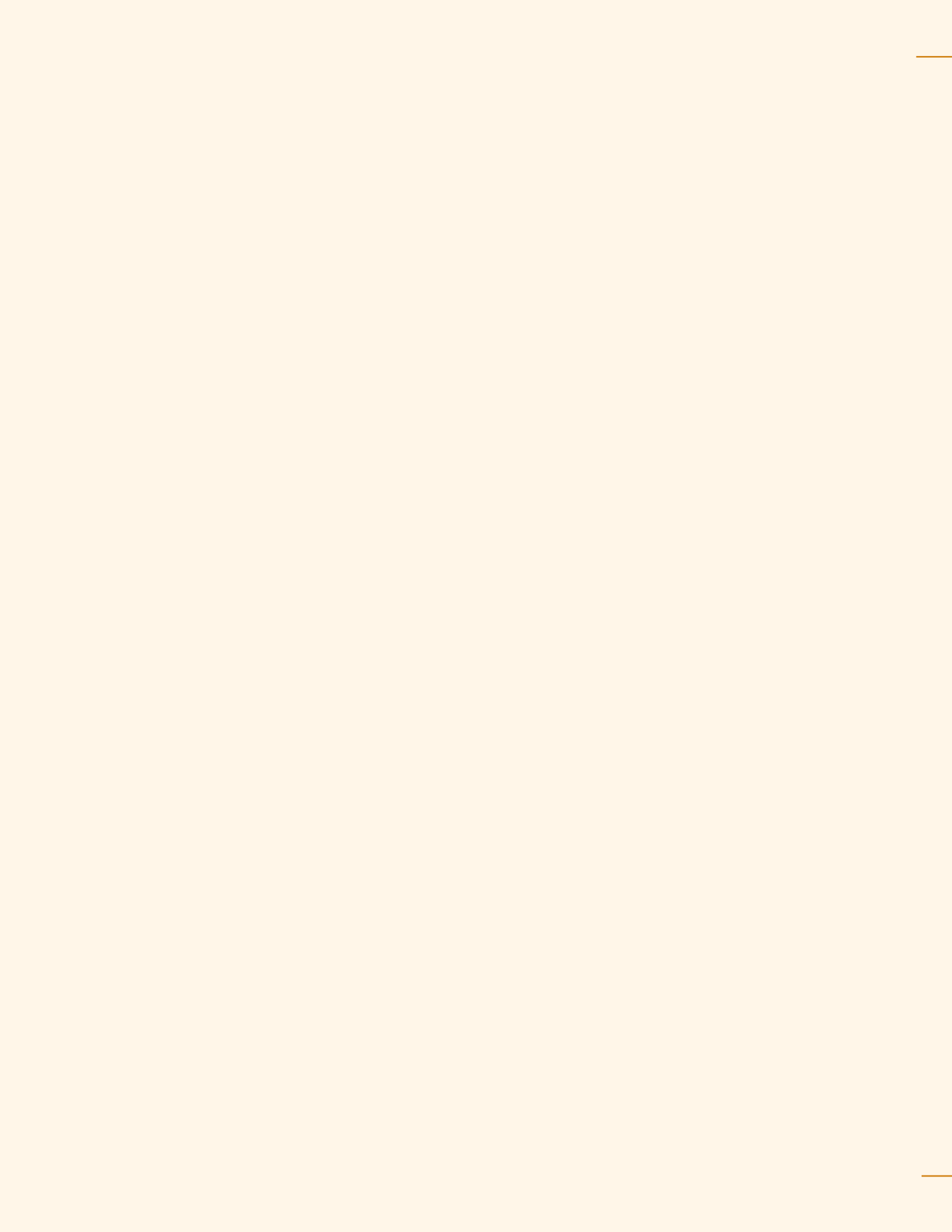


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U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks

by Richard K. Betts

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Strategy Landmarks

1944	<i>Bretton Woods</i>	World Order: Economic Underpinnings
1947	<i>Truman Doctrine</i>	Containment: Policy Commitment
	<i>Marshall Plan</i>	Containment: Economic Instruments
	<i>NSC 4/A</i>	Containment: Covert Political Instruments
1949	<i>North Atlantic Treaty (NATO)</i>	Containment: Military Commitment
1950	<i>NSC-68</i>	Containment: Grand Strategy
1951	<i>U.S.-Japan Peace Treaty</i>	Intra-Alliance Containment
1952	<i>NATO Lisbon Conference</i>	Conventional Defense: Dreams
1953	<i>NSC 162/2</i>	“The New Look”
1954	<i>NATO MC 48</i>	The New Look on the Ground
	<i>Manila Pact/SEATO</i>	“Pactomania”
1957	<i>NATO MC 14/2</i>	Prelude to Flexible Response
1961	<i>Berlin Contingency Planning</i>	Flexible Response: Nightmares
	<i>NSAM 2</i>	Counterinsurgency
1962	<i>McNamara Ann Arbor Speech</i>	Nuclear Counterforce
	<i>McNamara Athens Speech</i>	Dissembling to Allies
	<i>DoD General Purpose Forces Study</i>	“2 _ Wars:” Apex of Military Ambitions
1963	<i>“Assured Destruction” DPM</i>	Condition vs. Strategy
1967	<i>NATO MC 14/3</i>	Flexible Response: Diplomatic Blessing
1969	<i>Nixon Doctrine</i>	“1 _ Wars”: Orderly Retreat
1972	<i>Shanghai Communiqué</i>	Rebalancing Power
	<i>ABM Treaty</i>	Codifying Strategic Contradiction
1977	<i>PD-18</i>	Petroleum and a New Front: Pre-Strategy
1978	<i>PD-30</i>	World Order: Human Rights
1980	<i>PD-59</i>	Reinvigorating Flexible Response
1982	<i>Reagan Doctrine</i>	Toward Rollback
1983	<i>SDI</i>	Strategic Dreams vs. Realistic Irrationality
1992	<i>Draft Defense Planning Guidance</i>	Strategy for Primacy
1994	<i>NSSUS, “Engagement and Enlargement”</i>	Primacy and World Order Arm in Arm
2002	<i>NSSUS, “Preemption”</i>	Primacy in Your Face

U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks

For historians it is self-evident that we cannot know where we are going unless we understand where we have come from. Since the Cold War, however, many assume that economic globalization, ideological westernization, and military unipolarity create such a radically different world that national security strategy should have little to learn from the second half of the 20th century. In some respects this is true, but not many. Especially when rhetorical packaging is stripped away, the trajectory of American strategy has changed less in the past fifteen years than many would have expected. The Princeton Project's mission of grounding security policy in sound theory and analysis best starts with an understanding of the foundation built in the decades after World War II.

Which elements of national security strategy have mattered most since the United States took the international center stage sixty years ago? Identifying the landmarks depends on the lenses through which one looks, and the policy objectives by which strategic accomplishments or failures are measured. There has been remarkable agreement in American politics on general goals, but much less agreement on which instruments of strategy should take priority. While convergence on similar policies often makes the under-

lying rationales irrelevant, failures in policy tend to bring the distinctions to the surface with disruptive results.

Over the past half-century foreign policy elites have argued about priorities and instruments of national security strategy, some focusing entirely on the dimension of military power, others on economic and diplomatic cooperation. Sharp disagreements have often broken out about specific program decisions and about the process and style of grand strategy. Since most of politics takes place at the margins of established relations, these differences are important. At the level of principal objectives, however, real disagreements have seldom been large or long lasting. With brief exceptions, those concerned above all with marshalling military power against adversaries have valued multilateral cooperation and integration of the western alliance, because such arrangements would maximize western power and military efficiency. With brief exceptions, those whose prime concern was the inner political solidarity of the western alliance have still sought American freedom of action. When differences in diplomatic style, important as they are, are put aside, both approaches have usually aimed to come out in the same place. Rather than seeing a choice between nationalism and

internationalism, makers of national security strategy have usually conflated them, assuming a natural identity of interest between Americans and other right thinking societies. Even to liberals, multilateralism has usually been a vehicle for American dominance (rationalized as leadership), not an alternative to it. Whenever a choice did emerge between asserting American aims and deferring to allied preferences, the former almost always took precedence.

In the formative period of the Cold War Eisenhower promoted European integration as a means toward replacing bipolarity with two western power blocs to counter the Communist East, allowing the United States to reduce its military burden. This aim was abandoned after 1960 as Kennedy and his successors promoted integration solidly overlaid by American leadership, which was in turn cemented by permanent military presence in Europe. When bipolarity ended the USA remained thoroughly engaged in the old western alliance, now touted by many as the vanguard of political globalization. Again, however, this was under the assumption that it would be multilateralism under American tutelage, with American primacy uncompromised.

To tell this story the following pages survey: conceptual underpinnings of national security strategy; landmarks in the most general level, “grand strategy;” problems in translating grand strategy into workable programs at the operational level; the net importance of unilateral as opposed to multilateral approaches to strategy; and the ques-

tion of how to measure success or failure in strategy. To illustrate conceptual issues as well as to lay out crucial points in history, each section will feature a different aspect of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the most important and enduring vehicle of American strategy.

I. Concepts of Security and Instruments of Strategy

After the 1940s there was a basic consensus on two overarching objectives of national security policy: (1) development of a liberal political and economic world order, and (2) containment and deterrence of communist power. Two other objectives became important in more recent times: (3) assured access to Middle Eastern oil, and (4) attrition of terrorists with “global reach.” The first of these objectives regularly evokes rhetorical endorsement by all and engages the passions of many in the elites who pay attention to foreign affairs. In actual strategy, however, it has proven to be significant only when its requirements have been congruent with those of the capacity for force and coercion.

