

Simultaneous Contrast: Examining the Use of American National Power

**A Monograph
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Simultaneous Contrast: Examining the Use of American National Power

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Abstract

Simultaneous Contrast: Examining the Application of American National Power,
by Major Oliver Kingsbury, BRITISH ARMY, 55 pages.

After World War Two the United States moved into a position of global pre-eminence. The Bush doctrine of pre-emptive and preventive action, expressed in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies, holds that this level of relative power remains, with the US capable of success anywhere in the world, against any enemy. At a military level this idea is fully supported in the 2004 National Military Strategy's aim of full spectrum dominance.

These claims are ambitious enough to be worthy of some investigation. The US can point to operations where force has contributed to significant success, yet a troubling series of failures is equally apparent. The principal question studied in this paper is: what is it about US foreign policy and the wielding of military force that can produce great success but also allow such frustration?

An examination of the main strands of US foreign policy since World War Two reveals a nation which has, in the words of Henry Kissinger, "oscillate(d) between excesses of isolation and overextension." These swings have taken place in the context of traditions of individual freedom and a resulting focus on private domestic prosperity, and of an idea of military force closely aligned with just war theories. The consequence is a desire to maintain clear divisions between war and peace, and between political and military decision making. This separation has frequently clashed with the blurred ambiguities surrounding the idea of "winning the peace" in timeless modern conflict.

A helpfully apolitical way of appraising the subject is to use the idea of simultaneous contrast where two juxtaposed colors give the impression of a third, different color. All areas of foreign policy can be made to produce the conceptual perception of a color different from those initially spread onto the canvas. The conclusion of this study is that, if the true nature of America's foreign policy story is understood, there is a way to produce that third color; it is possible to employ the entire palette of national power without compromising America's basic metaphysical ideals.

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INTRODUCTION – THE PROBLEM

The Problem

The challenges America faces are great, yet we have enormous power and influence to address those challenges.

United States National Security Strategy, 2006

The goal is Full Spectrum Dominance – the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary across the range of military operations.

United States National Military Strategy, 2004

After World War Two, the United States achieved Thomas J. McCormick’s definition of hegemony, as being able to overmatch any issues which would require the complications of persuasion and treaty in more typical balance of power situations. As such, the US moved from being one of a small number of equal allies to a position of global pre-eminence during a period of history known by McCormick as “the American half-century.”¹ Even after the peace dividend at the end of the Cold War, historian Niall Ferguson describes the US as “the world’s only superpower, with an unrivalled financial and military-technological capability.”² The words of the 2006 National Security Strategy above also indicate the level of power the US is still held to possess as its foreign policy is now marked by a doctrine of pre-emptive and preventive action formally captured in the in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies. The idea of full spectrum dominance in the 2004 National Military Strategy supports this belief, that the US is both entitled to act, and capable of success, anywhere in the world, against any enemy.

¹Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). Excerpts reproduced in Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations : Documents and Essays*, 4th ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995), 3-7.

²Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 314.

Claims of such influence, across such a range of power,³ are ambitious and far reaching enough to be worthy of some investigation. Once the surface is scratched, the situation is complex. A number of successes have shown that the US is able to influence problematic situations by the conscious use of its instruments of power. Yet a troubling series of significant failures is also apparent. A fascinating picture emerges of a uniquely American understanding of warfare which appears increasingly at odds with the realities of modern conflict, with national foreign policies balanced according to shifting idealism and pragmatism.

In 1973, Russell F. Weigley produced the *The American Way of War*, a combination of analysis of the total military experience of the United States and a discussion of the effect of the twin shocks of the development of nuclear weapons and failure in Vietnam. He compares Hans Delbruck's two kinds of strategy – “annihilation, which seeks the overthrow of the enemy's military power; and . . . attrition, exhaustion and erosion” – arguing that American strategists have taken a predominantly narrow view of the use of military force. For Weigley, “annihilation became characteristically the American way of war,” as a way of using American combat capabilities to dominate and therefore control complex situations.⁴ The idea of a primary focus on success in battle is pervasive in studies of US history, and seems to stem from a culturally embedded concept of external national power. Within this concept, foreign policy is based on conventions of individual freedom, where war interferes with private domestic prosperity, and on a use of military force closely aligned with just war tradition. Force is understood as a last resort, only to be used in the event of great provocation. Crucially, there are sharp delineations between political and military decision making, and between war and peace.

³Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1 (JP 1), *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, November 2000) describes the instruments of national power as diplomatic, economic, informational and military, a model often known in military circles by the mnemonic DIME. These terms first appeared in the National Security Strategy of 1988, the second to be publicly released.

⁴Russell Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War; a History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), xxiii.

In its historical database, the Correlates of War project classifies three US post-1945 operations as “wars”: in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq in 1990-1. The database has not yet been updated to the present, so current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are not considered; the scale of these operations – in terms of time, troop numbers and the invasion of national sovereignty – would, however, suggest that both should also be included.⁵ These five cases are arguably the most high profile of the recent US military deployments, and even a brief overview is instructive.

The Korean War ended in 1953, but over sixty years later an uneasy ceasefire continues, with North and South Korea still only agreeing to a temporary armistice, and with tens of thousands of American troops deployed. The US involvement in Vietnam ended ignominiously in 1973, followed by a successful North Vietnamese invasion in 1975. Operation Desert Storm delivered success in the stated strategic goals of the time, but the military victory of 1991 was anything but politically decisive: humanitarian relief for Kurds, twelve years of combat air operations and the 2003 invasion reflect the much deeper threat posed by Saddam Hussein. The final results of that 2003 operation cannot yet be judged, but it is clear that the problem continues, in that overwhelming initial military victory – in the “war” – has not proved conclusive. The same comments can be applied equally to Afghanistan, as the current (early 2007) NATO force prepares for a much heralded renewed insurgent offensive,⁶ over five years after the rapid overthrow of the Taliban government.

⁵Despite the understandable difficulties of maintaining up to date records, the Correlates of War project provides useful reference in this regard. The project is available at <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>. A thorough explanation of the basis of the project – “until war has been systematically *described*, it cannot be adequately *understood*” – is in J. David Singer and Melvin Small, *The Wages of War, 1816-1965: A Statistical Handbook* (New York: Wiley, 1972). Singer and Small admit they are unable to reach much more than a subjective selection of criteria for the identification of a “war.” They settle on compiling an exhaustive list of every case that has been included by the “standard . . . histories” and then screening out those examples with “inadequate political status of . . . participants” or “failure to meet a minimum threshold of . . . casualties or troops.” The end result is of great importance as an attempt to really quantify a product of human behavior, but a central deduction is that even strict scientific analysis is unable to produce a definitive answer.

⁶See for example comments by the British former NATO commander in Afghanistan General Sir David Richards at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/02/14/afghan114.xml>

These cases raise the central issue: what constitutes modern war, and is there a difference between a state of war and normal international relationships in a time of confrontation? The “fundamental purpose” of the US Armed Forces being to “win the nation’s wars,”⁷ but since 1945 not one “war” has been won – at least in comparison with the complete victories of World War Two – and the National Military Strategy’s “full spectrum dominance” has been decidedly elusive. Despite this, a continued focus on full-scale “wars” has driven an exponential increase in American military capability where technological expertise and economic supremacy have now produced a force that may be unbeatable in conventional battle. These traditional underpinnings of the American way of war, however, may have ignored the question of the relevance of conventional battle in wars which refuse to end.

For the US, the desire to hold war as an entirely separate state from peace has frequently clashed with the blurred ambiguities surrounding the idea of “winning the peace” in timeless modern conflict. The failures have come on exactly the occasions when the US has followed its strongest mechanistic Newtonian traditions. A 2003 symposium on the historical experience of the United States Army, sponsored by the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command, summarized the persistency of the issue with the blunt conclusion that “certain shortcomings . . . seem to appear with depressing regularity.”⁸ In his 2006 book examining similarities and differences between Vietnam and Iraq, Robert K. Brigham suggests that, in Iraq, the United States may have “*again* used its power unwisely” (emphasis added).⁹

It is when the US wields its national power *in spite of* its natural inclinations that force is most able to deliver success. And these successes have not been trivial. Some have been of truly global significance, from counter-insurgency campaigns in Latin America to the Cold War. The

⁷JP 1, Executive Summary.

⁸Roger Spiller, “The Small Change of Soldiering and American Military Experience” in US Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Armed Diplomacy: Two Centuries of American Campaigning* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 284.

⁹Robert K. Brigham, *Is Iraq another Vietnam?* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), Introduction.

common denominator of such successes is a demonstration of power which consciously uses the different instruments of national power as a palette of blurred colors, producing a sophisticated blend of concurrent efforts, ambiguity, compromise and patience. In trying to find a description, as a first step to recreating success, it may be helpful to step out of the world of politics all together.

Simultaneous contrast refers to the effect on the eye of two juxtaposed colors, giving an impression to the brain of a third, different color.¹⁰ The idea has been used in art since at least the time of Leonardo da Vinci. It has been a central theme of the Cubist movement, where the idea of perception over actuality is key to understanding reality. The resulting representations are famously challenging to comprehend, which is where the issue of military power in modern warfare comes in. Winning the peace requires the creation of that third color, one which may not appear to exist when physical realities are viewed, but which can emerge with the right level of sophistication.

Foreign policy is the area of government where all decisions to commit military force are taken; current US foreign policy rests on an assumption of great and global national power, yet the most public displays of that power have, even during a time of hegemony, produced little but disappointment, stalemate and compromise. It may follow that the great difficulties the US has had with the wielding of its power lie in the formation of that policy. The principal question

¹⁰Simultaneous contrast is explained simply at <http://webexhibits.org/colorart/contrast.html>. A fuller explanation of the idea is in Margaret Livingstone, *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* (New York, N.Y.: Harry N. Abrams, 2002). A detailed history of the use of color in Cubist art is in Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1976). For some reason, the merging of artistic theories with those of the military realm is resisted. There is much discussion about whether military theory belongs in art or science, but despite no great consensus, it is always towards the sciences that military practitioners gravitate. There would seem to be great potential in further exploration of ideas and methods from art. As only one example, the rationale behind Cubism is to find ways of viewing a subject which reveal its true nature, whatever the superficial distractions of linear understandings of time and space; what else is any military decision making system?

studied in this paper is: what is it about US foreign policy that can produce great success but also allow such frustration?

Methodology

This paper will first review opinions on modern military operations, in order to fully understand the playing field. The subsequent analysis will seek to examine the traditions of US foreign policy, how it is linked to the relative global position of the country itself, and the role of military force within the application of power. Where possible, primary sources have been used for the deductions – minutes of meetings, transcripts of speeches, and formally published policy documents. Essays on the interpretation of those sources are used frequently, but are only intended to highlight opinions on the efficacy of the original policy. In conclusion, the paper will make suggestions as to how to avoid the continuation of this disturbing trend.

Although the main analysis section follows a chronological framework, it is deliberately light on historical detail; such facts provide a crucial scaffold for the story, but it is the contingent themes linking the facts which are of most interest here. Central among these themes is the idea of a culturally engrained understanding of national power, and the relative place of military force. This study emphasizes the importance of shared history and experience in producing influential collective traditions, but it is outwith its scope to enter into a discussion about whether or not there may be more ethnocentric, almost physiological, reasons behind such shared understandings. Similarly, although there are a number of references to Christianity – in the context of the historical genesis of just war theory, and of a basic moral understanding – there is no space here to examine the influence of the Christian church on American politics, although it is an area not unrelated to some of the conclusions. The final issue raised by this investigation but purposefully not considered fully is the debate over the terminology of nation and state. This is an area which would bear further discussion regarding the implementation of national policy while balancing domestic demands; again, to introduce such a complex subject would detract from the

main focus of this paper. Consequently, the words nation, state and country are to be regarded as interchangeable.

