

**THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

*American Power: For What? Ideas, Unipolarity and
America's Search for Purpose between the 'Wars',
1991-2001*

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the debates surrounding the grand strategy of United States in the decade after the Cold War. ‘Bookended’ by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, it assesses the strategic ideas that were advanced to conceptualise American foreign policy, grouping these thematically under the headings of primacy, neoisolationism and liberal multilateralism. To this end the thesis introduces a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation, in which ideas are considered in conjunction with considerations of power in the international system.

The thesis makes the case that the ideas of each strategic school-of-thought reflect both a distinctive theoretical understanding of international relations and a particular tradition in United States foreign policy. Furthermore, it makes the more general structural claim that under conditions of limited threat such as the apparent unipolarity of the post-Cold War years, great power strategies are less determined by the imperatives of international structure and more by the ideas at the domestic level influencing the foreign policy executive. As a result, grand strategy formation becomes highly ideologically contested, and the geopolitical science of strategic assessment and response becomes unpredictable.

The thesis argues that after the Cold War the strategic debate is best understood in conjunction with the contemporaneous idea that the United States held a functionally imperial position in the international system. In the absence of agreed threats, competition between strategic ideas resulted in the United States pursuing a foreign policy that selectively incorporated elements of each strategic alternative. Although this ‘uni-multilateralism’ had as its aim the management of the international system, its diverse sources of ideas and support meant that in security matters in particular American foreign policy was inconsistent and unpredictable. It was therefore not until the events of 9-11 provided a unified threat around which to coordinate strategy that America adopted a more coherent imperial grand strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

“When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world and we knew exactly who ‘they’ were. It was us versus them. And it was clear who ‘them’ was. Today, we’re not so sure who the ‘they’ are, but we know they’re there.”

Governor George W. Bush, at a campaign stop in Iowa, January 2000.¹

“How about this for foreign policy vision?” remarked the new President as he reviewed a selection of his own misspeaks and malapropisms for a light-hearted Washington dinner in March 2001. Yet perhaps unwittingly, beneath the humour the 43rd President of the United States had revealed a deeper uncertainty undercutting US foreign policy and summed up the overriding problem that had faced both his own father and the man he had replaced in the White House – how to think about the nature of international order and the United States’ role in it following the collapse of the Cold War.

A cartoon by James Borgman in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* captured the peculiar challenges of 1989 and after. It showed a bewildered President George H.W. Bush sat at his desk, thinking: “Communism is dead, the Wall is down, Apartheid is falling, Mandela is free, the Sandanistas are ousted, Germany is reunited, the Cold War is over, I’ve returned all my calls, and, heck, it’s not even lunchtime.”²

The subject of this study is what happened that afternoon, once the immediate crises precipitated by the end of the Cold War order had waned. It is loosely bookended by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, to cover the debate about the nature and form of American grand strategy

¹ Quoted in Anne E. Kornblut, "Campaign Trail a Trip of the Tongue Bush Bedeviled by Spoken Word", *The Boston Globe*, 23/1/2000.

² Nicholas X. Rizopoulos, *Sea-Changes: American Foreign Policy in a World Transformed* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1990), 1.

in a new era. The first bookend is the loser of the two: although it is only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that the end of bipolarity is confirmed and the debate surrounding American grand strategy takes on its distinctive form, the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 does constitute the beginnings of the process of strategic reassessment. At the same time, using the later date for the ‘end’ of the Cold War is justified by the continued preoccupation of American policymakers with the Soviet Union before its collapse, a preoccupation that reflected the fact that the systemic change it represented was unconfirmed.³

If there was unanimity after 1991 that international politics had undergone a massive structural change, and that this required the United States to reconsider its national security policy, there was also general agreement about the questions that needed to be answered. What was the nature of the post-Cold War international system? Within it, what were the United States’ interests and objectives, and what were the threats to those aims? What were the appropriate strategic responses to those threats? What principles should guide American policy? As one survey of the alternatives asked, “in short, what should be the new grand strategy of the United States?”⁴

These questions, directed as they were to the sole remaining superpower, presented the United States with a wide range of potential answers. While Soviet-American rivalry had not entirely dictated American policy – there had been vigorous political and academic debates over the previous forty-five years – Americans, Robert Jervis noted, “had at least agreed on the crucial questions most of the time:

³ 1989-1992 was a period of contingency management for the Bush administration, which cautiously and largely successfully managed the transition from communism to democracy in Eastern Europe, oversaw the peaceful reunification of Germany and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, intervened militarily to oust General Noriega in Panama and repelled Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. See Steven Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration: In Search of a New World Order* (New York: Pinter, 1999).

⁴ Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy", *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996-7), 5.

American security needs were the core of its national interest; the Soviet Union was the greatest threat; the United States had no choice but to be actively engaged in the world to protect itself.”⁵ The United States had poured \$11 trillion of treasure into the Cold War, the bulk of its military, scientific and ideological resources, and an incalculable amount of its collective psychological energy.⁶ Absent the Soviet Union, the fundamental rationale for American foreign policy had been lost, the importance of foreign policy was in question, and the level of public support for foreign-policy actions uncertain.⁷

Leaving the Cold War behind meant that the United States’ most sacred concepts of internationalism were legitimate objects of reassessment. The structural shock produced by the end of bipolarity therefore went to the very foundations of American foreign policy, breaking up old coalitions and redefining the very vocabulary of foreign affairs. As one regular commentator noted:

“In foreign affairs, the old dividing lines are blurring or being ignored, and with good reason. As is clear from any recent op-ed page, familiar classifications such as interventionist and isolationist, hawk and dove, realist and idealist, and multilateralist and unilateralist (at least as they have been used since the end of World War II) no longer make much sense, in the absence of the Cold War’s defining conditions... Even ideas as basic to modern politics as Left and Right are undergoing redefinition.”⁸

Such a deep reconceptualising of American foreign affairs was reflected in a profound sense of confusion about the nature of the emergent international order.

⁵ Robert Jervis, "The Future of World Politics: Will It Resemble the Past?", *International Security* 16, no. 3 (1991), 61.

⁶ Haynes Bonner Johnson, *The Best of Times: America in the Clinton Years* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 2-3.

⁷ James M. McCormick, "Clinton and Foreign Policy: Some Legacies for a New Century", in *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics*, ed. Steven E. Schier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 62.

⁸ Alan Tonelson, "Beyond Left and Right", *The National Interest* 34 (1993).

Despite having a greater range of strategic choice than it had enjoyed since Pearl Harbor, the United States was unsure of its footing: convinced of the importance of its decisions but lacking a compass to direct them.⁹ In the absence of any sense of existential threat, the process of defining a new strategy lacked urgency, and meant that despite its victory in the Cold War the United States was a rudderless and unsure power. As the *Economist* noted ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall:

“The United States bestrides the globe like colossus. It dominates business, commerce and communications; its economy is the world's most successful, its military might second to none. Yet, for all that, the colossus is uncertain. Having so much power, it does not know how to behave. Should it act alone and unhindered on the world stage, since it can? Or should it willingly dilute its power in cooperation with others?”¹⁰

Invited in 1995 to name the era in which they were living, the responses of readers of the *New York Times* expressed both doubt and disillusion, the more popular labels including the ‘Age of Anxiety’, ‘Age of Uncertainty’, ‘Age of Fragmentation’, ‘Age of (Great and Failed) Expectations’, and ‘Age of Disillusion (and Dissolution)’.¹¹ Academics were no more able to adequately conceptualise the age, indeed, the best they could do, it seemed, was to characterise the new era not so much in terms of what it was but in terms of what it was not, or what it came after. Thus the last decade of the twentieth century was a post-Cold War era, a post-socialist order, a post-Westphalian age or even a postmodern world.¹² September the 11th seemed to confirm the status of the 1990s as historical void between two more distinct eras, defined and constructed around ‘wars’ that were never clearly such, proving correct

⁹ Robert E. Hunter, "Starting at Zero: US Foreign Policy for the 1990s", in *U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, ed. Brad Roberts (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).

¹⁰ "America's World", *Economist* 353, no. 8142 (1999).

¹¹ Derek H. Chollet and James M. Goldgeier, *America between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008).

¹² Michael Cox, "Whatever Happened to American Decline? International Relations and the New United States Hegemony", *New Political Economy* 6, no. 3 (2001), 311.

one European observer's suggestion that this was "the era of the Interregnum, an age that cannot last."¹³

This thesis is, in part, an effort to allay that perception, and to make the case that the period between the Cold War and the War on Terror, far from being an interlude between eras, was actually a fundamentally important period in both United States foreign policy and the evolution of the international system more generally. Its subject of analysis is grand strategy, or rather the grand strategic proposals that formed the debate about the United States' role in the world following the end of the Cold War. As such it is a study of ideas, of the process of rethinking American grand strategy within the United States' foreign policy establishment, broadly defined, that was precipitated by the end of the Cold War.

In drawing together both secondary literature and primary sources this thesis first seeks to map the strategic debate that took place in the United States during the 1990s and so offer a contribution to the history of the period in question.¹⁴ The result is the construction of three 'ideal-type' grand strategies: retrenchment, liberal multilateralism and primacy, the ideas of which broadly correlate with the ideas of the defensive realist, liberal and offensive realist schools of International Relations theory respectively. This charting of the domestic ideas about the direction of American grand strategy employs as its evidence the recommendations contained in the plethora of books about America's role in the post-Cold War world, the output of think-tanks and government departments, the speeches of politicians, and newspaper

¹³ Christoph Bertram, "Interregnum", *Foreign Policy*, no. 119 (2000), 44.

¹⁴ A few shorter studies have presented typologies of United States grand strategy in the post-Cold War period, but these are either superficial or historically incomplete. Perhaps the most thorough analysis is Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy". See also Colin Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000-2004", *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004); John J. Kohout et al., "Alternative Grand Strategy Options for the United States", *Comparative Strategy* 14, no. 4 (1995); Alexander Nacht, "US Foreign Policy Strategies", *The Washington Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1995). A collection of articles from the journal *International Security* are organised into four ideal-type strategies in the first and revised editions of Michael E. Brown, *America's Strategic Choices* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997, 2000).

and magazine op-eds and comment pieces. The analysis of this evidence spotlights the contributions of both foreign policy elites and broader public discourse to the construction of these three grand strategic narratives.

In taking this approach, the thesis represents a work of both International Relations and History, or at least a work of International Relations that uses the study of History as its central methodological tool. Whilst History has always played a central role in the study of International Relations, much neorealist thought has been considered ahistoricist, and has cast History solely in the role of testing the validity of theoretical positions.¹⁵ The theoretical underpinning of the thesis therefore reflects the need to treat History seriously in International Relations, to respect the contingencies of History and the importance of how foreign policy is actually conducted.¹⁶ Whilst international historians may embed their causal arguments within narratives, and political scientists may seek to identify recurring patterns and make generalisations and read a particular event as instances of wider phenomena, their analysis and explanations are not mutually exclusive, quite the opposite.¹⁷ In doing so it embraces the epistemological and methodological premises of neoclassical realism, which emphasises problem-focused research and employs a case-study approach to explain cases and generate hypotheses.¹⁸ Neoclassical realism therefore uses History to illuminate states' foreign policies, integrating systemic and domestic influences in an attempt to draw out which aspects of foreign

¹⁵ John M. Hobson and George Lawson, "What Is History in International Relations?", *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008), 417-20.

¹⁶ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998), 171.

¹⁷ Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Role of History in International Relations", *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008), 358. On the commensurability of History and International Relations see the collection of essays in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Randall L. Schweller, "The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: Why a Concert Didn't Arise", in *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 184.

policy outcomes can be explained by which factors.¹⁹ Therefore, this thesis does not set out a specific theoretical hypothesis for testing, but rather seeks to draw some theoretical conclusions from the study of a historical period.

Therefore, the thesis' second primary aim is to make a contribution to neoclassical realism as a school of international relations thought. This school draws on the insights of the classical realist tradition to emphasise the variables that intervene at the domestic level between system structure and foreign policy outcomes. Although a number of recent neoclassical realist works have focused on the historical evolution of American grand strategy, none has specifically addressed the post-Cold War debate or focused on the specific role of strategic ideas in foreign policy elites' responses to changed international structure.²⁰ To that end the thesis introduces a neoclassical realist model of the role of ideas in grand strategy formation.

The relevance of grand strategy is sometimes disputed by professional diplomats, who regard thinking strategically about foreign policy as a waste of time since each challenge is different and has to be addressed on its own merits. Yet if a state's diplomacy is to be successful it requires an intellectual underpinning, a strategic concept to which the problems of the day can be referred.²¹ So whilst diplomacy is surely a process that is full of contingencies and particularities, strategy describes a general approach of a state towards all of its international relations – setting out its goals and prescribing the means to achieve them, whilst diplomacy and foreign policy is a narrative of the day-to-day victories, defeats and compromises along the course that national strategy has set out.

¹⁹ Fareed Zakaria, "Review: Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay", *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992), 198. For a full justification of the integration of domestic political process into a systemic approach see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables", *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997).

²⁰ Colin Dueck, "New Perspectives on American Grand Strategy", *International Security* 28, no. 4 (2004); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

²¹ Jonathan Clarke, "The Conceptual Poverty of US Foreign Policy", *The Atlantic*, September.

It should be noted therefore that the thesis does *not* represent an argument that state foreign policies are strictly and accurately predictable on the basis of strategic ideas. Grand strategy is not an outcome that entails specific responses in specific situations: rather it represents a general posture of a state that distinguishes it from other states. Neoclassical realism therefore reunites international relations and foreign policy analysis, two sides of the same discipline that should never have been divorced. The question of how states behave cannot be divorced from the questions of why they behave as they do; outcomes cannot be analytically separate from the processes that produce them.

In this sense a neoclassical realist focus on states' grand strategies is analogous to, and a replacement for, neorealism's conception of the state as a black box. Where neorealism predicts by stating the nature of the systemic imperatives that impel like states, neoclassical realism seeks to understand how systemic imperatives are mediated through state strategies. The subject of this thesis is therefore less the minutiae of US foreign policy during the 1990s than it is the attempt to create and sustain a set of ideas and interpretations that underpin and inform America's interactions with the world.

Overview and Structure of the Argument

The thesis begins by setting out the theoretical and methodological approach to the thesis. Chapter 1 therefore aims to introduce and justify both the neoclassical realist approach and the need to understand the ideas that intervene between system structure and foreign policy outcomes in the making of grand strategy. The integration of ideas within an ostensibly realist framework is not an uncontroversial project, but the notion that the process of making strategy involves ideas and interpretation is not one that is new to realism, as evidenced by the focus of classical realists on the importance of statecraft and the avoidance of idealism. International

Relations has struggled to integrate the role of nebulous ideas into a systematic form of analysis that recognises the interrelation between the material and the ideational in IR. The chapter therefore sets out a positivist conception of ideas that details how they intervene at the unit level in the process of strategy formation.

In line with neoclassical realism's prioritising of the study of history, the thesis then proceeds in Chapter 2 to identify historical trends in the strategic ideas of American foreign policy. Since the neoclassical realist model recognises that ideas may be embedded historically within the institutions and culture of societies, this chapter 'sets the scene' for the post-Cold War period in question by tracing the evolution of ideas within US grand strategy, arguing that the United States, as a result of its ideological identity, has consistently oscillated between the desire to remain internationally detached in order to protect the purity of American liberty and the impulse to project liberty's universal principles abroad. Although the stresses of these twin impulses were suspended by the Cold War's zero-sum dynamic, this tension would resurface in the profound sense of loss that accompanied the end of containment, and which is the starting point of the new US strategic debate.

Chapters 3-5 are case studies of each ideal-type grand strategy. Chapter 3 discusses the calls for retrenchment or disengagement that accompanied the disappearance of the strategic competitor that had justified American internationalism. With its historical antecedents in the foreign policies of the early republic and the interwar years, it argues that neoisolationism is a fair characterisation of this set of strategic ideas, which focus on the United States' strategic immunity and argues for foreign policy to give way to domestic concerns. This chapter argues that retrenchment corresponds to the theoretical ideas of defensive or minimal realism in its zero-based balancing approach to the strategic assessment that sees security as the sole motivation of the state and regards foreign adventurism as inherently dangerous. Retrenchment therefore seeks to return the United States to the position of a 'normal country' by dismantling America's Cold War infrastructure both at home and overseas.

Chapter 4 discusses the liberal ideas that lie behind the strategy of liberal multilateralism, and which draws on Wilsonian idealism to argue for the creation of a new world order based around the principles of democratic peace theory, international cooperation and collectivised security provision. Characterised by distinctive ideas surrounding the indivisibility of peace and security in a globalised world, liberal multilateralism is simultaneously an idealist grand strategy and a realistic one that locates the US national interest in the content of America's liberal values.

Chapter 5 considers the arguments for American primacy which go far further than the multilateral leadership envisioned by liberals. Undergirded by American exceptionalism and predicated on the ideas of offensive realism and hegemonic stability theory, this school believes at once both that the international system creates imperatives for expansion and that unipolarity is a sustainable form of international order. This chapter assesses primacists' focus on the military means of strategy and the willingness of both neoconservatives and nationalists to employ it for the achievement of systemic aims.

Chapter 6 assesses the three ideal-type grand strategies in the context of the post-Cold War international system. From an extensive analysis of the debates surrounding the analytical utility of 'empire' in International Relations, it argues that all three are best understood as imperial strategies, and that the United States' international position since 1945 is best understood with reference to empire. It proceeds to argue that in drawing on all three strategies during the 1990s the United States set about establishing the terms of the second American Empire, by means of an integrative approach that can be characterised as 'uni-multilateralism'.

The final chapter seeks to draw from the historical argument the theoretical implications of the American strategic experience following the end of the Cold War. It warns that while America's imperial moment may have passed with the demise of the Bush Doctrine, the United States retains the structural form of empire

which makes it vulnerable to idealism in its grand strategy, and argues that neoclassical realists have a responsibility to highlight this and caution against it.

CHAPTER 1: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST MODEL OF GRAND STRATEGY FORMATION

Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical and methodological approach to the thesis, by first introducing neoclassical realist thought and expanding upon the nature of grand strategy. It then discusses how strategic ideas have been approached by existing realist and constructivist theories, and concludes that neither can account for the interrelation between the material and the ideational in IR. The chapter therefore sets out a positivist conception of ideas that details how they intervene at the unit level. The subsequent parts of the chapter draws on this conception to articulate a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation that treats strategic ideas as an intervening variable between system structure and foreign policy outcomes, both to assess how states identify their strategic priorities and to point to why they might change. A number of implications of this approach for understanding international relations are outlined in the conclusion.

Neoclassical Realism – A Theory Of Foreign Policy

This thesis details how one state – the United States of America – reacted to a change in its external environment – the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Having emerged from a ‘war’ that had defined its strategic engagement for almost half a century, the United States was faced with the task of restructuring its relationship with the world. How did it assess the new environment

in which it now found itself? On what basis did it identify threats to its security? What were its foreign policy alternatives and how might it decide between them?

In examining the debate within the United States that sought to provide answers to these questions, this thesis is concerned with the effect of ideas on states in the context of their reactions to the international system. In order to do so it utilises an approach to International Relations (IR) that prioritises systemic imperatives whilst recognising that their translation into policy outcomes is a process that takes place within states, mediated by individuals and the ideas they hold. This attempt to integrate domestic-level variables within a broadly realist theoretical framework is sited within a school of International Relations thought known as ‘neoclassical realism’, a term coined by Gideon Rose in a 1998 *World Politics* review article, which argued that neoclassical realism

“explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical.”¹

¹ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism". The best current overview of neoclassical realism is Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). Examples of neoclassical realist works include Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, *Princeton Studies in International History and Politics*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*; Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1998); William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, *Princeton Studies in International History and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Neoclassical realism remains an immature and undeveloped child in the discipline of International Relations. In many cases the neo- prefix indicates a work of classical realism done again, a revival of that particular brand of approach to historical study that had been consigned to a footnote in the textbooks by the promise of a clean, predictive social science offered by realism's structural progeny. We should guard against this tendency, both for descriptive accuracy's own sake, but also to recognise the richness of understanding history that classical realism itself offers.

In contrast, what makes neoclassical realist theory 'new' is its attempt to systematise the wide and varied insights of classical realists within parsimonious theory, or to put it in reverse, to identify the appropriate intervening variables that can imbue realism's structural variant with a greater explanatory richness. In this sense, 'post-structural realism' could be as apt a designation for this area of IR that values theory and seeks at least some kind of predictive capacity, whilst at the same time recognising that the world is complex, and that events in international politics reflect the interaction of multifarious factors.

Having said that, it is first and foremost through a reengagement with classical realism that neoclassical realism must proceed. Classical realism presents us with a highly complex and interdependent picture of the relationship between the individual, the state and society; between the national and the international; between the study of international politics and its practice; between power and ideas. It illuminates the richness present in realist thought before the stripped-out determinist model of structural realism took hold of the discipline in the superpower-centric zero-sum world of the Cold War – a world now nearly twenty years lost. At the same time, an understanding of that classical tradition allows neoclassical realists to rebut the accusation that neoclassical realism, by allowing for intervening domestic or non-material factors, is not realism at all. That charge rests on an understanding of realist thought that erroneously identifies realism with only a cursory reading of

the work of Kenneth Waltz, and part of neoclassical realism's purpose should be to dispel that particular myth.²

Yet classical realism's weakness – and the reason for its being superseded in the 1970s by its more elegant and scientific structural variant – resides in its lack of a rigorous theoretical framework, and therefore the task for neoclassical realism has been to attempt to integrate the “rich but scattered ideas and untested assertions of early realist works” within a more systematic theoretical structure.³ So whilst “there is no evidence, and it is hard to imagine that any might exist, that any remotely respectable Realist does not understand that policy is the outcome of a complex political process,”⁴ the challenge for neoclassical realist explanations is to emphasize structural factors whilst allowing for their mediation through domestic political processes, to “move beyond the relatively spare world of neorealist theory and incorporate unit-level factors as well.”⁵ In this endeavour, neoclassical realists are therefore prepared to examine questions of *innenpolitik*, those “first and second-image variables” including domestic politics, state power and processes, leaders' perceptions and the impact of ideas to explain how states react to the international environment.⁶ In line with its realist heritage however, domestic-level variables are considered analytically subordinate to systemic factors, the limits and opportunities of which states cannot escape in the long run. However, to understand how states respond to an attempt to shape their external environment, scholars of international

² Murielle Cozette, "Reclaiming the Critical Dimension of Realism: Hans J. Morgenthau on the Ethics of Scholarship", *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008), 6-7.

³ Randall L. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism", in *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 316.

⁴ Alan James, "The Realism of Realism: The State in the Study of International Relations", *Review of International Studies* 15 (1989), 221.

⁵ Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 4.

⁶ Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism", 317.

relations need to analyse how system pressures are translated through intervening unit-level variables.⁷

For Stephen Walt the neoclassical realist endeavour is a fruitless one. Noting neoclassical realism's particular suitability (and tendency) towards the construction of historical narratives, he contends that the discipline's "open-minded eclecticism is also its chief limitation... where neorealism sacrificed precision in order to gain parsimony and generality, neoclassical realism has given up generality and predictive power in an attempt to gain descriptive accuracy and policy relevance."⁸

It is true that to date 'neoclassical realism' has referred more to works whose focus is essentially diplomatic history than it has to any established theoretical structure. Furthermore, the range of intervening unit-level variables that neoclassical realists have been prepared to consider have varied with the historical case in hand.⁹ At the same time this critique highlights a corollary point, that parsimony and generalisability are qualities that have long been overrated in IR theory. It is something of a false hope to expect there to be a simple, unifying grand theory of international politics.¹⁰ In the murky world of relations between states, parsimony is only occasionally appropriate, and we should rarely insist upon it as a principle of designing theories.¹¹ Therefore, "valid empirical tests require a sophisticated

⁷ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism", 151-2.

⁸ Stephen M. Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition", in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York, N.Y.; London: W.W. Norton, 2002), 211. See also Rose, "Neoclassical Realism", 167.

⁹ The plethora of intervening variables addressed by neoclassical realist is detailed in Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, 1-41. The authors argue that there is no single neoclassical realist theory of foreign policy, but rather a diversity of neoclassical realist theories.

¹⁰ Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism", 311.

¹¹ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994), 20.

understanding of the historical record”,¹² an approach to the discipline embraced by neoclassical realist works, which “sacrifice ‘rigor’ for richness”.¹³

Having said all that, the process of systematising the insights of classical realism and these neoclassical accounts is very much in its infancy. By specifying and analysing intervening variables between structure and policy outcomes, neoclassical realism is able to account for “outlier” cases that appear to defy the predictions of balance-of-power theory.¹⁴ This thesis argues that far from being mere history in disguise, a neoclassical realist approach has the potential to integrate non-systemic and non-material factors in a systematic way that will allow for greater parsimony and predictive capacity.

To that end I employ an approach which seeks to reduce the unit-level variables of the various neoclassical realist theories to a single intervening variable through which the realities of power capabilities are mediated, that being the role of strategic ideas in the grand strategies of states. This hopes to constitute the beginnings of a defined, systematic neoclassical realist approach that views states’ grand strategies as its primary analyte. Such an approach is able to specify the domestic ideational variables that intervene between system structure and foreign policy outcomes, and to assess the interaction of the international system with the internal dynamics of states in seeking to explain the grand strategic outcomes that result from systemic change. What follows sets out this approach by formulating a neoclassical realist model of grand strategy formation with specific reference to the role of ideas.

¹² Walt, *Revolution and War*, viii.

¹³ Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 11. For good examples of the historical richness of neoclassical realism, see Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*; Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances*; Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

¹⁴ Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism", 340.

What Is ‘Grand Strategy’?

Like many of the key notions of International Relations, ‘grand strategy’ is both commonly used and instinctively understood, yet at the same time the concept evades unanimous agreement as to its precise meaning. Indeed, it often appears that there are as many differing definitions as there are authors on the subject, each incorporating for their own purposes various nuances.¹⁵ Since grand strategy resists a single, rigid definition there seems little need to attempt yet another one here.¹⁶ Instead what follows is an overview of the historical progress of the concept, as much to separate it from what it is not as to affirm what it is, and from which we may derive some general insights about the nature of grand strategy in the international system.

Historically, statesmen used certain principles to guide their actions in the often uncertain and anarchic world of the international system, developing identities and postures for their nations in often violent competition with others. These strategies, rather than setting out day-to-day operational matters, governed the overall course to which those operations were directed. The early history of strategy is therefore concerned solely with military campaigns, and was distinguished by Clausewitz from tactics, which “is the art of using troops in battle; strategy is the art of using battles to win the war.”¹⁷

Just as tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, military strategy was an application on a lower plane of *grand strategy*, which encompassed not only military means and ends, but the means and ends of politics, economics and ideology, in short all the aspects of power and influence at a nation’s – and therefore, a

¹⁵ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 9-10.

¹⁶ Christopher W. Wells, "Grand Strategy and the United States Bureaucracy", paper presented at the *ISS Grand Strategy Paper Series*, (2002), 3.

¹⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard, and Peter Paret, *On War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 127-32.

statesman's – disposal.¹⁸ Drawing on its Clausewitzian heritage, the focus of grand strategy continued to be the conduct of war. Yet true to its status as the highest form of strategy and the most crucial task of statecraft, there developed an understanding that grand strategy was a complex and multilayered undertaking, involving much more than just fighting and winning wars.¹⁹ In an observation that was critical to the expansion of the concept, Basil Liddel Hart insisted that since “the object in war is a better state of peace... it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire”.²⁰ Since military ends are solely means to broader political ends, grand strategy required assessment and consideration of the political context both before and during conflict. To be successful, grand strategy therefore needed to integrate “the politics and armaments of the nation that resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory.”²¹

The trend in the development of the concept of grand strategy was therefore towards both the integration of more multifarious objects than solely military ones and the extension of its scope beyond simply the conduct of war. Grand strategy was to involve “the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even centuries” in order to balance means and ends both in peacetime and wartime. Such a broad remit for grand strategy required it to take into consideration factors as diverse as managing national resources; diplomacy; national morale and political culture.²²

¹⁸ Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Meridian, 1991), 321.

¹⁹ Paul M. Kennedy, "American Grand Strategy, Today and Tomorrow: Learning from the European Experience", in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul M. Kennedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

²⁰ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 338.

²¹ Edward Mead Earle, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), viii.

²² Paul M. Kennedy, "Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition", in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Paul M. Kennedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

“The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests.”²³

The extension of the concept reflected a trend in IR more generally that condemned neorealism’s definition of security as too narrow and its characterisation of those elements of power with which security could be achieved as too capabilities-centred. Since realist thought, by focusing on the systemic level, “tended to neglect patterns of domestic support and economic strength that might affect long term commitment to a deterrent, containment, or balance of power strategy”, the theoretical understanding of grand strategy needed to be modified to take account of those factors.²⁴ The peaceful end of the Cold War reinforced the idea that grand strategy need not ultimately rely on recourse to war, and that economic and ‘soft-power’ means were as important elements as military power.²⁵

Inevitably, realist authors countered that if the concept was to retain its analytical usefulness, it needed to focus on specific threats to the survival of the state and the military means to counter them.²⁶ Yet in the post-Cold War world it had become clear that both the range of threats and interests and the variety of strategic tools used to meet them were far broader than such restrictive definitions. Indeed, realist accounts focused solely on what Posen instead described as military doctrine, which in his view represented just one subset of grand strategy that sets priorities among military forces and prescribes how they should be structured to achieve the ends in view. Realism’s narrow focus on military threats, hard power and systemic

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Richard Newton Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, "Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy", in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, ed. Richard Newton Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 4.

²⁵ Joseph S. Nye, "The Decline of America's Soft Power", *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004).

²⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 17.

imperatives failed to understand the extent to which a state's grand strategy represents "a political-military means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best "cause" security for itself."²⁷

Undeterred, some authors (and it is implicit in Posen's political-*military* characterisation above) require that grand strategy must include at least the possibility of the use of force.²⁸ Yet few would deny that it is possible to have a grand strategy of neutrality that is explicitly focused around a refusal to use force internationally. Similarly, states living under a security umbrella are surely able to pursue their own grand-strategic goals quite separately from the military force that remains their ultimate security. So whilst in most cases military policy instruments will be important elements of a state's grand strategy, they are by no means necessarily so.

