Boys, James D. "Reflections on Clinton's Grand Strategy." *Clinton's Grand Strategy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 265–294. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472528780.ch-007>>.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Reflections on Clinton's Grand Strategy

Bill Clinton was not the first American president who came to power hoping to concentrate on domestic affairs, only to have foreign crises thrust upon him to the detriment of his original aspirations; nor was he the first president to take office following a US victory in a tumultuous conflict with an apparent mandate to steer a new course in policy. Clearly, however, the Clinton team faced anything but a clean slate when they first arrived in the White House, finding themselves hindered by the remnants of President Bush's ongoing policy directives and enactments: crises in the Caribbean, Africa, and the Balkans, unrest in Russia, major decisions to be made regarding China, the future of global and regional trade, and defense alliances all required presidential attention. Although President Bush had claimed that only the United States could "provide the kind of leadership necessary" for his New World Order, "no Bush doctrine or grand design existed for meeting the collective security needs of the new world order."¹ Accordingly, the Clinton administration inherited a rapidly transforming international environment that demanded constant fire fighting.

Rather than providing the necessary attention, however, the administration in general and the president in particular initially appeared content to let issues drift. The president was not disinterested in foreign policy as has often been suggested, but Bill Clinton's priority upon assuming the presidency was a domestic renewal. Where issues of foreign trade impacted his plans for the American economy, he was engaged, but this was not a president that intended to dwell on foreign affairs for their own sake. Foreign policy was utilized to further the goals of the administration, but it did not become a goal in and of itself. As a result, many have questioned the enduring nature of Clinton's Grand Strategy and

have rejected the idea that a coherent plan even existed. This, however, is an injustice to those who contributed to the formulation of foreign policy during the time period. The Clinton administration produced a coherent vision that it updated in accordance with legislation every calendar year. An examination of speeches and documents clearly reveal specific positions that Bill Clinton adopted on the campaign and which later formed the core elements of his administration's grand strategy. Such policies remained consistent from the time of Governor Clinton's Georgetown Address of December 1991 through the duration of his two terms as president of the United States.

Clinton's Grand Strategy was based on American ideals and geopolitical realities and reflected a concerted effort to define an innovative approach to foreign policy in a new era, based on the reinforcing principles of national security, prosperity promotion, and democratic promotion. As Warren Christopher announced, "a vibrant economy will strengthen America's hand abroad, while permitting us to maintain a strong military without sacrificing domestic needs. And by helping others to forge democracy out of the ruins of dictatorship, we can pacify old threats, prevent new ones, and create new markets for US trade and investment."² The strategy was designed to ensure America's continued interaction with the world through trade and open markets and rejected the principle of universality; simply because an approach was right for the United States, this did not mean it would be right for all people. Instead, the administration sought to bestow a bespoke approach to regions of the world. This was a very American concept, defined by Walter Russell Mead as being "uniquely far-reaching and systemic," with a deep-rooted belief in human rights, values, and trade, but which recognized that America must remain strong militarily.³

Clinton's Grand Strategy was a break from the past for it recognized the limits of American power, but sought to overcome them by adopting a multilateral approach to foreign policy. This belief resulted in the early embrace of the United Nations as the organization of choice to execute US foreign policy in the 1990s. While this enthusiasm was tempered by the events in Somalia, the administration remained committed to the concept of multilateralism, no matter how much it felt the need to advocate unilateralism in the face of congressional hostility. However, for those who placed their faith in a preponderance of power, the idea that a change in the form of other countries' governments could increase US national security appeared tenuous, "especially coming from someone so inexperienced in the ways of the world as Bill Clinton."⁴ However, the president's "ability was not as limited and his performance in foreign policy [was not] as bad as many critics charged."⁵ President Clinton's contribution to strategic thinking was to link economic security formally with national security in a pragmatic policy for an evolving international environment.

Clinton's Grand Strategy advanced the belief that democracies were unlikely to threaten American interests and would support free trade, as international stability became the ambitious by-product of globalization. The policy ensured that the United States remained "the world's indispensable nation" by embedding itself at the center of all major international organizations and structures: GATT, NATO, WTO, NAFTA, and APEC. The policy resulted in the expansion of NATO without causing irreparable damage to US-Russian relations; allowed for the removal of nuclear weapons and materials from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus; contributed to the Balkan peace deal; expanded trade throughout North America as a result of NAFTA; helped rescue the Mexican economy; and moved Haiti toward democracy.⁶ The policy combined Wilsonian principles with the financially motivated notion of opening foreign markets to US exports. Under President Clinton, therefore, US Grand Strategy encompassed prudent realism and moral idealism, to protect the nation from external threats and to stand for ideals worthy of emulation.

Grand strategy as presidential doctrine

A major reason that the US Grand Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement is not universally accepted as The Clinton Doctrine is because President Clinton did not deliver the speech that introduced its key concepts. The president may have been content to allow his advisers to announce major policy initiatives, but this greatly reduced their impact. Having Anthony Lake declare that "the successor to a doctrine of Containment must be a strategy of enlargement" ensured that the national and international attention that a similar presidential announcement would have received was missing.⁷ Similarly, a high profile unveiling of the annual grand strategy documents by the president alongside his national security team would have increased the policy's standing.

The Clinton White House appeared content to allow vital foreign policy initiatives to be unveiled by lower ranking members of the administration in a move that undermined the policies by raising doubts about the level of commitment to them within the Oval Office. While President Clinton did make foreign policy addresses, they were few and far between, and often failed to inspire confidence in his ability to convey strong leadership in matters of military planning or international relations. Anthony Lake commented that "a lot of the strategy comes more through presidential speeches than through the documents" and while this is undoubtedly true, the key foreign policy addresses of the Clinton administration, particularly in the first term, were delivered by officials and not by the president.⁸ Of course the processes involved in

presidential speechmaking are not straightforward, as interested parties from the State Department to the Congress seek to influence tone and content. This can mean that presidents are "reluctant to articulate foreign policy in detail and with precision," as the process "can be extremely time consuming and contentious. But a reluctance to articulate policy with precision is usually a mistake."⁹ Such was the case with the Clinton administration, as its willingness to delegate the pronouncement of grand strategy did much to undermine confidence in the eventual policy.

There was also tension within the administration over the need for a Clinton Doctrine or even the existence of a grand strategy: Tara Sonenshine of the NSC wrote in 1994, "I keep hoping that someone will pull together a Clinton Doctrine description which explains that Clinton's foreign policy is based on a careful calibration of force and diplomacy in which we use these dual levers to bring about the resolution of conflicts."¹⁰ However, within days Sonenshine's NSC colleague, Bob Borristin, advised Anthony Lake that the president "should not introduce any new all-encompassing term or phrase to describe our foreign policy," when he addressed the UN General Assembly, "nor should it explicitly go back to engagement, enlargement and three pillars," because "the press doesn't buy them."¹¹ Lake had previously attempted to coordinate a series of speeches in September 1993 around the concept of Democratic Enlargement, which had backfired when the four speeches failed to convey a single, simple message. However, it had also been undermined by Lake himself, who had told the *New Republic* the day beforehand that he was "sceptical about doctrines on immensely complicated and difficult issues [that] have all the answers before you ask the questions."¹² Policy divisions were present, therefore, not only between departments, but within them as well, ensuring that tension was never far from the surface.

