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CHAPTER ONE

The long road from Little Rock

Before he could enact US Grand Strategy for the post-Cold War world, Bill Clinton had to win the presidency, a tall order considering his background as the governor of a poor state and George Bush's historic approval ratings following the Gulf War. Clinton secured victory, in part, by turning the 1992 election into a referendum on the state of the US economy, with his campaign being remembered for the expression, "It's the economy, stupid," which captured the importance of economic issues for the candidate.¹ However, while Clinton focused on domestic issues, international considerations were addressed on the campaign as a series of foreign policy positions were developed that both helped and hindered Bill Clinton following his election as president. The challenge for the Clinton team was how to address global issues on a domestically focused campaign, and prepare their candidate to serve as commander-in-chief. The 1992 campaign served as a training ground for power, during which Bill Clinton developed the skills and accrued much of the knowledge required to serve as president. The campaign revealed much about Bill Clinton's ability to withstand media attention, his decision-making processes, his choice of advisers, and the issues he chose to address. Through a consideration of campaign speeches and the contribution of key advisers, it is possible to discern the evolution of the candidate and his grand strategy on the long road from Little Rock to the White House.

Grand strategy in principle and history

Bill Clinton's presidential campaign team members were not the first to consider concepts of grand strategy, nor were they the first to struggle with its definitions or implementation. Indeed, the very expression is open to varying interpretation, causing Sir Lawrence Freedman to refer to the

“developing muddle in use of this fundamental term.”² Concepts of strategy, grand or otherwise, have evolved over the millennia from a deliberation of military might to a wide-ranging consideration of national power and its use to advance national interests. From Sun Tzu and Clausewitz to Gaddis and Kennedy, grand strategy has been considered and differing elements emphasized, as strategists sought to define the term for their times.³ As Freedman cautions, the word “strategy” originates from the Greek word *strategos*, translated as “the art of the general.”⁴ It is apt, therefore, that a seemingly problematic contradiction must be addressed—grand strategies must be specific enough to identify a series of criteria, yet be fluid enough to adapt to changing circumstances as well as interpretation. The production of a grand strategy document poses several challenges, not least of which is the fact that it may quickly be rendered irrelevant by global events.

Today’s approach to grand strategy, indeed its very definition, has evolved from a narrow focus on military methodology and now seeks to chart the manner in which the full resources of a nation (economic, diplomatic, social, political, military, even cultural) may be operationalized to advance the national interest. This is a profound shift from Sun Tzu’s focus on the military and use of “extraordinary and the normal forces,” or Clausewitz’s attention to “the use of engagements for the object of war.”⁵ Reflecting on the career of General Grant, J. F. C. Fuller used the term in a broader context, defining it as “the national fabric upon which the war picture . . . is woven [which necessitated] directing all warlike resources towards the winning of the war.”⁶ Given the times during which these definitions were devised, it is perhaps unsurprising that many adopt a militaristic nature, a practice that continued throughout much of the twentieth century.

The total mobilization required during the Second World War and the accompanying writings of Edward Mead Earle and Sir Basil Liddell Hart both broadened the meaning of grand strategy and took the concept to a broader audience. Writing in 1943, Earle argued that drawing together aspects of national power to achieve an important objective was no less imperative in peacetime than in war.⁷ In *Strategy*, Liddell Hart established a definition of grand strategy as a mechanism to “co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war.” Liddell Hart’s definition of grand strategy as being “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil ends of policy” may have been apt for the interwar period, but became less relevant with the end of the Cold War. His distinction between nations at war and those that were not, as well as the state-centric focus of his work also reduce its relevance in the current era of multipolarity and non-state actors. He did, however, warn of the potential costs of victory, in a message that predated President Eisenhower’s renowned Farewell Address by several years: Grand strategy, he warned, “should not only combine the various instruments [of statecraft], but also regulate their use as to avoid

damage to the future state of peace.”⁸ Liddell Hart also offered a glimpse of a more Clintonesque approach, suggesting that grand strategy should “calculate and develop the economic resources and manpower of nations in order to sustain the fighting services.”⁹ The blending of national security with economics was of particular interest to Governor Clinton and found its way into administration policy in the 1990s.

As the Cold War ended, Paul Kennedy observed that “the crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (i.e., in wartime and peacetime) best interests.”¹⁰ Kennedy’s prescription, of military and nonmilitary elements, was seized upon by the Clinton campaign as it sought to erase distinctions between foreign and domestic policy in the post-Cold War era.

Following the attacks of September 2001, former presidential candidate Senator Gary Hart defined grand strategy as being, “a coherent framework of purpose and direction in which random and not so random events can be interpreted, given meaning and then responded to as required.”¹¹ More recently, Stephen D. Krasner defined grand strategy as “a conceptual framing that describes how the world is, envisions how it ought to be, and specifies a set of policies that can achieve that ordering.” Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the complexities involved, Krasner concedes that such efforts rarely succeed, since “it is hard to align vision, policies, and resources.”¹² Clearly, therefore, the concept of grand strategy has developed to a point where it must now accommodate the modern era’s geopolitical reality; that nations remain on high alert without being at war and utilize all resources to advance their national interest.

The current requirement for a US Grand Strategy document has its origins in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act (codified in 50 USC 404a), which mandated that administrations provide an annual account of foreign policies and ambitions. The congressionally mandated report is designed to reveal the approach adopted by an administration in pursuit of its broader aspirations. However, the necessity to commit grand strategy to paper has several drawbacks: first, it sets strategy in stone, despite the need to react rapidly in a highly fluid international system.¹³ Secondly, it telegraphs national intent that may be undermined by international rivals. This ensures that grand strategy is positively reactive; designed to address a dynamic international system, within which competitors (and allies) are constantly seeking to advance their own national interests. However, partly because of this legislation, modern definitions of grand strategy may now legitimately consider the role of presidential doctrines and national security strategies, a central element of this book.¹⁴

John Lewis Gaddis insists that the production of grand strategy documents is “an ecological discipline, in that it requires the ability to see how all of the

parts of a problem relate to one another and therefore to the whole thing.”¹⁵ Amy Zegart developed upon this, noting that grand strategy “is a multi-player game with powerful adversaries who are seeking their own future state of the world to serve their own interests.” To be relevant, they depend “on knowing the number and identities of these key adversaries, what they want, how they operate and what damage they can inflict.” As the Clinton administration discovered, the writing of such documents is part intellectual puzzle and part political maneuvering—a process imbued with inherent risks. Grand strategy documents must, by definition, be horizon-scanning reports that necessarily require an investment of time and energy. They must also avoid sounding too prophetic, or risk descending into the fanciful and the idealistic (or alternatively, the pessimistic and the apocryphal). As Zegart has noted, grand strategy “has always been seductive because it promises policy coherence in the face of complexity.” However, they are “usually alluring but elusive.”¹⁶

Such a conclusion has been borne out by events, as debate over the composition of grand strategy has occurred throughout the history of the United States. The 1990s were no different, with serious debate being conducted regarding the direction of US Grand Strategy due to the end of the Cold War, continuing a historical debate that predates the foundation of the Republic.

Writing in 1776, Thomas Paine sowed the seeds of a nascent isolationist approach to grand strategy initiatives, declaring “It is in the interest of America to steer clear of Europe.”¹⁷ This was a view echoed subsequently by George Washington, whose 1796 Farewell Address warned of the “insidious wiles of foreign influence,” since “’tis folly in one nation to look for disinterested favours from another,” and by Thomas Jefferson, who promised “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none,” in his 1801 Inaugural Address.¹⁸ Despite these repeated commitments to avoid alliances, the United States took an early interest in the Western hemisphere, issuing what may be its first grand strategy document in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine.

