

1998

## U.S. Grand Strategy

Robert Jervis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jervis, Robert (1998) "U.S. Grand Strategy," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 51 : No. 3 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol51/iss3/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

# U.S. Grand Strategy

## Mission Impossible

---

Robert Jervis

**O**N 1 MAY 1919, THE ACTING SECRETARY OF THE NAVY, Franklin D. Roosevelt, wrote the Secretary of State as follows:

It is a fundamental principle that the foreign policy of our government is in the hands of the State Department. . . . As it is upon our foreign policy that naval estimates must be based, it will be recognized that the Navy Department has a vital interest in this question. It is probable that certain policies are of such importance to our national interests that they must be defended at all costs. On the other hand certain policies are not, by the expense they would entail, justified if they lead to war. Hence. . . it is necessary for the Navy Department to know what policies it may be called upon to uphold by force, in order to formulate plans and building programs.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1940, the United States Chief of Naval Operations wrote the commander of the Pacific Fleet:

Suppose the Japs do go into the [Dutch] East Indies [without simultaneously attacking United States territory]? What are we going to do about it? My answer is, I don't know and I think there is nobody on God's green earth who can tell you.<sup>2</sup>

### Grand Strategy without an Enemy?

Leaders of military organizations always ask Roosevelt's question, but as he learned when he was president if not before, it is not easy to answer. Under

---

Robert Jervis is Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Politics and a member of the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. He is the author of numerous books and articles, which include *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976), *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (1984), *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (1989), and *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (1997).

---

© 1998 by Robert Jervis

**Naval War College Review, Summer 1998, Vol. LI, No. 3**

Published by U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, 1998

current circumstances it is impossible. To make the point more broadly, it will not be possible for the United States to develop and follow a coherent grand strategy over the next decade or so. Fortunately, one is not needed, although its absence will annoy scholars, confuse other countries, and make military planning extremely difficult.

The reason why the United States will not develop a grand strategy is the same reason why one is not necessary: the current world, like the one the nation lived in before the invention of heavy bombers, presents no pressing threats. But it is unlike the earlier eras in that the United States now has less-than-vital interests throughout the world, sufficient power to act on more than a few of them, and an activist ideology (as some would put it, a conscience, or as others would say, the belief that it has the right and indeed the obligation to try to improve the world).

This is then truly a new world, one that is unusual for statesmen and scholars alike. For many of them, especially if they belong to the Realist school, the external world that states inhabit is a very dangerous one.<sup>3</sup> States need to defend their security interests, and these are always potentially if not actually at risk—a situation Arnold Wolfers analogizes to a house on fire.<sup>4</sup> Under such circumstances, all states must obey the imperatives of the international system. This means that domestic politics does not enter in, that all states will behave the same way under the same circumstances regardless of their internal features (for instance, democracies react as dictatorships do), that democratic control of foreign policy has little meaning, and that morality can play no role, because there is little room for choice. Whether or not this is ever an accurate description has been heatedly debated, a debate that is irrelevant here, because no one would claim that this describes the world the United States now inhabits and shapes. The central implication here is that the United States now has unusual freedom of action. Of course, this is what statesmen often dream about. But we should not forget the old saying: “Be careful what you dream for, because you may get it.”

The most vital interest of any country is security from invasion or attack. The second-most-vital interest, often linked to it, is the ability to protect the state's closest allies, who may be valuable because they contribute to the state's security or because they are valued in their own right. A third interest is in economic prosperity, which both contributes to security and is a goal in itself. Almost all analysts agree that these three core values are now available to the United States for free—that is, they do not require strenuous efforts, partly because of nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, not only are there no plausible direct threats to American security, but Western Europe similarly lacks such threats. Those countries constitute what Karl Deutsch called a “security community,”

## 24 Naval War College Review

which means that they do not menace each other;<sup>6</sup> there is little reason to fear the development of extreme economic conflict between these countries and the United States. This now appears to be true for Japan as well, contrary to the alarmist claims that were common a few years ago. It is as certain as anything can be in international politics that the United States will not fight a war with the states of Western Europe, or Japan. This is a truly revolutionary change in world politics: there has never been an era in which the major powers have not periodically fought each other. We simply do not know what a world will be like in which this threat has been lifted.<sup>7</sup>