An alternative route of attack on the multifaceted conception of grand strategy holds that non-military instruments, whilst undoubtedly important to statecraft, should not be treated as elements of grand strategy in order to preserve the "useful distinction" between grand strategy and foreign policy, which includes all of the goals and all of the instruments of statecraft.²⁹ This however, is to misconceive of where the distinction, or certainly the usefulness, lies. Grand strategy is public policy, but it is a normative process, one that is theoretical and idealised in nature.³⁰ Foreign policy is the practical medium through which the stated ends of grand strategy are pursued using the means prescribed. It is contingent, a process of very real diplomacy, debate and compromise. Therefore, one can consider foreign policy successful to

²⁷ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 7.

²⁸ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 10; Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 80.

²⁹ Robert J. Art, "A Defensible Defense: America's Grand Strategy after the Cold War", *International Security* 15, no. 4 (1991), 7.

³⁰ Rosecrance and Stein, "Beyond Realism", 13.

the extent that it manages to achieve in practice the ideals set out in theory by grand strategy. Grand strategy and foreign policy are therefore flip-sides of the same coin: one is assessed in terms of the big picture, the other in terms of nitty-gritty detail; one makes judgements based on *ceteris paribus*, the other in ever-shifting circumstances; where one marks out the field, decides the object of the game and sets the rules, and the other takes to the field to play ball. It is in this sense that foreign policy begins where grand strategy stops, and it is a distinction that is far more useful than arguing over which instruments belong to which concept.

Of course, the realities and contingencies of foreign policy necessitate a process of continuing strategic reassessment. Foreign policy contingencies and shifting international conditions constitute a feedback loop in which both the validity of strategic assumptions, the desirability of strategic goals and the suitability of strategic means are continually reconsidered. So although the formulation of grand strategy itself is essentially a theoretical and normative activity, it is an activity that is constantly being informed by empirical facts. This presents some difficulties for scholars of International Relations, in particular concerning how we identify what really is grand strategy. If the day-to-day “stuff” of foreign policy only sometimes achieves its strategic goals it cannot be thought of as an especially reliable indicator of the prevailing strategy. Similarly, it is difficult to be sure whether normative documentary evidence represents strategic thinking when foreign policy contingencies may require compromise. Thus scholars face the dilemma that the study of grand strategy is a study of intentions that cannot necessarily be expected to be reflected in a coherence of outcomes.

However, whilst the day-to-day contingencies of foreign policy may obscure and confuse, over time consistencies become evident which betray strategy. Indeed, even if states do not actually have a plan, they act as if they do.³¹ Similarly there is

³¹ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 11. On the perceived difficulties, particularly in a decentralised and fragmented state such as the United States, of conceiving and maintaining a grand strategy, see Samuel Huntington, "The Evolution of National Strategy", in *U.S. National Security Strategy for the* (continued overleaf)

no shortage of normative material both internal and external to the state debating what strategy the state should adopt. It would seem unreasonable to assume that despite this desire for strategy the policies that states actually pursue are universally ad hoc. Indeed, the congruence of that normative material with the evolving historical record lends further weight to the identification of grand strategy. And if we understand that grand strategy and foreign policy exist in a feedback loop, grand strategy becomes something we must infer from the record of the past, “a project of historical scholarship and deductive reasoning, doing our best to connect the dots to see what kind of pictures are made.”³² So whilst the causal link between a theoretical grand strategy and a state’s foreign policy may not be logically necessary and IR scholars should caution against assigning strategic goals where there may be none, sound research and historical analysis should be able to establish the connection.

From this overview of the history of the concept of grand strategy a number of conclusions may be drawn. When we speak of grand strategy as an analytical concept, we are speaking of that considered set of national policies in peace and war that aim to set the goals of the state in the international environment. These policies also set out how a broad range of national resources should be utilised in pursuit of those goals. The study of grand strategy is therefore the study of states’ preferred ends and means of foreign policy, of their attitude to international politics – it deals with how states mobilise which elements of their power in pursuit of which causes in global politics.

1990s, ed. Daniel J. Kaufman, David S. Clark, and Kevin P. Sheehan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 11; Luttwak, *Strategy*, 235.

³² Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 19.

Theorising Strategic Ideas

Historians have always known that ideas matter in the conduct of international politics. The rich descriptions of diplomatic historians tell of statesmen agonising over choices in their own minds, and how the advocacy of thinkers impacted on events.³³ The difficulty for IR has been to describe just how ideas come to matter, to devise theories that isolate amorphous ideas from discrete facts and define the relations between the two. However, the tendency of International Relations to construct itself as a social science along the more definite lines of economics has profoundly hindered attempts to integrate ideas. As Dahl notes, “because of their concern with rigor and their dissatisfaction with the ‘softness’ of historical description, generalization, and explanation, most social scientists have turned away from the historical movement of ideas. As a result their own theories, however ‘rigorous’ they may be, leave out an important explanatory variable and often lead to naïve reductionism.”³⁴

Since the end of the Cold War however, a renewed interest in the role of ideas in IR has begun to redress that failing, through both the work of constructivist scholars and neoclassical realists. The following section considers realism’s prioritising of the material over the ideational before considering constructivism’s approach to ideas, concluding that neither has adequately conceptualised the interaction of the material and the ideational in international relations. It then sets out a positivist understanding of ideas that justifies underpins a neoclassical realist approach to the role of ideas in grand strategy formation.

³³ Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁴ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 182-83.

Realism and Ideas

Realism's dominance of international relations theory during the Cold War was highly prejudicial to the analysis of the role of ideas, yet this stemmed from a misreading of the works of classical realists, and Hans Morgenthau in particular. Realism is first and foremost a philosophical position, with modern variants of realist theory tracing their lineage from the writings of Thucydides through to Hobbes and Machiavelli.³⁵ Whilst we might admit that, as Frankel argues, "there is no single realist theory of international relations" and that rather "there is a family of realist theories and explanations, differing from each other in the importance they assign to different variables", there are key assumptions that characterise realist philosophy and so realist International Relations theory.³⁶ This philosophy is pessimistic about the human condition, rejects teleological notions of political progress and regards ethics and morality as largely products of power. From its assessment of humans in the state of nature realism identifies competition for resources among tribal groups as the most basic feature of social organisation, which is therefore defined by the facts of power.³⁷ Classical realists therefore build upon the foundations of this attitude towards human nature to derive a set of principles

³⁵ Thomas Hobbes and Richard Tuck, *Leviathan, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Niccolò Machiavelli and George Bull, *The Prince, Penguin Classics* (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2003); Niccolò Machiavelli, Bernard R. Crick, and Leslie Walker, *The Discourses, The Penguin Classics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); Thucydides, Rex Warner, and M. I. Finley, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Penguin Classics* (London: Penguin, 1972).

³⁶ Benjamin Frankel, *Roots of Realism, Cass Series on Security Studies* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), ix. See also Barry Buzan, "The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?", in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve M. Smith, K. Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The historical development of realist international relations theory and its popularity in the second part of the twentieth century was very much a reaction to the failure of utopian liberal order-building after World War I, initiated by Carr and more heavily theorised by Morgenthau. As Jervis notes, "the experience of Hitler was a greater sponsor of Realism than any written text could be." Robert Jervis, "Hans Morgenthau, Realism, and the Scientific Study of International Politics", *Social Research* 61, no. 4 (1994), 855.

³⁷ Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, 14. The clearest statements of realism's attitude to human nature are Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946); Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

about the nature of international politics, to argue that “politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.”³⁸ The state in the international system is analogous to man in the state of nature; thus international politics is most fundamentally about power, which is accrued, defended and wielded only in pursuit of the national interest defined as national security, the nature of which can be identified and assessed in terms of material capabilities. The international system has no sovereign and is therefore anarchic, and so state action within it can be reduced to the national interest: thus the security of the nation-state is the sole determinant of foreign policy.³⁹

Classical realist works are therefore not in any sense congested with enthusiastic championing of the ability of ideas to shape international politics. Indeed, the original title for EH Carr’s *Twenty Years Crisis* was *Utopia and Reality*, and Carr’s project was to demolish the idea that international politics could be subjugated to the force of human reason.⁴⁰ Yet at the same time classical realists see realism as a necessary corrective to the dangerous naivety of idealism, not as a replacement for it; indeed it is because the classical realists saw the impact ideas can have on international politics that they cautioned statesmen to abide by the more stable maxims of power. The realist’s task then, is to balance those imperatives of power

³⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, W. David Clinton, and Kenneth W. Thompson, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 4. Morgenthau was the most influential of all the classical realists, and his arguments remain the most systematic exposition of classical realist thought. Other examples of classical realist theory include Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966); Edward Hallett Carr and Michael Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); John Hermann Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A Study in Theory and Realities* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951). On the influence of realist thought in American policymaking see George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

³⁹ For Morgenthau, “national security must be defined as integrity of the national territory and its institutions.” Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 586.

⁴⁰ Michael Cox, "Introduction", in *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, ed. Edward Hallett Carr and Michael Cox (New York: Palgrave, 2001), xxi-xxii.

with the demands of ideas and ethics.⁴¹ Thus Machiavelli spoke of the virtù of the statesman himself, and both Morgenthau and Carr saw moral precepts in basic international norms, amongst domestic populations and as goals of states. Classical realists therefore understood that ideas and culture could have “a profound effect on the strategic behaviour of states.”⁴²

At the individual level, Morgenthau identifies ideas as sources of change, since “when people see things in a new light, they may act in a new way.”⁴³ Indeed, Morgenthau’s Aristotelian conception of human agency and his emphasis on both the virtue of prudence and diplomacy suggests a more complex picture of the role of ideas in international politics than he is often credited with having held.⁴⁴ *Politics Among Nations* offers numerous examples of states with incongruous political power and material capabilities, a gap deriving from the abilities of their leaders, for whom the strategies and tactics used to convert the potential attributes power into influence are as important as the attributes themselves.⁴⁵ The role of the statesmen was therefore to mitigate the more turbulent forces of anarchy through wise leadership, to moderate power and pursue peace. As Morgenthau writes, diplomacy is the instrument of peace through accommodation:

“Of all the factors which make for the power of a nation, the most important, and the more unstable, is the quality of diplomacy. All the other factors which determine national power are, as it were, the raw material out of which the

⁴¹ J Samuel Barkin, "Realist Constructivism", *International Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (2003), 333.

⁴² Dueck, "New Perspectives", 215. Kennan and Morgenthau, for example, were concerned by the impact of idealist liberal ideas on American foreign policy. Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, 65-90; Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 155-64.

⁴³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?* (New York: New American Library; Norton, 1972), 11.

⁴⁴ Anthony F. Lang Jr., "Morgenthau, Agency and Aristotle", in *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, ed. Michael C. Williams (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.

power of a nation is fashioned. The quality of a nation's diplomacy combines those different factors into an integrated whole, gives them direction and weight, and awakens their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breadth of actual power. The conduct of a nation's foreign affairs by its diplomats is for national power in peace what military strategy and tactics are for national power in war. It is the art of bringing the different elements of the national power to bear with the maximum effect upon those points in the international situation that concern that national interest most directly."⁴⁶

EH Carr too, recognised the ability of statesmen to mediate anarchy through normative power, or what he called the power over opinion, and saw that rhetoric – “the art of persuasion” – has always been “part of the equipment of a political leader” in mobilising the minds of men alongside the material elements of military and economic might.⁴⁷ Carr therefore offers the hope that not only is “there is something which man ought to think and do, but that there is something which he can think and do, and that his thought and action are neither mechanical nor meaningless.”⁴⁸ Carr sees a role for ideas at the domestic level in the use of propaganda and the education of the nation: “the state which provides the education necessarily determines its content. No state will allow its future citizens to imbibe in its schools teaching subversive of the principles on which it is based.”⁴⁹ Ideas, classical realists knew, are powerful things, and power over them is one of the greatest assets a state can procure for itself. Indeed, the basic moral ideas that statesmen themselves hold precludes them from even considering certain means and ends, a process which could “tame” the national interest and moderate self-interest and conflict.⁵⁰ Morgenthau therefore argues that beyond the irreducible minimum of

⁴⁶ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 152. See also 539-68.

⁴⁷ Carr and Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁰ W. David Clinton and Kenneth W. Thompson, "Foreword", in *Politics among Nations : The Struggle for Power and Peace*, ed. Hans J. Morgenthau (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), xxii-xxvii.

the survival of the state, statesmen would take into account the cultural and moral ideas of their people to pursue goals which could “run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue.”⁵¹

Carr’s analysis that the most influential ideas have been based on professedly universal principles also allows that ideas may operate at the international level, moving across borders as tools or effects of foreign policy, but only successfully when backed in some way by national political power.⁵² In addition, Carr identifies a “general sense of obligation”, a norm that operates between states, thus rendering treaties and agreements useful elements of international politics.⁵³ Similarly, both Kissinger and Morgenthau grant a role to the generation of legitimacy, and wrote approvingly of the international society of the European royal families, whose aristocratic ideals moderated competition.⁵⁴ So conceptions of justice do matter in international politics, and the production of peaceful change in that arena involves a compromise between utopian ideas of common right and realist adjustments to shifts in the balance of power.⁵⁵ In this sense, the international environment is composed not just of the distribution of power but also a climate of ideas, which contains certain moral values with enough force to delimit “the sphere of possible political interests itself”.⁵⁶

Thus even the most strident classical realists do not regard the accumulation of power for the purposes of national survival as the only logic of realism. Machiavelli, for example, is emphatically not a determinist who views power as

⁵¹ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 11.

⁵² Carr and Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 125-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁴ Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 62.

⁵⁵ Carr and Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 199-202.

⁵⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Problem of Neutrality", *University of Kansas City Law Review* VII (1939), 125-6.

impelling action, instead insisting that necessity narrows the range of alternatives to which statesmen may apply their wisdom and exercise choice.⁵⁷ Niebuhr also admits the possibility that states may “do justice to wider interests than their own, while they pursue their own.”⁵⁸ Although in the international order “the role of power is greater and that of morality less”, Carr accepts that in some cases ideas of morality can trump concerns of power to result in “self-sacrifice” on the part of the state.⁵⁹ As Barkin notes:

“The classical realists argued quite explicitly that moral ideals are a necessary part of the practice of international politics and that political realism in the absence of morality, in the absence of a vision of utopia, is both sterile and pointless.”⁶⁰

For classical realists then, what happens at the levels of the state and the individual, what Waltz called the first and second images, matters.⁶¹ It is for this reason that classical realists are political advocates, whose critical role is to “speak truth to power” and unmask relations of domination that are concealed by the moral rhetoric of statesmen.⁶²

There is therefore the theoretical space within classical realism for the integration of ideas, first at the unit level as part of its stress on political judgement, and secondarily between states as a product of the interactions of those judgements. Michael Williams has attempted to emphasise the impact of ideas within

⁵⁷ Machiavelli, Crick, and Walker, *The Discourses*, 62-3.

⁵⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1949), 71.

⁵⁹ Carr and Cox, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 151.

⁶⁰ Barkin, "Realist Constructivism", 336.

⁶¹ Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*.

⁶² Cozette, "Reclaiming the Critical Dimension of Realism". On the contemporary role of prominent realists speaking truth to power see Rodger A. Payne, "Neorealists as Critical Theorists: The Purpose of Foreign Policy Debate", *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 3 (2007).

Morgenthau's writings, with particular focus on the role of ideas in identity formation and the construction of the national interest.⁶³ Similarly, Smith notes that how a statesman "defines the national interest depends on the values he espouses and the way he ranks them."⁶⁴ Yet Williams stretches the point when he regard the role of ideas in classical realist thought as "crucial".⁶⁵ Morgenthau repeatedly argued against the "sentimental illusion" that America's Cold War rivalry was a struggle between good and evil, and regarded such ideologising of the national interest as potentially hazardous to its effective construction and pursuit. Whilst Morgenthau doesn't regard the national interest as a fixed, impenetrable entity, and requires political actors to make difficult choices in order to identify and pursue it, he like other classical realists is concerned to make the point that the task of the statesman is to discover and act upon the national interest defined as material power.⁶⁶ That ideas may impact upon international relations is not in doubt, but the extent that they do, Aron notes, creates dangerous utopias that serve "as an excuse, not an inspiration" for wilful leaders who "desired power as an instrument of their own glory."⁶⁷ Morgenthau's rejoinder that "all politics is power politics"⁶⁸ therefore remains an accurate summary of classical realist thought, affirming that the object of all politics is power whilst nevertheless implying that power is not the only feature of politics.

⁶³ Michael C. Williams, "What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory", *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005).

⁶⁴ Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger, Political Traditions in Foreign Policy Series* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 160.

⁶⁵ Michael C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization* 58, no. 3 (2004), 634.

⁶⁶ William E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 70-100.

⁶⁷ Aron, *Peace and War*, 77.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Williams, "Why Ideas Matter ", 634.

Neorealist theory or structural realism in contrast, prioritises the third image above all others, attributing security competition to the absence of any overarching authority in the international system and regarding the distribution of power between states as the only object of analysis in international politics. For neorealists, international politics consists of ‘like units’ – states – duplicating one another’s activities – their functional similarity rendering variations between states at the unit level irrelevant to explaining the international outcomes of interaction between them. It is solely the nature and structure of the system within which those units coexist that determines their behaviour and mediates outcomes.⁶⁹ Thus “wars occur because there is nothing to prevent them.”⁷⁰ So although classical realists held a healthy scepticism of the rhetoric of statesmen, believing that “the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalisations”, neorealists on the other hand consider the politics of states to be fundamentally irrelevant.⁷¹ Dismissing “ideology, form of government, peacefulness, bellicosity or whatever”, what makes international relations tick is nothing more than the “distribution of capabilities”.⁷²

Such a rigid view of state motivation coincided neatly with the apparently zero-sum nature of Cold War bipolarity and is distinguished from classical realism in an important sense by its relinquishing of the critical responsibility of scholarship. Indeed, the logic of this pure form of realism is so highly determined that it entails

⁶⁹ For the classic example of this kind of structural realist approach, see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979). Other neorealist approaches include Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978). The defensive and offensive variants of structural realism are covered in relation to the grand strategies of neoisolationism and primacy respectively.

⁷⁰ Waltz, *Man, the State, and War*, 232.

⁷¹ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 101. Legal and ethical principles espoused by statesmen are necessary ideologies that have the corollary effect of mobilising support behind a particular policy by rendering involvement in the contest for power psychologically and morally acceptable for the actors and their audience.

⁷² Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 98.

that policy choice can only arise ever in two scenarios. First, in situations where calculations of particular considerations balance equally, presenting alternatives with identical impacts on the security of the state, in which case the choice is arbitrary; and second where imperfect information creates gaps in the assessment of the national interest which are filled by competing sets of conjecture and supposition, in which case the choice is unwelcome, being a function of ignorance rather than knowledge.

This determinism of structural realism, its prioritising of the third image and material interest and its assumption that power is both the means and end of political action effectively renders ideas “impotent if they depart from the interest that politics have in power.”⁷³ Thus the dominant realist view throughout the twentieth century regarded ideology as nothing more than “pretexts and false fronts behind which the element of power, inherent in all politics, can be concealed.”⁷⁴

However, realism’s insistence on the perpetual priority of the pursuit of power and the divorce of political rhetoric from empirical reality faced difficulties in the shape of important historical anomalies. Stephen Krasner isolated a number of cases in American foreign policy that could not be explained in terms of strategic interests, that is, protecting the territorial and political integrity of the state, and saw instead a ‘politics of ideology’ that drove American leaders to go beyond pursuing interests and to attempt instead to impose their vision upon the world.⁷⁵ “A belief in how society ought to be ordered was more powerful than material concerns. In Pareto’s terminology, American policy was nonlogical.”⁷⁶ Similarly, IR approached obviously and explicitly ideological foreign policies as anomalous results to which

⁷³ Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, 62-63.

⁷⁴ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 103.

⁷⁵ Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1978), 337-44.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 345.

explanatory theory had no applicability. In the case of Nazi Germany, “ideology was victorious over other considerations”⁷⁷ and as such its foreign policy “must always be analysed in the light of Hitler's inflexible *Weltanschauung*.”⁷⁸ Similar analysis was applied to the ideological nature of the Soviet Union, where foreign policy “reflected ideology in ways that resist alternative explanations.”⁷⁹ Yet rather than take seriously the role of ideas in policy formulation, the idiosyncrasies of these cases were accounted for by their failure to comply with the rational actor model. Hence for Gaddis,

“there seems to have been something about authoritarians that caused them to lose touch with reality. Being a communist provided no greater safeguard against tilting at windmills than being a fascist. The explanation is not difficult to discern: autocratic systems reinforce, while discouraging attempts to puncture, whatever quixotic illusions may exist at the top.”⁸⁰

Essentially, the argument was that realism, in making the reasonable and necessary assumption that actors are rational, couldn't be expected to account for madmen gaining control of countries, and so its general explanatory power wasn't compromised by the policies of a Hitler or a Stalin. However, this type of analysis begs the question. At what point do actors cease to be non-rational, and just start being different? The danger is that rational action is defined as political realism, so that foreign policy that does not conform to realist tenets is *a priori* non-rational. Realism can't explain ideological foreign policy because it is not realist.

⁷⁷ George Schwab, *Ideology and Foreign Policy: A Global Perspective* (New York: Irvington, 1981), 3.

⁷⁸ Alan Cassels, *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World, The New International History Series* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 164.

⁷⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 290. See also Seweryn Bialer, "Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy", in *Ideology and Foreign Policy: A Global Perspective*, ed. George Schwab (New York: Irvington, 1981), 77-78.

⁸⁰ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 291.

Moreover, neorealism's attitude towards the force of ideas is condemned by aspects of the self-image of the doctrine itself. For classical realists, realism is not only the theory that best explains international politics, it is also the best guide for policymakers. For Morgenthau, "political realism contains not only a theoretical but also a normative element.... [it] considers a rational foreign policy to be a good foreign policy... [it] wants the photographic picture of the political world to resemble as much as possible its painted portrait."⁸¹ Realism then, is both an explanatory theory *and* a normative theory. The ideas contained within realism not only explain international politics, but should also inform the decision-making of policymakers.

The paradox of neorealism's treatment of ideas is that as an explanatory theory it cannot account for the normative influence of its own doctrine on the actions of states. This is the crux of Krasner's complaint that social scientists were offering policy advice to decision-makers "when there was nothing in their theories that would [lead them to believe they could] do any good".⁸² If ideas are merely for rhetorical purposes, then why urge statesmen to adhere to the ideas of realism? If, on the other hand, the ideas contained in realism's foreign policy prescriptions can shape the world so that it more perfectly resembles the theoretical image, how can those ideas be dismissed as lacking the power to affect international affairs? Thus the explicit expression of a normative element in realism necessarily undermines its explanatory power so long as the influence of ideas is denied.

Kenneth Waltz, for his part, has always maintained that it is logically inappropriate to ask structural realism to account for foreign policy outcomes.⁸³ For Waltz,

⁸¹ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 10.

⁸² Krasner, *Defending the National Interest*, xi.

⁸³ Kenneth Waltz, "International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy", *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996). reaffirms Waltz's belief that it is an "error... to mistake a theory of international politics for a theory of foreign policy." Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121. For a breakdown of Waltz's rationales and the implications, see James D. Fearon, "Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Theories of International Relations", *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998).

structure affects behaviour in the system only indirectly, through pervasive (i.e. systemic) processes of socialisation and competition. Thus it is improper to expect to find direct causal links from international structure to state behaviour in the day-to-day deliberations of foreign policy elites.⁸⁴ Neorealism for Waltz is concerned with explaining common patterns of international behaviour over time – it aims to explain broad patterns of systemic outcomes rather than the individual outcomes of the units within the system.

This distinction may be conceptually neat, but the application of such system-unit theoretical incompatibility to international relations is far from the clear-cut case that the relatively unchallenged nature of Waltz's assertion suggests. In order for theories of system to be logically distinct from theories of the behaviour of units within the system, the system must contain its own theoretical logic, that is, for there to be logical interrelations between systemic features that are independent from the units themselves. But the only logical claim that neorealism makes for the international system revolves around the nature of international anarchy, a concept which is hardly uncontested, and which the units within the system mediate, or at least attempt to. Thus the separation of system logic and unit logic is at best unproven, and we should not allow it to obstruct opportunities for further advances in knowledge that attempt to specify the causal linkages between environmental conditions and the behaviour of units making up that system.⁸⁵

A neoclassical realist theory of ideas therefore seeks to revive the insights of classical realism about the first and second images of international politics in order to treat domestic political ideas as intervening variables between systemic imperatives and unit-level behaviour. Before considering how such a theory can be

⁸⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 73-4.

⁸⁵ David J. Singer, "System Structure, Decision Processes, and the Incidence of International War", in *Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 8.

constructed it is important to establish why the other major theoretical approach that attempts to integrate ideas into a systemic theory is unsatisfactory.

The False Promise of Constructivism

The end of the Cold War served to bring the role of ideas in international relations to the forefront of the discipline of international relations. The failure to predict the demise of bipolarity, and moreover the fact that the Cold War's end was peaceful rather than violent, left realism questioning its core insights and explanatory power, and raised questions about the methods that international relations scholars had developed for understanding world politics.⁸⁶ The explanations for why "we" got the end of the Cold War wrong might have been internal to the nature of Soviet studies in the West, but the intellectual blame was directed most obviously at realism's failures to account for processes within states.⁸⁷ During the 1980s, although there had been little change in the capabilities indexes proposed by Waltz, there had, according to some analysts, been "an important change in ideas as the Soviet Union abandoned its threatening expansionary ideology."⁸⁸ Realists were

⁸⁶ John-Lewis Gaddis, "International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War", *International Security* 17, no. 3 (1992/3), 6. See also Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War and the Failure of Realism", *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994); Thomas Risse-Kappen and Isabelle Grunberg, "A Time of Reckoning? Theories of IR and the End of the Cold War", in *The End of the Cold War: Evaluating Theories of International Relations*, ed. Pierre Allan and Kjell Goldmann (Dordrecht; Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1992).

⁸⁷ Michael Cox, "Why Did We Get the End of the Cold War Wrong?", *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 11, no. 2 (2009).

⁸⁸ John Mueller, "The Impact of Ideas on Grand Strategy", in *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, ed. Richard Newton Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 53. The literature on international relations theory and explanations for the unexpected and peaceful end of the Cold War is vast. For accounts critiquing neorealism and emphasising the role of ideas within the Soviet decision-making process see Jeff Checkel, "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution", *World Politics* 45, no. 2 (1993); Matthew Evangelista, "The Paradox of State Strength: Transnational Relations, Domestic Structure and Security Policy in Russia and the Soviet Union", *International Organization* 49, no. 1 (1995); Tuomas Forsberg, "Power, Interests and Trust: Explaining Gorbachev's Choices at the End of the Cold War", *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 4 (1999); Lebow, "The Long Peace "; Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War", *International* (continued overleaf)

slow to defend themselves against this raft of new literature that regarded its theoretical power as flawed, and as a result, alternative approaches to the discipline began to take hold in the contemporary debate.⁸⁹ The foremost approach invigorated in the early 1990s by the debate over the end of the Cold War was social constructivism, which began to discard the positivist, materialist philosophical assumptions of realist approaches to international relations altogether to conclude that the very meaning of power and the content of interests are functions of ideas.⁹⁰

Perhaps the most important contribution to understanding the role of ideas in IR that constructivism makes is its emphasis on the importance of identities alongside interests in establishing durable expectations of behaviour between states.⁹¹ The interests of a particular state can only be properly understood as products of that state's identity, and both state identities and interests are in important part constructed by the social structures between states.⁹² Thus the interaction with other

Organization 48, no. 2 (1994). For coverage of the broader questions and debates within IR theory provoked by the end of the Cold War see Hans-Henrik Holm and George Sorensen, "International Relations Theory in a World of Variation", in *Whose World Order? Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War*, ed. H Holm and G. Sorensen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Terrence Hopmann, "Adapting International Relations Theory to the End of the Cold War", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 3 (2003); Risse-Kappen and Grunberg, "A Time of Reckoning?".

⁸⁹ Indeed, it was liberals who were first to emphasise the role of the international system in precipitating Soviet change. See Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change", *International Security* 16, no. 3 (1991-2). Realist explanations of the end of the Cold War that emphasise the deeper role of shifts in material power in forcing the Soviet Union's strategic shifts include Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, "Economic Constraints and the End of the Cold War", in *Cold War Endgame*, ed. William Wohlforth (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Stephen M. Walt, "The Gorbachev Interlude and International Relations Theory", *Diplomatic History* 21, no. 3 (1997); William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War", *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1995).

⁹⁰ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94-5. The other notable school of international relations thought that (re)emerged in the 1990s was democratic peace theory, which is dealt with in chapter 4.

⁹¹ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory", *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998), 174-5.

⁹² Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State", *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994), 385.

states that constitutes those social structures is constantly shaping states' social identities and consequent interests.

Ideas also play a role in the definition and establishment of norms and rules that regulate the structure of international society. Rather than enmity, competition and security dilemmas being inevitable features of the anarchic condition of international order, shared ideas are the building blocks of interaction that transforms anarchy into "what states make of it".⁹³ Rules are central to that interaction, which is responsible for the co-constitution of people and society. Rules "define agents in terms of structures, and structures in terms of agents... as rules change in number, kind, relation and content, they constantly redefine agents and structures, always in terms of each other."⁹⁴

For constructivists then, it is the complex interrelations of agents, rules and structure that constitute international society. In that society, "notions of what is right or wrong, feasible or infeasible, indeed possible or impossible, are all part of an actor's social context, and it is these ideas that shape what actors want, who actors are, and how actors behave".⁹⁵ Ideas define the identities of agents and the rules of structure, and agents and structure are mutually constitutive. Thus the "key structures of the international system are intersubjective; rather than material". The result is a form of structural idealism or "idea-ism" that stands in direct opposition to the core

⁹³ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992), 395.

