Boys, James D. "Democracy promotion." *Clinton's Grand Strategy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 211–264. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472528780.ch-006>>.

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CHAPTER SIX

Democracy promotion

From the first days of his presidential campaign, Bill Clinton stressed the importance of democracy promotion as the third element of his grand strategy with which to address the post-Cold War world. This was the most ideological aspect of US Grand Strategy and the most challenging to implement, with its dedication to the spread of democracy, advocacy of human rights, and a commitment to humanitarian assistance. It remained consistent throughout the Clinton administration's time in office, with changes occurring to reflect ongoing operational developments and incidents. The passing of the Cold War enabled the White House to actively promote democracy, as it sought to reinforce the strategic gains made following the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Where once a domino theory existed to explain the spread of communism, now such a process was attempted in reverse, as the Clinton administration sought to ensure that democracy flourished where it had once been forbidden.

Despite having been central to Bill Clinton's foreign policy from his December 1991 speech at Georgetown University until the publication of his administration's final National Security Strategy Review, the concept of democracy promotion become synonymous with his successor, President George W. Bush. Indeed, throughout Clinton's time in office, the concept received underwhelming public attention.¹ Despite this, democracy promotion was a central component of US Grand Strategy for the duration of the Clinton administration as the White House sought to advance the causes of freedom in the post-Cold War world.

Democracy promotion in US history

Just as historical tensions existed regarding the appropriate role for the United States to adopt on the world stage, between concepts of engagement

and relative isolationism, so too has the United States engaged in an historical struggle over the appropriate manner in which to advance concepts of democracy. As a result, "the singularities that America has ascribed to itself throughout its history have produced two contradictory attitudes towards foreign policy."² One attitude maintains the United States should passively act as an example to the world; the other asserts that the nation has an obligation to actively advance the cause of democracy, believing that to do so increased US security.

For the first century of its existence, the United States largely embraced the former role, as advanced by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, avoiding entangling alliances and acting as a global example to be emulated by others. The advice of the Founding Fathers echoed through successive generations, and on July 4, 1821, John Quincy Adams intoned, "wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will [America's] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be." However, he insisted that the United States remain true to the intent of its founders, inasmuch as "she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy."³ In this approach, he was emulating his father, the second president of the United States, who, along with Jefferson, believed that they were "lighting a beacon for mankind; theirs was a great creation, with government based on popular consent and limited under a written constitution."⁴

This passive approach to democratic advocacy encouraged a focus on the North American continent as the United States grew from a collection of 13 former colonies along the Eastern seaboard, to a vast continental power extending all the way to the Pacific. This Westward expansion, implemented in the name of Manifest Destiny, is all too often presented as a domestic excursion into the wilderness and as evidence of a desire to challenge frontiers, both old and new.⁵ Often overlooked is the fact that the territories that were being peopled belonged to other nations: France, Spain, Mexico, not to mention the indigenous tribes of the North American people. The Westward expansion of the United States, taking with it a nascent form of liberal democracy, was arguably as dynamic as any subsequent overseas initiative the United States initiated. Although its foreign policy may have been passive in its first 100 years, American-style democracy was exported to a growing number of states and territories throughout the nineteenth century as the United States cemented its political, cultural, and social hold on the North American continent.

Despite the oft-stated belief that US efforts to export democracy began with President Wilson's intervention in First World War, the engagement in the Philippines during the presidency of William McKinley can perhaps be seen as a more definitive turning point, as the president announced that the nation had a duty to "uplift and civilize and Christianize."⁶ Such a sentiment, with its inherent religious connotations, expressed a

fundamental tenet of developing US foreign policy that reached global proportions in the twentieth century, as democracy itself came to be advocated with a missionary zeal and adopted a religious quality of its own. Where once Christianity was spread far and wide, now democracy was promoted on moral grounds as a tool to confront those nations that posed an existential challenge to the United States. Indeed, for some presidents the distinction between religion and democracy appeared to blur as “the justification of America’s international role [became] messianic: America had an obligation, not to the balance of power, but to spread its principles throughout the world.”⁷ Theodore Roosevelt contributed to this developing approach to foreign intervention, announcing in 1904 that adherence to the Monroe Doctrine “may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.”⁸ However, once President Woodrow Wilson justified US intervention in the First World War on the grounds that “the world must be made safe for democracy,” Republicans and Democrats embraced the approach, ensuring democracy promotion became the unifying principle at the heart of the Henry Luce’s American Century.

In the 1940s, the Truman administration initiated a series of policy initiatives, including those espoused in NSC-68, to ensure the protection of democracy from those forces that threatened to subvert it. In the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration advocated a policy of Rollback to defend democracy and supported coups in Iran and Guatemala. In 1961, President Kennedy announced his intentions to defend freedom and democracy to the world in his inauguration as his administration committed itself to the “survival and the success of liberty.”⁹ In June 1982, President Reagan addressed the British Parliament and called for a “crusade for freedom,” and a “campaign for democratic development.”¹⁰ Reagan became the first Republican president to “emphatically . . . embrace the essential tenets of liberal democratic internationalism, or what might be called Wilsonianism,” as he sought to promote democracy in Nicaragua and Afghanistan.¹¹ In an intriguing development, it became apparent that “Wilson the idealist and Reagan the realist nonetheless shared a common interest in the promotion of global democracy.”¹²

Reagan’s successor, George H. W. Bush, not known for his embrace of “the vision thing,” could still muster the rhetoric and the forces to continue this approach.¹³ Addressing the UN General Assembly in October 1990, President Bush insisted that “calls for democracy and human rights are being reborn everywhere,” which he felt promised hopes “for a more stable, more peaceful, more prosperous world.”¹⁴ Bush reiterated this in September 1991, as he insisted, “as democracy flourishes, so does the opportunity for a third historical breakthrough: international cooperation.”¹⁵ As the president who initiated a land war in the Persian Gulf to expel Saddam from Kuwait in the name of liberty, if not democracy, Bush noted that

the United States was “a nation of rock-solid realism and clear-eyed idealism.”¹⁶

The Bush administration's 1991 National Security Strategy concluded that a new era was evolving: “A truly global community is being formed, vindicating our democratic values.” The administration insisted that it planned to “increase our efforts to clarify what America has to contribute to the solution of global problems—and to drive home democracy's place in this process.”¹⁷ The rhetorical promotion of democracy reached its apex in George W. Bush's second inaugural address, as the president announced, “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world.”¹⁸ The manner in which this was attempted, however, brought US intentions into question, as the initiation of what David C. Henrickson referred to as “Wilsonianism in boots,” ensured that what the United States saw as benevolence was disputed far and wide.¹⁹

Defining democracy

In a political environment where bipartisanship is a rare commodity, the promotion of democracy has often been a rallying point for politicians of varying backgrounds, though disagreements have arisen over its implementation and ideological content. While the concept of promoting democratic values may be readily agreed upon, conceptions of what constitutes “democracy” differ widely, both in defining the term and in its implementation. Kissinger noted that the word “democracy” is often misapplied and is “often invoked to legitimise whoever is in power.”²⁰ Clearly, the United States has identified its own brand of “liberal democracy” as a goal to be pursued, but this has also been poorly defined.²¹ Michael Foley has suggested that American democracy is “a qualitatively exceptional form of democracy whose idiosyncratic nature is derived from the peculiarities of America itself.”²²

Democracy, as a political concept and a governing reality, has come a long way since 1776. As Michael Cox has noted, “one of the hidden and still understudied themes of nineteenth century politics is the extent to which negative images of American democracy were developed by elites across the European continent to try to justify their continued rule.”²³ Far from being seen as an ideal, democracy was viewed as a threat to the status quo and dangerous to property rights. In 1861, the English educationalist Matthew Arnold posed the great, unanswerably question, “What influence may help us to prevent the English people from becoming, with the growth of democracy, Americanized?”²⁴

The practicalities of democracy promotion

The American experience did much to alter perceptions of democracy and by the dawn of the twentieth century it was “taken for granted” that liberal democracies were “showing the way toward the good life in the good society.” Indeed, it was suggested that “few had any doubts of the eventual, but certain, progress of all mankind toward more democracy and a wider freedom.”²⁵ Having embraced, and as far as it was concerned, “perfected” democracy, the United States now felt that what worked at home could and perhaps should, be made to work elsewhere. Such an approach, however, presented several challenges. Firstly, as de Tocquville observed, “the great advantage of the Americans is that they have arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution.” Instead, they were “born equal instead of becoming so.”²⁶ As Walter Lippmann noted several centuries later, “merely to enfranchise the voters, even to give them a true representation, will not in itself establish self government; it may just as well lead . . . to a new form of absolute state, a self-perpetuating oligarchy.”²⁷

Secondly, there was a hubristic quality to the assertion that a political system that had been embraced by a nation of immigrants, fleeing persecution, and oppression by vested interests would be embraced by the nations that had been left in the first place. There was, perhaps, a poetic quality to such thinking, but that was not going to make it any more palatable to rulers, despots, monarchs, and tyrants. Kennan critiqued such efforts to “transpose the Anglo-Saxon concept of individual law into the international field and to make it applicable to governments as it is applicable at home to individuals.” This, he argued, smacked of naivety. “People are unable to understand that what might have been possible for the thirteen colonies in a given set of circumstances might not be possible in the wider international field.”²⁸

Thirdly, was the matter of timescales. As Lippmann noted, “democracy is not the creation of abstract theorists. It is the creation of men who step by step though centuries of disorder established a regime of order.”²⁹ The constitutionally prescribed political timescales of American life, with elections every 2 years, do not reward careful, thought-out commitments to long-term initiatives. Instead, they reward short-term, easy fixes, designed to bring fast results with minimal expense and low casualties. Presidents, clearly, “do not pursue policy in a vacuum.”³⁰ Their policies are in part dependent on election cycles, public support for the administration, and party control of Congress.

This has been exacerbated by the rise of 24-hour media and the explosion of social network platforms, all desperate for sensational stories and unlikely or unwilling to dwell on policy initiatives that are not high

impact or dynamic in nature. Such a political and cultural environment appears ill-placed for long-term ideological projects designed to instill democracy in foreign lands. Brzezinski observed that “the spread of democracy is generally congenial to global peace”; however, the track record of American patience in regard to such overseas endeavors is not encouraging, as events in Somalia demonstrated.³¹ Creating a political system that “protects freedom and sustains democracy . . . is hard work.” It had not occurred overnight in the United States, but instead had taken 12 years, “from its Declaration of Independence in 1776 to ratification of its Constitution in 1788, to have a functional government.”³²

Finally, there remained the question over the rationale for such an enterprise. Was democracy promotion the benign act of a gentle, peace-loving superpower? Was it true, as Brzezinski insisted, that the United States merely “propagated a shared aspiration; it did not seek to impose its own political culture,” or was this a naive interpretation of continuing efforts to remake the world in America’s own self-image?³³ Was it “an unnecessary intrusion into the otherwise normal conduct of diplomatic relations,” or instead “part of a practical strategy designed to advance American national interests?”³⁴

All too often there appeared to be a stunning naivety to the concept of democracy promotion that emanated from Washington, as though having been the world’s original constitutional democracy granted a sense of omnipotence or omniscience in regard to how best to govern far away lands. Despotism equated to evil in the minds of American policy makers and evil was portrayed as a threat to the American way of life that had to be extinguished. Such a concept was apparent in 1913 when the US Ambassador to London, Walter Page, advised the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey that the United States intended to “continue to shoot men . . . till they learn to vote and to rule themselves.”³⁵ Such a stance reveals the contradiction in the American position, for “in a democracy the opposition not only is tolerated as constitutional but must be maintained because it is in fact indispensable. The democratic system cannot be operated without effective opposition.”³⁶ Historically, therefore, the United States had not promoted nor exported democracy uniformly. With his victory in 1992, Bill Clinton had an opportunity to determine if the United States could extol the virtues of democracy any more equally and in a greater diversity of locations, in the new post-Cold War world.³⁷

Promoting democracy in the Clinton administration

Bill Clinton identified the promotion of democracy as a key component of his grand strategy as early as December 1991. Speaking at Georgetown

University, Governor Clinton noted that “the defense of freedom and the promotion of democracy around the world aren’t merely a reflection of our deepest values. They are vital to our national interests.” Recognizing the calls to reduce defense spending, as well as the historic opportunity that existed to buttress the strategic gains made following the end of the Cold War, he insisted “as we restructure our military forces, we must reinforce the powerful global movement toward democracy.”³⁸ Clinton’s dedication to democracy promotion “stayed the course,” during his 8 years in office, as the president “returned to the theme again and again.”³⁹ As Clinton stated explicitly in 1997, democracy promotion was “one of the primary foreign policy objectives” of his administration, and remained so for the duration of his presidency.⁴⁰

Anthony Lake was central to this effort and his philosophical approach to foreign policy was a strong influence on the president. Lake reiterated the administration’s stance on democracy promotion in September 1993, insisting it was a policy that “protects our interests and security,” and which “reflects values that are both American and universal.” The opportunity existed, Lake observed, to “mobilize our nation in order to enlarge democracy, enlarge markets, and enlarge our future.”⁴¹ Lake heavily influenced the content and tone of US Grand Strategy in the first term and, while it may not have been everything he hoped for, he set the course for the administration’s entire foreign policy.