One can, of course, conjure up all sorts of threats, such as a resurgent Russia, a belligerent China that continues economic growth at 10 percent a year, or terrorism. It would take extremely lengthy analysis to rebut each of these claims, and I will be content to assert that they largely represent the political and psychological need to find dangers.<sup>8</sup>

### Multiple, But Secondary, Goals

Security threats to the United States, then, are largely absent;<sup>9</sup> that does not mean, however, that it has no foreign policy goals. Indeed, there are many secondary threats worth worrying about and secondary values worth pursuing, and doing so is feasible because of America's great power. But it is the very fact that many goals can be pursued while none are primary that generates the current debate. During the Cold War, to be sure, arguments over strategy were fierce, but they largely involved assessments of the Soviet Union. Some of today's arguments turn partly on assessments of the international environment, but most relate to what the United States values, the prices and risks it should be willing to pay to reach alternative goals, and the priorities of domestic and international objectives.<sup>10</sup> In this environment of greatly reduced threat, people focus on dangers that are less extreme or less plausible. By definition, policy makers and military planners concentrate on threats according to some combination of the likelihood that they will materialize and the menace that they will constitute if they do so. But it is harder than ever to see how one particular unlikely threat (for example, rogue states) compares to another (say, China) on these dimensions. Indeed, perhaps threats of a very different kind deserve greatest attention, as environmentalists, for example, claim. Of course this plethora of remote but equally plausible menaces would not be a problem if the grand strategy designed to deal with one of them suited the others as well. But only those who believe in a deity would expect such a happy coincidence.

Life is both more pleasant and more complicated when there are no threats that are both dangerous and likely. I believe that this is clearly the case today. For example, look at what one typical commission has designated as American

vital interests (“vital national interests” being in its view “conditions that are strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation”):

- Prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attack on the United States.
- Prevent the emergence of a hostile hegemon in Europe or Asia.
- Prevent the emergence of a hostile major power on U.S. borders or in control of the seas.
- Prevent the catastrophic collapse of major global systems: trade, financial markets, supplies of energy, or environmental.
- Ensure the survival of U.S. allies.<sup>11</sup>

Not only are all these threats vague or unlikely to materialize, but it is hard to see how we would go about estimating, even roughly, how probable each is. Yet in order to know what resources we should devote to preventing or coping with them, we would need to do this. Bernard Brodie, justifiably known as the dean of American strategists, noted:

All sorts of notions and propositions are churned out, and often presented for consideration with the prefatory words: “It is conceivable that. . .” Such words establish their own truth, for the fact that someone has conceived of whatever proposition follows is enough to establish that it is conceivable. Whether it is worth a second thought, however, is another matter.<sup>12</sup>

In previous eras, decision makers were often willing to say that certain eventualities that would be deeply disturbing if they arose were unlikely enough to be dismissed out of hand. Thus in 1924 Winston Churchill opposed the Admiralty’s argument that more ships had to be built to meet the menace from Japan: “A war with Japan! But why should there be a war with Japan? I do not believe there is the slightest chance of it in our lifetime.”<sup>13</sup> Of course these judgments can be wrong, as this one was. But they are both necessary and difficult to make in an era when no threat is salient and pressing. We may be able to make rough judgments of probability of dangers and events as being “very probable,” “probable,” or “improbable.” But it is extremely difficult to distinguish among the “improbable,” the “very improbable,” and the “very, very improbable.”

At least as troublesome, it is difficult to develop intelligent policy prescriptions for distant and unlikely threats, because with them we are dealing with so many unknowns. Take the first vital interest on the list above. How do we go about establishing a grand strategy for “preventing, deterring and reducing the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attacks on the United States” unless

## 26 Naval War College Review

we know something about the countries that might menace us and the circumstances under which the danger might arise? Of course in the past it was not easy to see how to diminish and protect against possible threats, as the debates before the two world wars and during the Cold War remind us. But at least there was a fairly small set of well-defined issues that needed to be analyzed in order to produce guidance. Difficult as it was to analyze Soviet intentions, that question was easy and well structured compared to estimating whether the People's Republic of China is likely to be a major threat ten or twenty years from now. Unless one believes in deterministic theories of history (for instance: countries with rapidly increasing economies will expand until they meet a superior power; the Chinese, because of their history and culture, see themselves as the "Middle Kingdom" and so seek to dominate the barbarians; the center of world power has shifted from Europe to Asia), one needs to examine a large number of pathways by which China might become dangerous, and for each one to estimate the likelihood that a proposed policy would be effective, ineffective, or misguided. Unfortunately, the world is sufficiently complex and perverse that a policy that would discourage and deter China under one set of circumstances could exacerbate the danger under another, thus ruling out any single prescription.