A last caveat concerns the use of individuals' names. This study identifies certain time periods and policy trends primarily by the relevant individual. This is not intended to convey the impression that domestic traditions have consistently produced monolithic foreign policies, without debate or disagreement. The reality is quite the opposite, from nationwide opposition to internal administration discord. Such is the prominence of certain individuals in the creation of US foreign policy – most notably, the president himself – that for simplicity's sake, a convention of linking concepts to individuals is largely maintained.

Understanding the Playing Field: Winning the Peace

You must know something about strategy and tactics and logistics, but also economics and politics and diplomacy and history. You must know everything you can know about military power, and you must also understand the limits of military power. You must understand that few of the important problems of our time have, in the final analysis, been finally solved by military power alone.

President John F. Kennedy, 1961, speech to United States Naval Academy graduating class.¹¹

Rather than attempting an exhaustive study, this review will focus on a central theme which stands out as running continuously through military operations in the late Twentieth and early Twenty-First centuries: warfare in modern times is endless.¹² Beyond superficial pronouncements of an end to major combat operations, the lines indicating when wars begin or end are confused and blurred. It has almost become unhelpful to even use the word “war”, since it must always be accompanied by tortuous explanation – from simpler times where a political declaration could itself provide the definition. The pivotal feature of modern warfare is the

¹¹President John F. Kennedy, speech to US Naval Academy. Available at http://www.jfklink.com/speeches/jfk/publicpapers/1961/jfk232_61.html. Accessed on 6 May 2006.

¹²For the purposes of this paper, “modern” is used to refer to the post World War Two timeframe. An interesting discussion – outside the scope of this study – remains on when the issue of endlessness first appeared. The author's view is that it stems from the increasing roles of populations in the direction of their countries after the revolutionary period of the late Eighteenth Century.

propensity for discord to continually re-emerge over extended periods of time. For the US, Vietnam epitomizes this theme.

The Correlates of War project holds the dates of the Vietnam War as from 1965 to 1973, which may suffice for historical definition, but do not come close to summarizing the totality of the circumstances. Did “the war” begin with President Johnson’s escalations in 1964, or with the formation of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam in 1962, or at the end of World War Two with the withdrawal of Japanese forces, or somewhere even earlier under French colonial rule? Did “the war” end with the withdrawal of American forces, or the northern invasion, or subsequent conflicts with the Khmer Rouge and China? The same questions can be asked of an almost limitless list of global situations where military force has been recently employed, rarely with any clearer answers: Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Bosnia, Sudan, Nepal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chechnya, Israel, Zimbabwe, Kashmir, Georgia, Eritrea, East Timor, Algeria, Somalia, Northern Ireland . . .

There is certainly a difference between the activities in Vietnam between 1965 and 1973, and those in a wider timeframe, which John Keegan has called “the small change of soldiering,”¹³ but the point remains. It is rarely possible to tell at the time whether a “war” has begun, and so force committed outside the time that history decides has earned the title is still of importance at the political level. If success at that level is to be the aim, as it surely is when the US wields its military power – “the most important decision a government can take is to commit military force”¹⁴ – then the entirety of a situation should be considered, before, during and after deployments. Dealing with this issue is pivotal to a number of works aimed at coming to terms with the frustrations of reaching long term success in modern military operations. Discussion quickly homes in on the idea that success in the warfighting stage of an operation is not enough.

¹³John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 16.

¹⁴Paul Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction to Legal and Moral Issues*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2003), ix.

This is not new – Carl von Clausewitz discussed it in *On War* in the early Nineteenth Century¹⁵ – but it has become en vogue as a result of the murky boundaries around war and peace, combatant and innocent, victory and compromise in the ethnic and sectarian conflicts that have seemed so common since the end of the Cold War. The idea is summarized in a 2004 book – among a number of other examples – produced jointly by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the United States Army: *Winning the Peace*.

Winning the Peace concentrates on providing specific practical advice about the requirements of such enduring situations. The book provided the conceptual basis of the Department of State’s Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, formed in 2004 to “help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace.”¹⁶ It describes four “pillars”¹⁷ as being required for long term success. Success in military activities is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition; persuasion and encouragement are more important than coercion. The first pillar, “security,” covers all areas of public safety, from “in its most pressing sense . . . protecting the lives of citizens from immediate and large scale violence,” to establishing indigenous forces and structures capable of managing internal issues. As the second pillar, “governance and participation” addresses the establishment of representative political institutions, which must be able to provide the required support to the population, without which the people’s faith in the new future will be lacking. Third, the importance of “social and economic well-being” reaches back to the origins of many tensions: fifteen of the world’s 20 poorest countries experienced internal

¹⁵Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret, *On War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). See in particular paragraphs 7-9 in Chapter 1, Book 1.

¹⁶The mission of the office – known as S/CRS – is “to lead, coordinate and institutionalize U.S. Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy.” Further details are available at <http://www.state.gov/s/crs/>.

¹⁷Robert C. Orr and Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Winning the Peace: An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 2004), 3-18. Orr’s introduction summarizes the idea; subsequent essays provide fuller explanations of each pillar.

conflicts between 1978 and 1998.¹⁸ The final pillar, “justice and reconciliation”, seeks to “build capacity to promulgate and enforce the rule of law.” The foundation of *Winning the Peace* is that all of its pillars relate foremost to the well-being of non combatants. The idea is – rather than stopping short of the traditional dividing lines – to cross into the different light reflected outside the boundaries of war; embracing the new challenge, rather than avoiding it.

This relative importance of the civilian population in war is a central theme of *The Utility of Force*, written in 2005 by a retired British officer, General Sir Rupert Smith. Smith begins with the dramatic assertion that “war no longer exists.” It has been replaced by a new paradigm of “war amongst the people”¹⁹ and a model of “confrontation and conflict.”²⁰ Confrontations last for many years, occasionally crossing into conflict: only political will and persuasion can solve the underlying issues, no matter how good the military performance. Smith uses Iraq as an illustration. The confrontation has existed since at least 1990; at times – for example, Operations Desert Storm, Desert Fox and Iraqi Freedom – conflict has appeared. The conflict can be solved by military force but a final answer to the deeper confrontation requires a much greater range of influence. Decisive military victory in clear black and white military campaigns as understood by Napoleon at Austerlitz is now oxymoronic. Echoing the remarks of President Kennedy, Smith’s main point is that the usefulness of military force is inherently limited, in terms of achieving political aims:

. . . we are engaging in conflict for objectives that do not lead to resolution of the matter directly by force of arms, since at all but the most tactical level our objectives tend to concern the intentions of the people and their leaders rather than their territory or forces.²¹

¹⁸World Bank, *Post Conflict Reconstruction: The Role of the World Bank* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998), 2.

¹⁹Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London; New York: Allen Lane, 2005), 1-3.

²⁰Smith, 181.

²¹Smith, 306.

This was most famously identified by Clausewitz, with his theory that “war is merely the continuation of policy by other means.”²² The phrase is now so well used that it has become a poorly understood cliché; “continuation” is too often used to mean “extension” as if the wielding of national power were like climbing a ladder. At Agincourt perhaps, but not in Spain for Napoleon, Russia for Hitler, and certainly not in Vietnam or Iraq for the US. In reality Clausewitz’s line remains a timelessly astute observation of the real relationship of warfare to political-strategic ends. The whole of his seminal chapter “What is war?” explains the complex and hazy interdependence of military *force* – that is, battle – and wider political objectives which can only be attained by other efforts.

In *The Meaning of Military Victory* from 2005, Robert Mandel wrestles with the same “intellectual puzzles surrounding meaningful triumph in modern warfare.”²³ Mandel argues that there is a key distinction between different levels of success where “*military* victory is necessary, but not sufficient, for *strategic* victory.” Supporting the work in *Winning the Peace*, beyond military success he identifies “informational, political, economic, social and diplomatic . . . elements of strategic victory.”²⁴ The idea which underpins this, in endorsement of Smith and continuing the distorting of neat demarcations, is the role of the affected population. In a chapter titled “victory challenges in modern warfare,” Mandel describes three “clusters of conditions” which contribute to strategic victory. Again, these are all based on the importance of social and cultural human concerns, ranging from traditions and politics, to ethnic, religious or nationalistic divides, to the ratio of “initiator-target” post war resolve.²⁵ Mandel’s points support those outlined above: beyond victory in battle, true long term success can only come from winning the peace, by first and foremost addressing the needs of the affected populations.

²²von Clausewitz, 99.

²³ Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), ix

²⁴Mandel, 176.

²⁵Mandel, 122.

The above authors have been writing in the aftermath of the American led invasion of Iraq, as uncertainty in intellectual, political and military circles over the nature of warfare has reached one of its periodic spikes. The previous such time came in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, when the complexities of President Clinton's "cauldrons of ethnic, religious, and territorial animosity"²⁶ were profoundly shocking, coming hard on the heels of Operation Desert Storm. In 1995, Colonel Harry G. Summers produced *A New World Strategy* as a reaction to the Clinton administration's faltering attempts at peace keeping in Bosnia, Haiti, Somalia and Rwanda. The coalition built for Desert Storm, in a widely professed new era of democratic and free market rationalism after the Cold War, had been heralded by the first President Bush as proof of "a new world order."²⁷ The sweeping military performance in 1991 had seemed to reinforce this return to certainty, yet in the end only accentuated the subsequent doubt induced by, in particular, Somalia. United States military doctrine made an attempt to come to terms with the resulting confusion, and many of the non combatant focused suggestions in the 1993 version of Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* would seem likely to have met with approval from the authors discussed above. Even that manual, however, reflects the underlying conceptual insecurity with the introduction of a tortuous difference between "War" and "Operations Other Than War."²⁸

Summers describes the 1990s discussions on how best to use American power as a "Hegelian dialectic", based on uniquely American "idealism and pragmatism", where a thesis about the military capability to relieve human suffering – the post victory mopping up of the few Cold War legacies – became antithesis in a post Somalia rejection of peacekeeping. Summers takes comfort in the resulting synthesis, "that national interests should (again) determine United

²⁶Speech by President William J. Clinton, "Confronting the challenges of a broader world" on 27 September 1993. Available at http://find.articles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_n39_v4/ai_14291623/print.

²⁷Speech by President George H W Bush, "Toward a New World Order" on 11 September 1990. Available at <http://www.archives.gov/>.

²⁸Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, June 1993), Introduction and, specifically, Chapter 13.

States involvement abroad,”²⁹ and he ends his conclusion with the assertion that the United States “must maintain escalation dominance, having both the military means and the political will to raise any future challenges to our security to levels at which the adversary finds himself unable to respond.”³⁰

This assumption, that a state which makes the decision to intervene in the affairs of another is able to control the foggy complexities of Smith’s war amongst the people through a mechanical “escalation” of military means, introduces the US methods of dealing with the playing field it has been faced with since World War Two. The dialectic which produced this synthesis was the function largely of American domestic opinion, a primary theme of Summers. He agrees with the importance of civilian populations in warfare, but focuses on his own, on the people within the United States whose support necessarily underpins and limits any use of military force. His book is based on an imaginative analysis of the “peculiar relationship between the American Army and the American people” – quoting former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Fred C. Weyand.³¹ Summers frequently uses Clausewitz’s remarkable trinity to explain the historical significance of America’s cultural and social character on the way its government has waged war. “Remember America’s trinitarian roots” is the first and most important of his “ten commandments” for success in future military operations.³²

At this point this study can leave the broad area of military operations, and begin to examine in more detail the specifically American contribution. The stage on which the US has had to play its part as a truly global power has been revealed as one where ideas of war and peace intermingle, where the other important actors are rarely those of armies in uniform colors, and

²⁹Harry G. Summers, *The New World Strategy: A Military Policy for America's Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 15-16.

