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CHAPTER TWO

Taking charge and taking stock

On the evening of November 3, 1992, Bill Clinton made his first appearance as President-Elect of the United States, urging his fellow citizens to face “the challenges of the end of the Cold War . . . to face problems too long ignored” and begin “the conversion of our economy, from a defense to a domestic economic giant.”¹ After a yearlong campaign advocating the need for sweeping change, the mantra for Clinton’s period as president-elect was “essential continuity.”² During the 11-week transition period that followed, Clinton was forced to reassess the viability of promises and assumptions made on the campaign, ensuring that long before he set foot in the Oval Office his attempts to dwell on domestic policy were threatened by events over which he had little control. The incoming administration was forced to assemble a foreign policy team drawn from a Democratic Party that had been out of power for all but 4 of the previous 24 years and take account of their challenging geopolitical inheritance.

The transition period exposed traits that continued once the Clinton team members were in office: a reluctance to confront difficult problems; a commitment to diversity that hindered decision making; and an inclusiveness that hampered an ability to say “no.” The Democratic Party’s 12-year absence from the White House became apparent as the administration came to Washington with a group of people who hadn’t worked together as a team, whose job descriptions weren’t clear and with a foreign policy concept that was generic at best and too theoretical for many. As George Stephanopoulos noted later, “We didn’t know what we didn’t know.”³

World crises came to the fore during the transition that dominated the Clinton administration’s first year on office, preventing it from focusing on long-term challenges and forcing it to concentrate on peripheral issues. Administration officials, returned to power for the first time in a political

generation, struggled to implement their pet projects and come to terms with a news cycle that was radically different from the 1970s. Rather than the smooth transition of previous years, inexperience and in some cases sheer exhaustion meant that many in the administration simply “hit the ground barely standing.”⁴ Poor planning, unexpected crises, and a lack of focus ensured that Clinton’s political honeymoon was effectively over before he even took the oath of office.

Clinton’s post-Cold War world

Despite President-Elect Clinton’s rhetorical emphasis on continuity, change was immediately apparent as the incoming team placed its stamp on US foreign policy. Foreign heads of state calling to offer their congratulations, all received the same message: “The next President of the United States was not available, call back tomorrow.”⁵ This was a calculated decision to convey that Clinton would not afford foreign affairs the same priority that President Bush had. It was, however, not a decision that endeared Clinton to world leaders with whom he needed to work in the coming years. Unlike Bush, who came to office with a network of foreign contacts, “Clinton was an unknown factor” and his actions caused “a bit of naval gazing at what might be the implications of this new president.”⁶ However, Clinton was determined that foreign policy not disturb him during the transition and declared “the greatest gesture of goodwill any nation can make toward me is to continue their full cooperation during this period with our one president, George Bush.”⁷ It was a declaration that distanced Clinton from any decisions made during the transition, with profound implications for when he took office.

Bill Clinton sought to effect change, but in foreign policy he found himself a prisoner of his own past and of decisions made long before he ran for the presidency. Despite his noted experience in international relations, President Bush failed to initiate a coherent policy to deal with the post-Cold War era that began during his administration, ensuring his time in office was “an era of illusion and false hopes in American policy” culminating in “the false dawn of a New World Order.”⁸ As a result, the incoming Clinton administration “faced a vacuum” in foreign policy, a challenge compounded by an apparent lack of planning for what to do once in office.⁹ As Morton Halperin conceded, there was no coherent foreign policy in place when the administration came to power.¹⁰ As a result, US foreign policy was in “disarray and confusion” at this point and the lack of direction hindered Clinton during his first months in power.¹¹

On the campaign trail, “foreign policy had been more a matter of words than deeds, it amounted to little more than a couple of speeches and a series of press releases.”¹² Suddenly, Clinton encountered the realities of

power, as campaign pledges returned to haunt him as he found himself restricted by the size of his mandate, political intransigence, and the realities of governing in the 1990s. What Clinton needed was a smooth transition and a prolonged congressional honeymoon. However, Clinton's mandate for change was not as clear as his supporters imagined. Only Arkansas gave Clinton a plurality of its ballots and, with just 43 percent of the popular vote, his was a minority presidency. Accordingly, Republican Senator Bob Dole was quick to suggest that Clinton had no mandate, no coat tails, and no excuses, stressing "the good news is he's getting a honeymoon in Washington. The bad news is that Bob Dole is going to be his chaperon."¹³ Republicans were determined to complicate Clinton's arrival in Washington, eyeing the midterm elections of 1994 before Clinton had even taken his oath of office.

During the transition, Clinton's advisers drafted papers on a potential trade war with Europe, the Middle East peace talks, and the state of Russian economic reform. With two of the reports directly linked to economics, Clinton's priorities reflected the ascendancy of economics in international relations and reinforced the president-elect's assertion that US economic recovery and its ability to shape world affairs were inseparable. Leon Fuerth conceded that the incoming administration faced a bewildering array of issues to address: "Would the US take an active role in promoting Middle East peace and how deeply should the president be in this? What approach should we take towards reform and democratisation in Russia? What was America prepared to do to prevent Russia from entering a free-fall?"¹⁴

The Council on Foreign Relations and the Carnegie Endowment National Commission advised the president-elect to prioritize geofinance (the measurement of national power in terms of exports and currency markets) over geopolitics (in which national strength was measured in armaments).¹⁵ The suggestion that Clinton focus on the economy as a precondition for an effective foreign policy was warmly received in Little Rock and was, in part, a reflection of the changing times. No president in the previous four decades could have elevated economics to the level of national security in the manner that Clinton aspired to, due to the ongoing Cold War. As President Kennedy remarked, "The big difference [between domestic and foreign policy] is between a bill being defeated and the country being wiped out."¹⁶ Clinton, freed from Cold War commitments, was finally able to throw off this yoke.

However, while the incoming administration's focus may have been on domestic issues, foreign policy could not be ignored. Bill Clinton had won the election with promises of a proactive presidency to change America. However, he found the era to be a double-edged sword: the end of the Cold War created the domestic conditions for his election, and also caused a turbulent international environment that demanded more of his attention than he wished to surrender, as the departing Bush administration left a series

of unresolved dilemmas: the USSR had collapsed; China was undergoing civil unrest following the Tiananmen Square protests; tensions with Iraq were unresolved; Haitians were preparing for a mass exodus to the United States; and Yugoslavia had degenerated into a civil war. These were matters of historical importance, but did not represent a direct threat to US national security and were certainly not a priority for the new administration. They did, however, need to be addressed, costing the president-elect valuable political capital as they distracted from his domestic focus.

As a consequence, many aspects of Bush's foreign policy continued under Clinton: the Middle East peace talks, START II negotiations, world trade talks, bolstering Russia's fledgling democracy, efforts to find a resolution to the conflict in the Balkans, and preventing starvation in Somalia were all policies that varied little from what George Bush had intended to address had he been reelected. President-Elect Clinton did not wish to dwell on these issues, so it made sense to continue existing programs, at least until there was time to devise new ones. Clinton also discovered during the transition that continuity was less dangerous than attempting new initiatives, as his credibility suffered due to two candid remarks that initially appeared to signify changes in US foreign policy.

When asked about future dealings with Iraq, the president-elect indicated that Saddam could be welcomed back into the family of nations, declaring that he "believed in deathbed conversions."¹⁷ Unlike Eisenhower's dramatic decision to intervene personally to end the Korean conflict, however, Bill Clinton did not have the military experience to immediately rectify the struggle with Iraq. He had neither the military standing nor the political strength on Capitol Hill to espouse bold new initiatives in this area and discovered that his past dealings with the military forced him to acquiesce to the policies of the previous administration.

This was compounded by a furore that developed during the transition over the issues of homosexuals serving in the US military. This issue had not been a priority on the campaign and was triggered by an off the cuff remark the president-elect made to a reporter. The ensuing *mêlée* distracted attention from domestic affairs, raised doubts over the president-elect's political competence, and ensured that Bill Clinton's standing with the military eroded further before he took office.