While consultation is a prerequisite in any government bureaucracy, the Clinton administration appeared to take such a process to extremes, as its initial grand strategy document went through 21 drafts and 2 authors before finally appearing in the summer of 1994. Such hesitancy did little to inspire confidence either in personnel or in the direction of policy, since it appeared that the document was a compromise solution, reached after endless wrangling between the State Department and the National Security Council in particular. Despite the compromise, the State Department harbored a growing concern over the emphasis on trade policy, while the apparent refusal of the secretary of state to give his full support to the eventual strategy did much to undermine faith in it, revealing the "typical" and "cautious" approach of the department.¹³

Warren Christopher reportedly wanted nothing to do with Anthony Lake's Democratic Enlargement policy, which he viewed as "a trade policy masquerading as foreign policy."¹⁴ Lake, in contrast, felt that Engagement was "rather wimpy, because of course we were going to be engaged" and believed that this was included "just to make everyone happy." Lake

conceded that Christopher “didn’t use it, he didn’t like it, it went, in his view, too far . . . but not in the view of Madeleine or me or most of the people.”¹⁵ As Carl Bildt observed, “A great deal of blood can be spilt in the course of inter-agency debates in Washington” and the struggle to define foreign policy in the Clinton administration was a prime example of such wrangling.¹⁶ Reflecting on the situation, Charles A. Kupchan observed, “I don’t think that there really was a grand strategy. I think that there were ideas floating around and that there were guiding presumptions about America and its role in the world. The administration was more characterized by pragmatism and problem solving.” This is not to suggest that this was a flawed approach: “I think in general in foreign policy, it was a successful presidency and America ended up stronger, ended up respected, more prosperous.”¹⁷ Perhaps, therefore, doctrinal constructs are of less importance than results?

Clinton’s Grand Strategy was a fine concept, but providing demonstrable results proved difficult as the crises that confronted the administration came not from interstate activity but predominantly from internal disputes within Backlash States. Therefore, while the policy succeeded in providing direction in Central and Eastern Europe and, along with Dual Containment, gave direction to policy regarding Iraq and Iran, where there was no democratic development—and in the face of genocide—the policy offered little strategic value. While the promotion of free markets was a priority for the administration, its grand strategy did not provide an adequate guide for how to promote democracy. The policy served as a general rationale for promoting political liberalization and challenging Backlash States, but it did not provide specifics about what actions should be taken prior to democratic development in these regions. However, as Leon Fuerth noted,

There is always a gap between philosophy and events. You need to judge an administration on its actions, not its doctrines. Should we have had a doctrine on the use of force that would have bound us to implement it everywhere and in all situations? Can a statement explain what we should do or whom we should support in all circumstances? Should we always adhere to a doctrine? The NSSR was designed to explain the general logic, the processes and impressions of the individuals involved in policy formulation.¹⁸

The grand strategy of Engagement and Enlargement succeeded despite the best efforts of the foreign policy intelligentsia to write it off and in spite of limited public knowledge or interest. As Kupchan noted, the administration could rightly claim to have “brought peace to the Balkans . . . expanded trade and presided over the greatest expansion in the American economy.”¹⁹ In the administration’s policies toward Russia, its approach to NATO expansion, its endorsement of European enlargement, and normalization

of trade with the Pacific Rim nations, one can see the tangible results of a policy of Engagement and Enlargement that aided not only the US economy, but also the global economy during the 1990s.

The evolution of grand strategy

Anthony Lake observed that “there’s a tendency for all of us, when we’re going back and analysing things, to impute more order to processes than in fact there is and to give more weight to strategy papers than they deserve.”²⁰ However, the official grand strategy documents of the Clinton administration are revealing for the manner in which they evolved over 8 years. As a candidate in 1992, Bill Clinton stressed the desire to offer more opportunity in return for an assumption of greater responsibility on behalf of the American people. In 1995, he turned this ethos to the area of foreign policy, recognizing that “we have a special responsibility that goes along with being a great power.” This was not a traditional liberal approach to grand strategy, however, for it was tempered by a steely realism, born of tragic circumstances in Somalia. The Clinton administration was determined to stress the lessons it had learned from the events in Mogadishu and expressed them at length: “When our national security interests are threatened, we will, as America always has, use diplomacy when we can, but force if we must. We will act with others when we can, but alone when we must.”²¹ This was, and had been, the guiding principle of Clinton’s foreign policy, but it went largely unrecognized throughout his time in office.

Following criticism over Somalia and the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, the administration stressed a more defined concept of the use of force, as specific criteria were applied prior to troop deployment and military intervention. This did not signify a withdrawal from the world, but was a sign that the United States was determined to prioritize its own interests. This was done in part to refute Jeane Kirkpatrick’s claim that “the Clinton administration offers us a vision of foreign policy from which national self-interest is purged.”²² From 1995, “although the United States would not wholly eschew multilateral actions in global affairs, the administration would be more amenable to utilising unilateral actions—and would undertake them only if necessary.”²³ Grand strategy became tempered by a greater degree of realism, as the administration conceded “democracy and economic prosperity can take root in a struggling society only through local solutions carried out by the society itself.” The administration pledged to deploy troops overseas “only when our interests and our values are sufficiently at stake,” a position stressed in repeated national security documentation and as devised in PDD-25.²⁴ However, despite alterations to the philosophy, the basic tenants of Clinton’s Grand Strategy remained the desire to free both peoples and markets and to

bind them together in a world of growing interdependency and increasing globalization. The strategy was guided by a commitment to freedom, equality, and human dignity, but this idealism became increasingly tempered as time progressed.

While the first administration had to establish policy, by the time of the second Clinton administration, "the broad policy framework had been set."²⁵ The second term grand strategy placed prominence on negotiation and engagement, particularly with regard to China and Russia. However, Engagement was a procedure, a tool of diplomacy, whereas Democratic Enlargement was an aim, albeit one that lacked a method. As was noted, "engagement is just a fancy word for diplomacy. That's what the State Department does . . . having engagement as the goal means that, by definition, a meeting is a success if you simply show up."²⁶ The policy could, therefore, be seen as far more cautious than in the first term, in which great strides were sought if not necessarily achieved.

Anthony Lake's philosophy was apparent throughout: "This is not a crusade, but a genuine and responsible effort, over time, to protect American strategic interests, stabilise the international system and enlarge the community of nations committed to democracy, free markets and peace."²⁷ Such a declaration was indicative of the philosophy and expectation that the Clinton administration started out with. However, it was the dynamic reach of US Grand Strategy that proved to be its downfall, as the inability to enact the policy within a 4-year time frame, and thereby demonstrate tangible results proved to be its undoing.²⁸ There was also a question about the wisdom of pursuing both Democratic Enlargement and NATO Enlargement simultaneously, since "democratic enlargement was difficult and other foreign policy issues that did not fit neatly under the rubric needed attention."²⁹

Clinton's Grand Strategy necessarily took time to implement in key geostrategic locations. Indeed the concept of open markets leading to free and fair societies seemingly backfired in Russia where "the power of the oligarchs increased, government legitimacy fell and the needs of the Russian people were ignored."³⁰ The second Clinton administration chose to concentrate on more traditional concepts such as reducing nuclear weapons and increasing aid to Russia. In China, the administration continued its free trade policy "in the hope that an expanding free market would create a more assertive Chinese middle class."³¹ Clinton's second term cabinet were also somewhat more robust than the first, a situation personified by Madeleine Albright, who feared that "the lessons of Vietnam could be learned too well" and lead to a paralysis of American leadership.³²

Policy evolution was a visible process during the Clinton years and by 1998 the emphasis had moved toward Homeland Defense. This did not mean an embrace of NMD or the establishment of a Department of Homeland Security, but rather an acknowledgement of the threats posed by terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking, and WMD. However,

much of the philosophy remained consistent, as the 1998 grand strategy document contained the three familiar pillars upon which US Grand Strategy continued to be based: National security, democracy promotion, and prosperity promotion. However, while democracy promotion had not been erased, it was now below the horizon, as it was felt that “by the start of the second term attempts at Democratic Enlargement had reached an equilibrium.”³³

Time also saw alterations to the policy of Dual Containment. Martin Indyk observed that “over time the nature of the threats changed. The Iraqis became more of a problem, more difficult to contain.” By November 1998, the Clinton administration changed its policy from Dual Containment to Containment Plus Regime Change and declared that its objective was “not only to contain Saddam as long as he was around, but also to help the Iraqi people remove him and set up a different kind of government.” However, the administration took the opposite approach to Iran following the election of Khatami and was prepared to move from containment to engagement if they were prepared to meet halfway. Regretfully, the Tehran regime failed to respond, ensuring that the containment policy remained in place.