Even Secretary of State Christopher, whose support for Lake’s Democratic Enlargement policy was less than total, conceded in his appearance before Congress in March 1993 that the United States should “embrace and promote this process by sustained support for democratic institution-building in the former Soviet bloc and elsewhere. And we should by collective engagement, working in partnership with other great democracies, promote democracy around the globe.”⁴² Twelve days later, speaking in Chicago, he reiterated that “by helping promote democracy . . . we are also making a strategic investment in our nation’s security.”⁴³ Stuart Eizenstat, Under-Secretary of Commerce for International Trade noted in 1994, “Anthony Lake’s enlargement strategy makes perfect sense. In the Cold War the concept was Containment, now it is to enlarge the scope of democracy. It’s all about widening market access.”⁴⁴ The combination of increasing access to markets and democracy promotion formed the basis of Lake’s geostrategic outlook and was central to the Clinton administration’s grand strategy.

Democracy promotion supported a key aspect of the entire grand strategy, which was to prevent a reversion to less open forms of government. Al Gore’s national security adviser, Leon Fuerth, referred to the concept in terms of a Ratchet, designed to prevent reversals and ensure that, at the very least, democracy was maintained and expanded where possible. Democracy promotion provided the ideological rationale for this, as the administration observed that the number of states embracing democracy

and rejecting authoritarian regimes was “one of the most gratifying and encouraging developments of the past fifteen years.” In language that remained consistent throughout its first term, the administration conceded that while such advances were not guaranteed, grand strategy needed to address “the consolidation of those regimes and a broadening of their commitment to democracy.” To achieve this, Clinton’s Grand Strategy was committed to work “with new democratic states to help preserve them as democracies committed to free markets and respect for human rights.”⁴⁵ The concept of democratic promotion bore the characteristics of American idealism, but the administration was eager to promote the policy as being more than just ideologically driven.

In this regard, democracy promotion, the final tenant of Clinton’s Grand Strategy, complemented the emphasis on national security and prosperity promotion in content, intent, and tone. The Clinton administration presented Lake’s Wilsonian-inspired concept as an indication of its commitment to democratic principles, but constantly stressed its real world, Realpolitik attributes. “In nearly every major foreign policy address they cite a host of ways that the spread of democracy abroad advances ‘hard’ U.S. security and economic interests, from reducing the chances of war to decreasing terrorism.”⁴⁶ Clinton’s Grand Strategy entailed a pragmatic embrace of democracy promotion, designed to ensure not only that democratic states survived and thrived, but also that they were accompanied by open markets, receptive to American goods and services.

Bureaucratic politics and democracy promotion

Although democracy promotion had been advocated, and in some cases actively pursued, by previous administrations, the Clinton White House sought to institutionalize the practice to an extent not previously attempted.⁴⁷ In an effort to avoid suggestions that the policy was beholden to any single individual or their department, the administration distributed responsibility for democracy promotion across the executive branch of government. At the State Department, the Clinton administration created the role of Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, a position initially held by Tim Wirth (1994–1997).⁴⁸ It also established the role of Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, in a role that built upon a position that President Carter had created in 1976, placing democracy promotion front and center.⁴⁹ The remit of the National Security Council was expanded to accommodate an office for democracy affairs and a new position of Assistant Secretary for Democracy and Peacekeeping was strongly considered over at the Pentagon.

In addition to the specific roles created at the NSC and the State Department, the Clinton administration also tasked the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor with overseeing an Inter-agency Working Group on Democracy, designed to coordinate programs and “reorganize the international affairs budget around strategic priorities.”⁵⁰ This overarching, interagency approach reflected Secretary of State-designate Warren Christopher’s announcement at his Senate confirmation hearings that “a strategic approach to promoting democracy requires that we coordinate all our leverage, including trade, economic and security assistance, and debt relief.”⁵¹ Having recognized the need for a coordinated effort, the administration’s real challenge came in attempting to implement it within a federal bureaucracy that had historically proved notoriously change-averse.

The administration appointed USAID as the public face of its efforts to provide assistance to pro-democracy groups as part of its ongoing grand strategy initiatives. Since 1961, USAID had focused on issues of global economic and social development. During the Reagan administration, this role was expanded to incorporate a variety of roles, including the oversight of elections, particularly in the Western hemisphere.⁵² With the end of the Cold War, USAID launched the Democracy Initiative in December 1990, placing the promotion of democracy at the forefront of its efforts. With the election of Bill Clinton, USAID became the logical agency to front the new attempt to promote democracy as an element of US Grand Strategy.

Democracy assistance programs benefited greatly as part of Clinton’s Grand Strategy initiative, as spending increased from \$100 million annually in 1990 to more than \$700 million by 2000.⁵³ It was estimated that USAID spent \$400 million on democracy assistance programs during FY 1994, as expenditure for USAID increased rapidly under the Clinton administration, rising from \$5.3 million in 1990 to \$119 million by 1994 for democratic governance programs in Africa.⁵⁴

Democracy promotion, however, was not immune to domestic politics, especially following the 1994 mid-term elections. A key initiative of the administration was passage of the proposed the Peace, Prosperity and Democracy Act of 1994 (PPDA) to replace the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. The initiative faltered however, as the new Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms, took offence at the levels of overseas aid: “The foreign aid program has spent an estimated \$2 trillion of the American taxpayers’ money, much of it going down foreign rat holes, to countries that constantly oppose the United States in the United Nations, and many reject concepts of freedom. We must stop this stupid business of giving away the taxpayers’ money willy-nilly.”⁵⁵ As the National Security Strategy of 1996 made clear, however, “Promoting democracy does more than foster our ideals. It advances our interests . . . Democracies create free markets that offer economic

opportunity, make for more reliable trading partners and are far less likely to wage war on one another.”⁵⁶ In such pronouncements, the Democratic Peace concept loomed large and demonstrated the inherent pragmatism that sat alongside idealism in the Clinton White House.

The Clinton administration's democracy promotion concept was imbued with national self-interest, concealed by a veneer of idealism, reflecting Anthony Lake's neo-Wilsonian approach to policy. “Democracy,” insisted Lake, was “at once the foundation and the purpose of the international structures we must build.”⁵⁷ The administration remained steadfast in its insistence that democracy promotion was vital not only to overseas recipients, but also to the United States as well, for despite the Wilsonian aspect to the principle, there was more than idealism at stake: “All of America's strategic interests—from promoting prosperity at home, to checking global threats abroad before they threaten our territory—are served by enlarging the community of democratic and free market nations.”⁵⁸ The relationship between the three elements of the strategy was essential, not only to the program's success but also to any effort to comprehend the philosophical approach that led to its creation.

In 1991, Morton Halperin wrote in *Foreign Policy*, “When a people attempt to hold free elections and establish a constitutional democracy, the United States and the international community should not only assist but should guarantee the result.”⁵⁹ Clinton's Grand Strategy incorporated Halperin's prescription, noting, “Domestic renewal will not succeed if we fail to engage abroad in foreign markets, to promote democracy in key countries and to counter and contain emerging threats.”⁶⁰ However, those who believed that the United States would fight to ensure the survival and the success of liberty the world over had severely misread the document. This was a pragmatic policy for a pragmatic administration: “We must focus our efforts where we have the most leverage. And our efforts must be demanded driven—they must focus on nations where people are pushing for reform or have already secured it.”⁶¹

Just as this was not an ideological struggle, neither was it unilateral, or designed to stand apart from the other components of grand strategy. It consistently recognized that the United States needed to aid “nations strengthen the pillars of civil society, improve their market institutions and fight corruption and political discontent through practices of good governance.”⁶² The policy recognized that “the first element of our democracy strategy is to work with the other democracies of the world and to improve our cooperation with them on security and economic issues. We also seek their support in enlarging the realm of democratic nations.”⁶³ Clinton's strategy of democracy promotion, therefore, complemented the national security and prosperity promotion aspects of grand strategy and was a tool with which to cement US foreign initiatives into a growing number of multiregional institutions. Hence, throughout the administration, its policy spoke of helping to “staunch democratic reversals” in Haiti, Guatemala, and Nigeria and of providing democracies

with “the fullest benefits of integration into foreign markets,” which partly explained “why NAFTA and the GATT rank so high on our agenda.”⁶⁴

This may not have been a democratic crusade, but into the second term it remained expansive and idealist in nature, while acknowledging the need to adopt a tough stance when faced with political realities. The 1997 and 1998 grand strategy reports noted that the United States could not seek to export democracy unilaterally and sought “international support in helping strengthen democratic and free market institutions and norms in countries making the transition from closed to open societies.” The administration continued to insist that “This commitment to see freedom and respect for human rights take hold is not only just, but pragmatic, for strengthened democratic institutions benefit the US and the world.” The 1997 and 1998 reports emphasized US efforts to aid foreign nations “strengthen the pillars of civil society, supporting administration of justice and rule of law programs, assisting the development of democratic civil-military relations and providing human rights training to foreign police and security forces.” The policy interaction that was central in the first term remained, as the second-term strategy insisted that the United States “must seek to improve their market institutions and fight corruption and political discontent by encouraging good governance practices.”⁶⁵ Despite changes to the national security team, the goal of exporting democracy and open markets remained constant.

The Clinton administration sought to stress the success that democracy had enjoyed during its tenure in the White House, noting how the concept, “when allowed to be freely shared, can spread widely and rapidly, enhancing the security of all nations.” However, the grand strategy stressed that moving forward, the United States “must focus on strengthening the commitment and capacity of nations to implement democratic reforms, protect human rights, fight corruption and increase transparency in government,” an initiative exemplified by the Warsaw Declaration of June 2000 in which 106 countries embraced a criteria for democracy and pledged to help each other remain on the democratic path.⁶⁶ Clearly, therefore, this was to be a multilateral mission that, by its very nature, depended on the assistance of other nations and organizations for its success, including the United Nations. Despite congressional concerns over command and control during troop deployment, the United Nations remained the organization of choice for addressing a key aspect of democracy promotion: human rights.

Promoting human rights

The appointment of former Carter administration officials such as Anthony Lake, Warren Christopher, and Madeleine Albright guaranteed that an ethical dimension was intrinsic to Clinton’s Grand Strategy, and this was most evident in its embrace of human rights. Grand strategy insisted

the United States must “redouble” its efforts to guarantee basic human rights “on a global basis.”⁶⁷ This aspect, as with all elements of the grand strategy, was designed to be mutually reinforcing, as the administration sought to “increase respect for fundamental human rights in all states and encourage an evolution to democracy,” not universally, but “where that is possible.”⁶⁸ The White House was adamant that “the more that democracy and political and economic liberalisation take hold in the world, particularly in countries of geo-strategic importance to us, the safer our nation is likely to be.”⁶⁹ Markets and democracy formed the basis of Anthony Lake’s geostrategic outlook and this was repeatedly exemplified in the administration’s grand strategy.