Assembling a foreign policy team

Despite having campaigned solidly since October 1991, Bill Clinton immediately began the process of assembling a foreign policy team to implement his grand strategy for the post-Cold War world. However, in 1992 the Democratic Party had been out of power for 12 years and in power for only 4 of the past 24 years. Jimmy Carter's single term was the

party's only experience in government since Lyndon Johnson left the White House in January 1969, ensuring that all senior Democrats were tainted either by their time in the Carter or Johnson administrations. Michael J. Sandel voiced the concerns of many when he noted that while Clinton was "rightly confident about his abilities in domestic affairs . . . he seems less confident about foreign policy. There is a risk, therefore, that he will embrace the conventional wisdom in foreign policy of the old Democratic Party establishment."¹⁸

There were also personalities to consider, for there was "the sense that Bill and Hillary thought they could do it all themselves." Both were used to being the center of attention in Arkansas and were determined to continue this at the White House. "As a result, some of the most clever and experienced Democratic Party operatives found themselves shut out of the administration or marginalized."¹⁹ This included Richard Holbrooke, whose credentials should have made him a natural selection for a high-profile role at the State Department, but whose deteriorating relationship with Lake and reputation for being "a pain in the ass" led to his appointment as Ambassador to Germany.²⁰ With his domestic focus and lack of international experience, Clinton needed a strong foreign policy team to compensate for his "background, indecisiveness, and detachment."²¹ The difference between what Clinton needed and what he secured was instrumental to the development and direction of US Grand Strategy in the 1990s.

Clinton wanted a competent Secretary of State who could run the department efficiently and prevent foreign policy from distracting the president from his domestic agenda. However, Clinton discovered that there was "a huge gap in age between those who would do it in the past and those who were not yet ready, but wanted to do it."²² Having discounted senior Democrats from previous administrations, it appeared that the right candidate might be found on Capitol Hill. However, there was a reluctance to take people out of Congress due to the narrow Democratic majorities in both chambers. Additionally, the most viable candidates in the Senate were more experienced than the president-elect. Drawing on their experience during the campaign was one thing, but many were unwilling to surrender their safe seats to serve a president with a slender mandate and a perceived ambivalence toward foreign policy, especially since many believed that they could wield more power on congressional committees than in the cabinet.

Intriguingly, the successful candidate was already part of the transition team but had played no role in advising the candidate on foreign policy during the campaign. Later identified as "the only man ever to eat Presidential M&Ms on Air Force One with a knife and fork," Clinton's Transition Director Warren Christopher had been Deputy Secretary of State under President Carter and was the most senior figure in the Democratic Party's foreign policy establishment and, who, at 67, was not too old to serve and

had not served at a Cabinet level before.²³ Christopher had not started out as Clinton's preference, but he had proved to be a discreet adviser on choosing the vice president. In his selection of Christopher, Bill Clinton demonstrated an ability to identify some of his own failings; his lack of standing with Washington's elite, his lack of foreign policy experience, and a perceived lack of refinement.

However, while Christopher's abilities were not inconsiderable, his critics thought they fell short, particularly for a job about to become extremely important now that the Cold War was over. It was noted that Christopher "may be a consummate manager, but is a highly unlikely architect of a new world order."²⁴ Few were excited by him, his view of the world or believed he had any particular ideas of his own on foreign policy. Indeed, although Christopher wanted to be Secretary of State "he seemed to have no strong beliefs or guiding philosophy."²⁵ This was partly why he had so few enemies, and also why many people who knew him had doubts about his selection. Madeleine Albright suggested that Christopher remained "a lawyer's lawyer," while others worried that he lacked imagination and innovation.²⁶ The consensus was that he was an ideal deputy, but unqualified to run the State Department and "unlikely to develop into a Metternich for the 1990s."²⁷

In a move that had serious repercussions for Clinton's presidency, Christopher advised the president-elect to ignore suggestions that an overarching, single-word doctrine for US foreign policy be identified to replace Containment. Christopher stressed that the post-Cold War challenges were too diverse to be summarized in a neatly defined doctrine. Although this stance was not without its supporters, it revealed a lack of appreciation for the need to present a coherent strategic vision that became an impediment to the development of Clinton's Grand Strategy.

Samuel "Sandy" Berger was offered the top job at the National Security Council (NSC), but realized that the foreign policy establishment perceived him as a Washington trade lawyer with strong Democratic Party connections. In a move that endeared him to the president-elect, Berger recommended Anthony Lake, his old boss from the Policy Planning Staff, for the position. Lake had not lobbied for the position, nor worked on the transition, but agreed to serve, despite reservations about the potential impact on his home life and general contentment working in Massachusetts and living on his farm.²⁸ Lake and Berger became the central components of Clinton's foreign policy team, "the principals, working with the issues and dealing with the president . . . Tony and Sandy were the CEO and deputy CEO; they were the decision makers, the ones making judgments and briefing the president."²⁹ Lake and Berger agreed on the need for US foreign engagement and the support for human rights, although Berger brought "a less academic and more political approach to the table."³⁰

Nancy Soderberg joined Lake and Berger, serving as Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the third ranking official at the NSC, or “the COO of the NSC” from 1993 to 1997.³¹ However, the appointment of Lake and Berger proved frustrating to Michael Mandelbaum, who had advised the Clinton campaign on Russian affairs, contributed to early speeches, and had a relationship with Clinton dating back to their university days in England. It was believed, however, that his thinking was more Realist than Wilsonian, placing him at odds with the central core of advisers on the campaign. Having been denied the job he sought at the NSC, he rejected the Directorship of the Policy Planning Staff and remained at Johns Hopkins University.³²

Due to Clinton’s past dealings with the military and his lack of a service record, the task of running the Pentagon was always likely to be contentious. Senator Sam Nunn was considered, but his conservative voting record made him anathema to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Despite the reluctance to take people out of the Congress, Les Aspin, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, had helped on the campaign and was a *bona fide* defense intellectual, was selected. He was also a Democrat who disagreed with calls for dramatic reductions in the US defense budget and was initially well regarded by the professional military.³³ However, doubts were raised as to whether Aspin was too abrasive to run the Pentagon and, although he was selected, his time in office was neither happy nor protracted. The same was true for Clinton’s appointment as CIA Director. Clinton had intended to nominate the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Dave McCurdy, but he refused to resign his seat to run the CIA. The only job that interested him was at the Pentagon, where he was Clinton’s second choice. After considering Tom Pickering, Clinton was persuaded to name neoconservative James Woolsey, whose credentials were a mystery to Clinton’s closest advisers—as Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers mistook him for an admiral.³⁴

Clinton initially invited his friend and Russian expert Strobe Talbott to be ambassador to Moscow; however, Talbott urged Clinton to consider Condoleezza Rice, who served as President Bush’s senior Russia adviser on the NSC. Talbott believed that her appointment might address the lack of bipartisanship in the foreign policy team and provide continuity in a vital area of foreign policy.³⁵ Instead, Clinton heeded Warren Christopher’s advice that a seasoned professional diplomat was needed in Moscow, and appointed Tom Pickering.³⁶ Talbott took a role at the State Department where he came to assist with broader policy toward Russia, although within a year he was promoted to Deputy Secretary of State.³⁷ Clinton again considered Dr Rice for the UN Ambassadorship, but decided to stay within the Democratic Party, naming another Carter administration alum, Madeleine Albright.³⁸

"In a time of great change and challenges, the world is no longer a simple place with clear choices," Clinton said as he introduced his foreign policy team. In the post-Cold War era, he noted, "we need bold thinking to advance our American values."³⁹ The foreign policy team had been assembled for their capability to do the job with as little fuss as possible. To many, however, the appointments represented a poor choice to devise US policy in a time of rapid and unpredictable change, and were widely viewed as a collection of "Carter administration retreads."⁴⁰ Even Clinton supporters expressed concern over the team, which many New Democrats felt looked a lot like Old Democrats. Joe Klein lamented that there was "a blandness, a lack of personal intensity in positions of great power that seems, well, weird."⁴¹ Republicans, uniformly excluded from the cabinet, feared an obsession with negotiations, angst over the use of military force and, from their point of view, too low an intellectual level.⁴² Even the desire to avoid "the total chaos and disillusion and misery" caused by in-fighting during the Carter years was not avoided, as personal feuding and the desire to define policy continued unabated.⁴³

Bill Clinton had sought a diverse group of cabinet officers that resembled the United States, but it appeared that their defining qualities were membership of the Council on Foreign Relations, their time together at a subcabinet level under President Carter, and the fact that they "were not attuned to the rigours of the new twenty-four hour news cycle or the harsh partisan politics that pervaded the Congress."⁴⁴ Suddenly, the "essential continuity" that Clinton spoke of appeared to be with the 1970s, rather than with the early 1990s. It was not an auspicious beginning.⁴⁵

The return to Georgetown

Having named his foreign policy team, President-Elect Clinton outlined his administration's priorities in an address to members of the Diplomatic Corps at Georgetown University, 2 days before he took the oath of office. He had spoken at the university 13 months earlier to unveil the New Covenant concepts that formed the ideological basis of his campaign for the presidency. Now Bill Clinton had arrived at a position of unrivalled power to dictate grand strategy for the coming 4 years, a moment he referred to as "an era of both peril and promise," during which "the future for millions and millions of people around the globe can be better than the present." It could be an age when "the dreams of freedom and democracy and economic prosperity and human rights can become real," but Clinton stressed that much depended on what path the United States adopted. Having spent the previous year attacking the Bush administration, the president-elect announced that he intended to build on his predecessor's work in the Middle East, nuclear arms reduction, Somalia, and reform in

the former USSR, raising questions about the degree of change that could be expected under this New Democrat.