An apparent turning point in US Grand Strategy came with the 1912 election of Woodrow Wilson. A sense of idealism has had a pronounced impact on the United States and her role in the world ever since, as Wilson ensured the application of morality to foreign diplomacy. Henry Kissinger noted, “it is above all to the drumbeat of Wilsonian idealism that American foreign policy has marched since his watershed presidency and continues to march to this day.”¹⁹ However, after the First World War, America saw a return to Warren Harding’s “normalcy” and for many years this was the status of America’s place in the world: neutral, disarmed, unready, and unable to adequately lead the world.

The outbreak of the Second World War, however, established the United States as a true global power, exacerbated by its participation in the United Nations, due in part to the efforts of Secretary of State Cordell Hull, whose

Trade, Prosperity, and Peace concept later exerted a strong influence on the Clinton administration. In the ensuing decades, America's place in the world and its accompanying grand strategy was defined by its response to the Soviet threat that came to overshadow the remainder of the twentieth century. Those decades witnessed the globalization of American power as it sought to defend freedom, not only on its own shores, but also far from home.

As Bill Clinton prepared to challenge for the presidency, the end of the Cold War offered a rare opportunity to reevaluate the direction of US Grand Strategy and to reflect on the last such demarcation point: the presidency of Harry Truman at the dawn of the Cold War. In retrospect, the era was viewed as the high point of US Grand Strategy, during which time NATO, the CIA, the NSC, the Department of Defense, and the United Nations were established; the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine were announced; NSC-68 was drafted; and the National Security Act of 1947 was implemented to contain the growing Soviet threat. Leslie Gelb has suggested that the Truman administration "marked the golden age of US foreign policy . . . as glorious in our history as the founding fathers' creation of the Constitution."²⁰ Like Truman, Clinton was a Democrat with little foreign policy experience, at the dawn of a new international era, required to redefine grand strategy. To Clinton, however, fell the unenviable task of replacing the much-lauded grand strategy of Containment, credited as having been responsible for winning the Cold War.

However, Containment had not been a static policy. As Gaddis relates in *Strategies of Containment*, it necessarily took into account changes in circumstances and evolved according to the undulating nature of global politics.²¹ This most revered of grand strategies, therefore, was one that "had to be developed, refined, and adjusted amid a seemingly ceaseless flow of events."²² As the father of Containment, George Kennan observed "any policy must rest on principles . . . but its application must be in a constant state of flux."²³ Kennan's Long Telegram of 1946 and subsequent article in *Foreign Affairs* "helped define American views of the Soviet threat, and they laid out the intellectual premises for a strong but measured response," ensuring that Kennan "came as close to authoring the diplomatic doctrine of his era as any diplomat in our history."²⁴

Although revered in hindsight, however, the Truman administration was simply reacting to events and situations as best it could. Kennan's recommendations, "to be of good heart, to look to our own social and economic health, to present a good face to the world," were described by Dean Acheson as being "of no help." Acheson conceded that Kennan's "historical analysis might or might not have been sound" but recognized that "his predictions and warnings could not have been better." Despite this, Washington "responded to them slowly."²⁵ While being viewed with reverence retrospectively, James Forrestal declared at the time, "there has been a notable lack of any central planning on American policy."²⁶

The internal divisions and evolving international environment that contributed to the evolution of grand strategy under Truman was evident in the shift away from Kennan as the architect of policy. Having been named director of the newly established Policy Planning Staff from 1947 to 1949, Kennan's thinking was overtaken by events. By 1950, following the loss of China and the US nuclear monopoly, Truman ordered a review of national security that resulted in the production of NSC-68 under Kennan's replacement, Paul Nitze. The report incorporated existing concepts, including those expressed by Kennan, and also incorporated a new commitment to prevent further Soviet advances in peripheral areas, if necessary through the use of proxy wars.²⁷

The drafting of NSC-68 was driven in part by the evolving international system, and also by the domestic impact of McCarthyism, which had a devastating impact on the Truman administration and helped solidify Cold War sentiment. The impact of domestic politics on the implementation of grand strategy likewise became a challenge for President Clinton, particularly after 1994. This highlights the fact that the American system of government, with its 2-year electoral cycle, rarely rewards long-term, horizon-scanning policies. The failure to deliver rapid solutions with demonstrable results may result in foreign policy falling prey to partisan attacks, ensuring that the very system of government that grand strategy is in part designed to protect could be an impediment to its successful implementation. This has been compounded by the rapid expansion of the federal bureaucracy, which, as Halperin observes, rarely assists in the efficient implementation of policy.²⁸

Despite being lauded retrospectively, therefore, the Truman administration and its policy of Containment was an all-too-imperfect model for Clinton to emulate, with its internal divisions and deadly international environment. Neither had it produced a political result that Governor Clinton wished to emulate, as President Truman was driven from office with some of the lowest approval ratings in modern history. A similar fate had befallen successive Democratic presidents, including Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter, who had both been seen to fail in regard to US Grand Strategy. As a result, the fate of previous administrations, the policies of Woodrow Wilson and Cordell Hull, as well as the intrinsic contradictions and political considerations of peace and trade were very much on the minds of Bill Clinton's fledgling foreign policy team as the governor of Arkansas announced his intention to seek the presidency of the United States on October 3, 1991.

The 1992 primary season

Following a remarkable career, 1992 should have been the pinnacle of George H. W. Bush's political life and a year that returned him for a

second term in the White House. During his 4 years in office, the Berlin Wall had fallen; the Cold War had ended; US forces had prevailed in the 1991 Gulf War and toppled General Noriega from power in Panama. President Bush received sky-high approval ratings heading into the election season and appeared to be the logical candidate to guide the United States through the formative years of the post-Cold War era.²⁹ His reelection campaign questioned the capability of his opponents to deal with potential international crises and portrayed the president as being uniquely qualified to lead. His son, George W. Bush, joked with reporters, "Do you think the American people are going to turn to a Democrat now?"³⁰ Initially, this appeared unlikely.

However, despite President Bush's international successes, his ill-defined New World Order had failed to materialize; the USSR had disintegrated, leaving a scattering of suddenly nuclear-empowered states; civil war was raging in the former Yugoslavia, while Japanese financial preeminence appeared to be inevitable. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations had stalled; Europe was beset by recession and dissent over further integration; China faced condemnation for its crack down on pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square, while South Africa was making steps toward international acceptance with the release of Nelson Mandela. Such incidents led President Bush to speculate that the world was going through changes of "biblical proportions."³¹ Accordingly, there was a growing recognition that the policies of the past could not endure; that new ideas were required for the post-Cold War era. As noted by Stanley Hoffman, "the three principles that have guided foreign policy; American exceptionalism, anti-communism and world economic liberalism, will be of little help because all are less receptive, or because 'victory' has made anti-communism irrelevant, or because the market itself is the problem or provides no answers."³² As the incumbent, President Bush needed to justify his continued relevance as powerful global forces swept established leaders from power.