³⁰Summers, 234.

³¹Summers, 19. This “peculiar relationship” is applied by both Weyand and Summers to the realm of the specifically military. As subsequent pages of this study show, it is also an apt summary of the relationship between the American people and foreign policy as a whole.

³²Summers, 208.

where the central themes are uncertainty, shifting political aims, endless confrontation, and economic and social complexity. Consequently, it is important not to consider America's use of military force without understanding the wider context of its more general understanding of national power. Therefore, the story returns now to the origins of America's time in the limelight to examine the development of US foreign policy.

ANALYSIS - THE STORY OF US FOREIGN POLICY

In *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War*, Thomas J. McCormick describes America's history as a progression, from "peripheral country" at the time of its founding, to "core country" by 1890, to "hegemonic center" at the end of World War Two.³³ In order to examine the trends of foreign policy since the US reached that position of hegemony, it is first necessary to discuss briefly the path of the nation up to that point. It is quickly apparent that the tensions which have existed since World War Two are not new; the entire history of America's foreign policy has been a balancing act between the twin motivations of domestic ideals and external threats and opportunities.

The Road to Hegemony

Throughout the first century of America's existence, the fundamental role of national government was almost entirely domestically focused, reflecting the challenges of stabilizing and consolidating a nascent democracy, the relative lack of international influence of a country dwarfed by the European powers, and an ideological desire to remain aloof from the squabbles and turmoil of the Old World. These three rationales added up to, at national governmental level, a generally laissez-faire approach to foreign policy, perhaps best summarized by George Washington's famous reluctance to engage in "entangling alliances". The new nation was never entirely isolationist, in the sense of a state content to remain behind its existing borders, as the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, expeditions against Barbary pirates and the Mexican expeditions of the 1840s make clear, but the overwhelming impression is of a country whose government preferred to keep its external policies unilateral and narrowly focused. The major global issues of the century, such as control of Atlantic and Pacific sea lanes, were left to more powerful

³³McCormick, reproduced in Paterson, 1-7.

countries. As A. E. Campbell has said, “the foreign policy of small nations is often determined for them.”³⁴

Where the US did interact with other states, it was largely despite the approach of the national government and took the form of a myriad of individual enterprises, from the commercial to the religious. These private ventures often carried an American flag, and markedly increased the country’s corporate image and sphere of influence, but it is of great importance to note the extent to which individuals preceded official representatives. In an interesting study of the importance of the cultural aspects of international relations, Akira Iriye went as far as to state that “until the beginning of the Twentieth Century these activities (of private individuals) defined the nature of American relations with the rest of the world.”³⁵

The importance of individual self-determination, rooted in the founding ideologies of the nation and institutionalized over a century of effort, is a central feature of US foreign policy. Closely associated was the establishment of an unusually high level of influence of internal attitudes on its foreign relations. This stemmed from the view – formalized in the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 – that “the American political system was ‘essentially different’ from that of Europe.”³⁶ Therefore, “because for most of its existence the US had isolated itself from the European state system, its national style was molded far more than that of other states by its domestic experiences and democratic values and outlook.”³⁷ This exactly reflects, at the national level, the importance Colonel Summers attaches to the “peculiar relationship between the American Army and the American people.”

³⁴Quoted in John Braeman, “Power and Diplomacy: The 1920s Reappraised,” *The Review of Politics*, No 44 (July 1982). Reproduced in Paterson, 103-114.

³⁵Akira Iriye, “Culture and International History,” *Journal of American History*, Vol 77, No 1 (June 1990), 103. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/view/00218723/di975292/97p00063/4?frame=no&frame&userID=a09566ac@cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/01cc99332300501ba1021&dpi=3&config=jstor>

³⁶John W. Spanier and Steven W. Hook, *American Foreign Policy since World War II*, 13th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1995), 11.

³⁷Spanier and Hook, 4.

By the 1890s, industrialization had taken hold throughout Europe and North America, and the US had reached a stage in its economic development where it had the capacity to compete with any other state for both markets and resources. The impetus had arrived to propel American governments into real international affairs, and US came to the start of the conceptual tightrope it has walked ever since in dealing with “tensions over national character or self-image (and) the clash between individualism and organized conformity, autonomy and centralized control.”³⁸ Beginning with a new political alignment known as the “System of ’96,”³⁹ America wrestled with the need to exert a level of national control over the private efforts which had brought it so far, without either stifling those efforts or contradicting the individual rights at the heart of the country’s existence. If unregulated private enterprise summarizes the first hundred years of American foreign endeavor, the second follows an intellectual struggle to “adapt the liberal institutions of an earlier day to the imperatives of an organized capitalism.”⁴⁰ Three interdependent areas for compromise have emerged from this struggle, all of which remain in some shape or form as foundations for foreign policy for the US to this day: first, the rationale behind taking on a wider role; second, competing domestic economic motivations; and third, alternative political theories behind that wider role.

The first issue is most helpfully explained in William Appleman Williams’s 1950’s idea of “Open Door” expansionism,⁴¹ comprising both economic and idealist elements. Williams sees a symbiosis between the requirement for global markets to enable domestic welfare, and a desire to export the American ideals of democracy. Influencing foreign societies to change into models of the US achieves both aims, providing compelling reasons for wider ranging foreign policies:

³⁸Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1983), 281.

³⁹Michael J. Hogan, “Corporatism: A Positive Appraisal,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol 10, (Fall 1986). Reproduced in Paterson, 15-18.

⁴⁰Hogan, reproduced in Paterson, 16.

⁴¹William Appleman Williams, *America and the Middle East: Open Door Imperialism Or Enlightened Leadership?* (New York: Rinehart, 1958), 58.

“free trade and peace . . . were one and the same cause.”⁴² For the second issue, by the 1920s, the varying domestic economic challenges found similar agreement in the idea of “corporate liberalism”, as a “middle way between the older laissez-faire system of classical theory and . . . paternalistic statism.”⁴³ This idea revolves around the importance of growth and mutual prosperity as unifying forces, able to provide the motivation for individuals, but also to be combined and coordinated for the benefit of the whole.

The third, political theory, aspect of the balancing act is captured in the most public early example of America’s appearance on the world stage: President Woodrow Wilson’s international diplomatic efforts during and immediately after World War One. It is impossible to find consistent historical opinion on Wilson foreign policy efforts, summarizing perfectly the challenges the US faced as it grew into a genuine world power. He is variously described as being “the first great advocate of world peace . . . who failed so wretchedly”⁴⁴ and, in his own words, as a true and honest exporter of real “American principles,”⁴⁵ and everything in between. The political version of the philosophical theory of idealism is so associated with Wilson that it is often given his name – Wilsonianism. Despite this, in a hybrid theory which offers much for the analysis of American politics, Arthur S. Link holds Wilson as a “higher realist”, defined as one able to see through “the fog of delusion” imposed by more classic realist concerns of “national power (measured) by army divisions and army bases.” Link provides one of the most charitable interpretations, which, whatever one thinks of its application to Wilson himself, shows exactly what the history of American foreign policy is all about. The higher realist understands the importance of such issues, but is able to incorporate his own idealism, to “win the long-run moral approval of societies professing allegiance to the common western, humane, Christian

⁴²Spanier and Hook, 15

⁴³Hogan, reproduced in Paterson, 16.

⁴⁴J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *Woodrow Wilson : A Life for World Peace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5.

⁴⁵Schulte–Nordholt, 211.

traditions.”⁴⁶ Here, at the first clear instance of America’s global interests, is the immediate appearance of a constant theme of the subsequent ninety years: the refusal of reality to submit to traditional definitions.

Whatever the challenges of definition, however, it is important to note the deep moral purpose behind the idealism of the first century or so of the American story. Even where some version of idealism was combined and diluted, its moral underpinnings – stemming from the wisdom and philosophical clarity of the Founding Fathers – were not compromised. Idealism was not allowed to become the empty and self-fulfilling logic of ideology. This may seem to be semantic pedantry, but it will be shown that enormous damage can result if the distinction is not made.

Despite the tribulations of renewed withdrawal after Wilson, the Depression and world war, the ideas and challenges described above remained central. The foundation had been laid for all the foreign policy issues that have come since America reached McCormick’s hegemony in the late 1940s,⁴⁷ as a single state powerful enough to operate internationally without the normal requirements of alliance and negotiation.

The American Half-Century

Although the concepts of a middle way or some higher realism seemed to show the path as World War Two ended, it is only with the full advantage of hindsight that their benefit is revealed; there is rarely concrete evidence to show they were comprehended explicitly at the time. The value of the established role of the individual in both providing for himself and adding to the aggregate wealth of the community was well understood, but it had relatively little role in international relations: “in peacetime one needed to pay little or no attention to foreign problems;

⁴⁶Arthur S. Link, “The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson,” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Vol 41 (March 1963). Reproduced in Paterson, 47-52.

⁴⁷McCormick, reproduced in Paterson, 3-7. McCormick holds Britain as the only other example from history, achieving hegemony between 1815 and 1870.

indeed to do so would divert people from their individual materialistic concerns.” The innate desire of Americans to focus on domestic prosperity continued, although it was now tempered at national level by greater responsibility and matching capabilities. Even with the new position of world leader, however, the US chose to only consider external affairs “with reluctance,”⁴⁸ rather than adopt the continuous engagement of other great powers. Changes to the normal laissez-faire foreign policy continued to require some type of trigger, usually manifested as danger; anything less was unlikely to provide the necessary impetus. Gabriel Almond wrote that one of two key variables in the formulation of US foreign policy is “change in the . . . political-economic situation involving the presence or absence of threat.”⁴⁹

Here, the story shows the major consequence of domestic influence on foreign policy. Geographically and traditionally separate from the coterminous border politics of Europe, America was protected from the day to day tribulations of control of resources and trade routes. Becoming involved in international relations had become a matter of choice, where the normal state of affairs for US government actions in relation to other nations was symbiotic concord and stillness. Given the unique contingencies of America’s time and place, from a well-meaning conservative idea that free trade both creates and requires international calm and mutual support emerged a “clear cut distinction between war and peace,” a dividing line rarely approached preemptively. Ironically at the time of its greatest power, US foreign policy has been largely reactive, and prompted only by some perception of danger. Spanier and Hook are blunt: “the US rarely initiated policy.”⁵⁰ And if such a reaction has required the use of force, the limitations imposed by domestic concerns – “the character and dispositions of the population,” as Almond’s other key variable⁵¹ – become even more constraining. War “could only be justified by

⁴⁸Spanier and Hook, 15

⁴⁹Gabriel Almond quoted in Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, and Lawrence J. Korb, *American National Security: Policy and Process*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 47.

⁵⁰Spanier and Hook, 15

⁵¹Jordan et al, 47.

presuming noble purposes . . . American power had to be ‘righteous’ power.” In an extensive review of American national security policy, Amos Jordan, William Taylor, Jr and Lawrence Korb describe the resulting “crusading spirit” in the context of a complete rejection of the Clausewitzian foundation of interdependence between political and military power. The position of hegemony also produced great freedom from practical necessities to compromise this all or nothing approach. With this political and cultural context, the idea of a uniquely American understanding of warfare easily follows.