However, the central narrative of Clinton's foreign policy remained consistent from the Georgetown Address of December 1991 and was reiterated once more on the eve of his presidency. Clinton formalized the place of economic security within US Grand Strategy and collapsed the barrier between domestic and foreign policy, since the United States could no longer "sustain an active engagement abroad without a sound economy at home." Having not served in the military, the president-elect sought to stress the most robust element to his foreign policy initiative: maintaining US national security through superior firepower. Clinton insisted that grand strategy would be "based on a restructuring of our armed forces to meet new and continuing threats to our security interests and the international peace." The end of the Cold War allowed the new administration to "continue prudently to reduce defense spending," but the incoming commander-in-chief stressed that "potential aggressors should be clear about American resolve." Clinton did not relish the prospect of military engagement, but stressed that he would do so "when all appropriate diplomatic measures have been exhausted."

Clinton announced that his grand strategy was to be dedicated to "the democratic principles and institutions which unite our own country and to which so many now around the world aspire." The president-elect insisted "America cannot and should not bear the world's burdens alone. But if we work together, we can make great progress in making this a better world." He committed his administration to the defense of freedom and democracy, noting that "whenever possible we will support those who share our values, because it is in the interests of America and the world at large for us to do so." Finally, Clinton advocated the promotion of democracy, insisting, "history has borne out these enduring truths: Democracies do not wage war against one another; they make better partners in trade and . . . offer the best guarantee for the protection of human rights."⁴⁶

This utilization of Kant's Democratic Peace concept proved to be pivotal to the grand strategy adopted by the United States in the post-Cold War era and was central not only to Clinton, but also to his successor. The capacity of the United States to implement sweeping Democracy Promotion was severely tested in Clinton's time in office and the moral justification for it came to be disputed during his successor's tenure. In 1993, however, few questioned this commitment to freedom and democracy so soon after the collapse of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁷

Bill Clinton's decision to address the diplomatic corps at Georgetown University on the eve of his presidency should not be overlooked. The combination of location, audience, and timing sent a variety of messages, both domestically and internationally. It signified a new era in grand strategy was imminent, with new priorities and a new focus in which

economics were central, along with Wilsonian concepts of Democracy Promotion. However, this was not going to be an administration that shrank from military confrontation when necessary and Clinton was eager to highlight this, lest his opponents, foreign or domestic, thought otherwise. In the coming weeks, Clinton would refer darkly to a passage from Machiavelli's *The Prince*: "There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than a creation of a new order of things" as he discovered the difference between campaigning and governing, and pledges returned to haunt him in the partisan atmosphere of Washington, DC.⁴⁸

Following an efficient campaign, Clinton's transition period was "considered by many historians and by more than a few staff members who suffered through it, as the worst in modern history."⁴⁹ A chaotic management style and the president-elect's insistence on approving all White House appointments resulted in vital time being lost. Morton Halperin insists that Clinton's approach reflected the priorities of the president as well as the changing geopolitical environment: "The president had his domestic agenda and foreign policy was not as imposing or as pressing then as when Kennedy had come to power. The Cold War was over so he spent less time dealing with foreign policy." Halperin acknowledged that this was hindered by the Bush administration, which left "a mess in Somalia that demanded more attention than we would have liked."⁵⁰ However, these were "eleven lost weeks, a time irretrievably squandered," which raised concerns about the new administration's preparedness for power.⁵¹ Eisenhower's critique of the Kennedy White House appeared apt: "Good organization does not guarantee good policy. But bad organization guarantees bad policy."⁵² The momentum behind Clinton's early agenda was taken from him and he spent his first months in office struggling to get it back.

Talking the talk . . .

The first opportunity for Bill Clinton to address grand strategy as president of the United States was in his inaugural address. As a student of history, Clinton was aware of those who had gone before him and of the opportunity that lay ahead, telling readers of *Time* that he aimed to be "somewhere between Roosevelt and Kennedy" since "there's a sense that we need to get the country moving again."⁵³ What Roosevelt and Kennedy had brought to the White House, however, was an eloquence that Clinton had not been blessed with in the past. He had been jeered while nominating Michael Dukakis in 1988 and his own acceptance speech had been criticized for lasting over an hour. George Stephanopoulos understood that Clinton's inaugural address had to be "crisp, concise,

Kennedyesque.”⁵⁴ For the previous 40 years, inaugural addresses had dwelt on foreign affairs, as presidents declared their intentions to the world. However, this was not to be the case with President William Jefferson Clinton—as he was to be known officially. Due to Clinton’s domestic agenda, foreign policy did not dominate the address and was only referenced in the context of linkage to domestic policy. Over the course of at least 20 drafts, Michael Waldman and David Kusnet prepared a speech that focused on campaign pledges to renew American democracy and stressed the themes of economic renewal, government reform, and increased personal responsibility.⁵⁵ However, the word of the day was “change,” which was mentioned nine times. Clinton’s campaign speeches were abridged into an inaugural address of 1,557 words, making it, “the third shortest inaugural speech in history by the third youngest man to make one.”⁵⁶

On the campaign, Governor Bill Clinton insisted that his foreign and domestic priorities were “one and the same: reviving our economy.”⁵⁷ Now, as president, Clinton used his inaugural address to insist “there is no longer a clear division between what is foreign and what is domestic. The world economy, the world environment, the world arms race—they affect us all.” This became a recurring theme in Clinton’s presidency as an increasing dependence on international commerce to bolster the domestic economy ensured that trade became an integral aspect of US Grand Strategy. Clinton redefined the parameters of American power to utilize foreign policy for domestic purposes. However, he insisted that, “While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges nor fail to seize the opportunities of this new world.” Clinton was adamant that a US global presence would not be forfeited in favor of domestic renewal, but instead would be used to assist in strengthening the nation, confirming that America “must continue to lead the world [it] did so much to make.”

However, in an inaugural address dedicated almost entirely to domestic affairs, the line concerning foreign affairs received most focus, as Clinton announced, “when our vital interests are challenged, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary.”⁵⁸ In this oblique reference to Iraq came confirmation that if foreign issues arose that were not economic in nature, the Clinton administration planned to resort to classic power politics. However, although the new administration’s view of foreign policy rejected a preponderance of power philosophy in favor of a multilateral approach, its overall methodology was unclear at this stage. Bill Clinton had campaigned stressing an activist approach to government, but his inaugural address lacked direction, ensuring that questions remained concerning the focus and intent of US Grand Strategy.

The new geopolitical environment was of little help to the administration in this regard. Two years before Clinton took office,

Theodore H. Moran predicted that in the coming decade, US national security would face “not clear and present dangers requiring great sacrifices, but dim and distant dangers calling for small sacrifice.”⁵⁹ The sudden absence of a single foe presented the Clinton administration with a challenge, since discerning the national interest was complicated by the lack of an external threat. This ensured the White House “faced a choice instead of compulsion” as it sought to define America’s new role in the world.⁶⁰ Kissinger noted at the time that Clinton “must find a role for an America that can neither dominate nor retreat.”⁶¹ The president needed to do so while fulfilling his pledge to concentrate on domestic policy, a balancing act that was initially achieved by delegating authority to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Defense Secretary Les Aspin. This, however, quickly led to claims that the president was not in control of foreign policy, a charge that hindered his efforts to implement sweeping change in the direction of international affairs. “I might have to spend all my time on foreign policy,” Clinton admitted, “and I don’t want that to happen.”⁶² However, Clinton’s presidential inheritance beckoned and the world was not about to wait for his new team to settle in. All too quickly, President Clinton “became surprised by how quickly the in-box filed up with stuff that he didn’t put there.”⁶³

Having devoted barely 200 words to foreign affairs in a 7,000-word address to a joint session of Congress on February 17, 1993, President Clinton’s speech at the American University 9 days later was intended to compensate. This was the first national security speech drafted following Anthony Lake’s successful effort to ensure that the NSC prepared such addresses rather than the White House speechwriters. On the day of the event, speechwriter Jeremy Rosner was concerned that the president had not practiced enough and could flounder, drawing upon varying drafts. However, as Rosner noted, Clinton “ad-libbed some sections, he found the key paragraphs. And it was this gorgeous speech . . . much better than anything we wrote.”⁶⁴

Speaking on February 26, Clinton reminded his audience that President Kennedy had spoken at the same university at the height of the Cold War on “the imperative of pursuing peace in the face of nuclear confrontation.” Having drawn the historical comparison and raised the image of his political hero, President Clinton used similar language to address “the great challenge of this day: the imperative of American leadership in the face of global change.” Clinton insisted that the great question of the time was whether the United States would adopt an isolationist stance as it had in the 1920s and 1930s, or “repeat the successes of the 1940s and the 1950s by reaching outward and improving ourselves as well.” The president made clear that definitions of national security were changing in the new era and that economic leadership was a priority. In light of this, the debate over GATT and NAFTA took on new meaning. They were no longer seen as

trade agreements, but as strategic initiatives vital to the continued economic security of the United States.