The reverse is not true; force and coercion have sometimes been used in ways inconsistent with liberal visions. Normatively, the mission of cooperative world order is endorsed by all. Empirically, it does not take precedence over the development and assertion of American national power, and this remains curiously as true in the 21st century as in the Cold War. The requiem for national sovereignty declared by many theorists of globalization is premature. In national securi-

ty, if not in other aspects of foreign policy, American policymakers have promoted cooperative world order as long as the order does things our way.

The Power of Order or the Order of Power?

For most of the Cold War the difference between world order and other security objectives did not matter. The diffuse objectives were complementary, the strategies for pursuing them were simply added together, and debates were about secondary issues rather than fundamental aims.

Isolationists and Marxists were pushed to the fringes, conservatives and liberals were all internationalists, and the importance of alliances to the anti-communist cause suppressed tension between nationalism and multilateralism.

Partisans argued about which aims should get more attention at the margin and about the relative importance of economic, political, and military means for building security, but with the exception of the 1970s, not about fundamental aims.

Beneath the unifying consensus, however, lay a split in conceptions of what national security is about. One conception is comprehensive, liberal, cosmopolitan, and oriented to developing international institutions and mechanisms of cooperation. The other conception is narrow,

focused, conservative, nationalist, and oriented to developing military power and leverage against adversaries.¹ (Full disclosure: my own views are eclectic, but closer to the narrow conception.)

The comprehensive view accepts military power as a necessity, but sees it as reduced in importance in recent times, and buries it among a raft of other interests such as economic prosperity, human rights, and environmental health that are identified as elements of security.² “Global governance” (in effect, the political globalization of liberalism) provides a better guarantee of American safety than does assertion of sovereign prerogatives; the most important strategies are those that maximize economic and political cooperation; and military force is best used in a system of collective security. This view most often coincides with confidence that the USA has ample military security. At least for most of the time since the British burned the White House this notion has been quite reasonable, given the blessing of huge ocean moats to east and west and weak neighbors to north and south. In this view, the main function of the U.S. military should be, in effect, *policing* against breaches of international law or human rights. Strenuous cultivation of capability to wage large-scale *war*, the traditional function of military power, shows

¹ The different lenses both have a long tradition and were evident before the outbreak of the Cold War. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. discussed the clashing views as “universalist,” based on international organization, and “spheres of influence,” based on balance of power. Schlesinger, “Origins of the Cold War,” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (October 1967), pp. 26, 36-38.

² The table of contents to *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, July 1994) includes fourteen entries for non-military interests— for example, “The Environment,” “Partnership with Business and Labor,” “Promoting Sustainable Development Abroad,” or “Promoting Democracy”— as many as for traditional security concerns like “Maintaining a Strong Defense Capability,” “Combatting Terrorism,” or “Strong Intelligence Capabilities.” On the alleged “Minor Role of Military Force” see Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), pp. 27-29. Keohane and Nye modified this argument in the “Afterword” to second and third editions in 1989 and 2001.

Old Thinking rooted in obsolete fixation on the balance of power among states, and risks being wasteful or counterproductive.

To many who concentrate on the increased integration of the world economy, the strictly *national* dimension of security, and the component of military power, became progressively less important. Such assumptions have led analysts to talk past the traditional standards by which security policies are defined and evaluated. Few of those rooted in the power politics perspective pay more than glancing attention to diplomatic institutions for cooperation such as the UN, OSCE, OAS, or ASEAN, if they do not overlook them altogether. Global governance enthusiasts, in contrast, do not focus on specifically *national* security. For example John Ruggie's *Winning the Peace* has two chapters on security policy, entitled "Competitive Security" and "Cooperative Security." In reality, however, both chapters are about cooperative security ideas; the one that allegedly addresses "competitive" security ignores the issues and institutions that were central to national strategic concerns and decision-making. That chapter says virtually nothing about military arrangements for deterrence and defense, nuclear strategy, war plans, or the Department of Defense, Strategic Air Command, or Central Intelligence Agency. Half of the chapter is about the United Nations, and the discussion of NATO is entirely about its political construction, not the development of its military functions.³

"Security," unmodified by the adjective "national," does indeed have a broad meaning.⁴ In the narrow view, however, national security properly conceived cannot be the same as *foreign policy*, which is about everything of interest to the USA in the outside world. National security is *part* of foreign policy, the part focused on preserving sovereignty and protecting the country from conquest, destruction, or coercion. The crucial ingredient in strategy is military power. This view in no way denies the importance of political cooperation with other countries or of economic interdependence, it just sees them as separate arenas, or as subordinate elements of strategy. International institutions and cooperation are most valuable to the extent that they support American interests and facilitate the marshalling and use of power. Traditionalists are unmoved by arguments that modern interdependence makes the priority of sovereignty passé, because "when the crunch comes, states remake the rules by which other actors operate," and "to be sovereign and to be dependent are not contradictory conditions." Rather, "To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems."⁵

Nor should national security be conflated with *international* security. The interest of the American nation may or may not coincide with the security of other nations, desirable as others' security may be. This distinction is not accepted

³ John Gerard Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), chaps. 3, 4.

⁴ See David A. Baldwin, "The Concept of Security," *Review of International Studies* 23 (1997).

⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 94, 96.

in the mainstream of the foreign policy elite, and has seldom been reflected in policy over the past 60 years, but it is well understood by the large segments of the general public that Walter Russell Mead dubs “Jeffersonian” and “Jacksonian.”⁶ Indeed, the mass public tends to be more unapologetically nationalistic than the attentive foreign policy elite.⁷ Since World War II voters have never selected a presidential candidate who was clearly less nationalistic than his opponent, with the single exception of 1964, when Lyndon Johnson presented himself as judiciously muscular in contrast to a Barry Goldwater portrayed as a reckless yahoo.

Policy and strategy are made by elites, however, and across the political spectrum American elites do tend to conflate U.S. national security with international security. For liberals this means that what is good for the world is good for the United States, and for conservatives it means that what is good for the United States is good for the world. This is not merely a cute nuance of difference, but as long as the policy implied is the same, the difference in nuance is of interest only to theorists. The conflation of national interest and international order flows from the economic conceptions and political culture that define American identity. As Louis Hartz wrote, liberalism (in the classical sense) so thoroughly suffuses our society that Americans do not even recognize it as an ideology, rather than the self-evident natural order of things.⁸ *As long as the*

costs of conflation are low this assumed identification is logical and popular. On the infrequent occasions when costs rise to unexpected levels—as, for example, in the 1983 intervention in Beirut or the 1993 intervention in Somalia—the difference between national interest and interest in international law and order explodes into view.

The Enduring Priority of Military Instruments

Strategy is not a policy objective. It is a *plan* for deploying capabilities to *achieve* policy objectives. Strategies are to objectives what means are to ends. Pundits often confuse the difference, and speak of objectives and strategies interchangeably. They focus on the aspirations of strategy more than on the actions required to achieve them, on strategy in theory more than in practice. Even political leaders usually stop short of following strategic decisions through to the end, and concentrate on charting a course they expect minions to find ways to implement.

Strategy in *theory* is whatever the government’s political leaders believe it to be, which is usually something very general if not vague. This is often called grand strategy. Strategy in *practice* is what the government’s professional diplomats, soldiers, and intelligence agents actually produce in specific programs, plans, and operations. As in most of life, the levels of theory and practice in strategy are not always aligned.

⁶ Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence* (New York: Knopf, 2001), chaps. 2, 6, 7.

⁷ See William Schneider, “Public Opinion: The Beginning of Ideology?” *Foreign Policy* no. 17 (Winter 1974-1975).

⁸ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955).

Politicians and their principal lieutenants concentrate on grand strategy, general ideas for coordinating resources, alliances, and operations in a general vision. Political leaders also have a natural stake in pleasing many constituencies, so official declarations err on the side of inclusiveness. The annual report mandated by Congress, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, has sometimes been a Christmas tree on which every interest group hangs its foreign policy concerns. This report rarely says much that really illuminates national security strategy, although it sometimes provides a useful bumper-sticker version of official strategy—for instance, “engagement and enlargement” for Clinton, and “preemption” (a misnomer) for Bush the Younger.

8

The driver’s manual version of strategy, for where the rubber meets the road, comes closer to the level of analysis in Clausewitz’s conception, which defines strategy as “the use of engagements for the object of the war.”⁹ Strategy at this level translates aspirations into specific concrete initiatives, but in practice translation is sometimes garbled. Worse, operational imperatives may take on a life of their own and produce an actual strategy different from what political leaders intend. What follows will discuss the problems at both levels, starting with grand strategy, then illustrating problems of translation into operational plans.

What instruments of policy are most important for security? The order of strategic priorities depends on what arena is judged to be the center ring. The comprehensive view of security emphasizes the economic realm and the narrow view emphasizes the military. Thus observers concerned with war and deterrence and those who focused on political economy saw the age of American hegemony at different ends of the Cold War. In the focused narrow view, the international structure of the late 20th century was bipolar. Specialists in strategic studies never dreamed of using the word hegemony to describe the American global position (as distinct from in the First World alone) until the collapse of the Soviet pole. High politics and strategy were about deterring adversaries and influencing neutrals who might tilt either way in the global struggle between opposed socio-economic systems. This meant concentrating strategically on the Second and Third Worlds, which had most of the world’s people, land, and natural resources. American economic power was most important for generating political influence, and especially, military capability.

The comprehensive view, in contrast, fastens on relations with allies: the countries of the First World that have most of the world’s money. In this view the United States had global hegemony in the earlier period because of its economic dominance, and that hegemony eroded as other economies developed after World War II.

⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 128 (emphasis deleted).

