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CHAPTER THREE

A grand strategy emerges

By August 1993 the Berlin Wall was becoming a memory, but the Clinton administration had yet to announce a grand strategy to account for the shift in world events. However, while foreign policy appeared to be of secondary importance to the administration, this did not mean that international issues were not addressed. The Dual Containment policy for dealing with Iran and Iraq was developed at the State Department; Bob Bell's team on the National Security Council were preparing the first drafts of the Nation Security Strategy Review; and the president had delivered a series of addresses that considered aspects of foreign policy.¹ However, the policy initiatives were developed and unveiled discreetly by Clinton's national security team, while the president's speeches had been too content to couch foreign policy in terms of economic issues. Therefore, despite the fact that the new evolving strategies were far more interlinked than was appreciated at the time, the public perception of the Clinton administration was far from positive. To address these growing concerns surrounding the direction of US Grand Strategy, the Clinton administration devised a series of policy announcements in September 1993. All too quickly, however, the White House discovered how policy declarations could be neutered, as their theoretical efforts were overshadowed by real world events that challenged Clinton's attempt to provide global leadership in the post-Cold War world.

The growing mood of unrest

During its first 8 months in office, the Clinton administration actively advanced domestic policies at the expense of foreign affairs. President Clinton's Inaugural Address had all but ignored foreign policy and his speeches in the spring of 1993 approached the issue in terms of its

relationship to the economy. On each occasion the president referenced incidents and nations of concern, but failed to espouse a specific policy with which to address the world. By May 1993, Clinton's public approval was 36 percent, "the lowest for any postwar president at a comparable point in his first year."² The lack of a Clinton foreign policy produced what *Time* called, "That Sinking Feeling," while *Newsweek* felt the nation was on "The Road to Indecision." Writing in September 1993, Jonathan Clarke lamented that the Clinton administration, "bristling as it is with academic talent," was "content to live hand to mouth on foreign policy, embracing stale concepts from the bygone era of the Cold War." Clarke noted that despite Clinton's criticism of President Bush's "lack of vision and despite promises of a "fresh assessment" of US foreign policy, the president, it seems, either doesn't comprehend or doesn't wish to grapple with the fact that in foreign policy terms he stands at a historic crossroads."³ Within the White House, President Clinton was growing increasingly tired of constant references to the "post-Cold War" era, believing the expression to be "agnostic, provincial, backward-looking." Worse still, "it was an admission that while everyone knew what was finished, no one knew what had taken its place, to say nothing of what would or should come next. He didn't want his presidency to coincide with an age of uncertainty."⁴ Providing a new definition for the era was becoming almost as pressing a matter as providing a new grand strategy.

The president's predicament was not aided by his disregard for cabinet-level structures, including the National Security Council, as formal meetings chaired by the president became rare. Although he immersed himself in domestic affairs, President Clinton tended to avoid meetings with his foreign policy advisers. Anthony Lake attempted to set a specific time to brief the president and met weekly for lunch with Warren Christopher, but Clinton's dedication to domestic affairs prevented him from being sufficiently engaged in the "larger contemplative discussions."⁵ Lake, although experienced in Washington, lacked the relationship with Clinton that was needed to serve as a surrogate for a president focused on domestic policy.⁶ This was not helped by his decision to adopt "the lowest profile of any national security adviser since Reagan's immortal Judge Clark."⁷

It was clear that many within the administration were ambiguous about foreign policy; the fact that President Bush had been hindered in his bid for reelection by a perceived preoccupation with foreign affairs convinced them the subject was potentially toxic. The administration, therefore, sought to keep foreign policy contained so the president could "put more than half [of his] energies and intensity into these other things."⁸ However, the belief that foreign policy was being delegated to subordinates led to concerns that Clinton had "spent too little time schooling himself in the vagaries of foreign policy."⁹ Foreign policy was drafted and enacted in the first months of the Clinton administration, but it was done quietly and without the president's active involvement.

This was not something that most were aware of, so that by the summer of 1993 it was suggested that the administration lacked even a basic foreign policy and the president's "ideas about the world and his policy preferences were mostly borrowed."¹⁰ To get away from his "reactive, seat-of-the-pants" approach to foreign policy, Clinton needed to construct a concept of America's place in the world in order to "protect the interests and project the values of the United States." This needed to be done "while simultaneously finding significant savings in those sections of the budget devoted to defense and international discretionary spending."¹¹ However, the world was not about to wait for the administration to perform such a political juggling act.

Within the NSC, a growing realization emerged in the summer of 1993 that change was needed. Experts were "looking to hear an overarching theme and to sense that this administration has a coherent, strategic vision for its foreign policy." The White House began to appreciate a growing concern that Clinton was "comfortable with '*ad hocery*' and . . . content to say that the post-Cold War era does not lend itself to an overall strategy and theme, and we will simply have to make policy case-by-case." Despite the repeated assertions of Warren Christopher, internal memos expressed concern over a perceived lack of direction and structure: "Most foreign policy thinkers are NOT prepared to accept the notion of an administration without a central, overarching strategy and not ready to concede that the world simply does not lend itself to gameplans anymore." This was a total repudiation of Warren Christopher's most basic approach to his position and after 6 months in the job the NSC were reporting that "There is still an expectation that we can articulate and deliver on a long-range plan that gives people a comfortable feeling that we are not simply managing crises, but organizing the world."¹²

Contrary to reports at the time suggesting that US foreign policy was in "disarray and confusion" and that "flips and flops of policy toward Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, North Korea and China . . . have elicited ridicule from all points on the political spectrum," the administration did have specific foreign policy aspirations.¹³ Its aim was to place the US relationship with Russia "on a very strong footing" and to pass "a new and streamlined defense programme."¹⁴ Neither the administration nor the president failed to recognize the significance of foreign policy, but in the initial months it was "too busy trying to do, rather than to sort out a pre-existing doctrine."¹⁵ The administration also unashamedly prioritized the promise of domestic reform that was credited with securing its election. As the president noted, "I wanted to be able to devote most of the first year to dealing with the domestic problems of the country that I thought were necessary to strengthen us so that we could formulate and carry out a successful foreign policy in the post-Cold War world."¹⁶ Yet, conversely, it was recognized that the administration had a unique opportunity. As Morton Halperin noted, "there was the perception at the end of the Cold War that there was

the lack of a threat and so we had an opportunity to deal with longer-term problems and opportunity to do things in keeping with our interests and values.” Bringing these interests and values to bear in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment proved to be the central challenge for the Clinton White House.

Devising Clinton's doctrine

The Clinton administration came to Washington openly divided on the wisdom of espousing a presidential doctrine. Throughout US history and particularly during the Cold War, administrations developed a series of principles to guide their global conduct. The concept of a presidential doctrine is largely predicated on the belief that only by articulating such a vision can an administration claim to be directing events, rather than being at the whim of history. During the initial months of the administration, President Clinton “was content to focus on his domestic agenda rather than formulate a doctrine. There was a preference to deal with events rather than formulate doctrines.”¹⁷ With a world in flux, many believed that such a doctrine risked offering a hostage to fortune that may be rendered irrelevant by a rapidly transforming world environment. In his confirmation hearing, Warren Christopher refused “to fit the foreign policy of the next four years into the straitjacket of some neatly tailored doctrine.”¹⁸ Others, however, felt a doctrine was needed that was “adoptive to the impulses at work in the world . . . that would encapsulate the conclusions of those working in the foreign policy team.”¹⁹

The necessity of devising a new strategy was compounded by internal debate concerning the validity of previous strategies. President Clinton was convinced that no grand strategies had sufficiently explained “how to exert American leadership against the global threats posed by Hitler and Stalin.” Instead, he believed that FDR and Truman had “powerful instincts about what had to be done, and they just made it up as they went along.” The president suggested that the sense of an overarching policy had been applied retrospectively, as the victors wrote their own histories, a practice that continued unabated and which perpetuated the “huge myth that we always knew what we were doing during the Cold War.” Despite this, the president recognized that the public needed to have policy explained to them in a simple, coherent fashion: “You’ve still got to be able to crystallize complexity in a way people get right away.” Clinton realized in 1993 that this was not happening. Instead, he complained, “The operative problem of the moment is that a bunch of smart people haven’t been able to come up with a new slogan.”²⁰