This more relaxed environment creates greater room than there used to be not only for differences of opinion over what policy to pursue but for the splintering of opinion into unstable segments. In the absence of a clear danger, let alone a clear and present one, our external environment does not require that we be guided in all contingencies by one set of values rather than another. There is always agreement that the protection of the country comes first, but after that, consensus breaks down, which is hardly surprising. Individuals and groups vary widely in the priority they give to self-interest as opposed to altruism (or to put it slightly differently, in how narrowly or broadly they construe self-interest) as well as in how they see their own interests and in the values they seek for themselves and others. Thus some people give economic interests pride of place; others believe that the United States should give priority to enhancing human rights around the world; while others believe that a crucial part of the national interest is aiding the countries to which they have ethnic or ideological ties. Still others focus on threats, but not on the same ones: some fear Russia, others worry about China, while others believe that the most pressing danger is proliferation in general, or specific countries getting nuclear weapons. Of course it is not news that the national interest is not entirely objective or that it can be composed of incompatible or conflicting parts. But in the current era, the lack of a plausible candidate for a single unifying value or a motive that should animate all American foreign policy greatly magnifies the difficulties of creating a coherent grand strategy.

## Pluralism with a Vengeance

What we are likely to see, then, is quite familiar to students of American domestic policy—because neither any one interest nor the state itself is strong enough to impose coherent and consistent guidance, courses of action will be shaped less by a grand design than by the pulling and hauling of various interests, ideas, and political calculations. This is the model of pluralism, which although often criticized normatively or descriptively, is believed by most scholars to capture a great deal of American politics.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is commonly argued that pluralism not only preserves individual liberties and ensures that each group gains at least some of the values about which it cares most but is likely to produce a better overall policy than could be arrived at by a central authority seeking a synthesis of the public interest.<sup>15</sup>

During the Cold War, however, Realists argued that the national interest abroad, unlike the public interest at home, is not chimerical, because the external environment is sufficiently compelling to override many domestic differences and enable even a relatively weak state to follow a policy of some coherence.<sup>16</sup> The argument that the United States can now adopt a grand strategy rests on the similar notion that it needs and has sufficient unity of interest, purpose, and government structures to allow the national interest model to hold. Whatever the virtues of this in normative terms—and I might debate but certainly not dismiss it—I see no reason to expect this to describe the future. Instead, I think the pluralist model offers much more guidance.

Henry Kissinger argues that “a conceptual framework . . . is an essential tool [of foreign policy. Its] absence . . . produces exactly the opposite of freedom of action; policy makers are forced to respond to parochial interests, buffeted by pressures without a fixed compass.”<sup>17</sup> But that any individual or group has such a framework is not sufficient to protect it against the danger that Kissinger foresees; rather, there must be widespread agreement on it. Indeed, it was the inability of domestic leaders to maintain such an agreement in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate that Kissinger claims destroyed his policy. That the argument is self-serving does not mean it is entirely incorrect. In any event, the history of the 1970s does remind us of both the importance and the difficulty of gaining domestic support.<sup>18</sup>

“All politics is local,” Tip O’Neill\* famously remarked. Students of foreign policy are offended by this notion—surely, they insist, the nation’s security and other vital interests are too important to be at the mercy of conflicting values, parochial interests, and partisan politics.<sup>19</sup> In July 1997 the Senate voted

---

\* Thomas Phillip O’Neill, Jr. (1912–1994), U.S. representative (Democrat) from Massachusetts, 1953–1987.

## 28 Naval War College Review

overwhelmingly to delay the next two rounds of military base closings until it received a study of the “economic effects of past and future shut-downs. By voting as it did the Senate ignored the wishes of President [William J.] Clinton and military leaders who have argued that the closings—of bases still to be determined—were central to their efforts to pare the Defense Department budget and allow military officials to shift money from military operations to weapons systems.”<sup>20</sup> Of course the location of military bases is the aspect of security policy that has always been most influenced by local and partisan politics, for the obvious reason that the ratio between domestic impact and foreign policy importance in that realm is so skewed toward the former. But in the post-Cold War world, this will characterize most foreign policy issues.