⁹⁴ Nicholas Onuf, "Rules, Agents, Institutions: A Constructivist Account", paper presented at the *Working Papers in International Society and Institutions 96-92*, Global Peace and Conflict Studies at University of California, Irvine, (1996). Cited in Harry D. Gould, "What Is at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?", in *International Relations in a Constructed World*, ed. V. Kubáľková, Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, and Paul Kowert (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 80.

⁹⁵ Alice Ba and Matthew J. Hoffmann, "Making and Remaking the World for IR101: A Resource for Teaching Social Constructivism in Introductory Classes", *International Studies Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (2003), 21.

structural claims of realism.⁹⁶ This dichotomy resides in the two approaches' competing epistemological and ontological perspectives.

Constructivism's critical focus on the limitations of prevailing empiricist epistemology and materialist ontology has certainly widened the theoretical scope of IR.⁹⁷ Significantly, realists were forced to defend their core assumptions. However, representatives of the two schools were unable to agree upon the terms of debate. For Mearsheimer, the two approaches "have fundamentally different epistemologies and ontologies, which are the most basic levels at which theories can be compared... where realists see a fixed and knowable world, critical theorists see the possibility of endless interpretations of the world before them."⁹⁸ In response, Wendt described the requirement to make a clean distinction between subject and object as a "naïve epistemology" rejected by "almost all philosophers of science today."⁹⁹ Essentially Mearsheimer and Wendt, serving as representatives of realism and constructivism, were arguing past each other; since their core disagreement derives from their incommensurable epistemologies neither of their theories was in a logical position from which it could legitimately critique the other.

Constructivism then appears to have provided a total alternative to realism rather than superseding it. Indeed, constructivism has regularly been listed alongside postpositivist approaches as an example of reflectivism or interpretivism in the discipline, viewing issues from a totally different angle to the rationalism of positivist theories such as realism.¹⁰⁰ Against this, some have argued that

⁹⁶ Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation", 385.

⁹⁷ Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 148-9.

⁹⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions", *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994-5), 41.

⁹⁹ Alexander Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995), 75.

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Constructivism", in *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, ed. Jennifer Sterling-Folker (Boulder, Colo.; London: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 117-8. The term reflective is suggested by Robert Keohane for approaches that "emphasise the importance of human reflection (continued overleaf)

constructivism holds an objectivist ontology and that much constructivist work, far from rejecting the belief that we can gain objective knowledge of that world, actually maintains a wholly conventional epistemology.¹⁰¹ Such a position suggests that constructivism has the potential to bridge the chasm that separates mainstream International Relations from postmodernist scholarship.¹⁰²

However, it is difficult to reconcile Wendt's claim that when IR scholars explain "state action by reference to interests, they are actually explaining it by reference to a certain kind of idea" with any kind of conventional epistemology, for this position appears to deny that there are empirically knowable material facts *per se*. Further, if material interests are actually explained by ideas, it is difficult to comprehend exactly how "the true 'material base' can still have independent effects".¹⁰³ Indeed, the use of the word 'true' implies a two-tiered epistemological approach to the empirical world, one where some material facts can be known and others can be known only by means of the ideas that constitute them.

If ideas are "inextricably involved in the production of interests"¹⁰⁴ it is futile to distinguish between the two. Indeed, it is tempting to agree with one critic that Wendt is "seeking a synthesis of rationalism and constructivism on his own

for the nature of institutions and ultimately the character of world politics", Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches", *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1988), 384. Interpretivism refers to the thesis that "in the social and interpreted world in which (as they see it) we live, only ideas matter and can be studied", Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics", *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997), 321.

¹⁰¹ Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", 75. See also Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity and Culture", in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 67, which denies that the volume's authors use "any special interpretivist methodology".

¹⁰² Jeffrey T. Checkel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory", *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998), 327.

¹⁰³ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 111-13.

¹⁰⁴ Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, "Beyond Belief: Ideas and Symbolic Technologies in the Study of International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 2 (1997), 195.

antimaterialist and holist terms”.¹⁰⁵ Constructivism’s fundamental rejection of the positivist “conceptual tool kit”¹⁰⁶ leads to the same problem of reductionism as pure realism suffers in mirror-image – where structural realism reduces all ideas to interest, constructivism reduces material interests to ideas.

There have been attempts to integrate the undoubted insights of constructivist scholarship with realist thought.¹⁰⁷ However, the epistemological basis for doing so has not been established, and although constructivism can help us understand that identities, norms and rules are endogenous to system structure, in doing so it is compelled to regard the distribution of material capabilities as an essentially exogenous factor. Where realism states that ideas don’t matter, constructivism tells us that material capabilities aren’t important. Neither can capture the sense in which both ideas and interests play roles – sometimes competing, sometimes complementary – in formulating the direction of states’ foreign policy and the structure of the international system. In order to do so, what is required is an epistemological approach to ideas that allows their influence to be assessed alongside the force of material capabilities.

A Positivist Conception Of Ideas

This thesis proposes that a neoclassical realist approach to the study of grand strategy can integrate the impact of ideas alongside the imperatives of material power in the making of foreign policy, rejecting the notion that either ideas or

¹⁰⁵ Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas Part-Way Down", *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000), 126.

¹⁰⁶ Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation", 394.

¹⁰⁷ See Barkin, "Realist Constructivism". A selection of responses to his article follow in Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Forum: Bridging the Gap: Toward a Realist-Constructivist Dialogue", *International Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (2004).

material factors are somehow ‘most fundamental’ and therefore deserving of analytic focus to the exclusion of the other. As Keohane puts it, “creating this dichotomy is a bit like arguing whether the heart or the brain is most fundamental to life.”¹⁰⁸ However, both the definitional status and conceptual implications of the term ‘idea’ are, to put it mildly, the subject of some debate. To date, no single definition has emerged, nor is there agreement on the causal roles ideas play in political processes.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, in much of the literature the necessity of clear definition is either ignored and the assumption of definitional transparency erroneously made; or the term is confusingly equated and used interchangeably with, variously, ‘belief’, ‘ideology’, ‘theory’, ‘models’, ‘schools of thought’ and even ‘intellectual idiosyncrasies’.¹¹⁰ In order to integrate ideas into a neoclassical approach that focuses on grand strategy we need to construct a rationalist, positivist approach that is both clear about how it defines its terms and rigorous about the accuracy of their application.

First, and contrary to what some have suggested, it is important that ideas and interests are maintained as conceptually distinct phenomena.¹¹¹ Although many ideas that people hold reflect their interests, and it may even be the case that an individual holds an idea because it is in their interest to do so, these are not reasons to logically conflate ideas with interests. There is no logical impediment to our holding ideas that directly contradict our interests, and that therefore the two should

¹⁰⁸ Keohane, "Ideas Part-Way Down", 127.

¹⁰⁹ Michael P. Marks, *The Formation of European Policy in Post-Franco Spain: The Role of Ideas, Interests and Knowledge* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1997), 27.

¹¹⁰ Laffey and Weldes, "Beyond Belief", 197.

¹¹¹ Keohane and Goldstein undermine their theoretical construction that posits a null hypothesis that ‘variation in policy across countries, or over time, is entirely accounted for by changes in factors other than ideas’ with their belief that ‘ideas and interests are not phenomenologically separate’. See Kathryn Sikkink, "The Power of Principled Ideas: Human Rights Policies in the United States and Western Europe", in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 26-7.

remain conceptually distinct.¹¹² Indeed, in rejecting the subjectivism underpinning constructivist approaches, it is crucial that neoclassical realists require that interests, in contrast to ideas, are those things that we can know as material facts about the world and which constitute power relations between states. They are those things that a state must secure if it is to maintain its place in the balance-of-power.

The idea that there is an independent reality directly available to state officials and analysts is not an uncontroversial one. It has been suggested that even the identification of a state's material interests is a process that requires "significant interpretive labour".¹¹³ Certainly there is something to this criticism, yet even were this always the case, and it is by no means clear that it is, we should not derive the conclusion that material interests are unknowable, that the concept is not a useful one. Instead we should seek to isolate the material from the ideational, to identify how particular ideas provide context within which states pursue their paramount objective of securing those things they identify as key material interests.

The second mistake that rationalist approaches have tended to make to date is that they identify ideas with beliefs, a definition that confuses far more than it clarifies.¹¹⁴ The same authors that define ideas as "beliefs held by individuals" claim that "ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them."¹¹⁵ Such thinking invites the criticism that for this to be the case, 'ideas' must be distinct from the 'beliefs' without which they can still have impact.¹¹⁶ This

¹¹² The philosophy of human altruism makes this case. See Samir Okasha, "Biological Altruism", in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003).

¹¹³ Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 7.

¹¹⁴ Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11.

¹¹⁵ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework", in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1993), 3, 20.

¹¹⁶ Laffey and Weldes, "Beyond Belief", 206.

critique erroneously assumes that for something to be a belief, at least someone needs to believe in it. This is transparently not the case. To say that one does not believe x is to say that one does believe x's negation. Yet it makes little sense to say, even on the basis of universal disbelief, that a statement is not a belief but its negation is. Despite the failure of this critique however, the shared belief characterisation is fundamentally weakened by the fact that by defining ideas as beliefs we remove their power. A rationalist approach to ideas envisages ideas as having force alongside material interests, but by defining ideas as mere beliefs it becomes difficult to see them as (effective) weapons in policy debates.¹¹⁷

Insisting on the distinctions between ideas and interests on the one hand and ideas and beliefs on the other does not however entail that each may not interact with or influence the others. Ideas may fill gaps in policymakers' knowledge of interests.¹¹⁸ Ideas can establish the framework within which interests are pursued and resolve uncertainty about how to pursue them. Thus, for Weber, "not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by ideas have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest."¹¹⁹ Similarly, Goldstein and Keohane's 'typology of belief' provides us with an indication of how individuals' worldviews and ethical ideas may prioritise certain ideas over others or lead them to particular ideas.¹²⁰

Phenomenological separation of ideas, beliefs and interests allows us to isolate three very specific types of ideas involved in policy formulation. The first, *scientific ideas*, tell us about how the world works. Scientific ideas establish the relations

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Marks, *The Formation of European Policy in Post-Franco Spain*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1948), 280.

¹²⁰ Goldstein and Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy ", 8-10.

between things in the international environment. Examples might include the stopping power of water, or the idea that liberal democracies will not go to war with each other. These ideas establish the boundaries of possibility for state strategies by describing and interpreting the relations of empirical realities in the international system.

Second, what one might call *intentional ideas*, are normative suggestions that seek to establish goals for foreign policy. These types of ideas reflect ethical prejudices on the part of their proponents. They articulate in the realm of foreign policy what the nation should seek to do, simply because it is the right thing to do. For example, a state may seek to use its foreign policy to advance the cause of human rights. It should be noted that this is not the same as it being in that state's interests to promote human rights. Whilst intentional ideas that run counter to the national interest are less likely to gain support among either elites, bureaucracies or the national public, there is nothing inherent in the concept that says that they may not – the separation of ideas and interests renders this a contingent rather than logical relation. So rather than seeing, for example, financial aid to impoverished countries in terms of powerful countries wielding economic power for their own ends, or alternatively as part of a process that constitutes the social identities of rich and poor countries, a neoclassical realist approach allows us to view aid as an intentional idea translated into policy because it is simply considered by a state's foreign policy executive as the right thing to do.

Third are what one might call *operational ideas*. These may be scientific or normative statements that recommend the means by which a certain end should be pursued. As in the case of intentional ideas they may be based on ethical judgements, but they more often arise from the holding of a particular causal belief about how which policies produce which outcomes. A neoclassical realist account might therefore explain the differing approaches of states towards similar threat by reference to differing operational ideas as much as differing coercive capabilities.

Apart from creating a typology of what ideas are, the other question that neoclassical realism must address if it is to properly integrate ideas is how ideas work in the process of foreign policy to mediate structural pressures. Why are some ideas adopted as policy where others founder? What precipitates changes in prevailing ideas?

The Intervening Variable: Ideas Within Nations

A neoclassical realist approach might usefully require that ideas are treated as objects with force, that is, as elements of power. However, it should be obvious that the relationship between ideas and power is rather different from the relationship between, say, money and power, or military hardware and power. Whereas material capabilities' power is largely intrinsic and fixed, the power of an idea is both dependent and variable. Therefore I suggest locations at which ideas may intervene at the unit level: through the specific individuals that hold them; through institutions in which they may become embedded; and through the broader culture of the state.

Fundamentally the state is made up of individuals. Individuals construct systems, institutions and bureaucracies; individuals lead and follow; individuals make decisions. On what basis do individuals decide between competing ideas? The first is the quality of the idea itself – it's internal coherence, it's congruence with known realities. The second key to success resides in the speaker himself – his intellectual status, his eloquence of advocacy. The power of an idea to persuade others at any one moment in history resides both in itself, and in the power of those who hold it. The causal effect of ideas on policies has tended to be displaced onto the political effects of individuals in IR theory. The persuasiveness of ideas is assumed rather than examined, and treated as constant.¹²¹ It is however, important to recognise that

¹²¹ Albert S. Yee, "The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies", *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996), 86. For psychological approaches to the role of ideas in policy see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); (continued overleaf)

some ideas are ‘better’ than others, and are more likely to progress into the policymaking arena, where institutional factors may then come into play.

This however, is not to deny the crucial role of forces exogenous to them that push certain ideas to heart of policymaking. Whilst the degree to which ideas generate popular support may provide them with power mediated through public opinion, ideas can take a shortcut to policy success if they have the backing of individuals and institutions that themselves have power. The character of the ‘couriers’ of ideas that may be as important, if not more so, than anything intrinsic to the idea itself.¹²² At the individual level then, neoclassical realism understands that the ideas held by powerful actors within the state matter. Whilst the intrinsic power of a particular idea makes its progress into such positions more likely, the ideas that will impact most upon foreign policy are those held by those in decision-making positions in the state and those who directly advise them. Thus as Mead notes, “It matters who the President is. If Theodore Roosevelt and not Woodrow Wilson had been President when World War I broke out, American and world history might have taken a very different turn.”¹²³

The second location at which ideas may impact at the unit level occurs when individuals with shared ideas coalesce into groups, organisations, and common practices within the state to form institutions that operate in both formal and informal sectors of the policymaking process. The formation of institutions reflects the fact that ideas that are somehow embedded in particular structures are possessed of greater power. Institutions can act as couriers for ideas in three ways.¹²⁴ ‘Epistemic communities’ of experts have the policy-relevant knowledge to exert

Jeffrey Legro, "The Transformation of Policy Ideas", *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (2000); David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis, *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹²² Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, 68.

¹²³ Mead, *Power Terror Peace and War*, 18-19.

¹²⁴ Yee, "Causal Effects of Ideas", 86-94.

influence on the positions adopted by a wide range of actors. The extent of the influence of such groups is dependent on their ability to occupy influential positions within bureaucracies from where they may consolidate their power, thereby institutionalising the influence of the community.¹²⁵ However, their ability to infiltrate bureaucratic posts will depend – at least in part – on the receptiveness of the existing bureaucratic order to their ideas.¹²⁶

A second means by which institutions act as couriers is by the encasing of ideas in formal rules and procedures at the creation of the institution itself. Once they have become embedded in this way, those ideas with which the institution was founded can continue to influence policy even though the interests or ideas of their creators may have changed. Thus, “when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas can be prolonged for decades or even generations.”¹²⁷

In both of these ways, “ideas acquire force when they find organizational means of expression”.¹²⁸ The third way in which ideas can impact is through the structural arrangements institutions create. These structures set up road-blocks and through-routes which determine the ease with which ideas can gain access to the policy process. Indeed, the structure of the institutional framework may determine the political and administrative ‘viability’ of particular ideas, that is, their ability to appeal to current conditions. Institutional structure therefore ensures that policymakers only have access to a limited set of ideas, whether those are percolated up to them or searched for by them.¹²⁹ In this way, the ideas that form what some

¹²⁵ Peter M. Haas, "Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination", *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992), 2-4.

¹²⁶ For a more detailed overview of how ‘idea-infused’ institutions operate within the bureaucratic order, see Daniel W. Drezner, "Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics and the Crafting of Foreign Policy", *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2000).

¹²⁷ Goldstein and Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy ", 20.

¹²⁸ Peter A. Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France, Europe and the International Order*. (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), 280.

¹²⁹ Yee, "Causal Effects of Ideas", 92.

refer to as ‘strategic culture’ may provide a reliable guide to a state’s likely reaction to shifts in the structure of the international system.¹³⁰

Underlying both individuals and institutions are the ideas contained in the broader cultural context within which the state is located. Ideas that are embedded in social norms, patterns of discourse and collective identities become accepted, “instinctual” parts of the social world and are experienced as part of a natural objective reality.¹³¹ In this way cultural variables subconsciously set the limits and terms of debate for both individuals and institutions, and so have “a profound effect on the strategic behaviour of states.”¹³² Mediated through institutions and individuals who are blinded to potential alternatives, ideas embedded in national culture therefore has the potential to explain “why some states act contrary to the structural imperatives of the international system.”¹³³

The power of ideas therefore rests on “the ability of believers in ideas to alter the costs and benefits facing those who are in a position to promote or hinder the policies that the ideas demand.”¹³⁴ In the process of foreign policy ‘engineering’, organisations and the ideas they espouse or represent vie with one another for dominance and autonomy.¹³⁵ Decisions taken reflect the process of formulating the choices to be presented.¹³⁶ Throughout the process of making foreign policy

¹³⁰ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 21-30.

¹³¹ Sheri Berman, "Ideas, Norms and Culture in Political Analysis", *Comparative Politics* 33, no. 2 (2001), 238-9.

¹³² Dueck, "New Perspectives", 215.

¹³³ Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies", *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998), 167.

¹³⁴ Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*, 58.

¹³⁵ Philip Zelikow, "Foreign Policy Engineering: From Theory to Practice and Back Again", *International Security* 18, no. 4 (1994), 153.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

powerful ideas – whether that power resides in their couriers or is internal to the ideas themselves – are prevailing over weaker ideas.¹³⁷

This conception fits with other neoclassical works that focus on the machinations of domestic politics as the intervening variable between systemic pressures and the production of unit-level responses. Randall Schweller has been prominent in identifying the constraints that domestic political processes impose on states that cause them to ‘underbalance’ in the face of external threats.¹³⁸ Schweller’s argument, although arguably more sophisticated, is similar to Zakaria’s concept of ‘state power’ and Taliaferro’s resource extraction model, in that they focus on the way in which domestic political processes affect the *ability* of the state to act in international politics.¹³⁹ The implication of these types of account is that states with similar internal bureaucratic structures will address similar threats in similar ways. A theory of ideas however, whilst incorporating these insights about the character of domestic politics, focuses on how prevailing ideas influence the *type* of foreign policy response to structural imperatives. It can therefore explain how similarly structured states may respond in different ways to similar threats by reference to differing prevailing ideas within the state, whether that be as a result of the particular individuals advocating the ideas, broader cultural preferences, national history or whatever. The response as understood through the prism of ideas can then account for both overreaction and underreaction, as well as for the pursuit of goals unrelated to the notion of threat.

¹³⁷ A classic and controversial example of powerful ideas affecting foreign policy processes is the Israel lobby in the United States. Here democratic and religious ideas both have strong congruence with prevailing American ideology, and powerful couriers in think-tanks, academia and the media enhance the influence of those ideas. See John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

¹³⁸ Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing", *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004); Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, *Princeton Studies in International History and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2006).

¹³⁹ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State", *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006); Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

A Neoclassical Realist Model Of Grand Strategy Formation

We have now set out both the scope of grand strategy and the way neoclassical realism should conceptualise the role of ideas in policymaking. What follows is an analysis of the making of grand strategy. How does grand strategy operate? What's involved in the process of its formulation? What determines the outcome of that process? Why does it change? These questions and the answers to them may serve to constitute the beginnings of a defined, systematic neoclassical realist approach that views states' grand strategies as its primary analyte and is able to specify the domestic ideational variables that intervene between system structure and foreign policy outcomes.

Grand strategy involves a number of processes that take place within states, "defined as the central decision-making institutions and roles [that] can be treated as unified actors pursuing aims understood in terms of the national interest."¹⁴⁰ Neoclassical realists do admit that the identities and scope of those central decision-making actors depends on the specific characteristics of a country's political system, but they retain a 'top-down' conception of the state in which systemic forces are mediated by a national security or foreign policy executive.¹⁴¹ That executive may however be

¹⁴⁰ Krasner, *Defending the National Interest*, 12-13. This definition can be developed by disaggregating the democratic 'state' into two elements, the representative (legislative) element and the foreign policy executive (composed of high-ranking bureaucrats and elected executive officials charged with the overall conduct of foreign affairs). Strategy derives from the balance of the necessary tensions between the societal pressure of the representative element which acts in the interests *of* society, and the strategic pressures of the executive which acts in the interests *for* society. David A. Lake, "The State and American Trade Strategy in the Pre-Hegemonic Era", *International Organization* 42, no. 1 (1988).

¹⁴¹ Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, 25.

influenced in their thinking by the cumulative actions of actors as diverse as policy makers, lobbyists, citizens' groups and businesses, and by the process of bargaining with them.¹⁴² Thus "leaders define the 'national interest' and conduct foreign policy based on their assessment of relative power and other states' intentions, but always subject to domestic constraints."¹⁴³ Thus by using a plural definition of the state neoclassical realism recognises that processes within states are influenced not only by exogenous systemic factors and considerations of power and security, but also by cultural and ideological bias, domestic political considerations and prevailing ideas.

The Strategic Assessment – Detecting National Security Threats

The first, and most significant task of grand strategy formation involves the identification of threats to the security of the state.¹⁴⁴ Neoclassical realism begins with a traditionally realist assessment of the strategic context of the state, that considers the geopolitical structure of the international system and identifies the material balance of power that defines and prioritises national interests and the threats to those interests.¹⁴⁵ It should be remembered that such an assessment is by no means a *fait accompli*, and that different assessments may follow from particular historical, ideological, political or ideational biases.¹⁴⁶ Clausewitz recognised that perfect information was rarely a feature of war and therefore required that officers

¹⁴² Mead, *Power Terror Peace and War*, 17. See also Norrin M Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups", in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M Ripsman (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁴³ Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, 25-6.

¹⁴⁴ Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*; Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*; Rose, "Neoclassical Realism".

¹⁴⁶ Steven E. Lobell, "Threat Assessment, the State and Foreign Policy", in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M Ripsman (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46-56, 61-68.

“possess a standard of judgement” and be “guided by the laws of probability”.¹⁴⁷

Morgenthau too, noted that:

“uncertainty of power calculations is inherent in the nature of national power itself. It will therefore come into play even in the most simple pattern of balance of power; that is, when one nation opposes another. This uncertainty is, however, immeasurably magnified when [the balance of power] is composed not of single units but of alliances.”¹⁴⁸

Thus uncertainty deriving from imperfect intelligence and the machinations of structure, plus the sheer volume of information involved, may create an imbalance between complexity and the analytic capacity of individuals involved in strategic planning.¹⁴⁹ Such an imbalance creates a void that can only be filled by the scientific ideas held by decision-makers, so that “the greater the ambiguity, the greater the impact of preconceptions.”¹⁵⁰ Having said all that, it should be clear that many features of the international system can be known with a satisfactory degree of certainty, and therefore a consensus on a strategic assessment is more likely to derive from clear facts than any collective cognitive bias. Still, it remains important to recognise that ideas may intervene to fill the knowledge gaps between the actual strategic situation and the conclusions of a strategic assessment.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret, *On War*, 117.

¹⁴⁸ Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 225.

¹⁴⁹ Michael Fitzsimmons, "The Problem of Uncertainty in Strategic Planning", *Survival* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2006-7), 135.

¹⁵⁰ Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 103.

¹⁵¹ A number of studies have identified cases where misperception of the strategic situation by opinion formers and leaders within states was instrumental in policy outcomes. See Thomas J. Christensen, "Perceptions and Alliances in Europe, 1865-1940", *International Organization* 51, no. 1 (1997); Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988); Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance*. Morgenthau specified three “typical errors of evaluation”: 1) disregarding the relativity of power by regarding the power of one particular nation as absolute; 2) assuming permanency of a certain factor (continued overleaf)

A consideration of the empirical facts of the balance of power is not on its own enough to identify a threat to a state.¹⁵² Threats come to be identified on the basis of both capability and intent, and in this latter category assessments are more vulnerable to be profoundly affected by perceptions of other states' strategy, culture, ideology and history.¹⁵³ Even where threats are agreed upon, different operational ideas may contest the ranking of those threats in terms of imminence and scale. Further, particular intentional ideas may consider some features of individual states or of the international system itself as simply threatening *per se*, even in the absence of targeted capability or intent.¹⁵⁴

The Means of Strategy – Power and Appropriateness

The second element in the formulation of grand strategy is the selection of means to address identified threats. This process involves consideration of both what means are available, which will work most effectively, and whether their use can be justified.

Neoclassical realism understands that states have a choice of means with which they may pursue strategic goals, since they have access to differing aspects of power which they can mobilise against threats. Distinctions between soft and hard power are common in international relations, yet may be too crude for a careful analysis of

of power when in fact most are subject to dynamic change; and 3) attributing to a single factor decisive importance. Morgenthau, Clinton, and Thompson, *Politics among Nations*, 174.

¹⁵² Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power", *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985), 8-9.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 12-13. Henry Nau goes further, to plausibly argue that power can only really threaten when national identities diverge, and that we should therefore usefully think of the international system in terms of a "distribution of identity," alongside the distribution of power. Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁴ For example, internal instability may be seen as a threat (UN Resolution 1556 describes genocide in Darfur as "a threat to international peace and security"). Some argue that dictatorships, irrespective of their particular character, are necessarily threatening. Robert D. Kaplan, "Old States, New Threats", *Washington Post*, 23/4/06.

a state's grand strategic preferences. In his discussion of the United States' grand strategic options, Walter Russell Mead usefully isolates four tools of strategy. *Sharp Power* is the military and intelligence capabilities of a state. These tools are purely coercive, in that they provide a state with the ability to force another state into a course of action they would not have otherwise chosen. It is the reality of sharp power that is the ultimate broker of disputes, should a state involved consider the strategic goal in view important enough to justify its use.¹⁵⁵ *Sticky Power* is the ability to makes others' economies dependent upon one's own. For example, if state A can engineer a situation where state B is dependent on the import of particular resources, state B may become 'stuck' to state A and therefore more likely to comply with the strategic preferences of state A. On a global scale, an economic system controlled by and run to the advantage of one power provides that state with a great amount of sticky power as the "consumer of last resort".¹⁵⁶ *Sweet Power* is the power of attraction of one state's ideals, culture and values, that make other states more likely to acquiesce to its strategic preferences. In the twentieth century, American anti-imperialism, political democracy and commitment to human rights, plus the popularity of her popular culture, gave the United States reserves of sweet power. One of the effects of that power is to attract immigration, which can then be further responsible for reinforcing sweet power in a positive feedback loop.¹⁵⁷ Following Gramsci, Mead isolates *Hegemonic Power* as the power of setting the agenda and determining the terms of debate.¹⁵⁸ People consent to hegemonic power because they see it as inevitable. Hegemonic power is mutually constituted by other strengths, for example military, technological and economic, that appear unchallengeable. It may allow a hegemon to provide certain international public

¹⁵⁵ Mead, *Power Terror Peace and War*, 26-29.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-36.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-40.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

goods, thus reinforcing its own hegemonic power and potentially providing a corollary increase in its sweet power.¹⁵⁹

Different states have access to these tools of power to varying degrees. Hegemonic power is by definition available to a select few, sharp power has heavy costs in terms of resources and sticky power may take generations to develop. Sweet power is easier to generate but requires history and position to give it real credibility and force. However, whilst a state's endowment may not change rapidly, grand strategy is long-term policy-making and key decisions of grand strategy involve which aspects of power to cultivate, and how best to do so. Will joining a regional free-trade area be an investment in pooled hegemonic power to counter nearby threatening states or will it deny the freedom of action to act in other ways? Should finite resources be invested in military hardware or policies for economic growth?

Actors within states may hold competing operational ideas about which means are most appropriate to address particular threats. For example, within militaries the different forces tend to hold competing ideas about the effectiveness of their respective methods. Elsewhere within the state, some actors may consider that particular goals require the use of economic sanctions and military 'sticks', whereas other actors prefer to rely on the 'carrots' of trade and softer elements of power. Within states, not only do actors hold different ideas about which means will work, there exists a competition of ideas concerning which means are ethically acceptable, which may reflect both long-standing cultural factors and prevailing domestic political attitudes. Should condom distribution or abstinence programs be used to address the African HIV epidemic? Are sanctions justifiable if they hurt the people as well as their despotic government? Is the use of torture justified to extract information that will prevent a devastating terrorist attack?

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 41-58. For example, hegemonic power allowed the US to provide the international public good of securing oil supplies. It was expected that Fordian 'harmonic convergence' would both deepen the ties of hegemonic power and soften the force of that power.

Auxiliary Goals – Strategy Beyond the National Interest

Once threats have been identified, ranked and the means to address them decided, the third, tertiary element of grand strategy identifies auxiliary goals and selects the appropriate means to attain them. In an anarchic system with uncertainty of intentions, the primary purpose of the state is to ensure its own survival using the resources available to it. The scope of these goals will be constrained by the availability of resources, and so some states in the system may not have auxiliary goals at all, preferring instead to engage all their available resources in the pursuit of security. On the other hand, some states may not have enough resources to provide a guarantee of security and will consider the attempt fruitless and may therefore instead devote the resources they have entirely towards auxiliary goals. Strong states have excess resources that will allow them to both guarantee their security and pursue auxiliary international goals. Auxiliary goals may be expansionist in terms of territory or economic power; they may create interests for a state based on historic or cultural ties; they may seek to further ethical concerns or political ideas; they may be directed towards ‘global’ interests. The choice of which auxiliary goals to pursue and with which resources to pursue them will always be the result of ideational debate within the state, since systemic imperatives have already been addressed in one form or another.