Military power was of interest not as the essential concern of foreign policy but as a background condition, shielding the economic and political development that was the important story.¹⁰ Yet although economic and political instruments of strategy have been consistently important, and were at the forefront in the 1940s, for most of the time planning and managing force and coercion have been at the center of national security policymaking. Surprisingly, this has still proved true after the Cold War. What demonstrates the persistent dominance of military concerns?

First, government structure. The National Security Act of 1947, the foundation that still organizes government for this subject, established new institutions focused primarily on dealing with the danger of war (the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Council). Periodic reorganizations of these institutions—for example, the Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1958, the Goldwater-Nichols bill of 1986, establishment of the Department of Homeland Security after September 11th, and recent moves to reorganize the intelligence community—have always been a greater focus of attention and concern than changes in the apparatus of international economic policymaking.

Second, resource allocation. Defense and intelligence budgets are where the overwhelming bulk of national resources for foreign affairs have gone: well over \$20 *trillion* since World War II, in today's dollars—a figure that makes expenditures for foreign development assistance, the United Nations, public diplomacy, or other non-military aspects of foreign policy appear trivial.

Third, rules of engagement. In the realm of security, the United States tends to conform law to policy rather than the reverse. That is, interpretations of law are made to accord with strategic imperatives and preferred instruments, or, when deemed necessary, laws other than those of the USA itself are simply disregarded. This is not just reflected in recent issues having to do with compromises of the Geneva Conventions or legal rationalizations for pushing the envelope in interrogation of prisoners in Guantanamo or Iraq, but in the institutionalization of intelligence operations. Although intelligence collection and covert political intervention throughout the past half-century have followed U.S. law with few exceptions, they regularly violate the laws of other countries through operations in those countries.¹¹

Fourth, the regular refocusing prompted by crises. Challenges to strategic emphasis on mili-

¹⁰ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 136-137.

¹¹ On intelligence activities that skirted or violated U.S. law see U.S. Senate Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report*, Book II: *Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans* (pp. 96-104, 139-165) and Book III: *Supplementary Detailed Staff reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976. The main case of a covert operation abroad that violated U.S. law was the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s. David Fagelson argues that covert action may be unconstitutional because Congress does not appropriate funds to the CIA in the constitutionally stipulated manner: "The Constitution and National Security: Covert Action in the Age of Intelligence Oversight," *Journal of Law and Politics* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1989), p. 294. This interpretation has not been endorsed by the courts.

tary power usually wear longer in rhetoric than in actual strategy. Liberal views of security priorities have been periodically ascendant, only to be regularly shoved aside by forcible jolts—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq’s conquest of Kuwait, Al Qaeda’s assault on the Twin Towers and Pentagon. “In placid times, statesmen and commentators employ the rich vocabulary of clichés that cluster around the notion of global interdependence. Like a flash of lightning, crises reveal the landscape’s real features.”¹²

The persistent importance of the military dimension does not just result from periodic jolts.

Americans evidently *like* having and using military power, even when the need for it plummets.

The pace of high defense spending continues today long after what originally drove it (the Soviet Union’s 175 divisions and 40,000 nuclear weapons) ceased to be a threat, and when counters to the new principal threat (secretive terrorist groups) lie more in intelligence and unconventional special operations than in regular military forces. Today the USA spends almost four percent of GNP on defense. This is less than during the Cold War, but it yields an absolute amount that is close to half of all military spending in the world, and which is more than five times the military budgets of all potential enemies combined.

Most pertinently, the United States has fought twice as many wars in the decade and a half since

the Cold War ended as it did during the Cold War’s four decades. Of course the wars over Kuwait, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq were far smaller than the wars in Korea or in Vietnam. This pattern shows that force remains a strategy of choice, far from a last resort, at least as long as it is cheap. It is also a reminder that conservatives and liberals can often converge on the same strategic choice for different reasons. For example, multilateralism was important in both approaches. For realists, western integration was a political means to a military end, and for liberals, a military means to a political end. (*More on this in part IV, below.*) The emphasis on international integration in the broad view of security was far more pronounced in the economic than in the military area. It was entirely absent, however, in the third major arena of security policy: intelligence operations.

The survey that follows begins with important strategic initiatives in the economic and political realms, and then concentrates on the military dimension of strategy. At the level of grand strategy the story is fairly straightforward, as promulgation of the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, NATO, rapprochement with China, arms control with the Soviet Union, or NATO expansion were clear commitments to pursue clear goals. Grand strategy does not show much, however, about what strategy actually accomplishes. When we move to more specific strategic initiatives meant to give practical force to lofty changes of direc-

¹² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 152.

tion, the story becomes more complicated. Alliance diplomacy, domestic politics, bureaucratic processes, and civil-military relations can confuse the translation of general strategic concepts into actual plans and capabilities. In real life the glittering rhetoric of bold strategic innovation often overlays confusion, hesitancy, inertia, and incoherence. A closer look at the evolution of the strategy of “flexible response” will serve as a reminder to beware of the prevalent tendency to conflate objectives with actual strategy, and strategic principles with operational practice.

II. Cold War Milestones

Throughout the Cold War economic and political instruments were secondary elements in U.S. strategy: financial aid to buttress pro-western governments in the Third World, and information programs to combat the appeal of communist ideology. In the very earliest stage of the Cold War, however, before the war scare of 1948, economic and political approaches dominated grand strategy. For those who identified U.S. national security with liberal world order, the founding acts and longest lasting initiatives occurred even before the Cold War. The Bretton Woods conference of 1944 formed new economic institutions—the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—to create stable exchange rates and more international trade,

while the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 aimed to preserve peace politically through a quasi-collective security system based on a concert of great powers. For those focused on the balance of power, the prime economic initiative was the Marshall Plan, which worked to fortify allies by stabilizing their societies. The prime political strategy was not reliance on collective security or overt propaganda, but the girding of collective defense capabilities and exploitation of covert political interventions in countries beset by strong communist movements.¹³

Grand Strategy

After U.S. policy toward the USSR hardened in 1946 national security planners were uncertain about whether the Soviet threat was primarily military or ideological. In early 1947 the Truman Doctrine launched the United States toward support of Greece and Turkey against internal and external communist challenges. The Marshall Plan followed, supplying American capital for the revitalization of European economies. The initiative was so significant that the new Economic Cooperation Administration that managed the program became virtually “a second State Department.”¹⁴ Winston Churchill called the Marshall Plan “the most unsordid act in history.” But the convergence of moral and material interests in a Cold War that combined ideological and military threats in the same enemy made

¹³ On the difference between collective security and collective defense (alliance) see G.F. Hudson, “Collective Security and Military Alliances,” in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 176-178; Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), chap. 12; Richard K. Betts, “Systems for Peace or Causes of War? Collective Security, Arms Control, and the New Europe,” *International Security* 17, no. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 9-10, 15-20.

¹⁴ Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 163. See also Hadley Arkes, *Bureaucracy, the Marshall Plan, and the National Interest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 84-88.

the humanitarian motive no more potent than the selfish one. One criticism of the Marshall Plan was, “You can’t fight communism with dollars.” But that was exactly what it did. The State Department pushed postwar plans for a liberal international economic system in order to avoid repeating the history of the interwar period.¹⁵ The Marshall Plan was also the start of U.S. efforts to promote European unity. As George Kennan, head of the State Department Policy Planning Staff at the time, wrote, “By insisting on a joint approach” of the European recipients of aid, “we hoped to force the Europeans to begin to think like Europeans, and not like nationalists.”¹⁶

12 If as Robert Pollard says, “the key element” of policy in the early Cold War was “reliance upon economic power to achieve strategic aims,” this followed a prime rule of strategy in the broadest sense: rely on comparative advantage, fight on favorable terms. But the Marshall Plan was followed by decades in which military instruments dominated national security strategy. The economic arena was central only temporarily in 1947 because of the expectation, soon dashed, that a Soviet military threat was not imminent and could be checked by the American atomic monopoly.¹⁷

The most novel departure in strategy before the full militarization of the Cold War was the plan to influence internal political developments in foreign countries by clandestine means. In December 1947 the National Security Council (NSC) approved the document known as NSC 4/A, the first formal plan for American covert psychological operations, just as the NSC was advising the President on how to oppose the influence of the Italian Communist Party. Of course the incompatibility of this instrument with international norms was well recognized, as indicated by government departments’ reluctance to give it a home. George Kennan sought State Department control over covert operations, but Secretary of State George Marshall vetoed that arrangement. Director of Central Intelligence Roscoe Hillenkoetter also resisted, but responsibility for the function became vested in the new Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Half a year later the NSC approved NSC 10/2 which went beyond the endorsement of secret propaganda to political and economic intervention: funding parties in foreign elections, economic warfare, and paramilitary assistance to underground movements inside the communist bloc.¹⁸ Thus began the history of covert action as a staple of strategy, a compromise option between sending the marines or doing nothing

¹⁵ Joseph M. Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks* (New York: Viking, 1955), pp. 6-11, 59-76, 92-94; quotations on pp. 177, 256.

¹⁶ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1967), p. 337. This was because Kennan, although known as a consummate realist, had a lifelong distaste for the military, and did not understand the compelling military need to integrate the alliance in peacetime.

¹⁷ Robert A. Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 244; Walter Millis, ed., with the collaboration of E.S. Duffield, *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), pp. 350-351. On strategic comparative advantage see Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, 3d Edition (London: Cass, 2001), p. 114.

¹⁸ Arthur B. Darling, *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Instrument of Government*, to 1950 (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 245-265 (this is the declassified publication of the CIA’s official history originally compiled in 1953); U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report*, Book IV: *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Foreign Aid and Military Intelligence*, “History of the Central Intelligence Agency,” 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, pp. 25-31; Gregory Trevorton, *Covert Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 20-21, 34-36.

in response to unfriendly political forces abroad. (The special secrecy attached to this instrument keeps the declassification of records on covert projects spotty, significantly limiting how much of the history of national security strategy can be reliably written.)