Three months earlier, the *New York Times* carried a story that may have been equally revealing, if inadvertently so. Indeed, it was only a photograph: the new F-22 fighter plane being rolled out of the Lockheed-Martin plant in Marietta, Georgia. In addition to a stylized American flag, the airplane bore the painted slogan “Spirit of America.”<sup>21</sup> Because the military rationale for the expensive, advanced aircraft is quite unpersuasive, “Spirit of America” is best translated not as the historic American commitment to defend itself, let alone to drop bombs on small countries, but by another slogan: “The business of America is business.” Of course military procurement policy has always been strongly affected by the domestic political economy, but with the declining persuasiveness of the foreign policy arguments for particular weapons, the influence of local economic pressures is certain to increase.<sup>22</sup>

The broader argument for the rise of American economic diplomacy hardly needs rehearsing here. Although since Ron Brown’s death\* American economic salesmanship abroad has not been so flamboyant, the basic point remains that when the most important foreign policy objective of security has been reached or is indeterminate, other goals will come to the fore. To take the most obvious example, it is then not surprising that American policy toward China, right or wrong, is driven much more by economic concerns than by the belief that levying trade sanctions would aggravate Chinese aggressiveness or compound human rights violations.

Yet even if economic objectives were not only of increased importance but were dominant, it still would not be easy to develop a coherent American grand strategy: economic interests are not united. Importers often have different

---

\* Ronald H. Brown (1942–1996), Secretary of Commerce and former Chairman of the National Democratic (Party) Committee, killed in the crash of a U.S. Air Force transport near Dubrovnik, Croatia, on 3 April 1996, along with a party of thirty-two U.S. government officials and senior business executives. The group was touring Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to encourage postwar reconstruction contracts for U.S. companies.



interests from exporters; one state or congressional district has economic stakes that conflict with those of others; different sectors in the economy—and perhaps different classes—have diverging interests. A strong executive branch or a corporatist political structure might be able to weld these interests together, but the United States lacks both.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, a small country whose prosperity depends on trade may behave coherently, especially if it elects its officials by proportional representation.<sup>24</sup> Again, the description does not fit the United States. Our system of separation of powers, an unruly executive branch, and the dependence of political parties on corporate and union money means that private interests have extraordinary access. Furthermore, the fragmentation creates multiple arenas for political struggles, which means that one group, interest, or ideology can prevail on one issue or in one instance but not in others. No more than it can adopt a coherent “industrial policy” is the United States likely to follow the sort of coherent economic foreign policy that could both support and require a grand strategy.

This is not to imply that economic considerations—conflicting or not—should dominate American foreign policy. Indeed, I think that conventional wisdom has tended to oversell the extent to which economics will dominate the post-Cold War era. Although it is easy to display some very large figures for the amount of trade, investment, or financial exchanges the United States engages in, it is far from clear how much these will be affected by foreign policy. A major war involving one of our main trading partners would deeply affect the American economy, but many of the main international factors that structure our economic well-being seem quite firmly established. Of course, our ability to lower trade barriers with specific countries, especially in Asia, can be affected by the policies that we choose, and these can reciprocally affect whether those countries buy such items as airplanes and advanced telecommunications systems from us or the Europeans. But in the context of a multitrillion-dollar economy the impact of these cases is not great. Now that the vogue for strategic trade theory has passed, it is easier to see that the main determinants of the health of the American economy are internal.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the decline in military threats automatically elevates the relative standing of economic goals.

Although economic considerations will play a large role, especially when the economic stakes are high, they do not have the field to themselves. To say that security interests are not pressing does not mean they are completely absent; to argue, as I did earlier, that potential threats like proliferation do not readily lend themselves to a judgment as to their magnitude or the policies that will best combat them does not mean that people will not or should not argue for dealing with them. In addition, humanitarian or altruistic values are strongly held in American society. Indeed, I doubt whether the policy of containment would have had as much public support were it not for the fact that people believed

### 30 Naval War College Review

that keeping other countries noncommunist not only bolstered American security but was good for the world. Similarly, the current policy of supporting emerging democracies is fed by the argument that this will improve the lives of the people in those countries in addition to making other nations, including the United States, safer and more prosperous. In other cases humanitarian motives are the main ones at work, as in what support there was for the intervention in Somalia. Realists may decry such motives and argue they will entangle the United States in unnecessary quarrels without necessarily helping others, but it is hard to understand American foreign policy in the past or predict it in the future without taking account of such motives. What is crucial here, however, is not that these impulses cannot be ignored but that they are too weak and unfocused to direct policy over a significant period of time and wide geographic areas. They will wax and wane according to circumstances and the public mood, and they will be intensified and brought to bear by particularly visible and outrageous atrocities. They are strong enough to contest with other values without being able to dominate.