It was already apparent that capital and services had become global and the new president summoned his countrymen to see the future as a land of opportunity, intoning, “in the face of all the pressures to do the reverse, we must compete, not retreat.” The address revealed the understanding of globalization that Bill Clinton brought to the presidency as he analyzed the problems to be overcome and presented a series of remedies. Neither globalization nor Clinton’s prescribed solutions were necessarily new, but his move to define economic security as vital to US national security was indicative of the new post-Cold War environment in which he sought to define US Grand Strategy. The president insisted his concept was based on established principles, for “as philosophers from Thucydides to Adam Smith have noted, the habits of commerce run counter to the habits of war.”⁶⁵ This, at least, was a philosophical basis for Clinton’s policies, but his referencing of an ancient Greek historian best known for his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher raised questions about the originality of Clinton’s New Democrat concepts and their suitability for the late twentieth century.

Tough talk with the Pentagon

As the Clinton administration sought to develop grand strategy during 1993, the Bottom Up Review was underway at the Pentagon, drafted from position papers prepared by Les Aspin’s staff from the House Armed Services Committee. The goal was to implement Clinton’s “pledge to cut forces by 200,000 troops and tens of billions of dollars.”⁶⁶ More immediate was the “pledge to slash \$60 billion from George Bush’s defense budget over five years, beginning with \$5.7 billion in 1994.”⁶⁷ There was a public expectation that millions of dollars could be diverted from the military to domestic spending, thus delivering a peace dividend. However, on the campaign Clinton had been attacked as a draft dodging, pot smoking, military-bashing liberal. Now, as commander-in-chief, Clinton desperately needed to avoid an open clash with the military, finding himself caught between political expediency and ideology.

On March 12, 1993, Bill Clinton made his first visit to a military establishment as president. Aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, he addressed the issues facing the US military and declared that a “changed security environment demands not less security but a change in our security arrangements.” The trip was designed to address the belief that Clinton’s avoidance of military service in Vietnam disqualified him from serving as commander-in-chief, as well as allay fears of impending

reductions in military spending. The two did not play well together, especially when compounded by the furore over gays in the military that enveloped the administration. The president stressed, "you have the services working together in new ways. That enables you to operate perhaps with fewer ships and personnel, but with greater efficiency and effectiveness." It was unclear how many of the assembled sailors were convinced, but the commander-in-chief reminded them that defense spending had been declining since 1986.

The downsized military needed to react to a growing number of regional crises where US interests were not directly involved, as the conflicts of the era became focused on the periphery of what could broadly be defined as America's area of strategic interest. One of Clinton's greatest challenges was in defining exactly where US interests lay in the absence of a single, formidable foe and his efforts to reconfigure the economy or the armed forces remained impeded by an inability to do so. The world environment, however, meant the US military "must also be agile, with an emphasis on manoeuvre, on speed, on technological superiority." The president referred to the world as "a hopeful time, yet one still full of challenges."⁶⁸ Not all agreed with this sunny assessment of the international situation and their pessimism soon found focus in the Horn of Africa.

The president sought to build on his remarks concerning US military priorities in a Commencement Address at West Point Military Academy on May 29, 1993. He conceded that the collapse of the Soviet Union had not resulted in utopia and that the end of the Cold War left America "with unfamiliar threats, not the absence of danger." The new era heralded the return of older forces; "ethnic and religious conflict, the violent turmoil of dissolving or newly created states, the random violence of the assassin and the terrorist." It was these forces that Clinton saw unleashed; "from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia to Armenia to Sudan, the dynamics of the Cold War have been replaced by many of the dynamics of old war." However, even at the crucible of America's military machine, Clinton could not ignore the economy, insisting that "what ultimately enabled us to prevail in the Cold War was the simple fact that our free political and economic institutions had produced more prosperity and more personal human happiness than did the confining institutions of communism."⁶⁹ The speeches were only the first in a series that Clinton gave during his presidency in a vain effort to gain the support of the military.

New structures

Among his very first acts as president, Bill Clinton initiated a number of changes to the national security architecture. Awaiting his signature

immediately after taking the oath of office were two Presidential Decision Directives. The first (PDD-1) established the Clinton-era Presidential Review Directive (PRD) and the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) series.⁷⁰ The second (PDD-2) enlarged the membership of the NSC to include the Secretary of the Treasury, thereby placing a greater emphasis on economic issues in the formulation of national security policy. PDD-2 also granted the Deputies Committee responsibility for day-to-day crisis management (CM), when it was designated Deputies Committee/CM. This was a decision with implications for operations in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia in the years ahead and led to allegations of disengagement at the senior level of the administration.

Despite the yearlong campaign against the Bush administration's policies, Clinton's team saw no reason to unnecessarily alter what was widely perceived to have been an efficient and coherent NSC structure.⁷¹ As a result, Clinton's NSC structure built on changes implemented by his predecessor and included a Principals Committee as a forum available to cabinet-level officials to address issues not requiring the president's participation, as well as a Deputies Committee for considering national security policy issues at a subcabinet level.⁷² Initially, Clinton's NSC "was not a hierarchical structure," but was "open access" and "user friendly," a situation that enabled increased access to the president, but did not necessarily make for an effective operation.⁷³

Somalia and Assertive Multilateralism

No administration inherits a clean slate; however, the Clinton team took office in the midst of an ongoing operation in Somalia. The plight of the Somali people became apparent during 1992 while America's focus was on the presidential campaign. Only after his defeat did President Bush declare the Somali deployment, "necessary to address a major humanitarian calamity and avert related threats to international peace and security and protect the safety of Americans and others engaged in relief operations."⁷⁴ On December 9, 1992, US troops landed in Somalia under the auspices of Security Council Resolution 794, as United Task Force (UNITAF) codenamed Operation Restore Hope.

The deployment ensured that the Clinton administration entered office with more than 25,000 troops deployed in an ill-conceived mission and needed to develop a strategy to deal with the situation, since the mission was "inherited" and "not thought out."⁷⁵ Dick Moose, Clinton's Under-Secretary of State for Management, drafted a memo examining options in Somalia that recommended a withdrawal. However, when his report received a muted response from Anthony Lake and Sandy Berger "he suspected he was saying something that Lake . . . did not want to hear."⁷⁶

Moose was not alone in his concerns, however; Morton Halperin, at that point working for Defense Secretary Aspin, suggested a pragmatic approach: "I felt that we should get out of Mogadishu, since we had no stake in that fight. I felt that we should establish a base in the countryside and tell the people if you want to come and get food, its here, if you want to stay in Mogadishu and shoot each other, then stay in Mogadishu and shoot each other."⁷⁷

However, Lake and Berger were proponents of a humanitarian-led foreign policy and feared that such actions might return Somalia to a state of anarchy. Lake in particular had a special interest in the plight of Africa and was committed to the operation's completion. In addition to Lake and Berger, Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, was committed to the mission, having spent the 1980s on the Georgetown University faculty developing the concept of Assertive Multilateralism.⁷⁸ This posited that if the United States no longer had the political will or the resources to act as a global policeman, it should form coalitions to do so. It meant, "that when America acted with others, [America] should lead in establishing goals and ensuring success."⁷⁹ Vitaly, this did not preclude unilateral action in self-defense or safeguard vital interests. The United Nations appeared to offer the best forum for such an approach in the 1990s, enabling the United States to lead while simultaneously reducing its defense expenditure. Albright was adamant that Assertive Multilateralism was a tactic, not a goal and a continuation of President Bush's actions in the 1991 Gulf War. It was an approach that the administration believed would receive strong bipartisan support. As late as June 1993, Albright was insistent that Assertive Multilateralism was in America's best interests.⁸⁰

However, the advice from Moose and Halperin should have been heeded. Instead, an ideological determination by the administration's senior foreign policy advisors caused them to reject pragmatic options and pursue policies that bore no resemblance to anything that had been espoused on the campaign trail and which had no place in the grand strategy that eventually emerged. It was a decision that contributed to tragic results in Somalia and the nadir of foreign intervention for the entire Clinton presidency.