The war scare of 1948, from the blockade of Berlin and the coup in Czechoslovakia, as well as the Soviet detonation of a nuclear weapon in 1949, ended confidence that the Soviet offensive would be ideological rather than military. 1949 brought the most significant and enduring strategic innovation of the Cold War: the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO superseded the 1948 Brussels Treaty of alliance among Britain, France, and the Benelux countries, a puny European-only coalition for containment, and committed the United States by treaty for the first time in peacetime history to the defense of Western Europe.¹⁹

The automaticity of American commitment via Article 5 was the main point of the North Atlantic Treaty, and the most controversial. Wary Senators seized on Article 11's assurance that treaty provisions would be implemented by the parties "in accordance with their respective constitutional processes" as an escape hatch.²⁰ Often forgotten in later years, Article 11 is a reminder that the United States did not bind itself irrevocably.

In the beginning, NATO remained a traditional "guaranty pact," an American promise to come into the fray in the event of war. Only later did it become a uniquely integrated organization with U.S. forces deployed in strength on the front line before war, and an articulated multinational command structure functioning in peacetime.²¹ As indicated below, this happened less for the political reasons that liberals emphasize than for military reasons, and for political reasons quite unfamiliar to those who celebrate the Atlantic union today.

Evolution into a genuinely institutionalized alliance, as distinct from traditional ad hoc or transient compacts, was what made NATO a thoroughly original innovation in strategy. To get to that unprecedented degree of transnational military institutionalization and peacetime mobilization required a novel idea for grand strategy, and a jolt to give the idea legs. Again the idea came from State's Policy Planning Staff, this time under Paul Nitze, in the document known as NSC-68. The jolt was provided by the Korean War. When Nitze's predecessor George Kennan authored the "X" article that coined the term containment, he had in mind not military but political containment.²² Nitze's paper left that notion in the dust, and called for a new departure in American history: the fielding of large forces for peacetime readiness, instead of the traditional reliance on mobilization after the out-

¹⁹ Earlier verbal commitments were given by James Byrnes in Stuttgart in 1946 and by Truman and Marshall in 1948.

²⁰ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 280.

²¹ Robert E. Osgood, *NATO: The Entangling Alliance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 32.

²² Kennan even opposed establishing NATO as a multilateral alliance: *Memoirs: 1925-1950*, pp. 358, 407-412.

break of war.²³ This focused the issue: “Could a democracy arm to deter or could it only arm to respond?”²⁴ The actual text of NSC 68, however, was mostly rhetoric, and President Truman reacted by asking for more information on the programs and costs implied by the paper. Given the need to increase taxes, and the pressure on other public spending programs that major growth in military budgets would impose, there was no formal decision to forge ahead with NSC-68’s recommendations. Then the North Korean attack two months after submission of the paper galvanized the government. The fact that NSC-68 existed lent direction and discipline to the arms buildup, concentrating effort in NATO capabilities and nuclear striking forces, rather than in the war in Korea.²⁵

14 It was in this context that NATO developed its unprecedented integrated multinational command structure. This served two purposes. First, the efficient pooling of military power to provide readiness against what was assumed to be overwhelming Soviet superiority in conventional forces, an aim that endured to the end of the Cold War. The second purpose ended with the Eisenhower administration, but was far more significant than current official memory recognizes. This aim was to lay the groundwork for U.S. withdrawal from primary responsibility for

European defense. This objective was not made clear in public, was not supported by a clear consensus within the U.S. government, and was abandoned after 1961, but it reflects an underlying issue that may well come back in years to come.

The reasons for promoting transnational military integration were simple. Chances for holding the line on the inner-German border against hordes of Soviet armored divisions poised within a few hundred kilometers of the Rhine and the English Channel depended on coordination of military deployments, operational doctrine, and plans, and on reliable mechanisms for the immediate exercise of centralized command, before war began. The United States retained effective control of the whole apparatus, however, since the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) would be an American general; the allies’ junior status was codified in the tradition of making SACEUR’s deputy a European officer. Integration also provided a means for politically rationalizing the rearmament of West Germany—the necessary condition for building a hefty NATO force and for limiting the military load the USA would have to bear in the alliance.²⁶ Encasing West German forces within the institutionalized multinational command structure reduced the potential threat to the

²³ NSC 68, “A Report to the President Pursuant to the President’s Directive of January 31, 1950,” April 7, 1950, chaps. V, VII-IX, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950, vol. I: *National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), pp. 245-252, 262-287.

²⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 52.

²⁵ Paul Y. Hammond, “NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament,” in Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 362.

²⁶ Marc Trachtenberg and Christopher Gehrz, “America, Europe, and German Rearmament, August-September 1950: A Critique of a Myth,” in Marc Trachtenberg, ed., *Between Empire and Alliance: America and Europe During the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 8-9, 11-14.

other states of Western Europe. In short, the unprecedented size of the perceived threat from the East meant that a militarily effective NATO had to be a highly articulated, institutionalized NATO.

For liberals, however, organizational integration was an end in itself, institutional cement for political unity. It would foster security by creating a security community, not just through European integration but through joint western integration. NATO's significance in this view was more political than military, and more for keeping the U.S. role prominent than for helping it to recede. American support for European political unification as manifested in proposals such as the European Defense Community (EDC) was also seen by liberals as an end in itself, and as a complement to American involvement rather than a substitute.

For Dwight Eisenhower, however, these arrangements would deal with military vulnerability in a way that would allow the United States to extricate itself from primary military functions on the continent. He made numerous statements to this effect, even before becoming President, as when he was finishing his assignment as SACEUR in 1952: "if in ten years, all American troops stationed in Europe have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project—meaning the whole NATO effort—will have failed."²⁷ Later presidents, however, were more interested

in maintaining American dominance in the alliance, and the Europeans also remained adamant about keeping U.S. power fully fused with NATO. By the 1960s, permanence of U.S. deployment became accepted, although debate over the scale and conditions recurred in the 1970s with the Mansfield Amendment.

When war raged in Korea while peace continued in Europe, why was the NATO model for building a security community not applied to Northeast Asia? In no small part because, unlike in Europe, the political impulse for integration was not underwritten by a military imperative. Integration was not needed for military purposes, would not help much, and would require a collaboration among diverse polities far more awkward than was possible in Europe. Geography obviated the operational need for integration. Unlike Germany and France, Japan was shielded by a buffer of water from Soviet invasion, and Korea was a peninsula with a short front. This situation in turn made it easier to resolve the regional political anxieties about Japanese power, since a strong Japanese military was not needed for defense of vulnerable allies in the same way that German power was needed in Europe. The USA concluded a peace treaty in which Japan accepted—indeed embraced—a demilitarized status virtually unprecedented for a great power. The reality was not as dramatic as the pacifist principle established in the peace constitution, since soon after it was imposed the

²⁷ Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 148.

Korean War changed American thinking and Washington pushed Tokyo to develop “self-defense forces” that were only theoretically different from normal military forces. Nevertheless the principle, and the limits on actual rearmament, contained Japan as effectively as integration in NATO contained the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In northeast Asia the USA managed its security relations bilaterally with Korea and Japan, and did not need a “NEATO” for the region.

In Southeast Asia, however, John Foster Dulles’s enthusiasm for the principle of collective security led the United States to try to apply the NATO model. The Eisenhower administration celebrated the formation of SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, as Indochina was partitioned after the French defeat at Dienbienphu. Today, SEATO sounds like a footnote in history, but it is a cautionary footnote for those enamored of creating international organizations for their own sake. SEATO went along with the ANZUS Pact in the South Pacific, the Rio Pact in Latin America, and the Baghdad Pact and CENTO in the Middle East (the USA being an affiliate though not a direct member of the latter), a proliferation of anti-communist treaties dubbed “Pactomania” by skeptics at the time. In contrast to NATO, however, none of these other organizations proved very significant. Or if they were significant as SEATO was supposed to be, they were not successful. Substituting lofty politi-

cal declarations for genuine common cause in strategy, SEATO was a paper alliance that proved impotent in the unfolding of the major conflict within its area, the Indochina War of the 1960s. By 1975 SEATO was defunct, but it had not been completely harmless. Though the organization was not involved, its logic was tied to the long string of decisions that entangled the USA in commitment to a non-Communist government in South Vietnam and a pattern of de facto American unilateralism covered by a pretension of multilateral support—as witnessed since 2003 in the war in Iraq.

In terms of *grand* strategy, nothing important changed for the fifteen years after 1954, although containment was played out in a few harrowing crises, a host of adjustments in theater strategies and programs, and above all, a prolonged and unsuccessful war in Indochina. The Vietnam War followed from the grand strategy of containment. With hindsight it became clear that Vietnam should not have been a test of containment, but until very late in the game it was seen that way by virtually all high-level policymakers in the U.S. government. What few doves there were in government could be found only at staff levels. The strategic issue for American policymakers was not whether to resist communism in Vietnam by force, but how.²⁸

The consensus on resisting communist “wars of national liberation” underwrote one departure

²⁸ Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979), chaps. 1, 6-8, 12.

in specific military strategy, the Kennedy administration's promulgation of counterinsurgency doctrine, beginning officially with National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 2 in 1961.²⁹ Kennedy sponsored a higher profile for unconventional warfare training and counter-guerrilla operations, symbolized in the invigoration of Army Special Forces and intensification of CIA paramilitary programs. This guidance did not take hold within the American military however, by 1965 counterinsurgency had failed to turn the tide in Vietnam, and the war became a conventional one. After years of inconclusive military investment and the shock of the 1968 Tet Offensive, disillusionment over Vietnam temporarily broke the national security consensus for strategic activism.