Finally, American foreign policy will be influenced by those who favor their co-ethnics abroad. Again, this is not a new phenomenon; the role of the Irish and German-Americans in earlier periods comes to mind. More recently, the American "tilt" toward Greece in its disputes with Turkey cannot be understood apart from the fact that Americans of Greek (and Armenian) descent vastly outnumber those who came from Turkey. Realists again are horrified by these influences; the textbooks are so embarrassed by them that they give them no acknowledgment. But I see no reason to reject these ties as a valid part of the national interest of a multiethnic country. Furthermore, while observers like Samuel Huntington see internal developments within the United States as dangerously approximating the external "clash of civilizations," it may well be that only a multiethnic country can operate effectively in a diverse world.<sup>26</sup> In addition, various ethnic groups within the United States can form bridges to their co-ethnics abroad.<sup>27</sup> But the main point here is that legitimate or illegitimate, dangerous or helpful, ethnic considerations are going to play a role in American foreign policy.

It was only the Cold War that held pluralism in check. A longer historical perspective reminds us of the difficulties states have had in constructing a coherent and stable foreign policy when the interests within them have been powerful and conflicting. Now it is all the rage to argue that democracies not only do not fight each other but are also especially able to commit themselves to courses of action;<sup>28</sup> in the nineteenth century conventional wisdom held to the contrary, that democracies, being under the sway of unstable public opinion, could not be counted upon to carry out threats or promises. Before World War I it was not entirely disingenuous of British statesmen to tell both France and

Germany that Whitehall could not make firm commitments as to the conditions under which Britain would fight a war on the Continent—because the decision would have to be made through democratic processes which, being responsive to public attitudes, would be influenced by the details of the situation that actually arose rather than be determined by more general and hypothetical questions. This kind of constraint was more the rule than the exception in earlier eras, and I believe it is likely to become familiar again.

In summary, the United States has a fragmented political system in an external environment in which no single interest, threat, or value predominates. This is a recipe for pluralism with a vengeance, not for a grand strategy, however intelligent it may look on paper. The United States will “muddle through,” to use Lindblom’s term, rather than follow a coherent plan.<sup>29</sup>

### **Military Planning In an Uncertain World**

None of this means that American foreign policy will be entirely without patterns. I doubt that we will undertake serious economic sanctions to improve the human rights in a major trading partner like China. Nor are we likely to deploy massive force for humanitarian goals, to secure secondary economic interests, or to uphold abstract principles of world order. At the other end of the continuum, inertia if not enlightened self-interest will maintain security commitments to allies in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and we are unlikely to permit the military conquest of Taiwan. Furthermore, diplomatic instruments, backed by demonstrations of force, will be important in areas of the world, such as East Asia and Eastern and Central Europe, where American interests are important but not compelling. Support for democracies, for countries with ethnic groups in the United States, and for humanitarian values is likely also to be provided when the cost is predicted to be low. But these boundaries leave a great deal in between. Whether the United States intervenes in cases like Somalia and Bosnia, how it will act if China puts military pressure on its neighbors, whether it would threaten to use force in a conflict between South American countries, whether it would provide guarantees or use force to inhibit proliferation, will be determined less by any grand strategy than by the balance of domestic interests and the play of domestic politics.

It has often been said that the current American enemy is uncertainty and instability. Whether or not this is true for the country at large, it is true for the American military. The domestic environment that will determine the missions it is directed to carry out is an uncertain and unstable one. Security policies will differ from one issue area to another and from one period of time to another,

## 32 Naval War College Review

as circumstances and domestic opinion vary. As I indicated in the epigraph, leaders of military organizations often ask their political superiors for general foreign policy guidelines so that they can develop an efficient force. In a well-ordered polity, such a request is not only reasonable but mandatory. As Bernard Brodie constantly stressed, we must not lose sight of Clausewitz's wisdom that politics must guide military policy.<sup>30</sup> But the politics that is going to guide American foreign and security policy is going to be pluralism, and its results cannot be codified ahead of time.