Differences of opinion within the administration regarding the relative benefits of a presidential doctrine were compounded by bureaucratic and

personal challenges. In June 1993 Bob Boorstin of the NSC expressed his concern to Mark Gearan, Assistant to the President and Director of Communications and Strategic Planning, that “there is little or no coordination between domestic and foreign policy messages . . . our external communications failures are grounded in dysfunctional internal communications in the Executive Office of the President.” The impact of such issues was that “people don’t talk to each other. Meetings don’t include relevant parties. People don’t show up at meetings, and then countermand decisions. Decisions are made, remade and then reversed.” The result of this was “confusion, both in message and policy.” The NSC sought to rectify this and called for the integration of the administration’s foreign policy message with its domestic message. It recognized that this was “a hazardous and complicated undertaking,” but stressed that the administration had thus far “not developed an easy to understand ‘Clinton doctrine’ that is in line with our domestic themes.” As a result, the “haphazard approach threatens to bury domestic events that we want to stress or to highlight foreign policy issues that we could muffle with domestic pronouncements.”²¹

The operational logic behind such a document was open to question. While a grand strategy document may have been congressionally mandated, the actual benefit may have been purely for public consumption. As Anthony Lake conceded,

These strategy papers are seen as opportunities to provide coherence for the bureaucracy for what the strategy is and to make public statements of what the strategy is and to inform the Congress, as legally required at the time, as to what the strategy is and in the process of working on them to get the very senior folks together. But the process involves putting together a lot of the things that you are doing with the general strategy. It is not a process of saying, “OK, first, what’s our strategy and then secondly, what are all of our policies,” because the world just doesn’t work that way.²²

However, as criticism mounted over his apparent disengagement, President Clinton ordered his foreign policy advisers to combine the administration’s policies into a discernable concept to capture the public attention and provide a rallying call for politicians. The plan called for the president to unveil the strategy in his address to the UN General Assembly in September 1993 and be underscored in speeches by Warren Christopher, Anthony Lake, and Madeleine Albright. The speeches were designed to do more than inform the public and Washington elite about the direction of policy; they were used “to drive decisions and focus the bureaucracy” and specifically designed “to force consensus internally.”²³ However, as a senior administration official said, “with no Cold War, the threats are more amorphous. The rallying ground is

more difficult to find. It's tough to put US policy goals on a bumper sticker."²⁴

The NSC had been drafting material for a grand strategy document, but with no success. As Morton Halperin revealed: "There is no general staff to do stuff like this at the NSC. At State they'd have the Policy Planning Staff do it. At the NSC it fell under the Defense Directorate and Robert Bell's people were involved in drafting it, but Lake was unsatisfied with it."²⁵ As a result Halperin was asked to come up with a coherent policy. Accordingly, Halperin, Anthony Lake, and NSC staff members Jeremy Rosner, Donald Steinberg, and Leon Fuerth began the task of "devising a strategic vision with an accompanying catchphrase."²⁶ The challenge was to produce a doctrine that embodied the foreign policy ideas articulated on the campaign: reconstructing US military and security capabilities, elevating the role of economics in international affairs, and promoting democracy. The aim was to dispel the perception that the administration had an *ad hoc* foreign policy while making it "simple so people would understand the heart of the strategy, while writing a fairly nuanced speech that did not overstate what we could do."²⁷

Leon Fuerth advocated "Global Civilization," a concept Al Gore developed in his book, *Earth in the Balance*.²⁸ It emphasized continued US leadership in the post-Cold War world and insisted that failure to do so invited "a decent towards chaos." The philosophy fitted with the administration's position that the United States needed to discharge its "obligation to world leadership," since the end of the Cold War should cause the West "to do more than merely indulge in self-congratulation." Gore's position was in keeping with Anthony Lake's philosophy that "Enlightened governments and their leaders must play a major role in spreading awareness of the problems, in framing practical solutions, in offering a vision of the future we want to create." Yet Gore also introduced a Clintonesque rationale as he stressed the "substantial economic and geopolitical benefits for the United States."²⁹ Despite this, Lake felt "Global Civilization" failed to convey the scale of the new policies the administration was seeking to unveil. It was also a concept associated closely with the vice president, recognized for his work in foreign policy and the exercise would have backfired if it were believed that Gore was defining and devising foreign policy.

At the height of the internal quest for a definition of policy, George Kennan advised the Clinton administration to reconsider their actions. He lamented that in retrospect he "had tried to pack so much diagnosis and prescription into three syllables," a folly that led to "great and misleading oversimplification of analysis and policy." Instead, Kennan recommended drafting a "thoughtful paragraph or more, rather than trying to come up with a bumper sticker." When notified, President Clinton observed wryly, "That's why Kennan's a great diplomat and scholar and not a politician."³⁰

Eventually “Democratic Enlargement” emerged as Lake’s chosen description of policies required in the post-Cold War world. It fell to the NSC’s Senior Director for Legislative Affairs, Jeremy Rosner to prepare the documents that stressed the US intention to “remain the world’s pre-eminent military power and its chief advocate for liberalizing the global economy” a ploy to be unveiled in a series of speeches in September 1993.³¹ President Clinton appreciated that Democratic Enlargement signified the notion that as free states grew, the international order became more prosperous, more secure, and likened the concept to the Domino Theory in reverse.³² Democratic Enlargement posited that where command economies collapsed, free markets may rise and flourish: “What Clinton liked best about Lake’s Enlargement policy was the way it was inextricably linked to economic renewal with its emphasis on making sure the United States remained the number one exporter.”³³ Lake and the NSC staff had tailored a bespoke foreign policy to match the aspirations of the president and his domestic agenda. The administration finally appeared to have an agreed upon grand strategy concept with which to engage the post-Cold War world. In September 1993, in a week of high-profile speeches, it was unveiled to a waiting world.

Warren Christopher’s address

The policy announcements got off to a poor start, however, as the first official to address the issue was Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, whose support for the new concept was less than total. Speaking at Columbia University on September 20, 1993, Christopher alluded to Democratic Enlargement, but without any enthusiasm and singularly failed to reference it directly, revealing the “typical” and “cautious” approach of the department.³⁴ The focus of Christopher’s remarks was the Middle East peace process, which had been energized by agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. This was promoted as a priority for the administration since “the real barrier to peace between the Israelis and Palestinians—the psychological barrier—has been breached.”³⁵ Christopher revealed plans to provide \$250 million to the Palestinians over the next 2 years. While conceding that the money would come from the foreign aid budget, leaving less for other countries, Christopher confirmed that aid to Israel and Egypt would remain at current levels, which in 1993 totaled \$3 billion and \$2.1 billion a year respectfully, accounting for more than one-third of the US foreign aid budget.³⁶ Christopher also revealed the administration had decided it could not count on the United Nations to keep order in the post-Cold War world, since it was often unwilling to take military action except in instances where the US had demonstrated a willingness to act unilaterally if necessary.

Christopher appeared to be a warm up act for Anthony Lake and gave notice that the national security adviser's speech would "address the broad outlines of our foreign policy. His speech will reflect broad policy discussions within our administration and I commend it to your attention."³⁷ He did not indicate that Lake would unveil specifics or agreed upon concepts. Christopher was used to dealing with traditional foreign policy concepts and believed that the theories developed by Anthony Lake and the NSC staff went too far.³⁸ As Nancy Soderberg noted, "The State Department tried its own hand at defining America's doctrine and put forth its own plan, everyone was trying to find something, all coming up with their own ways of trying to get at the same idea of what the United States had to do."³⁹ The lack of overall policy coordination was revealing.