Despite the idealistic nature of many aspects of the initiative, the administration was adamant that it not be misunderstood: “The core of our strategy is to help democracy and markets expand and survive,” it reported. This would not occur everywhere, but where the United States had “the strongest security concerns and where we can make the greatest difference,” as the administration attempted to blend idealism with a realist approach to policy implementation.⁷⁰ There were to be no flights of fancy, no efforts to liberate Cuba or Iran or sustained effort to hold China to account over its human rights abuses. The administration stressed that “the continued emergence of China as a great power that is stable politically and open economically, that respects human rights and the rule of law and that becomes a full partner in building a secure international order, is profoundly in America’s interest and in the world’s interest.”⁷¹ The White House was determined to clarify that “this is not a democratic crusade.” It was, instead, “a pragmatic commitment to see freedom take hold where that will help us most.”⁷² In this regard, the administration drew a bold distinction between its efforts and the rhetorical high point of the Cold War when Clinton’s political hero had asserted America’s intention to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” Such pledges were now a thing of the past.

The Kennedy legend had served Clinton’s purposes during the campaign, but in office, Clinton embraced Rooseveltian pragmatism over Kennedyesque romanticism. Gone was any pledge to “those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery.” No longer would the United States “pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves,” despite Kennedy’s promise to do so “for whatever period is required.”⁷³ The Clinton administration was eager to champion its success in lobbying for the reaffirmation of the universality of human rights at a 1993 United Nations Conference and the establishment of a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, US priorities had changed considerably since 1961 as the Clinton administration insisted, “we must focus our efforts where we have the most leverage.”⁷⁴ Where this sentiment left Kennedy’s assertion that “a free society [that] cannot

help the many who are poor . . . [could not] save the few who are rich,” remained unaddressed.⁷⁵

Deep into the second term, Clinton’s Grand Strategy continued “to press for political liberalization and respect for basic human rights worldwide, including in countries that continue to defy democratic advances.”⁷⁶ Changes were apparent, however, as the administration advocated bilateral as well as multilateral action to ensure adherence to human rights and democratic principles.⁷⁷ The insertion of bilateral options was indicative of a sense of frustration within the administration in regard to the United Nations that had grown since the Somali operation and the difficulties in enacting policy in Bosnia due to Russia’s veto on the Security Council. With a more robust second-term foreign policy team came a change in language and tone that was subtler than that of the George W. Bush administration in 2001, but which was determined not to be stymied by international prevarication in the face of US determination to act.

As the second term drew to a close, Clinton’s Grand Strategy reiterated the need to work bilaterally and with international organizations, to promote “universal adherence to democratic principles and international standards of human rights.” The policy noted the challenges posed by ethnic conflict, insisting that “innocent civilians should not be subject to forcible relocation or slaughter because of their religious, ethnic, racial, or tribal heritage,” as such a situation constituted “a grave violation of universal human rights.”⁷⁸ In 2000, US Grand Strategy went further, insisting that “when this occurs, the intersection of our values and national interests make it imperative,” that the United States “work to strengthen the capacity of the international community to prevent and, whenever possible, stop outbreaks of mass killing and displacement.”⁷⁹

In the second term, US Grand Strategy reflected a traditional American philosophy in relation to democracy promotion and human rights advocacy. The administration continued to “encourage governments to not return people to countries where they face persecution—to provide asylum as appropriate, to offer temporary protection to persons fleeing situations of conflict or generalized human rights abuses.”⁸⁰ In addition to previous years, the 2000 policy argued that by providing humanitarian assistance, US Grand Strategy was “in keeping with our values and objective of promoting democracy and human rights.”⁸¹

Humanitarian assistance

Clinton’s Grand Strategy was adamant that US global leadership had never been more important and insisted that the values that had previously been threatened by imperialism, fascism, and communism remained at risk in the post-Cold War world. As a result, its democracy promotion and human

rights initiatives were complemented by humanitarian assistance programs, “designed to alleviate human suffering and to pave the way for progress towards establishing democratic regimes with a commitment to respect for human rights and appropriate strategies for economic development.”⁸² US Grand Strategy revealed the administration’s priorities for the world at large: “to secure the peace won in the Cold War against those who would still deny people their human rights, terrorists who threaten innocents and pariah states who choose repression and extremism over openness and moderation.”⁸³ The policy was primarily aimed at stemming the potential for international tensions that were the by-product of forced population migration and refugee flows. The dilemma for the Clinton White House was how to implement such policies and how much political capital to expend to ensure their success?

This was a dilemma for foreign policy in general, but particularly so with regard to humanitarian assistance, which in itself posed no direct challenge to US interests and so made justifying expenditure all the more difficult. It was also a policy that depended on long-term multilateral cooperation with a range of agencies including the International Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Importantly, throughout the first term, the administration repeatedly committed to providing “appropriate financial support” to strengthen such entities and their missions, but stopped short of committing human resources in all instances. The administration sought to engage in “voluntary repatriation of refugees,” in a way that took into account the “human rights concerns as well as the economic conditions that may have driven them out in the first place,” ensuring that, once again, economic considerations found their way to the heart of grand strategy.

Espousing policy in this area was also problematic due to the track record of events during the first term. The administration could address humanitarian assistance in the abstract and insist that “helping refugees return to their homes in Mozambique, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia and Guatemala” was a high priority, but its actions in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia called into question the commitment to the policy.⁸⁴ The unfortunate disconnect between policy development and its execution, therefore, raised ongoing questions about the implementation of Clinton’s Grand Strategy as anything more than a philosophical exercise. Until the successful application of humanitarian policies in Haiti and Bosnia, grand strategy in this regard remained entirely theoretical, with sweeping assertions and promises of commitment, which appeared hollow in the face of hesitancy overseas. The administration’s case was not aided by its glossing over of incidents that reflected poorly on the United States and its tendency to focus on areas where it could highlight relatively minor successes.

Having chosen initially not to intervene in Rwanda and Bosnia, US Grand Strategy sought to leverage credibility by highlighting the American lead “in

assisting the UN to set up international tribunals to enforce accountability for the war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda.”⁸⁵ Suffice to say, this appeared to many to be too little, too late for the people of the Balkans or Rwanda. However, to govern is to make choices and as defined by its grand strategy, Rwanda remained outside the US sphere of interest, since it had no strategic importance and appeared incapable of sustaining a viable middle class, necessary for the implementation of democracy promotion. The Clinton administration was also still in the process of withdrawing from Somalia, making another African deployment politically untenable. The administration had no interest or intention in intervening in Rwanda, despite Anthony Lake’s personal interest in Africa.

However, the White House was torn on the issue, leading the NSC’s legal adviser, Alan J. Kreczko, to advise the NSC’s Senior Director for African Affairs that, “concluding that genocide has occurred/is occurring in Rwanda does not create a legal obligation to take particular action to stop it. (Human rights groups have argued to the contrary, saying failure to act makes one legally responsible as an accomplice. We would not agree.)” Kreczko conceded that “making such a determination will increase political pressure to do something about it.”⁸⁶ Kreczko concluded that the drawdown of US forces in Rwanda had been a “very bad process, unnecessarily resorted to, with risk of embarrassing the POTUS if repeated.”⁸⁷

Despite the apparent disconnect between policy and practice, as its second term began, the Clinton administration continued to stress that its grand strategy was rooted in “efforts to promote democracy and human rights are complemented by our humanitarian assistance programs,” which were “designed to alleviate human suffering, to help establish democratic regimes that respect human rights and to pursue appropriate strategies for economic development.”⁸⁸ Not only was this seen as the morally correct course of action, but the most pragmatic, since it enabled the United States “to help prevent humanitarian disasters with far more significant resource implications.” Pragmatism continued to define Clinton’s Grand Strategy, a fact that the documentation makes explicit: “Supporting the global movement toward democracy requires a pragmatic and long-term effort focused on both values and institutions.”⁸⁹ This policy required the United States to work in partnership with other nations, supranational entities, private firms, and nongovernmental organizations. This was a reflection of the administration’s early embrace of globalization and its appreciation that the United States could not lead in all instances.

Clinton’s Grand Strategy continued to stress a determination to work both multilaterally and bilaterally to protect vulnerable members of society. Where the first-term reports spoke in generalities, the strategy from 1998 was more direct and took issue with specific nations, such as Russia and China, which the administration pledged to “continue to work with” in an

ongoing effort “to combat religious persecution.”⁹⁰ From 1999, religious freedom was advanced as “one of the highest concerns in our foreign policy,” since “freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a bedrock issue for the American people.” The president signed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, to advance religious freedom and counter religious persecution. In September 1999, the administration released a 1,100-page document covering the status of religious freedom in 194 countries, as the first phase of the act. Finally, in October 2000, the administration “designated and sanctioned the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, and the Milosevic regime in Serbia as ‘countries of particular concern’ for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”⁹¹ Such concerns were expressed directly to the Chinese leadership during Clinton’s 1998 state visit when he rebuked President Jiang Zemin over the deaths in Tiananmen Square, insisting that “for all of our agreements, we still disagree about the meaning of what happened then. I believe and the American people believe that the use of force and the tragic loss of life was wrong.”⁹²

Pragmatism remained central to an appreciation of the administration’s approach to democracy promotion and humanitarian assistance. The White House had a philosophical commitment to both, but in all cases it adopted a far more realist approach than its critics conceded or its supporters cared to admit. It was an approach that granted room to maneuver but which garnered few admirers due to its ideological flexibility. In a world in flux, however, such an approach appeared eminently logical, especially at a time when foreign affairs were far from the minds of the American electorate. Every potential intervention and every opportunity to offer humanitarian assistance was addressed on its merits, since “sometimes collective military action is both appropriate and feasible and necessary.”⁹³ However, “sometimes concerted economic and political pressure, combined with diplomacy, is a better answer.”⁹⁴ Joined up policy coordination was vital and “all public diplomacy and international information efforts [must] be coordinated and integrated into our foreign and national security policy-making process.” As the administration prepared to leave the White House, it noted that at times “the imperative for action” would be “much less clear” and that “The United States and other countries cannot respond to every humanitarian crisis in the world.”⁹⁵ Pragmatism, therefore, defined the administration until the very end.

The global implementation of democracy promotion

Clinton’s Grand Strategy reflected the belief that security, economics, and democracy were “mutually supportive” and self-sustaining: an

improving economic climate in newly democratic states may lead to improved international cooperation and create new markets for US exports. These policies were advocated on the principle that “secure nations are more likely to support free trade and maintain democratic structures . . . democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with the US to meet security threats and promote sustainable development.”⁹⁶ They also aided in “protecting the lives and personal safety of Americans . . . and providing for the well-being and prosperity of our nation.”⁹⁷ The pragmatism that defined Clinton’s Grand Strategy was present in its global implementation of democracy promotion, as Lake insisted, “we are not starry eyed about the prospects for democracy—it will not take hold everywhere. But we know that the larger the pool of democracies, the better off we will be.”⁹⁸ However, there remained the contentious question of how best to execute such policies.

In retrospect, the “uneven nature” of the administration’s implementation of democracy promotion was “striking,” as its focus ranged “from serious engagement to almost complete disinterest.”⁹⁹ However, in language that remained consistent throughout its 8 years in office, the Clinton administration recognized as early as 1994 that attempts to consolidate democracy and markets must be “as varied as the nations involved.” It was certain, however, that there were “common elements.” The administration presented its grand strategy as a bespoke policy, reflecting the challenges and opportunities of the era: each region was assessed in terms of its needs, status, and capacity to implement the policy as the administration sought to ensure its approach was “tailored to their unique challenges and opportunities.”¹⁰⁰

The Pacific Rim/China

In its attempt to rationalize the global implementation of its grand strategy, the Clinton administration was loathed to accept that certain areas of the world were less receptive to democratic reform than others. However, throughout the first term, US Grand Strategy in China and the Pacific Rim remained consistent. “Nowhere,” the administration insisted, were “the strands of our three-pronged strategy more intertwined, nor is the need for continued US engagement more evident.” However, while the White House wished to support what it saw as “the wave of democratic reform sweeping the region,” it found this difficult to implement during its time in office. The administration recognized that its grand strategy needed to be flexible to accommodate regional differences, acknowledging that Western concepts of democracy and social behavior differed greatly from those in Asia. This presented challenges not only in implementing

political reform, but also in terms of the physiological barriers involved in changing attitudes:

Some have argued that democracy is somehow unsuited for Asia or at least for some Asian nations—that human rights are relative and that they simply mask Western culturalism and imperialism. These voices are wrong. It is not Western imperialism, but the aspirations of Asian peoples themselves that explain the growing number of democracies and the growing strength of democracy movements everywhere in Asia. It is an insult to the spirit, the hopes, and the dreams of the people who live and struggle in those countries to assert otherwise.