The American Way of War

Russell Weigley’s *The American Way of War* is a logical extension of the works discussing wider US foreign policy. Whatever the traditional “rejection of war as a political instrument and . . . Clausewitz’s definition of war,”⁵² there can be no denying that politics and warfare are like products of culture and tradition. Beyond Weigley’s assertion that, as a function of the monochromatic distinction between war and peace, “annihilation became characteristically the American way of war,” a number of other authors have identified certain characteristics. All of these directly relate to the idea that war is a completely separate state from normal democratic peace; that war lies across some finite metaphysical division.

In *War over Kosovo*, Eliot Cohen lays down “four qualities which distinguish the old American way of war.” The first, aggressiveness in pursuit of grand, audacious solutions, supports the second, a “quest for decisive battle” to deliver victory with one swift stroke. The third is a resulting “discomfort with ambiguous objectives, constricted resources and political constraints.” Such unwelcome complexities are avoided by the last quality, a clear understanding of civil-military relations, where “apolitical officers dutifully execute policies” and civilian

⁵²Spanier and Hook, 16

masters stay out of the way of military execution.⁵³ A similar view is offered by Professor Colin Gray of the Strategic Studies Institute. In “The American Way of War: Critiques and Implications” Gray sees the American concept of war as, at its most extreme, “a largely autonomous activity, leaving worry about peace and its politics to another day.”⁵⁴ Gray suggests twelve “characteristics”: apolitical, astrategic, ahistorical, problem-solving and optimistic; culturally ignorant; technologically dependent; firepower focused; large-scale; profoundly regular; impatient; logistically excellent; sensitive to casualties.

It is instructive to note that there have been three separate bursts of academic activity on the idea of this way of war, and all have come at times of great debate when the complexities of “winning the peace” have drained the confidence in America’s culturally preferred warfare – in Vietnam, the Balkans and Somalia, and Iraq. All of Cohen, Gray and Weigley identify the requirement for a more subtle approach. For Weigley, in place of annihilation should come an idea of “compellance,” taken from Thomas C. Schelling’s *Arms and Influence* of 1966: “there is a difference between taking what you want and making someone give it to you.” Similarly, Robert Mandel, General Smith et al see negotiation and compromise as vital in warfare.

For the US, however, “military action was seen as an *alternative* to bargaining, not a *process* of bargaining”⁵⁵ (emphasis in original). The impediment to changing this approach comes directly from the challenge in finding a middle way theory for the use of national power as a whole. Cohen and Summers both describe the issue as truly cultural, referring to the formal

⁵³A. J. Bacevich and Eliot A. Cohen, *War Over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 40-45.

⁵⁴Colin S. Gray, “The American Way of War: Critiques and Implications” in Anthony McIvor, *Rethinking the Principles of War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 13-40. See also Colin S. Gray and Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006).

⁵⁵Weigley, 475. Schelling’s original explanation is in Thomas C. Schelling and Harvard University Center for International Affairs, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). His ideas would bear much greater prominence in current discussions about the use of force – it is clear that the issues discussed in this paper do not solely stem from the post Cold War environment, as they are so often presented.

embodiment of a specific process to guide any decision to commit military force in the doctrine produced by Caspar Weinberger as Secretary of Defense. In 1984, Weinberger produced six principles, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Our vital interests must be at stake.⁵⁶
2. The issues involved are so important for the future of the United States and our allies that we are prepared to commit enough forces to win.
3. We must have clearly defined political and military objectives, which we must secure.
4. We have sized our forces to achieve our objectives.
5. We have some reasonable assurance of the support of the American people.
6. US forces are committed to combat only as a last resort.

Although these principles – “tests” for Weinberger – did not emerge formally until the 1980s, they have their roots in a tradition of warfare dating back to ancient times. The idea of “just wars” stems from the attempts of certain sections of political Christianity to reconcile the morality of their faith with a perceived need to use violence to achieve certain objectives. The theory developed primarily through three philosophers – Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Hugo Grotius – into the moral and legal underpinnings of today’s laws of armed conflict. A summary of its criteria makes interesting reading:

1. There must be just cause – in relation to threatened or actual injury to a nation.⁵⁷
2. Any action must be proportional – the good aimed for must be greater than the evil produced, requiring the prior identification of specific political ends.
3. There must be reasonable chance of success.

⁵⁶ Caspar W. Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1990), 402. The speech from November 1984 explaining these tests more fully is reproduced in the appendix to Weinberger’s book. This abridgement is Weinberger’s own, from the body of the book.

⁵⁷This summary is taken from Christopher, 82-91.

4. War must be publicly declared – specifically to ensure that the will of the population is behind its government’s decision.

5. Only a legitimate authority may declare war.

6. War must always be a last resort.

Weinberger does not reference Augustine, Aquinas or Grotius, or the general idea of just war theory, when discussing the development of his own doctrine, and this research has not shown a previously held link between the two. In some ways, this adds weight to the point that Weinberger’s ideas represent the modern expression of subsurface cultural traditions. American foreign policy is the inheritor of the original Augustinian genesis of trying to merge “common western, humane, Christian traditions” with a political need to secure oneself from threat. Beyond this, there are certain specific parallels between the two. Three of the criteria –of last resort, the support of the people, and the need for clear political aims – are almost word for word replicas in both lists, while a further – a reasonable chance of success (with the addition from Weinberger of committing enough force to win) – requires only a little modification. The most open to interpretation is the issue of just cause, and it is this point which goes to the heart of the US foreign policy dilemma. Is just cause defined purely by national interest, as Weinberger has it, or is there a more moral aspect, as with Grotius, who is very specific about a lack of justification for pre-emptive action in anticipation of injury?

Two general issues link the ideas. The first lies in the identical rationales of Weinberger and Grotius in laying out strict criteria in order to reduce the chances of war. In the speech which first outlined his doctrine, Weinberger prefaced his six tests with “there are . . . situations where United States combat forces should *not* be used (emphasis in original).”⁵⁸ In complete agreement, Grotius “attempts to make the conditions . . . so strict as to all but eliminate wars except in some

⁵⁸Weinberger, 441.

cases of self-defense.”⁵⁹ The second lies further back than the specifics of either. As has already been described, the US regards warfare as separate from routine political matters, and has been traditionally reluctant to engage in warfare except where moral justification requires it:

“the United States cannot logically use the military instrument ‘to restore a balance of power’ or ‘to protect economic interests abroad,’ or for any other mundane purpose. Instead, America goes to war as a last resort and in the name of moral principles – ‘to make the world safe for democracy,’ or ‘to end all wars.’ America gives its sons, daughters, and treasure only when forced and only in righteous indignation or outrage.”⁶⁰

The Augustinian understanding of just war supports this absolutely; when war is permitted by God, “war became more than just a legal remedy for injustice; it became a moral imperative – and even more significant, it could be fought for the benefit of the vanquished.”⁶¹ This is not to make the claim that modern American policy is beholden to the Christian church, but that, regardless of where the basis for American morality lies, its importance has an enormous effect on the actual conduct of warfare. Cementing the neat divisions between war and peace, civilian and military, is a central theme of just war theory, that only democratic institutions can make the right moral decisions. As military organizations are rightly undemocratic, a clear separation must remain as “elected officials make political decisions; military leaders act on them.”⁶²

There remains, however, an important reason why Weinberger cannot be compared favorably with Grotius. The products may be very similar, but the lack of philosophical reference from Weinberger seems to indicate that there is no intellectual link beyond the mere fact of a common Christian culture. Reliance in times of stress on a moral understanding no more than skin deep easily produces empty ideology; here is the greatest potential danger of idealism as a political theory. Where Grotius produced his conclusions from careful and thorough moral and logical thought, allowing his theory to surface naturally, Weinberger is writing only in reaction to more superficial pragmatic and particularistic concerns of the day.

⁵⁹Christopher, 98

⁶⁰Jordan et al, 58

⁶¹Christopher, 38.

⁶²Christopher, 84.

General Smith criticizes three assumptions behind the Weinberger doctrine: that there is an orderly process recognized by both parties in which force is the last act; that force is an alternative to other options rather than being used in concert with them; and that when all other options have exhausted force will provide the solution.⁶³ With these assumptions in place, the resulting impression is that, as the method of last resort after everything else has failed, military action can solve Smith's confrontation. The facts of the winning the peace concept suggest that this demonstrates a lack of honest appreciation for the world of human behavior. Weinberger's lack of moral and conceptual effort therefore reduces the subtleties of Clausewitz's explanation of national power as a homogeneous whole – war as the continuation of policy – to an artificially simple taxonomic escalation.

The American Misunderstanding?

The engrained idea of using warfare as last resort, as an explosive reaction to crisis, divorced in conception from military criticism and in execution from civilian mediation, denying oneself the political ability to use force to release pressure gradually, demonstrates a rejection of classically realist understandings of power as part of a continuously protective engagement. Spanier and Hook call this “the American misunderstanding of the nature and functions of power on the international scene.”⁶⁴ In many ways, however, this judgment seems too simplistic, and it raises an important question.

It is immediately apparent that the American way of war as described by Weigley, Cohen and Gray – and as *required* by Weinberger – potentially clash terribly with the work of Clausewitz, Smith and Mandel on the interdependence of military force and wider national power in achieving political objectives. The opinions discussed above show that, in situations which take place over protracted time periods with unpredictable spikes in activity, defined by

⁶³Smith, 309-10.

⁶⁴Spanier and Hook, 12.

emotional motives and a lack of conventional military forces, a successful concept of warfare will need to be comfortable with ambiguity and with the integration of military force into other areas of national power. This is the battle between the idealism of America's youth and the practicalities of the world into which it has emerged: if traditional black and white methods are so inappropriate for the realities of international power and the complexities of winning the peace, is the alternative to reject the moral idealism which brought America into being in the first place?

If there is one consistency in all the work on the history of American foreign policy, it is that there is constant disagreement on the best direction. In his essay "In the National Interest," Arthur Schlesinger agreed with Spanier and Hook, summarizing the idea of putting American practical concerns first as "saints can be pure, but statesmen must be responsible." Schlesinger quotes Alexander Hamilton: while it might be sensible for morality alone to provide personal action with a "narrow compass", it is a very different matter for a government, as "the rule of morality . . . is not precisely the same between nations as between individuals"⁶⁵. In exact contrast, Irving Kristol held the universal idea that America "is founded on moral propositions regarding the 'rights of man', not simply the rights of Americans. Other nations may make a sharp distinction between what is morally permissible in domestic affairs and in foreign. We cannot."⁶⁶ In this debate over the right rationale for America's foreign policy, such a crucial issue for the new world leader, from the early wisdom of Hamilton to the hindsight of Kristol or Schlesinger it is impossible to find consensus. The founding ideals were not bland policy decisions made in the cold light of day. They represented the function of centuries of culture, tradition and experience, and any approach which does not take into account the depth of the feeling involved must be doomed to failure.

⁶⁵Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "In the National Interest," *Worldview*, Vol 28 No 12, (December 1984), reproduced in Neal Bernard and Lynn Hall, *American Foreign Policy: Opposing Viewpoints*, 3rd rev.d ed. (St. Paul, Minn.: Greenhaven Press, 1987), 24.

⁶⁶Comments by Irving Kristol from *The Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 1983. Quoted in Bernard and Hall, 20.

It is also important not to underestimate the complexity of America's position, in attempting to consolidate its own economic and security position in what was still a time of great uncertainty, with a set of responsibilities and concerns that it had not asked for at the start of the war a few years earlier. It is tempting to view the Cold War period as a straight forward bipolar problem, but this is to ignore the ebbs and flows of the rest of the world, with so much economic devastation, with burgeoning third world nationalism, with embryonic domestic and international civil rights movements. To expect any nation to cope with all this, at the same time as taking its own proud and firmly embedded history into in a new position of responsibility, and also to produce a consistent political theory to underpin its foreign policy is surely too much.

