

U.S. Foreign Policy: America's Grand Strategy

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Now that you have lost your enemy, what will you do?

Georgy Arbatov, Soviet propagandist

The end of the Cold War produced little celebration in the United States. Almost immediately the elites began an open argument about the proper place of the U.S. in this new world: what goals should it have and how it should achieve them. For its part, the public seems to have great expectations about the **peace dividend** — now that the U.S. no longer had the awesome Soviet adversary, it would not need to continue its military spending and could instead focus on solving domestic and international problems. And problems there were aplenty: the gap between the rich and the poor was growing, both within the U.S. and globally,¹ the environmental degradation was proceeding apace, the disintegration of the Soviet Union left a multitude of nascent states some of which were armed with nuclear weapons and all of which faced uncertain political and economic transitions from Soviet rule, and the collapse of the global rivalry unleashed regional forces that had been restrained by their patron superpower. The emergence of a unified Germany in Europe revived old fears and ignited a debate about the future of NATO. It was fragmentation, however, not integration, that would pose the greatest challenges: in Yugoslavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Somalia, and Iraq, among others. What was the United States to do?

By historical standards, the U.S. was now the sole remaining superpower, a global hegemon whose economic and military might were simply out of reach even for its nearest competitors. Should it focus on security or economic development? Should it rely on multilateral institutions — many of which it had helped create — or act unilaterally in what it considered its own best interest? What were these interests? Should it engage in humanitarian assistance and support peace-keeping operations or focus on combating terrorism and preventing nuclear proliferation? Should it

¹We shall have an occasion to discuss whether this is (or should be) a concern.

drastically curtail its military spending or aim to maintain its status as the sole superpower for the foreseeable future?

Scholars and pundits alike called for a new **grand strategy** for America. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Americans had more or less come to agree that Communism represented an existential threat to the country, and as a result there was widespread support for the strategy of containment, even if its more militaristic descendants — like NSC-68 — had generated policies that commanded far less enthusiasm. But now Communism had been so thoroughly discredited that one prominent analyst declared an **end of history**, meaning that humanity has reached the pinnacle of political development in Western-style liberal democracy and no viable alternatives remained.²

Without communism, there was no containment, and without containment, there was no unifying purpose to U.S. foreign policy. Without such a purpose, there was no agreement about what constituted vital interests, and what priorities should be established in the allocation of resources. Without a clear sense of national goals, it would be impossible to implement coherent policies, making it difficult not only to reassure allies and warn potential adversaries, but even to identify friend and foe. During the Cold War, the clear opponent endowed U.S. policy with a sense of purpose that allowed it to assume leadership in the West and globally. Leadership, however, requires goals that the nation can agree on and that allies would support. Deprived of an enemy, the victorious superpower was now adrift, and inevitably its authority to lead suddenly evaporated. The U.S. had worked hard to create and preserve a global status quo that benefitted the West. Now, as new challenges to this status quo would inevitably arise, the U.S. would essentially take them on case-by-case basis, reacting to events without a vision that would link them and that could identify a strategy that would preserve the status quo at lower costs.

1 Isolationism

Roughly, there were four competing visions for the role of the United States in the post-Cold War world. One possible, but improbable, strategy was **isolationism**. It envisioned a thorough retrenchment of U.S. foreign policy that would see the country disentangle itself from great power rivalries in Europe and Asia, disengage from Africa, and limit its priorities to the Americas, with an emphasis on North America. It would continue to compete aggressively in the world economy but will no longer intervene militarily and diplomatically in messy affairs beyond the Western hemisphere. It would withdraw from NATO, stay out of regional and ethnic conflicts, and abstain from humanitarian interventions. Its main task would be self-defense and its focus will be on ensuring the security, liberty, and prosperity for its

²Francis Fukuyama. 1989. “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, Summer. <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>, accessed July 21, 2014.

own citizens. The isolationists tend to minimize potential threats to U.S. security by arguing that no other nation or reasonable combination of nations can come close to matching American military power, and that regional rivalries must be resolved regionally. For instance, even if Russia and China engage in military buildups, others will be able to contain them: Western Europeans will prevent the extension of Russian influence westward, Indians and Japanese will prevent the extension of Chinese influence eastward, while Russians and Chinese will contain each other in Asia. Isolationism emphasizes the power of the United States but instead of advocating using it (as other approaches do), it concludes that it would be safe to disengage and even go it alone if necessary economically.