By December 2000, US Grand Strategy was defined as “A National Security Strategy for a Global Age,” though the goals remained familiar: “enhancing security at home and abroad, promoting prosperity and promoting democracy and human rights.”³⁴ The document had a tougher edge to it, but it remained at heart, an internationalist policy that warned against a “retreat into a policy of Fortress America.” To do so, the document warned, risked “a global loss of our authority and with it ultimately our power. A strategy of engagement, however, is the surest way to enhance not only our power but also our authority and thus our leadership, into the twenty-first century.”³⁵ This was the final grand strategy document released by the Clinton White House and the last such report prior to the attacks of September 2001, an event that refocused attention on foreign policy after a decade of ambivalence. Despite having updated US Grand Strategy on an annual basis, Leon Fuerth insisted that “events were more influential than documents” and that “ultimately, consistency can be over-rated.”³⁶ The Clinton administration’s grand strategy documents, therefore, were “more a statement of strategy and intent than a guide to action.”³⁷ As a result, it is important to “consider reality more than theoretical concepts within a doctrine” when judging the success or failure of the administration.³⁸

The evolution of personnel

Just as doubts remain over the veracity of Clinton’s Grand Strategy, so too do they loom large in any consideration of his national security team.

The group that Clinton initially assembled to devise grand strategy was drawn from the upper echelons of the Democratic Party, but many failed to measure up. Clinton's plan had been simple: "It was going to be a well-organized administration, the president was going to be the boss and Lake and Berger . . . would be the intellectual cranks, Christopher would go around the world and be the guy who shows up at the press conferences and does the right kind of thing."³⁹ Instead, his first term team was quickly tainted by events in Somalia and the president's perceived lack of faith in them proved to be contagious, with regular reports of imminent departures and impending resignations.

This was reflected in how the administration was perceived, as the National Security Council in particular became concerned at the administration's inability to convey its message. In June 1994, Tara Sonenshine and Tom Ross noted that the administration was suffering from "major weaknesses in the current foreign policy communications apparatus" and devised a 6-month strategy to reengage the public and the foreign policy elite. Sonenshine was forthright in her concerns over interdepartmental intransigence, insisting that "too much happens at State and Defense without White House knowledge." As a result, she noted, "too many journalists now find they can play one agency off another." Instead of the efficient media operation that had defined the Clinton campaign in 1992, a dysfunctional approach blighted the administration once in office, ensuring that "neither those who make foreign policy nor those whose responsibility it is to articulate the policy are consistently doing so in a way that communicates strength, clarity and decisiveness." As a result, "too much of that reporting and analysis takes places without an administration point of view. We are, therefore, constantly on the defensive."⁴⁰

There was a constant evolution of personnel within the national security structure, with individuals moving in, up or out of the administration, in part as a reflection of President Clinton's growing confidence in foreign affairs. The president grew into the role and this was reflected in his choice of advisers and the way his administration operated. The initial 18 months was defined by an "open access, user friendly" style at the National Security Council. However, the departure of Thomas "Mack" McLarty as Chief of Staff and the arrival of Leon Panetta "led to a tighter ship" and ended the sense of "a certain lack of discipline."⁴¹ This shake up that occurred within the White House staff following the 1994 midterms, however, should have been accompanied by changes in the foreign policy team. Warren Christopher singularly failed to provide the sense of purpose required of a Secretary of State in the modern era, as Shimon Peres' observation that he was "very finely made . . . like an English suit" perfectly encapsulated the rather effete quality Christopher brought to the role.⁴² Tony Lake was "soft-spoken, unassuming, and bookish" and appeared more concerned with preserving the harmony among key players and overcompensated for the internal division of the Carter years,

while Les Aspin's failing health was a metaphor for a man running out of time in every sense.⁴³

Despite the best attempt at achieving cordial relations, it was acknowledged that the relationship between Christopher and Lake "was still not a good one, replete as it was with mistrust and unilateral manoeuvring," a situation that had "substantial effects on US policy making."⁴⁴ Throughout the first term, Lake was the key advocate of Democratic Enlargement, had overseen its development, and ensured its place within US Grand Strategy. He was "a very cerebral person, a nice by Washington standards person . . . not a back stabber, or an elbow thrower . . . he's on the nice end of that spectrum in that regard . . . a thinking man's NSC adviser."⁴⁵ He was the driving force behind foreign policy in the first term, leading Leon Panetta to concede that there were "very few times [that Lake's position was] reversed or changed or modified."⁴⁶ However, despite having been vital to the campaign and to the development of policy, Lake failed to develop a warm relationship with the president. He had wanted to resign in the autumn of 1993, partly due to "a series of constant and growing frustrations—partly at the interagency difficulties in pushing through new approaches as hard times bring out new hesitations and partly also with a White House that . . . still treats foreign policy as [a] wholly owned subsidiary."⁴⁷ He remained distant from a chief executive known for his touchy-feely approach to interpersonal relationships and as a result, the bond that had developed between previous presidents and their national security advisers failed to materialize.

This lack of empathy compounded a sense that the first term team had somehow failed to come together as expected. Kupchan noted that "If there were a criticism that I would level at the group, it was that they were too nice and they were not sufficiently hard headed enough in resolving differences of opinion and bringing the policy debate to a sharp conclusion."⁴⁸ Despite their shared experience in the Carter administration and apparent public displays of harmony, tensions existed that refused to dissipate. Madeleine Albright noted changes in Lake's demeanor: "I was unnerved by the manner of Tony Lake. The pressures of the job had made Tony less easygoing and patient than the clever friend whom I had long known."⁴⁹

Lake "stayed on through the entire first term, driven in part by the need to resolve the festering problem in Bosnia, somewhat to the frustration of Berger, who had gotten him the job and had thought that he might take over a year or two earlier."⁵⁰ Indeed, it was understood that Lake had advised his family that he would only serve for 2 years.⁵¹ Lake had sought to act as a "behind-the-scenes consensus builder" who presented the varying views of senior advisers to the president. He later lamented adopting this "discreet posture," since "in the post-Cold War world, the president needs all the help he can get in explaining his policies to the nation."⁵²