Unless and until the United States faces a major and pressing threat, foreign policy will begin at home. No American policy can be sustained without adequate domestic support. One might think that this could be arranged with adequate public education: if the experts develop any sort of consensus about at least the outlines of a necessary grand strategy, the public can be brought around to support it. Indeed, for all the current partisan sniping, the two political parties are not deeply divided on basic issues of foreign and security policy. But despite the best efforts of Madeleine Albright, even a secretary of state who places a priority on building domestic support faces severe constraints on the ability to do so.<sup>31</sup> In the late 1940s, when the partisan divisions were greater, those who favored the containment policy were able to work with opinion leaders throughout the society to develop strong foundations for the policy. I do not think this is possible now: not only is trust in government and many other organizations very low, but we lack the sort of civic leaders who were powerful in those days. Only the most extreme conspiracy theorists see the Council on Foreign Relations as anything but a social and status group. "Captains of industry" are absent, with the possible exception of a handful of leaders in the communications and information sectors, who lack the breadth of experience that earlier elites had. Union leaders have disappeared even faster than unions. University presidents, who once were national figures, now are itinerant money raisers. Those newspapers that have survived are much less relied upon than was true earlier, and television anchors lack the expertise and reputation that would allow them to be influential, even if professional ethics and the large corporations that own the networks permitted them to try. Known to the public now are "celebrities," largely from sports and the entertainment industry. I would not expect them to undertake the public educational campaigns we saw in the past.

What we are likely to see is that different groups, interests, and values will predominate in different areas and at different times. To take an extreme case, American policy toward Cuba has been "captured" by the emigrés in Florida in a way that is very familiar to students of American regulatory policy. When such a feat is impossible, we will see other patterns familiar in domestic policy making: shifting coalitions and logrolling. One group will agree to support

another's foreign policy in an area of great concern to the other (but not to itself) in return for reciprocation. A July 1997 newspaper carried a plea by the "Coalition for International Justice" that the United States arrest war criminals in the former Yugoslavia. From one perspective, it is heartening to see a coalition of such diverse organizations as the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the YWCA, B'nai B'rith, the Arab American Institute, the Anti-Defamation League, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, and several labor unions, as well as individuals as different from each other as Patricia Derian (Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights under President Jimmy Carter), Bianca Jagger, and former "hard liners" such as Max Kampelman, Paul Nitze, and Robert Dole.<sup>32</sup> But this is not the sort of coalition that can support a general foreign policy; it would not be activated by other issues. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that every new issue will produce a different alignment, there is little reason to expect the coalitions that form on questions like the policy toward the Congo, maintaining most-favored-nation status with China, expanding Nato, or expanding the North American Free Trade Association to bear much resemblance to each other.

Not only change but instability over time is likely, as the perceived effect of each policy influences later beliefs and preferences. Of course this phenomenon was not absent in the past: the American experience in Vietnam shaped policy for the succeeding decade. But with less to anchor American policy, smaller events will exert greater influence. Thus I suspect that how the Bosnian intervention ends will significantly influence the likelihood that the United States will undertake further missions of this kind, just as the deaths of a handful of soldiers in Somalia not only forced the United States to withdraw but reduced the American appetite for similar tasks.

Military planning, let alone rational procurement, will be very difficult in such a world. It is easy for a civilian theorist to say that the military should simply plan on being flexible and must prepare to deal with the unknown. But any military officer knows that there are severe limits on the extent to which this is possible. Indeed, in reaction to such instruction an obvious military strategy is to develop a force that can only be used in certain kinds of circumstances or in certain ways, in order to rule out at least the wilder possible political vagaries. Indeed, I admit to favoring a force structure that would make it impossible for the United States to engage in large interventions without extensive allied involvement; I think that others should carry more of the security burden, do not believe that there are threats to American vital interests that would leave those of our allies unscathed, and doubt that the United States has a monopoly of foreign policy wisdom, and so I would not mind giving allies a *de facto* veto over policy. But even with some degree of self-protection, the

## 34 Naval War College Review

military is likely to be called upon in unpredictable ways and places. The lack of major threats to vital American interests is an incredible boon to America and its allies, but it places unusual burdens on its military.