There are serious problems with this approach, which is probably why it was never a serious contender for a new vision for the United States. For example, it is difficult to see how withdrawal of the United States from global affairs would not unleash regional rivalries and an intense competition for security worldwide. Former allies will have to fend for themselves and former enemies will be emboldened to seek redress for their grievances. This will produce arms races in conventional weaponry and possibly nuclear proliferation. Those who cannot compete with conventional weapons because they lack the resources or the manpower to do so, might opt instead for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in an attempt to deter their opponents. These competitions are going to be far more complicated than the neat balance-of-power view would have it. It will be difficult to discern the direction of events until very late, which means that the United States might be forced to enter the fray long after its opponents have secured favorable positions. These belated entries will result in much more expensive, protracted, and riskier engagements. Even though the isolationist strategy could save billions in defense expenditures, the loss of global influence itself entails costs that are likely to far offset any such savings.

2 Primacy

The second strategy, **primacy**, agreed with isolationism that America's power was unchallenged, but did not share the optimistic assessment that it was going to remain so for the foreseeable future without active effort to keep it that way. If the United States were to reduce its military spending, the end of bipolarity would quickly give way to a multipolar world, where the U.S. would be first among relative equals. This would be a return to the traditional balance-of-power state of affairs that had characterized most of history prior to the Second World War, and that had been unstable and violent. The key to American security was not in alliance politics where potential coalitional partners have to be bribed, cajoled, and threatened into helping counter a rising challenger. It was also not in the bland hope that Germany and Japan will not find it worthwhile to re-militarize once deprived

of the American security umbrella, and thereby trigger security concerns in France, Britain, Eastern Europe, and China. It was certainly not in the unwarranted optimism that somehow all potential revisionist aggressors would contain each other. Russia and China in particular could not be counted upon to blindly charge into each other. The advocates of primacy assert that peace can only be durable when backed up by a clear preponderance of power, and that no such clarity will exist unless the United States has sufficient resources to ensure this preponderance on its own. The unipolar moment at the end of the Cold War would need to be preserved to ensure a *Pax Americana* in a world that would otherwise rapidly descend in violence and disorder. This meant that the United States would maintain its lead in military and economic matters, and that it would seek to prevent the emergence of a new rival that would pose a threat on the order of the one that had been posed by the USSR.

An overt strategy of dominance like primacy was bound to cause unease even among faithful allies, but it was also likely to generate opposition among less committed third parties, not to mention outright fear and hostility among anyone who did not fancy themselves members of the American peace. Supporters of primacy brushed these concerns aside with the assertion that the United States was a **benign hegemon** that would not exploit its global advantage for its own ends only but would spread the wealth around. They fully expected most everyone to subscribe to this view, with the remaining holdouts so marginalized that they would be easily deterred from trying to upset the equilibrium. The only means by which the United States was going to reassure everyone of its benign omnipotent rule was, apparently, a declaration of the purity of its intentions.

Other than that, the United States would support the spread of democracy, free-market economies, and the rule of international law as long as those did not conflict with its need to maintain primacy. Thus, the best way to ensure that Russia did not need to be deterred militarily would be by ensuring that it becomes a liberal democracy that would presumably harbor no ill will about being defeated in the Cold War and would accommodate itself to the new order. Analogously, a strengthened and enlarged NATO would provide for external security of Europe but also deprive Germany of any need to provide for its own military muscle. Moreover, it would also prevent the closer cooperation between France and Germany, and thus make it less likely that the European Union would be able to create a common defense policy that might challenge the United States. Similarly, the U.S. would maintain significant military presence in the Far East to ensure that neither Japan was encouraged to militarize nor China was encouraged to throw its weight around.