It could be countered here that the free resources of states are illusory, in that they find their security needs grow with their disposable power. This critique fails on two counts: first, in order for power to be disposable it must by definition be a free resource. Indeed, the logic of this claim is that at all times the resources of the state are equal to or less than the state’s security requirements, which seems dubious. Second, and more empirically, rather than new threats instantaneously appearing to occupy resources as states expand it seems more likely that states use ‘national security’ as a justification for other goals that require expanded resources.

Thus grand strategy emerges through these processes of empirical assessment and ideational competition within the state. Although in most cases the primary

requirement is for security from threats, placing a systemic analysis of the distribution of power at the heart of grand-strategic decision-making, grand strategy involves much more than simply the identification of, and response to, threats. At the heart of the process, strategic ideas provide policymakers with guidance in conditions of uncertainty, reflecting the considerable autonomy and scope for creativity on the part of the state to shape grand strategy in response to external pressures.¹⁶⁰

The conceptual framework of neo-realism can therefore only have a constraining, rather than determining, effect on grand strategic outcomes. Conversely, the insights of neoclassical realism fit well with a process of grand strategy formation that is plural, constrained by systemic imperatives and yet determined by ideational factors at unit level. Neoclassical realism allows us to understand the choices made between the wide range of grand-strategic options that typically remain following the strategic assessment, choices that are determined by the preferences, actions and relative positions of individuals and groups that comprise the state.

Accounting For Grand Strategic Change

Neoclassical realism therefore points us towards the processes by which grand strategy comes to be made. However, it is equally important to be able to trace how shifting factors affect strategic thinking, and to understand what is sufficient for that to be significant, that is to say, what is required for grand strategy to change? How and why does strategic adjustment take place?

The first question here is what constitutes ‘change’. Efforts to create typologies of strategy have had mixed success. Although we may recognise and contrast

¹⁶⁰ Dueck, "Ideas and Alternatives", 521-23.

“expansionist” and “status quo” strategies¹⁶¹; or “compellent”, “deterrent” and “accomodationist” strategies,¹⁶² it seems unlikely that states’ grand strategies fit neatly into these few typologies, or that significant change in grand strategy would necessarily be reflected by a move from one typology to another.

Rather than seeking to identify strategic adjustment in terms of moves from one defined typology to another, Dueck has suggested that we measure change by reference to the policy instruments typically associated with strategic decision-making. Thus we should look for shifts in areas such as military deployments and spending; alliance commitments; foreign aid; and willingness to commit to diplomatic initiatives as well as considering the overall tone of a state’s stance towards its adversaries and the international in general.¹⁶³

Of course, minor alterations of policy need not indicate strategic adjustment. As noted in emphasising the distinction between the idealised nature of strategy and the real-world of foreign policy, minor changes in foreign policy may just be the result of contingency and compromise, of a state faced with the realities of international politics picking where and when to fight its battles. Strategic change on the other hand is likely to combine policy change with a rhetorical shift. Whilst foreign policy contingency will be accompanied by a defence of both the ends in sight and the means to achieve them, strategic adjustment means a shift in the goals and/or the methods of the state in international relations.

¹⁶¹ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 182. The author mistakenly excludes the possibility of declinist grand strategies, perhaps because of an underlying assumption that strategy refers to a state’s purposeful interactions with others, rendering a minimally activist strategy almost a contradiction in terms. Eric A. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton, N.J. ; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995), 8. On declinist grand strategies see Paul M. Kennedy, “Grand Strategies and Less-Than-Grand Strategies: A Twentieth Century Critique”, in *War, Strategy, and International Politics: Essays in Honour of Sir Michael Howard*, ed. Michael Howard, et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 239-40; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500-2000* (London: Fontana, 1989, 1988), 534-5.

¹⁶² Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 67-8.

¹⁶³ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 12.

Dueck therefore rightly identifies that ‘tinkering’ takes place within a strategic approach without constituting strategic adjustment. He identifies two levels of strategic adjustment – first-order changes entail a “massive shift in the extent of strategic commitments” and second-order changes are “less fundamental”.¹⁶⁴

Although Dueck rightly points us in the direction of policy instruments (he wrongly neglects rhetoric) as our variable factors, there is little to judge how much change in which factors should determine whether a shift is “massive” or “less fundamental”.

To address the issue of the significance of any policy change, we need to consider first the goals of the state and second the means used in pursuit of those goals. We might propose that a first-order change should involve a significant shift in the goals of the state, that is, the identification of a new threat; a change in the ranking of serious threats; or the addition or removal of a significant auxiliary goal. It may also involve, though need not involve, a shift in the means used to pursue those goals. By contrast, a second-order change should involve only a significant shift in the primary means by which to pursue existing goals, that is to say, a shift from a focus on one form of power to another.

It is noted that this distinction may be over-simplistic, and that it is by no means certain that first order changes will have greater systemic impact than second order changes. A state which moves from a grand strategy of democratic enlargement by economic and diplomatic means to the same strategy achieved through the use of military force will clearly have a greater impact on the grand-strategic reactions of others than a state that gives up an auxiliary goal that was supported by little power. If one were able to specify the relation between different elements of power in terms of their coercive impact, one could rank the goals of the state in terms of the power allocated to them and so better specify the impact of a grand strategic shift. But for our purposes here it is enough to distinguish between shifts in goals and shifts in means.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

What factors can account for a grand strategic change in ends or means on the part of a state? The neorealist position focuses on shifts in international system, that is, shifts in national security doctrine stem from shifts in the international distribution of power that alter the state's relative position.¹⁶⁵ Patterns of strategic adjustment are determined by structural pressures at the systemic level, and the pressure of competition is such that states become "undifferentiated" in their strategic behaviour.¹⁶⁶ However, neorealist approaches are unspecific regarding the causal processes that turn systemic change into unit-level strategic shifts. Unless the international environment is especially highly constrained, that is, external threats to national interests and values are particularly high, it is difficult to deduce security postures directly from the balance of material capabilities.¹⁶⁷

Waltz himself therefore admits that "in the absence of counterweights, a country's internal impulses prevail".¹⁶⁸ The neoclassical realist position takes that admission further, arguing that variables at the unit-level – in the ideas and perceptions of actors within the state – actually "play an important, indeed, a pivotal, role in the selection of a grand strategy."¹⁶⁹ For neoclassical realists then, grand strategic change can result from changes at both the unit and systemic level. Since the most important element in international relations remains the balance of power between states, changes in the international distribution of power encourage strategic adjustment. At the same time, it is essential to understand the nature of the states in that balance of power in order to understand the structure of relations between them. States do not necessarily regard power as threatening, it is the combination of power

¹⁶⁵ Emily O. Goldman, "New Threats, New Identities, and New Ways of War: The Sources of Change in National Security Doctrine", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001), 54.

¹⁶⁶ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 74-7, 93-7, 127-8.

¹⁶⁷ Goldman, "New Threats", 54.

¹⁶⁸ Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War", *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000), 24.

¹⁶⁹ Rosecrance and Stein, "Beyond Realism", 5.

and nature that defines enmity in the international environment. Therefore, it is shifts in the level of external *threat* that are the most likely cause of strategic adjustment.¹⁷⁰

Of secondary importance, the introduction of intervening ideational variables means that neoclassical realism is able to account for grand strategic change in an unchanging systemic environment, in that shifts at the unit level may drive strategic adjustment. These shifts may occur within the state, or in the wider populous.¹⁷¹ Within the state, shifts in personnel, institutional power, or the popularity of particular ideas may precipitate changes in goals themselves or encourage reassessment of the most appropriate means by which to pursue them. Such shifts may be driven from the bottom up, by electoral results or by the use of bureaucratic leverage; or from the top down, in the form of the executive's power of patronage and final decision.

Conclusion: The Implications Of A Neoclassical Realist Approach To Grand Strategy Formation

Neoclassical realism then remains a structural theory of international relations. It prioritises and stresses “power, interests and coalition making as the central elements in a theory of politics” but seeks to recapture classical realists’ appreciation that we need to look within societies as well as between them, to deny that states are simple,

¹⁷⁰ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 18.

¹⁷¹ For example, Peter Trubowitz argues that significant American strategic adjustment coincided with and grew out of shifts in the underlying regional structure of political and economic power within the United States. Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

“irreducible atoms whose power and interests are to be assessed.”¹⁷² Understanding how and when ideas may intervene in the unit-level processes of grand strategy formation allows us to posit three hypothetical scenarios where states are likely to be more influenced by their ideas than their interests in the international environment.

First, states that are very powerful are the most likely to pursue ideas-based policies. We see this in the tendency of great powers with a surfeit of material capabilities to attempt visionary world-making. With their territorial and political integrity secured, interests offer few constraints to check the progress of grand ideas in the policymaking process, and the international system poses few constraints on a state whose material power and ideational dominance largely defines international structure. The question ‘what must we do?’ is replaced by ‘what shall we do?’ Hegemonic or imperial states therefore have power that can be used for objectives that are not associated with clearly definable needs, and in such situations, a foreign policy based on intentional ideas is the likely course, in which ideological goals become ends in themselves.¹⁷³ As Jeffrey Legro notes, “great power ideas matter because they guide foreign policy and are a building block of international life” and when they change they do so with “earthquake-like effects” that make as well as unmake the prevailing international order.¹⁷⁴ A neoclassical realist theory of the role of ideas in grand strategy understands that the more power is centralised within the international system, the more we should expect the grand strategy of the dominant states to be defined by their strategic ideas, and can account for the fact that those great power strategies may change for internal as well as external reasons.

The second scenario involves states where particular ideas are highly institutionalised or culturally embedded. In this scenario the impact of ideas is likely

¹⁷² Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 19.

¹⁷³ Krasner, *Defending the National Interest*, 346.

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.

to be strong and consistent throughout the policy process. Ideas that form a strong component of national identity or strategic culture are likely to be almost unconsciously shared among ruling elites and foreign policy institutions. These ideas filter and limit options, ruling out policies that fail to resonate with the national political culture.¹⁷⁵

Third, states where decision-making power is highly concentrated in one, or a few individuals, or in a particular institution in which particular ideas are embedded. Where power is highly centralised the rationality of numbers does not have a chance to operate, and so the potential for particular ideas to be placed centrally within the state's policy is increased. It is this that accounts for the unpredictability of dictatorial regimes.¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, neoclassical realism as a structural theory provides us with a number of insights about the composition of the international system. In this sense neoclassical realism can be viewed as a logical extension of neorealism.¹⁷⁷ First, neoclassical realism should be able to recognise that most of what are described by realists as system changes are actually shifts in the grand strategies of the units that make up that system. The balance of the system itself is made up of, in the main, the alignments of the grand strategies of states: not a balance of power by itself, but a balance of power and posture, a balance of goals and the means that have been placed in pursuit of them. A purely structural realist explanation cannot offer a comprehensive account of why a state's capabilities may decline in relation to a strategic competitor.¹⁷⁸ To do so, we must take into account both the grand-strategic

¹⁷⁵ Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*.

¹⁷⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 291.

¹⁷⁷ Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism", *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁷⁸ Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War", 107.

choices of the state, and the strength of the state, that is its ability to bring those choices to bear.¹⁷⁹

It follows that neoclassical realism considers the occurrence of structural change that is unrelated to one or more states' grand-strategic behaviour to be very rare. Important change can of course derive from long term changes in geography, resource availability and the availability of technology.¹⁸⁰ But such change is systemic rather than structural, in that it defines the rules by which interaction takes place. Most structural change should actually be understood as a reflection of a grand-strategic choice by one or more states that changes the pattern of interaction between them. Although neorealist theory defines a system as composed of structure and of interacting units, as Barry Buzan has pointed out, Waltz's emphatic distinction between unit-level theories and systemic theories "and his usage of terms such as 'systems theory' and 'systems level' makes the term system effectively a synonym for structure."¹⁸¹ Neoclassical realism, on the other hand, recognises as classical realism did before it that the international system is composed of units, their interactions, and structure. The system has structure, but the system defines structure only in as much as it creates imperatives for the interactions of states that constitute structure. Interaction, therefore, "is crucial to the concept of system, for without it, the term system has no meaning".¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ For example, Christensen discusses the "political hurdles to mobilisation" Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 14. Similarly, Zakaria defines state power as the government's ability to put national resources to the ends of its choice. Therefore, societies with weak states are unable to exploit their resources fully, so that only strong states can successfully pursue expansionist grand strategies. Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 38-39.

¹⁸⁰ For example, Goldman notes that air power, nuclear weapons and the information age have all reduced the 'space' between states, effectively altering the nature of their environment. Goldman, "New Threats", 48.

¹⁸¹ Barry Buzan, Charles A. Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 28.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 29.

Since the structure of the system creates constraints for states' grand strategies, then in a very fundamental way, states' grand strategies and the international system are mutually constituted. The nature of the units and the character of their interactions both create and are informed by structure. That is to say, the structure that informs and constrains states' grand strategic choices is itself constituted by the grand strategic choices of states.

Thus, in this vision of the international system, and true to the primacy neoclassical realism places on the imperatives of power, the most important states remain those that have the greatest resources or that hold the balance of power. However, it is not only the amount of power resources that determines structure, but the purpose to which the strongest states put their resources. Thus by reviving classical realism's insights about the state, neoclassical realism is better able to explain first and second order changes in grand strategy that are not wholly derived from a shift in international structure.

The recognition of intervening ideational variables in neoclassical realism is particularly important when considering their impact on the strongest states. Since the interaction of states' grand strategies constitutes structure, the grand strategic choices of the strongest states are crucial to an understanding of the international system at any given moment. A neoclassical realist approach is all the more appropriate given that the strongest states have the greatest degree of strategic choice because they possess more power than is required to meet their basic security requirements. Looking inside the strongest states to understand the mechanisms driving their choices of auxiliary goals is necessary to provide a proper understanding of the international system itself.

To date, most neoclassical realist approaches have attempted to explain deviations from the expectations of structural realism with reference to the limited authority of

the state to conduct foreign policy.¹⁸³ An approach that assesses the role of ideas at the unit level in grand strategy formation explains deviation in terms of states preferences, that is, when states choose to act in ways which structural realism would not expect. For neoclassical realists then, the international system is not the determining monolith that neorealism envisioned, a vision coloured by the admittedly highly restrictive bipolarity of the Cold War. Rather neoclassical realists regard the structure of the international system as providing states with information about the costs and benefits of particular courses of action, but how that information is processed and weighed depends on the way states understand the world, their preferences, their ideas and their ethics. It is in this sense that neoclassical realism resuscitates the ‘political’ element of political realism, and in doing so revives the role of realism in fulfilling Morgenthau’s dictum that the role of political scientists is to ‘speak truth to power’.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, 281.

¹⁸⁴ Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 15.

CHAPTER 2: IDEAS IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Introduction

As chapter one demonstrated, the neoclassical realist approach to the impact of ideas in grand strategy formation implies that the historical embedding of ideas within a state through its institutions and strategic culture sets the boundaries of debate at moments of strategic reassessment. This chapter therefore provides an overview of the role of ideas in constituting the historical narrative of the United States to establish the ideational constraints within which the United States' foreign policy executive would face the task of reassessing its grand strategic priorities at the end of the Cold War. It argues that the United States derives its identity in a very fundamental way from a set of ideas about liberty in a way that states with shared ethnic and historical experience do not. Those ideas of liberty have therefore consistently informed American conceptions of their national interest and the content of United States grand strategy. This chapter therefore traces the development of American strategic ideas alongside the growth of American capabilities, emphasising the persistent tension between the need to protect American liberty by avoiding constraints on the freedom of action of the United States, and the need to maintain a commitment to the universal ideas of American identity by promoting liberty abroad. These tensions having been temporarily resolved by the Cold War consensus around a grand strategy of containment, the chapter concludes with the sense of loss that the end of the Cold War generated within the United States and which serves as the starting point for a new US strategic debate.

Inventing America

“Picture yourself... if you can, a society which comprises all the nations of the world... people differing from one another in language, in beliefs, in opinions; in a word a society possessing no roots, no memories, no prejudices, no routine, no common ideas, no national character, yet with a happiness a hundred times greater than our own... This then is our starting point! What is the connecting link between these so different elements? How are they welded into one people?”¹

It was a French aristocrat with the aim of discovering the sources of American democratic success to contrast with the failure of his own country’s revolution who first described America as ‘exceptional’, qualitatively different from other nations.² Different, because in the American experience, the state preceded the nation. An immigrant colonial community having rebelled against their forebears, America was in the truest sense an ‘imagined community’ with no common ethnic or historical experience.³ America had legal status, the recognition of others, before it recognised what it was to be itself. As David Campbell notes in his seminal study of American identity, as America progressed and grew, the radical separation of its history and geography left the United States with neither a fixed territory nor a single people to serve as its foundational referent.⁴ More than any other state, “Americans had to invent what Europeans inherited: a sense of solidarity, a repertoire of national symbols, a quickening of political passions.”⁵

¹ Letter from Alexis De Tocqueville to Count Chabrol, quoted in Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 18.

² Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 18.

³ David Ryan, *U.S. Foreign Policy in World History* (London: Routledge, 2000), 10-11.

⁴ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 131.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto, 1993), xiii.

Yet a decade prior to the Revolution, few believed the colonies could ever be bought to unite. Benjamin Franklin noted that, in addition to the colonies cultural, political and legal differences,

“their jealousy of each other is so great that, however necessary a union of the colonies has long been for their common defence... they have never been able to effect such a union among themselves or even agree in requesting the mother country to establish it for them... In short I will venture to say, a union amongst them for such a purpose is not merely improbable, it is impossible.”⁶

The diversity of America was not as great as Franklin supposed or Tocqueville later believed. The colonists held common opinions that derived from their common heritage, so that whilst each may have defined their identity first and foremost in terms of their colony, it is equally true that most of them thought of themselves as Englishmen. The early colonists largely shared a language, a history and a religion, although these commonalities were to be increasingly diluted by migration from across Europe. What united the later colonists was the vision of America as a land of opportunity and a refuge from persecution, and they shared with their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries an admiration for the English constitutional protection of liberties. Indeed, in the decade prior to the Declaration of Independence there was a widespread conviction in America and Britain that those liberties were far from secure in Great Britain. Following on from reports of decaying liberty in the mother country, colonists increasingly believed that America had become the heir of Britain as the trustee of liberty.⁷

The invention of America proceeded along these lines by binding the citizenry together in support of a few ideas. The Declaration of Independence is both a list of material grievances with British rule, implying a new, less authoritarian form of

⁶ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Nationalism and Religion in America: Concepts of American Identity and Mission* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), xix.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xxx - xxxiii.

government, and most importantly, it is an assertion of shared values: the universal rights to ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ engendered by the salient fact that ‘all men are created equal’.⁸ America therefore justifies itself, not through self-determination of peoples or right to territory, but through an ideology of liberty. The declaration of independence is just that – a declaration that ‘we’ are different, but that difference is intellectual rather than biological or cultural. It could only be that way – at the time of the declaration the European ancestry of most of the subjects of the thirteen colonies constituted the bulk of their identity. Only shared ideas could form the platform on which to build a nation out of the new state. Thus for Richard Hofstadter, “it has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one.”⁹

The Declaration of Independence – together with the other formative documents of the new nation, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights – reflected the fact that in the Hegelian sense there was no *state* in the United States, no unified, rational will, only individual self-interest and a passion for liberty. Embracing this, the idea was that rather than constructing a state to rule over society – the European model – there should instead be built a *government*, drawn from society for its benefit, of, by and for the people. In this sense the Constitution is a social contract between the people and their government.¹⁰

The stark libertarianism of the founding of the American nation quickly developed into what has been termed the American Creed – a set of interrelated ideas, entrenched in the national consciousness, an ideology of a nation.¹¹ Different

⁸ *The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America*, available at http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration_transcript.html

⁹ Quoted in Samuel Huntington, "The Erosion of American National Interests", *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (1997), 29.

¹⁰ Daniel Bell, "The 'Hegelian Secret': Civil Society and American Exceptionalism", in *Is America Different?: A New Look at American Exceptionalism*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 61-62.

¹¹ Gunnar Myrdal, Richard Sterner, and Arnold Marshall Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York ; London: Harper & brothers, 1944), 235-43.

scholars describe the elements of this national thesis in different ways, but the elements they suggest boil down to two intimately related ideologies: political organisation underpinned by liberty and economic organisation by means of capitalism.¹²

The basic content of American liberty flowed from the English traditions of civil and religious liberty, those two mutually dependent necessities and rights of free men. Central to this kind of thinking is the philosophy of John Locke, for whom an individual's right to liberty is based upon the "property in his own person", that is, the idea that humans are naturally pre-contractual beings. Locke sees the logical progression of this basic political idea as being the force that drove economic modernisation: from one's own subsistence labour to bartering; from bartering to money; from money to land ownership and from land ownership to statehood. Thus "at the heart of liberal theory lies the claim that individuals are free and therefore establish government by consent whose main function is protection of private property as the basis of individual freedom."¹³ In this understanding, political liberalism and capitalism are more than just mutually constituted, they are logically inseparable. In this relationship, capitalism both relies upon the individual's freedom to pursue his own happiness and legitimises that quest.¹⁴ The moral imperative of human freedom, it turns out, is an economic imperative too. From the very birth of the United States in the Declaration of Independence, liberty and capitalism were placed together as the founding features of American ideology, the

¹² Slightly more plural characterisations of the elements of American ideology can be found in Michael Foley, *American Credo: The Place of Ideas in US Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), 49; Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 19.

¹³ Beate Jahn, "The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part I)", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2007), 91.

¹⁴ Foley, *American Credo*, 215.

inalienable rights of men, and in America they would quickly come to constitute an entire way of life, “a pervasive, quasi-religious entity”.¹⁵

Yet liberty had far greater symbolic overtones than simply the political ideas that would become the central tenets of free-market liberal-democracy. Around the War of Independence, most Americans shared the assumption that liberty was a gift from God. They may have disagreed about whether it derived from the cross or from natural law, but “Puritans, Anglicans, Quakers, Unitarians and deists were all prepared to name the deity, not some human agency, as the author of freedom. Liberty’s light was not only dazzling but holy, and Americans called upon God to protect them, because He – not George III – was their king.”¹⁶

Indeed, religion provided the bedrock upon which the American idea of liberty was constructed.¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson even proposed that the seal of the United States should have on one side “the children of Israel in the wilderness led by a cloud by day and a pillar by night” and on the other side “Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs, from whom we claim the honour of being descended and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed.”¹⁸ The idea of America itself was thus a fusion of Old Testament theology and English liberty.

Liberty so conceived was specifically a gift from God to America, a holy land that was set apart from the rest of the world, both in its geographical isolation and in its doctrines of self-government. Preachers, politicians, intellectuals and laymen invoked the hand of divine Providence in both the quest for and as an explanation of

¹⁵ George Cabot Lodge, *The New American Ideology: How the Ideological Basis of Legitimate Authority in America Is Being Radically Transformed, the Profound Implications for Our Society in General and the Great Corporations in Particular* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 11.

¹⁶ Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 15.

¹⁷ For a study of the importance of religion in the formation of a distinctive American identity, see Hudson, *Nationalism and Religion*.

¹⁸ Gilbert Chinard, *Thomas Jefferson, the Apostle of Americanism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 86.

American independence. “What great things has the God of Providence done for our race! By the revolution we this day celebrate, he has provided asylum for the oppressed in all nations of the Earth.”¹⁹ In that role, America was destined to grow under the watchful eye of God, so that “the Lord shall have made his American Israel ‘high above all nations which he hath made’”.²⁰ For McDougall, the evidence that Americans saw themselves as inhabitants of a holy land “is so abundant as to be trite... Americans were a chosen people delivered from bondage to a Promised Land, and you can’t get more exceptional than that.”²¹

Thus those early Americans created for themselves a nationalism, founded on the myth of divine Providence having bestowed liberty upon their people, the fulfilment of biblical prophecy.²² Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century this national myth had become so entrenched in the American consciousness that one author was able to refer to a “civil religion” with “its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols.”²³ In America, citizenship was the only criterion that made the individual a member of the nation, and that meant loyalty to the notions of liberty; loyalty that engendered a distinctly American way of life, identifiable by the certain social-behaviour pattern and value

¹⁹ Reverend John Rodgers, at the observance of a day of public thanksgiving for the peace treaty with Britain, 11/12/1783, cited by Hudson, *Nationalism and Religion*, 55.

²⁰ Ezra Stiles, "The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour: A Sermon (1783)", in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations: Documents and Essays. Vol.1, to 1920*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995), 38-40.

²¹ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 18.

²² Stiles’ sermon concerns Deuteronomy, which prophesies the renewal of the Jewish nation: God will gather his chosen people “...from all the nations whither the Lord had scattered them in his fierce anger; bring them into the land which their fathers possessed; and multiply them above their fathers, and rejoice over them for good, as he rejoiced over their fathers.” (Deut. 30:3.) Stiles, "Major Problems in American Foreign Relations".

²³ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America", *Daedalus* 96 (1967).

system that is the American creed.²⁴ The American national ideology of liberty implied two things; that America was unique, and that America was exceptional.

The National Interests Of Universal Liberty

What implications did the definition of America as liberty have upon its foreign policy? The first thing to recognise is that, early in its development as a nation-state, America was primarily concerned with political and economic freedom at home. Yet sovereignty as a nation – the liberty of the state – is essential to the liberty of the individual.²⁵ So early debates about the institutionalisation of liberty concerned the need to protect the liberties of Americans from foreigners, and central to this was the paradox of government power: “would not any federal government powerful enough to stare down Britain or France *ipso facto* threaten the freedom of its own constituent states and citizens?”²⁶ This tension led to a constitution that bestowed upon the executive branch the minimum of foreign policy powers, whilst establishing a government capable of deterring and, if necessary, fighting threats to American liberty.

Although Americans believed themselves exceptional, and were under no illusions about the vulnerability of their young nation, from the very birth of the United States there was a sense in which the blessings of liberty were not to be confined to America alone. The most striking feature of the American creed in terms of international relations is the assumed universalisability of the values it expresses. The truth of these values is ‘self-evident’, their application is to ‘all men’. Yet at the

²⁴ Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism*, 21-24.

²⁵ Christian Reus-Smit, "Liberal Hierarchy and the Licence to Use Force", *Review of International Studies* 31, no. SupplementS1 (2006), 76.

²⁶ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 26.

same time these values are explicitly linked to the *American* nation – they are after all its defining features. This tension in maintaining universal values for the end of singular identity – on the one hand uniqueness, on the other universality – is a recurrent theme in American foreign policy.²⁷

The debate did not take long to surface in the young nation's history. The occasion of the French Revolution and the subsequent war in Europe, despite Washington's policy of neutrality, sparked a national debate. Should America's attachment to democracy as a universal idea trump America's national security interest in remaining detached from the power-politics of the European system which most of her citizens had consciously abandoned? In short, did the aspirations for liberty of the French confer an obligation upon America, and how far was the United States prepared to meet that responsibility?

Federalists argued that Robespierre's Reign of Terror provided all the justification needed for America to stay out of European struggles.²⁸ On the other hand, Jefferson felt that the prospects for liberty in the whole world hung on the success of the French Revolution, and rather than have it fail he "would have seen half the earth desolated; were there but an Adam and Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than it now is."²⁹ Yet for all the debate and the idealism of many American thinkers the truth was that the debate was largely academic: America was simply not yet materially strong enough to become involved in European affairs.

Thus in the early stages of the nation's history American policy was constrained by the realities of power. Yet that so fierce a debate about the nature of foreign policy could arise so early in the nation's development shows the impact of the founding

²⁷ Foley, *American Credo*, 432-38.

²⁸ For a summary of the invective present in the Federalist and anti-Federalist debates of the time, see Charles Warren, *Jacobin and Junto: Or, Early American Politics as Viewed in the Diary of Dr. Nathaniel Ames, 1758-1822* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931), 89-96.

²⁹ Quoted in Hadley Arkes, "Jefferson on Race & Revolution", *The New Criterion* 15, no. 5 (1997).

myth upon the national psyche. For many, the very notion of ‘America’ in the world meant little if it would not support the concept of liberty by which it defined herself. And yet at the same time, there existed the fear that support for the liberty of other peoples might erode liberty in America itself. As Washington warned the young nation in his farewell address:

“Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or very remote relation... Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course... Why forgo the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice?”³⁰

Washington went on to state that the policy of the United States would be to avoid foreign engagements. Although it would fulfil existing obligations in good faith, and accepted the need to enter into temporary alliances in emergencies, the United States should not enter into permanent alliances, because to do so could restrict her freedom to act. It should be noted here that this was not a policy of total isolationism – both Washington and Jefferson sought to increase American contact with the outside world³¹ – but rather a means of maintaining liberty of policy, the idea being that binding alliances, rather than strengthening America, threatened the very liberal foundation of America itself.

³⁰ George Washington, *Farewell Address* (1796) available from www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/farewell/sd106-21.pdf.

³¹ Manfred Jonas, "Isolationism", in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, ed. Alexander DeConde, Richard Dean Burns, and Fredrik Longevall (New York: Scribner, 2001), 338.

American Separation, American Expansion

Washington's extrapolation of liberty into the international arena established a 'great rule' that had such a profound impact that it was to guide American foreign policy for over a century.³² It inculcated a tradition of American diplomacy that eschewed, in Jefferson's phrase, "entangling alliances" by showing that such a policy flowed naturally from America's geopolitical constitution.³³ America would interact with the world through commerce and in particular through the flows of people and ideas associated with immigration, but politically American independence required that it retain the power to act unilaterally, without the constraints of alliance considerations, remaining "firmly neutral regarding European conflicts. In this sense only was it outside the Atlantic community."³⁴ What is often termed American isolationism relied on the tools of unilateralism and neutrality to enable the United States to protect its cherished liberty at home by safeguarding freedom of action in the international sphere. Only when its liberty was directly threatened would compromising alliances be considered. Thus, even when both the United States and France were at war with Britain, America stubbornly remained neutral in its relations with Napoleon, and the US steadfastly steered clear of foreign engagements, must less alliances, for the whole of the nineteenth century.³⁵ George Washington's dictum, expressing the causal idea that the preservation of liberty at

³² Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 135.

³³ John Gerard Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue? Interests, Identity and American Foreign Policy", *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997), 89.