Rather than endorsing Democratic Enlargement, Christopher offered a policy of Engagement, which he referenced five times. His speech utilized a false construct as the secretary of state insisted "in the latest round in a century-old debate between engagement and isolationism, the United States chooses Engagement." Yet this was a false debate since no one was seriously advocating a policy of isolationism, while Engagement was a concept previously espoused by James Baker and Gary Hart. Christopher intoned that the central purpose of US foreign policy was "to ensure the security of our nation and to ensure its economic prosperity as well—and to promote democratic values." His second justification for Engagement was security, in a concession to classic power politics where Christopher felt at ease. US national interest was spelt out in the ensuing national security strategy documents, but Christopher asserted that the United States "must maintain its military strength and reinvigorate its economy so that we can retain the option to act alone when that is best for us." In defending its interests, the United States would not necessarily act alone and Christopher was at pains to stress the pragmatic approach the administration intended to adopt. He discussed how collective action could "advance American foreign policy interests. It can bolster our efforts to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to knock down barriers to global trade and to protect the environment. We have also seen that collective action requires—and cannot replace—American leadership."

Christopher sounded a scornful note when he suggested that the speculation surrounding policy development was of secondary importance to the implementation of diplomacy, noting that while "this largely tactical debate on the means of American engagement has proceeded, President Clinton has been meeting the key foreign policy tests and challenges." It was, however, a debate that had been brewing within the administration itself, both between and within departments. Clinton's challenges included addressing potential crises that could threaten the United States in the future, such as democratic reversals in Russia and the risk of ethnic conflict in Europe. As Christopher noted, "If any of these things comes to pass—then our own security and our ability to

focus on domestic renewal will be directly put at risk.” These potential developments were highlighted to justify Christopher’s stance regarding continued US engagement. The alternative, he stressed, must be rejected “for the dangerous argument that it is . . . the pied pipers of isolationism misread the history of this century . . . they minimize the threats to our security.”⁴⁰ However, suggestions that the alternative to Engagement was isolationism dramatically overstated the case. Calls for isolationism had been heard only from Pat Buchanan and the defeated fringe of the Republican Party and no one anticipated that such a policy would be enacted by the Clinton administration.

Christopher’s lack of reference to the agreed upon concept of Democratic Enlargement was noticeable. The missing element in Christopher’s speech was indicative of differences at the heart of the administration, between those who espoused an embrace of Democratic Enlargement and those who felt it was a step too far. It seemed that this was an effort by the State Department to dampen expectations in regard to US adventurism in the 1990s and betrayed Christopher’s pedigree as a Cold War diplomat, ill prepared for the realities through which President Clinton was governing. This was a fact that had already dawned on the White House; “The idea that you’re going to get independent thinking from Warren Christopher is ridiculous,” lamented a Clinton adviser.⁴¹ The Berlin Wall may have fallen but the Cold War mentality of a state-based approach to foreign policy remained constant, for as Nancy Soderberg noted after leaving office, “The world had changed and the government hadn’t changed with it.”⁴² Christopher personified this mentality, a shortcoming that hindered the administration and reduced its standing around the globe, repeatedly confirming fears that “his personality was too restrained for him to be effective.”⁴³ The fact that the secretary of state failed to publicly endorse the new policy spoke volumes about the level of support the initiative had within the administration. It was indicative not only of the challenges that the policy faced, but also of tensions within the administration between the State Department and the National Security Council.

Madeleine Albright’s address

While Warren Christopher could be accused of paying lip service to the new policy, the same could not be said of US Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright. In her address at the National War College on September 23, Albright openly supported the idea of enhancing democracy and empowering nations to take steps toward human rights and political reform. This stance marked her as a dove to many, however, as a firm advocate of military intervention when necessary, she was viewed as a hawk within the Clinton administration. Eight months into office

and with questions being asked about the direction of foreign policy at the White House, Albright noted that “a debate has raged about whether it is necessary to spell out a set of specific circumstances—a checklist—describing when America will or will not contemplate the use of military force.” Despite these having been issued in the past, Albright suggested that “Too much precision in public, however well-intentioned, can impinge on the flexibility of the commander-in-chief or generate dangerous miscalculations abroad.”⁴⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, she has subsequently stated her belief that the search for a new doctrine was “merely a public relations device and not very helpful in practical terms.”⁴⁵

Notwithstanding such concerns, Albright's speech developed the themes that the administration had chosen to unveil, announcing the policy goals as being “to strengthen the bonds among those countries that make up the growing community of major market democracies . . . to help emerging democracies get on their feet . . . to reform or isolate the rogue states . . . to contain the chaos and ease the suffering in regions of greatest humanitarian concern.” Unlike Christopher, Albright made specific reference to the policy, insisting that “taken together, our strategy looks to the enlargement of democracy and markets abroad” and presented a *tour de force* of the administration's view of the world.

Albright was quick to note that while few mourned the passing of the Cold War and its Containment policy, “anyone who concludes that foreign adversaries, conflicts and disasters do not affect us misreads the past, misunderstands the present and will miss the boat in the future.” Whereas Christopher felt Lake's Democratic Enlargement concept went too far, Ambassador Albright appeared to suggest that it could have gone much farther. Her previously espoused concept of Assertive Multilateralism adopted a liberal internationalist approach that sought to preserve US involvement abroad at a reduced cost by working through alliances and international organizations, enabling a sharing of the burdens. Albright acknowledged that “some say we must make rigid choices between unilateral and multilateral, global and regional, force and diplomacy. But that is not true . . . We have a full range of foreign policy tools with which to work and we will choose those that will be most effective in each case.”

Albright continued her use of the “assertive” prefix, insisting that “as a result of our assertive diplomacy,” the United States had garnered “global support for sanctions against Libya for shielding the alleged saboteurs of Pan Am 103, against Iraq for its continued failure to meet its obligations following the Persian Gulf War and against Haiti prior to the agreement reached recently to restore democratic rule.” Despite her personal preference for multilateral action, Albright stressed the unilateral options that the United States was willing to initiate when necessary, highlighting President Clinton's strike on Saddam Hussein's military intelligence headquarters in response to an attempt to kill President Bush. She also placed Clinton's willingness to embrace unilateral action in a wider context: “If America's

vital economic interests are at risk . . . or if terrorists need to be tracked down . . . President Clinton will not hesitate to act as a commander-in-chief to protect America.” It was, however, revealing that Albright was chosen to speak about the use of military force in the post-Cold War world, as she was not representing the Pentagon and her direct reporting line was to the State Department. The content, tone, and location of the speech indicated that it could, and perhaps should, have been delivered by Defense Secretary Aspin who was noticeably absent from the high-profile addresses that were made that September.

Despite the military component of the speech, the central focus of Albright’s remarks was the future of the United States within a UN framework. Albright was at pains to highlight the benefits and the drawbacks of continued cooperation, particularly in the area of peacekeeping operations. The administration saw the benefits that such missions brought by way of reducing rivalry with the former USSR, but expressed concern at the expansion of such missions, particularly in addressing ethnic conflicts: “More peace-keeping operations in the past five years than in the previous forty-three; a sevenfold increase in troops; a tenfold increase in budget; and a dramatic but immeasurable increase in danger and complexity.” At best, Albright insisted, such missions “have the potential to act as a ‘force multiplier’ in promoting the interests in peace and stability that we share with other nations.” Despite these potential benefits, Albright was forthright in her observations regarding the flaws in peacekeeping operations, insisting that “UN peace-keepers need reformed budget procedures, more dependable sources of military and civilian personnel, better training, better intelligence, better command and control, better equipment and more money.” Accordingly, the administration expected reform of the UN decision-making process on peacekeeping and insisted that key issues be addressed prior to any future commitment. These included ensuring that a cease-fire was already in place, that an exit strategy was agreed upon, that the mission had clearly defined objectives, and that sufficient resources be made available to ensure success. Albright announced that the administration was “preparing guidelines for American participation that will promise greater assistance in specialized areas such as logistics, training, intelligence, communications, and public affairs.” Notable in their absence was reference to troops or to the latest technology.