In May 1993, the United States handed over operational command of the Somali mission to the United Nations and reduced its contingent to just 1,100 rapid reaction troops and 3,000 logistical support personnel. UNITAF morphed into UNOSOM II as the Clinton administration endorsed Security Council Resolution 814, authorizing the United Nations to rebuild Somalia. President Clinton hosted a reception on the South Lawn of the White House to honor service personnel returning from Somalia on May 5, at which point only eight Americans had been lost during the deployment. This had been "the largest humanitarian relief operation in history" and an operation that the president believed, had "written

an important new chapter in the international annals of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.”⁸¹ However, leaving personnel in Somalia ensured the United States retained a lingering commitment to a mission that was of minimal importance to the administration. The mission remained multilateral at this point, but US involvement was anything but assertive. Retaining even a token commitment guaranteed that what was initiated under Resolution 814 became associated with the administration, despite the lead taken on the issue by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose commitment to social engineering led to a shift in the mission’s parameters.

The US withdrawal emboldened Somali warlords, including General Mohammed Aided, who targeted the multinational peacekeeping force on June 5, killing 23 Pakistani peacekeepers. This resulted in calls to arrest Aided “pursuant to Security Council Resolution 837.”⁸² Having withdrawn more than 20,000 troops from Somalia, President Clinton acquiesced to the recommendation of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell, and the Deputies Committee of the NSC to deploy Task Force Ranger to Somalia to prevent further losses to the UN detachment.⁸³ This rapid decision, made at a subcabinet level, drew American forces deeper into a land where US interests were impossible to define and in an operation that had nothing to do with the administration’s priorities.

On October 3, 1993, American Special Forces, dispatched to apprehend Aided, became embroiled in a mission that dragged on throughout the night, as two Black Hawk helicopters were lost. The ensuing battle cost 18 American lives in the worst day of battlefield casualties in the entire Clinton presidency. It contributed to the abandonment of Assertive Multilateralism as a model of policy implementation and began a shift in focus away from the United Nations as the organization of choice for future US initiatives. The White House was “totally blindsided by Somalia” and the mission raised serious questions about the administration’s commitment to its publicly declared principles.⁸⁴

The Bush administration’s decision to intervene in Somalia was recommended by the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council. This process continued under the Clinton administration as the Deputies Committee, rather than the full National Security Council, oversaw events in Somalia.⁸⁵ There was no Principals Meetings on Somalia until tragedy struck, because “the operation seemed to be going well. The mission seemed on track for transfer to the UN, with US forces scheduled to be out by early to mid-1994.”⁸⁶ This ensured that cabinet-level officials were “not sufficiently attentive” to the Somali operation and that President Clinton was removed from the policy-making process.⁸⁷ Nancy Soderberg, Staff Director of the National Security Council at the time, conceded the administration “weren’t really paying attention” and “didn’t focus enough on the political track as it was being shifted over to the United Nations, so

that was a huge mistake.”⁸⁸ This created a self-perpetuating situation; focus on domestic priorities led to inattention to the Somali mission, contributing to American fatalities, which ensured political adversaries could exploit the Somali debacle for their own ends and derail the administration’s domestic policy programs. Clearly, “wild assumptions were made and no one was paying attention.”⁸⁹

President Clinton’s well-documented, but well-hidden temper erupted at this stage, as he “felt betrayed by his top team and the intelligence community, whom he blamed for soft-peddling the threat just days before the raid.”⁹⁰ The president’s anger at the US deaths in Somalia reflected his realization that the incident threatened to dominate the news, overshadowing his domestic agenda and his entire presidency. Clinton’s fears were realized in a *TIME/CNN* poll that indicated only 43 percent supported a continued US presence in Somalia, down from 79 percent in January 1993.⁹¹ The administration’s problems were compounded when a ship loaded with lightly armed US soldiers seeking to assist in the return of Haitian President Aristide chose not to dock in Port-au-Prince due to the presence of an armed gang. The incidents caused the House Appropriations Committee to impede future humanitarian operations by demanding that presidents give 15 days notice before dispatching troops and provide estimated costs, projected duration, operational goals, and defined US interest. These moves, by a Democratically controlled Congress, reinforced growing concerns about President Clinton’s ability to serve as commander-in-chief.

However, President Clinton was in the difficult situation of having to rectify mistakes made by his own team and members of the former Bush administration. The Somalia tragedy “shocked Clinton into taking control of his foreign policy and his bureaucracy.”⁹² Clinton had acted on the advice of his senior military officers, including Colin Powell, and therefore saw the incident as his own Bay of Pigs. He ordered all US troops out of Somalia by March 31, 1994 and dispatched a contingent of 1,700 troops to facilitate the withdrawal. As Anthony Lake conceded, the decision made itself, since “to do otherwise would have made it open season on Americans around the world. The potential message: Kill and humiliate our people and the United States will immediately retreat.”⁹³

It was recognized that “the scale of the foreign policy reversals in Somalia destroyed the administration’s willingness to pursue foreign policy goals aggressively.”⁹⁴ It led to a change in philosophy at the White House and negatively impacted the internal debate surrounding the use of US troops for peacekeeping operations. Officials who had previously been enthusiastic about the idea acknowledged that “there was a pulling back from this idea from that point onwards.”⁹⁵ A State Department official said “We’ll get back to it at some point and hopefully some sort of concept of collaborative action with the UN will emerge, but it is not going to be what it was.”⁹⁶ Despite this hopeful assertion, US policy

toward the United Nations failed to recover from the incident and resulted in a relationship of mutual suspicion that endures.⁹⁷

The fallout from Somalia impacted not only the policy of Assertive Multilateralism but also the administration's capacity to engage in multilateral action. Leon Fuerth lamented that the events in Somalia "created an over-hang that was a consistent reminder in other events. It provided a realization that future losses or casualties would produce a response in Congress similar to that provided by the events in Mogadishu."⁹⁸ The crisis ensured that President Clinton was initially unable to recommend a deployment of US troops to Bosnia under a UN peacekeeping role, for fear of crossing "the Mogadishu Line."⁹⁹ Similarly, the fallout from Somalia coincided with the massacres in Rwanda, as the UN plan to send 5,500 troops to alleviate the situation was vetoed by Madeline Albright, operating under instructions from Washington. Despite protests from the White House that the plan had received limited support from other nations, the reality was that "it was politically impossible to go into central Africa" following the events in Somalia.¹⁰⁰ Nancy Soderberg noted, "After Somali there was just no enthusiasm for putting troops on the ground anywhere. I think it delayed aggressive engagement in Bosnia, it certainly delayed any response in Rwanda, but I don't think we ever really stepped away from multilateralism, it was more a question of assessing where multilateralism worked and where it didn't work."¹⁰¹ The eventual PDD document on this issue directed that any involvement in future peacekeeping operations required that vital national or allied interests be at stake and that a clear commitment to win existed.

Assertive Multilateralism appeared to offer the Clinton administration a way to share expenditure, casualties, and divert the focus of hostility away from the United States and on to the shoulders of a global organization that had the potential to live up to its mandate in the post-Cold War era. However, this was predicated on the expectation that the American people would tolerate casualties in distant lands when no national interest was at stake and that Congress would continue its Cold War era support of the president in matters of world affairs. Neither assumption proved to be viable as the administration's efforts met congressional opposition in the face of public dismay over the deaths in Somalia. The administration noted that mistakes had been made, both operationally and in terms of presentation. Tara Sonenshine of the NSC lamented, "we have failed to explain why multilateralism is NOT and does NOT have to be a substitute for US leadership or an excuse NOT to act."¹⁰² Such issues continued to plague the administration for years to come, while overseas, it was recognized that "having his fingers burnt in Somalia," was seen to have had "a very sobering impact," on the president.¹⁰³ Rather than reinforcing US efforts to export human rights and engage in conflict resolution, events in Somalia convinced Americans that internal disputes were of no concern to the world's sole superpower.

