

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY



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INTRODUCTION: SETTING PRIORITIES FOR A POST-COLD WAR WORLD

In the space of a few short years, world politics has undergone dramatic changes profoundly important to the future of American foreign policy. After a generation of intensive and extensive competition and conflict with the Soviet Union and its erstwhile allies, the United States suddenly confronts a radically new environment in which many of the objectives it has long sought through its foreign policy strategy of containment have been achieved. George F. Kennan argued in 1947 in his famous “X” article that “the United States has it in its power to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate, to force upon the Kremlin a far greater degree of moderation and circumspection than it has had to observe in recent years, and in this way to promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.”¹ Now, more than forty years later, the breakup and mellowing seem to have occurred. Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has collapsed, the Soviet Union’s external empire has disintegrated and its domestic power has diminished, the Warsaw Pact is defunct, and the division of Germany has ended. The Cold War is over.

With the end of the Cold War, the United States for the third time in the century has been called on to confront its global destiny. The first came in the aftermath of World War I, when the nation reverted to its historic tradition of isolationism; the second followed World War II, when isolationism was rejected in favor of a policy of global activism. It was during this formative period that the United States evolved its grand strategy for combating the communist and Soviet menace, the elements of which are captured in the themes of globalism, anticommunism, containment, military might, and interventionism.² The third debate—sparked like the others by the end of war, albeit in this case a “cold” war—is concerned largely with the continued relevance of the grand strategy launched after World War II. Harvard po-

litical scientist Stanley Hoffmann captured the truly revolutionary nature of today's challenges when he observed, "There are periods of history when profound changes occur all of a sudden. . . . We are now in one of those periods, which obliges the United States to rethink its role in the world, just as it was forced to do by the cataclysmic changes that followed the end of the Second World War."³

It was amid this introspection in the United States and the profound geopolitical changes occurring in Europe that Iraq launched its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Soviet support of the U.S. position in the crisis over Kuwait and later in the Persian Gulf War—widely heralded, respectively, as the first post-Cold War crisis and a "defining moment" in the new post-Cold War order—symbolized the dramatic changes the world has witnessed in recent years. The Persian Gulf War may itself be the harbinger of the future, as the United States once more appeared willing to don the mantle of world policeman in widespread disrepute in the wake of the Vietnam War.

The crisis over Kuwait and the subsequent decision by the United States to resort to force of arms against Iraq stalled the third debate regarding America's world role, which by the summer of 1990 had become an extensive and lively exchange among policymakers and other elites about the future of American foreign policy in a post-Cold War world. Simultaneously with the unfolding of events in the Persian Gulf region, Soviet leaders undertook measures to deal with the convulsive changes sweeping the Soviet Union; many observers viewed these measures as a setback to the promise of a freer society and economy that Mikhail Gorbachev had husbanded since the mid-1980s. As a result, the outlines of the post-Cold War world were less clearly delineated than they had been as recently as November 1989, when the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Still, as the United States approaches the millennium, the grand strategy of American foreign policy remains less certain than in any time in the recent past.

Policymakers today not only confront the most dramatic geopolitical changes in world order that have occurred in the previous half century; they also face another reality: the erosion of the political and economic supremacy in world politics once enjoyed by the United States. At the same time that new centers of power have emerged in Europe and Asia, widespread concern about the precarious state of U.S. fiscal affairs and its industrial, technological, and educational base shape a worrisome political climate at home. The United States is the most powerful nation in world politics today—a position affirmed by the desperate economic state of the Soviet Union, its nearest military competitor—but its ability to control outcomes at the international level now and in the future is seriously circumscribed.

Against this background, American foreign policymakers must confront critical questions as they assess the objectives of American foreign policy, the relationships of the United States with friends and foes, and the nation's foreign policy capabilities. At issue is whether the grand strategy designed to promote American interests and protect its security in the post-World

War II world will continue to serve the United States well as it looks toward the twenty-first century.