This, then, is the US as it embarked on the latter half of the Twentieth Century: a country with enormous external power, yet with the use of that power potentially hugely limited, not by the capability of any enemy, but by the ideology and traditions of its own people. Those domestic constraints have led lead successive administrations to continue along the tightrope it embarked upon in the 1890s while the draws of realism and idealism have tried to pull the country from its balancing act. Interestingly, it is only the commentators who favor an approach of national interest first who identify the potential for the US to be pulled from balance by the competing ideas. Walter Isaacson, a biographer of Henry Kissinger interprets the views of one of America's most controversial figures as a concern over the "idealistic streak in the American character, this desire to seek moral perfection rather than messy accommodations (which) caused the nation to lurch over the years between isolationism and interventionism, to embark on crusades, and then to recoil into self-righteous withdrawal."⁶⁷ Spanier and Hook follow up their criticism of the "American misunderstanding" with the deduction that it has caused "cyclical swings from isolationism to crusading and back again."⁶⁸ Such realists offer that allowing such schizophrenia in national policy is the real immorality. The leveling effect of national interest is the only way to

⁶⁷ Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 655-657.

⁶⁸Spanier and Hook, 18.

solve the perennial “identity crises,”⁶⁹ to bring about a proper “sense of balance between our interests and our ideals.”⁷⁰ This interpretation brings Republican arch-realist Henry Kissinger very close to Arthur Link’s opinion of liberal Democrat Woodrow Wilson. The point reveals the real issue at the heart of the use of American national power: what has always mattered has been an acceptance of balanced and blurred boundaries in intellectual rationale as much as winning the peace demands them in practice, rather than relying on labeling – of theory or Party or state of war. The story will reveal how often that state of balance has been understood, and how often US policy makers have grasped the intricacies of their own story enough to comprehend these challenges and produce policies sufficiently elastic to accommodate inevitable missteps and conceptual uncertainty. The story shows that there were leaders and policies which could attain this level of subtlety; there were also those who could not.

The Early Years: Consolidation Under Threat

The events of the years since the US reached super power status describe the path of a country as its leaders have steered around the competing challenges of periodic external threats and those constraining internal pressures. Those leaders were given little time to reflect on their country’s new power before the first danger emerged, as suspicions over the intentions of the Soviet Union were formalized in Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech of 1946. The Truman administration’s response was Williams’s balanced Open Door expansionism exactly, aiming to “safeguard US security” and “lure the world into a US-led orbit,”⁷¹ doing both for the sake of its own economic prosperity. This response had its roots in such public debate as George Kennan’s Long Telegram from 1946 and the president’s announcement of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, which led to the Marshall Plan of 1948. Consistent in this debate were the traditional

⁶⁹Spanier and Hook, 292.

⁷⁰Comments by Henry Kissinger, quoted in Bernards and Hall, 26.

⁷¹Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 496.

themes of developing and protecting domestic economic development, and of spreading the ideals of America. In Truman's words, "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples . . . (our help) is essential to economic stability."⁷² This one sentence captures the issue well, reflecting the basic driver as the domestic situation, in the context of threats and opportunities, and provided the basis for the start of America's Cold War foreign policy.

The result was a "sophisticated strategy,"⁷³ with a mix of financial control, in the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1945, economic aid in the Lend-Lease and Marshall Plans of the late 1940s, and the triple military efforts of the establishment of permanent conventional Europe-based forces, small scale intervention in largely third world conflicts around the Soviet area of influence, and the build up of the nuclear arsenal. With the clearly understood underpinning of "develop(ing) a healthy international community," founded on American led partnerships in the new NATO and UN alliances, and "'containing' the Soviet system,"⁷⁴ the US was able to establish a method well suited to "winning the peace" by appreciating the value of engagement and pressure well outside formal war. The sophisticated approach was summarized in the "overall policy" of National Security Council Paper No. 68 (NSC 68) in 1950, "to foster a world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish." The new world leader seemed to have made an impressive start.

Overextension: Korea, the Nuclear Brink and Vietnam

Concerns soon began to emerge, however. NSC 68 also heralded the start of a shift from idealism to ideology. Exacerbated by the external anxiety over the Soviet atomic bomb test of 1949, and the internal momentum of McCarthyism, NSC 68's militarism represented an "exaggerated" opinion of Soviet ability to "capitalize on the rising tide of nationalism in the Third

⁷²Speech by President Truman to a joint session of Congress on 12 March 1947. Available at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/trudoc.htm>.

⁷³Leffler, 501.

⁷⁴NSC 68. Available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm>.

World.”⁷⁵ One of the instigators of the strategy of containment, George Kennan, worried about the rising influence of domestic issues. In 1951, he wrote that a “legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems” seriously constrained American foreign policy, and in 1954 that foreign affairs could not be simply an extension of domestic policy: “we are either . . . part of the world stream of thought and feeling, or we are nothing at all. Smaller . . . weaker nations . . . might be able to get away with exclusiveness and provincialism . . . Americans cannot.”⁷⁶

Melvyn Leffler describes the US ideological reaction to the threat of communism as an obsession,⁷⁷ where the initial ability to blur the Kennan’s realism with traditional idealism for economic and security benefit, became skewed in the first post war example of Kissinger’s US tendency to “oscillate between excesses of isolation and overextension.” This is not to say that the 1950s and 1960s were devoid of realist politics for the US. Far from it, with careful balance of power alliances, financial aid to Third World buffer countries and anti-communist surrogate warfare in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. But, this was the first sight of the danger of moral idealism under threat becoming amoral ideology. Instead of sensible mixing of realism with idealist principles, power created for a realist world is then wielded for illogical and emotive reasons. The anti-Soviet rhetoric produced military operations couched in just such terms, where they often took on a life of their own and pragmatic expansion became overextension.

The Korean War was the first example, where the US put its faith in “a united Korea reject(ing) the communist model” and in the American force being able to “guarantee for all Koreans the right of national self-determination.”⁷⁸ Once the dividing line between war and peace had been crossed in the name of ideology, the traditions behind the American way of war took hold, and the deaths of tens of thousands of servicemen and civilians, and the near release of

⁷⁵Leffler, 508.

⁷⁶George Kennan, quoted in Dallek, 155-6

⁷⁷Leffler, 508.

⁷⁸James I. Matray, “Truman’s Plan for Victory: National Self-Determination and the Thirty-Eighth Parallel Decision in Korea,” *Journal of American History*, Vol 66 (September 1979). Reproduced in Paterson, 395-405.

nuclear weapons could only lead to an essentially permanent stalemate as the US became responsible for the security of another country, without having achieved its original grand aims.

In the initial years of that stalemate, the domestic debate continued. The records of a National Security Council meeting in 1953 reveal a key disagreement.⁷⁹ Termed in the minutes as “Side ‘A’” and “Side ‘B’”, the discussion focuses on the policy direction for the new Eisenhower administration, with both sides agreeing on the need to consolidate the national economy – the primary importance of domestic prosperity again – but arguing for very different methods. Side A, represented by National Security Advisor Robert Cutler and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, holds an idealist interpretation of the external threat posed by the Soviet Union, which must be secured first because of the ideological danger of communism, before any pragmatic management of more detailed affairs is possible. Side B, as expressed by the Department of the Treasury, conforms more to political realism, with the view that the domestic economy must come first, as attacking the US domestic economy is a key part of the Soviet Union’s international displays of power. The results of that debate, and others like it, were formulated in NSC 162/2 from later in 1953 with a commitment to the potential use of nuclear weapons to defend both “the free world” and “a sound economy based on free private enterprise.”⁸⁰ The ideological streak continued to dominate, and the key message from the US became one of confrontation. Eisenhower proclaimed the “Domino Theory” in 1954 and his foreign policy announced that “the United States would draw a line around the world and warn the Soviet Union that any penetration could lead to a nuclear response.”⁸¹ This grand idea not only assumed an area of responsibility that not even the British Empire at the height of its power could have contemplated, but brought the US to a period of constant brinksmanship, with the horrific potential consequence of mutually assured destruction.

⁷⁹Summary of the minutes reproduced in Paterson, 419-422.

⁸⁰NSC 162/2. Available at <http://www.jan.vandercrabben.name/nsc/index.php>.

⁸¹ Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981),

This tense period lasted some time, including the threatened use of nuclear weapons against China over Taiwan in 1954 and 1955, and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Rather than applying pressure and influence in a cautious and graduated manner to defuse the crises – the sophisticated multi-faceted approach which exemplified the subtle balancing act of the early Cold War years – ideology swept the US precipitously to the edge of all out war. In the case of China, in rushing to a black and white showdown, the US arguably even strengthened the relative power of its adversary, as the threats “spurred China’s nuclear program.”⁸² The ideological foundations continued after Eisenhower, reflected in President Kennedy’s understanding of his “commitments against outside Communist penetration,”⁸³ the policies almost created war where little threat existed, bringing “the US to the nuclear brink over relatively insignificant territories.”⁸⁴

The mid-century period of overextension in the nuclear realm blurred with the conventional ideological adventure in Vietnam. With efforts started by Eisenhower and Kennedy very much in line with the concentration on a Third World buffer zone around communism, Vietnam assumed almost a self-fulfilling logic, as the Johnson escalations led to the start of the “war” in 1965. Little needs to be said here about the problems the US faced in Vietnam, beyond summarizing the rationale for the US efforts there. In explaining his Domino Theory, Eisenhower ended with the sweeping assertion that “the possible consequences of the loss (of Indochina to communism) are just incalculable to the free world.”⁸⁵ In 1965, President Johnson followed the same theme, in a speech containing little but ideological rhetoric, with references to the dream of a generation, heroic struggles and of his aim for “a world where all are fed and charged with hope.” Eleven years after the Domino Theory, and despite all the strains of nuclear crisis and

⁸²Paterson, 438.

⁸³Speech by President Kennedy April 20, 1961. Available at http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/John_F_Kennedy/7.htm.

⁸⁴Paterson, 438.

⁸⁵The phrase “Domino Theory” appears to have been coined by President Truman, but gained most popularity after its use by Eisenhower at a press conference in April 1954. Conference transcript available at <http://hs1.hst.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/domino.html>.

escalating war, Johnson still felt able to echo Eisenhower in basing a large part of his foreign policy on a Biblical ideal: “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.”⁸⁶

Again, this is not to say that these administrations were purely idealists – in the formal understanding – but that, in a global context where American power was unchallenged either physically or conceptually, morality was allowed to become ideology. By 1970, however, the preponderance of power was being challenged, as the results of overextension came home to roost, both practically and intellectually.

Crisis in Confidence: After Vietnam

American efforts in Vietnam did not halt the flow of communist nationalism in South East Asia any more than the war in Korea succeeded in taking capitalism across the 38th parallel to the borders of China. The middle years of Vietnam, with the illuminating paradox of the US victory over the 1968 Tet Offensive becoming regarded as the start of final North Vietnamese success, heralded the first major shift in the balancing act of American foreign policy since the subtle “higher realism” of the 1940s gave way to the ideology of Korea. McCormick regards 1970 as the approximate start of a US decline from the position of hegemony, with a greater spread of post World War Two economic recovery, depreciated US influence during the quagmire of Vietnam, and the closing of the missile gap by the Soviet Union. As with China after Korea and Taiwan in the 1950s, the use (or threats) of major war – at a time of its irrelevance to objectives concerned with the will of populations – had actually decreased the power of the US in relation to its rivals.