This caused President Bush's advisers to consider what they called, "The Churchill Parallel," noting that "leaders are not necessarily re-elected for their foreign policy and wartime successes, even when monumental."³³ Despite the initial jubilation felt with the end of the Cold War, communism's collapse removed the unifying sense of purpose that had pervaded US society since the 1940s, leaving uncertainty in its place.³⁴ Senator Paul Tsongas captured the national mood when he wrote, "the Cold War is over and Japan won," while Gavin Esler noted that the United States "had conquered the world and yet . . . found little peace," as Americans were beset by political scandals and economic woes.³⁵

Although elections rarely turned on issues of foreign policy, fear of the USSR had helped Republicans win 7 of the 12 presidential elections during the Cold War. The year 1988, however, proved to be the final presidential

election of that era, removing a key justification for Bush's reelection. Fear of a historical analogy and the rapidly shifting geopolitical environment had a devastating impact on Bush's reelection campaign and contributed to his defeat. The president failed to campaign on his strengths in the international arena and was, instead, drawn into domestic policy debates on the state of the economy. President Bush's refusal to "dance on the Berlin Wall" and proclaim an historic victory over the USSR revealed his strong diplomatic reasoning, and also his poor domestic political touch, as he refused to utilize a vital justification for his reelection for fear of destabilizing the international situation.³⁶

President Bush's position was further undermined by two unexpected domestic challenges. Former Nixon speechwriter, Patrick Buchanan, openly challenged Bush for the Republican nomination, which forced Bush to adopt a less internationalist approach to foreign policy than he wanted and to embrace more conservative domestic policies than he found agreeable. This rearguard action, necessary to secure his own nomination, forced Bush to the right, vacating the center ground of US politics where the election was decided. Secondly, driven by forces that appeared more personal than political, Texan billionaire H. Ross Perot launched an independent bid for the presidency, in a move that hemorrhaged support from the president in a three-way race.

Democrats were eager to exploit the growing mood of national discontent and benefit from Republican Party in-fighting, to fulfill Arthur Schlesinger's forecast of a decade of liberalism in the 1990s.³⁷ Their challenge was to present a credible case for change that encompassed foreign and domestic policy, despite being viewed as having "no coherent foreign policy" and being "widely considered pacifists."³⁸ However, while the Republicans were divided over the degree of internationalism to embrace, the Democratic Party was split between two foreign policy factions.³⁹ Exponents of New Internationalism advocated the promotion of democracy with a concentration on multilateralism and supported "an activist approach rooted in classic American values but with the cost mitigated through burden sharing with others."⁴⁰ Conversely, proponents of Retrenched Internationalism sought to promote economics on a par with diplomacy and defense, insisting that the end of the Cold War enabled the United States to "redirect [its] energy and resources towards outstanding social problems at home."⁴¹ To succeed, the Democratic Party needed to bridge these competing views before taking their message to the country. However, President Bush's popularity in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War convinced leading Democrats to avoid the campaign and those who did run were not considered the party's most credible candidates. They were former senators, governors of small, rural states, and maverick politicians with nowhere else to go, not a field of experienced candidates who appeared qualified to compete for America's highest office.

Grand strategy on the Clinton campaign

When Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton announced his candidacy on October 3, 1991, it appeared unlikely that he would steer the United States through the emerging post-Cold War era. The idea that a 46-year-old governor from the second poorest state in the nation could unseat a president with the highest approval ratings ever recorded seemed unrealistic and it appeared likely that he was positioning himself for a more viable run in 1996 against Vice President Quayle.⁴² While Clinton “had a profile as a very smart political animal,” it was noted that he was looking to “succeed a president who probably knew more about foreign policy and had more foreign policy experience than many presidents in a long number of years.”⁴³ Both individually and as a representative of the Democratic Party, it was vital for Governor Clinton to inoculate himself against charges of international inexperience as early as possible. Foreign policy could not win the presidency for Bill Clinton, but it threatened to reduce his credibility as it had for the last Democratic president, Jimmy Carter and the previous Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis. Bill Clinton, therefore, had his work cut out for him in this area, long before he began to espouse a grand strategy of his own.

Bill Clinton’s political background was exclusively domestic; he had been Governor of Arkansas, head of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), and Chairman of the National Governors Association. These roles convinced Clinton of the importance that international trade played in the modern world, an understanding he brought to the White House with wide-ranging implications for US Grand Strategy. His exposure to foreign affairs had been almost exclusively academic, having attended the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, worked in Senator Fulbright’s office at the height of the Vietnam War, and studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. As a state governor, however, he had acted as “an international salesman for his state,” which brought Clinton into contact with foreign politicians and policy makers.⁴⁴ Accordingly, “he was someone for whom the foreign world was not foreign.”⁴⁵ Clinton’s appreciation of the emerging concept of globalization and his willingness to seeking solutions from the wider world became central to the Clinton presidency. In the autumn of 1991, however, Clinton’s rivals remained focused on domestic issues and avoided international affairs, as they believed it was unpopular with the electorate, ensuring Governor Clinton was alone in addressing foreign policy early in the campaign.⁴⁶ As he began his presidential odyssey, however, Clinton had no particular global philosophy and was, therefore, initially reliant upon a core group of advisers that played a vital role in the evolution of foreign policy during the election and later of grand strategy in the White House.

The foreign policy advisers, Anthony Lake, Samuel "Sandy" Berger, and Nancy Soderberg, formed a distinct team, separate from the core that advised Clinton on domestic issues, becoming a "wholly owned subsidiary" of the Clinton campaign, granting them "a lot of running room" on foreign policy.⁴⁷ Anthony Lake advised the campaign while teaching at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, and had been recruited to the campaign to act as "the focal point" for putting together Clinton's first speech on foreign policy, to be delivered at Georgetown University in December 1991. The success of the speech led to Lake being asked to stay on and coordinate foreign policy for the campaign, which he did along with Samuel Berger, who had known Clinton since working together on the 1972 McGovern campaign and who had been Lake's deputy at the Policy Planning Staff in the 1970s. As the campaign progressed and Clinton won an increasing number of primaries, it became clear that as Lake was still teaching in Massachusetts, "it made sense to do it jointly, so Sandy and [Lake] became the co-equal or senior advisers."⁴⁸

Lake was a proponent of Neo-Wilsonianism, which he defined as an attempt to create a world that was neither naively liberal in the Wilsonian sense nor relentlessly realist in the conservative sense. He felt that the United States "should use its moral, military, economic and political strength to engage and promote a more just, stable world."⁴⁹ It was noted that, "Tony is a moralist. He believes passionately in the moral aspect of foreign policy, he is a true Wilsonian."⁵⁰ Having spent his adult life considering the balance of American supremacy and responsibility, Lake saw the 1990s as a time to pursue "democracy's promise of a better, safer world" and unite elements of the Democratic Party that had been at odds since the Vietnam War.⁵¹ Lake and Berger wrote the campaign's initial foreign policy speeches and brought what Clinton needed, "in terms of adding to Clinton's contacts within the foreign policy establishment, reassuring the democratic establishment that Clinton was an OK guy and making sure his ideas were not out of line or going to be attacked too much."⁵²

In June 1992, Nancy Soderberg was hired as Foreign Policy Director to run foreign policy out of the campaign's Little Rock headquarters. She was "the day-to-day person," coordinating the flow of ideas and arguments from the foreign policy advisers to the candidate, while Lake and Berger were engaged in "the bigger picture stuff."⁵³ For a time Soderberg was the campaign's top-paid, full-time foreign policy official, since Lake and Berger remained volunteers.⁵⁴ The three were responsible for coordinating policy and "were reporting directly to Clinton or through George Stephanopoulos."⁵⁵

The campaign consulted regularly with academics such as Michael Mandelbaum of Johns Hopkins University, Joseph Nye of Harvard, with members of the Democratic Party's foreign policy community including Madeleine Albright and Martin Indyk, as well as with Congressmen Les