This environment will also be a difficult one for civil-military relations already under significant strain.<sup>33</sup> To employ military instruments for national goals that are secondary at best brings up a whole host of difficulties for the armed services, especially because many of the missions require frequent overseas deployments and retraining. Our military cannot be an over-armed police force that specializes in assisting local "civic action" programs, let alone ambitious nation-building. Yet these are almost certain to be prominent among the missions assigned to it. In this difficult and turbulent atmosphere, the closest working relations among civil and military officials at all levels is greatly to be desired. But it is extremely unlikely, as the two cultures have grown further apart over the past decade. Only a decreasing number of civilians have served in the military or have extensive experience in military affairs; fewer military leaders seem to have a deep understanding of proper civil-military relations. The result is not so much that one group or the other has grown excessively strong, but that both have mishandled their responsibilities and relations vis-à-vis the other. Civilians seem to have great difficulty in understanding why many activities will pose serious problems for the military and fail to consult adequately on issues with a strong military component, such as the proposed expansion of Nato. Military officials too often use their expertise to influence political decisions inappropriately, if not to actually make them, as the American military commander in Bosnia apparently did when he made clear that Nato troops would not arrest indicted war criminals. Uncertainty about American grand strategy will only exacerbate these problems. Dealing with them calls for excellent working relations and understanding on both sides of the civilian-military divide, but this divide has become deeper, and few seem to be willing or able to begin the efforts necessary to bridge it.

---

### Notes

1. Roosevelt to Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., 1 May 1919, National Archives, State Dept., 110.7/56.

2. Quoted in Robert Butow, *Tojo and the Coming of the War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 190.

3. For the purposes of this paper, I will not distinguish between "classical" Realism (e.g., Thucydides, E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau) and Neorealism (Kenneth Waltz).

4. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 12-7.

5. The influence of nuclear weapons on world politics has been hotly debated; my own views can be found in *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).

6. Karl Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), chap. 2.

7. I have discussed the causes and implications of this in "The Future of World Politics: Will It Resemble the Past?" *International Security*, Winter 1991-92, pp. 39-73, and "International Primacy: Is the Game Worth

the Candle?" *ibid.*, Spring 1993, pp. 52–67. Also see John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Real World Order* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1993); and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

8. Frederick Hartmann, *The Conservation of Enemies* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982); John Mueller, "The Catastrophe Quota: Trouble after the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, September 1994, pp. 355–75.

9. For an excellent discussion, see Eric Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995).

10. The literature on alternative grand strategies is voluminous; an excellent comprehensive survey is Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Winter 1996–97, pp. 5–53.

11. The Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Science and International Affairs, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., July 1966), p. 5.

12. Bernard Brodie, "The Development of Nuclear Strategy," *International Security*, Spring 1978, p. 83.

13. Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The Prophet of Truth, 1922–1939*, vol. 5 of *Winston S. Churchill* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 76.

14. For normative criticism, see Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1979; 1st ed. 1969); for descriptive criticism see, for example, C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), and Grant McConnell, *The Decline of Agrarian Democracy* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1953). On pluralism in general see Andrew McFarland, *Power and Leadership in Pluralist Systems* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1969).

15. The classic statement is Charles Edward Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

16. This claim was most commonly made by students of security but was affirmed by some of those analyzing foreign economic policy as well: see Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978) and Robert Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," *Security Studies*, Spring 1996, pp. 3–26.

17. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 130.

18. This need is neglected in most scholarly analyses; even the brief mention of domestic support in Posen's and Ross's canvass of candidate grand strategies is more than most treatments offer (Posen and Ross, pp. 16, 22, 31). It is usually assumed that the intellectual job of determining the best policy is the hardest part of the task, if not the only part.

19. My sense is that in addition to finding pluralism a menace to the country, Realists are deeply offended by the notion that something so important—indeed noble—as the country's stance in world politics should be determined by grubby domestic politics. Foreign policy would then be "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"—which would not only rule out the possibility of developing coherent policy and explanations for policy but also call into question the importance and meaning of the analyst's calling.