In an effort to resolve the chasm between the policy of democracy promotion and its actual implementation, the administration stressed that “each nation must find its own form of democracy.” This pragmatic approach, however, left the administration open to charges of double standards, but the alternative would have been an inflexible, seemingly intolerant foreign policy, offensive to many parts of the world and difficult, if not impossible, to implement. To many, however, this appeared to be an easy way out of an impossible dilemma and raised doubts over the administration’s ability to face hard decisions and stand by them. The White House insisted, however, that there was “no cultural justification for torture or tyranny,” and “refused to let repression cloak itself in moral relativism.” Democracy and human rights, it stressed, were “universal yearnings and universal norms” and pledged to “continue to press respect for human rights in countries as diverse as China and Burma.”¹⁰¹

The Clinton administration’s decision to separate China’s MFN status from its record on human rights was of vital significance in the region and reflected the financial motivations inherent in the grand strategy initiative. The administration presented this as an attempt to improve relations, but the decision proved to be one of the most significant of Clinton’s time in office and revealed a move away from an initial idealism to a more pragmatic approach to world affairs. Whereas President Woodrow Wilson made the world safe for democracy, Clinton sought to make the world safe for commerce, as human rights took a secondary role to the promotion of trade.

The second-term grand strategy documentation was driven more by events than philosophy. In regard to East Asia and the Pacific, it focused heavily upon events that had transpired in Indonesia, East Timor, and Burma. It continued to argue against what it referred to as “cultural imperialism” by refusing to accept that “democracy is unsuited for Asia or at least for some Asian nations [and] that human rights are relative.”¹⁰² The democracy promotion aspect of US Grand Strategy in Asia during Clinton’s second term sought to focus upon “cementing America’s role as a stabilizing force in a more integrated Asia Pacific region”¹⁰³ by continuing

to stress the inherent linkage between security, economics, and democracy, insisting that the United States “continue to support the democratic aspirations of Asian/Pacific peoples and to promote respect for human rights.”¹⁰⁴ In its dealings with the Pacific Rim nations, the Clinton policy of Engagement and Enlargement can be seen to have combined the key tenets of democracy promotion, military preparedness, and prosperity promotion. However, such an approach was not tied to the Pacific Rim alone. The administration was at pains to define Engagement and Enlargement as a true global policy, one capable of replacing Containment for a new geopolitical age.

The Western hemisphere

If China and much of Asia presented a series of seemingly endless challenges, then the Western hemisphere appeared to be a very different proposition and was seen as “a fertile field for a strategy of Engagement and Enlargement.”¹⁰⁵ Much had changed since the turbulent era of the 1960s–1980s, as the continent’s rulers were turning increasingly democratic. The administration believed that what it defined as being “the unprecedented triumph of democracy,” in the region presented “an unparalleled opportunity to secure the benefits of peace and stability” throughout the hemisphere.¹⁰⁶ The administration saw great hope in the fact that “the nations of the Western hemisphere have proclaimed their commitment to democratic regimes and the collective responsibility of the nations of the Organization of American States to respond to threats to democracy.”¹⁰⁷

However, Cuba remained a particular blot on the hemispheric landscape. The administration’s efforts to support the restoration of democracy in Haiti enabled the White House to boast that, partly due to its action, Cuba remained the only nondemocratic state in the region. It acknowledged, however, that it remained “committed to extending democracy to the handful of remaining outposts where the region’s people are not free. The Cuban Democracy Act remains the framework for our policy toward Cuba; our goal is the peaceful reestablishment of democratic governance for the people of Cuba.”¹⁰⁸

The Castro regime, like that of Saddam, was not prioritized. Successive American administration’s had pledged to end Castro’s time in power and had left office certain only in the knowledge that they had failed to do so. With the demise of the Soviet Union, Cuba had lost its international sponsor, as had the nations of Eastern Europe, and while the tide of democracy had not yet reached Cuban shores, it was deemed realistic to expect that it would ultimately do so. Until then, Cuba offered nothing in regard to the national security framework that Engagement and Enlargement was

defining. It posed no threat to the United States; it was not initiating plans for democratic governance; and there were no signs of a market economy developing in the near future. US Grand Strategy was committed to the "peaceful establishment of democratic governance for the people of Cuba," a move that saw development in October 1995, when the United States took steps to "promote the cause of peaceful change in Cuba." These included tightening the economic embargo and "reaching out to nongovernmental organizations, churches, human rights groups and other elements of Cuba's civil society," in an attempt to "strengthen the agents of peaceful change."¹⁰⁹

Having previously been a political victim of migration from Cuba while governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton was determined that history not repeat itself and this was reflected in grand strategy that sought to prevent "a mass migration [from Cuba] that would endanger the lives of migrants and safety of our nation."¹¹⁰ The administration sought to build upon the Papal visit of January 1998 by "expanding the role of the Catholic Church and other elements of civil society, and increase humanitarian assistance." It was anticipated that as Cubans felt an incentive to take charge of their own future, they were "more likely to stay at home and build the informal and formal structures that will make transition easier."¹¹¹ Castro's 33 year defiance of the United States continued unabated, and Clinton found that Dr Castro remained in office long after his own second term had expired. In the 1990s, however, the primary US objective was "to preserve and defend civilian elected governments and strengthen democratic practices respectful of human rights."¹¹²

Efforts to ensure free and fair elections in Peru were far from successful, but the White House's ability to leverage President Fujimori was reduced due to its dependency on his government in the continuing war on drugs. The most evident lack of progress in the hemisphere was in Haiti, where much was promised, but with disappointing results. The fiasco surrounding the reinstatement of ousted leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide encapsulated the well-intended but flawed efforts in the country, whose "catastrophic economic situation and ragged socio-political history" made it an unlikely location for a successful implementation of such a policy. Indeed, as Thomas Carothers has noted, "the fact that the administration chose one of the least promising countries in the world to be the leading edge of its democracy policy reflects a persistent unwillingness to think strategically rather than idealistically in this domain."¹¹³

Africa

Africa was a continent of special interest to Anthony Lake. His first public address as National Security Adviser had been on the subject, and

he had a track record of publications dealing with the challenges faced by the continent. However, it was always going to be difficult to see how democracy promotion was to be implemented on the continent. Indeed the administration was stark, referring to Africa as “one of our greatest challenges for a strategy of Engagement and Enlargement.” Specifically, there was little in the way of existing democracy to build on and, therefore, few opportunities to greatly enhance American interests on a continent that few believed posed a threat to America’s national security.

However, the administration was eager to present a positive portrayal of its actions in Africa, especially in light of the Somali incident, which was now rendered in a new manner: “US forces in Somalia allowed us to break through the chaos that had prevented the introduction of relief supplies and UN peacekeepers. US forces prevented the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Somalis, established a logistics system and then turned over the mission to more than 25,000 UN peacekeepers.” The report shied away from the events that led to the deaths of US servicemen in the operation. It was clear, however, as early as 1994, that despite the administration’s good intentions, “the responsibility for the fate of a nation rests finally with its own people.”¹¹⁴

Africa was recognized as being a particularly difficult region within which to enact a policy of Engagement and Enlargement, and the events in Mogadishu had done little to convince policy makers otherwise. The one great region of hope of course was South Africa, where Nelson Mandela had recently become president. The country’s rejection of apartheid had now made possible what the administration referred to as “a bilateral commission to foster new cooperation between our nations.”¹¹⁵ The United States worked to assist the transition to democracy in South Africa, supporting the nation’s first presidential election with \$35 million in aid, followed quickly by a commitment of \$600 million in trade and investment packages.¹¹⁶

While the historic developments in South Africa gave reason for rejoicing, however, the outlook in the rest of the continent remained grim. While USAID’s Greater Horn of Africa program successfully prevented a famine that had threatened millions of lives, the administration’s actions in Africa were constantly overshadowed by the Somali deployment.¹¹⁷

US Grand Strategy recognized its limitations and sought to find solace in “states whose entry into the camp of market democracies may influence the future direction of an entire region; South Africa now holds that potential with regard to sub-Saharan Africa.”¹¹⁸ US Grand Strategy noted that the “restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Nigeria has long been one of our major objectives in Africa.”¹¹⁹ President Clinton met with Nigeria’s President Obasanjo at the White House in October 1999 and reaffirmed the US commitment to assist him on “the challenges and security, economic, political and social issues.” The administration noted the benefits derived from Nigeria’s restoration of

democracy and the hope that this may open the way for Nigeria to become a leader in Africa. Peaceful elections in 1999 and the inauguration of the new civilian government in May 1999 were seen as "important steps" in this process.

US Grand Strategy noted that in Africa, as elsewhere, "democracies have proved stronger partners for peace, stability and sustained prosperity," and pledged to work "to broaden the growing circle of African democracies."¹²⁰ Democracy promotion in Africa was attempted via a \$30 million Great Lakes Justice Initiative, which committed the United States to working "with both the people and governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi to support judicial systems which are impartial, credible, effective and inclusive." This initiative sought to strengthen Ministries of Justice and Interior, create civilian law enforcement, provide human rights training, and demobilize irregular elements of standing armies.¹²¹

US Grand Strategy in Africa continued to "support and promote . . . national reforms and the evolution of regional arrangements" that contributed to pan-African cooperation, but acknowledged that "the prosperity and security of Africa" depended on "African leadership, strong national institutions, and extensive political and economic reform."¹²² It conceded, however, that it was "in the U.S. interest to support and promote such reforms,"¹²³ and in doing so defy what it acknowledged as a sense of "Afro-pessimism" that existed due to the "nexus of economic, political, social, ethnic and environmental challenges" that faced the continent.¹²⁴

Europe

Despite the many challenges it faced in global regions, the Clinton administration had doubtless expected a far easier reception in Europe. Europe in general and the United Kingdom in particular greeted Clinton's election with caution. European leaders had developed strong working relations with the Bush administration and were wary of the New Democrat president, who appeared to view relations with Europe as *passé* and indicated that the White House prioritized dealings with the Pacific Rim nations. This sentiment echoed Secretary of State John Hay's statement in the early twentieth century that "the Mediterranean is the ocean of the past, the Atlantic the ocean of the present and the Pacific the ocean of the future."¹²⁵ Indeed, for the last 50 years "People have been speculating as to whether the United States is losing interest in Europe! Whether it's titling to Asia, whether the Special Relationship is no longer special, whether this particular president couldn't give a damn about it!"¹²⁶ These concerns were exacerbated when President Clinton

failed to visit the continent during his first year in office, failing to do so until January 1994 when he addressed a NATO summit in Brussels.