In 1969 the Nixon (or Guam) Doctrine refocused U.S. security commitments in the Third World on assistance to allies and reliance on them to supply the manpower for peripheral wars.³⁰ In the central arena, détente aimed to cool military competition and stabilize relations with an ascendant Soviet Union. The most significant result was the pair of nuclear arms control agreements signed in Moscow in 1972, especially the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. This represented acceptance of a condition of "mutual assured destruction," and codified publicly the abandonment of the long-standing strategy of maintaining meaningful nuclear superiority, a turn heralded internally in McNamara's Draft

Presidential Memorandum of December 1963.³¹ Détente was deceptive from the beginning, however, as the two sides failed to make clear a mutual understanding of the meaning of the Helsinki Agreement or the acceptable limits of political competition in the Third World. Within a decade détente was repudiated and the Cold War reenergized. Hailed in the early 1970s as a cornerstone for a new national security strategy, détente with Moscow (as distinct from that with Beijing) had only fleeting impact.

The most significant departure in grand strategy between the formation of NATO and the end of the Cold War was the rapprochement with China symbolized in the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué. It is hard to remember more than thirty years later how bold this move was, hard to remember that in the 1960s Americans thought of Communist China as every bit as wild and crazy as they have recently thought of Iran, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, or North Korea. This reversal made "triangular diplomacy" a potent strategy for constraining Moscow. Overnight the tables turned militarily for the superpowers. In contrast to the preceding two decades, it was no longer Washington that had to plan for a two-front war, but Moscow. In the 1970s and '80s approximately a full one-fourth of Soviet army divisions were deployed on the Sino-Soviet border. This rebalancing of the strategic equation rationalized the change in notional requirements for American conventional forces that budget pressures made

²⁹ Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 52.

³⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 223-225.

³¹ On the "assured destruction" DPM see Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), chap. 22.

necessary anyway, scaling down from the over-ambitious Kennedy administration standard of capabilities to fight “2^{1/2} Wars” simultaneously (meaning major wars against the Soviet Union and China and a minor war someplace like Cuba) to “1^{1/2} Wars.”³² Rapprochement developed into tacit alliance by the time of the Carter administration. The Sino-American entente did not survive the Cold War, but its strategic importance was defined by the Soviet threat, so temporary service fulfilled its purpose.

The Carter administration was the first to turn military planning toward the Persian Gulf and to missions only partly defined by the Soviet threat. In 1977 a Presidential Review Memorandum and subsequent Presidential Directive (PRM-10 and PD-18) directed development of capabilities for rapid deployment to the region, although the Pentagon did little to implement the directive until after the Iranian Revolution.³³ The other major departure under Carter was the promotion of human rights abroad (mandated in PD-30 in 1978), consistent with the comprehensive and cosmopolitan conception of national security.

Ronald Reagan accentuated the return to vigorous anti-Soviet policy that congealed in the last year of the Carter administration, and moved tacitly toward a policy of rolling back Soviet power. These moves were best symbolized in the 1982 speech at Eureka College that became known as the Reagan Doctrine, and the “Evil

Empire” speech a year later. For all the aura of radicalism attached to Reagan’s policy, however, it did not represent a fundamental change in strategy so much as a dedication to investing more resources in a grand strategy reminiscent of Truman’s and Kennedy’s. Rhetoric was more strident, budgets were higher, and some actions (as in Central America) would not have been taken by a different administration, but the change was more one of degree than of kind.

In the more specific realm of military strategy, however, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) did symbolize serious change. Research on active defense against missile attack (which had continued since the ABM Treaty, and was funded before SDI at an annual level of more than \$1 billion in today’s dollars) had been for Nixon, Ford, and Carter a hedge against uncertainty. For Reagan anti-missile defense became a positive objective to be achieved as soon as possible. Beginning the process that culminated twenty years later in abrogation of the ABM Treaty, SDI moved away from the reliance on deterrence and arms control that had taken hold in the early 1970s.

Whether the Soviet surrender during the administration of Bush the Elder was due to Reagan’s push, the cumulative effect of forty-plus years of competition, simple loss of faith by the leadership in Moscow, or all of the above, is debated. In terms of the instruments used and the arenas

³² William W. Kaufmann, *Planning Conventional Forces, 1950-80* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), pp. 4-17; Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 214.

³³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, Revised Edition* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), p. 456.

of competition, however, Reagan's strategy was not in a class by itself. Although his administration doubtless had much to do with the dénouement of the Cold War, his strategy did not make quite as much difference as either his admirers or detractors assumed.

*From Bumper Sticker to Driver's Manual:
The Case of NATO's Flexible Response
Doctrine*

When layers of rhetoric are peeled away and attention shifts from declarations to implementation, even the most important strategic plans can prove to be inconsistent, inadequate, or incredible. Yet even then they may not fail. The best example is the forty-year effort to develop NATO military strategies and plans for war and, thereby, prevent war via deterrence.

With the exception of counterinsurgency doctrine in the 1960s, almost all major controversies about military strategy, including nuclear deterrence and arms control, were rooted in dilemmas about war plans for defense of Western Europe. If Soviet capabilities for conventional war in Europe were overwhelmingly superior, as prevailing opinion in the West always assumed, could NATO build conventional military power to match the threat? If doing so was too expensive to bear, how could the United States devise options for escalation—the threat to initiate nuclear war deliberately in the face of successful Soviet conventional attack—that would substitute

for confidence in conventional defense? These questions underlay most debates about American military spending, because more than half of the defense budget could be attributed at least indirectly to the NATO mission. They also drove most debates about nuclear strategy as a whole. Requirements for simply deterring an unprovoked Soviet first-strike against the continental United States by the threat of devastating retaliation against the USSR were much less demanding than those for making credible American options to proceed as far as attacks on the Soviet interior (despite the Soviet threat of retaliation against the American homeland) in the “seamless web” of NATO escalation plans. As long as the Cold War lasted the strategic dilemma—whether to derange western economies by mobilizing on the same scale as the Soviet Union or to risk suicide by turning a conventional war into a nuclear war—was never definitively resolved by any of the adjustments of strategy that were episodically proclaimed. All solutions devised were temporary because they proved conceptually frightening, diplomatically divisive, militarily awkward, or economically insupportable. At its center, the general strategy of containment rested for decades on a wobbly foundation of specific military strategy.

At the 1952 Lisbon Conference NATO resolved to build conventional forces—nearly 90 divisions and 10,000 aircraft—that could suffice to hold a line against the Soviet Army.³⁴ This plan imme-

³⁴ John S. Duffield, *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 60-61.

diately dissolved in the face of its budgetary requirements. Coming to office soon after the Lisbon conference, the Eisenhower administration moved sharply toward reliance on cheaper nuclear firepower. In the famous words of NSC 162/2 in 1953, “In the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons to be as available for use as other munitions.”³⁵ For the next 35 years NATO and American strategic decisions were bedeviled by ambivalence about how much the alliance should rely on nuclear weapons to deter Moscow from invading. Those who wanted to maximize deterrence and minimize military budgets favored resting NATO doctrine on deliberate escalation. Those who worried about what to do if deterrence failed sought to rely on conventional defenses in order to avoid uncontrolled escalation to mutual annihilation. Those who saw the merit in both concerns sought a range of options that would ratchet up the odds of successful defense with conventional forces alone, and allow controlled and limited uses of nuclear weapons if conventional defense faltered. The compromise approach was known as “flexible response.”³⁶

According to folklore, the Eisenhower administration held stubbornly throughout its tenure to the strategy of “massive retaliation”—the intent to vaporize the whole Warsaw Pact as soon as Soviet tanks poured into West Germany.

Conversely, folklore holds that Kennedy moved decisively to promote flexible response and stronger conventional defense options. In reality there was less difference than commonly assumed. Eisenhower supported the impression of staunch commitment to nuclear escalation in his rhetoric and decisions, but the commitment originally enshrined in NATO’s 1954 document MC 48 was modified in official development of strategy three years later in MC 14/2.³⁷ Leaders of the Kennedy administration promoted improvement in conventional forces and revision of strategy, but action in these directions was inconsistent and changes in war plans were small and delayed. In Kennedy’s first year Secretary of Defense McNamara actually budgeted a reduction of conventional forces, and Kennedy later threatened withdrawals of U.S. forces from Europe to cope with the balance of payments deficit. Ten years after 14/2 the official adoption of flexible response as NATO doctrine in MC 14/3 occurred ironically just when capacity for conventional defense was falling, as France withdrew from the integrated command, London moved to withdraw forces from the British Army of the Rhine, and the war in Vietnam hollowed out U.S. units in Europe. MC 14/3 was a compromise in principle between conventional and nuclear emphasis in war plans, but produced little change in practice.³⁸

³⁵ NSC 162/2, October 30, 1953: “Basic National Security Policy,” in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, vol. II: *National Security Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984), p. 593.

³⁶ For surveys see Jane Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response: NATO’s Debate Over Strategy in the 1960s* (London: Macmillan, 1988) and Ivo Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response: NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces Since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

³⁷ Duffield, *Power Rules*, pp.112-114, 121-130; Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 188-189.

³⁸ Francis J. Gavin, “The Myth of Flexible Response,” *International History Review* 23, no. 4 (December 2001), pp. 859-861; Duffield, *Power Rules*, chap. 5.