The speech occurred at a time when the administration was being critiqued for its embrace of the United Nations, forcing Albright to walk a fine line between support for the organization and a defense of US sovereignty and determination to act unilaterally when necessary. Ambassador Albright outlined the administration’s policy on multinational peacekeeping operations within a framework of Democratic Enlargement. The administration, she insisted, supported the United Nations, but understood “that there are limits to what that partnership can achieve for

the United States . . . we cannot rely on the UN as a substitute guarantor for the vital interests of the United States.” Pragmatism reigned supreme in the Clinton White House and “The tools that America will use to carry out its foreign policy will be both unilateral and multilateral.” Albright wanted to leave no doubt that the United States had “strong reason to help build a United Nations that is increasingly able and effective. But America will never entrust its destiny to other than American hands.”⁴⁶

The Clinton administration initially believed that US participation in UN-led actions may remove some of the military burden shouldered by the United States and allow the president to concentrate on his domestic agenda. That did not mean that America intended to surrender her right to act alone and Albright asserted the nation’s right to act unilaterally where its interests were at stake. Such declarations, however, were included primarily to appease the administration’s domestic critics and belied the fact that the evolving US Grand Strategy reflected a Wilsonian belief in multilateralism and a sense that action through international institutions could foster global peace. However, not all were convinced by such Wilsonian principles. Unilateralists felt that America should and could act alone and rejected involvement where humanitarian needs did not represent a challenge to American self-interest. They feared the Clinton administration was ceding too much authority to the United Nations in what Senator Robert Dole called “an abdication of American leadership.”⁴⁷ Ambassador Albright’s address was an attempt to refute such allegations, while stressing the limits to America’s embrace of multilateralism.

The speech also reflected a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report of August 1993 that stipulated clear mandates should be provided to troops going into war zones and that a realistic time frame of action should be prepared so that operations could be properly planned and implemented. However, neither Albright nor the Senate ruled out using American troops in multinational peacekeeping operations where US interests were not threatened. Despite the attempt at a coordinated effort the administration was accused of “patching together, amid much internal squabbling, a policy framework,” with which to engage with the world.⁴⁸

The presidential address

The presidential address at the United Nations on September 27, 1993 should have been an historic event, as Bill Clinton became the first US president born after the foundation of the organization to address the General Assembly. With a new era, a new president and a new global strategy to deliver, this could have been a key moment in UN history. However, the president was under congressional pressure to justify continued involvement in UN peacekeeping operations and was forced to neuter his

advocacy of multilateralism. The president faced two distinct challenges: the need to reveal policies that adhered to his campaign promise of putting domestic affairs first and the need to outline a vision for America's place in the world, which he had struggled to do in his first 8 months in office. While an American withdrawal from the world was never in question, the domestic focus of the administration and the anti-UN tone of Congress forced the president to dispel fears about continued US involvement in international affairs. The president advocated an activist foreign policy and full cooperation with the United Nations in a speech that called for the bolstering of democracy around the globe, new initiatives on weapons proliferation, environmental protection, and population control.

Never one to shy away from a Kennedy reference, Clinton attempted to cloak himself in the mantle of his fallen hero, telling the gathered dignitaries, "Thirty-two years ago, President Kennedy warned this Chamber that humanity lived under a nuclear sword of Damocles that hung by the slenderest of threads." Under Clinton's leadership, the United States was striving to heed Kennedy's warning by "working with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and others to take that sword down, to lock it away in a secure vault where we hope and pray it will remain forever." While the threats that Kennedy spoke of may have been reduced, the end of the Cold War "removed the lid from many cauldrons of ethnic, religious and territorial animosity." Clinton believed that this ensured nations must "work together more effectively in pursuit of our national interests and to think anew about whether our institutions of international cooperation are adequate."⁴⁹

Continuing a theme from the campaign, the president rejected the distinction between the domestic and international systems, describing them as inseparable, insisting that this was necessary if America was to compete economically and promote a more stable international system. To Clinton, domestic and foreign, as well as political and economic issues, were inextricably intertwined and what was needed "was an integrated approach in which foreign policy would take its place as part of an overall strategy for guaranteeing the security of present and future generations of Americans."⁵⁰ As a result, while this may have been an address on foreign policy, economics were never far from the surface. By 1993, the US economy was entwined in the global economy and its security with global security. Therefore, Clinton insisted that "a thriving and democratic Russia not only makes the world safer, it also can help to expand the world's economy. And the growing economic power of China, coupled with greater political openness, could bring enormous benefits to all of Asia and to the rest of the world." The administration believed that domestic problems should be prioritized, but that in an interdependent world foreign policy could not be considered in isolation.

It was on such a note that President Clinton introduced the policy of Democratic Enlargement. He insisted that America's "overriding purpose"

must be to “expand and strengthen the world’s community of market-based democracies,” since democracy and free markets were “reducing suffering, fostering sustainable development, and improving health and living conditions.” This was a new policy for a new era. During the Cold War, the West “sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions”; now it should “seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions.” Democratic Enlargement was presented as a worldwide effort in which the United States supported “the consolidation of market democracy where it is taking new root, as in the states of the former Soviet Union and all over Latin America.” This was not to be a *pax-Americana*, however, as the president demanded this was “no crusade to force our way of life and doing things on others.” It was necessarily, however, a policy that depended on multilateral support, something that was soon to be in short supply as the future of the US relationship with the United Nations came into question.

Despite praising the United Nations for its peacekeeping activities and hailing it as the instrument that “holds the promise to resolve many of this era’s conflicts,” President Clinton used his address to demand changes in the way the United Nations embarked on and operated peacekeeping operations.⁵¹ The UN budget was of concern to many in Washington, despite its total budget being “roughly what the Pentagon spends every thirty-two hours.”⁵² There was a duality to the president’s speech, therefore, which insisted that the United States intended to continue to be engaged globally, while indicating to the Congress that future participation in UN peacekeeping was to be restricted. President Clinton may have believed in the United Nations, but he was forced to inoculate himself from congressional critics. He insisted that the United States had not supported peacekeeping missions “as some critics in the United States have charged, to subcontract American foreign policy,” but rather “to strengthen our security . . . and to share . . . the costs and effort of pursuing peace.” Despite the ambiguity in the president’s message, it was clear that the administration was ideologically committed to the United Nations in a way that many of its predecessors were not. Yet while Clinton supported the concept of multilateralism, he refused to surrender his powers as commander-in-chief, insisting that the United States intended to “work in partnership with others and through multilateral institutions,” while refusing to hesitate “when there is a threat to our core interests or to those of our allies.”⁵³ This had long been US policy and remained so during the Clinton administration, as revealed in speeches and documents released during the campaign and its time in office.

Although time and events put the administration’s faith in multilateralism to the test, President Clinton’s UN address demonstrated that he was more than just a domestic president and the results were immediate—his

approval rating jumped to 56 percent, the highest since shortly after taking office.⁵⁴ However, the mood in Washington prevented President Clinton from making a Kennedyesque call for sacrifice “to assure the survival and success of liberty” and this lack of absolute commitment led some to question his dedication to the international order.⁵⁵ Indeed, despite the jump in his approval ratings, it was noted that his delivery “gave away the difference within him [between] domestic or foreign policy issues . . . He was wooden and projected little confidence.”⁵⁶ It was further noted that, “If the belief takes hold in Washington that America need only provide the technology while others die on the ground, Clinton’s hopes of providing leadership will quickly dissipate.”⁵⁷ After US losses in Somalia, however, this approach effectively became the operating principal for US forces for the remainder of the decade.

Anthony Lake’s address

While the president spoke of America’s global status and its relationship with the United Nations, the speech was short on specifics. As a result, the clearest explanation of the Clinton administration’s foreign policy came not from the president but from Anthony Lake, in a speech delivered on September 21, 1993 entitled “From Containment to Enlargement.” It was to be the most succinct foreign policy statement to come out of the Clinton White House in its 8 years and set forth the administration’s view of the world and how it intended to shape it. Speaking at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Lake argued that the end of the Cold War presented an opportunity to reassess America’s place in the world, as the United States returned to “debates about our role in the world that are as old as our Republic.”

Communism’s collapse presented a challenge that Lake believed was one of the greatest America could face: “whether we will be significantly engaged abroad at all.” As it enabled him to identify with the architects of the modern world, Lake was eager to highlight a similar debate after the Second World War that had “pitted those Democrats and Republicans whose creativity produced the architectures of postwar prosperity and security against those in both parties who would have had us retreat within the isolated shell we occupied in the 1920s and 1930s.” Lake may have made an ally of history, but he recognized that times had changed, for in 1993, “rallying Americans to bear the costs and burdens of international engagement is no less important. But it is much more difficult.” Americans were anticipating a peace dividend, not a call to arms, which hindered advocacy of an activist foreign policy. This public sentiment had contributed to Clinton’s election and, despite this paradox, Lake placed such concerns in their historical

context, recognizing that with the end of the Cold War, "there is no longer a consensus among the American people about why and even whether, our nation should remain engaged in the world."