The purpose of this book is to provoke inquiry into the future of American foreign policy and the forces that will shape it. It is organized into three parts that emphasize *objectives*, *relationships*, and *capabilities*. Part I, Objectives, begins with a discussion of whether the United States should continue its global activism, revert to isolationism, or reorient its world role in other ways. This discussion is followed by a consideration of how the changing configuration of world power will impact the United States in a post-Cold War environment. Other essays in Part I propose alternatives to anticommunism and containment as foreign policy priorities and examine the impact that the post-Cold War world will exert on American domestic politics, where anticommunism and anti-Sovietism have heretofore been prominent in creating the domestic support necessary for active U.S. involvement in world affairs.

Part II, Relationships, focuses attention on the impact that a post-Cold War world can be expected to exert on U.S. relationships with its former adversaries and allies in Europe and Asia and on Third World nations once courted as potential partisans by the superpowers. The future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the cornerstone of American foreign policy since early in the post-World War II era, figures prominently in the various discussions. The critical importance of economic issues in shaping U.S. security relationships with others is also highlighted.

Part III, Capabilities, critically examines ideas about the military means and intelligence capabilities appropriate to the realization of U.S. foreign policy objectives in the emerging global order. Issues that challenge American leadership in international economic affairs are also examined. Central to the discussion is the ability of the United States to match its capabilities to its commitments. We therefore conclude the book with three essays that explicitly focus on the heated debate about the alleged decline of American power in world affairs and its consequences for the future of American foreign policy.

NOTES

1. George F. Kennan ["X"], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), p. 582.

2. See Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*, 4th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

3. Stanley Hoffmann, "What Should We Do in the World?" *Atlantic* 264 (October 1989), p. 84.

Part I: OBJECTIVES

In 1941 Henry Luce, the noted editor and publisher of *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*, envisioned his time as the dawn of “the American century.” The prediction was based on Luce’s conviction that “only America can effectively state the aims of this war [World War II],” which included, under American leadership, “a vital international economy” and “an international moral order.”¹ Fifty years later, in a State of the Union Address that followed shortly on the heels of the initiation of war against Iraq, George Bush spoke repeatedly of the “next American century” in which the “rule of law” would reign supreme in the “new world order.” Like Henry Luce, Bush extolled America’s leadership role, urging that “only the United States of America has the moral leadership, and the means to back it up.” “As Americans, we know there are times when we must step forward and accept our responsibility to lead the world away from the dark chaos of dictators, toward the brighter promise of a better day.”

Bush’s vision embraced the tradition of moral idealism long evident in American foreign policy, but especially since Woodrow Wilson sought early in this century to create “a world safe for democracy.” Bush’s words also harked back to the 1940s when the United States and the Soviet Union stood shoulder to shoulder, first in opposing Nazi Germany and later in seeking to build a structure of peace premised on the continued cooperation of the wartime allies. Still, hubris in the belief that the United States alone now had a special responsibility for creating the new world order was only thinly disguised. Shortly after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, for example, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard L. Armitage boasted that “those who so recently predicted America’s imminent decline must now acknowledge that

the United States alone possess [sic] sufficient moral, economic, political, and military horsepower to jump-start and drive international efforts to curb international lawlessness."²

In a similar vein, syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer portrayed this as the "unipolar moment." "The center of world power [in the immediate post-Cold War world] is the unchallenged superpower, the United States," he wrote. "There is but one first-rate power and no prospect in the immediate future of any power to rival it. . . . American preeminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself."³

Arrogance about the unipolar moment paralleled the earlier exhilaration evident in the notion that communist ideology had failed and that democracy had emerged triumphant.⁴ The theme, which was repeated often by members of the Bush administration during its first months in office, was given special intellectual currency by Francis Fukuyama, deputy director of the State Department's policy planning staff, who argued that political and economic liberalism had emerged the victor over its challengers. In consequence, he wrote, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."⁵