Aspin, Sam Nunn, Lee Hamilton, Dave McCurdy, and Stephen Solarz.⁵⁶ Their utilization provided political coverage and revealed Clinton's willingness to court advice from the Democratic Party's foreign policy elite.⁵⁷

In addition, many of Clinton's policy proposals originated from the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), which helped prepare policy statements and "covered his right flank as he began campaigning from the left against Senator Tsongas."⁵⁸ PPI president, Will Marshall, argued that the United States had to "erect a whole new conceptual basis for foreign policy" after the Cold War, believing that a new age had dawned on defense issues.⁵⁹ As a member of the PPI, Clinton was a proponent of the Third Way, which posited a middle ground between liberalism and conservatism. In an expansion of this approach to the realm of foreign policy, Clinton made shrewd use of language to combine elements of New Internationalism and Retrenched Internationalism to appeal to varying elements of the Democratic Party. He stressed economic policy to the masses, while reserving discussion of US Grand Strategy for select audiences, ensuring that while Bush offered "a limited presidency in a rather unusual time of limited expectations," Clinton offered a viable alternative, far removed from the Realpolitik of the Cold War years.⁶⁰ The PPI espoused a New Internationalist philosophy, perhaps the truest indication of where Governor Clinton's instincts lay on the issue, irrespective of how his statements were refined for public consumption.

Central to that effort were Communications Director George Stephanopoulos and Campaign Manager James Carville, who developed a narrative of responsibility and growth, detailing Clinton's humble origins, his 1963 encounter with President Kennedy, and success as governor of Arkansas to advance the candidate's cause with the electorate. Governor Clinton campaigned as a New Democrat to distinguish himself from a series of Democratic presidential failures, invoked memories of President Kennedy whenever possible, and actively downplayed any reference to the Carter years. However, while the Clinton campaign sought to distinguish itself from Carter's term in office, Lake and Berger had been members of the former administration, which was reflected in several of the policies that emerged on the campaign trail.⁶¹

Clinton's Grand Strategy campaign addresses

With Containment of the USSR no longer a valid justification for a continued global presence, the question naturally arose, "What does a superpower do in a world no longer dominated by superpower conflict?"⁶² To address this question, Governor Clinton made a series of foreign policy speeches based on three principles designed to build harmony among the disparate elements of the Democratic Party: advancing American economic

competitiveness, spreading democracy, and the maintenance of a strong national defense. Clinton believed that this combination would ensure the United States stayed “secure by remaining the strongest force for peace, freedom and prosperity in the world.”⁶³ Clinton saw these speeches as opportunities “to articulate the ideas and proposals [he] had developed over the previous decade as governor and at the Democratic Leadership Council.”⁶⁴ The Clinton campaign “was very strategic about his foreign policy speeches, going to the right of Bush,” and doing “slightly more than the minimum necessary to give himself foreign policy credentials and heft.”⁶⁵ Foreign policy was not Clinton’s *forte*, but it was manipulated to stress his progressive policies, while negating his perceived weakness in the area. Clinton’s message was that “the world had changed and the government hadn’t changed with it,” insisting that the Bush administration “had missed the boat in trying to handle the collapse of the Soviet Union, had opposed the independence of Slovenia and Croatia,” and retained “a Cold War mentality,” inappropriate for the post-Cold War world.⁶⁶

The Announcement Address

Governor Clinton introduced his campaign with an Announcement Address on October 3, 1991 in Little Rock, Arkansas. The candidate referred to his campaign manifesto as the New Covenant with echoes of FDR’s New Deal and JFK’s New Frontier. In a speech that dealt predominantly with domestic issues, Clinton charged that President Bush was prepared to “celebrate the death of communism abroad with the loss of the American Dream at home.” This enabled Clinton to conceptualize the end of the Cold War in economic terms, noting that “national security begins at home . . . the Soviet empire never lost to us on the field of battle. Their system rotted from the inside out, from economic, political and spiritual failure.” Governor Clinton presented this as a warning, stressing the inherent risks of concentrating on foreign policy at the expense of domestic affairs.

Clinton used the speech to introduce his signature concept, the linkage of foreign and domestic policy, insisting that the United States could not “build a safe and secure world unless we can first make America strong at home.” Clinton sought to bring his experience of dealing with trade issues in Arkansas to the world stage, insisting that the competition for the future was “Germany and the rest of Europe, Japan and the rest of Asia” and that the United States risked losing its role as a global leader “because we’re losing the American dream right here at home.”⁶⁷ This stance enabled Clinton to address foreign policy by redefining its parameters and benefit from the appearance of a grand vision. However, his reference to Germany and Japan raised concerns over Clinton’s future ability to forge relations with either nation and was an example of the difficulties faced by the candidates in 1992: Bush and Clinton sought to promote a domestic agenda, realizing

that the outside world still needed attention after the election. However, offending foreign leaders was a risk both sides took in 1992, as President Bush urged Mikhail Gorbachev “not to pay any attention” to campaign rhetoric taking credit for ending the Cold War.⁶⁸

Clinton’s concentration on the state of the US economy enabled him to turn the incumbent’s perceived strength in foreign affairs into a fatal flaw. George H. W. Bush was labeled “the foreign policy president,” as Clinton promised to “focus like a laser beam on the economy.”⁶⁹ Accordingly, Clinton’s team strove to ensure the election focused on the economy, campaigning to President Bush’s left on domestic issues and to his right on foreign affairs.⁷⁰ The campaign sought to “blunt Bush’s advantage [on foreign affairs] and in boxing terms, keep a left jab in his face,” ensuring that Bush was so worried about being seen as a foreign policy president, “he failed to take advantage of his strengths.”⁷¹ While pledges of an activist approach to government generated dynamic campaign speeches, however, they returned to haunt the candidate once in office.

The Georgetown University Address

On December 12, 1991, Governor Clinton spoke at Georgetown University and surveyed the challenges faced by the United States following the end of the Cold War. As prepared by Anthony Lake and Samuel Berger, this was the first foreign policy speech of the campaign, designed to attract financial, intellectual, and political support. While it was kept deliberately generic to avoid alienating individuals or groups, the speech revealed a willingness to address matters of international importance. Lake’s moral influence was evident as Governor Clinton lamented the speed with which President Bush rushed “to resume cordial relations with China barely a month after the massacre in Tiananmen Square.” Such an approach may have made sense during the Cold War, Clinton noted, “when China was a counterweight to Soviet power. But it makes no sense to play the China card now, when our opponents have thrown in their hand.” Clinton stressed that he favored a more assertive approach toward Beijing, with implications for China’s continuing most favored nation (MFN) trading status.