There are serious problems with the strategy of primacy too, and one can immediately identify several of them from the alternative names that this strategy often goes under: **American hegemony** or **unilateralism**. Despite protestations of American benevolence, it is a long stretch to assume that most important regional powers would be content to dwell in the shadow of U.S. hegemony.

The common perception of the Cold War as a bipolar world is a poor guide in that respect. The purported division of the world into two poles tended to mask a far more complex reality, in which countries in the Communist bloc challenged the USSR both openly (Yugoslavia) and somewhat less so (China), in which American allies pursued more accommodating policies with the East (West Germany), in which some states alternated patrons to maintain freedom of action (Egypt), in which the United States supported both sides of violent conflicts (Israel and several Arab states, Greece and Turkey), and in which the U.S. sometimes had to coerce its own allies (France and Great Britain). One wonders why China would be so accommodating to U.S. hegemony as Great Britain was, and to what extent the combined pull of a common Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage and defeat in two wars (American Revolutionary and War of 1812) had brought the British around. In fact, one might even wonder whether it was the British that accommodated American rise or the Americans who wrested hegemony from the British (along with other European colonial powers) when they assisted them during the Second World War but made sure they got paid for their troubles in cash, bases, and postwar influence.

Working outside of constraints of multilateral institutions must inevitably undermine the rule of law, a fatal weakening of the institutional framework that the United States had worked so hard to establish after the Second World War, and that was so instrumental in maintaining the preeminence of the West. Among these are the United Nations, NATO, the IMF, and the WTO. Every time the U.S. acts unilaterally and refuses to submit to a collective (non-binding!) judgment of other nations or to obtain approval for its actions, it reduces the usefulness of these institutions to others and therefore increases the willingness to go outside them. This deprives the U.S. of its traditionally strong powers of informal governance within these institutions, encourages the creation of rival organizations, and makes it more difficult and more expensive to coordinate policy and overcome opposition. Being unconstrained does not necessarily mean being powerful in the sense of being able to get one's preferred policies through. Others might not be capable of preventing the U.S. from acting with scant regard for legal niceties or international opinion but they might be just capable enough to impose significant costs on U.S. policies, making such unilateral activism self-defeating.³

Whereas containment was criticized as potentially too aggressive — because it sought to react to real or imagined threats of communist expansion around the globe — primacy is potentially even more so because the U.S. would have to be willing to wage preventive war (possibly alone) to forestall the military rise of a large state or to deprive a **rogue state** from WMDs, and it does not even have to have the veneer of combating communism. Preventive war has always been exceedingly difficult to justify domestically (in fact, both such instances, the Vietnam and the 2003

³We have seen some of this already, both in Russia's attempts to construct an Eurasian Economic Union, and with the recent foundation of a development bank by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in direct challenge to the World Bank and the IMF.

Iraq wars, have also been the most divisive and with most contested legacies) and even harder internationally. Since a hegemon's motives are always suspect simply because the hegemon does not have to hold itself accountable to others, a preemptive war might provoke balancing behavior. The lack of international support for a preemptive war, especially when it comes from trusted allies, can also undermine domestic support for the policy, making it that much harder to achieve its goals.

Like containment, primacy is open-ended, and as containment sought to fill every nook and cranny in the basin of world power to deny the Soviet Union the opportunity to do so, so can the search for hegemony lead to constant expansion of the area of influence, leading to that traditional killer of global power: imperial overstretch. The U.S. is overwhelmingly powerful, but this power is neither boundless nor cheap. Attempting to maintain primacy around the world can drain the national treasury and produce the very collapse primacy is seeking to avoid.