The optimism about the future of American foreign policy implicit in these viewpoints must be tempered by another vision that comes out of the 1940s. This one is associated with the eminent political commentator and journalist Walter Lippmann who, in 1943, observed that "foreign policy consists of bringing into balance . . . the nation's commitments and the nation's power."⁶ Coping with the "Lippmann gap," to use Samuel P. Huntington's felicitous phrase,⁷ has become a widespread concern. As argued by James Chace, a former managing editor of *Foreign Affairs*, the United States "is becoming more ordinary, more like the others, and increasingly subject to unaccustomed constraints." Having failed for more than two decades to pursue a "solvent" foreign policy, Chace contends, "the central question now is how to manage domestic and foreign affairs to bring about a sustainable foreign policy."⁸

In a similar vein, historian Paul Kennedy provoked a storm of controversy about the ends and means of policy with his 1987 treatise, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, which became a national best-seller. "Although the United States is at present still in a class of its own economically and perhaps even militarily," Kennedy wrote, "it cannot avoid confronting the two great tests which challenge the *longevity* of every major power that occupies the 'number one' position in world affairs: whether it can preserve a reasonable balance between the nation's perceived defense requirements and the means it possesses to maintain those commitments; and whether . . . it can preserve the technological and economic bases of its power from relative erosion in

the face of ever-shifting patterns of global production.”⁹ The danger, he warned, is similar to that faced by hegemonic powers in earlier historical periods, notably the Spanish at the turn of the seventeenth century and the British at the turn of the twentieth. “The United States now runs the risk . . . of . . . ‘imperial overstretch’: that is to say, decision-makers in Washington must face the awkward and enduring fact that the sum total of the United States’ global interests and obligations is nowadays far larger than the country’s power to defend them all simultaneously.”¹⁰

Even those who reject the thesis of “imperial overstretch” worry about the solvency of the United States. Krauthammer, for example, responds to the question “Can America long sustain its unipolar preeminence?” with the observation that “an American collapse to second-rank status will be not for foreign but for domestic reasons. . . . America’s low savings rate, poor educational system, stagnant productivity, declining work habits, rising demand for welfare-state entitlements and new taste for ecological luxuries have nothing at all to do with engagement in Europe, Central America or the Middle East. . . . What created an economy of debt unrivaled in American history is not foreign adventures but the low tax ideology of the 1980s, coupled with America’s insatiable desire for yet higher standards of living without paying the cost.”¹¹

What should be the objectives of American foreign policy in the new world environment policymakers face abroad, given the constraints they encounter at home? Fear of communism and Soviet expansionism galvanized domestic support for global activism in the years following World War II. The radical geopolitical changes that have occurred since the late 1980s open these motivating objectives to scrutiny as the nation confronts its interests and purposes in a way not matched since the early years of the Cold War nearly a half century ago.

DEFINING AMERICA’S INTERESTS

For more than forty years, containment of the Soviet Union dominated the foreign policy of the United States. The principle derives from President Harry S Truman’s declaration in 1947 that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” It is too simple—and simplistic—to suggest that nothing else animated the nation’s approach toward world affairs, but no principle has been more important in explaining American foreign policy conduct for a half century. Containing communism and the threat of Soviet expansionism whenever and wherever they might appear were the overriding objectives. Thus, globalism, anticommunism, and containment were inextricably intertwined as defining elements of America’s post-World War II grand strategy.

What should America’s grand strategy in the post-Cold War world be?

We begin our search for an answer with an essay by the eminent diplomatic historian John Lewis Gaddis, "Toward the Post-Cold War World."

Gaddis provides a panoramic view of the environment confronting the United States now that the Cold War has ended. Arguing that the geopolitical map that provided a lens for viewing world politics during the Cold War—framed as a contest between democracy and totalitarianism—may no longer be usable, Gaddis describes the new cartography as a contest between the forces of integration and disintegration. Each force subsumes a number of prevailing global trends with which the United States must grapple as it seeks to protect American national interests in a changed and changing world. These forces range from the emergence of a potential new superpower in the form of a consolidated European Community and an ascendant Germany, to the revival of nationalism and the protectionist policies it rationalizes, the resurgence of fundamentalist religious movements, and the emergence of ecological threats in the form of global warming and excessive population pressures. The new geopolitical landscape can be encapsulated as a competition between the forces of integration and disintegration. As Gaddis argues the end . . . of the Cold War brings not an end to threats, but rather a diffusion of them, as "one can no longer plausibly point to a single source of danger, as one could throughout most of [the Cold War]."