The early detachment from Europe was reversed as President Clinton made four trips to the continent in 1994, a “commitment of presidential time and attention” that revealed what Richard Holbrooke referred to as “an inescapable but little-realized fact: The United States has become a European power in a sense that goes beyond traditional assertions of America’s ‘commitment’ to Europe.”¹²⁷ In addition to opening markets, the administration was eager to see democracy take hold in the former Warsaw Pact nations, believing that democratic and economic reform in former communist states were “the best measures to avert conditions which could foster aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatreds.”¹²⁸ What was less self-evident was how the relationship might develop if and when true political and economic integration occurred in Europe, with the potential threats such an entity could pose for the United States. However, the Clinton administration was adamant that its goal remained “an integrated democratic Europe co-operating with the United States to keep the peace and promote prosperity.”¹²⁹

It was evident that elements of grand strategy were more applicable in certain regions than others and, while democracy promotion had little direct impact on Western Europe, the strategy was particularly relevant to Central and Eastern Europe. As President Clinton declared in Budapest, in December 1994, “The end of the Cold War presents us with the opportunity to fulfil the promise of democracy and freedom . . . we must not allow the Iron Curtain to be replaced by a veil of indifference.”¹³⁰ Madeline Albright observed that in the early 1990s, Central Europe “was still seen by many Americans as a mysterious collective entity characterised by medieval castles, spicy sausages and an insufficient supply of vowels.”¹³¹ The view was not dissimilar in Western Europe, where members of the European Union were less than eager to incorporate the Central and Eastern European states. Various reasons existed for this reticence, not least of which was the recent recession, as well as political concerns over the potential eastward focus of the organization. These reasons contributed to the Clinton administration’s embrace of NATO expansion “as a guarantor of European democracy and a force for European stability.” The White House insisted that NATO must play the leading role in promoting “a more integrated, secure Europe prepared to respond to new challenges.”¹³²

Despite the organization’s military focus, the administration recognized its capacity to advance political, social, and democratic reform by admitting former adversaries. There was also a logistical reason for adopting this approach: expanding NATO “was actually easier than the European Union, because NATO only involves a defense commitment, which they were very happy to give.” Enlarging the European Union, however, involved “so many changes in your domestic legislation and so many transitional arrangements are required, that was always going to take a

lot more time.”¹³³ Suggestions made at the time that the nations of Eastern Europe may have been better integrated by expanding the European Union failed to account for the political realities of the era. This was not a viable option considering the nature of European relations at the time, for in addition to a continent-wide recession, there was the geopolitical reality to consider: coming so soon after the reunification of Germany, another seismic shift in the European Union was far from welcomed by France, which sought to ensure that the European Union remained focused on Western Europe.¹³⁴ This was recognized in Washington, as Holbrooke noted that expansion of NATO and the European Union would not be simultaneous and “their memberships will never be identical.” They were, however, “clearly mutually supportive.”¹³⁵

By 1998, the Clinton administration could observe that “the prospect of joining or rejoining the Western democratic family through NATO, the EU and other institutions has strengthened the forces of democracy and reform in many countries of the region and encouraged them to settle long-standing disputes over borders and ethnic minorities.”¹³⁶ This not only had security and economic implications, but also exemplified Leon Fuerth’s Ratchet concept, of locking nations into new, democratically focused entities, in a deliberate attempt to prevent a reversion to Cold War alliances. The administration saw this move as a benefit to all and especially the United States: “Expanding the Alliance will promote our interests by reducing the risk of instability or conflict in Europe’s eastern half. It will help assure that no part of Europe will revert to a zone of great power competition or a sphere of influence.” Above all, it would “build confidence and give new democracies a powerful incentive to consolidate their reforms.”¹³⁷

The Clinton administration believed that NATO expansion was the first move in the process of integrating Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union, and therefore represented “another element of a policy aimed at ‘locking in’ democracy where it has been achieved in Eastern Europe.”¹³⁸ This approach made great strides throughout the administration’s time in office, ensuring that by 1997, the administration was already noting that its ambition was to “complete” the construction of a truly democratic Europe.¹³⁹ Although the concept of nation building may have been off the table, the administration was insistent that in Central and Eastern Europe, it was determined to work “with our West European partners [to help] these nations build civil societies.”¹⁴⁰ To this end, the administration worked actively with varying groups to ensure that “throughout the region, targeted exchange programs have familiarized key decision-makers and opinion-moulders with the workings of American democracy.”¹⁴¹ Grand strategy focused on support for increased integration and the utilization of supranational organizations to cement democratic and market reforms. These varied from state to state and from region to region, depending on which approach was the most practical. By January 2001,

the Clinton administration highlighted elections in Croatia, Montenegro, and Kosovo as evidence of its successful advocacy of democracy in the region. Such initiatives had been possible due to “the UN, EU, and NATO operations in the area focused on developing professional civil and military institutions that are respectful and promote human rights and respect for civil authority.” Efforts to implement democracy in this region served to deepen “support for those civil efforts that promote democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.”¹⁴²

These moves were complemented by the administration’s support of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which it heralded as a direct result of its efforts at Dayton in 1995. It was clear from the administration’s consideration of grand strategy on the European continent that this work would not be completed during its time in office. This was to be “the work of generations.” Setbacks would occur and the process would be complex. However, “as long as these states continue their progress towards democracy and respect the rights of their own and other people, that they understand the rights of their minorities and their neighbours,” the administration planned to “support their progress with a steady patience.”¹⁴³ This element of grand strategy with regard to democracy promotion in Europe remained constant during the Clinton years. It sought “to build a Europe that is truly integrated, democratic, prosperous and at peace” and in doing so, “complete the mission the United States launched fifty years ago with the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.”¹⁴⁴

Russia and the newly independent states

From the beginning of the Clinton administration’s time in office, the most ideological aspect of its grand strategy was designed to “to support the growth of democracy and individual freedoms” that had begun in Russia. The White House believed that such reforms enhanced US security and provided a solution to “the aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatreds unleashed by the end of the Cold War.”¹⁴⁵ Success was far from certain, however, as Strobe Talbott warned, “among the contingencies for which [we] must be prepared is that Russia will abandon democracy and return to threatening patterns of international behaviour that have sometimes characterized its history.”¹⁴⁶

From their first meeting in April 1993, however, President Clinton and Boris Yeltsin developed a strong working relationship that set the tone for US–Russian relations in the 1990s. Clinton recognized the scale of the task ahead: “The Russians are trying to undertake three fundamental changes at once: moving from a Communist to a market economy; moving from a tyrannical dictatorship to a democracy; and moving to an independent

nation state away from having a great empire. And these are very difficult and unsettling times.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, support for Russia was designed to be “tangible to the Russian people . . . our challenge is to provide some tools to help the Russians do things that work for themselves.”

In its priorities, it is possible to see Clinton's philosophy of foreign and domestic linkage in contrast to the policies of the past. Present were the New Democrat notions of providing opportunity while demanding greater responsibility in return, the idea that foreign investment should be promoted as a means to enhance American security and the realization that such programs would not result in immediate success and needed to be viewed as long-term initiatives.¹⁴⁸ The Clinton administration presented its initiatives as an extension of its domestic agenda, since a resurgent Russia would cause America “to restructure our defenses to meet a whole different set of threats than those we now think will occur . . . Therefore, our ability to put people first at home requires that we put Russia and its neighbours first on our agenda abroad.”¹⁴⁹

President Clinton saw his relationship with Russia as fulfilling two criteria. First, it was portrayed as an extension of efforts to enhance the US economy and, secondly, it granted him a specific role to play on the world stage—a role he turned to with increasing regularity as his domestic programs floundered in Congress. However, given the political climate during the 1990s, grand strategy did not escape partisan criticism, especially on Capitol Hill, where not everyone endorsed this relationship, or Clinton's approach to Russia. Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole insisted that it was wrong to ignore Yeltsin's “serious errors,” his “move toward authoritarian rule,” or the fact that he had “lost the political support of virtually all reform-minded Russians.”¹⁵⁰ Dole insisted that US policy toward Russia should be based on an acceptance that the nations were rivals with conflicting national interests. The Clinton administration, he insisted, had a “misguided devotion” to a “Yeltsin first policy,” which caused the loss of “a tremendous opportunity to state American concerns forcefully before thousands were slaughtered in Chechnya.”¹⁵¹

Not surprisingly the administration did not concur with Dole's sentiment. Anthony Lake stressed, “To state that this is a Russia-first policy or that we have somehow failed to make known our concerns on Chechnya is simply wrong.”¹⁵² However, maintaining a working relationship with Yeltsin was essential for Clinton's Grand Strategy which sought to maintain peace with the former Cold War rival, while simultaneously supporting the spread of democracy in the former Soviet satellite states. In spite of criticism, the administration took comfort from the fact that Russians were now capable of electing their leaders “for the first time in 1,000 years” and presented this as a reason why the United States “should support those Russians who are struggling for a democratic, prosperous future.”¹⁵³

As Walter Russell Mead noted, “Russians must choose their future for themselves and in their own way. But with the help of Japan and our allies

in Europe, we can create the conditions that give the Russian people a real chance to build prosperity and democracy.” However, the Clinton administration’s support for Yeltsin ensured that the White House was forced to overlook the Russian military engagement in Chechnya and was unable to adequately engender a true sense of democracy. So long as Boris Yeltsin remained in power, “there was also a tendency to underestimate the strength of the dark forces in Russia and to overestimate the ability of the Russian government to create and maintain the conditions for Polish style economic reforms.”¹⁵⁴ Too much, it appeared, was dependent on the personal relationship between Clinton and Yeltsin, a fact that became all too apparent when the Russian leader suddenly left office, replaced by the former KGB colonel, Vladimir Putin. Despite the peaceful transfer of power from Yeltsin to Putin, doubts were now raised as to the viability of democracy under the former KGB chief.¹⁵⁵

On June 3, 2000, Clinton held his first formal meeting with Putin. A memo from Sandy Berger stressed the importance of visuals as well as content: “On Saturday evening, you will have a meeting/working dinner with President Putin. The pictures of your first encounter will be important, and we recommend business attire. We want to convey ‘getting down to business’ and avoid the inaccurate charge that we’re embracing Putin without question.” Gone were the bear-hugs and laughter associated with the Yeltsin era as both sides recognized the beginning of a new stage in US–Russian relations. Berger stressed “this is a working visit with a broad agenda of establishing a relationship with the newly elected government,” in which “the importance of continued engagement with Russia and the Newly Independent States” was to be prioritized.¹⁵⁶ As President Clinton became the first American president to address the Russian Duma, he sought to use the opportunity to press for continued Russian progress on economic reform, arms control, and encouraging Putin to preserve Russia’s democratic gains. Whatever progress was made with Russia, however, US efforts at rapprochement with the Kremlin and its efforts to utilize the United Nations as a vehicle of choice for foreign policy initiatives were both hindered by developments in the Balkans, where US Grand Strategy initiatives were put to the test.

Democracy promotion in the Balkans

The Balkan crisis evolved during the end of the Cold War when the world’s attention was diverted away from the region. By the time focus had been brought to bear on the situation, European insistence on taking the lead initially enabled the United States to avoid the issue. However, a degree of paranoia affected both parties: the United States refused to send observers to European-sponsored peace talks for fear of implying

US involvement, while European determination to pursue a diplomatic solution led them to preclude the use of NATO, which was dependent on American hardware. As early as May 1991, the *International Herald Tribune* carried the headline: "NATO's Bosnia Dithering: Waiting for the US to Lead."¹⁵⁷

Critics of US inaction in the region overlook the assertion of Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jacques Poos that "this is the hour of Europe, not of America," a sentiment echoed by the President of the European Community, Jacques Delors, who declared, "we do not interfere in American affairs; we trust America will not interfere in European affairs."¹⁵⁸ These statements highlighted European impotence and were used by Washington as a rationale for avoiding military intervention. They were, in the words of Sir Malcolm Rifkind, "simply foolish."¹⁵⁹ However, the United States decided to take the Europeans at their word. "They will screw it up," Secretary of State Eagleburger argued, "and this will teach them a lesson."¹⁶⁰ Eagleburger's comments proved to be prophetic, with disastrous implications for European aspirations of military and diplomatic self-sufficiency and far worse implications for those living in the Balkans.

During the 1992 campaign, Clinton had promised a "forward leaning position" and refused to rule out air strikes against Serb positions or the lifting of the arms embargo on the Bosnians.¹⁶¹ During his confirmation hearings, Warren Christopher said that the world "must bring real pressures, economic and military, to bear on the Serbian leadership" and that unilateral American action was not impossible.¹⁶² Once in office, however, Clinton was faced with the practical realities of such a policy and began to prevaricate on potential deployments, an approach that did little to inspire confidence in the administration or the president.