3 Cooperative Security

If the advocates of primacy suspect every great power of potential aspirations for regional hegemony at least, the advocates of **cooperative security** draw a sharp distinction between liberal democracies and non-democracies. Building on Kant's idea that states, which (1) are governed by an elected representative government (democracy), (2) uphold the rule of law (constitutionalism), and (3) protect individual rights (liberalism), will not engage in violent conflict with each other, and on the empirical finding that democracies tend not to fight wars with each other (**democratic peace**), proponents of this strategy assert that the United States has nothing to fear from established democracies like Germany and Japan, that it can alleviate any security concerns with mixed regimes like Russia's by supporting a transition to liberal democracy, and most effectively deal with authoritarian regimes like China's by promoting their transformation into democracies instead of containing them militarily in an inferior position. In other words, the best bet for the U.S. is to support the spread of democracy irrespective of whether it allows other democratic states to rise in prominence and power; that is, to pursue a policy of **liberal internationalism**.

Since liberal democracies are also assumed to be more likely to cooperate with each other in general, it will be easier to agree upon and coordinate joint policies through multilateral institutions. Doing so would allow others to bear their fair share of defense burdens and confer legitimacy on the actions. Even though the United States reigns supreme in military technology and war-fighting prowess, its global tasks would be made much easier if there was less opposition to them; that is, if the U.S. chose to go through multilateral channels. Thus, proponents of cooperative security tend to be very keen on NATO and the UN, and they generally believe that **multilateralism** is the way to go.

Some of the problems with cooperative security come from its proponents' willful disregard of the implications of their own assumptions. Take, for instance, the idea that the spread of liberal democracy will enhance security. Let us grant the **democratic peace** — the claim that democracies (suitably defined) do not fight wars (suitably defined) — and let us instead ask whether multilateral security arrangements through international institutions will be reliable guarantors of peace.⁴

Cooperative security generally tends to overlook the problem of **free-riding**, which we saw in stylized form in the Prisoner's Dilemma game. Providing security is a public good for all states that get to enjoy the peace, but the costs of such provision must be paid privately. Each state is better off if the others pay, which will inevitably produce conflict over the distribution of these costs (who must pay and how much) over the goals (what constitutes desirable security) and over the strategies (what should be paid for). These disagreements will weaken the credibility of the threat that the collective poses and encourage challengers to test its resolve and ability to coordinate. When push comes to shove, the ones affected most by the failure to deter a challenger might be forced to bear the burden of defense on their own. Aside from providing a much weaker force than the putative total that the collective was supposed to be able to wield, this will engender lingering resentment, which will further weaken the collective security arrangements. It will inevitably cause some to fend for themselves while others drop out of the collective security institutions altogether. When states rely on others for their security, they might be ill-prepared to act in contingencies where such help fails to materialize, which further encourages aggression. Collective security might well be less than the sum of its parts because of free-riding.

The free-riding problem can actually be *more acute* when many states are democracies. This is because security policies generally, but the use of force in particular, will have to be justified domestically. Publics in different countries who are exposed to the threat to various degrees and who are facing different economic trade-offs would have to agree to support expenditures on a common action. Even if their governments can initiate this action without obtaining such support (e.g., because of executive prerogative), they would generally find it very difficult to sustain their involvement against domestic opposition. In the U.S., such opposition can eventually cause Congress to deny funds for continuing the military action, and in many countries the opposition can force the government to resign through votes of no-confidence. When the threat is vague and public support slim, even low casualties might quickly overwhelm the desire to continue the engagement and force a democratic state to drop out of collective action. In other words, democracies might be especially ill-equipped to support multilateral peace institutions when peace requires deterring potential non-democratic adversaries from challenging the status quo or compelling them to reverse destabilizing policies.

⁴We shall return to the democratic peace when we discuss Clinton's foreign policies.