Despite finding him “not entirely simpatico,” President Clinton intended to move Lake to Langley at the start of his second term, where he would remain within the administration as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI).⁵³ President Clinton announced that Lake’s role at the NSC had given him “a unique understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of our intelligence operations.”⁵⁴ The president referred to Lake as “one of my closest advisers and one of my most trusted ones. He was an integral part of every foreign policy decision we made and his legacy can be seen around the world.”⁵⁵ Writing in *Foreign Policy*, Melvin Goodman noted that Lake was an ideal candidate to “restore the integrity and credibility of the CIA and to confront its Cold War legacy.”⁵⁶ However, Lake became the most high profile victim of the increasing partisanship that swept Washington. His posting as national security adviser had not required congressional approval, but the bid to become DCI was derailed in hearings before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. In Lake’s place, Clinton selected George Tenet as the DCI, who continued to serve into the following administration.⁵⁷

With Lake no longer at the NSC, Clinton finally nominated his friend of 30 years, Samuel Berger, who had been offered the role 4 years earlier. Berger “was not someone you would necessarily think of as a foreign policy thinker, but he was a good nuts and bolts guy who knew everyone and made sure you didn’t screw up, which was Clinton’s instinct.”⁵⁸ The changes from Lake to Berger were not major ensuring that policy positions that had been initiated by Lake were credited to Berger toward the end of the administration’s time in office. Writing in the *Washington Post*, Sebastian Mallaby suggested that Berger had brought a much needed balance between realism and idealism since “he had declined to be a Wilsonian idealist or a Henry Kissinger realist. He has refused to chose between a go-it-alone conservatism and liberal internationalism,” a stance that perfectly described Anthony Lake’s approach since he joined the Clinton campaign in 1991 at Berger’s invitation.⁵⁹

The appointment of William Perry as Defense Secretary helped to improve interdepartmental relations. Similar moves at State and the NSC in 1994/1995 could have greatly aided the administration, and enabled members of the second term to be promoted sooner, or empowered others, such as Richard Holbrooke, with greater responsibility. However, along with the obvious problems of replacing the entire foreign policy team was the challenge of getting candidates confirmed in the new 105th Congress—a fact that undoubtedly tempered the temptation to clean house in 1995, especially since “there were concerns that replacing Christopher would have been a bloodbath.”⁶⁰

Clinton’s second-term foreign policy team of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, National Security Advisor Samuel Berger, and Secretary of Defense William Cohen were “less talented than their predecessors, but also less restrained” and better reflected the president’s evolving

aspirations.⁶¹ Clinton's selection of Albright was not guaranteed, indeed "it was surprising, Clinton ambled into it, wasn't sure he wanted her." Eventually, President Clinton "warmed to her story and to her as more than a figurehead, an embodiment of American values that would work well aboard, but he was worried about her ability to make the trains run on time." Richard Holbrook was considered "and would have gotten the job, but Clinton didn't trust him as a team player."⁶² As a team, they were far more prepared to endorse unilateral action than their predecessors. Despite this, during Clinton's time in office, "the chances of an American serviceman being killed by hostile action while on active duty were less than 1 in 160,000. He was six times more likely to be murdered by one of his comrades, nineteen times more likely to kill himself, and fifty times more likely to die in an accident," odds that changed considerably following Clinton's departure from office.⁶³

Considering the critiques of grand strategy

The Clinton administration envisioned its replacement of Containment to be the quintessential foreign policy initiative for addressing the final decade of the twentieth century. However, its reception was less than glorious: Republicans were damning; foreign policy analysts were scathing; the press was unimpressed; and former members of Clinton's campaign team were dismissive. Before the administration had left office, its grand strategy was damned for being "indecisive, incoherent, contradictory, confused, lacking in vision and purpose."⁶⁴ Clearly, this was not the reception that the Clinton administration had hoped for. However, this was the good news, for at least the aforementioned groups noticed that a strategy had been designed. The vast majority of Americans remained blissfully unaware that a new global strategy had been devised, as polls repeated revealed Americans to be "uninformed, confused, or apathetic."⁶⁵ With the end of the Cold War, foreign policy ceased to be a daily concern for most Americans and, as a result, Clinton's Grand Strategy initiative was "a public relations dud; few liked it or even took a passing interest."⁶⁶

The Clinton administration sought to convey the "new dangers, opportunities, and responsibilities" that had arisen at a time when Americans were "preoccupied with domestic concerns."⁶⁷ However, having campaigned on a domestic agenda, critiquing President Bush for his emphasis on foreign affairs, President Clinton was ill-placed to complain when much of the country ignored issues relating to foreign policy, while those who did express an opinion were unimpressed when the administration singularly failed "to build a domestic political consensus in support of its strategic vision."⁶⁸ In a survey of public opinion on foreign policy conducted in late 1994, only 31 percent of the public

judged the Clinton administration's handling of foreign policy as "good" or "excellent."⁶⁹

The administration did not need to look far for critics of its grand strategy, for what its policy lacked in overall success, it made up for in an ability to rally opposition. Senator John McCain accused Clinton of having "pursued a feckless, photo-op foreign policy" during which there had been "little or no effort to define a coherent plan for United States engagement in the world."⁷⁰ The editor of *Foreign Affairs*, William G. Hyland, suggested that Clinton's foreign policy amounted to little more than one of "selective engagement" and alleged that a "magnificent historical opportunity to shape the international system had been missed."⁷¹ Richard Haass turned criticism of US Grand Strategy in the 1990s into an art-form, declaring that Clinton "inherited a world of unprecedented American advantage and opportunity," and presided over an age of "underachievement and squandered potential."⁷² Henry Kissinger went further, as he dismissed not only the president, but also his entire generation, as one dedicated to the "self-indulgence or self-righteousness of the protest period." Clinton's generation, Kissinger lamented, had "not yet raised leaders capable of evoking a commitment to a consistent and long-range foreign policy."⁷³

Former Clinton campaign adviser Michael Mandelbaum berated the administration for its efforts, declaring that, "the seminal events of the foreign policy of the Clinton administration were three failed military interventions in its first nine months in office."⁷⁴ Mandelbaum, passed over for a high-ranking position in the White House, lamented that "after three years the Clinton administration had not articulated a clear foreign policy doctrine for the post-Cold War world."⁷⁵ However, by the time this had been published, the Clinton administration had produced two national security strategy reports and was preparing a third. The issues that Mandelbaum referenced had also been inherited from "a supposed master of foreign policy, George Bush" and Clinton "essentially tried to maintain the policies he inherited in those trouble spots."⁷⁶ Mandelbaum had also previously written that "whoever won the election in 1992 would have had to face a tough choice in 1993 regarding Somalia . . . The Bush people might have made a different choice than Clinton and just pulled out, but they can't now say that they could have avoided that choice."⁷⁷ As Jacob Heilbrunn noted, "US foreign policy has been increasingly successful precisely because Bill Clinton has refused to embrace chimerical visions. As a result, he has skillfully piloted the US through a sea of New World disorder."⁷⁸

Jacques Attali, former adviser to François Mitterrand, expressed concerns that the Clinton administration had failed to provide "long-term vision. Leadership becomes an empty concept when day-to-day actions do not occur within a broader context."⁷⁹ However, a broader context had been espoused, though roundly ignored, something that did not prevent

Richard Haass from writing in *Foreign Affairs* that Clinton had failed to establish “an overarching intellectual framework” for foreign policy and that as a result, “few relationships or institutions bear his imprint.”⁸⁰ Yet the decision to expand NATO, the alterations to APEC, and the moves to enact NAFTA and the WTO were all decisions made by the Clinton White House that had major, long-term implications for the United States and the world well into the twenty-first century. As the great architect of European unity, Jean Monnet, observed, “Nothing is possible without men, but nothing is lasting without institutions.”⁸¹