These facts were not lost on US officials at the time. With a monopoly on control, the US had been free to experiment with the export of its ideology, but now the growing influence of allies and rivals alike forced a return to the old realism of maintaining the balance of power. The

⁸⁶Speech by President Johnson at Johns Hopkins University on April 7 1965. Available at <http://www.historicaldocuments.com/PeaceWithoutConquestLyndonJohnson.htm>.

names of Henry Kissinger and President Nixon have become synonymous with this shift; as Nixon stated in his 1968 inaugural address, “after a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation.”⁸⁷ The Grand Strategy which resulted was “foreign policy based on the traditional logic of the state system.” This was *realpolitik* without the enormous influence of *idealpolitik* of the previous decades,⁸⁸ leading to the idea of “détente,” with such milestones as the opening of talks with the Soviet Union on the limiting of nuclear weapons and the visit of Nixon to China, events which could never have taken place under the ideological framework of the 1950s and 1960s. Foreign policy in the early 1970s represented a return to the ideas of George Kennan, where an objective understanding of national interest could and should outweigh more transient emotive concerns. In total agreement with Kennan, Kissinger wrote that a way to moderate the oscillations in foreign policy was “by making judgments according to some more permanent conception of national interest.”

Despite the generally favorable reviews of the intellectual basis of Kissinger’s policies, domestic constitutional crisis over the impeachment of Nixon and an innate reluctance to support foreign policy in the absence of a publicly agreed unifying force resulted in a reaction against the *realpolitik* methods. Walter Isaacson, has referred to his realism as “too dismissive of the role of morality” despite the role it played in preventing “the pendulum from careening too rapidly in one direction or another.”⁸⁹ Consequently, a “backlash against détente” created a return to America’s founding ideals of freedom and moralism. Kissinger and Nixon, after an initial steadying influence, in the end may have actually given the pendulum greater impetus.

The administration of President Carter, in the late 1970s, was driven by the resultant renewed morality, with a return to an emphasis on objectives which clearly demonstrated a link to the traditional rationale of domestic freedom and prosperity. The key strands of the Carter foreign

⁸⁷Inaugural address of President Nixon. Available at <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres58.html>.

⁸⁸Spanier and Hook, 151.

⁸⁹Isaacson, 655-657.

policy were “global interdependence, universal standards of morality and peaceful cooperation.”⁹⁰ The boundaries between war and peace had blurred in Kissinger’s deeply held belief in “ambiguous compromise,” to the extent that “great displays and pretenses of power” were as influential as real war – delivering “credibility” was essential to Kissinger.⁹¹ Carter took America back to a position where those lines were firmly black and white again, and set in train a period of withdrawal, where the US would only flex its muscles openly in the event of serious moral provocation. For some, this was a successful strategy. Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, presents the focus on human rights as a central pillar of the democratic movements which began to appear in eastern Europe to put very public pressure on the Soviet Union, and he puts the enormous Reagan era defense spending in the context of the foundations laid in the late 1970s. For Brzezinski, these were “a US response that not only blunted the Soviet offensive but also intensified the crisis of the Soviet political and socioeconomic system itself.”⁹² From this point of view, the policies of the Carter years reach very close to the “higher realism” Arthur Link holds for Wilson, standing above the intricacies of power politics and allowing examples of goodness to create their own opportunities, while constantly working below levels of war. Carter’s success in starting the Middle East peace process is an example of just such an approach, where traditional morals and true idealism avoided the sloganeering of *idealpolitik*.

Carter may have been too true to his ideals, however, in placing the protection of the country in his faith in others to follow the right example. Certainly, for many commentators, he is blamed for stepping down from the front line of the Cold War, creating the room for the shocks of Marxist power in Nicaragua and El Salvador, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the emergence of a new enemy with revolution and hostages in Tehran. Spanier, for one, is highly critical, calling this period “the collapse of Carter’s foreign policy” which caused a “crisis of

⁹⁰Spanier and Hook, 195.

⁹¹Isaacson, 656.

⁹²Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Cold War and its Aftermath,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 71 (Fall 1992).

confidence' in the government."⁹³ Whether one views these set backs as the disastrous results of idealist isolation, or as inevitabilities in a complex and conflicted world, there is no denying the American reaction. As Carter himself lamented, "the erosion of confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and political fabric of America." Whether subtle higher realist or insufficiently tough idealist, Carter was held responsible. After the increasingly desperate experiments of Kissinger and Carter, it seemed that nothing could be done to escape from the lingering malaise of a declining super power. At this low point, onto the stage strode the rampant fervor of Ronald Reagan.

Simultaneous Contrast: the Reagan Years

The Reagan years represent a fascinating chapter in the story, as in many ways the high water mark of US foreign policy. On the one hand, he was pure ideology, displaying a level of rhetorical confrontation not seen since Kennedy. On the other, he was able to subjugate the actual execution of policy to the pragmatic requirements of day to day reality. At root, beneath the partisan bombast and political theatre, Reagan had more in common with Carter and Wilson than most supporters would like to admit, and consequently he was able to make the long searched for "higher realism" his own. Like Carter, moral principles were uppermost in the rationale for his policies. The focus was still the Soviet Union, and if for nothing else, Reagan will be remembered for his "evil empire" speech of 1983. Yet, seeing the value of negotiation and compromise with Mikhail Gorbachev displayed the open mind of the early Nixon or Truman, and Kissinger himself would have understood the subterranean intrigue of CIA activities inside Soviet occupied Afghanistan, of Special Forces counter-insurgency operations in Latin America, and, most notoriously, of the Iran-Contra affair. Unlike Carter or Kissinger, however, Reagan understood

⁹³Spanier and Hook, 189.

the truth behind all American international relations, that foreign policies must consider their traditional grounding in domestic will.

The morality of Carter was able to avoid the trap of empty ideology, but intellectual purity was nothing if it could not convey the strength required by an American population reeling from defeat in Vietnam, under economic pressure at home and threatened by a Soviet Union with at least an equal nuclear capability. Even the shift towards a greater focus on military security is dismissed as the “anguished transition” of a “paralyzed” administration as it realized the depth of its “naiveté”⁹⁴ by those who always disagreed with the moral hopefulness of Carter’s first years. The realism of Kissinger could deal more proactively with the threats, but was undone by his view of “the ultimate moral imperative” as a realization that “great goals can only be achieved in imperfect steps.”⁹⁵ This complex intellectual morality usually required justification after the fact, and all too easily disappeared in public beneath the more obvious reliance on “messy accommodation” in day to day execution. George Kennan could lament the limitations this imposed all he wanted; Reagan saw the truth, that domestic influence was an unavoidable fact of American political life and something to be embraced and maximized, not worried over. Consequently, he was able to “capture a more assertive national spirit”⁹⁶ and not only secure the victory America had yearned for since it came to power half an century before – it only remained for his heir, the first President Bush, to deliver the head – but also strike a balance between the traditionally competing motivations in a more effective way than any administration before or since.

Reagan’s foreign policy was not the product of any neat previously understood political theory. His was an ideology based realism, with the kind of pragmatic balance of power intricacies which are the hall mark of classic realism as espoused by Kissinger, but here bolstered

⁹⁴Spanier and Hook, 191-193.

⁹⁵Isaacson, 764-767.

⁹⁶Spanier and Hook, 197.

by the republican ideals of America's rich history. Reagan had transcended the normal definitions to the extent that this most conservative president has even been called a neoliberal.⁹⁷ The specifics of military operations continued this blurring of lines, with Special Forces working directly for Ambassadors in El Salvador, economic incentives for military cooperation in the Middle East and surrogate warfare in Afghanistan. The foreign policy of the Reagan era defies conventional description, which is precisely why it was so successful. The key to his success was that the third color of simultaneous contrast was always allowed to emerge: nothing remained black and white.

The Cubist use of simultaneous contrast relates to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Nineteenth Century adaptation of Sir Isaac Newton's view of color as a physical issue. Goethe held that all color was a matter of perception alone, an idea taken on in particular by artists Robert Delaunay and Marc Chagall in paintings designed to rearrange physical reality to reveal aesthetic truth. Goethe explained the emotional reaction of the human brain when differing colors are placed next to each other: "plus" colors – like yellow – induce warmth and comfort, and "minus" colors – such as blue – induce shadow and weakness. In the same way, careful positioning of different aspects of the application of national power can produce ever more subtle results. The traditional American way of war, and its parent policies, are profoundly Newtonian, relying on superficial philosophies and mechanistic progression cause and effect methods for everything from the procedures for planning the use of military force to the tactics and equipment employed. Allowing one aspect to dominate in the way the Weinberger doctrine releases military force after all else has failed can only produce a narrow, one-dimensional result. This applies to all areas of foreign policy, whether mixing instruments of power in execution or understanding the impact of external pressures on domestic motivations: all should produce the conceptual

⁹⁷ Verna V. Gehring, *War After September 11* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 87.

perception – in all witnesses, domestic electorate and adversarial foreign populace – of a new color, different from the colors initially spread onto the canvas.

After the Cold War

The true zenith of the Reagan approach came after the man himself had left office, and spread over the two years which heralded the emergence of the first President Bush's "new world order," from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the expulsion of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. After such a high, anything else was bound to come as a disappointment. Few could have predicted, however, the depth of anti-climax and confusion that would stem from the end of the Cold War. The decade after Operation Desert Storm gave rise to a more rapid series of pendulum swings than had previously been seen in so concentrated a time period. As has already been discussed, Colonel Summers has called this a Hegelian dialectic, writing in 1995. Looking back now with greater hindsight, Summers's basic point still appears valid, but requires some redefinition. In the early Clinton years, without a clear international mission, the initial swing was towards idealism, to polish the Cold War victory by leading the few remaining areas of tyranny and totalitarianism to peace and free trade. This was a hopeful and genuine idea, but after the glorious and dramatic end to the Soviet confrontation, it was not enough to unify the country behind the policy. Precipitous withdrawal from Somalia after the deaths of eighteen Special Forces soldiers in 1993 is often blamed on the intrusion of instant media technology on to the battlefield. In reality, this was but a symptom, and all it achieved was to highlight the inability of circumstance and rhetoric to provide the unifying moral cause that had propped up the Reagan policies. The sectarian and tribal chaos of Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, however, refused to bow to ideology in a timeframe that could be supported by the insufficiently strong rationale, and the American mood swung hard into an antithesis of domestic rejection of the concept of helping others for altruistic reasons.

Colonel Summers makes an illuminating comparison between the principles of Weinberger and those detailing the “strict standards” to be met as part of President Clinton’s Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25, from 1994: *The Clinton Administration’s Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*.⁹⁸ Both sets of principles are remarkably similar, and coming after three years of experimentation with ideological peacekeeping adventures, PDD 25 is held up by Summers as a return to common sense.

1. Participation advances United States interests and both the unique and general risks to American personnel have been weighed and considered acceptable.
2. Personnel, funds and other resources are available.
3. United States participation is necessary for operation’s success.
4. The role of United States forces is tied to clear objectives and an endpoint for United States participation can be identified.
5. Domestic and Congressional support exists or can be marshaled.
6. Command and Control arrangements are acceptable.
7. There exists a determination to commit sufficient forces to achieve clearly defined objectives.
8. There exists a plan to achieve those objectives decisively.
9. There exists a commitment to reassess and adjust, as necessary, the size, composition, and disposition of our forces to achieve our objectives.