20. Jerry Gray, "Senate, in a Rebuff to Clinton, Votes to Delay Base Closings," *New York Times*, 10 July 1997, p. A1.

21. *New York Times*, 10 April 1997, p. A26.

22. For the effect of domestic politics on procurement see, for example, James Kurth, "Why We Buy the Weapons We Do," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1973, pp. 33–56; and Nick Kotz, *Wild Blue Yonder: Money, Politics, and the B-1 Bomber* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

23. In what other country could a trade crisis be sparked by the actions of an obscure federal agency (the Federal Maritime Commission), which took everyone else in the executive branch by surprise? The story can be found in the *New York Times*, 17–8 October 1997.

24. Peter Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985); Ronald Rogowski, "Trade and the Variety of Democratic Institutions," *International Organization*, Spring 1987, pp. 203–24.

25. For strategic trade theory see, for example, Paul Krugman, ed., *Strategic Trade Policy and the New International Economics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), *Rethinking International Trade* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), and *Peddling Prosperity: Economic Sense and Nonsense in the Age of Diminished Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1994); Klaus Stegentann, "Policy Rivalry among Industrial States: What Can We Learn from Models of Strategic Trade Policy?" *International Organization*, Winter 1989, pp. 73–100; Helen Milner and David Yoffie, "Between Free Trade and Protectionism: Strategic Trade Policy and the Theory of Corporate Trade Demand," *International Organization*, Spring 1989, pp. 239–72; J. David Richardson, "'New' Trade

Theory and Policy a Decade Old: Assessment in a Pacific Context," in Richard Higgott, Richard Leaver, and John Ravenhill, eds., *Pacific Economic Relations in the 1990s* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1993), pp. 83-105; and Marc Busch, "The Strategic Trade Calculus of States: Cooperation and Conflict in Emerging Industries," unpublished dissertation, Department of Political Science, Columbia Univ., 1994.

26. For the "clash of civilizations," Huntington, pp. 304-8.

27. Yossi Shain, "Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Winter 1994-95, pp. 811-41.

28. See, for example, James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audience and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, September 1994, pp. 577-92. The discrepancy between current and past beliefs is commented on by Kurt Gaubatz, "Democratic States and Commitment in International Relations," *International Organization*, Winter 1996, p.

29. Charles Edward Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review*, Spring 1959, pp. 74-88. A sidelight is that if this analysis is correct, decisions will be hard to explain after the fact, because so many relatively small factors either influenced them or could have. We are accustomed to trying to explain big and important cases, in which we believe that with so much at stake only major forces and considerations could have been responsible. But when we look at cases like the American intervention in Somalia or even the intervention in Bosnia, this assumption does not hold, because the costs and risks were low. For future decisions as well, many values and considerations could be at work, because even relatively small perceived gains will be sufficient to set policies in motion.

30. See especially his *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), chap. 1.

31. Steven Lee Myers, "Secretary of State Sells Foreign Policy at Home," *New York Times*, 8 February 1997, p. A6. For a discussion of decision makers' attitudes as to whether public support is desirable or necessary for an effective foreign policy, see Douglas Foyle, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Elite Beliefs as a Mediating Variable," *International Studies Quarterly*, March 1997, pp. 141-70.

32. "Mr. President: Order the Arrest of War Criminals in Bosnia Now!" *New York Times*, 15 July 1997, p. A8.

33. See, for example, Richard Kohn, "Out of Control: The Crisis in Civil-Military Relations," *National Interest*, Spring 1995, pp. 3-17, the symposium in the following issue, and A. J. Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned: America's Military in a New Era," *ibid.*, Summer 1997, pp. 16-25. The difficulties are exacerbated but not caused by Clinton's unique characteristics.

Ψ

### **Our Electronic Addresses Will Be Changing!**

*Some time between 1 August and 30 September 1998, the Naval War College will shift to its own World Wide Web server and to a new Web "domain." When it does, all of its electronic addresses (including those of the Press) will change.*

*For the first year thereafter, visitors to our online service (on the College's Website) will automatically be forwarded to our new URL (which is not yet finalized but will be announced in our Autumn 1998 issue).*

*E-mail, however, will be forwarded only through 30 September 1998. After that date, or if e-mail to one of our current addresses is returned as undeliverable, contact us at <press@nwc.navy.mil> or at the telephone or fax numbers given on page 164 of this issue. New individual addresses will appear in our Autumn issue.*