Events in Somalia confirmed President Clinton's worst fears about foreign policy being "a murky business, outside the reach of domestic presidential control, with greater possibility for negatives than positives, out of which relatively little good could come."¹⁰⁴ There would be no further deployment of ground forces to locations where US national interest did not exist, or could not be adequately defined, as peacekeeping operations were not considered a justifiable cause for American casualties. The death of 18 American servicemen on October 3, 1993, a number that Colin Powell noted would not have even warranted a press conference during the Vietnam War, was instrumental in ending a brief era of bipartisan support for multilateral operations under the United Nations, and caused the Clinton administration to reconsider its commitment to the organization and to peacekeeping operations in general.¹⁰⁵

Iran, Iraq, and dual containment

The Somali mission was far from being Clinton's sole concern during his first months in power. Before he even entered office, Bill Clinton was forced to confront Iraq. Intelligence reports indicated that Saddam Hussein had amassed forces in northern Iraq in an effort to challenge US resolve by mounting military strikes against Iraqi Kurds in the safe havens along the Turkish border. A spokesman for the president-elect said Saddam "should take no comfort in the fact that Bill Clinton is heading towards the presidency."¹⁰⁶ The incoming team were determined to demonstrate solidarity with Bush over Saddam, least they be portrayed as weak on foreign policy, a slight that had blighted the Democratic Party. When allied forces shot down an Iraqi MiG that violated the No-Fly-Zone, the president-elect supported the action in terms almost identical to those used by President Bush, as advisers emphasized the "fundamental continuity between the policy of a Clinton administration and the policy of the Bush administration on Iraq."¹⁰⁷

To Clinton, however, Iraq was not a personal matter, as it appeared to have been for President Bush and his philosophical approach to Saddam was apparent from his comments to the *New York Times*. Clinton freely admitted, "I am not obsessed with the man." Clinton's view was that "the people of Iraq would be better off if they had a different ruler. But my job is not to pick their rulers for them." Clinton appeared open to a new relationship, stating, "if he wants a different relationship with the United States and the United Nations, all he has to do is change his behaviour."¹⁰⁸ Clinton was not alone in suggesting that a *rapprochement* with Saddam may be possible. British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd insisted that the coalition had never planned to drive Saddam from power and that the normalization of relations with Iraq with Saddam in power could be

achieved “with difficulty.”¹⁰⁹ Britain’s Gulf War Commander General Sir Peter De La Billiere maintained that the West was not trying to destroy Iraq, but rather “to point out to Saddam Hussein that unless he complies with the United Nations, then he must expect retribution, in the form of force.”¹¹⁰ There was, however, a world of difference between Clinton’s views and those of the British; the president set western policy, Hurd and De La Billiere merely followed it.

Almost immediately, Clinton’s remark, totally in keeping with his personality, was seized upon by political opponents and portrayed as a weakening of American resolve. Within 24 hours, Clinton backed away from any suggestion of peaceful relations with Saddam in a retreat that did little to inspire confidence in the incoming administration or its capacity to stand by stated principles or policies. Having been attacked for appearing to move to the left on the issue, Clinton could not veer too far to the right without escalating the situation to a point that forced the United States to act unilaterally. Iraq and its leaders remained an irritant, but not a priority and regime change was not an option for the Clinton administration in its first term. Faced with a multilateral framework and with pressing domestic priorities upon which to focus political capital and attention, the Clinton administration had little or no room to maneuver in regard to Iraq.

Despite this setback, new policies began to emerge following meetings conducted by Secretary of State Christopher in the Middle East and a review requested by President Clinton shortly after he took office.¹¹¹ In April 1993, Vice President Gore and senior officials met with representatives from the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a group of exiled Iraqi dissidents dedicated to the overthrow of Saddam. Despite concerns in the previous administration about their ability to bridge religious and ethnic rivalries, the Clinton’s White House believed that the INC had “succeeded in broadening its base” and allayed US concerns by pledging to maintain current Iraqi borders. Washington was “keen to ensure that the INC [received] more regional recognition and support,” particularly from Persian Gulf nations, to present a “vision of an alternative, democratic future” in Iraq.¹¹² The administration was also encouraged by reports of unrest within Saddam’s inner circle, since such trends could lead “to new conditions for the citizens of Iraq and new opportunities to build a more peaceful and normal relationship between Iraq and the outside world.”

Just as Iraq and Saddam was the *bête noire* for Republicans, so Iran loomed large for Democrats. This was especially true of the Clinton administration’s senior foreign policy team who left government service when President Carter’s tenure ended so ingloriously, partly due to the Iranian hostage crisis. The administration was forthright in stating its case against the Iranian regime, which it viewed as being “the foremost sponsor of terrorism and assassination worldwide.”¹¹³ Secretary of State Christopher alleged that Iran had established terrorist training camps in Lebanon and Sudan and assisted groups trying to overthrow the governments of Egypt,

Algeria, and Tunisia. Christopher was certain that Iran was the world's "most significant state sponsor of terrorism and the most ardent opponent of the Middle East peace process." Due partially to the focus on Iraq, he argued that the international community had been "far too tolerant of Iran's outlaw behaviour" claiming that Iran was "intent on projecting terror and extremism across the Middle East and beyond."¹¹⁴

The administration believed that a window of opportunity existed "to prevent Iran from becoming in five years time what Iraq was five years ago." The White House stressed that it did not oppose Islamic government, nor seek the regime's overthrow. Instead, it remained "ready for an authoritative dialogue" with the Iranian regime. The administration's desire to remove religion from the equation was of importance, as Lake noted, "Washington does not take issue with the 'Islamic' dimension of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is extremism, whether religious or secular, that we oppose." The administration believed that it had a new approach to Iran and Iraq, which it felt was both realistic and sustainable, as well as one that took into account both "US interests and the realities of the Persian Gulf region."¹¹⁵

The Clinton administration's policy for addressing Iran and Iraq was Dual Containment, announced on May 18, 1993. However, in a pattern that continued to reduce confidence in the administration's commitment to its policies, the plan was not unveiled by the Secretary of State, or by the President, or even by the National Security Adviser, but by Martin S. Indyk, then Senior Director for Middle East policy at the National Security Council. Dual Containment sought to persuade allies to halt loans, investment, and arms sales to Tehran and prevent Iran gaining access to materials required to achieve a military renaissance. Indyk said, "If we fail in our efforts to modify Iranian behaviour, five years from now Iran will be much more capable of posing a real threat to Israel and to Western interests in the Middle East."¹¹⁶ Compounding fears of a revitalized Iran were concerns over links to the bombing of the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993.¹¹⁷ In addition, the CIA reported Iranian meetings with Chinese and Russian delegations for the purchase of nuclear material, leading to speculation that Iran could become a nuclear power by the end of the twentieth century. Robert Gallucci, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, argued that "No country ought to cooperate with Iran in the nuclear area."

Iran, however, had negotiated trade deals with nations as diverse as Russia, China, and members of the European Union. Therefore, the administration brought pressure not only on Iran and Iraq, but also on its own allies by arguing that, "the income supported Iranian terrorism and that Iran's steadily worsening economy made it a bad investment."¹¹⁸ The administration stressed the risks in dealing with Iran, referencing the \$25 billion it had borrowed over the previous 4 years and the \$5 billion it had already fallen behind in repayments: clearly, Iran was "no longer a

good commercial proposition.”¹¹⁹ The policy had domestic implications, blocking a bid by Boeing to sell 20 jets to Iran in a deal worth more than \$750 million.¹²⁰ However, with high inflation and unemployment, it was believed that Iran was “more vulnerable than it has been in the past or is likely to be in the future.” Indyk insisted that the White House did not seek a confrontation, but refused to normalize relations “until and unless Iran’s policies change across the board.”

In regard to Iraq, Indyk explained that the administration sought Baghdad’s “full compliance with all UN resolutions” and was “committed to ensuring Iraq’s compliance with UN Resolution 688, which calls upon the regime to end its repression of the Iraqi people.” The administration did not “seek or expect a reconciliation with Saddam Hussein’s regime” and called for a UN commission to investigate Iraqi war crimes and human rights abuses “to establish clearly and unequivocally that the current regime in Iraq is a criminal regime, beyond the pale of international society and, in our judgment, irredeemable.”¹²¹ Since the end of the Gulf War, the United States had enforced the No-Fly-Zone above Iraq, requiring the positioning of aircraft carriers in the region. Containing Iraq was, therefore, proving to be a costly role, requiring increased military expenditure in the Gulf when the administration was looking to reduce costs.¹²²

The administration may have unveiled a new policy to deal with Iran and Iraq, but it did not view the two nations as a monolithic power to be handled identically. Instead, it recognized the different cultural and religious influences and attempted to tailor its policy accordingly: “In Saddam Hussein’s regime, Washington faces an aggressive, modernist, secular avarice; in Iran, it is challenged by a theocratic regime with a sense of cultural and political destiny and an abiding antagonism toward the United States.”¹²³ The nations were challenging enough alone, but in the early 1990s fears emerged that they could attempt a reconciliation: Iran imported refined Iraqi oil and was believed to have obtained a shipment of Iraqi steel, acts that violated the UN trade embargo.¹²⁴ In addition, 1993 saw a repatriation of Iraqi prisoners of war from Iran. The administration was dismissive of suggestions that by combining Washington’s approach to Iran and Iraq, the White House risked driving the two nations together: “The prospects for reconciliation will remain limited for a simple reason: they mistrust each other more than they mistrust the United States.”