Clinton used the address to rally behind Boris Yeltsin and the emerging democratic movement in Russia, where he argued, “a small amount spent stabilising the emerging democracies . . . will reduce by much more the money we may have to commit to our defense in the future.” Clinton was at pains to draw distinctions with the Bush campaign, lamenting that the president had “devoted his time and energy to foreign concerns and ignored dire problems here at home.” This prevented him from learning from the fall of the USSR, which Clinton stressed had “collapsed from the inside out, from economic, political and spiritual failure.”⁷² Clinton’s stance received an unexpected endorsement from President Nixon, who agreed

that if Yeltsin were to fail, "the new despotism which will take [his] place will mean that the peace dividend is finished, we will have to rearm and that's going to cost infinitely more than would the aid that we provide at the present time."⁷³

Governor Clinton insisted that foreign and domestic policy were "inseparable in today's world" and that the "false choice" between them placed the United States and its economy at risk, a contribution to strategic thinking that had been formulated in tandem with Anthony Lake. There was an undisguised duality in this approach to policy, which Clinton stressed could "lead to the creation of lucrative new markets, which means new American jobs."⁷⁴ The decision to emphasize the domestic element to foreign policy allowed Clinton to highlight his record and distinguish himself from President Bush. This was an astute manipulation of politics and policy that allowed Clinton to take the battle to Bush on the incumbent's apparent strongest area. It was an approach that was reprised whenever foreign policy arose on the campaign and represented an example of Clinton blending the issues to suit his strengths. Clinton's argument that the best foreign policy was a sound domestic policy and that Bush had failed by devoting so much attention to foreign affairs was "unusual, if not downright tautological, but it works as part of a jeremiadic critique because of the jeremiad's embodiment of contradictions."⁷⁵ Drawing on his experience, Clinton noted, "any governor who's tried to create jobs over the last decade knows that experience in international economics is essential and that success in the global economy must be at the core of national security in the 1990s." This shift in focus and the changes it promised for US Grand Strategy were at the heart of Clinton's insistence that in 1992, Americans should not elect "the last president of the twentieth century, but the first president of the twenty-first century."

The basic principles of Bill Clinton's eventual grand strategy were present in his Georgetown University Address of December 1991 and were outlined in language that appeared almost verbatim in future National Security Strategy Reviews; the need to "restructure our military forces for a new era . . . work with our allies to encourage the spread and consolidation of democracy abroad," and "re-establish America's economic leadership at home and in the world." These elements became the blueprint for the Clinton administration's grand strategy and the bedrock of all campaign addresses on the subject. At the forefront of this emerging strategy was Democracy Promotion, which carried the dual caveat of making the world safer while opening new markets for US exports, resulting in more American jobs. This combined Anthony Lake's moral call to enlarge democracy with Governor Clinton's pragmatic advocacy of economic expansionism and encapsulated the candidate's call to "tear down the wall in our thinking between domestic and foreign policy."⁷⁶ It also exemplified Governor Clinton's ability to combine aspects of New and Retrenched Internationalism.

Bill Clinton first encountered this approach as a student working on Capitol Hill in 1967, when he noted Senator Fulbright's preference for "multilateral cooperation over unilateral action; dialogue with, not isolation from, the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations . . . and the winning of converts to American values and interests by the force of our examples and ideas, not the force of arms."⁷⁷ Governor Clinton built on this approach in his campaign speeches to advocate a distinct American engagement in the world, while stressing the practical implications of the policy.

Clinton's observation that "democracies don't go to war with each other . . . don't sponsor terrorist acts against each other" revealed the campaign's embrace of the Democratic Peace Theory, as espoused in 1795 by Immanuel Kant, who suggested that peace was not only possible, hence a moral duty, but also inevitable. Thinkers such as Hegel had challenged this approach, insisting that war was "historically and morally necessary and good," and that "the idea of perpetual peace was therefore absurd."⁷⁸ Michael Doyle had sought to advance the concept in 1983, but at a time when the end of the Cold War was not foreseen it received little serious attention. However, with the end of the Cold War, democracy was seen as a potential vehicle for peace and became central to the development of Governor Clinton's strategic thinking, guided by insights from Anthony Lake.⁷⁹

But was democracy really the best solution to the world's challenges? Were democracies less able or willing to use power in an arbitrary and indiscriminate manner against other democracies?⁸⁰ Or were they, as Churchill dryly observed, merely "the worst form of government, except for all the others that had been tried." Even George Kennan, whose thinking did so much to define the response to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, was known to have his doubts. Speaking at the University of Chicago in 1950, Kennan spoke of democracy in the following terms:

I sometime wonder whether . . . a democracy is not uncomfortably similar to one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but, once he grasps this, he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary but largely wrecks his native habitat.⁸¹

Despite such concerns, the end of the Cold War provided an opportunity to test Kant's thesis on a global scale as the Democratic Peace concept became embraced by Democrats and Republicans alike, ensuring bipartisan support for "repeated presidential calls to promote the creation of democratic government abroad."⁸²

In embracing this Kantian approach, Clinton sought to distinguish between the possibility of an Iranian nuclear arsenal and the deterrence retained by European democracies. "The French and British have nuclear weapons," Clinton insisted, "but we don't fear annihilation at their hands." Therefore, he argued that the spread of democracy was more than reassuring to Americans; it was of the utmost importance to US security. Democracy Promotion became a defining policy of the campaign, identified as "a legitimate part of our national security budget," as Clinton insisted that under his leadership an "American foreign policy of engagement for democracy will unite our interests and our values."⁸³

Clinton's Georgetown University speech was important for four reasons. It was made only 2 months after the Announcement Address and 2 months before the first primary, when other candidates were dwelling on domestic issues, establishing Bill Clinton as a candidate capable of addressing international policy. This allowed Governor Clinton to gain the support of the Democratic Party's foreign policy elite before returning to domestic issues in New Hampshire and Iowa. Secondly, the speech brought New Democrat, Third Way thinking to foreign affairs, stressing the linkage of foreign and domestic policy. Thirdly, it demonstrated Clinton's mastery over a range of foreign policy issues including economics, trade, geopolitics, and defense. Finally, it enabled Clinton to demonstrate he was not a "failed governor from a poor southern state" and allowed him to "cross the threshold of understanding and competence in foreign affairs."⁸⁴

The New York Primary Address

Governor Clinton sought to consolidate his developing international thinking in an address to the Foreign Policy Association in New York City on April 1, 1992, shortly before the state primary. Taking direct aim at the president, Clinton charged that George Bush had "invoked a new world order without enunciating a new American purpose." In addition to appeasing China, President Bush had "poured cold water on Baltic and Ukrainian aspirations for independence," failed to recognize Croatia and Slovenia, and relied too heavily on global partners, resulting in hesitancy when the world was undergoing powerful change. Governor Clinton called for greater use of multilateralism, but refused to rule out unilateral action. In a statement that became the unrecognized position of his subsequent administration, Clinton pledged, "we will never abandon our prerogative to act alone when our vital interests are at stake. Our motto in this era will be: together when we can; on our own where we must."⁸⁵ This approach was present from the earliest days of the campaign and remained in place throughout Clinton's time as president. However, the inability to convey this position successfully haunted the administration, as a perceived

predilection for multilateralism led to accusations of weakness by political opponents.

The speech and accompanying remarks made during the New York Primary were an example of the use of foreign policy to gain domestic support at the potential expense of longstanding international relationships, as Clinton's foreign policies collided with the Special Relationship in a struggle for the Irish vote. Speaking on St. Patrick's Day 1992, President Bush claimed that the United States was "not in a position to dictate a solution, to in any way be the sole arbiter of this difficult situation" between London and Dublin.⁸⁶ Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy and Boston Mayor Ray Flynn condemned this position, ensuring that the president's remarks were resonating as Clinton campaigned in New York. In keeping with his campaign's multilateral approach, Clinton conceded the possibility of UN involvement in Northern Ireland, stated his intention to appoint a special envoy to Northern Ireland, and pledged to raise the subject of human rights violations with the British Prime Minister if elected.⁸⁷ Clinton also promised to consider issuing a visa to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, in the full knowledge that such a move may "infuriate the British and strain our most important transatlantic relationship."⁸⁸ At this stage of the campaign, however, Clinton had no ability to implement these promises and nothing to lose by making them. In time, however, they returned to haunt him as pledges proved harder to implement in office than to make on the campaign trail.