Not all criticism was unfounded. John Lewis Gaddis suggested that that US Grand Strategy amounted to little more than “foreign policy by autopilot,” that “never specified who or what was to be engaged or enlarged.”⁸² This was perhaps a fair critique of the policy; it presented admirable concepts, but little to help with implementation. Clearly, aspirations were set, but the policy lacked a methodology. Clinton’s Grand Strategy contained the goal of aiding nations in their efforts to attain democracy, but offered little by way of a strategy, which required more than the prioritizing of goals. As George Kennan explained, in foreign policy, the “what” cannot be separated from the “how.”⁸³ However, Gaddis later observed that the administration “assumed the continued primacy of states within the international system” and that it needed only to “engage” with them in order to “enlarge” the processes of self-determination and economic integration. Gaddis suggested that the administration’s view of states was that “if you could bind them together by removing restrictions on trade and investment as well as on the movement of peoples and ideas, then the causes of violence and the insecurity it breeds would drop away.” Such efforts were deemed to be “well intentioned but shallow.”⁸⁴ Gaddis, however, failed to address the focus on Backlash States that Anthony Lake raised or efforts to combating international terrorism.

Accordingly, Clinton’s critics often revealed their own ignorance of the policy-making process and the track record of debate on the subject. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Jonathan Clarke complained that “all too often the slogan comes first, the substance second,” using as evidence of this, the president’s lament that his administration had failed to design a “bumper sticker” that encapsulated its foreign policy. Clarke complained that under Clinton, “policymakers reach first for the sound bite tested in focus groups . . . and then try to construct a policy that fits it.”⁸⁵ Such an assault on the manner in which foreign policy was devised revealed a lack of insight into the evolution of policy and totally misconstrued the president’s remarks, which had conceded not that there was no policy, but rather that the White House had failed to reduce its policy to a simple expression, necessary to engage the general public. In every sense, Clarke failed to appreciate the manner in which policy had been devised and the importance of conveying a message to the media and the world at large. Robert Kagan critiqued the administration for failing to contain China, remove Saddam Hussein,

maintain US military strength, or deploy NMD.⁸⁶ However, as Stephen Walt noted, the administration's foreign policy was "well suited to an era where there [was] little to gain in foreign policy and much to lose. The American people recognise this and have made it clear that they want neither isolationism nor costly international crusades."⁸⁷

President Clinton recognized that due to America's electoral timescales he had a finite period in which to enact his domestic program and, therefore, prioritized his deficit reduction plan and efforts to introduce universal health-care coverage to the detriment of other considerations. For much of President Clinton's first year in office, "there was no pressure . . . to focus on foreign policy. He was content to focus on his domestic agenda . . . There was a preference to deal with events rather than formulate doctrines."⁸⁸ By doing so, the president remained true to his goal of focusing on America's economy, but this helped to formulate a belief that he was disengaged from the foreign policy decision-making process. This reduced the authority of the White House and of America's officials around the globe, leading to claims that the Clinton administration "almost turned foreign policy into a vaudeville act."⁸⁹ The repercussions demonstrated that Bill Clinton could not afford to abdicate interest over one area of government merely for the benefit of another. As President of the United States, Bill Clinton needed to demonstrate mastery of his entire White House, not merely those areas of policy that interested him. His failure to do so sufficiently in this first year in office was something his critics never forgave him for.

Perhaps the most remarkable critique of the administration, however, came not from opponents, but from its former members. Michael Mandelbaum's devastating broadside, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," has been well documented, but Kupchan's comments in *The End of the American Era* warrant consideration. He noted that, "although members of the Clinton team effectively blended realism and liberalism in practice, they never did so self-consciously—that is, they never articulated a set of guiding principles that could serve as the conceptual foundation for their actions." This is a remarkable declaration from a former member of the NSC that raises questions about the impact, even internally, of the annual National Security Strategy Review, which laid out, year by year, precisely the "guiding principles" that Kupchan refers to. He remarked that as Clinton "failed to arm himself with a clear set of guiding strategic principles that he could impart to the electorate, he was not even able to begin the task of laying the foundation for a new American internationalism." Yet time and again, throughout the administration, Clinton and his officials sought to do so, detailing the three central elements to policy that had been present since the Georgetown University speech of December 1991. Kupchan concludes that "without such conceptual coherence, the whole of Clinton's foreign policy ended up being much less than the sum of its parts. The administration may have gotten right many specific policies, but those policies did not add up to a coherent grand strategy."⁹⁰ This reinforced the

fears of the NSC's Tara Sonenshine that the administration's message was simply not being conveyed adequately, either internally or externally.

Certainly, the administration's shortcomings were recognized by its own officials. Members of the NSC noted that the president needed "to speak with the confident voice of the captain and navigator of our ship of state" because the American people "crave a sense of national direction."⁹¹ This, alas, was not always forthcoming, enabling Richard Haass to conclude that Clinton "gave the American people the foreign policy that polls suggested they wanted—unlike a truly great president, who would have tried to lead them toward the foreign policy they needed."⁹² Yet during the 1990s the American people were content to focus on a domestic agenda and were not seeking foreign wars. Indeed, there is little to suggest that things would be any different had it not been for the terrorist attacks of 2001. Despite setbacks, the moves made with both Russia and China were examples of the policy being utilized to improve both American exports and the safety of the world. These successes were compounded by the successful expansion of NATO, done without drawing the Russians into either a conflict or alienation. It was also a policy that was palatable to the rest of the world and did not produce the vitriolic backlash that marked the administration of Clinton's successor.

The significance of Clinton's Grand Strategy

Whatever their policy successes and despite their best efforts, the Clinton administration was unable to define the era through which it governed and remained exposed to criticism that it failed to define US foreign policy, as the end of the Cold War "meant the loss of a single enemy . . . around which to rally a national and international consensus."⁹³ In this regard, little had changed since Al Gore wrote in 1992, "our geo-politics are labelled post-Cold War. We know what we are not, but we don't seem to know what we are."⁹⁴ Fundamentally, an administration must define "what constitutes a vital interest—a change in the international environment so likely to undermine the national security that it must be resisted no matter what form the threat takes or how ostensibly legitimate it appears."⁹⁵ This was perhaps the greatest failure of Clinton's Grand Strategy, as it failed to engage either the public or foreign policy experts. Wolfowitz noted that the administration had "failed to explain what American interests are worth defending and to justify the actions that it has taken in relation to those interests."⁹⁶ This was compounded by the fact that so few in the administration appeared interested in promoting the concept to the American public, who in turn were not very interested in hearing about it. Therefore, the only people to comment were those who feared the policy threatened to surrender

America's primacy in the world. Eventually the White House realized that in an age when the United States lacked both a defined enemy and a defined role, it was no longer advisable to develop narrow concepts and attempt to manipulate foreign policy to match.

This had been the view of Warren Christopher all along and his stance had supporters. John Lewis Gaddis called it "a defensible position," adding that "there is something to be said for staying flexible . . . One of the distinct advantages of a world without clear and present dangers is that it allows such improvisation."⁹⁷ Gaddis was far from endorsing the administration, however, and lamented "the absence of any grand design," believing that "there's a kind of incrementalism and *ad-hocism* to things."⁹⁸ Gaddis was echoed by Condoleezza Rice, writing in *Foreign Affairs*: "The absence of an articulated 'national interest' either produces a fertile ground for those wishing to withdraw from the world or creates a vacuum to be filled by parochial groups and transitory pressures." Despite Dr Rice's concerns, the Clinton administration's National Security Strategy Reviews were hardly "hijacked by isolationist tendencies" and were not prey to "parochial groups and transitory pressures."⁹⁹ Indeed, the central themes of the annual reports remained consistent with Clinton's December 1991 address at Georgetown University.