The administration believed that Dual Containment was a viable concept for a number of reasons. The end of the Cold War removed fears of a potential Soviet incursion into the Persian Gulf, significantly reducing the strategic importance of Iraq and Iran, since “their ability to play the superpowers off each other has been eliminated.” Secondly, Iraq’s victory in the Iran–Iraq War “substantially reduced Iran’s conventional offensive capabilities, whilst Iraq’s defeat in Desert Storm significantly diminished its offensive capabilities and brought its weapons of mass

destruction under tight control.”¹²⁵ Thirdly, following the Gulf War, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were more inclined to enter into pre-positioning arrangements with the United States, enabling forces to be deployed locally against future threats. However, the administration was wary of accusations that the policy was religiously motivated. Eager to reject a fashionable concept, Anthony Lake stressed, “This is not a clash of civilizations . . . it is a contest that pits nations and individuals guided by openness, responsive government and moderation against those animated by isolation, repression and extremism.”¹²⁶

There was a wider dimension to the policy: in 1993, the Middle East stood at the threshold of a more promising era that heralded Arab–Israeli peace, Israeli security, and unimpeded access to Persian Gulf oil. Before Clinton’s first year was over, he presided over the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. A year later, a similar ceremony was held between Israel and Jordan. However, there were some that would stop at nothing to disrupt the peace process and it was believed that Iran was the main sponsor of groups dedicated to such an outcome.

The *Boston Globe* believed the administration had unveiled “a clear, forceful policy adapted to the transformations wrought by the implosion of the Soviet Union and by Saddam Hussein’s failure to annex Kuwait.”¹²⁷ Paul Wolfowitz, the former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, referred to Dual Containment as having provided “a much-needed break with old notions of depending on a balance between the two to protect security in the gulf.”¹²⁸ Despite this initial praise, however, Wolfowitz questioned the commitment to the policy, the degree of interest shown in the matter at a senior level, and the effect that an Iraqi victory in overcoming sanctions may have on the prestige of the United States. Considering that Martin Indyk announced the policy, Wolfowitz’s concern about senior level interest (itself a thinly veiled reference to the president) was perhaps not wide of the mark. President Bush’s former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft felt the administration had “behaved as if the principal issues of the region, Iraq, Iran and the [stalled Israeli–Palestinian] peace process, have no relation to each other.”¹²⁹ However, concern that Iranian-sponsored terrorism and Iraqi-inspired instability was affecting the Middle East peace process was at the heart of the Dual Containment policy. The administration sought to enforce UN sanctions that were being flouted and to prevent the sale of nuclear materials to Iran in violation of various nonproliferation accords.

Daniel Pipes, editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*, believed that the Iranian threat was being underestimated: “They’d want to take control of Iraq, at least, if Saddam were gone, but they’d likely create a classic satrapy rather than move to an outright annexation.” A senior Kuwaiti official added, “it’s exactly because they’re so much more clever than Saddam that the Iranians pose the more serious long-term threat.”¹³⁰ Therefore, while the containment of Iraq struck many as logical, the

decision to impose similar constraints on Iran appeared to others as less than wise. Critics pointed to the size of Iran, its population of almost 60 million, and a leadership determined to be preeminent in the Gulf as factors suggesting that an embargo may struggle to succeed.¹³¹ Others argued that rather than isolate the nations, a move toward *rapprochement* served all interests. Highlighting US policy toward China, it was suggested that a more tolerant stance could lead to economic liberalization and political democratization. However, despite the Chinese precedent, the administration believed that such an approach was flawed in regard to two nations that remained openly hostile to Western interests, insisting that “fuelling their economic resurgence would only permit them to rearm and become more adventurous.”¹³² These suggestions also failed to consider the long-standing hostilities between the United States and Iran and the increasing pressure from Congress to take a strong line in the region.

Critics suggested that Dual Containment was “more a slogan than a strategy,” that lacked “strategic viability” and had a “high financial and diplomatic cost.”¹³³ It was suggested that the policy was “shot through with logical flaws and practical inconsistencies” and was “based on faulty geopolitical premises,” since it was “hard to see how either Iraq or Iran could be contained, in the administration’s sense, without the cooperation of its hostile counterpart.” A major debate arose over the viability of implementing the policy simultaneously, since “containment of Iran requires a relatively strong and unified Iraq on its long western border . . . a weak Iraq is an inviting target for an Iran ‘contained’ and isolated.” However, the containment of Iraq was “hard to imagine without some kind of Iranian cooperation,” since Iran was “an important element in keeping the pressure on his regime.”¹³⁴ Fears of an Iranian super state at the heart of the region were prevalent, but this worst-case scenario failed to materialize. Additionally, despite the valid notion that “the security and independence of the region is a vital US interest” suggestions that “a recommitment by President Clinton to the principles of the Carter Doctrine—a renewal of US vows to the Gulf—might be both welcome and appropriate” appeared self-serving on behalf of Brzezinski who had helped to prepare the unloved, unlamented doctrine.¹³⁵

In Dual Containment the Clinton administration had a policy, which along with arms control and Arab–Israeli peace, formed a three-strand Middle East strategy, the successful implementation of which could have bought sweeping change in a vital part of the world. Like the eventual grand strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, however, the biggest hurdle came not in devising the initiative but in implementing the policy. For Dual Containment to be effective, the United States needed to convince Russia and China not to sell Iran weapons and nuclear reactors and to persuade Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan to cut off loans. Not surprisingly, these countries were hesitant to do so at a time of economic instability when it meant “forgoing a market whose imports from Europe were over \$10 billion and from Japan over \$2.5 billion in 1992.”¹³⁶ Neither

was the administration's cause aided when the World Bank loaned Iran \$165 million to upgrade its electrical power system in March 1993.¹³⁷ Given this environment, it is perhaps not surprising that the policy was unable to produce the result that was hoped for.

However, during the Clinton years, neither Iran nor Iraq made forays into foreign lands, as Dual Containment effectively kept Saddam "in his box" for the remainder of the decade. This, however, was a short-term solution that did little to end Iran's support for Hezbollah. In Iraq, Saddam's conventional forces were rebuilt following his defeat in Desert Storm, allowing him to impose his will over Shiite Muslim rebels in southern Iraq and the Kurdish rebels in the north. Gradual alterations to Dual Containment led to its eventual demise, and by November 1998 the administration changed its policy to containment plus regime change. Martin Indyk insisted that the objective was not only to contain Saddam, "but also to help the Iraqi people remove him and set up a different kind of government." The administration took the opposite approach to Iran. Viewing the changes implemented following the election of Khatami, the administration indicated that it was ready to move toward an engagement with Iran. Regretfully, the Tehran regime failed to respond as hoped. The policy continued unabated, but Indyk declared that "Whereas what we're saying is on the Iraqi side it's containment plus regime change, we're saying on the Iranian side it's containment until they are ready for engagement."

Dual Containment maintained the sanctions imposed by the United Nations in the aftermath of the Gulf War. This policy did not initially endorse regime change since the administration believed that doing so would invite an armed conflict that had no backing from Congress, the population or within the administration itself. Dual Containment, therefore, fitted the administration's overall approach to the Middle East, which was viewed as a two-way process: "The more we succeeded with making peace, the easier it would be to contain these two regimes that were threatening our interests. The more we succeeded in containing them, the easier it would be to pursue comprehensive peace."¹³⁸ Anthony Lake was more direct: "It was more 'These guys can screw up what's going on in the rest of the world and we need to contain them and implement the change.'"¹³⁹ Dual Containment did not provide a lasting solution, but throughout the 1990s it proved effective at restricting both Iran and Iraq without strengthening either side, demonstrating a theoretical alternative to a balance of power strategy in the Persian Gulf.

The Tarnoff doctrine

The Clinton administration's position was not eased on May 25, 1993, when Under Secretary of State for Policy, Peter Tarnoff, appeared to reverse

US foreign policy that had endured for more than 40 years.¹⁴⁰ Washington, DC is renowned for “official and unofficial information leaks as well as trial balloons for new initiatives,” but what became known as the Tarnoff Doctrine was especially problematic for the Clinton administration.¹⁴¹ Tarnoff was attempting to explain the new administration’s approach to foreign policy, however, by making his remarks off-the-record, he unnecessarily caused editors to seek verification. This led to denials and confusion that could have been avoided had the administration been more adroit in its dealings with the Washington press corps.