Moreover, proponents of collective security also favor free-market capitalism and globalization in the belief that **interdependence** will enmesh countries in a framework of mutual benefit and reduce the temptation to disrupt it for transitory gains from aggression. Whether interdependence actually dampens conflict is a matter of controversy, but here we only need to highlight one consequence of an open economic world order: diffusion of technology. As technological and economic know-how spread around the world, various potential opponents will inevitably improve their military capabilities: their economic base will improve and stabilize, their administrative and communications capacity will expand, and the wealth available to the government will increase. All of these mean that these governments will be able to acquire or build more sophisticated weapons, raise more troops, train them better, and sustain them longer in conflict. Even though proponents of collective security envision some form of **arms control** to act as a brake on these developments, it is highly unlikely that the mostly voluntary measures of these agreements will be able to stop determined adversaries from acquiring the technology and means they desire. In this way, a central pillar of collective security is likely to create many more threats for the suspect collective security apparatus to deal with than proponents seem to want to admit.

4 Selective Engagement

If the United States cannot abandon the responsibilities inherent in its dominant international position (isolationism), sustain that position indefinitely on its own (hegemony), or sustain the global order it created with the help of others (multilateralism), then what? Although some scholars have dignified the fourth alternative with a name — **selective engagement** — the *ad hoc* policy of reacting to events on case-by-case basis is an essentially passive stance that deprives the U.S. of any leadership role. This is ironic because the proponents of this policy actually argue that the U.S. should assume the leadership role in identifying potential challenges to the distribution of power and in balancing against such threats. In other words, they expect the U.S. to watch over regional rivalries (specifically in Eurasia), detect cases where these can escalate into war among great powers, act to defuse such crises, and, if that fails, throw its military weight against the aggressor to deny it any possible fruits of victory.

Unlike primacy, selective engagement will not have to persuade the public to invest enormous amounts of money to maintain a military sufficiently imposing to the rest of the world. Unlike cooperative security, it will not have to persuade it to spend money and lives on distant conflicts because of hazy global duties. Unlike isolationism, it will not rely on wishful thinking and assume that great power war cannot occur.

In its essence, selective engagement is a recasting of the role that Great Britain

seems to have played in Europe from the 18th to the 20th centuries, when its major concern was preventing one of the land powers from dominating the continent. The obvious problem with such a policy for the United States is that it goes against the grain of traditional American values: there is not commitment to any grand principle, only cool calculating action in service of an abstract balance of power. Since the U.S. would have to threaten war in order to prevent war, the public is very unlikely to take kindly to such a policy without a clear vision of what is at stake, especially if it is for an amorphous cause of preventing war among others. There will be no epic struggle between good and evil, no ideal that would make sacrifices of blood and resources worthwhile. It is highly unlikely that the public could be mobilized to sustain such a strategy for any significant period of time, which is a problem for the government because unlike its British counterparts of centuries past, it does have to account for public opinion, especially when it comes to use of force.

Such a strategy would require an extensive analysis on case-by-case basis and a public debate to decide whether action is justified. This means that the United States will be slow to respond even when it chooses to do so, and that it will be highly uncertain whether it will act at all or how involved it will get when act it does. With such unclear commitments, potential challengers might be encouraged to take their chances, and the policy might result in many more wars than its supporters are willing to countenance.

Moreover, since the decision to act will be inherently political, policies might shift when politics do, which means that domestic political changes can result in large and unpredictable swings in foreign policy. This can further encourage adversaries to gamble on outstaying hostile U.S. governments in the hopes that a more accommodating alternative comes to power. As with any decision that is at the mercy of politics, this U.S. strategy could ignore many problems because they do not seem sufficiently important to a large segment of the population until it is too late. Then the U.S. would have to do a lot more or accept consequences that are a lot worse (e.g., failure to intervene in Rwanda and Bosnia). Of course, the opposite of this could be true as well: public outrage at some event that is otherwise insignificant from a security perspective could force the hand of the U.S. government, provoking an intervention when action would not be warranted.