Clinton openly advocated making economic security a central element of grand strategy. His agenda was the foundation for a new, post-Containment American mission in the world, as Clinton positioned the United States as "a power for free markets, democracy and development."¹⁰⁰ Yet the belief that foreign and domestic agendas could be combined for the good of the nation was a revolutionary concept and one that appalled those who maintained their faith in classic power politics. However, the Clinton administration was governing the nation through a new age that called for new concepts. The guiding mantra had been Franklin Roosevelt's desire for "bold, persistent experimentation" and in its grand strategy, Clinton's team believed it had found a way to engage in such an activist approach to policy, coupled with a much needed pragmatic stance.¹⁰¹

For all of the interdepartmental compromises, even critics conceded that no policy "set forth to address the disorder and chance of a rapidly evolving world order can be frozen in rigid application"; attempting to do so would have been futile and potentially disastrous.¹⁰² As Lake acknowledged, "Nobody in any government I am aware of except perhaps in the Soviet Union, or in Mao's China, says at a meeting, 'OK, what did we say in the strategy document, therefore, here's what our policy is.'"¹⁰³ Neither the policy of Containment that preceded Engagement and Enlargement nor that of Pre-Emption that followed it tied the United States to specific unyielding action regardless of the ramifications. Indeed, the Containment doctrine, "so celebrated in hindsight . . . saw inconsistent implementation."¹⁰⁴ As Anthony Lake observed in his 1994 speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, "while the policy of Containment looks

obvious to us in retrospect, we should remember that it took . . . several years to define their way and build a policy consensus . . . And they had the advantage of an ideologically and geographically defined adversary with whom to contend.”¹⁰⁵ This did not prevent Richard Haass from observing in *Foreign Policy* that, “the one attempt to articulate an overall construct was embodied in then national security advisor Anthony Lake’s September 1993 address . . . but this neo-Wilsonian vision has had a negligible impact on day-to-day affairs.”¹⁰⁶ Policy documents can only ever exist as a guideline and in many cases “there is no relationship between the document and policy.”¹⁰⁷ Within the Clinton White House, the grand strategy documents “were designed to provide guidance for overall policy. However, the responses to ongoing issues should be given more attention than theoretical documents. The Clinton worldview was not driven by a doctrinal situation.”¹⁰⁸

Official US foreign policy, as printed, can only ever be theoretical, designed to indicate direction and principles. “Nobody looks at them to clear up issues. Any concept that the policy influences events or people’s reaction to them is just wrong.”¹⁰⁹ To presume that such documents are consulted in time of crisis is to misunderstand both the rationale for such documentation and also the nature of government and emergency responses. “For all administrations they are more a statement of strategy and intent than a guide to action.”¹¹⁰ This was recognized by those covering the administration, as Jef McAllister of *Time* observed, such documents “might be good for imposing discipline on the machine, but its probably not the place where real creative thinking gets done . . . When the president wants to come up with a new foreign policy its usually done with him, the secretary of state and the national security adviser and a speech writer or two.”¹¹¹ Such documents exist for two reasons: to provide public reassurance about the overall strategy of the administration and to fulfill a legal requirement to report such a strategy to Congress. For critics to lament that the Clinton administration’s “early experiments” with its ambition of Democratic Enlargement and tactic of Assertive Multilateralism “were quickly abandoned, with *ad hoc* decision-making becoming the norm” fails to convey the realities of the administration or the manner in which all foreign crises are addressed as they occur.¹¹²

In 2010, Krasner noted that “most foreign policies most of the time have not been guided by grand strategy,” and that most efforts to articulate a holistic vision have failed. Rather than attempting to initiate grand strategy, Krasner suggests, states should base their foreign policy around Orienting Principles, an approach that warrants consideration in light of the critiques leveled at the Clinton administration’s foreign policy initiatives. Such an approach, Krasner believes, “is distinct from pure *ad hocery*. It aspires to something beyond specific short- or medium-term material interests.”

The Clinton administration was repeatedly accused of adopting an *ad hoc* approach to foreign policy, a claim this book has sought to refute,

but does this necessarily mean that it was inadvertently adopting Krasner's model? Clinton's initiatives were certainly more far reaching in their ambitions than mere short- or medium-term goals, indeed, this may have served to undermine their viability due to the need to produce results in a finite political timeframe. Krasner concludes that "coherence is more likely to be achieved by aiming at something more modest, a principle around which foreign policy might be oriented."¹¹³ This perhaps is the clearest point of departure from the aspirations of the Clinton administration; while the Clinton approach was based on three key principles around which it oriented its foreign policy, these elements were far from modest. Indeed, it was their broad aspirations that proved more complex to deliver upon than to articulate, that contributed to doubts about their viability.

It is clear that while grand strategy documents are important for discerning aspirations and intentions, they can only ever be seen as the beginning of policy development. Nancy Soderberg suggested "basically it's an internal document that was largely ignored. A lot of work went into it but it was pretty much ignored . . . Rob Bell slaved away on these things year after year and most people never read them."¹¹⁴ Accordingly, "the Clinton administration's presentation of its strategy was been more consistent than its actions."¹¹⁵ Changes in policy during the course of an administration are far from unusual and are indeed quite normal, since the alternative is stagnation. A consideration of the Reagan White House, for an example, reveals an administration that went from decrying the Soviet Union as an evil empire in 1981, to the signing of nuclear reduction treaties in 1987. It should be no surprise, therefore, to view changes in foreign policy during the Clinton administration—as its natural inclination for multilateralism morphed into a grudging recognition that American unilateralism was required in the face of perceived UN timidity—as being quite normal. Considering the rapidly changing environment Clinton's team found itself addressing, evolution was expected. Indeed, to adhere rigidly to a policy in an environment where change was the only constant, would itself have been a mistake.

Clinton's Grand Strategy attempted to walk a fine line between defending the administration's inclination toward multilateralism, which it referred to as "an important component of our strategy" and the fact that world events predicated the need to espouse a more robust unilateral approach to foreign policy.¹¹⁶ The documents were adamant that America's "security preparedness depends on durable relationships with allies and other friendly nations. Accordingly, a central thrust of our strategy of engagement is to sustain and adapt the security relationships we have with key nations around the world."¹¹⁷ This continued interaction with loyal allies proved essential to the United States during the 1990s and beyond, as the nation sought to define itself in an age free of communism, but not yet defined by attacks on the American homeland.

The continued relevance of Clinton's Grand Strategy

The Clinton administration left the White House on January 20, 2001. Since then, tumultuous events have occurred that have raised questions about the continued relevance of its time in office. However, the issues that have defined the Bush and Obama presidencies: terrorism, health care reform, economic boom and bust, globalization, and financial reform can be traced back to Clinton's time in office. As such, Clinton's grand strategy looms over his successors, creating a continuity of both personality and policy. Since January 1993, the same issues have dominated; the same regions have tested; and a surprisingly small number of individuals have led US Grand Strategy. Time and again, the same names, faces, and places have appeared to lead, challenge, taunt, and defend US interests around the world, in a pattern that reveals the continued relevance of Clinton's Grand Strategy.