³⁴ Paul A. Varg, *United States Foreign Relations, 1820-1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1979), 39.

³⁵ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 39-56.

home required unilateralism and neutrality abroad, had become what historian George Tucker called a “test of orthodoxy to American patriots.”³⁶

Yet liberty at home also required the freedom of Americans to go forth and seek their fortunes. Thus exceptionalism, particularly in its religious understanding of America as a ‘promised land’, justified expansion across the continent of North America.

“We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? We point to the everlasting truth on the first page of our national declaration, and we proclaim to the millions of other lands, that... the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles.”³⁷

The manifest destiny argument therefore held that continental expansion followed from the central American idea of liberty. If the United States was to remain free and independent, then it needed to pursue a unilateral foreign policy and avoid European entanglements, and to achieve this, the United States had to pre-empt European bids for influence over unclaimed land in the American continent.³⁸ Thus the United States “entered the nineteenth century not with cloistered modesty but with grand dreams of national expansion.”³⁹

Alongside territorial expansionism in North America came an increasingly expansive view of their role in the world, or at least in the Western hemisphere, summed up by the Monroe Doctrine’s declaration that the United States would

³⁶ George Tucker, *The History of the United States, from Their Colonization to the End of the Twenty-Sixth Congress, in 1841* (4 vol. Philadelphia, 1856). Cited in McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 49.

³⁷ John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity”, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. Reprinted in Stiles, “Major Problems in American Foreign Relations”, 248-50.

³⁸ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 77-8.

³⁹ Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America and the World, 1600-1898* (London: Atlantic, 2006), 130.

consider the Americas off-limits to new colonisation. Often mischaracterised as a claim to an American sphere of influence over Latin America,⁴⁰ the Monroe Doctrine is better understood as a commitment to defend whatever vital interests it might identify in the Western hemisphere, in order that her liberty might not be threatened by European powers at her door.⁴¹ Despite American material capabilities rendering it “little more than a Yankee bluff”,⁴² the Monroe doctrine confirmed the United States’ commitment to what it could not yet accomplish – an extension of principles of liberty internationally.

Yet the tensions are all too clear. Liberty applied to Americans, but not to the native peoples who already inhabited the ‘unclaimed’ land in North America. Liberty applied to whites, but not to their black slaves who powered the expanding American economy. Westward expansion, although presented as the rightful inheritance of a fabled empty continent was actually an emptying of it by the presence and policies of white Americans.⁴³ So whilst “geography invited it [and] demography compelled it”,⁴⁴ American expansionism was a deeply racist undertaking that sits uncomfortably with the idea of universal human liberty that defined the American nation.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ William Appleman Williams, "Manifesto of the U.S. Empire", in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations: Documents and Essays. Vol.1, to 1920*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995), 190-92.

⁴¹ Harry Ammon, "National Interest, Not Politics", in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations: Documents and Essays. Vol.1, to 1920*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995), 198-202; McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 57-75.

⁴² Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York; London: Penguin Press, 2005), 42.

⁴³ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1987), 53.

⁴⁴ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 79.

⁴⁵ Bruce W. Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Norton, 2004), 87.

The prevailing social Darwinist beliefs of the time were both popularised by and a cause of the ease by which Manifest Destiny justified expansion.⁴⁶ Manifest Destiny was envisaged as natural, peaceful process, validated by self-determination and, importantly, with the implication that subsumed peoples needed only to be educated to share in the blessings of liberty.⁴⁷ Some Manifest Destinarians went further, as one Boston journal argued for the annexation of Mexico by force:

“The ‘conquest’ which carries peace into a land of where the sword has always been the sole arbiter... must necessarily be a great blessing to the conquered. It is a work worthy of... a people who are about to regenerate the world by asserting the supremacy of humanity over the accidents of birth and fortune.”⁴⁸

By the turn of the twentieth century the fusion of exceptionalism, manifest destiny and notions of genetic superiority had combined with the material aspects of America’s growth to bring a new dimension to US foreign policy. In the thirty-five years after the end of the Civil War, the population of the United States doubled as reconstruction attracted European immigrants at the rate of nearly 400,000 per year.⁴⁹ This ‘Gilded Age’ following the Civil War saw American GDP overtake the United Kingdom’s in 1872, and more than triple by 1900,⁵⁰ making the United

⁴⁶ Michael H. Hunt, "Racism in American Ideology", in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations: Documents and Essays. Vol.1, to 1920*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1995).

⁴⁷ Thomas Jefferson believed that “proofs of genius given by the Indians of N. America, place them on a level with Whites in the same *uncultivated* state” Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 107-8.

⁴⁸ Bradford Perkins, "The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865", in *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Bradford Perkins, et al. (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 193.

⁴⁹ The US population grew from 35,701,000 in 1865 to 76,094,000 in 1900. European immigration 1866-1900 totalled 9,571,900, an average of 382,876/year. Immigration to the United States in this period was overwhelmingly from Europe. Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial ed. ed. (Washington: Bureau of the Census, 1975).

⁵⁰ By 1913 US GDP accounted for 18.9% of world output. All statistics from Angus Maddison, *The World Economy* (Paris: Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006).

States the world's dominant industrial power, whose dominance of the Western hemisphere was accepted as a *fait accompli* by the other great powers.⁵¹

A New Consciousness Of Strength: The United States As A Great Power

The United States' arrival as a great power brought with it a predictable desire for the United States to throw off the shackles of Washington and Jefferson's cautious husbandry of the American ideal. As a *Washington Post* editorial put it:

“a new consciousness seems to have come upon us – the consciousness of strength – and with it a new appetite, the yearning to show our strength... the taste of Empire is in the mouth of the people”.⁵²

The United States was now in a position of power that not only allowed it to sustain the Monroe doctrine but to extend it.⁵³ This expansion of American foreign policy interests may have been facilitated by the growth of American power but it was justified by the same ideas of the protection of liberty upon which those early Presidents' fears of entangling alliances had been based. By the late-1890s the Spanish-American war had resulted in the United States taking on the role of imperial overlord in strategic territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaii and the Philippines. Yet these takeovers did not seem to arise from a new imperial consciousness, a yearning for the rightful trappings of regional hegemony. Instead, the rationale for engaging in a war with a European colonial power – something that

⁵¹ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 302-4.

⁵² Quoted in Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), 299.

⁵³ Adam Quinn, "The Global Monroe Doctrine under Bush and Beyond: Benign Hegemony as Strategic Paradigm", paper presented at the *ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting*, Rio de Janeiro, (2009).

most would have thought inconceivable just twenty years before – was one of noble intervention to free the Cuban people from tyranny.⁵⁴

This was a ‘progressive imperialism’, a pursuit of a universal liberal enlightenment, and much of the energy and drive for such policies came from the twin engines of religion and social Darwinism. Characterised by a missionary zeal to bring the blessings of liberty to foreigners who were not so intractably inferior that they could not be educated by philanthropic Americans to understand liberty, President McKinley knew full well the Methodist constituency to which he was speaking when he justified the annexation of the Philippines thus:

“I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance. And one night late it came to me... that there was nothing left for us to do but take them all, and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.”⁵⁵

America’s rise to global power meant that from the same basic ideological roots America’s twentieth-century foreign policy was destined from the outset to have a very different character to the previous hundred years. The Monroe Doctrine could now not only be enforced but expanded, in Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘corollary’ which justified “the exercise of an international peace power” by a civilised United States in Latin America to protect “our interests and those of our southern neighbours that are in reality identical.”⁵⁶ Securing liberty at home had ceased to be the central principle of US foreign policy. Rather, a strong proud nation had begun to measure

⁵⁴ Authority for the Spanish-American War came by means of a Congressional joint resolution, which both asserted that “the people of the Island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent” and disavowed any exercise of “sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Islands” by the United States and asserts its determination “to leave the government and control of the Island to its people”. *Congressional Record*, XXXI, Part 4, 1898, 56th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 3988, quoted in Louis A. Pérez, "Between Meanings and Memories of 1898", *Orbis* 42, no. 4 (1998), 511.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Mark Tooley, "The Last Methodist President", *The American Spectator*, 28/1/09.

⁵⁶ Speech to Congress, 6/12/1904, in Richard D. Heffner, *A Documentary History of the United States* (New York: Signet Classic, 2002), 259.

the fulfilment of its founding ideology by the progressiveness of what it did in the world, by its extension of liberty to others rather than the husbanding of liberty for the chosen few. In the words of Henry Cabot Lodge, the American people “had begun to turn their eyes to those interests of the United States that lie beyond our borders”.⁵⁷ The Spanish American war therefore represents both a departure and a conclusion in the historical logic of America. As Robert Kagan sums up:

“It was the product of a universalist ideology as articulated in the Declaration of Independence. It reflected Americans’ view of themselves, stretching back to before the nation’s founding, as the advance guard of civilization, leading the way against backward and barbaric nations and empires... [It] was, in short, and expression of who the American people were and what they had made of their nation.”⁵⁸

Whereas in the past the end of foreign policy had been to accrue the strength to make America safe for liberty, by the turn of the century that liberty, now secured, compelled the exercise of American strength abroad as a moral duty.⁵⁹ Failure to defend the values of liberty wherever they were threatened would shame and corrupt the very principles on which the United States had been founded, threatening to undermine American identity. Overseas adventurism was now justified in the same imperial terms that had rationalised the oppression of Indians at home – the need and moral duty, to “civilise, educate and look after ‘primitive’ peoples, and the anarchy, barbarism and danger that would flourish if the United States did not act.”⁶⁰ American strength had enabled it; American exceptionalism compelled it: the United States had picked up ‘the White Man’s Burden’.

⁵⁷ Karl Schriftgiesser, *The Gentleman from Massachusetts: Henry Cabot Lodge* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), 147.

⁵⁸ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, 416.

⁵⁹ As *The Churchman* had it: “Woe to any nation... called to guide a weaker people’s future which hesitates for fear its own interests will be entangled and its own future imperilled by the discharge of an unmistakable duty.” Foster Rhea Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power, 1898-1954* (London: Hamilton, 1955), 48.

⁶⁰ Campbell, *Writing Security*, 135.

A Distinctly American Tension: Liberal Universalism, Exceptional Isolationism

By the time of the Great War, the United States had elected a President who believed whole-heartedly in the exceptional moral character of the American nation and in the need for its foreign policy to reflect that character. Yet the reality, as Archibald Cary Coolidge pointed out, was that the United States was now a world power, one of a select few nations “directly interested in all parts of the world and whose voices must be listened to everywhere”.⁶¹ For Wilson however, it would be “a very perilous thing” to behave as other great powers and “determine the foreign policy of a nation in terms of material interest. It is not only unfair to those with whom you are dealing, but it is degrading as regards your own actions.”⁶² So when America entered the First World War, seemingly repudiating once and for all the tradition of isolating itself from European entanglements that had formed the bulk the United States’ foreign policy history, it did so for “the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are the only single champion” because “the world must be made safe for democracy.”⁶³

By then, what would become the perennial critique of American imperialism had already become well established. Behind the universalism of freedom, it stated, lay not a desire for the liberty of peoples, but an unquenchable capitalist thirst for foreign markets.⁶⁴ American foreign policy “for all its high-minded statements of intent... boiled down to a Wall Street racket.”⁶⁵ There is certainly much to this

⁶¹ Archibald Cary Coolidge, *The United States as a World Power* (New York: 1909), 7.

⁶² Thomas Andrew Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), 556.

⁶³ Woodrow Wilson, *Address to Special Session of Congress, April 2, 1917* available from <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/wilswarm.html>.

⁶⁴ The classic statement of this view is William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962). On the role of American business interests in the United States’ entry into World War I, see Zinn, *A People’s History*, 361-64.

⁶⁵ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 59.

ongoing critique of American foreign policy, and no doubt the structure of America's loans to Europe had helped convince some of the importance of intervention on the side of the Allies.⁶⁶ But to regard gold as the overarching driver of American imperialism is to invert the linkages between the liberty of peoples and capital which are the centrepiece of American ideology and identity. The liberal developmentalism⁶⁷ that characterises American expansionism is not an ideology of crude economic exploitation dressed up in the progressive clothes of liberty and freedom. Rather it is the political idea of individual liberty that impels private enterprise and consumerism; and it is the universal nature of that liberty that drives open markets, free trade and the belief that others' development should mirror that of the United States.

Wilson exemplified the intellectual primacy of political liberalism over economic capitalism.⁶⁸ He held deep suspicions that the plunderous nature of the profit motive might threaten his vision of an open liberal political order made up of democratic states of free self-determining peoples. Where Rosenberg sees in Wilson's encouragement of American entrepreneurs to secure markets against domination – at the expense of private profits – a commitment to an American-led economic order in the long run, she inverts the causal linkage between the political and economic ideas.⁶⁹ Political liberty may well breed capitalism and open markets, but Wilson saw that emphasising the freedom of business over the freedom of peoples could

⁶⁶ The Nye Committee reported that the United States' loans to Europe between 1915 and 1917 were overwhelming made to the British – it was therefore in the interest of American commerce that the Allies not lose the war. John Milton Cooper Jr., "The Command of Gold Reversed: American Loans to Britain, 1915-1917", *The Pacific Historical Review* 45, no. 2 (1976).

⁶⁷ Emily S. Rosenberg and Eric Foner, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 7-13.

⁶⁸ Wilson backed his decrial of determining foreign policy on the basis of material interests by (among other cases) refusing to consider US commercial interests to be preeminent when dealing with Mexico. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 129-30.

⁶⁹ Rosenberg and Foner, *Spreading the American Dream*, 64.

only threaten the liberty for which the United States stood, and upon which its identity relied.

Certainly exploitative economic imperialism cannot explain the drive to build the League of Nations, that great idealistic tool for a world of liberal nations to settle their disputes peacefully, without recourse to war or Old World balances of power.⁷⁰ That the treaty was rejected too, and American foreign policy reverted for a time to the detached neutrality that Washington had extolled, demonstrates that something deeper than pure commercial interest was motivating American attitudes to the world. What drove the isolationism of the interwar years were the same ideas that had informed the progressive imperialism of the previous two decades – American liberty, and American exceptionalism.

Although the failure to ratify the League Treaty was primarily due to Wilson's intransigence rather than the implacability of congressional opposition, opposition to the treaty – and the reservations and amendments proposed by the Senate – rested on some very clear and familiar ideas about the nature of America, and what it meant to be America in the world at large.⁷¹ Opposition to the League was in the main based on a fear of world government, which would restrict the freedom of the United States to determine its own polity, its own interests and its own commitments, and would place American citizens at the mercy of the Old World's discredited interests. America was exceptional, and could not put its liberty at risk by ceding the rights to

⁷⁰ Utopian it perhaps was, but Wilson himself saw the League as a realistic substitute for the balance of power that would prevent the United States having to become embroiled in European wars that would now inevitably become global conflicts. Frank A. Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 49-56.

⁷¹ Some have argued that Wilson's stroke was the precipitate cause of his unwillingness to compromise. See Edwin A. Weinstein, *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography, Supplementary Volumes to the Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 349-71. However, Wilson's unwavering commitment to the League and his particular dislike of Henry Cabot Lodge, who led the resistance to the treaty as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were more long-standing and deep-rooted. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 140-46.

impose duties upon the United States to nations that could not meet its standards. In the words of one ‘irreconcilable’, Lawrence Sherman (D., Ill.):

“If we cut the cables of constitutional government here we are caught in the irresistible tides that sweep us up into the maelstrom of the Old World’s bloody current flowing from every shore. The feuds and spoliations of a thousand years become our daily chart of action... The Old World simply harvested the destruction she sowed. Her heritage has been war and ours peace. We are asked to abandon our own and adopt another’s... We are invited to become knight-errant of the world. A nation’s first duty is to its own people. Its government is for them... If this supersovereignty is created, conscription will take from all, and we will bear the white man’s burden in every quarter of the world.”⁷²

America would not, of course, ever return to a truly isolationist position, if indeed it had ever had one.⁷³ The United States remained a great power, and when forced to re-enter the international political arena in 1941 it did so with the force of a superpower-in-waiting. Yet led by European-American ethnic groups,⁷⁴ a significant proportion of Congress and the American public at large believed strongly that whilst on the one hand no other nation could threaten the United States, it was also true that involvement in another major war might destroy American liberty at home.⁷⁵ As a result, in the 1920s and 1930s the United States came to adopt a policy of neutrality and non-intervention that saw it remain disengaged from the dishonourable nitty-gritty of international diplomacy, preferring to conduct what diplomacy it had to through international economics.⁷⁶ In what

⁷² *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 1st Session, (March 3, 1919), pp. 4865-67, quoted in John Chalberg, *Isolationism: Opposing Viewpoints, American History Series* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1995).

⁷³ The debate surrounding the utility of the label ‘isolationism’ is dealt with in Chapter 3.

⁷⁴ David Dunn, "Isolationism Revisited: Seven Persistent Myths in the Contemporary American Foreign Policy Debate", *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 02 (2005), 256-7.

⁷⁵ McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 150.

⁷⁶ James A. Baker III, "Selective Engagement: Principles for American Foreign Policy in a New Era", in *After the Cold War: Essays on the Emerging World Order*, ed. Keith Philip Lepor (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

would become a persistent and internationalised feature of American foreign policy, ‘dollar diplomacy’ substituted for the backroom dealings that characterised European power politics, taking on a particularly salient developmental role in Latin America, as the United States substituted globalism for a Good Neighbour Policy that looked back to Monroe’s first principles. Further afield, the United States was the world’s banker, administering German reparations and Allied debt.⁷⁷ Yet despite this crucial role as a stabiliser of world order, the United States lacked a vital security interest in the health of the world economy and remained unwilling to commit American economic power fully to alleviate the Depression.⁷⁸ The balance of highly divided Congressional opinion thus refused to recognise the interrelations of politics and economics or to commit the United States to a political role beyond high-minded neutrality that would have the United States set a shining example to the world. America therefore exercised something of an “awkward dominion” in Europe, reluctantly helping to rebuild the continent whilst refusing to bail it out, and all without exercising political hegemony.⁷⁹

That the United States was committed once more to the avoidance of foreign entanglements undoubtedly played a part in the breakdown in the stability of the international order in the 1930s. Hamstrung by Congress, Franklin Roosevelt nevertheless sought to back the Allies by turning the United States into the ‘arsenal of democracy’, seeking revisions of the neutrality acts and circumventing them by sometimes underhand means.⁸⁰ Yet for all Roosevelt’s financial backing of the

⁷⁷ Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 84-95.

⁷⁸ The United States’ failure to engage in policies to revive global trade reflected the fact that although the US was the world’s largest exporter, those exports only accounted for 6.3% of national income. David Reynolds, "Power and Superpower: The Impact of Two World Wars on America's International Role", in *America Unbound: World War II and the Making of a Superpower*, ed. Warren F. Kimball (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 17-18.

⁷⁹ Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁸⁰ Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 199-268.

Allies in the early period of the Second World War it took the attack on Pearl Harbour to finally lay to rest the great debate in American society concerning how far internationally liberty needed to be protected. That Japan could attack the American navy showed that the impregnability of the American continent, for so long ensured by the stopping power of water, was at an end, and that American liberty depended on events beyond its shores. The liberal exceptionalist split between neutrality and interventionism was over, as summed up by one of the leading isolationists of the 1930s:

“My convictions regarding international cooperation and collective security for peace took firm form on the afternoon of the Pearl Harbor attack. That day ended isolationism for any realist.”⁸¹

Rise To Globalism: American Ideas Of World Order

America’s second reluctant entry into a European war would not be to restore the status quo. Instead, the United States “clambered back to Wilson’s tent with the zeal of repentant sinners”,⁸² and from the very start began to sketch an image of postwar order that revolved around open markets, a modified gold standard in which the dollar would be the reserve currency, a collective security organisation and the dismantling of the European colonial possessions. As *Life* declared in October 1942, ‘of one thing we are sure, Americans are not fighting to protect the British Empire’. Quite the opposite, the United States was seeking not just to defeat Germany and Japan, but to “knock Britain from its great power perch” and put itself at the very

⁸¹ Michigan Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, quoted in Chalberg, *Isolationism*, 206.

⁸² McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 151.

heart of the international order, “thereby completing the interwar period’s unfinished geopolitical transition from British to American global hegemony.”⁸³

Even so, it was postwar destruction and bankruptcy as much as American anticolonialism that eventually extinguished the colonial European empires.⁸⁴ America might have arrived late as a superpower as a result of its ideological disinclination to great power status, but when it did arrive it did so with an astonishing degree of dominance.⁸⁵ The United States emerged from the Second World War with a preponderance of power on all major indices, economic, financial and military.⁸⁶ As Mikael Gorbachev would later lament, in 1945 the United States “found itself to be the only big country that had waxed fabulously rich on the war.”⁸⁷

American planners were very well aware of the strategic situation that the United States would find itself in after the war, and had approached the end of the war with a vision of order-building that embedded its power in a system of institutions – multilateral in membership but American in form – that established the rules of the American Century.⁸⁸ This was the ultimate attempt to reconcile America’s strategic dilemma – to protect liberty at home by institutionalising the protection of liberty in the very logic of the international system itself. Yet before the global American system that the reinvigorated Wilsonian internationalists had envisaged could pick

⁸³ Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 47.

⁸⁴ Geir Lundestad, *The American Empire and Other Studies of US Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1990), 34-6.

⁸⁵ Reynolds, "Power and Superpower".

⁸⁶ For a full breakdown of America’s postwar strategic dominance, see chapter 6.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Warren F. Kimball, "U.S. Economic Strategy in World War II: Wartime Goals, Peacetime Plans", in *America Unbound: World War II and the Making of a Superpower*, ed. Warren F. Kimball (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). That America emerged from World War II so economically dominant, Kimball argues, was due to its economic strategy, initially preceding its entry into the conflict and thereafter forming a central component of the United States’ war aims.

⁸⁸ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, *Princeton Studies in International History and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 163-214.

up the baton from the European empires, a new empire rose from the ashes of the Second World War, a former ally with a political and economic system implacably opposed to American liberalism, with enormous military might and the distinct impression of expansionist tendencies.

No doubt the Soviet Union viewed the United States in the same way, and historical accounts of the causes of the Cold War have swung to and fro on the question of assigning blame.⁸⁹ Indeed the irony at the heart of the Cold War is that the Soviet move from 'Socialism in one country' to a more expansionist communist ideology was a mirror image of the United States' move from liberty at home to a global liberal worldview.⁹⁰ That the expansion of these two states' power capabilities moves largely in time with these shifts in strategic ideology is no coincidence, and the combination of two ideologically driven superpowers produced a conflict that was nothing short of a struggle for history, for the very organising principles of human life on Earth. For the United States, once the nature of the Soviet Union had been established in the first months of 1946 the position was clear.⁹¹ Pearl Harbour had proved that American liberty could not be protected by disengaging from the

⁸⁹ Orthodox and neo-traditionalist accounts focus on the Soviet Union's ambitions and see Stalin as the aggressor. In this view containment is a defensive strategy adopted by the United States in the face of Soviet provocation. See Gaddis, *We Now Know*; Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Origins of the Cold War", *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967). The revisionist history, arising around the time of the Vietnam War, blames American thirst for markets for creating enmity with the Soviet Union. See Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam; the Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965); Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.

⁹⁰ Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century*, 145-6.

⁹¹ The key elements in the Western strategic assessment of the Soviet Union happened in the space of seventeen days in February and March 1946. The discovery of Soviet spies in the Manhattan Project was swiftly followed by George Kennan's Long Telegram, which was the first systematic intelligence appraisal of the USSR's attitudes and intentions. Less than two weeks later, Churchill, with the tacit approval of Truman, set out with typically vivid imagery the Communist challenge to liberal civilisation. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 158-61.

international system.⁹² Hereafter the United States would have to stand for liberty wherever it might be threatened.

The strategy that emerged from this acknowledgement that American liberty did not exist *in vacuo* was one that once again balanced the defence of America's liberal identity with suspicion of foreign entanglements. Containment was a pledge to defend liberty where Soviet expansion threatened to deprive people of it, to accept the status quo but refuse to brook any attempts to revise it in ways that diminished the twin poles of democracy and capitalism. Moreover, it was a policy based upon and which reinforced American identity defined as liberty, an identity to which communism was a logically necessary threat independent of the Soviet Union's military capabilities.⁹³

Containment was therefore an expression of the universal nature of American values as much as it represented the zero-sum logic of a security dilemma.⁹⁴ It also demonstrates how "the cross-currents of uniqueness and universality" could be simultaneously integrated into American grand strategy.⁹⁵ Containment resulted from domestic coalition-forming that tacked together Dean Acheson's Europe-first internationalists with the Asia-first school of Robert Taft in order to sustain general support for American internationalism, particularly among Congressional opinion. Driven by the likes of John Foster Dulles and Dean Rusk, the strategy therefore

⁹² John Lewis Gaddis writes that "Franklin D. Roosevelt's most important foreign policy legacy may well have been to convince the nation that its security depended on that of others elsewhere, not simply on whatever measures it might take on its own." Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 51.

⁹³ Campbell, *Writing Security*, 139.

⁹⁴ Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001).

⁹⁵ Foley, *American Credo*, 435.

became a globalist anticommunist consensus, rooted in strategic ideas such as domino theory and monolithic communist expansionism.⁹⁶

For over forty years containment would swing between activism and détente, between imperialism and realism, reflecting the balance of ideas amongst hawks and doves, between universalists and exceptionalists.⁹⁷ The experience of Vietnam in particular raised doubts about American ideals on the one hand and American capabilities on the other. Vietnam ignited the containment debate, animating American politics from the Presidential candidacy of George McGovern to the songwriting of Bob Dylan, and from the revisionist history of William Appleman Williams to Henry Kissinger's concerns about overextension that underpinned his policy of détente.⁹⁸ In response to what they saw as a collective failure of nerve by the Nixon and Carter administrations, neoconservatives argued for a revival of moral purpose and the assertive use of material power in American foreign policy.⁹⁹ These arguments were heated, and produced very real changes in the rhetoric and policies used in pursuit of containment in the 1970s and 1980s under first Nixon, then Carter and then Reagan.¹⁰⁰ But although these were significant strategic shifts, they were shifts of degree, questions of strategic means rather than ends. The rationale for American internationalism – the threat to liberty represented by the Soviet Union – remained constant.

⁹⁶ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 255-304. Snyder argues that competition between internationalists and nationalists served to sum their goals, creating a functional coalition which had the effect of overexpanding American strategic interests during the Cold War.

⁹⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹⁸ Keith L. Nelson, *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁹⁹ Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 55-58.

¹⁰⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*.

Beneath the minutiae of the operational ideas of containment as a military, political and economic strategy, the intentional idea of containing the Soviet Union became a basic assumption of American political life, a bipartisan consensus that allowed the realist and idealist conceptions of securing American liberty to coexist, “without policymakers having to worry too much about whether we were containing the USSR for geopolitical balance of power considerations or for moral ideological reasons.”¹⁰¹ For successive administrations, the Soviet Union “represented a denial of America’s own experience of nature” and so it was no longer enough that American values be transferable. Instead, America had to build a grand strategy around the international indivisibility of liberty, and actually transfer American values to as many countries as possible, to build and sustain the political and economic superstructure of the free world.¹⁰²

America’s grand strategy defined not just American internationalism, but also American culture. Anticommunism energised politics in the United States from unions to universities and from movies to churches. Containment thus infected American society and culture with the pathologies of nationalism, intolerance and suspicion.¹⁰³ The Cold War thus provided for the United States a basic rationale for international involvement, a righteous struggle for American ideals and American security.

Containment had, in sense and albeit temporarily, resolved the conceptual tensions at the very heart of liberty and exceptionalism that had seen the United States invoke their national ideology to justify both righteous imperialism and high-minded

¹⁰¹ Ronald D. Asmus, *The New U.S. Strategic Debate*, ed. United States. Army., Arroyo Center., and Rand Corporation. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1993), x.

¹⁰² Foley, *American Credo*, 435-6.

¹⁰³ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

neutrality over the previous centuries.¹⁰⁴ The central paradox at the heart of the American national myth, between American uniqueness and the universal nature of the values that defined America itself, had caused American strategy to oscillate, “at once aloof from and engaged in world affairs”.¹⁰⁵ Yet the presence of a strong and ideologically antithetical foe rendered that tension irrelevant, for exceptionalism would be for nought unless the United States fought for its universal worldview. The ideas of internationalism therefore triumphed in the containment consensus: the protection of American liberty at home necessitated America’s support for liberty abroad.

Conclusion: After Containment –Victory, Loss and Uncertainty

After forty years, the Cold War competition for history had become a basic fact of American life, and so when the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States experienced a profound sense of loss. The events of 1989 that brought down the Iron Curtain “unleashed a political gale that swept across the Eurasian chessboard, leaving confused and toppled players in wholly new positions.”¹⁰⁶ In doing so the end of Cold War was not just an outcome of a power struggle, it was also a process of recognising and repositioning relative national identities.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰⁴ Frank L. Klingberg, *Cyclical Trends in American Foreign Policy Moods: The Unfolding of America's World Role* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

¹⁰⁵ Ryan, *U.S. Foreign Policy in World History*, 8. Serge Ricard has made the point more forcefully that the ‘basic incompatibility of the exceptionalist claim with political messianism, of singularity with universalism [is a] fundamental ambiguity [that] largely accounts for the incoherence and inconsistencies in the American diplomatic tradition.’ Serge Ricard, “The Exceptionalist Syndrome in U.S. Continental and Overseas Expansionism”, in *Reflections on American Exceptionalism*, ed. Cornelis A. van Minnen and David K. Adams (Keele: Ryburn Press, 1994), 73.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas H. Henriksen, *Foreign Policy for America's in the Twenty-First Century: Alternative Perspectives* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁰⁷ Nau, *At Home Abroad*, 33.