For more than two decades after 1960 the most strenuous efforts to develop new ideas and plans for limited war occurred within the arena of nuclear strategy. The logic of flexible response required the willingness to initiate “controlled” escalation in the event of a Soviet attack on West Berlin or a breakthrough on the Central Front. At one level, the hypothetical use of tactical nuclear weapons within the theater of combat, planning involved NATO as a whole. The multinational mechanism for doing this was the Nuclear Planning Group, but for decades the NPG never reached much agreement on which specific options would be implemented in what circumstances.³⁹

The biggest controversies within the alliance diplomatic arena were about how much control the European allies would have either to prevent or to compel use of U.S. nuclear forces in the event of war. In principle, multinational cooperation and allied options to prevent American use of tactical nuclear weapons were assured by the official requirement for Washington to consult its allies at the appointed time, but few had confidence that the consultative system would work.⁴⁰ Officially the USA insisted that capacity to compel escalation was not a problem. Most prominently in McNamara’s 1962 speech to the NATO ministerial meeting in Athens,

Washington promised firmly to bring all of its nuclear forces into play to retaliate against invasion, and used this assurance to dissuade allies from developing nuclear forces of their own.⁴¹ Europeans were naturally suspicious—for good reason as it turned out, since McNamara later confessed: “in long private conversations with successive presidents ... I recommended without qualification, that they never initiate, under any circumstances, the use of nuclear weapons. I believe they accepted my recommendation.”⁴²

Abortive schemes such as the Multilateral Force (MLF) failed to solve the problem that when the chips were down, the United States would control whether and how it would use its nuclear forces to defend Europe. Periodically anxieties in allied governments led to American initiatives to deploy new types of tactical and long-range theater nuclear weapons to the theater in order to reassure the Europeans that they could rely on credible American nuclear deterrence: Thor and Jupiter missiles in the late 1950s, Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles assigned to the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic (SACLANT) in the 1960s, and Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles in the late 1970s and early ’80s. When these responses to European government fears of “decoupling” were undertaken, they ignited fears among mass

³⁹ J. Michael Legge, *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response*, R-2964-FF (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, April 1983), chap. 2; David N. Schwartz, *NATO’s Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1983), pp. 152-185. A superb graphical representation of the antiseptic theoretical sequence of escalation in flexible response is in Carl H. Amme, Jr., *NATO Without France* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1967), p. 18.

⁴⁰ The requirement to consult is conditioned by the qualification “time and circumstances permitting, and “the NATO Defense Planning Committee is not responsible for approving a nuclear release request...its function is to act as a channel for conveying the views of the allies to the nuclear power concerned.” Legge, *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response*, p. 23.

⁴¹ Schwartz, *NATO’s Nuclear Dilemmas*, pp. 158-160.

⁴² Robert S. McNamara, “The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons: Perceptions and Misperceptions,” *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 1 (Fall 1983), p. 79.

publics of the reverse danger—being sucked into an American nuclear war—and produced political backlashes. The strategy of deliberate escalation could be maintained as long as it remained a principle discussed among diplomatic elites, but created as many problems as it solved when it had to be translated into new concrete programs to revive confidence in American commitment among those elites. Then it shocked public opinion because the idea of starting nuclear war defied common sense, reeking of strategic suicide.

Conventional forces and theater nuclear forces were two parts of the flexible response “tripod.” The third part was the adaptation of targeting options for U.S. “strategic” forces—the intercontinental missiles and bombers aimed at the Soviet homeland. The political need to link intercontinental forces to the defense of NATO prompted most of the anxieties about the state of the intercontinental nuclear balance, and episodic attempts to provide options for counterforce attacks that could set back the Soviet Union but stop short of mutual annihilation.

When the Kennedy administration faced the challenge of contingency planning for war over Berlin, serious attention was given to the option of a disarming first strike on Soviet nuclear forces, in order to blunt Moscow’s capacity to retaliate for U.S. escalation if war broke out over the city. This harrowing experience led civilian

leaders to ask for a wider menu of options in the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), the main nuclear war plan.⁴³ Change in the SIOP was modest and slow, however, and preoccupation with Vietnam diverted McNamara’s attention from following up on the demand for options. Nixon and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger tried again to develop limited options, producing much controversy among arms controllers who mistakenly believed that counterforce targeting had been abandoned when McNamara’s rhetoric started emphasizing “assured destruction,” but again yielding less change in the SIOP than civilian strategists wanted. Professionals in the Air Force and Strategic Air Command resisted for fear that limited options would derange the main war plan. Pushed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter became the one president to take a detailed and sustained interest in nuclear war plans, and finally forced substantial revision to enable protracted nuclear war, more effective targeting of the Soviet political control structure, and other options. The revised doctrinal guidance was codified in PD-59 in 1980.

All of these initiatives were controversial because of the dilemma between weakening deterrence of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, and risking national suicide if deterrence were to fail. For decades, the bedrock of NATO military strategy made no good sense, but no alternative could be found that would not divide the

⁴³ Fred Kaplan, “JFK’s First-Strike Plan,” *Atlantic Monthly* 288, no. 3 (October 2001); Kaplan, *Wizards of Armageddon*, chap. 20; Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), pp. 91-102; Desmond Ball, *Politics and Force Levels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 189-201; William W. Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), chap. 2.

alliance. The key to the apparent success of NATO strategy (winning the Cold War without firing a shot) was obfuscation of the strategy's bad sense. The paradox is that bad strategy for war turned out to be quite alright for peace.

III. Grand Strategy After the Cold War: Controlling Multilateralism

Since the Cold War, U.S. grand strategy has flowed, like water through a burst dam, from managing bipolarity to exploiting primacy. There has been some disagreement among presidents about strategy, at least on the rhetorical level, but scant disagreement on objectives. As I believe Bill Clinton said, for Clinton the strategy was “multilaterally if we can, unilaterally if we must,” and for Bush the Younger it is the reverse. Although this implies a radical difference in one sense, it implies substantial similarity in another. For those who see multilateral cooperation as an end in itself, the difference is crucial. For those who focus on the object rather than on processes, the difference is one of style more than substance. Thus many of Bush the Younger's Democratic critics faulted him not for attacking Iraq, but for “going it alone.” In terms of diplomatic strategy, the second Bush represented a sharp shift from Clinton's approach. In terms of security outcomes sought from strategy, he has not been a great deal more than Clinton's Evil Twin.

From the Berlin Wall to September 11th

No American leaders invoke the value of primacy, empire, or hegemony after the Cold War, nor is it probable that many think of national security objectives in those terms. Multilateralism is not seen as an alternative to American control, but as a vehicle for it, a practice in a world order where the United States is first above equals, not among them. The value of primacy is covered, unconsciously as well as in public rhetoric, by euphemisms, such as “*shaping* the international environment”—the Pentagon's official description of the Clinton defense strategy.⁴⁴ No euphemism is more overworked than “leadership,” which allows simultaneous denial and affirmation of dominance. Thus John Kerry, who regularly excoriated Bush for unilateralism, declared, “America wasn't put here to dominate the world.... We have a higher calling: to lead it.”⁴⁵ But the point, of course, is to get the world to where we want it to go, not to wherever some plebiscite of governments might take it. And as Kerry was at pains to affirm during the campaign, he categorically rejected the possibility of giving allies a veto over American action.

To many, the diplomatic process that ended the Cold War in the late 1980s seems one of grand cooperation, since it was marked by comparative calm and amity in superpower negotiations. There was actually very little cooperation, however, because there was no give and take, only take: the West conceded nothing of significance, sim-

⁴⁴ Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, May 1997), p. 9 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ Quoted in David M. Halbfinger, “Shedding Populist Tone, Kerry Starts Move to Middle,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2004, p. A14.

ply pocketed a series of concessions by Gorbachev, and watched contentedly as first the Soviets' East European empire and then the inner empire of the Soviet Union itself collapsed. The Cold War ended not with a compromise peace, but with virtually total surrender by Moscow.

After the Berlin Wall opened American grand strategy evolved with little explicit debate. The exception to this drift was the Pentagon exercise in the last year of the administration of Bush the Elder to inform military planning for the post-Cold War world. Under direction of then Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, the Draft Defense Planning Guidance outlined strategy to prevent the rise of "potential competitors," to discourage advanced countries "from challenging our leadership," and to extend security commitments to countries that had been Soviet allies only a short time before.⁴⁶ When the draft was leaked, controversy, especially among allies, produced a toned-down version with more politic packaging.⁴⁷ The earlier draft nevertheless revealed the real thinking of the strategic leading lights in the two Bush administrations.

Comprehensive notions of national security came into their own after victory in the Cold War mission eliminated the main military threat. Military instruments remained popular, however, as the threat vacuum left by communism's col-

lapse sucked "rogue states," which had been minor threats, into the USA's cross-hairs. Small-scale military actions also increased, as humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping tasks associated with world order became temporarily popular, and policing tasks in the Balkans grew into war over Kosovo. The strategic rationale for these operations, other than as charity, was dubious, so commitment receded when operations became costly without being conclusive, as in Somalia. Bill Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive on peacekeeping simultaneously endorsed the function and stipulated conditions for fulfilling it that amounted to backing away.⁴⁸ The United States would not contract with "the international community" to pound the Globocop beat, but would show up where and when it felt like doing so. The big exception to this insistence on flexibility was the spread of contractual defense guarantees in Europe. The initiative that most demonstrated the ascendancy of the objective of world order was the expansion of NATO, and its transformation from a military alliance to a political club, in line with Clinton's bumper-sticker strategy of "engagement and enlargement" (see the following section).

NATO moved into the power vacuum created by the USSR's implosion even before the European Union (EU). The militarization of containment that began in the late 1940s has been replaced

⁴⁶ From Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival', *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Patrick Tyler, "Pentagon Drops Goal of Blocking New Superpowers," *New York Times*, May 24, 1992, pp. 1, 14.