Lake was eager to dismiss two fashionable foreign policy concepts, insisting the United States faced neither the end of history nor a clash of civilizations, but rather "a moment of immense democratic and entrepreneurial opportunity." What was needed was a policy that took account of the rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances, leading Lake to insist, "the successor to a doctrine of Containment must be a strategy of Enlargement, enlargement of the world's free community of market democracies." This policy promoted global democracy, isolated Iran and Iraq, and worked with the United Nations to implement international policies that combined America's "broad goals of fostering democracy and markets with our more traditional geopolitical interests."

As Lake surveyed the initial months of the Clinton administration, he implied that a policy of Democratic Enlargement was already in effect. The administration had "completed a sweeping review of our military strategy and forces . . . led a global effort to support the historic reforms in Russia . . . helped defend democracy in Haiti [and] facilitated major advances in the Middle East peace process." However, he insisted that such an approach no longer sufficed; a doctrine was required to prevent dire consequences. If not, "foreign events can seem disconnected; individual setbacks may appear to define the whole," resulting in "unwise cuts to our military force structure or readiness, a loss of the resources necessary for our diplomacy and thus erosion of US influence abroad." Lake's unveiling of a doctrinal approach was intended to shore up support and provide direction for future US foreign policy initiatives.

However, the Clinton administration was reliant on the United Nations to implement various aspects of its far-reaching Democratic Enlargement program and it was feared that this risked ceding too much power to the UN Secretary General. In this instance, Lake stressed that the argument between unilateralists and multilateralists was misplaced. Since both agreed that the United States had important interests abroad it should rely on a pragmatic use of both approaches: "We should act multilaterally where doing so advances our interests and . . . act unilaterally when that will serve our purpose. The simple question in each instance is: What works best?" This pragmatic approach to policy defined the Clinton administration, though it infuriated many and confounded others. On the policy of Democratic Enlargement, however, Lake was adamant: "I believe strongly that our foreign policies must marry principle and pragmatism." Lake emphasized that the new policy had its roots in the history of the twentieth century, since "throughout the Cold War, we contained a global threat to market democracies; now we should seek to enlarge their reach, particularly in places of special significance to us." Clearly Democratic Enlargement was designed to have a special meaning

to those with an East European heritage, a region that eventually benefited greatly from these new policies.

Underlying the policy of Democratic Enlargement was the notion of neo-Wilsonianism, which Lake attempted to implement, fully conscious of the historical parallel he was attempting to draw. Wilson, Lake explained, “understood that our own security is shaped by the character of foreign regimes.” The League of Nations failed, but “most presidents who followed, Republicans and Democrats alike, understood we must promote democracy and market economics in the world, because it protects our interests and security and because it reflects values that are both American and universal.” The Clinton administration built on Wilson’s legacy, and also drew inspiration from the post-Second World War generation, whose spirit America “needed to recapture in forging a coalition of the center.”⁵⁸ To demonstrate his efforts in this direction, Lake consulted with Newt Gingrich on the formulation of Democratic Enlargement and attempted to fulfill his self-imposed mandate of delivering a concept that was “simple so that people would understand the heart of the strategy.”⁵⁹ To do so, he equated the modern struggle with that of the Cold War, when Americans “knew we were trying to contain the creeping expansion of that big, red blob.” Now, Lake explained, “we might visualize our security mission as promoting the enlargement of the ‘blue areas’ of market democracies.”⁶⁰ Gingrich concurred that no Republican could oppose the spread of democracy, but despite Gingrich’s “interesting comments, [he was not] committed to supporting us publicly.”⁶¹ The future Speaker of the House may have been a dedicated internationalist, but as the White House discovered, neither he nor his fellow Republicans hesitated to use foreign policy initiatives against the administration if it promised electoral reward.

Lake stressed that practical interests, not starry-eyed idealism, defined the Clinton administration: “This is not a democratic crusade; it is a pragmatic commitment to see freedom take hold where that will help us most.” For the plan to work, America needed to target its efforts “to assist states that affect our strategic interests, such as those with large economies, critical locations, nuclear weapons, or the potential to generate refugee flows into our own nation or into key friends and allies.” The policy was open to interpretation, so while Democratic Enlargement was presented as a challenge to the growing mood of neo-isolationism and a way to maintain American global leadership, Lake insisted that the United States was to be selective in its interventions. In this respect, Lake’s statement echoed the Tarnoff Doctrine, with implications for the global implementation of policy. It was this pragmatic approach that did much to raise doubts about the policy, as it granted the administration the right not to intervene when the mood suited. Indeed, the strategy rejected the belief that the United States was duty bound to promote constitutional democracy and human rights everywhere, as this was not a politically viable approach. Rather,

Democratic Enlargement was aimed at US strategic and economic interests: "We cannot impose democracy on regimes that appear to be opting for liberalization, but we may be able to help steer some of them down that path while providing penalties that raise the costs of repression and aggressive behaviour."⁶² For those hoping for a return to the ideology of the Carter years, the Clinton administration proved to be disappointing as it placed economic considerations ahead of human rights concerns, despite early rhetoric to the contrary.

The backlash from rogue states of concern

For all of the administration's hopes for Democratic Enlargement, it recognized that certain states fell beyond its capacity to enact social and political reform.⁶³ In his speech and subsequent writings, Lake developed the idea that the United States was threatened by the Backlash States of Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya, which sought "to traffic in the weapons of mass destruction, support terrorism and are dedicated to the destruction of the tolerant society."⁶⁴ Lake may have been a neo-Wilsonian, but he was not blind to the threats that such nations posed to his policy. In a passage that had great resonance 8 years after its delivery, Lake insisted America "respects the many contributions Islam has made to the world . . . but we will provide every resistance to militants who distort Islamic doctrines and seek to expand their influence by force." Islamic Fundamentalism was a growing threat during the 1990s, but Lake believed the Backlash States posed a more immediate threat and that the United States should "expect the advance of democracy and markets to trigger forceful reactions from those whose power is not popularly derived."⁶⁵

The Backlash States concept built on the Dual Containment policy unveiled by Martin Indyk and posited that certain states needed to be targeted for radical change, in a precursor for the Regime Change policy that evolved during Clinton's second term and was implemented in Iraq by his successor. It was the repressive nature of the ruling bodies, as opposed to the ethnicity or creed of the population that best underscored the rationale for the Backlash States concept, of which Iran and Iraq were but two. Lake believed such nations had defining characteristics: they were "ruled by cliques that control power through coercion, they suppress basic human rights and promote radical ideologies . . . their leaders share a common antipathy toward popular participation that might undermine the existing regimes."⁶⁶ There was a general consensus within the administration that the term defined "all those who would return newly free societies to the intolerant ways of the past."