Although the Clinton campaign was criticized for risking Anglo-American ties, it was less concerned about upsetting the British government and more focused on gaining the votes of 40 million Irish-Americans. George Stephanopoulos noted, "it obviously ticks off the Brits, but equally obviously, that is acceptable to a lot of us."⁸⁹ Prime Minister John Major's annoyance was not a matter of concern to the Clinton team, who were anticipating a Labour Party victory in the upcoming British elections of April 1992. In London, however, "there would have been an assumption that the UK government was assuming a second Bush term."⁹⁰ Thus began a series of events that saw UK consultants aid the Republican campaign and suggestions that John Major's government tried to discover whether Clinton sought British citizenship to avoid the Vietnam draft. The affair was dismissed as "a bunch of media chatter," but US Ambassador Raymond Seitz noted that such "clumsy little incidents planted the seeds of transatlantic recriminations," which haunted Anglo-American relations throughout Clinton's first term in office.⁹¹

Clinton's Foreign Policy Director, Nancy Soderberg, was instrumental in developing Clinton's Irish policy and sought to steer it away from its confrontational tone. "I joined in June of '92," she noted, "He made the statements April '92, in the New York Primary, not insignificantly!"⁹² Her efforts met with limited success, however, as Clinton reinforced his position in October 1992, declaring that, as president, he would "take

a more active role in talks on Northern Ireland and tell the British to establish more effective safeguards against the wanton use of lethal force and against further collusion between the security forces and Protestant paramilitary groups.”⁹³ Clinton’s Irish policy, cloaked in the mantle of support for human rights, was designed to attract votes not only in the primary, but also in the general election when New York’s Electoral College votes would be essential. This demonstrated the inherent risk in an electoral strategy that prioritized domestic issues above global relationships and revealed the often overlooked influence that domestic political pressures place on the development of grand strategy: the need to appeal to a multicultural melting pot of competing domestic constituencies risked alienating overseas powers. While Clinton’s approach helped him win the New York Primary, it placed a strain on Anglo-American relations that was not fully healed until the 1997 election of Tony Blair.

Clinton’s Acceptance Address

Clinton’s first speeches on the future direction of US Grand Strategy were delivered when he was a candidate in search of the Democratic Party’s nomination. By the summer of 1992 that goal had been achieved, ensuring that when he next addressed the issue it was as his party’s nominee for the presidency of the United States. The ensuing addresses on the subject revealed the changing nature of the campaign and of the candidate himself, as the responsibilities of power closed in and his speeches became more realistic in tone and rhetorical in style.

However, in his Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention in New York on July 16, 1992, Governor Clinton devoted only 141 words to foreign affairs, among which were, “the Cold War is over. Soviet communism has collapsed and our values—freedom, democracy, individual rights, free enterprise—they have triumphed all around the world.” However, as Clinton told his audience, “just as we have won the Cold War abroad, we are losing the battles for economic opportunity and social justice here at home.”⁹⁴ While the brevity of his remarks reflected the view that the election was to be fought on domestic policy, it exposed Clinton to attacks that were repeated until Election Day and beyond; that he was ambivalent on foreign policy and unfit to lead a military he had actively avoided serving in during the Vietnam War. President Bush mocked Governor Clinton’s lack of attention to foreign affairs, noting that his speech “spent about one minute on the national security of this Nation . . . If you blinked or had to do something else or even heated up a ham and cheese sandwich in the microwave, you missed the entire part about the national security and world peace.”⁹⁵ Both men played to their perceived strengths in their acceptance speeches, however, for just as Governor

Clinton downplayed foreign policy, President Bush failed to make reference to his own economic record.

The development of what became Clinton's Grand Strategy continued with the publication of *Putting People First*, the blueprint for a potential administration. The chapter on national security insisted that the United States "cannot go four more years without a plan to lead the world," and argued that with the end of the Cold War Americans needed "a team in the White House whose goal is not to resist change, but to shape it."⁹⁶ The vital elements of Clinton's Grand Strategy were all present: an enhanced military, a role for economics in foreign affairs, and the promotion of democracy. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace mirrored these findings in a report entitled *Changing our Ways: America and the New World*, a bipartisan critique of Bush's performance that echoed the Clinton campaign's call for an economic renaissance. As Patrick Buchanan dragged President Bush further to the right, the center ground of American politics opened up for Governor Clinton, ensuing opportunities to draw on previously unforeseen support. Former Carter aide Stuart Eizenstat prepared a memo for the Clinton campaign entitled, "Winning Back the Neo-Conservatives" that explained the group "had influence far out of proportion to their numbers" and insisting that "they can be won back in 1992 and to do so would be viewed as a major crack in the Republican armour."⁹⁷ The eventual support of several neoconservatives, though tepid, conditional, and ultimately short-lived, eased concerns about Clinton's capacity to serve as commander-in-chief and further fractured support for Bush, as Eizenstat predicted.

The Los Angeles Address

Much of the Carnegie Endowment's report fed into Governor Clinton's address to the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles (LA) on August 13, 1992. At the time, LA was in turmoil following the Rodney King verdict and for Clinton to deliver a foreign policy speech in the midst of domestic strife was a risky move, which only succeeded because of his linkage of foreign and domestic policy. The local audience was on Clinton's mind as he highlighted job losses created by the defense cuts that were a by-product of the end of the Cold War. This demonstrated the link between foreign and domestic policy and the manner in which George Bush, the "foreign policy president," had failed America. Clinton insisted that the United States required a president "who attends to prosperity at home" if the American people were "to sustain their support for engagement abroad," a role in which Clinton claimed Bush had singularly failed. Governor Clinton lamented that the Californian economy had been hurt by "the lack of a plan to convert defense cuts into domestic economic investments," contrasting his policies with those of the incumbent, who had "no serious plan to help

our defense personnel make the transition to a civilian economy.” Clinton promised to help “retrain defense technicians for work in critical civilian fields.”⁹⁸ As the challenger, Governor Clinton had the advantage of being able to campaign on such promises, rather than on his record in office.

Congressman Lee Hamilton aided Clinton’s efforts, writing in *Foreign Affairs* that the restoration of US competitiveness was critical not only to the domestic economy, but also to its foreign policy. “Our economic problems are limiting the reach of our foreign policy at a time when the rest of the world is looking to the United States for leadership,” Hamilton stressed, in a deliberate echo of the Clinton campaign’s central message.⁹⁹ The LA speech began a series of attacks on Bush’s claims to have won the Cold War, as Clinton reminded Americans that a bipartisan effort had secured victory in the struggle with the USSR. “The notion that the Republicans won the Cold War reminds me of the rooster who took credit for the dawn,” the governor said. “The truth is, from Truman to Kennedy to Carter, Democratic as well as Republican presidents held firm against the expansion of communism.”

Clinton used the LA speech to set forth three tests of presidential leadership for the 1990s: “the first is to grasp how the world has changed. The second test is to assert a vision of our role in this dynamic new world. The third test is to summon all our strengths; our values, our economic power, when necessary our military might, in service of that vision.” The speech was phrased to promote Clinton as a proponent of leadership and vision in contrast to the incumbent, who was accused of holding on to “old assumptions and policies, trying to prop up yesterday’s status quo, failing to confront our new challenges.” The idea that domestic strife was a result of an undue concentration on foreign affairs was key to understanding Clinton’s foreign policy: if domestic policy was flawed, foreign policy was irrelevant, for it implied that the United States was headed for a disaster akin to that which had consumed the USSR. Governor Clinton was adamant on this central concept: “in this new era, our first foreign priority and our first domestic priority are one and the same: reviving our economy.” Clinton not only outlined where President Bush had failed but also announced that he planned to “elevate economics in foreign policy; create an Economic Security Council, similar to the National Security Council; and change the State Department’s culture so that economics is no longer a poor cousin to old-school diplomacy.” This campaign pledge led to the establishment of the National Economic Council, which assisted Clinton as he presided over one of the most prosperous eras in the nation’s history.