5 The Search for Purpose during the Interwar Period

All the alternatives had their problems and perhaps not surprisingly in the immediate decade after the end of the Cold War elites could not agree on what the appropriate grand strategy should be even though most of them agreed that having such a strategy was a good idea. Even before the demise of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev had called for, and there had been reason to hope for, “the basic restructuring of

international politics—for the rule of law, not force; for multilateralism, not unilateralism; and for economic as well as political freedoms.”⁵ The first publicly released statement, the strategy of **regional defense**, came from Secretary of Defense **Dick Cheney** in January 1993, in the document “Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy.”⁶ It acknowledged that a radical rethinking of strategy was necessary, now that there were “no global threats and no significant hostile alliances” for the U.S. to face. But even if the collapse of the Soviet Union, its empire, and the discrediting of Communism had dissipated the shadow of a nuclear holocaust, they only “fundamentally altered, but did not eliminate, the challenges ahead.” These challenges would not be global but regional, and the regions of great importance were Europe and Asia (since the Gulf War had placed the U.S. on a firm footing in the Middle East).

In Europe, the momentum toward liberal democratization and capitalist markets must be sustained, and stability maintained. Toward this end, NATO had to be strengthened and Eastern Europeans encouraged to cooperate with it. The U.S. should promote the democratic consolidation in Russia, Ukraine, and other successor states but be aware that there might be serious internal challenges to these processes.

In Asia, nuclear proliferation remained a concern, and the U.S. had to maintain its presence there. Lingering disputes between Russia and Japan, the two Koreas, China and Taiwan, India and Pakistan, among others, required the continued American commitment to its allies.

It was an interesting mix of elements of multilateralism with a muscular foreign policy that would put the U.S. in the lead toward reshaping the world now that the principal constraint for doing so — the Soviet superpower — was no more:

We have a marked lead in critical areas of warfare. Our alliances, built during our struggle of Containment, are one of the great sources of our strength in this new era. They represent a democratic “zone of peace,” a community of democratic nations bound together by a web of political, economic, and security ties. This zone of peace offers a framework for security not through competitive rivalries in arms, but through cooperative approaches and collective security institutions. The combination of these trends has given our nation and our alliances great depth for our strategic position.

⁵“Gambler, Showman, Statesman,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/08/opinion/gambler-showman-statesman.html>, accessed February 9, 2016. This was the superpower summit where Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union was reducing its military forces unilaterally and converting defense industries to other uses. The editorial went on to say, “Breathtaking. Risky. Bold. Naive. Diversionary. Heroic. All fit.” The National Security Archive at George Washington University has recently declassified documents from this summit: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB261/>, accessed February 9, 2016.

⁶This can be found at <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb245/doc15.pdf>, accessed February 9, 2016.

Simply put, it is the intent of the new Regional Defense Strategy to enable the U.S. to lead in shaping an uncertain future so as to preserve and enhance this strategic depth won at such great pains. This will require us to strengthen our alliances and to extend the zone of peace to include the newly independent nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as these now-fragile states succeed in their struggle to build free societies and free markets out of the ruin of Communism. Together with our allies, we must preclude hostile nondemocratic powers from dominating regions critical to our interests and otherwise work to build an international environment conducive to our values. Yet, even as we hope to increasingly rely on collective approaches to solve international problems, we recognize that a collective effort will not always be timely and, in the absence of U.S. leadership, may not gel. Where the stakes so merit, we must have forces ready to protect our critical interests.