Due to the relative calm of President George W. Bush's first 8 months in office, the events of September 2001 are often viewed as the start of a new era, signifying the end of the post-Cold War period and the start of the War on Terror. However, as this book has revealed, international terrorism was a major challenge to the Clinton administration during its 8 years in power. Within weeks of taking office, Clinton was faced with the first effort to destroy the World Trade Center in Manhattan. This was followed by the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the attack on the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and attempts to bring down airlines and attack the infrastructure around Manhattan on Millennium Eve. Suggestions that the United States was not engaged in an ongoing struggle with the forces of political violence during the 1990s fail to appreciate the rising tide of anti-American sentiment that the Clinton administration sought to quell during its time in office.

Throughout the Clinton presidency, Osama bin Laden remained a target for US intelligence services as he established his position alongside Ayman al Zawahri, striking at targets in Egypt, Tanzania, and Albania in a struggle against the central tenants of Western civilization. The Clinton administration's attempt to destroy terrorist training camps in Afghanistan was overshadowed by the president's impeachment hearings, causing political opponents to suggest that the administration was "wagging the dog," a charge latter exacerbated by claims that Bill Clinton bore personal responsibility for the 2001 attacks.¹¹⁸ On closer inspection, however, a far more complex tale emerges, of an administration focused on removing this threat to the American homeland and of stubborn resistance from the military and Capitol Hill—in stark contrast to the robust authority granted to President George W. Bush. As President Clinton lamented in a private meeting with President-Elect Bush as they prepared for the transfer

of power, "One of the great regrets of my presidency is that I didn't get [bin Laden] for you, because I tried to."¹¹⁹

If the attacks of September 2001 narrowed the world's attention on Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, there remained those in the Bush administration who never wavered from their focus on Saddam Hussein. As the twin towers burnt, efforts were made to link the Iraqi leader to the attacks, with or without evidence of such a conspiracy.¹²⁰ Clinton's Grand Strategy adopted a variety of policy approaches intended to reduce Saddam's capacity to threaten the United States and its neighbors. The fundamental approach was to keep Saddam "in his box" and isolated from world affairs. This took the form of policies designed to reduce international access to Iraq in the form of Dual Containment; inclusion of Iraq on a list of pariah nations, referred to as Backlash States that proceeded the Axis of Evil by almost a decade; the continuation of air patrols and efforts to ensure compliance with UN resolutions from the end of the 1991 Gulf War; and finally the adoption of regime change as official US foreign policy in 1998, 3 years prior to the presidency of George W. Bush. Vitaly, however, the Clinton White House refused to prioritize the threat posed by Saddam and viewed him as an irritant as opposed to a serious threat to regional or global harmony.

The Iraqi leader's stubborn refusal to placate Western concerns with regard to potential violations of UN resolutions ensured that Iraq was never far from the minds of Clinton's national security team. The Iraqi leader was not, however, a priority for the president who had no intention of entering into a personal battle of wits that had occurred between Saddam and his predecessor and which defined his successor's time in office. The Clinton administration believed that it had an appropriate approach to Saddam that kept him isolated and unable to initiate military action, but without the need to engage in a costly land war, while remaining hopeful of his eventual overthrow by Iraqi nationals. This ambition was one that Clinton's successor was not prepared to delay, with devastating consequences for America's global standing and economic well-being that continued to impact the administration of Barack Obama.

Clinton's Grand Strategy initiatives in African set a precedent for future missions in Liberia, Sudan, Uganda, Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia. While the action of a small group of Somali's meant they had "effectively written themselves off the map," the importance of the continent could not be ignored during Obama's time in office.¹²¹ Events in Somalia continued to haunt US decision making, however, ensuring a hesitancy to deploy ground forces even at the height of the Arab Spring, resulting in the Obama policy of "leading from behind."¹²² The lack of direct US action in the uprisings and the hesitation to place ground troops on the African continent can be attributed, in part, to events that occurred under the auspices of Clinton's Grand Strategy and the administration's response to them is vital for appreciating subsequent US reluctance to engage in the region.¹²³

Africa may not have become a continent that the United States was eager to deploy troops to, but it became a strategic staging post for a new generation of un-manned aerial aircraft that had first come to prominence during the Clinton years.¹²⁴ Drones had been a developing technology during the Clinton administration, used mainly as a surveillance platform. They had, however, become integral to the search for bin Laden and, as described by Richard Clarke, were hunting for the elusive terrorist in the hope of relaying his whereabouts to a nearby Los Angeles class attack submarine, waiting to guide a missile to his location.¹²⁵ While no sightings proved verifiable, the development of drone technology and their deployment against international terrorists were a key component in Clinton's Grand Strategy that continues to influence policy.

The Clinton administration reformulated concepts of foreign affairs to incorporate prosperity promotion as a central component of grand strategy and strove to reduce the budget deficit so that by the time it left office, debate centered on what to do with the vast government surplus that had been amassed. During the 1990s, Bill Clinton "restored the Democrat's reputation for economic competence that had been established by Franklin D. Roosevelt, consolidated by Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson and surrendered by Jimmy Carter."¹²⁶ As a result, both Democrats and Republicans sought to lay claim to Clinton's economic record in a bid to out-promise one another during the 2012 election. In a remarkable turn of events, even Bill Clinton's former critics conceded that the 1990s were the most affluent decade in American history with unemployment and inflation under control, government spending reduced, new approaches to welfare introduced (with the help of Republicans in Congress), and a stock market that rose to record highs. Breaking down the wall between foreign and domestic economic policy as an aspect of grand strategy ensured that President Clinton's economic policies not only reversed the financial woes of the United States, but also did much to alter the perception of the Democratic Party standing for higher taxes and increased government expenditure, creating a formidable precedent for his successors to meet.

However, the economic repercussions of the Clinton years continue to be of direct relevance for altogether less favorable reasons, as the deregulation policies of that era, which enabled such rampant growth, gave way to the eventual collapse of the very institutions that thrived in the 1990s. Indeed, it appears possible to track the end of the boom almost precisely to the end of the Clinton presidency, as the dot.com bubble burst in his final months in office. The market stalled during the drawn out election of 2000 and collapsed after the attacks of 9/11. The aftermath saw slow and hesitant growth throughout the decade, but the confidence of the 1990s was clearly lacking and was removed entirely in the aftermath of the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. It is possible, therefore, to see the origins of the age of austerity in the boom days of the Clinton years, a

time that witnessed a transition from recession to boom and eventual bust, with damning implications.

Just as the economic implications of Clinton's Grand Strategy continue to resonate, so too do members of his administration. Hillary Clinton is merely the most prominent of a series of political figures from the era that ensure the continued relevance of Clinton's Grand Strategy.¹²⁷ Others include Leon Panetta, Dennis Ross, Rahm Emanuel, George Mitchell, Eric Holder, Susan Rice, and John Podesta. This "revolving door" approach to political appointments is based on a desire to retain institutional memory and draw on those with executive department experience. With the same small group of individuals rotating in and out of power, however, campaigns based on a platform of "change" appear at odds with the reality of inherent continuity at an institutional and personnel level.¹²⁸

The strategies and approaches to grand strategy that evolved throughout the Clinton administration had a direct bearing on its interaction with the world, on the way in which the United States was perceived and on the legacy that was bequeathed to future occupants of the White House. Issues of globalization, international trade, the rise of China, and the emergence of the European Union were all addressed as part of an evolving grand strategy. All had consequences for Clinton and his successors as the United States sought to recalibrate America's global focus in the aftermath of the Cold War.