Clinton charged that Bush lacked “a vision of our role in this new era,” arguing that “in a world of change, security flows from initiative, not inertia.” The governor scolded China, whose trading privileges he promised to link to “its human rights record and its conduct on trade and weapons sales” and attacked President Bush for failing to advance US interests with the

rising power. Clinton critiqued the president for appeasing Saddam Hussein, despite evidence of his brutality toward the Kurds, called for intervention in the Balkans and for the delivery of supplies to Sarajevo. Finally, he decried Bush for siding “with the status quo rather than democratic change, with familiar tyrants rather than those who would overthrow them.”¹⁰⁰ This refrain was echoed by the authors of *Marching in Place* who referred to President Bush as “a warrior for the status quo.”¹⁰¹

Clinton expanded on his notion of Democratic Enlargement, calling for Ukrainian independence, in contrast to what William Safire of the *New York Times* referred to as the “Chicken Kiev” policy of the Bush administration.¹⁰² Clinton accused the president of moral cowardice for his refusal to support Ukrainian “emancipation from a dying communist empire” and for publicly chastising Ukrainian calls for what Bush referred to as “suicidal nationalism.” In contrast, Clinton portrayed himself as an agent of change, seeking to recapture the idealism of the Peace Corps by announcing that his administration would “stand up for democracy and create a Democracy Corps to help them develop free institutions.”¹⁰³ Berger, Lake, and Soderberg urged Clinton to stress Democratic Enlargement along with a strong defensive posture as they believed this was “a theme that brings together conservatives and liberals, and would be an excellent vehicle for solidifying your support from both wings of the party . . . It also provides a defining purpose for America’s role in the post-Cold War world.”¹⁰⁴ It was a combination that Clinton adopted throughout his campaign and into his presidency.

The LA speech made direct reference to the Base Force defense policy of the Bush administration and revealed the powers at work behind the campaign: “House Armed Services Chair Les Aspin is right: The administration’s Base Force plan leaves us with a military that does not fit our strategy and cannot do what we ask.”¹⁰⁵ Aspin became a key adviser to the campaign and, along with Senator Sam Nunn, provided Clinton with political coverage and vital defense-related data. Given Clinton’s lack of military experience and avoidance of service during the Vietnam War, the support of such prominent individuals was a great boost to his credentials. Moreover, Aspin was right of center in the Democratic defense spectrum, offering the political protection Clinton desperately needed, as his campaign produced a post-Cold War plan for the Pentagon that could have been modeled on the views of his opponent. This hindered efforts by the Bush team to portray him as an old-style Democrat, weak on defense, or hesitant to use force. However, the candidate’s repeated references to his advisers raised questions as to Clinton’s personal grasp of the issues at hand.

Ultimately, Bill Clinton presented the election as a choice between two opposing outlooks: “President Bush will seek to establish his leadership by emphasizing the time he has spent, the calls he has placed and the trips he has taken in the conduct of foreign policy,” Clinton noted, insisting that

such criteria were no longer sufficient, since “the measure of leadership in the new era is not the conversations held or the miles travelled. It is the new realities recognized, the crises averted, the opportunities seized.” With his eye on the White House, Clinton echoed Kennedy’s call for a new generation of leadership that was “strategic, vigorous and grounded in America’s democratic values,” insisting his vision was of a world “united in peaceful commerce; a world in which nations compete more in economic and less in military terms . . . a world increasingly engaged in democracy, tolerant of diversity and respectful of human rights.”¹⁰⁶ This exemplified the changes that had enveloped the campaign as it sought to utilize soaring rhetoric to define its aspirations; the language of the past was utilized to portray a vision of the future that was both interventionist and internationalist.

The Milwaukee Address

As the race tightened toward Election Day, Lake, Berger, and Soderberg convinced Clinton to deliver a final foreign policy address in Milwaukee. “When they walk into the voting booth . . . Americans must be able to visualise you as commander-in-chief,” they noted in a memo dated August 22. “It’s a threshold test. You are well positioned, but you’re not there yet.”¹⁰⁷ Seeking to regain the support of Democrats who had defected to Reagan in 1980, Clinton spoke at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee on October 1, 1992, asserting his belief that the United States had “a higher purpose than to coddle dictators and stand aside from the global movement toward democracy.” He chided President Bush for his “ambivalence about supporting democracy,” his “eagerness to befriend potentates and dictators” and for not being “in the mainstream, pro-democracy tradition of American foreign policy.” In contrast, Clinton promised “a pro-democracy foreign policy” based on American principles, dedicated to “building a just, enduring and ever more democratic peace in the world.”

Governor Clinton attacked Bush for his “callous disregard for democratic principles” after the Gulf War, but carefully avoided calling for a global crusade: “Every ideal, including the promotion of democracy, must be tempered with prudence and common sense,” Clinton noted, stressing, “we cannot support every group’s hopes for self-determination.”¹⁰⁸ This was an indication of how much had changed since President Kennedy’s promise to “pay any price, bear any burden, oppose any foe, in order to ensure the survival and the success of liberty.”¹⁰⁹ Clinton was content to commit the United States to the promotion of democracy when and where possible, but pragmatism prevailed as this approach became not an overriding moral duty, “but one objective amongst others that would help guarantee America’s place in a complex international system.”¹¹⁰

The address was carefully constructed to shore up support, reach out to disaffected Democrats, and present Clinton as a credible commander-in-chief. The speech was indicative of Clinton's developing grand strategy, which now benefited from official briefings by the Central Intelligence Agency.

On September 4, 1992, Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates met with Clinton in Arkansas to brief him on intelligence matters. The governor invited his running mate, Senator Al Gore, and the outgoing chairmen of the two congressional intelligence committees, Senator David Boren and Representative David McCurdy, to attend the session.¹¹¹ The meeting covered Russia, the former Yugoslavia, developments in Iraq, North Korea, China, and Iran, as well as weapons of mass destruction. Clinton's inclusion of his running mate was indicative of the relationship that developed between them. Former Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, tasked by Clinton to identify a vice presidential candidate, felt Senator Gore had "worked hard to make himself knowledgeable in arms control, foreign affairs and the environment, all areas where Clinton needed support."¹¹² With a strong reputation in security matters, it was natural for Gore to speak on the issue and in September 1992 declared "George Bush does not fit the requirements of the New World Order his own speechwriters once summoned up. We require a fresh approach from a new leader of vigour and high intelligence, of courage and vision."¹¹³ Gore's foreign policy adviser, Leon Fuerth, assisted in preparing the address, which alleged that loan guarantees and dual-use technology exports in the 1980s helped Saddam Hussein build the war machine that American soldiers had to fight in 1991.¹¹⁴

In August 1991, President Bush referred to Governor Clinton as "a very nice man," but a year later his opinion had changed, insisting, "my dog Millie knows more about foreign policy than these two bozos!"¹¹⁵ However, rather than defend his actions over the course of the previous 4 years, George Bush appeared to acknowledge his predilection for foreign policy by canceling and rescheduling overseas trips and suggesting that in a second term he planned an energetic domestic agenda, the opposite of most presidencies. This, however, was viewed as being too little, too late, as the editors of *New Republic* noted that the Bush administration had "failed to grasp the two essential movements of its world: the growing clamour for democracy and the related impulse for national sovereignty. Its instinct has always been the status quo."¹¹⁶ Such assessments enabled Anthony Lake to observe that "Bush was so worried about being seen as a foreign policy president that he failed to take advantage of his strengths."¹¹⁷

For Clinton, appearing presidential was a vital requirement in his efforts to convince Americans to elect a Democrat administration for the first time in 12 years and his foreign policy speeches helped him in this process, elevating him from a rural politician to a credible challenger.