United States was victorious in the sense that that process bought much of the world into alignment with America's basic political identity, yet at the same time the end of the conflict left vacant the purpose to which that identity had been directed. The comforting knowledge of clear enmity and purpose was replaced by moral and strategic ambiguity. As Paul Kennedy wrote in 1993, "the relief that the Soviet Union is no longer an "enemy" is overshadowed by uncertainties about the United State' proper world role."¹⁰⁸ Ronald Asmus explained the irony:

"The paradoxical impact of the end of the Cold War is that it simultaneously vindicated American purpose and past policies and forced a rethinking of the assumptions that guided US foreign policy for nearly half a century. While liberating the United States from its overriding concern with the Soviet threat, the end of the Cold War also compelled Americans to again confront core issues concerning definitions of our national interests and our role in the world."¹⁰⁹

The Cold War had expanded the American state, leaving a more powerful presidency, a more secretive government and less constraining Congress. For some, the debate that needed to be had was not one of America's role in the world, but of the role in American life of the executive and legislative branches, the media and the military, of public opinion and freedom of information, of the restructuring of domestic liberties and industrial organisation in the move from war to peace.¹¹⁰ Yet there is little evidence that these questions were addressed among a political elite – in think tanks, universities and the bureaucracies – that owed its twentieth century growth to the grand strategy of anti-communist containment. The debate in the 1990s was not therefore about how to dismantle containment, but about what to replace it with.

¹⁰⁸ Paul M. Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), 293.

¹⁰⁹ Asmus, *The New U.S. Strategic Debate*, ix.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "End The "Torment of Secrecy"", *The National Interest* 27 (1992); Edward Pessen, *Losing Our Souls: The American Experience in the Cold War* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993).

The pole star that had guided American diplomacy, that had blinded many to the tensions of liberty and exceptionalism for so long, had been extinguished. America had lost the ‘other’ through which it had come to define not only its interests but itself. If liberty had won, if the end of history had been reached, what was left of American identity that had from the very start defined itself through resistance against liberty’s opponents?¹¹¹ The United States at the beginning of the post-Cold War era was therefore alone, the only superpower left standing, and the rest of the world that had been caught up in the bipolar rivalry of the twentieth century looked towards Washington. In his memoir *Present at the Creation*, Dean Acheson recalls thinking that the task that faced the United States after World War II was only a “bit less formidable than that described in the first chapter of Genesis.”¹¹² Now the United States faced having to redefine the international order for a second time, but on this occasion nobody had made plans for the job. As Patrick Buchanan put it, the United States had no ready answer to the question of the war movies of his childhood: “What are you going to do, Joe, when this is all over?”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Huntington, " ", 29-30.

¹¹² Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969).

¹¹³ Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2002), 324.

CHAPTER 3: ‘COME HOME, AMERICA’ – NEOISOLATIONISTS, REALISTS AND THE RETREAT FROM GLOBALISM

Introduction

Chapter 2 set the scene for the debate surrounding American grand strategy that took place after the Cold War, a debate that was an important feature of the 1992 Presidential election, which is this chapter’s starting point for a discussion of the revival of the historical tensions between internationalism and isolationism. This chapter presents a case-study of the strategic ideas presented by proponents of American disengagement following the Cold War to construct the first ideal-type grand strategy. It begins by analysing the utility of the contested term ‘isolationism’ to describe this strategic outlook, and considers the assumption of internationalism that neoisolationists complain is present in the very process of grand strategy formation itself. It then proceeds to set out the grand strategy of disengagement, which identifies the sources of the United States’ strategic immunity in the post-Cold War world and argues for a refocusing of American priorities towards domestic concerns. Those priorities included removing the constraints on individual liberty that had been justified by Cold War security concerns and focusing policy resources on the task of reviving the American domestic economy. Retrenchment seeks to return the United States to the position of a ‘normal country’, by dismantling America’s Cold War infrastructure both at home and overseas. The chapter argues that the neoisolationist and realist approaches to a strategy of disengagement are consistent strategies that have their roots in the theoretical ideas of defensive or minimal realism.

Discarding The Cold War Mindset

In the 1992 Presidential election the incumbent George H.W. Bush was defeated, despite a record of foreign policy achievement that had seen his administration preside over the peaceful defeat of the Soviet Union and the violent routing of Iraqi aggression in Kuwait. In the absence of a serious foreign threat, domestic issues overshadowed foreign concerns for the first time since the 1930s. That Ross Perot, with his “long record of gun-slinging hypernationalism” was a plausible candidate, gaining almost 19% of the popular vote, revealed that the American public had already grown out of its Cold War mindset that judged potential Presidents on their likely calm in a crisis in the shadow of nuclear war.¹

In this period “anti-internationalism” and “foreign-affairs bashing” prevailed on the hustings and in Congress.² On either side of party-political divide candidates in Presidential primaries exploited this inward turn to advocate domestic agendas and attack foreign policy elites. On the democratic side Paul Tsongas focused on the scale of the budget deficit necessitated by high military spending, arguing that “if our security needs have lessened, our level of military spending should reflect that change.”³ America’s Cold War leaders were out of touch, Jerry Brown said, “more interested in a new world order 10,000 miles away than they are in a full employment economy”, adding that he “wouldn’t give a penny for foreign aid until every small farmer, businessman and family [in the United States] are taken care of.”⁴ That a realignment of American strategic concerns was so important now that the Cold War had ended was reflected in the serious challenge made for the sitting

¹ Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "America after the Long War", *Current History* 94, no. 595 (1995), 368.

² Jeremy D. Rosner, "The Know-Nothings Know Something", *Foreign Policy*, no. 101 (1995), 116.

³ Adam Clymer, "Bush's Arms Plan; New Weapons Cuts May Prompt More Than Bush Wants", *New York Times*, 30/9/91.

⁴ Quoted in Norman J. Ornstein, "Foreign Policy and the 1992 Elections", *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 3 (1992), 8-9.

President's Republican Party nomination by Pat Buchanan, the flag-bearer of the new American nationalism. Ross Perot's independent candidacy in the general election itself was made possible by the success of Buchanan's challenge in the primary campaign, and he subsequently defined himself as an economic nationalist committed to balancing the federal budget.⁵

All of this came out of a Cold War victory that left many on the right in particular searching for meaning. Roland Steel's lament of an 'ambiguous victory' is worth quoting at length:

“During the Cold War we had a vocation; now we have none. Once we had a powerful enemy; now it is gone... The world we knew has collapsed around us... Until the Cold War was over we did not appreciate that the conflict, for all its iniquities and dangers, imposed a kind of order on the world. Now even that is gone... Yes, the other side lost. But did we win? And if so, was it because of our superior strength and values? Or did we merely have deeper pockets than our foe? And what does it mean to win? What do we do with our victory? Who wants to be a superpower these days? Who wants to pay the bills? What is the point of being a superpower if there is only one of them?”⁶

Such questions left a nagging nostalgia for the Cold War, derived partly from that fact that it “was easy to figure out”. Underneath the ideological overlay it was a classic conflict between states fought with the classic tools of statecraft. It was a zero-sum game that everybody could understand, in which “every arena was critical, every problem, by definition, a crisis.”⁷ In setting up the struggle for the minds of

⁵ Walter J. Stone and Ronald B. Rapoport, "It's Perot Stupid! The Legacy of the 1992 Perot Movement in the Major-Party System, 1994-2000", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001), 52. It is easy to forget that Perot was the front-runner, achieving as high as 39% in the polls in June 1992 with 49% believing he could win the election in July when he dropped out of the race. Samuel James Eldersveld and Hanes Walton, *Political Parties in American Society* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 69.

⁶ Ronald Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

men, for their choice between the two universal ideologies of political and economic organisation, it provided a set of axioms for understanding the world. The Cold War gave the United States a cause, deferent allies, and “a role of undisputed boss of the realm we called the “free world”” and it neatly divided the world along clear lines of good and evil.⁸ It had changed the United States from a republic normally at peace into a national security state perpetually prepared for war, with a massive military-industrial complex.⁹ Anticommunism was nothing less than the “sextant by which the ship of state has been guided since 1945”,¹⁰ and for its intellectual clarity and economic and bureaucratic largesse it was, according to one commentator, “not surprising” that some “actually miss the Cold War.”¹¹

Yet what is striking is how this sense of loss was superseded by those that felt it most not by a rush to define a new purpose for America in the world but by the urge to withdraw from America’s global role. So strong was this conviction that it could even justify the disavowal of the Cold War commitment that had sustained a bipartisan internationalist consensus for forty years. The doctrine of containment, one author argued, had “warped our sense of national interest” and left America entangled “in areas and issues of marginal utility to the United States while eroding America’s wealth and prosperity.”¹² For the more positive, “for the first time in half a century, the United States has the opportunity to reconstruct its foreign policy free of the constraints and pressures of the Cold War.”¹³

⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Peace Dividend", *New York Review of Books* 37, no. 11 (1990).

¹⁰ Charles William Maynes, "America without the Cold War", *Foreign Policy*, no. 78 (1990), 5.

¹¹ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 10.

¹² Asmus, *The New U.S. Strategic Debate*, x.

¹³ William G. Hyland, "America's New Course", *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 2 (1990), 1.

In this reading, the Cold War was an anomaly, the bulk of a “seventy year detour” from the main road of American diplomatic history.¹⁴ With victory assured and totalitarianism vanquished the immediate post-Cold War years in particular were characterised by a desire for America to withdraw from its global position and reap the benefits of its victory in that long and tiring conflict with the Soviet Union. The United States was secure; its power total, its ideology unquestioned. At the same time, many saw new threats to the United States arising from within rather than without, issues of public policy that had been neglected during the interminable emergency of the Cold War years. It was time for the United States to discard its Cold War mindset, to resist the imperial temptations of its sole superpower status and ‘come home, America’.¹⁵

The ‘I’-Word

“And so we now come squarely and closely face to face with the issue which Americans most hate to face. It is that old, old issue with those old, old battered labels – the issue of Isolationism versus Internationalism. We detest both words. We spit them at each other with the fury of hissing geese.”

Henry Luce, ‘The American Century’, 1941¹⁶

That the United States should consider a policy of withdrawal from internationalism raised familiar passions. The idea that America has ever had or sought to have a foreign policy that can be described as ‘isolationist’ is a notion that has attracted a

¹⁴ Mary Eberstadt quoted in Moynihan, "The Peace Dividend".

¹⁵ Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation", *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997).

¹⁶ Henry R. Luce, "The American Century", *Life* (1941), 63.

great deal of controversy among politicians, commentators and scholars.¹⁷ This may derive from the fact that their chosen subject matter is foreign policy, and indeed the label ‘isolationist’ has long been used as a “conjuring trick” by internationalists, a stick with which to beat those who advocate a more restrained strategic posture, and “a hoodoo to call up whenever they feel threatened.”¹⁸ The Cold War instantiated engagement as a defining norm of good policy, and as a result isolationism could be summarily dismissed, as Clinton’s National Security Advisor did in a major foreign policy speech, as “the rhetoric of Neo-Know-Nothings”.¹⁹ Owen Harries and Michael Lind were not alone when as self-identified realists they complained of being labelled isolationist by proponents of foreign policy activism who “relied on a tendentious misreading of American history, according to which either generations of foolish isolationism suddenly gave way to heroic internationalism in 1941 or 1945, or an unbroken tradition of high-minded idealism from the Founding Fathers on effectively rules out realism as an approach to American foreign policy.”²⁰

Indeed, isolationists tend to disavow the label, largely due to the opprobrium it attracts in public debate. Perhaps the most high profile exponent, Patrick Buchanan, finds “traditionalist-nationalist” more accurate, and prefers to use Lippmann’s “enlightened nationalism”.²¹ Far from representing the fringe grouping that isolationism has come to imply, this school sees themselves as being in tune with the overriding theme of American foreign policy, summarised by Washington’s dictum

¹⁷ Dunn, "Isolationism Revisited".

¹⁸ Paul Weyrich, "A Populist Policy", *The National Interest* 21 (1990), 54-5.

¹⁹ Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement", *US Department of State Dispatch* 4, no. 2 (1993). On the difficulties of sustaining isolationist positions in a foreign policy debate conducted in internationalist language see Jonathan Clarke and James Clad, *After the Crusade: American Foreign Policy for the Post-Superpower Age* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1995), 49-63.

²⁰ Owen Harries and Michael Lind, "Realism and Its Rivals", *The National Interest* 34 (1993).

²¹ Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 364.

that the United States commits to “temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.”²²

Given this debate, it is worth a brief introduction to consider whether isolationism is the most appropriate way of characterising proposals for a rollback of American commitments and more limited American engagement with the world.

‘Isolationism’ is a difficult term to locate because its definition is both logically and empirically ambiguous. First, it is not clear whether it refers to a policy of isolating or isolation. Isolating oneself from particular aspects of international politics does not entail isolation. So it is uncertain whether isolationism refers to a specific condition to be attained (isolation) or a more general tendency related to process. Second is the extent to which a policy of isolationism seeks to detach a state from international politics. Is it that the policy seeks to avoid entanglement, or does it go even further and seek to avoid involvement? Third is the sense of willingness – does the policy advocate detachment because the state doesn’t *need* to engage itself, or because it doesn’t *want* to become engaged?

From these three considerations we can see that isolationism can be understood quite fairly to encompass a range of attitudes, from the wilful refusal to get involved in any aspects of international politics to such an extent that it might advocate a ban on all migration and trade, to a policy of selective engagement that seeks to maintain national freedom of action and judges involvements on the basis of necessity. It is hard to imagine any state in the Westphalian era that has pursued the policy of pure isolationism suggested here, and indeed, William Appleman Williams dismissed American isolationism as a ‘legend’, largely on the basis of its economic contacts with the world.²³ Similarly, James Baker prefers to use ‘disengagement’ to describe the prevailing American tradition up to 1941, arguing that America was never

²² George Washington’s Farewell Address, in Heffner, *A Documentary History of the United States*, 68.

²³ William Appleman Williams, “The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s”, *Science and Society* 18, no. 1 (1954).

isolated, but it was able to remain disengaged from world affairs, and “to indulge in the fantasy of isolation”.²⁴

Yet the fact that the United States – or any other nation for that matter – has not taken isolationism to its extreme logical conclusion should not render the term analytically useless, particularly if we regard it less as an ontological state than as a process that is directionally opposed to internationalism. At the same time, there is a danger that this becomes hopelessly relative, that ‘isolationism’ becomes no more than a term do denote a position “one notch less internationalist than the one currently be defended.”²⁵

David Dunn has objected that to use neoisolationism to describe this aspect of the 1990s grand strategy debates is to lump together the realist end of internationalist sentiment, concerned with the dangers of imperial temptations and seeking to mitigate balancing behaviour, with the advocates of a more radical redefinition of American engagement with the world who would genuinely withdraw to a fortress America on the hill. As he writes, “It is only by conflating and confusing these phenomena... that it is possible to see the steady rise of neoisolationism as a serious development in the American foreign policy debate.”²⁶

There are two rebuttals to be made here. First, the ‘neo’ prefix is a recognition that this sentiment is time-contingent, related to the post-Cold War moment. It is about a significant shift in American strategy away from the previous position of total global engagement, and so may be related to but not equated with the limited internationalism of the interwar years. Such a policy can be fairly characterised as neoisolationist whether justified by realist or radical rationales because it seeks to detach the United States from many of the engagements of the Cold War, just as the

²⁴ Baker III, "Selective Engagement", 70.

²⁵ John Dumbrell, "Varieties of Post-Cold War American Isolationism", *Government and Opposition* 34, no. 1 (1999), 24.

²⁶ Dunn, "Isolationism Revisited", 241.

isolationists of the twenties and thirties sought to detach the United States from the engagements of the League of Nations and great-power politics. Second, as we shall see, it is unclear that Dunn's distinction between realist and radical approaches is one whereby the underlying philosophy defines the degree of retrenchment. Whilst some neoisolationists are motivated by radical libertarian notions of the necessarily entangling effects of international engagement, others argue for similar degrees of withdrawal simply on the basis of a highly limited yet clearly realist conception of the American national interest. In short, there aren't clearly distinct phenomena to conflate and confuse.²⁷

Whilst a few neoisolationists have been prepared to embrace the designation, scholars examining the debate have attempted to recapture the descriptive utility of term and free it from the realm of invective. John Dumbrell admitted that he had "perhaps unwisely" attempted to rescue the term, though whether he is admitting naivety in believing such a liberation was possible or scolding his own attempt is unclear.²⁸ Dumbrell's definition of isolationism as "beliefs or policy propositions which tend to contradict the general thrust of post-1945 US internationalism" is rather too broad, because after any major conflict a degree of retrenchment is the normal course of policy.²⁹ The issue with neoisolationism is one of degree – a neoisolationist policy must go further than realist predictions would expect a state to drawdown after the global commitments of a major conflict like the Cold War.

What distinguishes neoisolationism from more standard realist responses to the disappearance of a major great power competitor is that their conception of the national interest, however derived, is so restrictive that it renders international

²⁷ It is even more difficult to discern the boundaries between Dunn's five motivations of anti-internationalism: 'libertarian', 'paleo-conservative', 'economic nationalist', 'anti-imperialist' and 'narrow realist'. David Dunn, "A Desire to Leave?: Foreign Policy Radicalism and Opposition to Atlanticism at Century's End", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 23, no. 1 (2000).

²⁸ John Dumbrell, "American Isolationism: A Response to David Hastings Dunn", *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 04 (2005).

²⁹ Dumbrell, "Varieties of Post-Cold War American Isolationism", 25.

engagement not only unnecessary but counterproductive.³⁰ Neoisolationists look to two elements in the national interest – the territorial integrity of the United States and the prosperity of its citizens.³¹ Or, as Doug Bandow, a fellow of the CATO Institute, the only major think tank to fully subscribe to the neoisolationist agenda during the 1990s, wrote, “the purpose of the United States government [is] to protect the security, liberty and property of the American people”.³² Such an outlook reflects the fact that isolationism is a unilateral policy, “in that it involves a self-centred act of non-engagement.”³³ That form of non-engagement rejects the institutions of internationalism founded by the first generation of Cold Warriors that binds the United States’ freedom of action to multilateral frameworks, and seeks to return American foreign policy to the essential dictums of Washington and Jefferson and their single-minded focus on national survival.³⁴

This chapter examines the strategies that proposed that the United States retreat from its global Cold War role. Some may be fairly considered neoisolationist, others are based on a limited conception of internationalism. All advocate disengagement to greater or lesser degrees, and would have been the subject to the opprobrium of the ‘isolationist’ accusation from proponents of American primacy or liberal multilateralism. In preference to what they deem “vainglorious efforts to create a benign international environment”, advocates of strategic disengagement regard the post-Cold War environment as anarchic, incapable of being “led, managed or

³⁰ Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy", 9.

³¹ Gholz, Press, and Sapolsky, "Come Home, America", 8-9.

³² Doug Bandow, "Keeping the Troops and the Money at Home", *Current History* 93, no. 579 (1994), 10. The Heritage Foundation also made some significant contributions to the neoisolationist case, but the CATO Institute was the ideological centre of neoisolationism in the think tank community.

³³ Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Polity, 2004), 159.

³⁴ Hubert P. Van Tuyl, *America's Strategic Future: A Blueprint for National Survival in the New Millennium* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 115-41.

stabilized.”³⁵ This school believes foreign policy is about making the best of bad choices, and disengagement is designed to reduce the number of those choices the United States will be forced to make and to provide flexibility of response.

The Internationalist Assumption

The basic approach of all of the strategy proposals advocating greater or lesser degrees of American disengagement is the same: by adopting a limited conception of the American national interest they produce a strategic assessment that limits the threats that the United States has to address through international engagement. That America’s national interest can be so limited rests on one, or a combination of two propositions. First, that particular features of American geography and power relative to the rest of the world make it strategically immune. Second, that American liberty may be threatened not by neglecting to universalise its prescriptions but by failing to create the domestic conditions for its flourishing.

However, for one self-confessed neoisolationist merely engaging in a strategic assessment is to accept a number of unjustifiable internationalist assumptions. In what is by far the most sophisticated of the genuinely neoisolationist texts, Eric Nordlinger complains that the even the narrowest definitions of strategy assume the necessity of interactions with others, making empirical assumptions of activism that implicitly downplay policies of nonengagement and inaction. Indeed, even the most basic theoretical underpinnings of game theory allow only the activist options of cooperation or defection, neglecting the choice of disengagement, of refusing to play

³⁵ Benjamin Schwarz, "Strategic Independence: Learning to Behave Like a Great Power", in *Prisms and Policy: U.S. Security Strategy after the Cold War*, ed. Norman D. Levin (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994), 79-80.

the game.³⁶ That Nordlinger can reject Thomas Schelling's conviction that if you are "invited to play chicken and you say you would rather not, you have just played" (and lost) denotes a more sophisticated understanding of the security dilemma that denies that states are like units, or that all features of power are convertible between states.³⁷ For Nordlinger then, the process of making an assessment of the strategic situation and adopting a strategy is less deterministic than that suggested by the dilemmas of rational actors seeking to maximise conflicting and shared interests. His resultant definition of a security strategy therefore subtly eschews zero-sum assumptions, to refer to "any broad gauged policies that a state may adopt for the preservation and enhancement of its security."³⁸

Whilst this may not look particularly different to any of the conceptions of grand strategy discussed earlier, Nordlinger's definition does two very important, and for neoisolationists, useful, things. First, in rejecting the internationalist assumptions of strategy it removes the basis upon which strategy is judged. Rejecting the assumptions of game theory leaves us without strict predictors of state behaviour, and it becomes difficult, even invalid, to suggest what the reaction of another state to a policy of disengagement would be. This theoretical move may be seen as usefully underpinning many neoisolationists' assault on the foreign policy-making 'elite'. Second, by rejecting the assumptions of security strategies it makes 'security' ambiguous and therefore builds in a bias in favour of more limited definitions, because the criteria for establishing which elements may constitute security have been dismissed. Nordlinger uses the space to discredit more expansive conceptions,

³⁶ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 8-9.

³⁷ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 188. Cited in Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 9.

³⁸ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 9-10.

and as a result can summarily reject elements of ‘national security’ as mere ‘milieu goals’.³⁹

Nordlinger is right that game-theory doesn’t provide the option of disengagement, but what he doesn’t do is address the salient issue: whether national security strategies really are analogous to a prisoner’s dilemma or stag hunt, that is to say, does international anarchy actually create those conditions? There is a case to be made, but neither Nordlinger nor any of the other neoisolationists make it, which is perhaps just as well, because in spite of this interesting and potentially fruitful theoretical aside, Nordlinger, like all of the other advocates of international disengagement, takes the standard approach towards the strategic assessment, assessing the international environment, assigning threats and then establishing the most appropriate means to meet them. Realists argue that in much of the post-Cold War debate this kind of serious geopolitical analysis is eschewed in favour of an attempt to articulate an idealist and engaged strategic vision for the United States.⁴⁰ Such a tendency cuts against the grain of American history, which has consistently made geopolitical realism the basis for any engagement in world affairs, valuing freedom of action above all else and creating an elaborate rhetorical superstructure of foreign policy only as a tool to gain public and congressional consent.⁴¹

Thus what makes this branch of the debate in the 1990s distinctive is that whilst the advocates of primacy and multilateralism do so partially on the basis of what they view as America’s Cold War success (they disagree regarding from what policies that success flowed), the case for disengagement is usually made on the basis that because the Cold War is over, the strategic environment is new, and Cold War knowledge is irrelevant. This “foreign policy equivalent of zero-based budgeting”

³⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁰ For a defence of geopolitical analysis, see Colin S. Gray, "The Continued Primacy of Geography", *Orbis* 40, no. 2 (1996).

⁴¹ Jonathan Clarke, "America, Know Thyself", *The National Interest* 34 (1993).

doesn't exclude the continuation of Cold War policies, but insists that the changes in the international system precipitated by the Soviet Union's collapse mean that engagements "must be justified anew, regardless of any utility they had in the Cold War."⁴² For neoisolationists more than anyone else in the American grand strategy debate, the 1990s presented United States foreign policy with the opportunity and obligation to start with a blank slate.

America's Strategic Immunity

The most basic aspect of this school's strategic assessment is that it denies that American security is threatened, not because there are no potential threats, but because America is so secure. Its adherents believe that "America's major advantage is strategic immunity... the United States is unique not just ideologically but geographically."⁴³ Protected to the East and West by two great oceans, with an ideologically aligned and historically peaceful neighbour to the north and fragmented and weak states to the south more interested in gaining the benefits of American power than challenging it, the United States is 'security-rich'. This view sees a state's geopolitical security as being most fundamentally rooted in the nature of its geography, and so the United States' distance from the likely theatres of great power conflict not only means that it will be insulated from their effects but also that the US will not be regarded as threat to others' security.⁴⁴

⁴² Ted Galen Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies: America's Alliances after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1992), vii.

⁴³ Nau, *At Home Abroad*, 45.; Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 63-91.

⁴⁴ Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise", *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993), 48.

Central to the concept that the United States is strategically immune is the belief that America's nuclear weapons "virtually eliminate the possibility of a conventional attack on US territory."⁴⁵ Such is the ability of America's nuclear deterrent to inflict total destruction on any would-be first-strike enemy that "there can be no politically rational motive" for such a strike, and so the possibility may be disregarded when it comes to defense planning.⁴⁶ As Christopher Layne succinctly puts it, "threats to commit suicide are inherently *incredible* – in both senses of the term."⁴⁷

Together with America's geographic advantages, the nuclear deterrent serves to confer full political sovereignty on the United States. This was no new idea, the result of post-Cold War wishful thinking that the demise of the Soviet Union would somehow put an end to nuclear fear. Instead, it draws on the theory of mutually assured destruction to argue for the obsolescence of balance-of-power alliances. As early as 1972, isolationists were arguing that nuclear weapons confer such a surfeit of deterrent power that alliances cannot serve to enhance security, and in fact the need to act on behalf of allies may itself increase potential threats.⁴⁸ Twenty years later, that argument was being revived in the face of the increasing likelihood of nuclear proliferation:

"As the membership of global nuclear club expands, alliances are dangerous arrangements that can needlessly entangle the United States in conflicts that might go nuclear... If U.S. policy does not change, the United States will find

⁴⁵ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 196. For a theoretical discussion of the role of nuclear weapons in creating disincentives for war see Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁴⁶ Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy", 13.

⁴⁷ Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, 166.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Tucker, *A New Isolationism: Threat or Promise?* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 45-7.

itself having to shield an assortment of nonnuclear allies from a rogues' gallery of nuclear-armed adversaries.”⁴⁹

Thus the argument that underpins strategies advocating disengagement is that the United States is in the uniquely advantageous strategic position of being isolated from the threats of the strategic environment. The nexus of geographical advantages and nuclear weapons raises the bar of American deterrence so high as to be absolute – the United States is both insulated and invulnerable, “doubly immune, which is to say maximally secure, despite minimal security efforts.”⁵⁰ Underlying American security is the fact that the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union’s global ambitions left questionable the indivisibility of international security that had been the key tenet of American internationalism. Local problems once more become local, not global.⁵¹

“It is time to re-examine the first principles and assumptions – both stated and unspoken – that have shaped America’s vision of world order and the imperial conception of security that underpins it.”⁵²

Thus the combination of the absence of zero-sum global conflict, America’s geographic situation and its nuclear deterrent ensure that the United States retains the luxury of the strategic choice of where, when and on whose terms to act outside of its own borders. Even were another state foolish enough to attempt to threaten the United States, as Patrick Buchanan concludes, no other nation “has the luxury America does, of time, space, and power, to observe at a distance and assess whether

⁴⁹ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 196-7.

⁵⁰ Eric A. Nordlinger, "America's Strategic Immunity: The Basis of a National Security Strategy", in *Soviet-American Relations after the Cold War*, ed. Robert Jervis and Seweryn Bialer (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 241.

⁵¹ Tonelson, "Beyond Left and Right".

⁵² Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz, "American Hegemony: Without an Enemy", *Foreign Policy*, no. 92 (1993), 17.

some emergent menace is a true peril – to us.” Quoting Washington, he asks ‘why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation?’⁵³

All variants of disengagement strategies – from neoisolationist pleas for near total withdrawal to realist arguments for selective and *ad hoc* international engagement – base their arguments on the fact of America’s strategic immunity and a limited conception of the national interest. America does not need, as a rule, to go out into the world in order to secure its security, and the conflicts of others can rarely be fundamental to the United States’ territorial or ideological integrity. Moreover the United States was unable to intervene effectively in others’ conflicts. William Hyland, a highly experienced foreign policy official and the then-editor of *Foreign Affairs*, asserted that America’s strategic position was – paradoxically – weaker as a consequence of 1989. In his view, the breakdown of the geopolitical alignments of the Cold War had served to devolve power away from the institutional arrangements of containment controlled by Washington and reduce the dependency of allies on the United States, with the result that America could not “have anything approaching the freedom of action it enjoyed in the Cold War decades.”⁵⁴ The columnist William Pfaff agreed, arguing that the collapse of superpower rivalry had abolished superpower status itself. There was not therefore a single superpower – the United States – there were none.⁵⁵ Once this actual consequence of the illusory victory in the Cold War was recognised, realism’s expectations mandate a strategy that will delay balancing by attempting to reduce the sense of threat that American power provokes. Nordlinger therefore neatly summarises the realist position of restraint

⁵³ Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 365. Washington’s ‘great rule’ also constitutes the intellectual basis of Nordlinger’s national strategy. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 50-1.

⁵⁴ William G. Hyland, "The Case for Pragmatism", *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1991).

⁵⁵ William Pfaff, "Redefining World Power", *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1991), 34.

despite apparent dominance when he states that “going abroad to ensure America’s security is unnecessary, doing so regularly detracts from it”,⁵⁶

This is the ‘internationalist temptation’. By engaging with the conflicts of others, by allying and entering into treaty commitments, the United States exposes itself to discord with others when it has no need to do so, and the costs of maintaining alliance commitments may divert resources from where they are really needed: the home front.⁵⁷ Liberty, and so American identity, is to be preserved within the borders of the United States, so that America may be a beacon of righteousness, rising above the waves of a world order that more than ever is characterised by disorder. Surprise that the post-Cold War world was even more violent despite the removal of the Soviet Union must not induce the United States to define its interests more widely than they really reside, or to believe that US involvement is a universal solution to others’ problems.