In remarks that reflected Bill Clinton’s campaign pledge to focus on the economy, Tarnoff insisted America’s “economic interests are paramount” and would cause the United States to “define the extent of its commitment and make a commitment commensurate with those realities,” that may “fall short of what some Americans would like and others would hope for.”¹⁴² Tarnoff was forthright, as he believed he was presenting a nonattributable briefing: “We’re talking about new rules of engagement for the United States and new limits,” he noted, since “we don’t have the money.”¹⁴³ This was a pragmatic approach to policy in which financial considerations were weighed. Tarnoff insisted “there may be occasions in the future where the United States acts unilaterally—if we perceive an imminent danger very close to home.”¹⁴⁴ When such situations arose, the administration planned to act, but every deployment had to be considered “case by case,” with the administration being prepared to limit foreign intervention to “what we think is appropriate.”¹⁴⁵ This approach was the result of economic realities and the administration’s decision to prioritize domestic spending, which impacted the funds available to foreign initiatives. Tarnoff stressed that in a time of deficits the “importance of money” ensured a “constant preoccupation” with expenditure.¹⁴⁶

Tarnoff appeared to advocate a less interventionist foreign policy, arguing that the United States was not the world’s policeman: “We simply don’t have the leverage, we don’t have the influence, we don’t have the inclination to use military force, we certainly don’t have the money to bring to bear the kind of pressure which will produce positive results anytime soon.”¹⁴⁷ This was a new administration with new priorities, which Tarnoff acknowledged may not be universally welcomed and may be “difficult for our friends to understand,” but noted “it’s not different by accident; it’s different by design.”¹⁴⁸ Financial realities and new priorities ensured that a new era was inevitable, in which roles and responsibilities were changing and in which “there will have to be genuine power-sharing and responsibility sharing.”¹⁴⁹ Tarnoff used the debate over intervention in Bosnia to explain that inaction represented a calculated withdrawal from overseas commitments, not a policy failure: the administration was “determined not to go in there and take over Bosnia policy,” Tarnoff insisted, adding that the United States would not “take over” if other nations could do so.¹⁵⁰

Tarnoff's briefing was in keeping with statements that had been issued previously by the Clinton White House and those that followed for the next 8 years: together when possible, alone when necessary—but this was not how the briefing was reported. Instead, headlines screamed “Reduced US World Role Outlined But Soon Altered” (*Washington Post*), “Clinton Foreign Policy Appears to Retreat From Decades of US World Leadership” (*Baltimore Sun*). Almost a year later, the *New York Times* continued to misquote Tarnoff, as evidence that the United States had “an administration that does not believe in the commitment of American power, purpose and resolve to keep the peace.”¹⁵¹ Paul Wolfowitz, who addressed the briefing in his assessment of Clinton's first year in office, exacerbated this, noting that it was “simply common sense” for the United States “to summon as much international support as possible and spread the burden of action to as many partners as possible” as it had throughout the Cold War. Wolfowitz warned darkly, however, that “it is something else to say, as Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff apparently did, that the United States can no longer afford to act except multilaterally.”¹⁵² Except, of course, that this is not what Tarnoff had said.

Tarnoff's briefing did not stay off-the-record for long, as its implications demanded an official statement. When it came, it was an apparent rebuke from Warren Christopher, who insisted that the remarks did not represent official policy “if the implication is that we'd step back from our leadership role.” Christopher added, “there is no derogation of our powers and our responsibility to lead.”¹⁵³ When a White House official stressed Tarnoff's statement was “not our foreign policy,” it appeared that the undersecretary had been tasked with issuing a statement that served as a reminder of the new rules of engagement, while being plausibly deniable.¹⁵⁴ Despite Christopher's rebuke, many viewed Tarnoff's remarks as an accurate reflection of the administration's approach to foreign policy, suggesting that Clinton's “abdication of American leadership and his reluctance to sustain attention on a US Grand Strategy, all gave rise to the impression that Washington was locked in a policy of inertia and drift.”¹⁵⁵ The situation was exacerbated by the response from the White House; although the State Department inadvertently released Tarnoff's schedule that included the briefing, White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers refused to identify him as the source because the briefing had been off-the-record and nonattributable.¹⁵⁶ State Department Press Secretary Richard Boucher faced the bizarre situation of journalists offering him transcripts of the briefings, derived from their own recordings, for the administration to comment upon in circumstances that did little to boost confidence.

The Tarnoff briefing caused a rewrite for a speech the secretary of state gave in Minneapolis 3 days later, which made 23 references to American leadership in an effort “to dispel any suggestion at home or abroad that the first Democratic administration in a dozen years was sounding a retreat.”¹⁵⁷ Christopher noted that the United States faced “many challenges” that

were “unlike any in the nation’s history.” He insisted, however, that this meant the United States “must be more engaged internationally, not less; more ardent in our promotion of democracy, not less; more inspired in our leadership, not less.”¹⁵⁸ The speech reinforced Tarnoff’s comments, which reflected Clinton’s campaign statements that successful foreign policies needed to be based on solid economic foundations. Neither Tarnoff, nor his colleagues in the administration, were advocating anything that had not previously been espoused by officials dating back several decades; that America’s allies should take a greater role in their own protection; and that US intervention depended on the circumstances of each situation. However, “since the president had not yet made a major pronouncement about his foreign policy principles or priorities, Tarnoff’s words filled a conceptual vacuum.”¹⁵⁹ Tarnoff’s announcement was in keeping with the attempt to have foreign policy dealt with by a specific element of the administration (as it had been on the campaign), allowing the president and his key advisers to focus on domestic affairs. However, while this avoided the necessity of involving the president in the rigmaroles associated with such a high-profile declaration, it raised questions about the administration’s dedication to the policy and reduced the credibility of its senior members who appeared to be upstaged by subordinates.

Tarnoff’s statement was in line with stated policy, but its delivery, subsequent denial, and attempts at explanation exacerbated the sense of an administration out of control. The *New York Times* argued that Tarnoff’s explanation was “a defensible, even sensible doctrine” but asked why its defense was left to “covert briefings by unnamed senior officials?” The paper argued that what was needed was a clear statement of intent: “A thoughtful Presidential speech on American values, interests and priorities in the world could also help enormously—especially if he then matches deeds to words.”¹⁶⁰ Matching words to deeds became the administration’s central challenge in the months ahead as it sought to quell doubts over its ability to lead in the post-Cold War world.

Conclusion: Clinton’s poisoned chalice

All administrations inherit the detritus of their predecessors. However, in Clinton’s case, the presidential chalice was particularly toxic, if not altogether poisoned. Clinton assumed responsibility for US forces engaged in Somalia, off the Haitian coast, in Bosnia, and in the skies above Iraq. Little wonder, perhaps, that his first year in office appeared to be more concerned with “putting out fires” than devising a new grand strategy.¹⁶¹ However, foreign policy was arguably the one area in which President Clinton appeared to lack self-confidence and, during the 1990s, there was a belief that foreign affairs were so remote to Americans that “success

would bring only fleeting advantage, much as George Bush's Gulf War victory was unable to rescue his presidency."¹⁶² When President Clinton addressed foreign policy he did so in relation to domestic and economic matters, which did little to inspire confidence. As informed as President Clinton could be in domestic matters, he seemed unengaged in his response to foreign policy issues. This is not to suggest that the commander-in-chief was disengaged from international relations, for clearly President Clinton "was not the foreign policy innocent he is often portrayed as." However, it is clear that in his initial months in office 'his primary concern was to revert the direction of the American economy."¹⁶³ The president's foreign policy advisers advised him, but there was no clear plan emerging as attention was focused on the domestic agenda due to the lack of a discernable threat from overseas. The communications team did what they could with the material they had, but as Halperin observed, "I don't feel that there was a problem communicating, there just was no specific policy to communicate since there was no doctrine at the time."¹⁶⁴

As smart as Clinton was in domestic matters, he seemed unfocused on foreign policy issues, where critics lamented the absence of a strategic outlook. Even the US ambassador to Great Britain noted the administration "almost turned foreign policy into a vaudeville act," as international repercussions demonstrated that the president couldn't abdicate interest over one area of government for the benefit of another.¹⁶⁵ Clinton's presidential inheritance was a world in flux that demanded close and immediate attention. Neither were forthcoming in the first months as the administration plunged from crisis to crisis, struggling with its new responsibilities and lacking focus and leadership. The best efforts of Clinton's foreign policy team to espouse a new approach to foreign policy failed to generate enthusiasm as global events provided "real wake up calls for the administration. They may have been thinking about big strategic things, but when you are the big giant that's the problem: you are vulnerable in places that people don't know exist."¹⁶⁶

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