As the campaign progressed, his speeches became more refined and rhetorical, though less ambitious. While they inflicted no harm on Clinton's electoral chances, his policy of appearing more activist than Bush led to statements that returned to haunt him, as he called for aid in Somalia, a reversal of Bush's repatriation policy toward Haitian refugees and for intervention in the Balkans. Yet for the first time in a generation, a Democratic candidate was dictating the parameters of the debate going into the final stages of a Presidential Election and the accompanying televised debates.

Grand strategy in the presidential debates

The televised presidential debates have become a vital component in modern US elections and have historically favored the challenger, of whom expectations are usually lower, since appearing on the same stage bestows equality on the contestants. They proved to be the undoing of President Ford, whose 1976 insistence that there was no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe did much to undermine confidence in him. Four years later, President Carter's revelation that he discussed arms control with his daughter did little to strengthen his reelection chances. Although George Bush was the incumbent, few doubted Clinton's debating skills, especially when contrasted to the president's garbled syntax and known disdain for debates, which he viewed as a triumph of style over substance. The debates, therefore, were an opportunity and a risk for Governor Clinton: he could reveal his intelligence, stature, and empathy, but it was an unforgiving environment where any mistake risked undermining his growing presidential credibility.

There was little difference between Clinton and Bush on the subject of defense and in the first debate both candidates attempted to trump the other in terms of cuts and the use of US forces. Clinton stressed his disagreement over the need to station 150,000 US troops in Europe, citing a report that argued for "100,000 or slightly fewer troops." Clinton continued to advance the idea of democratic promotion, insisting "we ought to be promoting the democratic impulses around the world. Democracies are our partners. They don't go to war with each other." He lambasted Bush over his China policy, but with an eye on the future, stressed that he did not wish to alienate the emerging power: "I don't want to isolate China, but I think it is a mistake for us to do what this administration did when all those kids went out there carrying the Statue of Liberty in Tiananmen Square."¹¹⁸

In the subsequent debates, Clinton stuck to his central message: "If you don't rebuild the economic strength of this country at home, we won't be a superpower . . . We need to be a force for freedom and democracy and we need to use our unique position to support freedom." Throughout, Bush

mocked Clinton's experience as Chief of the Arkansas National Guard and ridiculed his equivocation over Operation Desert Storm. Bush posed the question directly: "If in the next five minutes a television announcer came on and said there is a major threat to this country, who would you choose? Who has the character, the integrity, the maturity, to get the job done?"¹¹⁹ Bush made it clear that only he had the wisdom and experience to chart a course in his self-proclaimed New World Order. Governor Clinton, however, reminded the audience that the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Crowe, had recently endorsed his candidacy, a move that Clinton strategist, Paul Begala, noted had an "enormous impact" on the campaign: "Having the most important military figure in America getting up and saying Clinton could be an effective commander-in-chief undermined the Republicans' fundamental argument."¹²⁰

Crowe's endorsement was reinforced by a statement released by the Clinton campaign in October 1992, in which many leading hawks revealed their support for Clinton: "We did not agree with the stand Bill Clinton took toward the Vietnam War as a young man, but that should not disqualify him from the presidency today . . . his firm support for the democratic and anticommunist movements in the former Soviet empire and in China make him a distinctly preferable candidate to George Bush."¹²¹ Therefore, by the time of the debates, even Bush's foreign policy credentials were in doubt, as Adam Michnik, founding member of Poland's *Solidarity* movement, suggested that the Bush administration was "sleep-walking through history."¹²²

These sentiments boosted the Clinton campaign and gave credence to the belief, expressed by Leon Fuerth, that Bush's foreign policy reputation was "over-rated."¹²³ His administration was being referred to as "The Revlon Presidency," due to Bush's perceived ability "to identify serious problems but offer only cosmetic solutions."¹²⁴ George Stephanopoulos declared "experience isn't judgment" and insisted that the Clinton campaign intended "to question the president's judgment when it is appropriate. Bill Clinton will cede no ground on foreign policy."¹²⁵ Polls taken immediately after the debates indicated that President Bush had lost them all, while Governor Clinton was only prevented from taking a clean sweep by a strong performance from Ross Perot in the first event.¹²⁶ The debates revealed Clinton to be Bush's equal in stature and his superior in style. As Craig Allen Smith observed, "Where Bush decried the 'vision thing,' Clinton had a vision . . . and a fusion of the liberal agenda and traditional values; and where Bush 'went negative' in the campaign, Clinton was positive in his affirmation of American values."¹²⁷

The Clinton campaign's strategy in the final weeks concentrated on domestic affairs when possible and mentioned foreign policy only when necessary and always in a manner designed to demonstrate their candidate's abilities. However, Bush had the upper hand in the dying days of the campaign in his incumbency—his power to control events—and the Clinton

campaign feared that with Bush stressing the threats and dangers of the new world, an international incident could be enough to convince voters to reelect the president.¹²⁸ However, despite potential troop deployments in Somalia, Bosnia, or Iraq, no such moves materialized by Election Day, paving the way for the election of William Jefferson Clinton as the forty-second president of the United States.

Conclusion: Clinton's triumph

Contrary to the popularly held misconception that Governor Clinton's 1992 campaign for the presidency focused entirely on domestic policy, an effort was made to define a grand strategy for his administration. Clinton focused his campaign on a comprehensive worldview and articulated an assertive internationalist approach, introducing the concept of linkage between domestic and foreign policy. The campaign proposed restructuring military forces to counter post-Cold War threats, promoting democracy and restoring America's economic leadership. Governor Clinton worked to overcome the foreign policy credibility gap that he had, both as an individual and as a member of the Democratic Party, and downplay Pat Buchanan's assertion that his international experience consisted of having "had breakfast once at the International House of Pancakes."¹²⁹

Thomas Friedman noted that the Clinton campaign's foreign policy was "hard to summarize in a single phrase," but recognized that it was "a blend of idealism and pragmatism, internationalism and protectionism, use of force and reliance on multinational institutions."¹³⁰ Certainly, the policies that emerged from the campaign were vague and unformed, but the principles that continued in office were all in place: the promotion of democracy, the importance of the economic development, and the need to maintain a strong defensive capability. These concepts permeated policy, influenced rhetoric, and helped define attitudes in the Clinton White House until the strategies became not just stand-alone objectives, but integral aspects of US Grand Strategy.

The end of the Cold War created the conditions for Clinton's domestically focused candidacy, but as a candidate and as president, he discovered that challenges from beyond America's shores were impossible to avoid. Governor Clinton and his advisers established the broad concepts around which to base US Grand Strategy, but had also created challenges for themselves in locations as diverse as China, Bosnia, and Somalia. It was these challenges that they were forced to address in office, as they struggled to implement their activist policies and come to terms with their new roles. However, they found the transition to power more complex and bewildering than any of them had imagined, exposing concerns about their level of competence even before the administration had taken office.

Notes

- 1 George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (London: Hutchinson, 1999), p. 88.
- 2 Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. xviii.
- 3 For a consideration of the manner in which grand strategy has been defined, see Paul Kennedy (ed.), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Robert Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusader: Power, Culture and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey (eds), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 4 Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, p. xvi.
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