America’s strategic immunity is therefore both the guarantor and the source of an inward-focused American nationalism. The strategic environment to which the United States should focus its attention is not the great-power posturing of international relations but the domestic arena in which America’s fate is held. As Lincoln warned:

“At what point shall we expect the approach of danger?... Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined... with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.... If destruction be our lot, we

⁵⁶ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 6.

⁵⁷ Ronald Steel, "The Internationalist Temptation", in *At the End of the American Century: America's Role in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Robert L. Hutchings (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998).

must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”⁵⁸

‘It’s The Economy, Stupid’ – Domestic Post-Cold War Priorities

America’s uniquely strong position at the end of the Cold War presents the opportunity to radically reconsider the priorities of the American nation. It is not simply that, as Nau puts it, “America has never felt at home abroad.”⁵⁹ Instead, it is argued that long-neglected domestic concerns needed to feature higher on the list of priorities given that the resources that had been devoted to containing the Soviet Union were no longer required for foreign policy. The 1992 presidential election bore testament to this, as James Carville’s pithy précis of Democratic candidate Bill Clinton’s agenda became the slogan to define the campaign. For all President Bush’s foreign policy successes, from the peaceful fall of Communism to the reversal of Iraqi aggression in Kuwait, the American public were focused on the pressing necessities of a recession that had hit the middle classes, and it was their assessment of Bush’s economic performance that proved decisive.⁶⁰ Much like the British public’s decision in 1945 to oust a respected foreign policy leader, in 1992 the United States believed that the war was won, and it was time to focus on prosperity at home, on challenges that were both significant and pressing in their own right, and which spoke to America’s exceptional self-image.

⁵⁸ Abraham Lincoln, Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield Illinois, 1838, in Roy P. Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers U.P., 1953), 109. Cited in Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 372.

⁵⁹ Nau, *At Home Abroad*, 1.

⁶⁰ R. Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler, "Economics, Issues and the Perot Candidacy: Voter Choice in the 1992 Presidential Election", *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 3 (1995).

“Our domestic troubles are not in a realm separate from our foreign policy. They are an integral part, even a product, of it. A nation that pretends not only to protect, but inspire, the world with its values and achievements must be able to offer at least as much to its own people as to those it seeks to guard.”⁶¹

Thus the foreign policy story of the 1992 election was that an Arkansas governor with no previous military or foreign policy experience was able to get elected on a promise *not* to be a foreign policy president. In 1992 “the national mood was clearly to lessen the burdens of international leadership and to ask others to accept more responsibility for military security, foreign aid, and support for international organization.”⁶² For the previous forty years American politics on issues from technology to sport had been totally subsumed by the foreign policy framework of the Cold War. The first post-Cold War presidential election was a reminder, as the Heritage Foundation noted in its contribution to the debate, of the long-forgotten truth that:

“Foreign policy is domestic policy... [it] is not an end in itself, but a means to secure the greatest possible degree of liberty, freedom and opportunity for Americans from foreign threats. It has no other purpose.”⁶³

Such was the dominance of domestic issues in the prevailing mind-set in 1992 that for two scholars of American history “It was only a short step from that attitude to isolationism, 1930s style.”⁶⁴ Yet there was a definite split among the advocates of retrenchment when it comes to the relationship between domestic policy and a reduced foreign policy activism. The foreign policy realists saw these issues entirely from a foreign policy perspective – the use of American power in the world will

⁶¹ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 124.

⁶² Stephen E. Ambrose and Douglas G. Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* (New York, N.Y.; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993), 370.

⁶³ "Making the World Safe for America: The Heritage Foreign Policy "Blueprint," With Responses from Lee Edwards, Charles H. Fairbanks Jr., Fred Charles Iklé, Penn Kemble, Keith B. Payne, Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., Peter R. Rosenblatt", *Policy Review* 61 (1992), 52.

⁶⁴ Ambrose and Brinkley, *Rise to Globalism*, 370.

provoke threats in reaction to it, and so a reduction in the United States' foreign entanglements will increase American security whilst providing the domestic fillip of cost savings in the defense budget. Realists' belief that the use of power provokes resistance leads them to focus on the costs and dangers of globalism and unipolarity, rejecting the temptation to perform international 'social work' and judging that the United States' engagement with conflicts in which it has no direct interest makes it less secure.⁶⁵

This school of thought should not be confused with the liberal isolationist impulse which had largely died out by the 1990s. Emerging in the wake of the Vietnam War, liberal isolationism worries "that the world is pure while America is not, and hence America's forays into the world are likely to generate evil results."⁶⁶ Liberal isolationism is opposed to America intervening in the world not on the security basis that it is likely to harm the United States but on the moral basis that the United States is likely to cause harm to others, and was embodied by the Presidential candidacies of George McGovern, who wanted to ensure that "there will be no more Asian children running ablaze from bombed-out schools."⁶⁷

Ending the Cold War at Home

The neoisolationists of the 1990s were largely conservative, nationalist and concerned about the world's effect on America rather than America's action in the world. Conservative neoisolationists base their isolationism on the "conviction that America is pristine and the world corrupt, and hence maintaining America's purity

⁶⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work", *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (1996).

⁶⁶ Robert W. Merry, *Sands of Empire: Missionary Zeal, American Foreign Policy, and the Hazards of Global Ambition* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 75.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

requires that it stay out of the evil world”⁶⁸ Their focus then is not on the foreign policy arena *per se*, but on foreign policy’s capacity to impact upon America at the domestic level, in particular by restricting domestic liberties in the cause of national security. They believe that the security and prosperity of the American people is most likely to be assured by a focus on domestic policy and a watchful but disengaged and uncommitted foreign policy. Thus the neoisolationist movement in the 1990s is chiefly concerned with rebuffing new foreign policy visions – denying that the ‘hole in the doughnut’, as the American political scientist Michael Mandelbaum characterised it, needs to be filled.⁶⁹

The domestic arena, in this view, had been long neglected as a result of the attitudes of the “globalist elites” and “bureaucratic-military empire” that had come to hold a grip on American foreign policy during the Cold War, a power which they were loath to yield.⁷⁰ These elites viewed the position of the United States in the world as a reflection of their own status, and worried that that following the break-up of the Soviet Union their importance would be reduced by a more circumscribed role for the United States. As one academic noted, the notion that America may not have global interests is hard for foreign policy professionals with three generations’ experience of running the world to deal with.

“Experts... often know a great deal about their subject. But as with every speciality, they are particularly attached to it. They tend to elevate it in importance above everything else. Often they have little perspective, and lost track of the concerns of the person in the street. They tend to get contorted in considerations of ‘credibility’, ‘national prestige’ and ‘influence’. They are suckers for abstractions like ‘leadership’ and ‘stability’.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁹ Clarke and Clad, *After the Crusade*, 2.

⁷⁰ Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 327-8.

⁷¹ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 113-4.

Now that their defining bipolar contest was over, the subsequent threat to their professional identity helps to explain the “frantic” search for new missions and visions for United States foreign policy, efforts that the CATO Institute concluded “are so wide ranging as to constitute a campaign of threat procurement.”⁷² Realist and neoisolationists were therefore united in their concern to debunk constructed threats, to ensure that American foreign policy could not persist at a level of engagement that was more reflective of bureaucratic inertia than the strategic environment.

Such arguments were therefore present both in the reactionary nationalism of Pat Buchanan and the more sophisticated realism of some significant luminaries of the foreign policy establishment. Charles Maynes, the influential editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine, wrote that the Cold War had fundamentally changed the nature of American society and in particular the relationship between its people and its government. America’s separation of powers meant that in foreign policy the country had been unable to speak with one voice, placing the United States at a disadvantage compared to the Soviet Union’s ability to communicate accurately and act swiftly.⁷³ Morton H. Halperin concurred, arguing that compensating for this weakness in the “bellicose climate” of the ultra-securitised Cold War conflict had led “policymakers to adopt, and led the public to accept, restraints on freedom unprecedented in peacetime.” The power of the military-industrial complex; the designation of enemy ideologies; the annexation of constitutional powers by the executive from Congress; the culture of classifying information; the secret institutions of the national security infrastructure; all redefined the American

⁷² Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 153-4.

⁷³ Maynes, “America without the Cold War”, 5.

people's relationship with their government to the detriment of their constitutional rights.⁷⁴

Although the Cold War was over the institutions of containment survived, “a burgeoning bureaucracy in search of a new mission.”⁷⁵ The consequences of this bureaucracy on the health of American democracy had been little considered during the Cold War, due to an establishment consensus that elevated national security above the usual political debate. But now that liberalism had triumphed, the preservation of liberty at home was no longer an issue of protecting the United States from foreign foes but of protecting the American people from their government, which in the field of international affairs, as the editor of *Foreign Policy* noted, had more capacity to affect the American people's lives and welfare than in any other area. The end of the Cold War therefore needed to stimulate a debate about foreign policy that was prior to its domestic effects, to reap a peace dividend that was “not just about the money that will be freed up” but is also about “the categories of thought that will finally be opened up.”⁷⁶ The lack of any significant reassessment of the national security infrastructure of the Cold War after 1989 led Halperin, a veteran of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, to go as far as to call for Congressional hearings on the domestic legacy of containment in a bid to “End the Cold War at Home.”⁷⁷

Whilst the regeneration of both American democracy and capitalism is central to the neoisolationist platform, the notion that the maxims of market democracy could become an organising principle for American engagement with the world was fiercely resisted. The idea that there is any correlation between free markets,

⁷⁴ Morton Halperin, H. and Jeanne M. Woods, "Ending the Cold War at Home", *Foreign Policy*, no. 81 (1990), 128-9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁶ Maynes, "America without the Cold War", 6, 25.

⁷⁷ Halperin and Woods, "Ending the Cold War at Home", 143.

democracy and pacifity in international affairs is thus rejected as a “provincial conceit, a delusion rather than a policy.”⁷⁸ Whilst promoting democracy may be “a laudable American ambition”, it “could become a perilous guide to policy... It is one thing to support the new democracies of Eastern Europe that have liberated themselves, but it would be another matter to intervene to institute democracy”.⁷⁹

Thus in the 1990s neoisolationist sentiment, broadly conceived, was about more than simply retreating to a fortress America to celebrate a famous victory. Having concluded that America’s security from external threats was effectively assured, neoisolationists repeat a strategic assessment at the domestic level to assess the threats to liberty that come from inside the state. Neoisolationists therefore focused inward, recognising that American identity as defined during the Cold War was unsustainable, that liberty could no longer be sustained simply by anticommunism, and that America therefore needed to realign its priorities from the inside-out, once again paying most attention to issues of domestic liberty and prosperity.

“For as long as most of us can remember, foreign policy has dominated our national agenda. Our domestic needs have consistently been sacrificed to it. We have turned security against foreign challengers into a shibboleth. But we have neglected the threats to our own security that come from within.”⁸⁰

Immigration and the Multicultural Society

The most prominent of these threats arises from the linked issues of immigration, demographics and multiculturalism, which together threatened to push the United States towards heterogeneity and social fragmentation. In the absence of an external other to bind the nation together, America’s ideological national identity –

⁷⁸ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 127.

⁷⁹ Hyland, "America's New Course".

⁸⁰ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 23.

summarised in the motto *a pluribus unum* – was under threat. American foreign policy had become one of ‘particularism’, devoted to promoting highly specific ethnic and commercial interests, which substitutes the rights of individuals for the rights of ethnic groups and lobbies.⁸¹

Indeed, it was the lack of direction and the open debate of the early post-Cold War period that allowed lobbying by ethnic minorities to make their kinsmen’s cause America’s cause.⁸² Whether it was relations with Britain being made more difficult by Irish Americans’ closeness to republicans in Northern Ireland; the easing of restrictions towards Cuba being blocked by swing-vote Cuban Americans; the Israel lobby’s effect on Middle East policy or NATO expansion being driven by the need to appeal to voters of East European origin, “pandering to ethnic constituencies” had become an “accepted norm” in post-Cold War American foreign policy.⁸³ For Stephen Walt, this constituted a dangerous imbalance in American foreign policy, between the organised and particular interests which constantly push the United States to do more things in more places, “and the far-weaker groups who think we might be better off showing a bit more restraint.”⁸⁴

For realists and neoisolationists, this hijacking of the national interest threatens to undermine the American identity that it purports to serve. No less powerful a voice than Samuel Huntington regarded the fate of the Soviet Union as a ‘sobering example’:

“The United States and the Soviet Union were very different, but they also resembled each other in that neither was a nation-state in the classic sense of the

⁸¹ For an analysis of the role of ethnic groups in formulating foreign policy see Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁸² Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 334.

⁸³ James Schlesinger, "Fragmentation and Hubris", *The National Interest* 49 (1997).

⁸⁴ Stephen M. Walt, *Imbalance of Power: Why the United States Is (Always) over-Committed Overseas* (2009) available from http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/12/imbalance_of_power.

term. In considerable measure, each defined itself in terms of an ideology, which, as the Soviet example suggests, is likely to be a much more fragile basis for unity than a national culture richly grounded in history. If multiculturalism prevails and if the consensus on liberal democracy disintegrates, the United States could join the Soviet Union on the ash heap of history.”⁸⁵

Immigration without assimilation was therefore a malignant force undermining American identity and distorting the national interest. As a nation based on the idea of liberty, the dilution of commitment to that founding ideology was as great a threat as to the United States itself as any threat to the integrity of American territory. For Patrick Buchanan mass immigration and the radical demographic alteration that it might cause constituted “the most immediate and serious problem facing the United States in this hemisphere”.⁸⁶ Liberal attitudes towards immigration therefore struck at the heart of America itself:

“When we say we will put America first, we mean also that our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved, and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped into some landfill called multiculturalism.”⁸⁷

This kind of rhetoric reflects that strand in American history that relies less on the abstract idea of the preservation of American identity as liberty than it does on racial and religious prejudice. Charles Krauthammer, no leftist liberal himself, was moved to accuse Buchanan of “subliminal appeals to prejudice”.⁸⁸ Yet at the same time it was clear that the American public was expressing a conscious preference for European over Asian and Latin American immigration, and growing concerns about

⁸⁵ Huntington, " ", 35.

⁸⁶ Buchanan, *A Republic Not an Empire*, 370-1.

⁸⁷ Patrick J. Buchanan, "America First, Second and Third", *The National Interest* 19 (1990).

⁸⁸ Jake Tapper, *Who's Afraid of Pat Buchanan?* (1999) available from <http://www.salon.com/news/feature/1999/09/04/pat/>. For evidence of Buchanan ‘playing the race card’ in the elections of 1992 see E.J. Dionne Jr., "Is Buchanan Courting Bias? Equivocations on Duke Pose Questions About Attitude", *The Washington Post*, 29/2/1992.

the integrative nature of a multicultural society had led twenty-one states to pass legislation making English their official state language.⁸⁹ Writing in *The National Interest*, James Kurth went so far as to accuse the American intellectual class, in their advocacy of a multicultural America, of being “present at the deconstruction of Western civilization.”⁹⁰

This focus on immigration reflects the expansionary approaches to national security that came to prominence in the post-Cold War period and that see any threat to a country’s population’s quality of life as a security concern.⁹¹ Yet one would not expect a school of thought whose *modus operandi* is so distinctly realist to embrace such an expansive notion of security. For the neoisolationists it was a useful tool of nationalism in that securitising domestic issues allowed them to capture the intellectual space and resources that might otherwise be devoted to internationalism; for the realists it was about ensuring a unified conception of the national interest. But whether the underlying motivation arises from the recognition that American identity requires a sustained and consistent ideological commitment or whether this stream of conservative neoisolationism is simply the refuge of the disgruntled white man, there is no doubt that throughout the 1990s immigration was as contentious an issue as any aspect of foreign or domestic policy.

The main catalyst of immigration’s rise as an increasing concern of the American public during the early 1990s was their economic worries. In 1993, nearly two-thirds of survey respondents felt immigration should be lowered, nearly seventy percent believed that most new immigrants were in the country illegally, a majority felt that immigrants tended to cause problems for American society and over a third

⁸⁹ Gregory A. Huber and Thomas J. Espenshade, "Neo-Isolationism, Balanced-Budget Conservatism, and the Fiscal Impacts of Immigrants", *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997), 1041.

⁹⁰ James Kurth, "The Real Clash", *The National Interest* 37 (1994).

⁹¹ For a contemporaneous example of the extension of security concerns see Jessica Tuchman Mathews, "Redefining Security", *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 2 (1989). On the securitisation of immigration see Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Immigration and the Politics of Security", *Security Studies* 8, no. 2 (1998).

felt immigrants took American jobs. Such sentiments confirmed a sustained trend in US public opinion in which the desire for reduced immigration is highly correlated with levels of unemployment.⁹² It was therefore natural for neoisolationists to raise immigration and integration concerns as part of a broader focus on domestic economic issues. Indeed, by the mid-1990s it was possible to discern a new “fiscal politics of immigration” in which immigration, and in particular the cost of providing social services for immigrants, were depicted as a drain on government funds, as “growing anti-immigrant sentiment coalesced with the forces of fiscal conservatism to make immigrants an easy target of budget cuts.”⁹³

The Economy

The recession of the early 1990s was the overriding feature of all areas of American policy debate. By 1990 US economic expansion had ground to a halt, labouring under the burdens of rising oil prices, a capital shortage, tightening credit markets and a burden of public and private debt. Growth in the 1980s had been fuelled by a “borrowing binge” to fund trade and budget deficits, and the United States had taken the dubious title of the world’s largest debtor nation.⁹⁴ With the federal budget deficit restricting government’s ability to use fiscal policy to stimulate the economy, balanced-budget conservatism became a major force in American politics, in particular with neoisolationists who believed that the major areas in which government had become too big were expressions of a sustained Cold War internationalism that was now redundant. With its “omnipresent focus on deficits, spending cuts and tax avoidance” balanced-budget conservatism was used by

⁹² Thomas J. Espenshade and Katherine Hempstead, "Contemporary American Attitudes toward U.S. Immigration", *International Migration Review* 30, no. 2 (1996), 539.

⁹³ Huber and Espenshade, "Neo-Isolationism", 1048.

⁹⁴ C. Michael Aho and Bruce Stokes, "The Year the World Economy Turned", *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1991).

conservatives to “celebrate meat-axe approaches” to public spending.⁹⁵ Its legislative expression was the Republican Party’s 1994 *Contract with America*, which of the ten policy-planks it set out for a Republican-led Congress only one related to foreign policy, and that was a pledge to prevent American troops coming under foreign command. The *Contract* was a manifesto for small government, calling for zero base-line budgeting of the entire Federal budget and a legislative bias against tax increases.⁹⁶

Part of this emphasis on budget deficits stemmed from the need to compete with Japan, which had emerged as the world’s most competitive economic power and biggest creditor, having exploited the ‘new industrial revolution’ in manufacturing and invested heavily in research and development.⁹⁷ Japan’s economy had grown rapidly and consistently as a *de facto* American protectorate during the Cold War, and by 1991 it was the second-largest economy in the world with growth rates over the previous three years above 5%, whilst in the same year America slipped into recession.⁹⁸ Concern about trade relations with Japan had been building since the mid-1980s, but with the end of the Cold War came the realisation that America’s alliance with Japan could no longer proceed upon the premises it had for the previous forty years.⁹⁹

Ironically, Japan’s economic accomplishments that now so concerned American policymakers were the result of America’s long-term economic strategy in the

⁹⁵ Sidney Plotkin and William E. Scheuerman, *Private Interest, Public Spending: Balanced-Budget Conservatism and the Fiscal Crisis* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994), 6.

⁹⁶ ‘Republican Contract with America’, available at <http://www.house.gov/house/Contract/CONTRACT.html>. Leading the resistance to Clinton’s foreign policy was Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who claimed to have never voted for a foreign aid bill. See John Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 39.

⁹⁷ Ezra F. Vogel, "Pax Nipponica?", *Foreign Affairs* 64 (1986).

⁹⁸ Source: World Development Indicators Database

⁹⁹ See for example, George R. Packard, "The Coming U.S.-Japan Crisis", *Foreign Affairs* 66 (1987); Vogel, "Pax Nipponica?"; Karel G. van Wolferen, "The Japan Problem", *Foreign Affairs* 65 (1986).

Pacific rim.¹⁰⁰ Since the United States had focused its resources on defeating communism it had been unable to invest domestically, and now its economy was structurally deficient compared to Japan's, which had been a free-rider on American security guarantees for the better part of forty years. With the disappearance of the Soviet threat Tokyo no longer needed to defer to the United States, with the result that by the early 1990s the relationship was becoming more fractious, "its tone increasingly acrimonious and its original post-war rationale now largely irrelevant."¹⁰¹ One contribution to the debate, which was translated into both Japanese and Chinese, went as far as to argue that a second war in the Pacific was unavoidable.¹⁰²

The suggestion that the success of Japan's export-led growth could be in large part attributed to the security umbrella provided by the United States was an open goal for neoisolationists who argued for a drawdown of American overseas commitments in favour of domestic investment.¹⁰³ Yet at the same time the less nationalist amongst them were cautious not to fall into the trap of regarding Japanese growth as a security threat requiring American political and military engagement.¹⁰⁴ As the realist editor of *Foreign Affairs* noted, "efforts to depict Japanese economic success as a security threat comparable to the Soviet military menace can succeed only if hysteria replaces common sense."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Michael Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Superpower without a Mission* (London: Pinter, 1995), 84-101.

¹⁰¹ Richard Holbrooke, "Japan and the United States: Ending the Unequal Partnership", *Foreign Affairs* 70 (1991).

¹⁰² George Friedman and Meredith LeBard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

¹⁰³ Patrick Buchanan, for example, believed that free trade was "killing" America. Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice Are Being Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

¹⁰⁴ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Maynes, "America without the Cold War", 4.

Such hysteria was not in short supply. Jeffrey Garten, an investment banker who had worked on economic policy for the Nixon administration, presented the idea that it was not just Japan, but the newly reunified German economy, that were the two poles to which power was shifting, and that the economic rivalry between those two pacifist trading states and the world's policeman might constitute a 'Cold Peace' in the coming era. This economic competition represented the most severe challenge the United States had faced since 1941.

“We are in danger of become a hobbled power, and, based on current trends, a second-rate country in the areas that will count most in the coming world order. More significantly, we risk the prospect of a declining standard of living, with attendant social strife and increasing dependence on other nations for critical capital and technology... with all that and more, is there any wonder why we should be thinking about Japan and Germany and all they represent in terms of the competition we face, the cooperation we need, and, most of all, the urgency of getting a grip on ourselves at home?”¹⁰⁶

That this type of thinking was so salient during Clinton's first term in office was made clear by Garten's selection by the new administration as Under Secretary for International Trade, a powerful position in a government that seemed to be moving from geopolitics towards a focus on geo-economics, closely monitored by an activist and inward-looking Congress that for the first time in forty years refused to extend fast-track authorisation to a US trade negotiation.¹⁰⁷ The political difficulty that the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) presented reflected the fact that the early 1990s was a period in which “protectionism in trade has much greater support than at any time since the 1930s.”¹⁰⁸ Agreed and signed by George H.W. Bush before he left office, NAFTA was initially opposed by a good deal of Congressional opinion on the basis of a

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey E. Garten, *A Cold Peace: America, Japan, Germany, and the Struggle for Supremacy* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 22.

¹⁰⁷ See Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 21-37.

¹⁰⁸ Hyland, "The Case for Pragmatism".

populist and nationalist desire to maintain America's industrial base in an era where outsourcing was already transforming the United States into a services-dominated economy.¹⁰⁹ Largely based around the representatives of organised labour within the Democratic Party but led by the activism of Ross Perot, opposition to the agreement was unusually heated and public for what remained a "dull as dishwater" trade agreement.¹¹⁰ Portraying Mexico as weak, dependent and corrupt, neoisolationist sentiment stoked fears that NAFTA would force American workers to accept lower wages and higher taxes.¹¹¹

Another aspect of the conservative neoisolationists' irascibility with NAFTA was that in reality it was a foreign policy issue of providing material and legitimising support for a democratic and market-reformist government in Mexico.¹¹² Some of the key objections to NAFTA were that it would subvert representative government to a trade policy governed by a NAFTA bureaucracy and international lawyers.¹¹³ Neoisolationists worried that it entangled American prosperity with Mexico's economic success, and that its advocates could use the success of NAFTA to justify an ever more extensive agenda of foreign agreements advancing both free trade and its associated international institutions and an idealised crusade to support and spread democratic governance. Thus one feature of the Congressional debate was the deliberate conflation of trade and foreign policy issues, leading one critic to snap that "protectionism and isolationism are sisters under the skinheads"¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Paul Krugman, "The Uncomfortable Truth About NAFTA", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (1993), 14.

¹¹⁰ Ann Devroy, "Perot Takes Early Lead in Race on Trade Pact; Clinton Appears to Be Short of NAFTA Votes", *Washington Post*, 26/8/93.

¹¹¹ One study found that isolationism was the main 'myth' of the anti-NAFTA advertisements that appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* in the Autumn of 1993. Amy Skonieczny, "Constructing NAFTA: Myth, Representation, and the Discursive Construction of U.S. Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2001), 447-8.

¹¹² Krugman, "The Uncomfortable Truth About NAFTA", 18-19.

¹¹³ Skonieczny, "Constructing NAFTA", 448-9.

¹¹⁴ William Safire, "Laughter after Nafta", *The New York Times*, 21/10/93.

Following NAFTA's eventual ratification after a political-capital-sapping campaign by the Clinton administration, a 1994 ABC News/Washington Post poll showed respondents rejecting a leadership role for the United States in favour of reducing American involvement in world affairs by 27% to 67%.¹¹⁵ The midterm elections later that year that ushered in one of the least internationalist Congressional memberships ever could therefore be understood as Americans "stampeding back into the laager from which they were forced to emerge in 1941."¹¹⁶ Over half of the members of the 104th Congress had served less than five years on the Hill, and many proudly declared they did not even have passports.¹¹⁷ Responding to criticism that the new Congress was isolationist, Newt Gingrich argued that America's ambitions had to have a limit.

"A conservative watching a feckless liberal throw away American money in an utterly infantile pursuit of projects that have no hope, it's not isolationism to say that's stupid."¹¹⁸

The 'infantile pursuits' in which the American government was engaged were numerous. In search of a low tax, small government economy, balanced-budget conservatives and neoisolationists advocated swathing cuts in a range of areas, most deeply in what might collectively be characterised as the United States' internationalism budget. Any federal money spent for the benefit of anything other than a highly narrow definition of national security was waste. The means of Cold War strategy were to be re-appropriated so the American people could have a balanced budget and lower taxes, in a set of proposals that amounted to "the most

¹¹⁵ Cited in "America's Role in the World", *The Polling Report*, January 24, 1994, 6. For analysis of whether Congress turned anti-internationalist because or in spite of isolationist opinion in the broader public, see Steven Kull, "What the Public Knows That Washington Doesn't", *Foreign Policy*, no. 101 (1995); Rosner, "The Know-Nothings Know Something".

¹¹⁶ Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 18-19.

¹¹⁷ Sidney Blumenthal wrote that the key consequence of the 1994 midterms was the "shattering of the foreign policy consensus" as a result of the most overtly isolationist campaign since 1938. Sidney Blumenthal, "The Return of the Repressed", *World Policy Journal* 12, no. 3 (1995).

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Chollet and Goldgeier, *America between the Wars*, 109.

severe restructuring of the US foreign policy apparatus since these institutions were established in the late 1940s.”¹¹⁹

A Normal Country In A Normal Time – Retrenching The American Empire

For neoisolationists, the institutions with which the United States had fought the Cold War amounted to two massive empires. Realists were most concerned about a foreign empire that entangled the United States in the affairs and conflicts of foreign nations in ways that threatened American security, and, the neoisolationists added, all at an enormous economic cost to the United States. A second concern was the effect of a domestic bureaucratic empire that threatened American liberty by extending the purview of government deep into American society. A zero-based budgeting approach to reviewing the architecture of the Cold War therefore reflected the need to make budget cuts in order to free up resources for the needs of the domestic economy and the desire to revive American liberty by rolling back the forces of the state. This task was nothing less than the rebuilding of America through the demolition of its Cold War commitments, to force allies to take responsibility for their own security and ensure that American power could only be used in pursuit of American interests. In a world in which there was “no pressing need for heroism and sacrifice” the time for Americans to bear unusual burdens had passed and the United States could become “an independent nation in a world of independent nations.”¹²⁰ In short, the United States could behave like a normal nation, and keep its troops and its money at home.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Franklin Lavin, "Isolationism and U.S. Foreign Policy", *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 3 (1996), 272.

¹²⁰ Jeane Kirkpatrick, "A Normal Country in a Normal Time", *The National Interest* 21 (1990).

¹²¹ Bandow, "Keeping the Troops and the Money at Home".

In order to achieve this normality, the United States needed to fundamentally reconceptualise its role in the international order to reflect American society's willingness to pay for it.¹²² In the post-Cold War era, few international issues would threaten the nation's territorial integrity, political independence or material welfare, so that "America can choose not to become involved in many conflicts."¹²³ Now that the indivisibility of international security and prosperity need not be presupposed, focusing upon and protecting America's vital interests should be an easier task, and by recalibrating American strategy along the lines of its vital interests the United States could avoid the temptations of international leadership and their associated costs which threatened a "most worrisome means-ends gap".¹²⁴ For all the talk of exploiting a peace dividend the United States was already suffering from a strategy-forces-budget mismatch that meant that "sooner rather than later it will be a case of raise the anchor or lower the ship."¹²⁵

At the same time, retrenchment was not solely a means to cut budgets for the short-term benefit of the American people. It also reflected the deeply realist belief that if American power was too engaged in the world it would provoke retaliation towards it. Here was the essential policy challenge of the security dilemma: to balance the need to deploy military forces that were capable of deterring potential aggressors and defending against threats with the necessity of preventing challengers from rising by appearing non-threatening. Neoisolationists, however, believed that America was in a unique position to avoid having to walk this particular tightrope if it retrenched itself sufficiently:

¹²² Robert W. Tucker, "The Future of a Contradiction", *The National Interest* 43 (1996).

¹²³ Heritage Foundation, *Making the World Safe for America: A U.S. Foreign Policy Blueprint* (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1992).