Therefore, years before President George W. Bush announced an Axis of Evil, the Clinton administration prepared a similar list of similar states,

against which it would fight for “small victories, through persistence and pragmatism.” Such initiatives were “the hallmarks of determination, of a nation engaged in the long struggle for democracy and the freedom and tolerance it brings.”⁶⁷ The Backlash States threatened their neighbors, US allies, and vital American interests and met the full resistance of the United States, though not necessarily via military engagement. “Our policy toward such states must seek to isolate them diplomatically, militarily, economically and technologically,” Lake insisted and it was via such a policy that Saddam Hussein was to be “kept in his box” for the remainder of the decade.⁶⁸

The ideology that motivated the Cold War may have gone, but the Clinton administration recognized that it faced “a struggle between freedom and tyranny . . . between those who would build free societies governed by laws and those who would impose their will by force.”⁶⁹ While conceding that in the short term the Backlash States lacked the resources to “enable them to seriously threaten the democratic order,” it was feared that “the ties between them are growing as they seek to thwart or quarantine themselves from a global trend to which they seem incapable of adapting.” The administration sought to solve what it viewed as “a strategic puzzle” that had confounded the three previous administrations, yet one it believed the United States could resolve and, in doing so, “transform these Backlash States into constructive members of the international community.” Lake was aware that there were those who advocated a more conciliatory approach, but the administration believed that these nations were “on the wrong side of history” and that an opportunity existed to rectify this. This, he insisted, was “not a crusade, but a genuine and responsible effort, over time, to protect American strategic interests, stabilize the international system and enlarge the community of nations committed to democracy, free markets and peace.” As stressed in the eventual National Security Strategy Reviews, the administration recognized the need to tailor policy specifically to address the history, culture, and circumstances of each nation. In regard to the Backlash States, however, the White House sought “to contain the influence of these states, sometimes by isolation, sometimes through pressure, sometimes by diplomatic and economic measures” and encouraged the international community “to join in a concerted effort.”⁷⁰

This, however, remained a state-based approach to issues that failed to take into account the rise in importance of non-state-based actors. Eventually, the policy evolved to one of States of Concern, since “Rogue States suggests a state that you fundamentally cannot deal with. States of Concern are states that you have strong concerns about but will continue to deal with, Pakistan was one, Saudi was another.”⁷¹ The announcements highlighted the administration’s recognition that all nations needed to be dealt with independently, depending upon their status, a vital element in the policy announcements and one that fitted the administration’s world

view. Lake identified challenges and advocated a manner in which to deal with them, something that was missing in many pronouncements from the White House in this era. All too often it appeared that a great deal of attention had been lavished upon defining policy, but with far less attention paid to how such policies were to be implemented.

Reaction

Democratic Enlargement was conceptually simple, acknowledged the potential unleashed by the end of the Cold War and, “unlike all the self-proclaimed competitors like Clash of Civilizations, it had a positive rather than a negative sound to it.”⁷² It was an important message that some felt was overdue, but the Clinton administration had only been in office 8 months, was the first in 45 years not to be able to rely on a policy of Containment, and had a mandate to concentrate on domestic reform. Anthony Lake was adamant that US foreign policy had “to be based on ideas as well as on interests, ideas, not ideals” and, despite the apparent differences between them, this philosophy was clear in the speeches of September 1993. If the speeches lacked operational specificity, they nevertheless conveyed the message that America intended to remain engaged in world affairs, albeit selectively. The speeches refuted allegations of an overdependence on multilateralism and left no doubt that the Clinton administration intended to pursue an activist foreign policy and remain internationalist in perspective, adopting a multilateral approach when possible, but acting unilaterally when necessary. Lake insisted that the concept was simple: “together when we can, alone when we must.”⁷³

That was not to say that President Clinton planned to engage US forces recklessly. An underlying theme of the speeches was that the administration sought to be selective about where and when it posted its resources. As such, the speeches reflected a caution about military engagement that characterized the Clinton years. However, while the administration wished to be cautious in its execution of military operations, this did not mean that it adopted a passive foreign policy. The speeches emphasized a proactive effort to introduce positive change to the world, roll-back the remaining influences of the Cold War, and usher in a new era of democracy. The difficulty came not in convincing policy makers of the righteousness of the concept, but in its implementation. The lack of an external threat ensured that the administration could focus less on foreign policy. This also meant that when the White House sought to address international affairs, it found that congressional support was far more difficult to generate, as there was relatively little to focus against. This was apparent in the emerging Clinton Grand Strategy, which had no specific focus against an overseas aggressor. The administration's repeated

efforts “were really inadequate to describe America’s role in the world because people wanted a containment theory for the post-Cold War and there wasn’t one.”⁷⁴

In this environment the policy announcements failed to appease critics who argued that an opportunity had been lost, as the speeches “fell short. And they received little attention.”⁷⁵ Democratic Enlargement was branded “a strained attempt,” to replace Containment, with much of the criticism reserved for Anthony Lake, whom opponents concluded was “no Henry Kissinger or even a Zbigniew Brzezinski.”⁷⁶ Kissinger contrasted Lake’s Democratic Enlargement policy with Containment, noting “Lake’s speech contained very elevated attitudes, yet he gave it no operational definition. When George Kennan put forward Containment . . . that was an operational definition, being something that one could actually do.”⁷⁷ The man who had set out to devise a new foreign policy for the post-Cold War world was branded, “Lake Inferior” and his policy critiqued as “academic and abstract, that while seemingly high-minded, failed to explain anything beyond Americans’ good intentions [and] aspiration to morality.”⁷⁸ This was exacerbated by a failure to coordinate the speeches and ensure that the same policies were advocated with the same phraseology. Lake “had wanted the whole team to deliver a single message, but he was unable to get his colleagues on board, since none of them shared his passion to find a single concept to replace Containment.”⁷⁹

The criticism leveled at Lake seemed more personal than professional and certainly went beyond what may have been expected or anticipated for a presidential adviser who made no effort to conceal his disdain for publicity or the limelight. He had, of course, burnt bridges by his decision to resign from the National Security Council in protest at the Cambodia operations during the Nixon administration. However, the vitriol that his philosophical approach to policy attracted was all the more perplexing considering the complex nature of Wilson, whose political and philosophical approach to foreign policy Lake sought to update for a late twentieth-century administration.

It was suggested that Lake had invoked a singular reading of history. Gaddis remarked that Wilson had not sought universal democracy, but rather “democracy and capitalism where possible within a framework of great power cooperation; but he was not so naive as to believe that the other great powers’ interests would automatically accord with his own.”⁸⁰ However, what appear to be contradictions in the Clinton administration’s interpretation of Wilsonianism are less problematic than initially appear when Wilson’s record is examined. Much like the widely accepted interpretation of Clinton, the single dimensional view of Wilson distorts the historical record, which is far more complex than either his supporters or detractors care to concede.⁸¹

Wilson’s democratic crusade of 1917 can be seen as an idealist veneer to conceal the realist principles behind US entry to the First World War, as he

blended realist policies with an idealistic rhetoric to inspire the American people to engage in a conflict that many believed was of little consequence to them. Wilson's much-vaunted idealism was certainly not on display in his address to the Senate in January 1917, as he told the assembled lawmakers that a "peace forced upon the loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished . . . would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, at an intolerable sacrifice and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory upon which terms of peace would rest . . . as upon quicksand."⁸²

Wilson had previously praised the Kaiser's system of government as a "shining model" of efficiency.⁸³ The man credited with making the world "safe for democracy" had also dismissed the role of elections within democracies and resorted to force in Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, in the First World War, northern Russia, and Siberia between 1914 and 1918.⁸⁴ As Cox reminds us, "Wilson was neither a fool nor a saint and to portray him as if he was one or the other only serves to distort his place in history."⁸⁵

On April 2, 1917, however, the same president insisted that "the world must be made safe for democracy," a rallying call that defined Wilson and provide his ideological legacy. Rousing a peaceful populace in the name of balance of power or geostrategic leverage is unlikely to succeed. Urging them to fight to defend liberty and democracy, the very bedrock of American political life, proved to be a successful model that has been emulated ever since, despite what George Kennan later bemoaned as the "legalistic-moralistic approach to international affairs" that become synonymous with Wilsonianism.⁸⁶

The concept of Wilsonianism has been adopted, interpreted, and utilized ever since and the Clinton administration's attempt to do so was merely the latest example. Interpretations have differed considerably, but it has been suggested that they have fallen into two camps: liberals embrace a "soft" interpretation of Wilsonianism and seek to rely on treaties and international organizations to foster peace and secure US ambitions. A conservative approach embraces a "hard" interpretation of Wilsonianism with which to use US power to advance national interests and ideals.⁸⁷ However it was interpreted, it was a clear break with the previous model that had endured since the founding era. It has been suggested that Wilson's fate was that of "a man who let his ideals exceed his grasp and whose immodesty for America led to his fall."⁸⁸ It was a fate Bill Clinton was determined to avoid as he sought to make the world safe not only for democracy, but also for American commerce.