Clinton initially asked Colin Powell about the prospect of using airpower, but without being "too punitive." Powell mocked this request in his memoir, noting, "there it was again, the ever-popular solution from the skies, with a good humanist twist; let's not hurt anybody."¹⁶³ This was indicative of the relationship between the White House and the Pentagon in the first 18 months of the administration, as the "deep division" over the "merits of intervention" contributed to a sense of a lack of direction. The Bosnian situation may have been "the most urgent foreign policy issue facing the Clinton administration" but it faced "a lot of pushback" from the Pentagon, in the days before the United States "had sort of grown comfortable again with limited war." Time and again, Powell reported, "we don't do this stuff, we don't do mountains and valleys and weird ethnic guerrilla groups."¹⁶⁴

On its second full day in office, the Clinton administration produced PRD-1 to address US policy in the former Yugoslavia. Signed by Anthony Lake on January 22, 1993, the document raised the possibility of a full NSC meeting on the situation, with a view to deciding "broad strategic goals and

strategies that will guide [US] policies toward the Former Yugoslavia.” Lake suggested that the administration needed to decide “what it wants to achieve and what price it is prepared to pay to get it.” Ahead of any meeting, Lake urged his staff that “no presumptions should be made about limitations on policy” but they were only given 4 days to respond to a range of questions regarding potential US involvement in the Balkans—a timescale that Lake conceded “may make a coordinated product impossible.” However, if coordination was possible within such a timescale, agencies were advised that “any differences of opinion should be clearly stated rather than compromised for the sake of an agreed product.”¹⁶⁵

Accordingly, the administration held a series of NSC meetings in its first months to understand what had been done so far in the Balkans and what its new strategy should be. Defined by Madeleine Albright as being “numerous, rambling and inconclusive,” they singularly failed to achieve a consensus.¹⁶⁶ President Clinton pledged to provide 25,000 troops to a multilateral peacekeeping operation, but only after a comprehensive peace settlement was reached.¹⁶⁷ There was a feeling at the NSC that “the situation in Bosnia could not wait for a year’s study since the situation was not theoretical.”¹⁶⁸ The White House discovered that neutralizing President Bush’s foreign affairs experience on the campaign was far easier than conducting a coherent foreign policy once in office.

One of the biggest challenges Clinton faced was from critics who suggested he had no foreign policy to speak of. Dan Rather asked the president, “you seem to have been all over the place in terms of policy toward Bosnia. One, tell us exactly what US policy toward Bosnia is at the moment and what we can expect in the future.” Clinton insisted that he was “appalled by what [had] happened there,” but added that his “ability to do anything about it is somewhat limited.” Clinton was “convinced that anything we do would have to be done through the United Nations or through NATO or through some other collective action of nations.”¹⁶⁹ This response was indicative of two elements within the Clinton White House; first, the faith in multilateralism as endorsed by the president and his national security adviser, and secondly the belief that the United States should work with its allies in consultation, rather than be seen to be dictating solutions across the Atlantic.

Unlike many of his predecessors, Bill Clinton prioritized negotiation, conciliation, and empathizing with his friends and adversaries; his natural inclination was to confer, not to instruct or to seek military engagement. This reflected the view of many within the administration, including Nancy Soderberg, who acknowledged, “we were unwilling to use force to try to solve Bosnia and it took us two years to figure out that we’d have to use force to do that.” This was a generation to whom “the use of force was reserved for World War One, or the World War Three syndrome and containing the Soviet Union, not these smaller ‘Teacup Wars’ as Leslie Gelb called them.”¹⁷⁰

This, however, led to misunderstandings about America's intentions in the post-Cold War world—Clinton was reacting to America's changed position in the world while other nations lagged behind. Nowhere was this more evident than in the administration's dealings with its European allies over Bosnia. Clinton's approach took the rest of the world time to adjust to and, in the meantime, European leaders continued to look to the White House to solve what many in the United States believed to be a European problem.

The American press were fundamentally opposed to any deployment in the region, with *The Wall Street Journal* fearing that sending US ground troops to enforce any settlement could lead to "another Beirut, or even to Vietnam if larger powers begin to side with the Serbs."¹⁷¹ Charles Krauthammer noted that US troops could be sent to "a swamp of historical grievances."¹⁷² Even the *New York Times* feared that Clinton was on the "slippery slope of military engagement" that could put 15,000 American servicemen into a "cauldron of violence that our European allies have refused to take on themselves."¹⁷³ Recognizing the historic parallels, President Clinton steadfastly refused to be drawn into the conflict.

Former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and former British Foreign Secretary Lord Owen had searched for an acceptable peace initiative throughout 1992. However, when their plan was revealed, many believed it legitimized the Serb seizure of territory. The plan recommended dividing Bosnia into ten provinces, made up of distinct ethnic communities, a move dependent on Serb forces returning conquered lands to non-Serbs. Beyond the practical flaws, there were serious moral issues with the plan, which contravened the UN Charter that outlawed the acquisition of territory by force. Acceptance of the Vance-Owen plan, therefore, necessitated defying the charter of the United Nations, "accepting territorial conquest . . . accepting genocide as a way of acquiring territory" and most troubling, "accepting the destruction of a UN member state."¹⁷⁴ The plan also violated the Wilsonian concept of self-determination—a vital tenet to members of Clinton's foreign policy team. Such philosophical niceties were lost on David Owen, who accused Clinton of "scuttling the chances of ending the war."¹⁷⁵

There were other sensibilities to consider beyond David Owen's ego, however, not least of which were Russia's historic ties to Serbia and the risks posed by intervening in a civil war that had the potential to renew Cold War enmities. To avoid rejecting the Vance-Owen plan outright and damaging Russian sensibilities, the administration pressed for stronger sanctions, the enforcement of a no-fly zone, and the creation of an international war crimes tribunal to punish those who had violated human rights. While many welcomed the president's proposals as a viable alternative to the Vance-Owen plan, others were more sceptical; former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick claimed that the plan was inadequate and called for unilateral American military intervention.¹⁷⁶ The *New*

York Times warned of the dangers in becoming embroiled in the Balkans and asked “Is anyone around the Oval Office reading history books?”¹⁷⁷ Anthony Lake admitted the lessons being learned were from Vietnam: “Don’t make commitments that you can’t meet. And just don’t wander into something.”¹⁷⁸

The Clinton administration made it clear that the United States would not act unilaterally, as Warren Christopher urged “the entire international community [to] do its utmost to provide economic aid and reconstruction assistance to the Bosnian state.”¹⁷⁹ Madeleine Albright compounded this statement by stressing that the United States “will not act unilaterally when a multilateral presence is clearly needed and available.”¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, the approach to Bosnia was viewed as a policy of “creeping US disengagement” devised with the aim of “educating America’s allies into their new responsibilities in a post-Cold War world, in which US leadership will no longer be automatic.”¹⁸¹ The Clinton administration concluded that the United States had not gone through the Cold War merely to emerge as the world’s policeman and that from now on the United States would adopt a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. On some issues, it planned to work with Russia, on others with NATO allies, sometimes with the United Nations, and sometimes would not get involved at all.

Time White House correspondent Jef McAllister noted that the administration “blundered all over the place,” in regard to Bosnia during its initial months.¹⁸² However, Europe and the United States did not fundamentally disagree on their goals in Bosnia. Both sought the end of bloodshed, the return of confiscated land to the country’s Muslims and Croats and feared that Western inaction risked widening the conflict. The disagreements arose over tactics, with European governments dismissing Clinton’s initial plan to arm the Bosnian Muslims and conduct air raids against Serb targets as short-sighted and ill-conceived, especially considering the presence of European peacekeeping troops working under a UN flag who would have been in the target zones. Only once a grand strategy had been decided upon and a major reorganization of the White House completed, could the Balkan crisis finally be addressed.

By April 1993, Warren Christopher was forced to concede, “The United States simply doesn’t have the means to make people in that region of the world like each other.”¹⁸³ The Balkan situation was defined not as “a moral outrage necessitating outside military action,” but as “a quagmire embodying ancient feuds that defied imposed resolutions.”¹⁸⁴ Despite the outrage espoused on the campaign trail, the Clinton White House was intent on focusing on health care reform, the North American Free Trade Agreement, budget reduction, and reinventing government and did not intend “to get distracted with bombing raids against the Bosnian Serbs.”¹⁸⁵ Even Clinton’s supporters, however, worried that the situation made the president appear “irresolute” and “unsure about the use of force, whether in deploying it or refusing to deploy it.”¹⁸⁶ However, unilateral US action

in the Balkans was not an option, regardless of whatever may have been gleaned from prior remarks.

Clinton felt that "America's allies had to be encouraged to emerge from the shadow of Washington's tutelage and take the lead in solving regional problems."¹⁸⁷ This was a position supported by Colin Powell who opposed using limited American military force in Bosnia, arguing against air strikes and stressing that any intervention would need 300,000 American troops, which was "sufficient to kill off the whole idea."¹⁸⁸ Powell maintained that no US forces should be deployed in the absence of a political goal and the conditions he set for the use of force were such that they effectively ruled out a Balkan intervention, revealing time and again how he was "the most dominant voice of caution" with respect to the Balkans.¹⁸⁹ He also stressed that "No matter what we did, it would be easy for the Serbs to respond by seizing UN humanitarian personnel as hostages."¹⁹⁰ Not for the first time, it appeared that the Tarnoff Doctrine, unveiled in an off-the-record briefing, was guiding US Grand Strategy.

As concerns grew over the potential international ramifications of military intervention, a clash of opinion erupted over how best to utilize US forces. Defense Secretary Aspin was divided between a personal desire to deploy forces and Powell's hesitancy to do so; Anthony Lake had no interest in entering an un-winnable war, but shared Albright's view that Bosnia affected European security and therefore America's interests. Leon Fuerth and Al Gore favored air power to slow Serb advances. George Stephanopoulos warned that military intervention could divert attention from the domestic agenda, while Warren Christopher "had trouble identifying any option he could recommend."¹⁹¹ In keeping with his diplomatic approach, the secretary of state "laid down four strict conditions for military intervention, which would render it almost impossible in the conditions prevailing in Bosnia."¹⁹² The advisers were not aided by the president, who lamented, "I don't want to have to spend any more time on [Bosnia] than is absolutely necessary, because what I got elected to do was to let America look at our own problems."¹⁹³

On Capitol Hill, Senator Sam Nunn raised the specter of Somalia as a rationale for avoiding a deployment: "My big question will be not how do we go about it . . . but how do we get out if the parties begin fighting again?"¹⁹⁴ This contrasted with those who felt that national power should be used to promote national objectives, as Madeleine Albright asked, "What's the point of having this superb military if we can't use it?"¹⁹⁵ This clash of opinion, over which Colin Powell believed he may "have an aneurysm," ensured that consensus was a rarity.¹⁹⁶ Albright's remarks revealed the "sense of frustration that was palpable about the fact that more was not happening" in the Balkans.¹⁹⁷ The crisis was seen as "very personal and visceral" by Albright and led her to contrast the situation with events in her native Czechoslovakia in 1938. She "could not stand doing nothing on Bosnia," said Toby Gati, Chief of Intelligence

at the State Department; “She kept on saying, ‘We have to do more, why aren’t we doing more?’” In a memo to the president dated August 1993, Albright argued that Bosnia would taint the administration’s foreign policy objectives and urged that military pressure should be applied to bring the Serbs to the negotiating table.¹⁹⁸ Albright was particularly cutting regarding the Powell Doctrine, which she suggested only applied when “dealing with a crazy dictator with six months to prepare and the earth was flat and you’d use overwhelming force and somebody else would pay. But those circumstances don’t come along very often.”¹⁹⁹ Albright conceded that two trains of thought were prevalent at the time: the “Vietnam Syndrome” that dictated absolute noninvolvement, and the “Gulf War Syndrome,” which she defined as “Don’t do it unless you can deploy 500,000 marines.”²⁰⁰

In contrast to Somalia, Bosnia was routinely considered by the Principals Committee of the National Security Council, in meetings chaired by Anthony Lake. However, this body proved to be as divided as any other on the issue and its meetings often displayed a “dispirited, inconclusive quality,” with “little enthusiasm for any proposal for action.”²⁰¹ Madeleine Albright conceded, America “couldn’t hope to persuade others if we had not least persuaded ourselves . . . with a new president, a wary secretary of state, a negative Pentagon, nervous allies and crises in Somalia, then Rwanda and Haiti blowing up, we weren’t prepared to run the risks of leadership in Bosnia.”²⁰² The administration faced a serious dilemma in dealing with the Balkan crisis: the United States did not have the votes on the Security Council to end the arms embargo; a cease-fire would reward ethnic cleansing, while the use of significant force to punish the Serbs could have led to UN peacekeepers being taken hostage and jeopardizing the humanitarian mission.