If it is not obvious what exactly made this strategy different from what the U.S. had been doing for fifty years, it is perhaps because it was essentially more of the same. The only change was to shift from a “global” to a “regional” definition of the threats — which, naturally, made them much more diverse — and continue to rely on the multilateral institutions the U.S. had built while providing leadership in identifying the threats, formulating responses, and implementing the desired policies. One problem with the diversity of threats acknowledged in the strategy was that the allies might not agree with the American definition of what was dangerous and what was safe. The other problem was that the Americans would not agree with each other.⁷

In the context of this call for American leadership, the slow and uncertain moves in foreign policy that would characterize the next decade seem particularly galling. The lack of strategic interests in the Balkans would keep the U.S. at arms length from the severe conflict that engulfed the region during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Leaving it to the Europeans to handle this European problem would prove a grave mistake, as the belated but decisive intervention by the U.S. would show. The absence of any serious interest in Rwanda (by the international community in general) would enable a tragic genocide with anywhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000 civilians killed. The humanitarian-driven intervention in Somalia would also be half-hearted and abandoned as soon as the American forces suffered a handful of casualties. Far from leading its allies into expanding the zones of peace, the U.S. got mired in what one analyst called “process without purpose [and] purpose without process”.⁸

⁷The division of the world in liberal Western-style democratic “zones of peace” and, presumably “zones of war” for the remainder presents us with a curious parallel to the medieval Islamic division of the world into *Dar al-Islam*, the house of Islam (also often called *Dar as-Salam*, the house of Peace), and *Dar al-Harab*, the house of War (also often called *Dar al-Garb*, the house of the West).

⁸Jeremi Suri, “American Grand Strategy from the Cold War’s End to 9/11,” *Orbis*, 53:4 (Fall), 2009, pp. 611–27. A condensed version can be found at the Foreign Pol-

The debate about what the key threats to the U.S. were would somehow manage to entirely miss the growing storm of Islamic terrorism. The vague exhortations for the spread of free markets and free societies would fail to “gel” into specific and coherent policy recommendations. The notion of American primacy amid serious reductions in its armed forces and of its leadership role amid the cold fact that much of the world was of little interest now that it could not be dominated by a hostile force, would provide no guidance as to what policies the government should pursue, where it should look, and how much it should spare for them. In practice this would mean that the government would lurch from one policy to another buffeted by public opinion, lobbying groups, bureaucrats, and high-ranking members of the administration with their own agendas.

Articulating a new grand strategy during the “interwar” period between the end of the Cold War and 9/11 was difficult, and the failure was not for lack of trying. Communism had provided a systemic, global, threat, which made it relatively straightforward to prioritize goals. The USSR was also a familiar adversary, and the U.S. had developed considerable knowledge about its functioning and behavior, which had allowed it to manage its relations with the Soviets more or less successfully. The Soviet bloc constrained American policy by leaving it to the USSR to deal with problems in its own sphere of influence, and by limiting the goals Washington could pursue in the grey areas between. The two superpowers had repeatedly clamped down on regional powers to prevent conflict escalation. Whatever the demerits of conceptualizing the world as bipolar — split between the Soviet-led communist camp and the American-led liberal one — there was no mistaking the fact that it had substantially reduced its complexity, even after allowing for a bloc of non-aligned (but even collectively not very powerful) states. The new reality of failed states where warlords fought each other, of rogue states that could go nuclear on their own accord, of terrorists that operated without a single territorial base, and of societies teetering on the brink of collapse presented an infinitely more complicated picture. In fact, it was so complicated that neither the Bush nor the Clinton administrations would be able to understand it as a whole, defaulting to piecemeal *ad hoc* policies.

In Europe, President Bush managed the disintegration of the Soviet empire with considerable skill, neither pushing hard enough to provoke a hardline response (even ignoring the brief flare-up of Soviet-style repression in the Baltics) nor acquiescing to arrangements that would favor the USSR. The CIA still envisioned the USSR as the long-term adversary and specialists like Henry Kissinger argued that the U.S. should use the opportunity and agree to a permanent division of Europe into spheres of influence in return for concessions from the Soviets. Bush, however, pressed for self-determination of all nations in Eastern and Central Europe,

icy Research Institute, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2010/03/promise-and-failure-american-grand-strategy-after-cold-war>, accessed February 9, 2016.

pushing for political pluralism and openness. The citizens of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia solved the problem of what to do next by taking it out of American hands.