Considering the transition from the Cold War to the Age of Clinton, however, the reaction was to some extent to be expected: "For a generation hand-reared on the truths of realism and the doctrine of power politics, the idea that a change in the form of other countries' governments would enhance US security must have sounded a little odd, especially coming from someone so inexperienced in the ways of the world as Bill Clinton."⁸⁹

Worryingly, however, the speeches exposed differences that existed between the National Security Council and the State Department, which viewed Democratic Enlargement as naive and self-aggrandizing on the part of Anthony Lake. “Was it enlargement or engorgement?” one official asked.⁹⁰ As the reaction against the speeches gathered pace, the president turned on its architect, insisting that the speeches of September had been “weak, pathetic . . . I just didn’t get it; it just didn’t grab.”⁹¹

By dividing the speech writing process between the State Department and the NSC, the administration inadvertently highlighted internal divisions in relation to the direction of policy. These differences undermined the credibility of the efforts to launch a cohesive approach to foreign policy. Yet Leon Fuerth later explained, “we all believed in engagement and the expansion of democracy. We viewed it as a Ratchet Principal, a guard against the situation slipping back to the previous situation, particularly in the former Soviet Union.”⁹² However, differences clearly existed. The NSC’s Jeremy Rosner, described by Don Baer as a “tremendous writer with force and punch,” had prepared the addresses for Lake and the president, while the State Department had prepared Christopher and Albright’s remarks.⁹³ Both bodies were meant to support administration policy, but the feuding that left Madeleine Albright feeling like Anthony Lake’s student had repercussions beyond personality and into the realm of policy making.⁹⁴ The speeches had been coordinated “but they didn’t write them for each other” and the failure to ensure that the speeches were watertight ensured that while they may have been policy-coordinated, “the rhetorical gap was not closed.”⁹⁵

The difficult birth of Clinton’s Grand Strategy

Having delivered a series of high-profile speeches, the administration recognized that its foreign policy credibility rested on its ability to formulate a credible, coherent strategy with which to address the new geopolitical environment. The administration had dealt with issue-specific policies to address regions and organizations and had formulated approaches to policy through PDDs, but had yet to demonstrate a capacity for linked-up thinking. This process did not constitute a grand strategy, but it was the first step toward the formulation of an overall policy, which began to take shape during the autumn of 1993 and into 1994.

Under the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act, the White House was mandated to produce an annual National Security Strategy Report (NSSR) even if it was naturally inclined to focus on domestic policy. Having espoused policies of Democratic Enlargement, Engagement, Dual Containment, Assertive Multilateralism, and the Tarnoff Doctrine, the NSSR process gave the administration an

opportunity to demonstrate its capacity to produce a strategy for dealing with the world at large. Clearly, there were many competing concepts to amalgamate and the risk was producing a report of “mushy ‘globaloney’ to be fed to Congress.”⁹⁶ This was not a problem unique to the Clinton administration. As Richard K. Betts has noted, the report “has sometimes been a Christmas tree on which every interest groups hangs its foreign policy concerns.” As a result, the NSSR reports “rarely says much that really illuminates national security strategy.”⁹⁷

The Goldwater-Nichols Act was an attempt by Congress to encourage the White House to formulate a coherent national security strategy. While few in the Congress at that time doubted that such a concept existed, what was in doubt “was its focus in terms of values, interests and objectives; its coherence in terms of relating means to ends; its integration in terms of the elements of power; and its time horizon.”⁹⁸ The concern was that too few administrations gave too little serious thought to medium- or long-term foreign policy initiatives and failed to elucidate a coherent strategy with which to engage the world. It was hoped that requiring a written report would focus the attention of the White House and generate horizon-scanning perspectives with regard to foreign policy, which would assist in annual budget planning and resource allocation. Each report was expected to include the worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that were judged vital to its national security; the foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities necessary to deter aggression and to implement the national security strategy; the proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of national power; and the adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy.⁹⁹

However, “even when submitted,” the reports had “generally been late,” noted Senator Strom Thurmond in 1994, who added that the documents had “seldom met the expectations” of those who had drafted the legislation.¹⁰⁰ The NSSR was supposed to be presented to Congress along with the annual budget in February, but exceptions have occurred, usually when the date conflicts with military deployments or a presidential transition. At the start of the Clinton administration, five previous documents had been prepared; two by the Reagan administration in 1987 and 1988 and three by the Bush administration in 1990, 1991, and 1992. Intriguingly, the Clinton administration came to make more use of the NSSR process than any administration before or since, as it sought to present a strategic vision for the role of the United States in the post-Cold War world.

Ultimately going through 21 drafts, the administration’s first National Security Strategy Report was quietly released in July 1994. Elements of the December 1991 Georgetown University Address, the 1993 Inaugural Address, the speeches of September 1993 and the 1994 State of the Union all found their way into the report. As had been the case since the 1991 Georgetown speech, Clinton’s Grand Strategy was based around three

central pillars: national security, prosperity promotion, and democracy promotion. Yet just as Lake's specific policy of Democratic Enlargement blended the apparently opposing policies of Wilsonianism with a post 1945 realism, so now the administration combined Lake's policy of Democratic Enlargement with the State Department's notion of Engagement, a term Lake felt to be "rather wimpy, because of course we were going to be engaged" and which "became a part of it just to make everyone happy."¹⁰¹ The competing policies of Engagement and Democratic Enlargement were brought together to form the 1994 National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. Accordingly, the document appeared to be both a composite and a compromise, a collection of policies developed during the previous 18 months brought together under a title that combined opposing notions. The document's unceremonial unveiling led some to conclude "it was intended to be missed, or it was eminently missable."¹⁰² Clinton may have been searching for a pragmatic policy, but many saw flaws in its principles even before it could be implemented.

The 1994 report revealed a broad approach to foreign policy that was decidedly more muted than Clinton had anticipated earlier in his administration and was seen as little more than "watered-down versions of earlier White House pronouncements."¹⁰³ Gaddis suggested later that such reports "tended to be restatements of existing positions, cobbled together by committees, blandly worded and quickly forgotten. None sparked significant public debate."¹⁰⁴ The report also revealed the bureaucratic challenges involved in its preparation. While Leon Fuerth viewed Clinton's NSC as "an ensemble" in which "there was a collective sense of what tasks we faced, consistent with our views of the world and of the administrations," the NSSR faced the organizational hurdle of the US national security structure.¹⁰⁵ The strategy document had been written within the Defense Directorate of the NSC, but it had to be cleared by every office in State and the Pentagon. This is where Morton Halperin's "Australia Phenomenon" emerged:

What I mean by this is that the Australia desk at the State Department will demand that Australia be mentioned, else they may refuse to send her 450 troops next time we need them in a peace operation. But then once you mention Australia fourteen other desks demand that their countries be included. Then you get a document that simply goes around the world and results in an unfocused policy.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the bureaucratic challenges, personal traits presented problems. In an effort to avoid the open warfare that defined the Carter years, Anthony Lake was eager to "preserve harmony among the key players" within the administration "and if that meant living with decisions that were not pushed to a logical conclusion then that was OK in the name of not upsetting the apple cart." Such an approach was evident in

the eventual production of the National Security Strategy Review, which was devoid of “a lot of sharp edges,” in keeping with Lake’s effort to build “an inclusive, open tent and to good working relationships across the interagency process.”¹⁰⁷

In his statement unveiling the grand strategy, President Clinton insisted that although the Cold War was over, American leadership remained essential. Accordingly, the administration’s policy was founded on three principles: “maintaining a defense capability strong enough to underwrite our commitments credibly,” American economic strength at home and abroad, and the assertion that “the best way to advance America’s interests worldwide is to enlarge the community of democracies and free markets throughout the world.” These were seen as being mutually supportive:

Democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with us to meet security threats and promote sustainable development. Secure nations are more likely to maintain democratic structures and to support free trade. And even with the cold war over, our Nation’s security depends upon the maintenance of military forces that are sufficient to deter diverse threats and, when necessary, fight and win against our adversaries.¹⁰⁸

The document was the foundation of grand strategy for the Clinton years, which remained largely consistent throughout the two terms of the administration. As Lake observed, “It’s always the case that the first one is the most interesting and then the others are always looking for places to amend it.”¹⁰⁹ This proved to be the case as the policy evolved throughout the administration to reveal the pragmatic nature of the Clinton presidency. It was also a tacit acknowledgment that a liberal grand strategy based on the view that “American security and national interests can be best advanced by promoting international order organised around democracy, open markets, multilateral institutions and binding security ties,” would continue to prevail under the new administration.¹¹⁰ Such strategy was not prepared in an intellectual vacuum, however and world events and the reaction to them influenced the drafting of the annual reports. The impact of events was to be found in every incarnation of the US Grand Strategy documents as reality repeatedly forced the administration to trim back its initial ambitions.