It was clear that action was needed and what consensus there was, eventually focused on the concept of Lift and Strike: the end of the Bosnian arms embargo with threats of NATO air strikes against Serb military units. Vitality, there would be no threat to American ground troops, as none would be provided: “This option seemed appealing when compared to doing nothing or joining the fighting.”²⁰³ Yet Lift and Strike would have been a more palatable choice if the crisis had only recently begun. If the United States were to Lift and Strike, allied troops serving under the United Nations would be caught in the front line, as potential hostages or targets for retaliation. If the United Nations withdrew, the humanitarian effort would falter, perhaps irrevocably. British Defence Secretary at the time, Malcolm Rifkind, felt “the Americans were trying to eat their cake and have it too. They consistently refused to offer any manpower in Bosnia. They were trying, as it were, to lead on the policy, but without accepting the need for their own contribution other than up in the sky, and that was utterly unacceptable given the function of the UN.”²⁰⁴ When Lift and Strike emerged as the US policy, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd

was forced to admit his “deep reservations” in the House of Commons, as “privately, both British and US officials [admitted] that differences over Bosnia brought US–British relations to their lowest point since the 1956 Suez crisis.”²⁰⁵

The Clinton administration deployed the secretary of state to Europe to address this situation. Importantly, the White House announced that the final decision would be made once Christopher returned from Europe, forcing him to adopt a “listening mode,” rather than being able to inform European leaders of the White House plans.²⁰⁶ In London, Christopher was received at Chevening, the Foreign Secretary’s official residence, by Prime Minister John Major, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, and Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind. As Sir Malcolm later reflected, “We just went through the whole American proposal and we were pretty sceptical because we didn’t believe it had been properly thought through and it became manifestly clear that it hadn’t been properly thought through.” Basic questions regarding the physical implementation of Lift and Strike went unanswered, as Christopher “didn’t have any answers to offer at that stage on how they would have managed that.”²⁰⁷

Christopher had been appointed secretary of state because he conveyed the impression of being “a safe pair of hands,” whom Clinton found “reassuring.”²⁰⁸ However, his European visit singularly failed to help Clinton’s international standing. His attempts to promote the Lift and Strike policy were met with derision: “It was largely a plan designed to satisfy the cantankerous Congress and it meant that America would step in to change the Bosnian situation without exposing itself to any of the consequences if things went wrong.” The US Ambassador to London noted that it was “a cockamamie idea.”²⁰⁹ Essentially, there would be no American ground troops, which appalled European leaders. “Frankly, he didn’t do a very good job of presenting his case,” said one British official. The Europeans were expecting a plan, but Christopher thought he had come to listen, not to lead. The comparison with Bush’s secretary of state was damning: “I knew Jim Baker,” said a senior European diplomat; “Jim Baker was a friend of mine. Believe me, Warren Christopher is no Jim Baker.”²¹⁰ Following “a perfectly friendly discussion” with the British government, Christopher “was left in no doubt that [they] were profoundly unimpressed and un-attracted by what he was proposing.” Upon his return to Washington, the Clinton administration “just dropped the idea, they said there’s just not the support.” Sir Malcolm Rifkind reflected “We took from that, that that meant actually that they were doing this in order to keep their critics in Congress happy, rather than that they passionately believed this was the way to go and what flows from that its that they might not have been too upset by our pretty negative reaction.”²¹¹

Christopher’s European trip had dreadful ramifications and left the White House open to attack from all quarters. “For an American Secretary of State to go and see the allies about a matter on which the president

campaigned and about a matter on which the administration was said to have strong feelings and then come back and say, 'They won't go along with it, so we're going to change our policy,' well, that was without precedent," declared Richard Perle, former Assistant Secretary of Defense.²¹² The trip "was not consistent with global leadership," Christopher later admitted, as the European mission became a profound lesson in how not to exercise American leadership. Fears grew that the administration did not understand foreign policy and the use of power, for it appeared that while the president and his administration talked about multilateralism, neither he nor his advisers knew quite how to achieve it.²¹³

By October 1993, it was suggested that the administration had placed the Balkan crisis "on the back burner, desperately hoping the issue will go away."²¹⁴ Despite European misgivings, however, the president was not about to buckle: "I do not believe the United States needs to send a lot of troops there which might get involved in a civil war on the ground when we had a plan which would have led to a settlement," he told Larry King.²¹⁵ The administration blamed the failure of its Bosnian policy on the Europeans, who were understandably furious.²¹⁶ Britain in particular had been prepared to accede to air strikes if Clinton had insisted, but no formal request had been made. However, the president understood the futility of endorsing a policy in the Balkans when faced by an intransigent Boris Yeltsin who refused to permit UN action against the Serbs. This was not a point that could be made public, as the idea of US foreign policy being dictated by a neutered Russian state was not something that would have made positive headlines in the *New York Times*. Regardless of the bloodshed in the Balkans, Clinton's decision to maintain the relationship with the Kremlin and ensure Yeltsin's political survival was simply too important to risk over the land Bismarck once claimed was "not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier."²¹⁷

The Balkan crisis revealed the uncertainty at the heart of the administration over US national interests. International ramifications appeared to be secondary to domestic implications, as time and again grand strategy was hampered by regional crises. An ambivalent electorate greatly impacted President Clinton's international standing, since his "affinity for appeasing opinion at home made it difficult for his allies to predict how his administration would behave, though it kept him well ahead in the domestic opinion polls."²¹⁸ Yet public ambivalence also came to Clinton's aid as the White House avoided the backlash it received following the Somali imbroglio, since there was never a popular consensus in favor of intervention in the Balkans: "As awareness of ethnic cleansing spread, the proportion of those who wanted the United States to 'do something' increased, but they probably never constituted a majority."²¹⁹ Even the *National Review* conceded only "modest risks" were justified, as the United States had no vital interests at stake.²²⁰ Americans may have been appalled at the Balkan

atrocities, but their horror never amounted to a resolve to commit ground troops, as opinion polls constantly recorded a two-to-one majority against intervention in Bosnia.²²¹ However, neither Lake nor Clinton made a serious attempt to build public support for ground troops or for any forceful use of American power in the Balkans.

Other issues influenced the Clinton administration's Balkan policy, or lack thereof. The deaths of US servicemen in Somalia and the ensuing political fallout had implications not only in Rwanda, but also "delayed aggressive engagement in Bosnia." Somalia and the ensuing debacle initiated a policy debate over the future of multilateral peacekeeping operations that Nancy Sodeberg conceded, "took us two years. It took us two years to figure out the new balance of force and diplomacy in the post-Cold War era."²²² It was a 2-year period, however, in which lives were lost as the result of political and bureaucratic resistance on both sides of the Atlantic. During that time, Madeleine Albright conceded "our goal was a negotiated solution, but we never applied the credible threat of force necessary to achieve it. Instead we employed a combination of half-measures and bluster that didn't work."²²³

By the mid-1990s, as the Balkan crisis deepened, the Clinton administration took comfort from the knowledge that they were not responsible for the outbreak of hostilities, that the European powers were in disarray over the issue, and that "little support existed," for the deployment of American troops into "the new world disorder."²²⁴ The Clinton administration was in the awkward position of benefiting from public apathy and hence not under pressure to intervene militarily overseas, while still having to attempt to build a new world "in the domestic circumstances not of the 1940s but of the 1920s, when there was no single, foreign threat against which to rally public opinion."²²⁵ Despite President Bush's assertion that the Vietnam Syndrome had been buried in the sands of the Persian Peninsula, many in Washington feared being sucked into another civil war. An article by Arthur Schlesinger Jr in the *Wall Street Journal*, warning that Clinton's domestic strategies could wither in the Balkans as Lyndon Johnson's had in Vietnam, confirmed the president's worst fears.²²⁶

Yet despite the lack of public or editorial support, the Balkan crisis was inflicting serious damage on the Atlantic relationship, in spite of what the administration saw as its record of progressive reform: "It had built a new relationship with Russia and the other former Soviet republics; started to enlarge NATO; tackled the Irish problem; strengthened American ties with the Baltic nations and Central Europe; and gained congressional approval for the NAFTA and GATT trade agreements."²²⁷ However, as long as the belief persisted that America was failing to act over the worst atrocity to impact the continent since 1945, such achievements would be negated. Accordingly, the administration was caught between its assertions and its aspirations, with senior members expressing fears for the future of the

transatlantic partnerships that had sustained Europe and the United States during the Cold War.

By 1995, events were moving in a direction that threatened not only the credibility of US foreign policy, but also the president's prospects for reelection, as Britain and France considered a withdrawal of forces that would have required US assistance. These aspects, coupled with the slaughter of 6,000 Muslims at Srebrenica, proved to be the catalyst for a reversal of attitudes. Having defined the new geopolitical era as "a contest that pits nations and individuals guided by openness, responsive government and moderation against those animated by isolation, repression and extremism," Anthony Lake subsequently advised Clinton that the debacle over Bosnia threatened to impact his reelection hopes.²²⁸

A series of memoranda were put to the president for his consideration, including several from Madeleine Albright who urged US engagement was in keeping with its interests, while continued disengagement would destroy American credibility. Albright feared that Clinton's "entire first term [was] going to be judged by how you deal with Bosnia."²²⁹ Albright's forthright manner came to the fore, as she noted at a meeting of the foreign policy team in late June: "When US leadership is weak in one area, it affects leadership in others." She lamented that "the strategy we have now makes the president look weak" and that to survive politically, the administration needed "to get ahead of the game."²³⁰

With the State Department unable to initiate a viable option, Anthony Lake introduced a shift in policy: "The choice was no longer between staying out and going in. It was between going in to get the allies out or going in to impose a peace. As the crisis deepened, a *Pax Americana* came to be seen as the least unpalatable option."²³¹ NATO unity was prioritized over issues such as bombing Serb forces, or lifting the arms embargo. The policy of deferring to the Europeans was at an end. No longer would President Clinton place his fortunes in the hands of foreign leaders, as he led for both international and domestic reasons. French President Jacques Chirac had suggested that the post of Leader of the Free World was "vacant."²³² Clinton needed to demonstrate otherwise to survive politically.