The Germans, however, presented an immediate complication because of their desire for unification. This concerned not only the Soviets but frightened some American allies, the U.K. and France in particular. Bush threw his support behind West German Chancellor **Helmut Kohl** who championed immediate unification and integration of Germany into NATO out of fear that the pliant Soviet policy might provide only a fleeting window of opportunity before it reasserted itself. West Germany provided financial aid and, together with the U.S., U.K., and France, security assurances to Gorbachev (among them, that non-German NATO troops could not be stationed in the territory of the former DDR, and no nuclear weapons systems would be deployed there).⁹ This paved the way to **German unification** in 1990, a truly momentous event and a triumph for American diplomacy.

The events in Romania in 1989 indicated that if the old regime pushed back, the transition could turn bloody. Thankfully, armed forces that Romania's ruler, **Nicolae Ceaușescu**, had ordered to fire on the anti-government demonstrators turned against him and ended the conflict with a special military tribunal and his summary execution. But what if they had proven loyal? What if the regime had not collapsed or had been supported by an outside force? What would the U.S. have done had that conflict exploded into a civil war?

As it turned out, these were not questions of merely academic interest. When Yugoslavia headed toward dissolution, Serbia's ruler, **Slobodan Milošević**, attempted to preserve the federation under the domination of Serbia, or, failing that, ensure that the post-collapse Serbia would incorporate all territories with significant Serbian population or that had traditionally been part of the country. As we shall see in the following lectures, this provoked wars between Serbia-supported Bosnian Serbs and Croats, Croats and Bosnian Muslims, and Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, while the Europeans stood ineffectively aside. It would take years of fighting and appalling massacres of civilians before the U.S. would finally step in through NATO to settle the conflicts. The collective security envisioned by the postwar architects of U.S. foreign policy failed miserably without determined American leadership.

While debates about grand strategy were taking place in the rarefied heights of

⁹There is considerable controversy what else might or might not have been promised to the Soviets. In particular, did the West commit not to expand NATO eastwards? Whereas there was clearly no formal deal to that effect, it seems that the West did make serious attempts to leave the Soviets with the impression that no such expansion would take place. Uwe Klußmann, Matthias Schepp, and Klaus Wiegrefe, "NATO's Eastward Expansion: Did the West Break Its Promise to Moscow?" *Der Spiegel*, November 26, 2009. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-s-eastward-expansion-did-the-west-break-its-promise-to-moscow-a-663315.html>, accessed February 9, 2016. For a summary of available evidence, see Mary Elise Sarotte, "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow about NATO Expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, September-October, 2014.

Washington and inside the ivory tower, the public seemed largely indifferent, content to assume that with the Cold War over, the United States had no serious enemies left, that whatever it needed to do, it could with ease, and that its global benevolent preeminence is likely to endure. Foreign policy had become largely irrelevant domestically. President Bush called Clinton and Gore “two bozos” who knew less about foreign policy than Millie (Bush’s dog), but it was not foreign policy that voters cared about.

The Republicans, once unified by the Soviet threat, now split, unable to agree what to do in this new world, some preferring isolationism, and others promoting a muscular hegemony. The President seemed incapable of getting even allies to open their markets to U.S. producers to help the ailing economy and the trade deficit.¹⁰ The Democrats slowly gained the upper hand campaigning on a platform of domestic economic reform. Even while the public largely approved President Bush’s handling of foreign policy, the economic recession that had hit the United States with its mushrooming deficits and galloping unemployment sealed his fate at the polls, paving the way for the first post-Cold War President, Bill Clinton.

¹⁰Bush threw up at a banquet hosted by the Japanese Prime Minister and then fainted although this was probably not meant as an expression of his disapproval of Japan’s protectionist policies against American car-makers.