Problems of policy and presentation

Having espoused a grand strategy initiative in a series of high-profile speeches and in a fully fledged national security strategy, the Clinton administration may have been forgiven for thinking that their problems

in the area had been solved. Instead, they were only beginning, as time and again their efforts to guide the United States through what Anthony Lake referred to as “a radically new international environment” were hindered by problems as much to do with presentation as with policy.¹¹¹ In December 1993, pollster Stan Greenberg briefed the president on the public perception of the administration’s grand strategy thus far. “Foreign affairs,” he conceded, “is not our strongest area.” Although the signing of the Middle East peace agreement between Israel and the PLO was viewed as an important accomplishment by 67 percent of respondents, other foreign policy initiatives fared less well. Only 46 percent saw the administration’s support for Boris Yeltsin in making the transition to democracy in Russia as an important accomplishment, and less (44%) thought similarly about the passage of NAFTA.¹¹² The following month, following a meeting of academics and administration officials, Greenberg urged the president to “use his educative role to shape people’s understanding of this new world.”¹¹³

As the White House prepared for the State of the Union address in 1994, it courted the opinion of leading historians and foreign policy experts. White House Deputy Communications Director David Dreyer advised Clinton to consider the input of Walter Russell Mead, whose work Dreyer believed, “succeeds brilliantly on history and theme.”¹¹⁴ Mead stressed that the State of the Union “should explain the overall guiding strategy of American foreign policy and put it in the context of the current world situation. Second, it should show how this overall strategic foreign policy supports the overall domestic reform and renewal agenda of the administration.” Mead noted that “it is, frankly, not easy for the average American citizen to see why chasing warlords in Somalia or sending the marines to Haiti would serve his or her interests.” However, he suggested that “if global economic growth is properly appreciated as the strategic centerpiece of your quest for peace and democracy abroad, then your foreign and domestic policies will be seen to be complementary.” Mead observed “Foreign policy is not a diversion from the domestic agenda.” Instead, he suggested, it should be harnessed as “a method to reach the central Administration goal of renewed prosperity for the American middle class.”¹¹⁵

By September 1994, Bob Borstin of the NSC briefed Lake that the president needed to “set out US interests in clear terms for the American people, and to convince the media/foreign policy elite to take a fresh look at the President’s leadership and policies.”¹¹⁶ Doing so was seen as being vital to the future of the administration, as the NSC urged Clinton to remind voters “of what he stands for and what his Presidency is fundamentally about.”¹¹⁷ The administration required “a deep commitment to explain, explain and explain again, in simple and concrete terms, the ideals that drive our overseas agenda and how that agenda relates to life at home.”

It is clear from declassified internal memos that the NSC saw the lack of communications as a serious impediment to the administration's ability to establish a credible grand strategy initiative. The NSC feared that the administration had allowed its critics "to draw old, outdated lines between domestic and foreign policy without making a strong case for why the distinction is no longer valid." Despite this, the Clinton administration failed "to build a strong bridge between national security and international security and to explain why and how in an interdependent world it no longer makes sense to look at foreign policy in isolation from domestic issues and vice versa," despite repeated efforts by the president and his advisers to do so.

These conclusions make it clear that the White House believed its challenges were not in the devising of policy, but in its communication: "Neither those who make foreign policy nor those whose responsibility it is to articulate the policy are consistently doing so in a way that communicates strength, clarity and decisiveness." The administration had a variety of media outlets to utilize, however, and the NSC feared that "too much of that reporting and analysis takes places without an administration point of view. We are, therefore, constantly on the defensive." Much of this was viewed as being a continuation of interdepartmental infighting, as "too much happens at State and Defense without White House knowledge." As a result, "too many journalists now find they can play one agency off another."¹¹⁸

Anthony Lake had attempted to prevent this by ensuring that the NSC wrote the president's national security speeches, a move that both Kissinger and Brzezinski had sought, but which Lake had implemented in what was described by Jeremy Rosner as "the biggest turf grab in White House history." Lake insisted that this move had been made for "simple efficiency" wanting speeches to be drafted "in the NSC by a speechwriter who [knew] the substance behind foreign policy so that you're not then getting behind and trying to fight over nuance."¹¹⁹ This may have taken national security speechwriting away from the White House, but not from the State Department, resulting in a continued lack of policy coordination.

In the wake of the Somali disaster, special assistant to White House Chief of Staff, Roderick K. Von Lipsey, prepared a memo for his boss, Thomas McLarty, highlighting the continuing flaws in the administration's presentation of grand strategy initiatives. Von Lipsey noted that widespread media coverage "insinuates that the administration lacks viable foreign and security policies," and that without "clear and coherent statements of national interest and policy objectives by senior administration officials," the administration's entire grand strategy initiative "is put at risk." Von Lipsey recommended McLarty "provide guidelines or talking points to all cabinet officials which clearly outline our interest in, and policy toward Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti."

Von Lipsey urged McLarty to “convene a working group to define, in plain language, the administration’s overarching foreign and security policy objectives, and . . . relate these objectives to an overall Presidential strategy which includes NAFTA, Health Care Reform, the Crime Bill and Deficit Reduction.”¹²⁰ Once the American public understood the interconnectivity of policy, it was believed, they would fall in line behind the administration. The fact that such a coordinated response had only been unveiled weeks beforehand, however, spoke volumes as to its impact with the American public.

Indeed, the coordinated outreach that Von Lipsey envisioned was rendered less likely by the president’s own actions. Tara Sonenshine and Tom Ross of the NSC argued further that President Clinton “should not be placed in the position of articulating foreign policy on the run. He needs to communicate our foreign policy in carefully structured and dignified settings on matters of great importance.” All too often in his first year in office, President Clinton had addressed policy while literally on the run, as he jogged around Washington. Such impromptu incidents ended, but not before they eroded some of the majesty of the presidency. In their place, the president was urged to deliver “well-crafted speeches, appropriately placed and well-timed,” to ensure that foreign policy issues were dealt with “in a proactive, not reactive manner.”¹²¹

Conclusion: Clashes on the road to grand strategy

The addresses of September 1993 were the tip of an intellectual iceberg that betrayed the different priorities key members of the administration sought to promote. The central themes in the speeches had been Lake’s concept of Democratic Enlargement and Christopher’s policy of Engagement. Despite Leon Fuerth’s insistence that he didn’t “recall any clash between State and the NSC” and that he failed to “see any great distinction between Engagement and Enlargement,” the lack of coordination and differing emphasis revealed clear divisions between personalities and departments. Bill Clinton had campaigned on a promise to strengthen America’s global standing by promoting democratic values, while embracing the need for a continued strong defense—themes of the speeches of September 1993 and the initial NSSR document were intended to espouse.

Having been out of power for a political generation, it was not surprising that Clinton’s foreign policy team had differing views on how best to define grand strategy. However, rather than attempting to coordinate policy, it appeared that there was intense internal competition to define policy. The speeches of September 1993 were intended to convince critics that the White House had a grasp of foreign policy and put an end to accusations

of incompetence in this area. However, rather than heralding the prompt publication of a National Security Strategy Report, the White House became embroiled in a debacle that saw the report delayed until July 1994, during which time Fuerth conceded the administration was “busy wrestling with crocodiles!”¹²² Rather than ushering in a new era of calm, the speeches coincided with a flare up of violence in Somalia and accusations of double standards in Bosnia. Having considered the manner in which policy was devised on the campaign trail and during the Clinton administration's initial months in office, it is vital to consider the manner in which it was implemented under these conditions and the degree to which it adhered to the three central policies espoused in its grand strategy.

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