⁴⁸ Press Release: "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations," U.S. Mission to the United Nations, n.d.; Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Set to Limit Role of Military in Peacekeeping," *New York Times*, January 29, 1994, pp. 1, 5; Paul Lewis, "U.S. Plans Policy on Peacekeeping," *New York Times*, November 18, 1993, p. A7.

by the militarization of enlargement since the 1990s.⁴⁹ As ever, official rhetoric does not distinguish between national security and international security, and none but intellectuals call the new approach liberal imperialism. The last major declared adjustment of U.S. strategy reflects the elision of the objectives: the preventive war doctrine (misleadingly “preemption” in public discussion) of Bush the Younger.⁵⁰ The principle of preemption—beating an enemy to the draw when he is preparing to attack—has natural appeal, especially in regard to combating terrorists. Were the new Bush strategy really about preemption, few would object. The unabashed endorsement of striking bad states that are not yet preparing an attack, however, is likely to fall by the wayside for a while after the embarrassment of the strategy in Iraq. With no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction found to justify the American attack of 2003 in terms of self-defense, the administration was left with liberation of oppressed people as the rationale for war. Humanitarian aggression is popular only if it is cheap or if it coincides with strategic necessity.

A dozen years after the Cold War American security priorities changed precipitously. Before September 11, 2001, arguments were about military charity: how often and how much to commit American power to settle ethnic conflicts, protect foreign populations from local enemies, and build stable states. Those with the comprehen-

sive view of national security saw such charity as self-interest in the long run, since political as well as economic globalization would make the world safer—and more profitable—for the United States. September 11th highlighted the downside of globalization: the backlash against westernization and American primacy.

Today, counterterrorism is the top national security priority. As in the Cold War, both cosmopolitan and nationalist conceptions of security now converge on similar strategies—aggressive collection of intelligence and the use of force to eliminate terrorists who can be located. Until September 11th there was debate about whether counterterrorism should be conceived primarily in terms of law enforcement or of war. The comprehensive world order view held the edge then, because terrorism was not yet perceived as a major threat. The FBI subordinated intelligence collection to the primary mission of apprehending and prosecuting terrorists as criminals.⁵¹ September 11th settled the debate in the other direction, and law enforcement took a back seat to national security. As had happened a half-century earlier with the shock of war in Korea, objectives of world order and American power converged on strategies emphasizing force.

⁴⁹ I thank Anne-Marie Slaughter for the phrase, “militarization of enlargement.”

⁵⁰ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), p. 15.

⁵¹ *Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism*, Report of the National Commission on Terrorism, Pursuant to Public Law 277, 105th Congress (N.p. [Washington, D.C.], n.d. [2000]), pp. 9-12; *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, n.d. [2004]), pp. 74-80.

NATO Enlargement: Staying First Above Equals

The NATO alliance was unprecedented in its peacetime institutionalization of military integration and joint planning. Did it thus embody the cosmopolitan ideal of multilateral cooperation as opposed to nationalist autonomy? In principle, yes; in practice, no. The actual history of strategy development indicates that the United States always called the tune, no matter how much it bobbed and weaved to cope diplomatically with allies' anxieties. During the Cold War the USA did have to take serious account of allies' preferences—more so than later, after the Cold War—because bipolarity made it imperative to add as much power as possible to the anti-communist coalition. But this meant cajoling and finessing, not submitting to allies' preferences when they conflicted with American aims. With frequent differences of opinion between Washington and allied capitals, the American position on what NATO's strategy should be always won out. When diplomacy required reassuring Europeans who disagreed, diplomacy dissembled, as in McNamara's Athens speech. The USA used alliance integration for its own purposes, and its sovereignty was never substantially compromised by the integration.

For Eisenhower, the main purpose was to reduce the financial and military burden on the USA. Eisenhower supported European unity so that Western Europe could become “what he called ‘a

third great power bloc’.... America, he said, could then ‘sit back and relax somewhat.’” This would require that Europeans control their own nuclear weapons, and Eisenhower pushed in this direction, endorsing Euratom as well as the EDC. He looked forward to limiting U.S. military commitment to NATO to naval and air forces, with ground forces returning to the USA.⁵²

To that end, Eisenhower contemplated a prospective command arrangement that today would seem bizarre or frightening, in different ways, to both conservative hawks and liberal doves. He envisioned a more or less independent SACEUR, a European but implicitly supranational figure who would have authority to initiate war, including nuclear operations, on his own, in response to strategic warning that a Soviet attack was imminent. (If one looks at statements that Eisenhower made under conditions of secrecy in NSC meetings, if the logic of MC 48 is traced out, and if studied American obfuscation of the question of when and how NATO's decision to go to war would be made, it becomes clear that the strategy of massive retaliation was really one of anticipatory retaliation—that is, preemption).⁵³

After Eisenhower, however, as permanent American commitment of ground forces on the continent became accepted, American leaders honored a veneer of multilateralism while keeping control of essential war plans and options.

⁵² Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 147-156 (Eisenhower quoted on p. 147).

⁵³ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 166-173, 213-215, 298n46.

They could rely on control of SACEUR because Eisenhower's vision of putting a European in that position evaporated. It became an accepted principle in NATO that SACEUR would always be an American general, whose second hat was CINCEUR—commander in chief of U.S. forces in Europe. The precise responsibility of this individual to collective demands of the North Atlantic Council, as distinct from the American president, is slightly ambiguous. But whatever the principle of multinational involvement in military decisions, CINCEUR would always be bound by the U.S. Constitution to obey orders from the American president.⁵⁴ Clear-eyed focus on the main substantive business of the alliance—operational plans for deterrence and war—have long indicated that the United States would coordinate with its allies as long as it was confident that Washington could control the essential resulting action.

This reality, overlooked or wished away by most diplomats and enthusiasts for international institutions, underlies the special estrangement between Washington and Paris that grew in the 1960s and has persisted to the present. France insisted on no less independence than the USA

within the alliance. Charles De Gaulle made many mistakes, but he saw through the polite fiction of automatic solidarity and recognized that Washington would not sacrifice its own national interest for the sake of its continental allies' interests when the two diverged.⁵⁵ Since military integration was on American terms, more clearly after 1960, De Gaulle ended France's integration while maintaining its membership in the alliance on traditional terms. The British were able to live with Washington as the 800-pound gorilla in the alliance because of the special relationship, and because their independent nuclear deterrent gave them a hole card for hypothetical situations in which American control proved unacceptable. During the Cold War the FRG had little choice, since the division of Germany, the political legacy of World War II, and the conditions of German admission to NATO had limited its sovereignty. This was all scarcely an issue for the other members of the alliance, since they did not have pretensions to great power status. So only France fully confronted the reality of American control of the essence of NATO—its military strategy—and France remained the one important European ally with a consistently tense relationship with the United States. It is precisely

⁵⁴ Consider Wesley Clark's experience in NATO's only war to date, over Kosovo in 1999. He was sandwiched between conflicting pressures from European diplomats and U.S. political and military leaders, and provoked ire in the Pentagon when he did not truckle completely to his military colleagues' preferences. He did not resist demands from the American commander in chief, however, as reflected, for example, in the fact that the Clinton White House insisted on approving all bombing targets. See General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), pp. 124-127, 178, 224, 278.

⁵⁵ By 1958 De Gaulle told Eisenhower and Macmillan that it was "essential for Paris to participate directly in the political and strategic decisions of the alliance, decisions which were in reality taken by America alone with separate consultation with England." When Eisenhower tried to convince him to accept nuclear weapons from the USA, but with the Americans controlling the key to them, De Gaulle replied, "If Russia attacks us, we are your allies and you are ours. But...we want to hold our fate in our own hands.... you Americans certainly have the means of annihilating the enemy on his own territory. But he has the means to blow you to pieces on yours. How could we French be sure that, unless you yourselves were bombed directly on your own soil, you would invite your own destruction.... I know, as you yourself know, what a nation is.... It can help another, but it cannot identify itself with another." When Kennedy visited and promised that the General could count on the USA to use nuclear weapons to defend Europe, De Gaulle later wrote, "But in answer to the specific questions I put to him, he was unable to tell me at what point and against which targets, far or near, strategic or tactical, inside or outside Russia itself, the missiles would in fact be launched. 'I am not surprised,' I told him. [American] General Norstad, the Allied Commander-in-Chief...has never been able to enlighten me on these points...." Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor*, Terence Kilmartin, trans. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971) pp. 202-203, 213-214, 257-258.

because the French have dared to take their sovereignty as seriously as the United States has taken its own that Americans have found them so infuriating.

The rationale for NATO as a political institution for building community among its members, as distinct from a military institution developed to optimize combat power against an enemy, was secondary from 1950 until the end of the Cold War, but came to the fore when NATO's military reason for being ceased to be a threat. The organization has always been, and continues to be, both a political and military organization, but the priorities are now reversed. NATO has become a political club more than the military alliance it was originally designed to be. The difference between a club and an alliance is that a club is inward-looking, oriented to enjoying association and common bonds, while an alliance is outward-looking, subordinating internal relationships to the business of confronting common threats. Although the organization retains significant military functions, they are minor compared to the original mission of defending the continent in World War III.

America's four recent wars aside, NATO expansion has been the most significant strategic initiative of the post-Cold War era. It contradicts conservative doves' preference for a balance of power strategy, but it unites liberal multilateralists and anti-Russian conservatives in seeing incorporation of everyone in Russia's front yard into the western community as progress.

Expansion could proceed with practically no objections in the United States, apart from a coterie of grumpy academics who took Russia's concerns with the balance of power seriously, because proponents did not believe that the commitment at the heart of the alliance's purpose would ever have to be met.