In August 1995, Lake met with European leaders to inform them that the UN mission in Bosnia should be allowed to collapse, so their troops would no longer find themselves hostages on the ground. This was not a consultation; the administration's philosophy had changed to an approach they termed "Tell, don't ask."²³³ Lake's presentation was a reverse of Christopher's previous efforts, telling the Europeans, "If you won't act with us, we're going to have to adapt this new strategy."²³⁴ Unsurprisingly perhaps, Lake's move revealed the true nature of government bureaucracy as it was suggested he "was pulling an end run around the State Department."²³⁵ Regardless of departmental in-fighting, the president announced, "We have obligations to our NATO allies and I do not believe we can leave them in the lurch." The administration's appeal to NATO and cooperation

with European allies was a sound political strategy. Many members of Congress, including senior Republicans, urged Clinton to define a new strategy for NATO in the post-Cold War era.²³⁶ Clinton responded by authorizing substantial air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, ensuring that NATO conducted military air strikes for the first time in its history, with US bombers completing 2,318 of the 3,500 sorties flown in the operation. As Clinton led NATO in a new direction that was backed by the allies, it became much more difficult to criticize the policy.²³⁷

In its dealings with Bosnia, the administration tested the boundaries of a new and improved relationship with NATO. Since the US relationship with the United Nations had been strained during the Somali crisis, the concept of identifying a new international body with which to address the problems of the world was not surprising. The Clinton team remained pragmatic and retained the right to use the United Nations when needed, but would not become part of the United Nations task force already deployed to the Balkans. Instead, "Should large-scale fighting resume and UN troops need to be withdrawn, the President has agreed . . . to provide US support, including the use of ground forces, to a NATO-led operation to help assure a safe withdrawal."²³⁸ The assertion of NATO airpower, the unity of Europe and America, and the intense efforts of Richard Holbrooke resulted in the peace talks at a US Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio. There, Holbrooke arranged a power-sharing agreement with the warring parties, resulting in "the first, most intricate and, arguably, the most significant foreign policy success of the Clinton administration."²³⁹ A NATO-dominated International Protection Force (IFOR) of 60,000 heavily armed troops, including 20,000 Americans, was dispatched to enforce the agreement, replacing the lightly armed United Nations contingent of peacekeepers. The Dayton Accords altered the perception and the practices of the Clinton administration. The White House recognized that it had succeeded in halting the bloodshed and "Criticism of President Clinton as a weak leader ended abruptly, especially in Europe and among Muslim nations."²⁴⁰

The crisis in the Balkans began before the Clinton administration came to power, but neither President Bush nor the Europeans had developed a viable plan to end the war. With many Americans questioning US interests in the Balkans and with European leaders insisting that America stay out of its affairs, it was little surprise that the administration failed to prioritize the conflict. However, its location and potential made it a prime candidate for its grand strategy of Engagement and Enlargement and, as a result, intervention should have come much sooner. Yet the ramifications of the Somali operation cannot be denied. The early idealism that had defined that administration in 1993 had been tested to a point that Lake was forced to concede: "You don't solve foreign societies. You plant, you plough, you seed, you water, you weed and then you harvest. You just

have to keep working.” Ultimately, however, “If you don’t learn from experience, you’re not concentrating.”²⁴¹

The decision to intervene in Bosnia was a vital one for the administration. Not to have done so would have seriously undermined its future role in Europe, but the ramifications of a flawed engagement could have been equally calamitous and risked drawing the United States into a civil war that could have undermined the administration’s domestic agenda. By risking the possible rather than the inevitable, the administration had an opportunity to build on the success of Bosnia to espouse a new direction for international relations. From 1996, US Grand Strategy envisioned a continent at peace and sought “to ensure that the hard-won peace . . . will survive and flourish after four years of war.” Yet while it is clear to see the development of a more assertive US foreign policy, the Clinton administration was unable to build upon its success at Dayton to implement sweeping change.

While few doubted the importance of the Dayton peace deal, the time taken to arrive at its conception was hardly a matter of pride for any concerned. The language used to define the ensuing peace mission was also revealing: in light of the Somali mission, the United States deployed troops in Bosnia as part of a NATO-led initiative, not under a UN banner and the mission was a peace implementation force not a peacekeeping operation. There would be no ideological mission and no nation-building exercises, despite the need to reestablish order in the ravaged land. Rather, the coalition of 25 nations limited their ambitions to “assisting the parties in implementing the military aspects of the peace agreement, including monitoring the cease-fire, monitoring and enforcing the withdrawal of forces and establishing and manning the zone of separation.”²⁴² It appeared that the Clinton administration had heeded the words of Lord Salisbury; “It’s difficult enough to go around doing what is right without going around trying to do good.”²⁴³

The Bosnia mission revealed the lessons learned from Somalia: never lose command of the mission and plan for an exit before the troops arrive. In this case, the Clinton administration agreed that “We anticipate a one-year mission . . . in Bosnia. We believe that by the end of the first year, we will have helped create a secure environment so that the people of Bosnia can travel freely throughout the country, vote in free elections and begin to rebuild their lives.” There would necessarily be a relief effort launched in Bosnia, but the administration was aware of the need to separate it from the military exercise in light of the Somali mission: “This broad civilian effort is helping the people of Bosnia to rebuild, reuniting children with their parents and families with their homes and will allow the Bosnian people to choose freely their own leaders.” Nation building would occur, but not under the guidance of the US military. Neither would the American taxpayer be expected to bankroll the operation:

"In view of the large role that US forces are playing in implementing the military aspects of the agreement, we believe it is appropriate for Europe to contribute the largest share of the funds for reconstruction." No doubt remembering the initial declaration that the Bosnia crisis was a European dilemma, not an American one, the administration was keen to see such a belief acknowledged financially. "The European Union has taken the lead in these efforts in tandem with the international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank."²⁴⁴

With the peace deal at Dayton closely identified with Richard Holbrooke, the State Department emerged victorious from the encounter, despite the initiative having been launched by Anthony Lake, whose successful 1995 mission to inform the European allies of Clinton's plan sat in stark contrast to Warren Christopher's efforts in 1993. Despite his widely acknowledged triumph, however, Richard Holbrooke's ultimate prize eluded him. When the second-term foreign policy team was announced, he found himself passed over for secretary of state once again, on the basis that he was "a pain in the ass and he never got the top job because he remained a pain in the ass his whole life."²⁴⁵ It was exactly due to Holbrooke's directness and stubbornness, however, that peace had been secured at Dayton, leading to the most successful diplomatic engagement of the entire Clinton presidency.

Reflections on democracy promotion

The democracy promotion aspect of US Grand Strategy committed the United States to the defense of principles, peoples, and liberties. Anthony Lake was adamant that American leadership in the world was a prerequisite, since "it can mean more democracies and fewer dictatorships." Lake invited Congress to "join with the president in helping shape a second American Century of security and prosperity."²⁴⁶ Lake's ideological philosophy was clear: "If we can help lead the dozens of nations . . . who are trying to adapt to democracy and free markets, we help to create the conditions for the greatest expansion of prosperity and security the world has ever witnessed."²⁴⁷ Despite this optimistic aspiration, the Clinton administration drew criticism for the democracy promotion element of its grand strategy initiative, ensuring that what the strategy lacked in quantifiable success was made up for in its ability to rally opposition.

Gaddis suggested that Clinton's Grand Strategy amounted to "foreign policy by autopilot, a grand strategy of *laissez-faire*" that "never specified who or what was to be engaged or enlarged," while Kissinger noted that the strategy was lacking in "operational terms."²⁴⁸ Others insisted that the suggestion that democracies did not fight each other ignored tensions

between India and Pakistan, Greece and Turkey, “not to mention nineteen democracies demolishing much of Serbia.” Critics lamented that the democracy promotion aspect of grand strategy offered “little guidance when national interests among democracies don’t coincide and [there is] no framework for dealing with non-democratic states.”²⁴⁹ As the administration prepared to leave office, Thomas Carothers reflected that democracy promotion had “not lived up to the expansive rhetoric,” but conceded that “policy so rarely does.”²⁵⁰

The White House did not need to rely on Republicans for criticism of its democracy promotion efforts, as it was clear that not everybody in the administration embraced the concept. In a resignation letter that was written but never accepted, Anthony Lake conveyed his misgivings about the levels of support for his policies at the White House. “What concerns me,” Lake wrote, “is a growing sense that your and my own priorities and philosophies may not be the same.” Lake knew the president found his Democratic Enlargement speech to be “aesthetically displeasing,” but insisted that “there was little in the rhetoric that could not have been redeemed by vigorous, determined pursuit of our goals.” He continued:

While I have no doubt we agree on the importance of open markets to American workers and reshaping our military forces, I do not sense the same depth of commitment on issues involving the spread of democracy and human rights or the carnage of foreign civil wars. These last are messy issues that require painful choices. But once involved, we can only resolve them though pragmatic but persistent and, when necessary, forceful action.²⁵¹

In the autumn of 1993, Lake was not alone in his doubts concerning President Clinton’s capacity to exert such assertive action.

Democracy promotion was advanced as a global strategy, but was clearly targeted in Europe and parts of Asia where success was most likely. These areas had benefited previously from America largesse and as such had an existing foundation of freedom upon which to build. The administration’s efforts in Europe culminated in June 2000, with the awarding of the Charlemagne Prize to President Clinton in recognition of his leadership on European integration.²⁵² US interests in these regions had “evolved from compulsory and coercive, to cooperative and collegial, the result was the same: stable countries supporting American interests and sharing American values and perspectives.” Colonel M. Thomas Davis of the Brookings Institution captured the policy most succinctly when he suggested that the actual US objective was simply one of stability, since “history is loaded with examples indicating that where stability is threatened, American interests are as well.”²⁵³

The initial incarnation of Clinton’s Grand Strategy recognized that what it proposed was “the work of generations. There will be wrong turns and

even reversals, as there have been in all countries throughout history.”²⁵⁴ The administration, however, did not have an infinite timescale within which to work. With electoral timescales set in stone, it recognized that advances were necessary to prevent foreign policy becoming another tool at the disposal of political opponents. As a result, grand strategy was tasked with assisting states that directly affected US strategic interests; “those with large economies, critical locations, nuclear weapons, or a potential to generate refugee flows into our own nation or into key friends and allies.” Above all, the administration consistently noted that it must focus its efforts “where we have the most leverage.”²⁵⁵ Pragmatism, along with domestic political realities, was a vital component of US Grand Strategy in the post-Cold War World.

Conclusion

Democracy promotion was the most ideological component of US Grand Strategy during the Clinton administration. As with national security and prosperity promotion, it had been at the heart of Bill Clinton’s foreign policy initiative since the start of his presidential campaign and remained central to his grand strategy throughout his two terms in the White House. The administration wished to support the spread of democracy, but sought to do so using market forces, not military might. Under Clinton, democracy would be encouraged and nurtured, but not imposed, in a classic example of the United States seeking to act as an example to others, rather than actively seeking to impose its values abroad. Democracy promotion required international support; however, events in Somalia and Rwanda, along with the election of less-internationally focused Republicans in Congress ensured that multilateral operations were no longer *en vogue*.

Critics accused the Clinton administration of blind engagement, but this was a pragmatic policy from the start, which insisted US involvement “must be carefully tailored to serve [its] interests and priorities.”²⁵⁶ This was vital to understanding US Grand Strategy in the 1990s: idealism when possible, realism when necessary; the prioritizing of human rights where feasible, the elevation of the national interest at all times; multilateralism when possible, unilateralism when necessary. Indeed, the administration was forthright in its language, insisting that “in this time of global change, it is clear we cannot police the world, but is it equally clear we must exercise global leadership.”²⁵⁷

In retrospect, it could be claimed that the best the policy achieved was to maintain the equilibrium. During the Clinton years, democracy thrived and grand strategy actively supported this. The enlargement of the NATO military alliance encouraged the spread of democratic principles to Central and Eastern Europe in a process described later as

“brilliantly successful.”²⁵⁸ Democracy was sustained and supported by the United States during these years, ensuring that where it was existed, it was aided to ensure its continued success. However, where democracy was challenged, suppressed, or forbidden, US Grand Strategy proved ineffectual. Democracy was promoted but not imposed; encouraged but not exported. However, the wording of US Grand Strategy explicitly stated that this would not be an ideological crusade; it was pragmatic and aimed at supporting US national interests. The Clinton administration had no ideological intent or desire to initiate overseas adventures in the name of liberty, freedom, or democracy. Its focus was on domestic affairs and addressed foreign policy when necessary, but all too often through a domestic prism.

The democracy promotion element of US Grand Strategy was a product of its time, instigated by an administration that chose not to seek unnecessary foreign intervention. It was designed to be initiated along with market reform and, as such, was inseparable from the second component of the grand strategy, prosperity promotion. It was specifically not designed to be enacted using military power, which became policy under the George W. Bush administration. The two administrations, therefore, perfectly encapsulated the continuing historical struggle in US political life in regard to democracy promotion.

Notes

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