Conclusion: A strategy grand enough for the times

As the first administration to come to power following the end of the Cold War, the Clinton team was required to devise a new approach with which to address the world and the rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Its efforts to devise a grand strategy were endangered by bureaucratic sensibilities, personal rivalries, and the rapidly changing environment through which it sought to govern. Despite such difficulties, the Clinton administration successfully produced a series of strategy documents in line with the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act designed to demonstrate the direction and intent behind US Grand Strategy.

However, with no external threat to motivate public opinion, the Clinton years quickly become viewed as the age between eras: between the end of the Cold War and before the War on Terror. Indeed, it is looking increasingly likely that Bill Clinton was elected at the only time in his life when it was theoretically possible. Before 1992, the ongoing Cold War dictated that foreign policy experience was essential for the presidency and, that once in office, foreign policy would dominate the administration. Clearly, Clinton would have failed on both criteria, with

no foreign policy experience gained during his time as governor and with no particular predilection in that direction to guide him even if he had been elected. A decade later, the events of September 2001 dictated that foreign policy initiatives and the War on Terror dominated administrations to the detriment of domestic affairs. Perhaps, therefore, "Bill Clinton was lucky to serve as president in such quiet times, times he palpably made better through his economic and domestic policy actions."¹²⁹

As he prepared to leave office, President Clinton raised Thomas Jefferson's warning of entangling alliances. He insisted, however, that despite the eminent wisdom of his predecessor, "America cannot and must not disentangle itself from the world. If we want the world to embody our shared values, then we must assume a shared responsibility." Rather than withdrawing from the world, Clinton insisted, the United States "must embrace boldly and resolutely that duty to lead—to stand with our allies in word and deed and to put a human face on the global economy, so that expanded trade benefits all peoples in all nations, lifting lives and hopes all across the world."¹³⁰

Foreign policy may not have driven Bill Clinton's presidential odyssey, but despite this, his administration achieved notable successes, including the passage of NAFTA, expansion of NATA, the normalization of relations with China, conclusion of the GATT negotiations that led to the formation of the WTO, protection of the Mexican peso, the Dayton Peace Accords, and the securing of nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union. The administration made strides toward peace in the Middle East and Northern Ireland and stood by Russia as it struggled to embrace democracy. The administration bequeathed its successor a foreign policy legacy that included "a commitment to a sustained role for the United States in global affairs after the Cold War, an enhanced position for economic issues on the foreign-policy agenda and a redefinition of the global threat environment that the United States faces."¹³¹ It failed, however, to secure backing for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, chose not to embrace NMD, and was unable to expand NAFTA to include Chile. It also failed in its efforts to develop agreement over the circumstances in which America should engage in regional conflicts and "the question of how values and interests should shape American foreign policy remained unresolved."¹³²

During its time in office, the Clinton administration underwent a severe learning curve. The president entered office critiquing President Bush for being "the foreign policy president," yet "travelled abroad more than any other US president, making almost as many overseas trips as Ronald Regan and George Bush combined."¹³³ Just as the president grew into his role, so too did his administration, a point conceded by Anthony Lake: "In Somalia we tried to do too much. In Rwanda we did too little. In Haiti and Bosnia, after false starts, we eventually got it right."¹³⁴ Yet the Clinton administration kept America out of foreign wars, arranged the expansion

of NATO, ended the genocide in the Balkans, and made valiant efforts to progress the peace process in the Middle East. As David Gergen observed, "one could say of his foreign policy what Twain said of Wagner: 'His music is better than it sounds.'" ¹³⁵

Warren Christopher noted that foreign policy "is always a work in progress" and this was never more accurate than under President Clinton, who inherited a dangerous international situation with massive nuclear proliferation in the former Soviet republics, tensions in the Middle East, and massive deficits at home. ¹³⁶ "Did they succeed in making the world anew? Probably not. Did they succeed in something that would rival Acheson's *Present at the Creation*? No. Probably not." ¹³⁷ However, while Engagement and Enlargement was an imperfect policy, in an age when the old rules did not apply and no New World Order had emerged, Clinton's Grand Strategy provided a flexible and pragmatic response to an evolving world order.

Notes

- 1 Larry Berman and Bruce W. Jentleson, "Bush and the Post-Cold-War World: New Challenges for American Leadership," in Campbell and Rockman (eds), *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals*, pp. 93–94.
- 2 Warren Christopher, "Statement at Senate Confirmation Hearing," *US Department of State Dispatch* 4, Issue 4 (January 25, 1993), p. 45.
- 3 Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, p. 285.
- 4 For a summary of the arguments for and against Democratic Promotion see Christopher Layne and Sean M. Lynn-Jones (eds), *Should America Promote Democracy?* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1998).
- 5 John Brummett, *High Wire*, p. 209.
- 6 PPPWJC, vol. 1 (1997), Inaugural Address, January 20, 1997, p. 44.
- 7 Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," p. 658.
- 8 Author's interview with Anthony Lake.
- 9 Hamilton, *A Creative Tension*, pp. 44–45.
- 10 Tara Sonenshine to Bob Boorstin; re: Some Random Thoughts on the UNGA Speech, n.d., Clinton Presidential Records, National Security Council, Robert Boorstin (Speechwriting), OA/Box Number: 422, UNGA '94—NSC Memos, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.
- 11 Bob Boorstin to Anthony Lake; re: Preliminary UNGA Thoughts, Clinton Presidential Records, National Security Council, Robert Boorstin (Speechwriting), OA/Box Number: 422, UNGA '94—Outline, William J. Clinton Presidential Library.
- 12 Heilbrunn, "Lake Inferior," pp. 29–35.
- 13 Author's interview with Morton Halperin.

- 14 Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement," p. 121.
- 15 Author's interview with Anthony Lake.
- 16 Holbrooke, *To End A War*, p. 369.
- 17 Author's interview with Charles A. Kupchan.
- 18 Author's interview with Leon Fuerth.
- 19 Author's interview with Charles A. Kupchan.
- 20 Author's interview with Anthony Lake.
- 21 *NSSR95*, p. ii.
- 22 Quoted in Walker, "Home Alone: What Matters Now is Trade Not the Cold Not Tanks But Toyotas," p. 12.
- 23 James M. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process*, Fourth Edition (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), p. 189.
- 24 *NSSR95*, p. ii.
- 25 Lael Brainard (Special Assistant to the President for International Economic Policy, 1995–97) quoted in *The National Security Council Project Oral History Roundtables: The Clinton Administration National Security Council*, moderated by Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler Center for International and Security Studies, University of Maryland, September 27, 2000.
- 26 Manning, "Orwellian Spin Masking Clinton's Failures."
- 27 Lake, "Confronting Backlash States," p. 55.
- 28 Richard Haass wrote in 1997 that the neo-Wilsonian vision represented by a strategy of enlargement "has had a negligible impact on day-to-day affairs. Enlarging the community of market democracies might look good on paper, but it has provided few policy-relevant guidelines for pressing foreign policy problems such as those presented by Bosnia, Iraq, North Korea, Rwanda, or Somalia." See Richard N. Haass, "Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* 108 (Autumn 1997), pp. 112–123.
- 29 Goldman and Berman, "Engaging the World," p. 236.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 31 Klein, *The Natural*, p. 76.
- 32 Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 182.
- 33 Author's interview with Leon Fuerth.
- 34 *NSSR2000*, p. 1.
- 35 *NSSR2000*, p. 67.
- 36 Author's interview with Leon Fuerth.
- 37 Author's interview with Anthony Lake.
- 38 Author's interview with Leon Fuerth.
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