How might the United States best safeguard its interests in this emergent post-Cold War world? Gaddis examines alternatives for enhancing the bases on which American security rests with respect to several specific issues: the reconstruction of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; the creation of new security and economic structures for Europe; the deterrence of aggression of the sort symbolized by Saddam Hussein's attack on Kuwait; the costs and benefits of economic and political integration; and the resuscitation of domestic financial solvency.

As Gaddis takes care to explain, the post-Cold War environment defies easy characterization, which explains why the debate over the future of American foreign policy often leads to widely divergent prescriptions. The basis for these divergent viewpoints is the primary concern of the second essay. In "Entangled Forever," Josef Joffe examines the commonly held view that the West's victory over communism will lay to rest the U.S. obsession with the spearhead of the so-called communist challenge, the Soviet Union. Many observers, adhering to the view that the Cold War was rooted primarily in ideological incompatibilities, assume that the repudiation of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe simultaneously removed the sources of animosity toward the Soviet Union and policymakers' obsession with America's ideological foe. Not necessarily so, Joffe argues. Communism may be dead, but the logic of *realpolitik* continues. In Joffe's words, "The death of communism spells neither the birth of a new order nor the end of conflict." The Soviet Union remains formidable, new centers of power are emerging, and new conflicts are coming to the fore as the Cold War conflict recedes. Thus, the United States cannot return to isolationism, despite the Soviet

Union's rejection of communism and its withdrawal from competition for global influence. Instead, the United States must continue to bear the burden and exercise the responsibility of power, for it remains "entangled forever."

Whether the United States will follow Joffe's prescription depends on the outcome of the third debate on the role of the United States in world affairs. Robert W. Tucker examines two competing viewpoints in this debate in his essay, "1989 and All That." One is reflected in the view of those who believe the United States "should once again play a more modest role in the world," the other in the view of those who believe that its "post-World War II role must be held up as a model for the future." The case for each view is compelling, and Tucker's tightly constructed logic makes it difficult to determine which is likely to prevail. Events such as the Persian Gulf War and changes in the behavior of the Soviet Union may ultimately prove decisive in tipping the balance in favor of one or the other.

PREPARING FOR A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

The United States emerged from World War II as the single most powerful nation in the world. Eventually, the Soviet Union would rival the United States militarily, thus giving rise to a bipolar power configuration, but for a brief time the United States was the sole pole of power.

As noted previously, the end of the Cold War may signal that the United States has once more emerged as the world's single dominant actor. It is the hegemonic power to which other nations in the Northern Hemisphere will turn for leadership, according to this viewpoint, as they did in the case of the crisis over Kuwait and the Persian Gulf War. "The unipolar moment means that with the close of the century's three great Northern civil wars (World War I, World War II and the Cold War) an ideologically pacified North seeks security and order by aligning its foreign policy behind that of the United States," argues Krauthammer. "That is what is taking shape . . . in the Persian Gulf. And for the future, it is the shape of things to come."¹²

An emergent multipolarity is more commonly anticipated. In this world, as power comes to be distributed relatively equally among four or five great powers, new centers of power—for example, Germany, Japan, China, and a united Europe—will emerge to challenge the dominance of the United States.

Historical experience suggests that when power is distributed equally, political relationships are typically fluid and subject to change. Each player in the game is assertive, independent, and distrustful of the motives of the others; diplomacy displays a rational, nonideological, chesslike character; alliances and alignments are unstable and of short duration; and conflict is intense as each contender for predominance nervously fears the power accumulation of the other challengers and seeks to protect itself from their domination by struggling for its own supremacy. Historically, periods of multipolar balance-