The language is a step further removed from the just war idea than Weinberger’s doctrine, and relates more to the specific problems of 1990s military operations, but the focus on unambiguous objectives, no action without significant threat and an assurance of domestic support remains. The Clinton administration continued to wrestle with the implications of this antithesis for the rest of the decade. Force was committed to such politically uncertain missions as

⁹⁸ Summers, 187. PDD 25 is available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd25.htm>.

Operation Desert Fox in Iraq in 1998 and Kosovo in 1999, but the US generally preferred to play it safe domestically, keeping the military instrument behind glass while the example of American democracy led the way in, for example, developing peace processes in Northern Ireland and Israel. Meanwhile, the next great danger for America was growing in the shadows. Despite the later allegations that Clinton naively minimized the threat from the increasing activity of Islamic terrorism, content with politically expedient long range missile strikes while allowing hard won intelligence networks to wither, the next administration was preparing to cement the military disengagement even further.

This was captured explicitly in the 2000 presidential campaign of George W. Bush, with a renewed focus on the domestic prosperity angle above all: “I don’t think nation-building missions are worthwhile.”⁹⁹ Bush’s principal foreign policy guide, Condoleeza Rice, soon to be National Security Advisor, and later Secretary of State, clarified the reaction to the seemingly endless problems of war amongst the people in a *Foreign Affairs* article early in election year with “a Republican administration should refocus the United States on the national interest and the pursuit of key priorities.” She also wrote, with a turn of phrase that could have leapt out of the Truman Doctrine, at another time when the country celebrated its power after the defeat of a one enemy, only for another to grow in its wake, “America's pursuit of the national interest will create conditions that promote freedom, markets, and peace.” More prosaically, Rice summarized the renewed isolation with “we don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten.”¹⁰⁰

Like Truman, Bush was given little time to use his original concept, before external events again provided the trigger for the US to suppress its natural inclinations and put its

⁹⁹Presidential Debate at Wake Forest University Oct 11, 2000. Transcript available at <http://www.debates.org/pages/trans2000b.html>.

¹⁰⁰Condoleeza Rice, “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 79, No. 1 (January-February 2000). Available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20000101faessay5/condoleeza-rice/campaign-2000-promoting-the-national-interest.html>.

shoulder once more to the wheel of international affairs. The Al Qaeda attacks of 2001 brought about the latest synthesis of preceding foreign policy theories, where the ideal of global responsibility from the early Clinton years is merged with a renewed focus on national interest. This synthesis has resulted in the Bush doctrine of preemption and prevention, where the US has adopted the right to act wherever and whenever a threat may be based. The rhetoric from the Bush administration has been unrelenting since 9/11, and is at the same level as that of Reagan, and even Roosevelt in World War Two. Arguably the most famous example comes from the State of the Union address of 2002, with a description of an “axis of evil” which was deservedly compared to Reagan’s “evil empire” of nineteen years earlier. That axis comprised specifically Iran, Iraq and North Korea, but also referred to the non-state organizations of Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed and Al Qaeda.¹⁰¹ The same rhetorical flourishes have continued unabated to this day with the State of the Union address of 2006 declaring an aim of nothing less than “an end to tyranny,”¹⁰² an objective reaffirmed in the current National Security Strategy, published in 2006: “the policy of the United States (has) the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”¹⁰³ As the quote at the start of this paper shows, the US holds itself capable of achieving this.¹⁰⁴

The concluding questions of this study now appear. The American foreign policy objectives since 9/11 have assumed at least as great a self-imposed responsibility as the speeches of Dulles and Eisenhower “drew a line around the world,” and those of Reagan required “a major effort . . . for all people.”¹⁰⁵ Since doing so, has the US fallen into the trap of relying on

¹⁰¹State of the Union address by President Bush on 29 January 2002. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

¹⁰²State of the Union address by President Bush on 31 January 2006. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/>.

¹⁰³National Security Strategy 2006, Chapter I, Overview. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/>.

¹⁰⁴National Security Strategy 2006, Chapter XI, Conclusion. It is important to note that the NSS does acknowledge the requirement for help from other nations in such an “ambitious” aim.

¹⁰⁵Speech by President Reagan to British House of Commons on 8 June 1982. Available at <http://www.historicaldocuments.com/RonaldReagan'sSpeechtotheBritishHouseofCommons.htm>

Kissinger's "empty emotional slogans," leading to the overextension produced by the decades of Korea, near nuclear war and Vietnam, or has the second parallel been the example, when Reagan was able to achieve so much? In the context of winning the peace, as the dominant theme of warfare today, what has the use of national power by the Bush administration delivered?

CONCLUSION – THE PROBLEM CONTINUED?

President Reagan first made reference to the Soviet Union as “an evil empire” in a speech in 1983.¹⁰⁶ He was speaking in relation to the US policy of maintaining diplomatic pressure for reduction in certain elements of strategic arsenals, while continuing to increase spending on others, knowing that the Soviet Union would be unable to keep up in the long term. This effort was supported by the parallel – undisclosed – American efforts to support the Mujahadin insurgency in Afghanistan which was so draining to both morale and budget for the Soviets. The dramatic choice of words was not new for Reagan, coming after a speech to the British House of Commons in 1982 calling for “a crusade for freedom” now that “the emergency is upon us,”¹⁰⁷ and, in his 1981 inaugural address, his “heroic dreams” of prevailing over the “enemies of freedom.” Yet even with this level of perceived threat – and the responsibility it placed on the US – Reagan was never willing to fight a conventional war. His inaugural address is revealing, speaking of “reluctance for war . . . forbearance . . . negotiation,” and describing any sacrifice as not be of the same type as that made in World War One.¹⁰⁸ It took some time to achieve his defining success – over eleven years from that first inaugural to the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, three years after Reagan himself had left office.

The length of time that American foreign policy had to remain constant itself shows much about an understanding of a form of warfare relying on so much more than battlefield victories, accepting that the level of conventional war needed to achieve such goals could not be intellectually sustained. Consequently, the methods used were exactly those suggested by the writings on winning the peace, using all the colors of power: diplomatic influence, economic pressure and control of information, backed by credible – but never fully revealed – military

¹⁰⁶Speech by President Reagan to the National Association of Evangelicals in Florida on 8 March 1983. Available at <http://www.nationalcenter.org/ReaganEvilEmpire1983.html>.

¹⁰⁷Speech by President Reagan to British House of Commons on 8 June 1982.

¹⁰⁸Inaugural address of President Reagan. Available at <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres61.html>.

threat. Despite the time required for final success, Reagan's adversary was constantly declining in relation to the US throughout that time.

It is impossible to claim that the same fate has befallen those enemies described in similar language by President Bush in 2002. Five of the highest profile of these are illustrative – the actual axis of evil of Iran, Iraq, North Korea, together with Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran and North Korea are famously significantly closer to acquiring nuclear weapons than before they were classified as “evil.” Hamas, from being an internationally marginalized terror group, now forms a democratically elected government of sorts, whatever the distractions of its current intra-Palestinian civil war. Hezbollah is riding high after inflicting the first defeat on Israel in its history, increasingly influential both inside Lebanon and beyond, and also with growing legitimate political power. In this light, the chaos of Iraq is a success, in that the removal of Saddam Hussein does at least appear to have reduced the country's direct threat to American interests. It is true that Bush has had only a little more than half of the time required under Reagan's policies, but it appears undeniable that *all* of these adversaries are now stronger in relation to the US than they were before five years of this ideology. It can even be argued that the problems the US has had with maintaining the support of its coalition – acknowledged as vital in NSS 2006 – are indicative not only of rising adversary power, but an actual decline in its own influence.¹⁰⁹ It is difficult to reach this conclusion without comparing the situation to the results of the nuclear brinkmanship over Taiwan in the 1950s, when the principal rival – China – became more militarily capable as a result of the pressure, and the NATO alliance was strained enormously.

¹⁰⁹The difficulties the US and the UK, in particular, have had in getting NATO allies to agree to troop increases in Afghanistan – an operation universally supported in 2001 – would appear to be an example of this.

The reasons why this has happened lie in the difference between the “America first” rhetoric of George Bush before assuming the presidency and the language of the National Security Strategy of 2002:

As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against . . . emerging threats before they are fully formed. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. . . . History will judge harshly those who saw the coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action.¹¹⁰

The defenders of this policy could argue that there is no change; a focus on failed states is not naïve altruism, but is fundamentally in America’s national interest. If this is really true – and there does appear to be a valid connection – then why the specific denunciation of nation building before 9/11? Here, there is a breakdown in logic. There are two possibilities. The original “no nation building” policy was not fully thought through, in simply missing the importance of preventative and constructive action inside potential areas of threat – as required in *Winning the Peace*. Therefore, serious revisions were required after such danger emerged from a failed state. Or, the original policy understood that issue, but regarded the domestic focus as the greater imperative, after careful study and thought, a decision which was subsequently rapidly abandoned. It does not really matter which; either Bush’s election campaign, or his war in response to 9/11, was a superficial reaction to crisis. Somewhere along the line, the age old problem has reared its head, and idealist principles, “unleavened by some more permanent concept of national interest,” have been allowed to turn into ideology bereft of proper metaphysical opinions of the world.

Reagan was able to hit the ground running, his unifying rhetoric based on a well thought through understanding of international affairs and on the threat he defined. Consequently, he was able to minimize the swings, and the ideology served mainly to unite the public behind his foreign policy. Crucially, he was able to focus on the real problem, without being drawn into a

¹¹⁰National Security Strategy 2002, Introduction. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>.

noisy war against the symptoms. In the analogy of simultaneous contrast, the colors continually reflected off each other; nothing was ever isolated into artificial simplicity. The consequences of Bush's response to threat are entirely different. In allowing the ideals of "freedom (as the birthright of every person – in every civilization)"¹¹¹ to become not just a rallying cry anchored in reality but an unrestrained judgment of the world, America has committed itself to the apparently unstoppable idea of war as moral imperative. This requires overwhelming force and concentrated effort, and justifies the literally awesome American military machine – and leads to the sad, inevitable consequences of a way of war irrelevant to reality and doomed to exhausting overextension.

As has been shown, the crucial feature of the American way of war is not the tactical ability of American military forces. It is the way in which an artificial separation is imposed between political decision making and military execution, a boundary which both requires and creates a strict division between war and peace. Another retired United States Army officer, Andrew Bacevich, provides a blunt analysis of the problem:

Reluctant to engage in any sort of political-military dialogue that might compromise their autonomy, the generals allow fundamental questions about the relationship between power and purpose to go unanswered and even unrecognized. . . . The US today has great ambitions for how the world should operate (and) it wields great power . . . but there exists nothing even approaching a meaningful strategy to hold the two together.¹¹²

This is the problem which results in so much frustration when the US servicemen try to win the peace, and which allows the US political system to employ its military power for purely ideological reasons. The American way of war is now fighting the Global War on Terrorism, but there does not appear to be the same logical consistency linking means to ends in the way that – for Reagan – actions in El Salvador were part of the same war as SALT talks, or – for Truman and Marshall – economic aid to Europe was part of same war as military build up in Berlin. The

¹¹¹National Security Strategy 2002, Introduction.