NATO's ostensible purpose, collective defense, appears to have been barely in the minds of the sponsors of the organization's enlargement. Clinton recoiled from involvement in Somalia, and left Rwanda to its fate, because the costs of American military action were real, even if they would have been trivial compared to fulfilling the guarantee to a NATO member. Clinton embraced new members in NATO despite the high costs that defending them in war would impose, because the possibility of facing those costs no longer seemed real. Consider the incorporation of a Estonia—a country that not only lies deep within any conceivable Russian sphere of influence, but was recently part of the USSR itself. How many who celebrate that new admission to the Atlantic alliance really see it as a guarantee to go to war to protect the country's sovereignty? But if military functions were beside the point, and the real point was to create a new political club, celebrating and consolidating the liberation and democratization of the former Soviet empire, why should NATO be the vehicle rather than the European Union? Because the EU did not include the United States. For Washington, whose domination of NATO's command structure has never been in doubt, expan-

sion of the alliance was an extension of American power into Eastern Europe.

The evaporation of NATO's founding purpose is reflected in the Bush administration plan announced in 2004 to redeploy U.S. forces from Europe to areas closer to unstable regions in which the United States may intervene. What military purpose remains in NATO has shifted completely from self-defense toward managing world order, at least in adjacent parts of the world. Never officially promulgated, this implicit new mission falls in line with the wisecrack, "Out of area or out of business." In practice, this mission has included humanitarian aggression, as reflected in the alliance's assault on Serbian Yugoslavia in 1999 on behalf of an oppressed population group within one of that country's provinces—Kosovo. In Bosnia as well, the objectives of regional order and protection of threatened groups were clear while strategy was not. The USA aimed to constitute stable governments where secession, communal violence, and civil war had destroyed the local political order, yet at the same time American leaders foreswore involvement in "nation-building." Given the contradiction, military intervention sucked Washington into nation-building anyway, but in a half-hearted manner that so far leaves the viability of states after the end of occupation in doubt.⁵⁶ (The same thing happened in Iraq four years after the Kosovo War.)

IV. What Makes Strategy Effective?

In theory, strategy should be judged first by whether it accomplishes policy objectives. Simple as this sounds, it is actually very difficult to measure. We can observe correlations, but the complexity and confusion of international politics make it hard to have confidence that the correlations are not spurious. The absence of vampires in the neighborhood does not validate the deterrence strategy of wearing garlic around the neck.

By the simple standard of correlation, most American strategies since 1945 should be considered effective, since the most important goals of national security policy were achieved. Communist power was held at bay and ultimately defeated as decisively as anyone could imagine when containment was first undertaken. But did Gorbachev surrender because four decades of containment had worn the Soviet Union down, or would Moscow have mellowed sooner if containment had not been militarized early in the game? Did it matter at all whether NATO strategy was massive retaliation or flexible response? After all, neither can be shown to be inferior to the other as a successful deterrent, since the Soviet Union refrained from attack during both periods. Did the adoption of flexible response deter Moscow, or aggravate conflict by spurring the Soviet military buildup of the 1970s? The complex interplay among economic, political,

⁵⁶ Richard K. Betts, "The Lesser Evil: The Best Way Out of the Balkans," *National Interest* no. 64 (Summer 2001), pp. 53-54, 56-57.

diplomatic, psychological, and military factors makes it seldom possible to be sure which strategies cause the results intended; which strategies are superfluous or irrelevant; and which objectives are achieved *despite* a strategy that was counterproductive. Consider the sharply different views of American liberals and conservatives about whether Reagan's aggressive strategy shortened or prolonged the Cold War.⁵⁷

Although it is hard to know whether achievement of an objective can be attributed to a particular strategy, it is easier to know clearly when a strategy fails, because the object is not achieved. The existence of a Communist Party government in Saigon is unambiguous evidence that U.S. strategy in Vietnam did not succeed. For that reason, a demanding standard for evaluating the adequacy of strategy would actually be a weak one: non-failure. Although failed strategies can be identified, there is still the question of whether the fault lies in the choice of strategy or the policy decision to pursue the objective—that is, the question of whether the objective could plausibly have been achieved by any other strategy. Would Saigon have been saved, or would it have fallen sooner, if the United States had pursued a more energetic counterinsurgency strategy instead of the conventionalized war of the late 1960s?

After effectiveness, strategy should be judged by how efficiently the effectiveness was achieved. If

massive retaliation would have sufficed indefinitely as NATO strategy, flexible response was an inefficient alternative, because the greater emphasis on conventional defense imposed higher economic costs. If Western Europe would have recovered on its own well enough to maintain stable and prosperous democratic governments in any event after 1947, the Marshall Plan was also inefficient for the United States as a national security strategy, however beneficent it was. If communism would have collapsed without four decades of vigorous containment and deterrence, and the trillions of dollars invested in military power rather than civilian consumption or investment, then U.S. strategy throughout the Cold War was inefficient. Probably none of these counterfactual alternatives for the effective achievement of today's peace among the great powers is plausible, but that judgment must rest on informed intuition, not scientific analysis.

This skeptical view of how well the effectiveness of strategy can be measured, even with hindsight, is no help to policymakers, nor does it offer any reason to place great practical value on academic analysis of the sort in this paper. It does help, however, for seeing why debates about the relative effectiveness of general approaches to strategy are never resolved. The record does not prove clearly whether the priorities associated with the comprehensive liberal approach, or the narrow realist approach, yield the best

⁵⁷ See Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000).

results. At least until failure jars them into retreat from a strategy, policymakers will remain free to interpret evidence selectively, and to choose strategic priorities according to the lenses of preexisting faith rather than of scientific analysis.

Most of the time since Pearl Harbor, faith in American mission and fear of enemies' power have united liberals and conservatives in a consensus for activism abroad and muscular military strategies, even when they argued about whether economic or military programs should be the focus of that activism. Only a bloody nose suppresses the impulse to military activism, and then not for long. Retreats from Beirut and Somalia made policymakers hesitate for a time but were soon followed by other uses of force. The huge disaster in Vietnam produced a longer period of caution, but still only for a decade.

Opponents of the consensus for forward strategy have rarely been influential since World War II. The only challenges at the highest level were failed presidential candidacies of Robert Taft in 1952 and George McGovern twenty years later. Taft could not get his party's nomination and McGovern was buried by Nixon in a landslide, despite public frustration with the Vietnam War. Most of the time critics are stuck on the fringes and tarred as isolationists. At the dawn of the Cold War critics of forward strategy were strange bedfellows. The Truman Doctrine was resisted by

both the extreme left, which opposed aid to allegedly reactionary governments, and extreme right, which feared that it would lead to war. Henry Wallace said at one point that Robert Taft was more likely to keep the peace than was Truman.⁵⁸

The same bedfellows can be found after the Cold War as well. Today, anti-interventionist arguments from the left and right, by Ralph Nader and Patrick Buchanan, and pundits in *The Nation* and *The American Conservative*, sound eerily similar. These critics from the ends of the spectrum have generally been impotent, with the partial exception of the period of reaction against failure in Vietnam; although Nixon was elected twice, his foreign policy was marked by retrenchment. Anti-interventionist views could grow again if the American adventure in Iraq fails and the ambition to make the world safe for democracy is seen as the cause.

If it is to be judged at all, basic U.S. national security strategy has to be judged as quite effective from World War II through the end of the Cold War. After all, it is hard to find fault with total victory in an epochal global conflict between two transnational ideologies and two superpowers, no matter what questions there may be about the efficiency of the enterprise. The only obvious big exception was the catastrophe of the long war in Vietnam. With that exception, the discipline of bipolarity made the

⁵⁸ Jones, *The Fifteen Weeks*, p. 177; James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 386.

United States active and steadfast but also kept it from overreaching strategically. The United States valued its primacy *within* the western world, but recognized that this did not mean primacy in the world as a whole.

Since the end of the Cold War left no opposing check on American power, and indeed elevated the USA to global primacy, there has been less to prevent overreaching. It is conceivable that U.S. interventionism for preventive purposes in the 21st century may ultimately prove to be as beneficial as activism for deterrent purposes was in the second half of the 20th. It also may never have been feasible and is certainly now too late to believe that nonintervention abroad would reduce the anger of aggrieved groups in the Islamic world that leads them to blame the USA for their problems, and to target Americans with terrorism. Half a decade into the new century, however, no clear strategy has been identified that promises to yield the maximum benefits of exploiting primacy without ending in overextension or counterproductive results. We should certainly not be nostalgic for the Cold War and the sobering constraint of Soviet power. But neither should primacy be so enthralling that Washington waits for awful setbacks to force consideration of a strategic change of course, back in the direction of a world of more balanced power.

If the United States does not restrain the exploitation of primacy it may stay lucky and enjoy the benefits, or at least the pride, for some

decades more. If terrorists do not manage to use weapons of mass destruction against us, and if China does not become a superpower (or becomes one without also being hostile), there is no daunting threat on the horizon. No other potential source of countervailing power appears plausible. One that could hypothetically emerge at any time the political will is summoned, however, is the European Union, if it were to become a genuine United States of Europe. It is interesting that France in recent years has joined the large array of other countries apart from the United States in asserting the principle that the United Nations is the necessary authority to approve warmaking, and has also moved toward supporting the development of Europe into a new collective pole of power. These moves reflect the realization that merging French power into larger international organizations is the only way to develop any counterbalance to the USA. It is ironic that De Gaulle's heirs in a sense have moved toward what Eisenhower hoped for: a collective European power bloc that would have been a third bloc. This aim may not be realized. If it is, however, it will be unfortunate if it happens in opposition to U.S. national security strategy, as would be the case under recent American policies, rather than as the result of a cooperative transition like that envisioned by Eisenhower, NATO's first supreme commander, a half-century ago.