¹¹²Andrew J. Bacevich, "A Modern Major General," *New Left Review* No. 29 (September-October 2004). Available from <http://www.newleftreview.net/>.

seeming inexorability of the moves towards war in Iraq is an indication of this, with a momentum which started even before Afghanistan was underway.¹¹³

The approach of the military has been to follow the same cultural trends as the politicians, and consolidate the problem. Operation Desert Storm was studied by former Israeli officer Shimon Naveh as a key element of his examination of the history of operational art, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*.¹¹⁴ Naveh holds the dramatic display of technologically enabled firepower and maneuver in Kuwait and Iraq to be the natural successor to the widely admired pre World War Two systems-based theories of war of such Soviet officers as Mikhail Tukhachevskii. As such, the campaign once and for all “completely invalidated” the old paradigm of the single decisive battle of destruction. Max Boot, in the 2003 essay “The New American Way of War”¹¹⁵, takes much the same view as Naveh, in describing the initial success of Operation Iraqi Freedom as an improvement even on Operation Desert Storm, which was ponderous and unimaginative by comparison. For Boot, the 2003 invasion of Iraq was “one of the signal achievements in military history . . . making fabled generals such as Erwin Rommel and Heinz Guderian seem positively incompetent by comparison.” The reason for this sweeping success was the willingness to use small numbers of troops enabled by the inventive use of technology and unconstrained by outdated desires to control every inch of the battlefield. Casualties – on all sides and including civilians – could now be minimized and the legacy requirements for expensive time and resources to build up pre-battle combat power can be dramatically reduced. The end result is that, for Boot, “the military is making impressive progress toward making the American way of war both more effective and more humane.”

¹¹³See, among many other sources, Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002) and Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Regan Books, 2004).

¹¹⁴ Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence : The Evolution of Operational Theory*, (London ; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997). See in particular the conclusion.

¹¹⁵Max Boot, “The New American Way of War,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 82, No. 4 (2003). Available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20030701faessay15404/max-boot/the-new-american-way-of-war.html>.

But it is too easy to read the praise for the tactical excellence of AirLand Battle and believe that the argument still revolves around how best to achieve decisive military victory. There is a limitation to the compliment, appreciated by both Boot and Naveh. The real issue does not concern military capability, but what that capability is used for. There has been no doubt over the American military's tactical superiority for decades. As Boot acknowledges, however, "battlefield victories in places like Afghanistan and Iraq can easily be squandered if they do not do enough to win the peace" and "the task of "imperial" policing . . . is as vital to safeguarding US interests in the long run as are the more conventional war-fighting skills on display during the second Gulf War." The understanding of the operational level of war in either Iraqi case still appears to be predicated on the idea that strategic success is achievable through military force alone, an idea which continually runs into the brick wall of the will of populations. The question of how Tukhachevskii would have fared in General Smith's war amongst the people in the Afghanistan of 1987 or the Iraq of 2007 remains unaddressed by either AirLand Battle or the minimalist approach of the Iraq invasion.

It did not have to be like this. The early months of the response to 9/11 suggested that the US had adopted methods that suited the ideals of establishing democracy in order to protect America – a climb down from “no nation-building,” perhaps, but still pragmatic and thoughtful. Maximizing the capabilities of Afghan insurgents, economic aid and massive diplomacy seemed a perfect – and globally supported – compromise, in the greatest traditions of American “higher realism.” The logical confusions between pre and post 9/11 language, and the subsequent actions, however, indicate the strategy did not have the level of considered reasoning required for such a venture. It now appears likely that the initial methods of Afghanistan were only part of the same sort of self-fulfilling narrative that produced escalation after escalation in Vietnam, a parallel which gives no confidence for long term success.

Revealing the Simultaneous Contrast

There have been attempts to come to terms with the problem of using military force in modern warfare; those who address the issue, however, remain split on how to solve it. Colonel Summers suggests that greater military dominance is the answer. Others take the line that winning the peace is the only true route to success; military efforts are secondary. A general feature of such authors, however, is declaring the obsolescence of the old way, while being unable to offer much more than hope that things will change to their suggested new version. Professor Gray devotes an entire essay to the trend of concern about whether or not meaningful change is possible, with “Irregular Warfare and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?” His answer is equivocal at best: “perhaps, but only with difficulty.”¹¹⁶ Eliot Cohen’s conclusions argue for deep-seated reviews. For Cohen, intervention into Kosovo fundamentally contradicted all of the Weinberger principles as “another milestone in an era that has evoked a new way of war.” Although practical experience is at least forcing some acceptance of the resulting “cognitive dissonance,” there is still “a long way to go in adapting the legacy of the old way of war to meet the imperative of the new one.”¹¹⁷ Weigley suggests a more conclusive possible end. After showing that victory in general nuclear war is probably impossible, and that “the record of nonnuclear limited war in obtaining acceptable decisions . . . is scarcely heartening,” he contends that, as the US comes to realize the futility of its tactical excellence in battle, it will see that “the history of usable combat may at last be reaching its end.”¹¹⁸ Subsequent experience of course suggests that Weigley was overly optimistic.

Despite a number of attempts to declare the obsolescence of the American way of war, the illusory certainty of warfare based on sweeping maneuverist attacks has always proved too strong. The latest evidence is the infamous lack of planning for stability operations as part of

¹¹⁶Gray and Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, *Irregular Enemies and the Essence of Strategy: Can the American Way of War Adapt?*, 55.

¹¹⁷Bacevich and Cohen, 59-61.

¹¹⁸Weigley, 477.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, four years after Kosovo. So why is it that the United States military continues to concentrate on becoming better and better at battles which are not only manifestly *indecisive*, but may actually be helpful to its adversaries?

Here, the story returns to the influence of domestic and cultural trends on American foreign policy – this is not a military problem. As has been shown, this influence can be regarded as a constant feature, and the results have been consistent. Spanier describes an American reality where “policy and strategy were unrelated; strategy began where policy ended.” The global stage – where the US has chosen to operate – is very different. Situations involving the commitment of military force require a great deal more than initial military victory; political and military strategies – themselves overlapping and interdependent – are needed with the sophistication to operate outside normal partisan labeling, combining hidden and overt methods, promise and threat, and effort across national power. Many have noted the issue summarized by President Kennedy, that “few of the important problems of our time have . . . been finally solved by military power alone” – many more than are outlined here. Yet the more the evidence points to this view of war, the more the military power of the United States seems to be deliberately positioned as separate to the other instruments of power, as a last resort of illusory omnipotence.

The principal deduction from this study is that this does not appear to be something which can be solved by adjustments in doctrine, organization or training. Truly meaningful, relevant, theories of war cannot simply be plucked from thin air, regardless of the contingencies of the time. The American way of war is just that – American. It cannot be ignored, or happily adjusted. But the US cannot allow the current paradigm to continue. So what is the answer?

Looking back at the detail of American foreign policy in the sixty plus years since the US ended World War Two as the world’s greatest power reveals a number of compelling observations. First, the principal inclination of America and its citizens is to allow the prosperity of individuals to expand, and foreign policy is entirely in the context of domestic will. Second,

prosperity is the result of democratic freedom more than avarice, so peace and international free trade should be one and the same. Third, when threatened, domestic prosperity should be protected: pragmatic realism short of war is well-understood by both leaders and people as a tool of foreign policy. Fourth, despite this acceptance, there remains a black and white line between peace and all out war. Warfare is not be part of the daily business of either individuals or government, only approached when ideology begins to outweigh rational discussion about national interest. Fifth, these culturally ingrained ideas, within the wider Christian tradition of just wars, mean that while war is a last resort, once reached its prosecution becomes a moral imperative and requires the commitment of overwhelming resources in order to secure victory in a time short enough not to affect the normal domestic peace.

Combined, these concepts produce a cultural way of war defined by finite dividing lines, which is manifestly unsuitable to the blurred complexities of modern warfare characterized by endlessness and a resistance to tidy definition. These issues are embedded far more deeply than the purely military level. It is however, both unhelpful and too simple to say that this has always been the case, and that therefore no change is possible. It is further untrue that these problems have always been visible, although they have always lurked close to the surface.

It has been shown on a number of occasions – from Wilson to Kennan to Kissinger to Carter to Reagan – that American leaders have understood some version of a “higher realism,” where protecting national interests can be combined with traditionally held ideals. The trick has been to achieve this balance without losing that crucial domestic support by either being perceived as too amoral – Kissinger – or too weak – Carter, and without allowing enlightening idealism to become empty ideology. The high point of this understanding came when the sophisticated policies of the Reagan administration produced the defeat of the Soviet Union. This success can only be reproduced by accepting the truth of the history of the US. Domestically focused ideals would seem likely to continue to dominate; there should be no problem in accepting this, and indeed maximizing the enormous potential benefit – they are after all the

ideals which brought the US to independence, stability and then prominence. There is much talk in the wake of the difficult operations in Iraq of concurrency, of planning for both stability operations and combat, of military and wider efforts. A true understanding of the American story accepts that this can only happen with a method both based on and constrained by logically and morally sound decisions, and to limit the means to those supportable by the American people in the long run.

In the 1940s, Roosevelt and Truman could have a multi-million man army, drop nuclear weapons and, after four years of war, still pay for the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, because they had the both the threat and the rhetoric to keep the problems relevant to the New Deal. In the 1950s, when ideology was allowed to outweigh domestic practicalities, the US committed to actions that its people could never have supported all the way, resulting in dangerous overextension. Reagan knew that he faced same potential problem, and exercised constant restraint, never reaching the stage where he had to rely on his military power alone. Michael Ignatieff has called the true influence of great powers “the power of awe.”¹¹⁹ Crucially, this relies on exactly that restraint, on never allowing the adversary to know what is coming. This of course cannot happen *after* large scale war. If ideology escapes and breaks down the restraint, great potential energy is released; hugely powerful in the short term, but leaving nothing to the imagination after the initial effect.

This is not a progressive science, however. Achieving one good example does not indicate similar accomplishments for his successors. President Bush has made the same mistake as all of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, allowing ideology to produce a false simplicity. America is now embarked on another period of damaging overextension, by allowing the taxonomic escalation of power to run its course, condemning a loyal and valiant military to a series of wars in which it seems destined to flail heroically, but blindly. The last similar period

¹¹⁹Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003), 89.

took place while America's greatest threat was the finite concern of nuclear attack by a Soviet Union, controlled paradoxically by the security blanket of Mutually Assured Destruction. Other problems could be dominated by genuine economic hegemony. The real worry for the country now should be that the current overextension is being watched by a China playing a careful waiting game while steadily increasing economic influence throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America, by a newly authoritarian Russia with an aggressively nuanced policy of using the supply of energy to potentially control its neighbors, by terrorist groups able and willing to use both themselves and America's own technology as weapons, and by adversarial countries from Venezuela to North Korea who witness the draining effects of open-ended American military commitment with undisguised glee. All of these, in a position of inferiority, have been forced into an understanding of the techniques required by General Smith's war amongst the people. As a result, the American military is fundamentally unsuited to the practicalities of defending the country against the real threats of Twenty-First Century warfare.

Robert Dallek has pointed out the dangers inherent in America "projecting its internal problems onto the world."¹²⁰ The evidence in this paper shows that, at heart, America is inward looking: it is no surprise that the only general officers to have lost their jobs over the Iraq war have presided over issues right at the core of American domestic politics, at Abu Ghraib prison and Walter Reed Medical Center. Ignatieff calls this use of great national power "narcissistic,"¹²¹ where a state attempts to set up foreign mirror images to demonstrate its worth, to itself. This is the simultaneous contrast: understanding that the results of actions will be the perception of a third color, and that in the murky world of international politics, predicting what that color will be is inexact. American leaders – civilian and military – must comprehend the role of their own color, their own domestic history, as they interact with the colors of the outside world. If a true understanding of this is achieved, the Reagan administration has shown that it is possible to

¹²⁰Dallek, 282.

¹²¹Ignatieff, 42.

employ the whole palette of the colors of national power to coerce and persuade, and to accept negotiation with one's enemies, without compromising one's basic metaphysical ideals. If not, then the American color is unacknowledged and unrestrained, a danger to itself and others.

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