¹²⁴ Alan Tonelson, "Superpower without a Sword", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993), 168.

¹²⁵ James Schlesinger, "Raise the Anchor or Lower the Ship: Defense Budgeting and Planning", *The National Interest* 53 (1998).

“The dilemma’s viselike (sic) grip can be released for a strategically immune America situated at great distances from any challengers, one whose security interests are circumscribe by an exceptionally narrow core perimeter.”¹²⁶

Thus the underlying rationale of realist and neoisolationist grand strategy proposals was to use America’s strategic immunity to underpin a reduction in America’s global military commitments, to “attain safety and prosperity by carrying a significantly lower international profile.”¹²⁷ Such a strategy would enhance America’s security by ensuring that the inevitable transition to a multipolar world could be a peaceful one whilst concentrating on servicing the internal elements of American power and security. The unipolar moment was an illusion, and neither benign nor preventative strategies could prevent the rebalancing of world order away from hegemony.¹²⁸ America’s success in the new century would depend on the extent to which it embraced this inevitability, accepted that “over time the position of preponderance that we have acquired with the close of the Cold War inevitably must weaken” and recognised that the United States “ought to avoid doing things that speed up that process”.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 46.

¹²⁷ Tonelson, "Superpower without a Sword", 167.

¹²⁸ Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion".

¹²⁹ Schlesinger, "Fragmentation and Hubris".

America's Redundant Alliances

“America cannot afford to pursue the mirage of a new world order, nor can it tolerate the continuing haemorrhage of its wealth to subsidize the defense of prosperous allies who are now capable of defending themselves.”¹³⁰

The central feature of the United States' global commitments was the system of military alliances that had been carefully constructed to constitute an anti-communist bloc over the previous forty years. The question in 1991, given the collapse of the nation that inspired those alignments, was what continued to justify the military budgets they commanded?¹³¹ Apart from the first law of bureaucratic survival, the neoisolationist answer was ‘very little’. Yet many American strategists advocated policies designed to ensure that those allies – potential great powers in their own right – regarded the gap to the United States as too big to be closed and thus choose to bandwagon with rather than balance against American system dominance. Neoisolationists regarded this position as expensive, arrogant and dangerous. It required the United States to be perpetually involved in quarrels in which it could have no direct interest; it presumed to replace national sovereignty with American security guarantees; and it imagined that American ‘reassurance’ is universal, and that it could somehow serve to simultaneously reassure without constituting a threat to anyone. Such a strategy cast the United States not as an honest broker but as a “meddlesome belligerent”.¹³² The end of the Cold War provided the opportunity to recalibrate American entanglements, the first task of which was to deconstruct the rationale for America's global apparatus of military bases and capacity for worldwide intervention. This “strategic internationalism”, Nordlinger wrote, “is

¹³⁰ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 10.

¹³¹ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 53.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 57-9.

expensive. It is all the more so when wealthy allies do not contribute their fair share”.¹³³

In East Asia, from Tokyo to Bangkok via Seoul, Manila, Taipei and Saigon, the United States dominated the Pacific Rim through a network of alliances and security guarantees that had ensured the dominoes stayed standing during the Cold War. The United States had overseen the growth of Korea from an impoverished and war-torn society into an economic powerhouse, in stark contrast to its communist neighbours in the North. As the CATO Institute’s *Handbook for Congress* argued:

“there is no special gravitational field on the Korean peninsula that prevents those living in the South from constructing a military as powerful as – or even more powerful than – that possessed by the North. Rather, for years South Korea has *chosen* not to match the North’s military effort... a curious way for a nation allegedly under siege to act.”¹³⁴

Other American commitments could be scaled back too, including the ‘basically useless’ ANZUS alliance with Australia and New Zealand that was a manifestation of ‘pactomania’ in the 1950s and in which no possible threat to American interests could be constructed. The defense treaty with Pakistan, more worryingly, proffered the prospect of entangling the United States in a conflict on the turbulent Indian subcontinent.¹³⁵ Yet to question these commitments, even including the perpetual protectorate of South Korea, was simply to fiddle around the margins of America’s global commitment, which rested upon the fundamental relationships with Japan and Europe, the United States’ richest and most powerful economic competitors.

Having rebuilt their former enemy following the Second World War by 1991 the United States still had 45,000 troops stationed in Japan, a military deployment

¹³³ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 218.

¹³⁴ CATO Institute, *The Cato Handbook for Congress: Policy Recommendations for the 105th Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1997), 486.

¹³⁵ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 95-126.

amounting to approximately half of America's \$40 billion annual security commitments in East Asia.¹³⁶ The issue of American military presence in Japan was intimately bound up with issues of economic competitiveness. William Pfaff discerned a "colonial quality" in the relationship whereby American debt was purchased by Japan, which in return received the forces of the United States to guarantee its security.¹³⁷ Japan's own military spending had been kept low under Article IX of its Constitution adopted following the Second World War and designed to prevent a resurgence of Japanese militarism. As a result, in pure cash terms, the United States was spending over nine times what Japan was on military expenditure, but more importantly from an economic competitiveness point of view, Japan was spending no more than 1% of its GDP on military expenditure during the 1990s compared to United States average of 3.79%.¹³⁸ Indeed, what military spending there was, moreover, was overwhelmingly directed towards domestic industries, with hardware produced under license from American companies, eroding the United States' technological lead and in some cases spawning direct competition in the arms business.¹³⁹ And because Japan did not have to concern itself with military development it was able to direct far greater research and development resources to civilian products.¹⁴⁰ America's alliance relationship with Japan, in short, allowed one of its chief trading partners to pursue trading practices that were "less than free and fair".¹⁴¹

This reconsideration of America's relationship with Japan was more than simply an expression of another trade dispute, the likes of which had been a regular source of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁷ Pfaff, "Redefining World Power", 38.

¹³⁸ Military spending data averaged for the period 1989-2000 inclusive from SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>.

¹³⁹ James Fallows, "Japan: Let Them Defend Themselves", *The Atlantic*, April.

¹⁴⁰ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 53.

¹⁴¹ Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured*, 224.

turbulence in US-Japan relations for decades. Instead, neoisolationist and realists were engaged seriously with the question of whether the United States and Japan had essentially similar or dissimilar interests, of whether this was indeed the natural alliance that diplomats on both sides claimed.¹⁴² It reflected their realist understanding of the theory and history of international relations that predicted the dissolution of alliance solidarity in the absence of a common threat. In the absence of the Soviet Union then, the United States should not assume that the interests of Japan or Europe would coincide with their own.¹⁴³

In Europe, the defining alliance of the Cold War and the symbol of American entanglement with the affairs of the 'old world' found its formal military expression in NATO, which was always more than a tool, in its first Secretary-General Lord Ismay's words, "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."¹⁴⁴ The United States instead became the linchpin of European security, with NATO as the military symbol of the cultural and political grouping called 'the West', an alignment of forces in defence and pursuit of a shared economic, political and ethical ideology. Yet in the absence of the Soviet Union, the threat that held together this highly integrated alliance had vanished, and realists therefore expected the freedom of action that the backing of those allies conferred on the United States to diminish.¹⁴⁵ For American advocates of disengagement, here was an alliance that in the post-Cold War world was not only unnecessary but dangerous, a outdated military behemoth fighting the last war in pursuit of a model of social organisation that was now uncontested. In seeking to avoid clinging to the carcasses of dead policies - what Lord Salisbury had called the commonest error in politics - the

¹⁴² Richard V. Allen, "Fifty Years after Pearl Harbor: The Future of U.S.-Japan Relations", (Heritage Foundation Lecture 356, 1991).

¹⁴³ Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Case for US Strategic Independence", in *CATO Foreign Policy Briefing No.16* (1991).

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Joseph S. Nye, "The US and Europe: Continental Drift?", *International Affairs* 76, no. 1 (2000), 53.

¹⁴⁵ Hyland, "America's New Course".

CATO institute was moved to describe it as a “Cold War Anachronism”.¹⁴⁶ Steel argued that:

“What started as an alliance to defend West Europeans against Russia has turned into one for protecting Europeans against themselves... We did not pledge to come to the aid of any European country embroiled in a quarrel with its neighbours. All we intended was to put the Russians on warning that they had expanded their influence as far west as they would be allowed to go.”¹⁴⁷

The historical argument was a strong one. The United States had never intended NATO to be a permanent or enduring alliance. It was to have been a primarily European operation to which the United States would provide assistance – initially as a security contribution to assist rearmament whilst European economic recovery was completed, and then as a backup to a European deterrent force.¹⁴⁸ As the then NATO Supreme Commander General Eisenhower wrote shortly after assuming the post in 1951, “If in ten years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.”¹⁴⁹

Although there had been significant calls for the United States to disengage from NATO throughout the 1980s, it was not until the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 that that failure could be rectified.¹⁵⁰ America’s alliance with Europe had achieved its basic aims: Europe was unified; Eastern Europe had been liberated and

¹⁴⁶ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 75-6.

¹⁴⁸ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 18-23.

¹⁴⁹ Eisenhower to Bermingham, 28/2/1951, *Eisenhower Papers* Vol 12, 77, quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 148.

¹⁵⁰ See for example David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Christopher Layne, "Atlanticism without NATO", *Foreign Policy* 67 (1987); Earl C. Ravenal, "Europe without America: The Erosion of NATO", *Foreign Affairs* 63, no. 5 (1985).

the military threat of the USSR had been removed.¹⁵¹ Europe, like Japan, would finally become responsible for its own defense. Rejecting President Bush's claim that "European and American security is indivisible",¹⁵² neoisolationists came to regard NATO as the ultimate expression of the peace dividend, and along with realists concerned about being drawn into conflicts on the European periphery, advocated a drawdown of American military commitments in and to Europe.

Allied to these concerns, realists worried about the effect of Clinton administration proposals for NATO enlargement on Moscow, and the instability that might result from a policy that might be perceived as an attempt to encircle, isolate and subordinate Russia, rather than integrating them into a new European system of collective security.¹⁵³ Enlargement was a policy whose logic the advocates of disengagement could not understand, and which sparked one of the fiercest national security debates of the decade.¹⁵⁴ The point of an alliance, they maintained, was to pool security against a common foe. Yet NATO seemed no longer to have an enemy:

"If we expand NATO further east, how far are we willing to go?... At what point does an expanded NATO become an anti-Russian alliance... Or do we want Russia in NATO as well? In that case, whom is the alliance directed against? If everyone is under the umbrella, who is outside?"¹⁵⁵

Defenders of enlargement argued that NATO would evolve from a traditional security alliance into an instrument of European security and out-of-area military

¹⁵¹ Hyland, "The Case for Pragmatism".

¹⁵² President George Bush, "The President's News Conference in Rome, Italy", in *NATO Summit*, ed. White House: Office of the Press Secretary (White House, 1991).

¹⁵³ Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). On the politics of NATO enlargement under Clinton, see Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*, 124-29.

¹⁵⁴ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era*, xxiv.

¹⁵⁵ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 76.

cooperation.¹⁵⁶ Such an altered role would however, bring with it commitments that America need not engage in and expose United States troops to dangers they need not face. This attempt to maintain US pre-eminence within an alliance with which it no longer shared security interests left some incredulous:

“It is difficult to imagine how becoming entangled in ancient and intractable ethnic quarrels, religious conflicts, and territorial disputes in regions that have never been deemed relevant – much less essential – to the security of the United States constitutes a worthwhile mission for the American republic. Assuming such burdens would be an exercise in masochism as well as futility.”¹⁵⁷

However, this neoisolationist-realist view was not the dominant one among those calling for retrenchment from the Cold War strategic posture. Most realists favoured maintaining NATO as the cornerstone of a transatlantic alliance, but expected the European role *vis-à-vis* the US to increase. Realists were also opposed to enlargement, predicting greater political and cultural divisions within the alliance that would weaken it and hasten its inevitable demise as American and European security interests grew apart in the absence of a shared existential threat.¹⁵⁸

Ultimately therefore, even those realists who saw value in the continuation of the Transatlantic Alliance believed that the structural realities brought about by the end of the Cold War would force at the very least a reconfiguration of NATO, with the United States accepting less of a leadership role. As Steel sums up, “The problem with NATO is that changes in world politics have outrun the organization’s

¹⁵⁶ Richard M. Nixon, *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One-Superpower World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 142-3.

¹⁵⁷ Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies*, 33.

¹⁵⁸ John C. Hulsman, *A Paradigm for the New World Order: A Schools-of-Thought Analysis of American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 51.

logic.”¹⁵⁹ Republican Congressman John Lander was even more succinct: NATO “expired in 1989”.¹⁶⁰

This school of strategic thought therefore insists that the organisational logic of America’s alliances be reassessed in the light of the changed strategic situation, not justified again on the basis of some hypothetical or discretionary circumstance. Calls for friends to bear more of the burden could therefore have little impact “until America’s allies see GIs leaving their bases in Europe, Japan and Korea.”¹⁶¹ Independence from allies was to be welcomed, since it reduced the burdens on American taxpayers and made it less likely that the United States could be dragged into conflicts in which it had no vital interest.

Conclusion: Neoisolationism As Defensive Realism

Neoisolationists understood that their proposals were unlikely to be well received by the foreign policy establishment, which finds the task of sustaining the international order a difficult one to relinquish, no matter how counterproductive for the United States that mission may appear. As the realist analysts Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz wrote:

“Simply put, the U.S. foreign policy establishment does not want international responsibilities to be reallocated because it fears diminished American leadership and a greater – perhaps even equal – German and Japanese voice in international affairs. Better, they say, to bear disproportionate costs than to

¹⁵⁹ Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 78.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*, 124.

¹⁶¹ Clarke, "The Conceptual Poverty of US Foreign Policy".

yield American control... [in this view] the great post-Cold War danger actually is imperial *understretch*.”¹⁶²

In an environment so totally biased towards internationalism, there is the sense in which some of the advocates of neoisolationism are playing politics rather than genuinely writing strategy – advocating an extremely limited conception of the national interest in order to get foreign policy realism onto the political agenda, particularly in a domestic political climate keen to reduce the federal budget. At the same time, neoisolationism justifies such an agenda because it asserts that for a foreign policy to be effective it requires the support of the American public that generally demonstrates a keen sense of proportion.¹⁶³ The new threats of proliferation, fundamentalism and ethnic conflict around which the foreign policy establishment attempts to mobilise foreign policy are discretionary: none carries the immediate threat to the United States that was present during the Cold War and that was so effective in mobilising American public opinion.¹⁶⁴ That neoisolationist politics had become so important was reflected when the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “one of the nation’s venerable bastions of internationalism”¹⁶⁵, produced a report which focused first and foremost on America’s domestic economy, declaring that “whilst foreign policy has lost glamour, domestic policy has gained urgency... To advance our interests abroad we must get our own house in order.”¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the less politically motivated advocates of American retrenchment remained careful not to present their arguments as the raiding of foreign affairs budgets for domestic wish lists. Whilst recognising the importance of

¹⁶² Layne and Schwarz, "American Hegemony", 19.

¹⁶³ John Mueller, "The Common Sense", *The National Interest* 47 (1997).

¹⁶⁴ Clarke, "The Conceptual Poverty of US Foreign Policy".

¹⁶⁵ Joshua Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁶⁶ Carnegie Endowment National Commission on America and the New World, *Changing Our Ways: America and the New World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1992), 7.

defense, they remained confident in America's strategic advantages, and regarded it as "unpatriotic" to sustain "a bloated budget on the basis of an outmoded and flawed doctrine".¹⁶⁷

Thus Earl Ravenal argues that the United States cannot simply isolate itself but should attempt to "quarantine regional violence and compartmentalize regional instability, but not by active intervention... At most, American policy should encourage regional balances of power, whether bipolar or multipolar. The balances do not even have to be neat and precisely calibrated: Rough and messy ones will do."¹⁶⁸ James Kurth goes further, arguing for the United States to aid regional powers in shaping their legitimate spheres of influence. The US could then be the global hegemon of the regional hegemons – "the boss of all the bosses".¹⁶⁹

Thus the differences between the American nationalist and realist internationalist ends of the spectrum are significant. Yet at the same time the strategies exist along the same spectrum, sharing fundamental ideas of a limited reading of the national interest, and a recognition that victory in the Cold War fundamentally changes the strategic environment in which the United States operates. These ideas that inform the strategy of strategic disengagement reflect the theoretical perspective of defensive or minimal realism, which argues that since states cannot avoid the security dilemma they act to maximise their security rather than their power.¹⁷⁰ This form of realism is inherently declinist, since states will always act to ensure their

¹⁶⁷ Clarke, "The Conceptual Poverty of US Foreign Policy".

¹⁶⁸ Earl C. Ravenal, "The Case for Adjustment", *Foreign Policy*, no. 81 (1990).

¹⁶⁹ James Kurth, "America's Grand Strategy: A Pattern of History", *The National Interest* 43 (1996), 19.

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Realism", in *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, ed. Jennifer Sterling-Folker (Boulder, Colo.; London: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 15. The theoretical foundations of defensive realism can be found in Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma". Examples of defensive realist works include Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Structures of Power and the Roots of International Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1999); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

security against great powers such as the United States. However, although the security dilemma is intractable, it need not spark intense conflict.¹⁷¹ Therefore even this schools more internationalist variants prescribe that America selects its interests carefully, in order to reduce the perception of threat its power elicits, in the belief that it “can and should act as an ordinary great power”.¹⁷²

Defensive realists therefore conclude that what some might perceive as unipolarity is an illusion, a necessarily temporary phenomena, a function of time-lags before the inevitable rise of great-power challengers.¹⁷³ As Christopher Layne writes, such ‘minimalists’:

“advise that the United States should seek security by capitalizing on the dynamics of the balance of power in an emerging multipolar world. They do so because they believe that the United States lacks the resources to sustain its present predominance, and, more fundamentally, because they see hegemony as inherently unstable.”¹⁷⁴

From its understanding that international anarchy creates disincentives for expansionary strategies, defensive realism advocates moderation as the best route to security. Strong states in particular best serve their security interest by pursuing “military, diplomatic and foreign economic policies that communicate restraint.”¹⁷⁵ The challenge was therefore not to seek purposes to which to direct America’s vast power but rather to proportionately assign elements of that power to those genuine purposes to which it needed to be directed. Indeed the lack of threats to American

¹⁷¹ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited", *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2000), 138.

¹⁷² Layne and Schwarz, "American Hegemony", 22.

¹⁷³ Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion".

¹⁷⁴ Christopher Layne, "Less Is More: Minimal Realism in East Asia", *The National Interest* 43 (1996).

¹⁷⁵ Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited", 129.

interests meant that America could not construct a national purpose that might command widespread support. The alternative, however, was not the:

“...promulgation of a ‘grand design’, ‘coherent strategy’, or ‘foreign policy vision’. It is a policy of restraint and reconstitution aimed at limiting the diversion of American resources to the service of particularistic subnational, transnational, and nonnational interests. The national interest is national restraint, and that appears to be the only national interest the American people are willing to support at this time in their history. Hence, instead of formulating unrealistic schemes for grand endeavors abroad, foreign policy elites might well devote their energies to designing plans for lowering American involvement in the world in ways that will safeguard possible future national interests.”¹⁷⁶

Neoisolationism recognises that the overarching structure of the Cold War that established public and bipartisan consensus was unusual, and that the American domestic polity is structurally unsuited to foreign policy activism. As James Schlesinger puts it, “the Founding Fathers did not envision a nation absorbed by foreign policy, let alone one that was the world’s leading power.”¹⁷⁷ Given this structural failing, for the United States to embark on an internationalist course to which it could not be sure to be able to keep could strain America’s friendly relations by creating expectations that could not be fulfilled. Thus, despite the complaints of internationalists, neoisolationism should not be thought parochial or provincial but cautious, fundamentally concerned with the national interest of the United States, and disinclined to endanger American security or prosperity by writing cheques American government and society can’t cash.

¹⁷⁶ Huntington, " ", 49.

¹⁷⁷ Schlesinger, "Fragmentation and Hubris".

CHAPTER 4: 'INSTITUTIONALISING AMERICA'

– LIBERAL MULTILATERALISM

Introduction

Chapter three showed how neoisolationism reflected defensive realist ideas to envision a world in which a secure United States would remain disengaged. This chapter discusses the diametrically opposed views of liberals, who envisioned a new world order in which the ideas of the United States were placed at the very centre of the international system. This chapter outlines the strategy of liberal multilateralism and its sources. It proceeds by first making the liberal case that the United States needed to pursue a multilateralist approach to international politics both as a result of its paradoxical international weakness and in order to sustain the domestic support for internationalism. It then argues that precisely because the emerging security environment was heterogenous and complex the United States needed to engage with others to build regimes and institutions for the effective management of the international system. Liberals drew their strategic ideas from liberal international relations theory, in particular the principle of democratic peace, and the belief that peace and prosperity were indivisible. These ideas generated a strategy based around the enlargement of the liberal community of free market democracies, multilateral cooperation in international institutions and a collectivised approach to security provision. Fundamentally, although liberal multilateralism advocated an unashamedly moral approach to international politics, it was one that was in the national interest of the United States, since its identity was defined by reference to liberal values.

Creating A New World Order

When President Bush proclaimed his ‘new world order’ to Congress in 1990, he was echoing Mikhail Gorbachev’s image of world progress enunciated at the United Nations two years earlier. As the old structures of an international order structured on enmity were collapsing around them, here were the two leaders of that order articulating a new vision of international relations based on the harmony of the values of mankind. Out of what Gorbachev called the “de-ideologisation of interstate relations” would emerge a global order based on universal values, the liberty of peoples and the rule of law.¹ Here in two hopeful speeches was what Francis Fukuyama would proclaim as the ‘end of history’, the result of which would be the realignment of international politics along the principles of liberal order.²

Fukuyama reflected and was the source of an unashamedly idealist and liberal side of the debate surrounding America’s post-Cold War grand strategy. Here was an opportunity to remake the world in America’s image, to realise the dreams of Wilson and usher in an era of perpetual peace in which liberal rights of men would be the foundation of an international order based on cooperative institutions, resurrected from the ashes of the Cold War to fulfil their original purpose of entrenching the American liberal order into the very structure of international society.

This vision was not, however, as utopian as it could be made to sound. American ideology had, after all, proved victorious in the Cold War, and in a world that was

¹ Gorbachev had spoken of the “emergence of a mutually connected and integral world” in which progress was possible “only through the search for a consensus of all mankind, in movement toward a new world order” in which “freedom of choice is a universal principle to which there should be no exceptions.” Bush concurred, arguing that “A new partnership of nations” could construct “a new world order... in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony.” It would be “quite different from the one we’ve known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.” See Mikhail Gorbachev, Speech before the UN General Assembly, 7/12/1988 and George H. W. Bush, Speech before a Joint Session of Congress, 11/9/1990

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

economically increasingly globalised and in the process of undergoing the greatest democratic shift in history, there was, liberals argued, a very real opportunity to use America's preponderant position to underpin collective security and the multilateral management of world order. Such order-building was not some act of hegemonic generosity, (although there were plenty who were happy to praise American enlightenment), but a process that served both the interests of the United States and the world. That the order envisioned by Wilson in 1919 and revived in 1945 was now coming of age had been shown by the coalition, led by the United States and authorised by the United Nations' Security Council, to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in the Gulf War.

At the same time, there was a recognition that America's relationship with multilateralism had long been an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the United States had created and financially sustained an institutional framework of world order after World War II, but on the other it had been constantly tempted to undermine those institutions by acting unilaterally. The roots of this vacillation are not difficult to discern in the exceptionalism that pulled the United States simultaneously in the opposite directions of liberal world-making and domestic preservation, and in the power of the United States since 1945 to act regardless of the sanction or censure of multilateral instruments. Moreover, the institutional structure of the American foreign policy process, in which the joint executive and legislative controllers of policy often have different interests, and which contains an inbuilt bias against foreign engagements in the form of the two-thirds majority requirement in the Senate, makes commitment to internationalism difficult to sustain.³ Whatever the reasons, the United States' record in the development of

³ Stewart Patrick, "Multilateralism and Its Discontents: The Causes and Consequences of US Ambivalence", in *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement*, ed. Shepard Forman and Stewart Patrick (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 7-10.

international law was hardly one of principled leadership: as one realist succinctly noted, “great powers do not make great multilateralists”.⁴

Yet despite these structural and historical impediments, the end of the Cold War was seen by liberals as providing both the means and the opportunity for the United States to embrace its liberal idealism without succumbing to the illiberalism of imperialism. The new President, who had attacked George Bush for his limited and cautious construction of America’s post-Cold War role, reflected that idealism in his first speech to that symbol of liberal multilateral hopes, the United Nations General Assembly:

"During the Cold War we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions... to foster the practices of good government... [and] pursue our humanitarian goal of reducing suffering”⁵

Liberal multilateralism was therefore more than just a grand strategy for the United States, it was a global strategy of integrationist order building. Liberals viewed the position of the United States at the end of the Cold War as providing both the right and the duty to remake world order to institutionalise the principles that had won that conflict: democracy, capitalism and multilateral management of the international system.

⁴ Steven Holloway, "U.S. Unilateralism at the UN: Why Great Powers Do Not Make Great Multilateralists", *Global Governance* 6 (2000).

⁵ Bill Clinton, “Globalism and Interdependence”, Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, 27/9/1993

The Necessity Of Multilateralism

At the end of the Cold War, the global distribution of power was more complex than it is often presented and many thought. Although the United States was dominant in terms of traditional military power, economic power was more evenly distributed between the United States, Europe and Japan, with China's growth likely to make the world of geo-economics still more multipolar. Liberal theory also pointed to the host of transnational relations that were largely outside of government control, from international finance to terrorism, and in this realm power was widely dispersed. Thus the characterisation of American unipolarity was "misleading because it exaggerates the degree to which the United States is able to get the results it wants".⁶

This paradoxical powerlessness owed much to the fact that interstate war was no longer the great arbiter of international politics. Indeed, great power war might even be thought obsolete.⁷ So even though the United States' power was too great to be challenged by any other state, it was not great enough to solve the problems that the new international order posed.⁸ The United States would therefore need to cooperate to address a whole host of transnational issues of varying problematics, from terrorism to climate change and migration to money laundering. On these and other issues the need for international collaboration was obvious, since "unilateral action simply cannot produce the right results on what are inherently multilateral issues."⁹ The United States needed therefore to base its post-Cold War foreign policy on a strategy of inclusiveness, since as part of the international system, "the US simply does not have the luxury of framing policy without reference to the

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38-9.

⁷ Michael Mandelbaum, "Is Major War Obsolete?", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 40, no. 4 (1998).

⁸ Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

perceptions and policies of other states". The post-Cold War moment presented United States foreign policy with the opportunity "to help shape elements of the system in directions that favour the achievement of greater political and economic development and stability."¹⁰

At the same time, the United States needed multilateralism in order to marry a global role to its historical isolation, due to both the absence of a "pull-factor" such as that the Soviet threat had exerted, and the American public's tendency to prefer that the United States 'mind its own business' internationally. The "milieu preferences" for security cooperation through institutionalised commitments; an open door world economy governed by uniform rules of trade; and a commitment to the universal rights of individual liberty that American leaders had reached for in 1919 and 1945 now needed to be reaffirmed in the post-Cold War era. Doing so would both reflect American civic nationalism's built-in affinity for multilateralism, and ensure that the American public remained minded to accept an expanded conception of American interests through collective legitimation and burden-sharing.¹¹ Moreover, it would avoid the costs and potential pitfalls of unilateralism, which both generated false legitimacy for activism that could be emulated and abused by other states, and which would inevitably produce resistance or backlash.¹²

The resultant emphasis on multilateral institution-building drew on a body of international relations theory that had emerged in 1970s and which emphasised the utility of regimes for governing activity within the international system.¹³ These

¹⁰ Ian Lesser, "Multilateral Security: Interdependence and US Strategy", in *Prisms and Policy: U.S. Security Strategy after the Cold War*, ed. Norman D. Levin and United States. Army. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 37-8.

¹¹ Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue".

¹² Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997), 86-90.

¹³ The standard definition of a regime is Stephen Krasner's, who describes regimes as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural (continued overleaf)

regimes could be loose and informal, based on general consultation, or more rigid structures of rules and sanctions, but in its basic character multilateralism involves sacrificing sovereign autonomy for the establishment of mutual group gains.¹⁴ Multilateral norms and institutions had formed the bedrock of the international order after 1945, as American enthusiasm to embed itself in the international order (and avoid the retreat to closed regional blocs of the 1930s) manifested itself in the birth of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT).¹⁵ Insulated by the Cold War and able to put down bureaucratic roots, the postwar institutions and their progeny were also credited with having contributed to the peaceful nature of that conflict's end and the stabilisation of its international consequences.¹⁶ Indeed, here was evidence that having been embedded within the structure of the system itself, multilateral institutions could outlast the structure that produced them. The United States could therefore use its hegemonic position to embed in regimes principles that would provide it with 'structural power' even after its hegemonic position had wilted.¹⁷

The emphasis on embedding American power recognised the dangers inherent in assuming that because of America's preponderant position in the international system it could act unilaterally. Unilateralism threatened to provoke balancing – hard or soft – against the United States; exclude efficiency gains from institutional cooperation; and undermine the legitimacy of the United States as leader of the

Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables", in *International Regimes*, ed. Stephen D. Krasner (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1983), 2. Here 'regime' is used essentially synonymously with 'institution', whilst admitting that the extent to which regimes may be 'institutionalised' may differ.

¹⁴ G. John Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?", *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 03 (2003), 535.

¹⁵ The classic account of this process is Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 163-214.

¹⁶ John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution", *International Organization* 46, no. 3 (1992), 561.

¹⁷ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Susan Strange, "The Future of the American Empire", *Journal of International Affairs* 42, no. 1 (1988).

international order.¹⁸ Hegemony therefore brought with it the obligation to act, and to be seen to act, in the interests of the international order, since self-interested unilateralism would undermine the hegemony that both permitted that unilateralism and sustained the existing order. As Stanley Hoffman warned, “nothing is more dangerous for a ‘hyperpower’ than the temptation of unilateralism”.¹⁹

Multilateralism was therefore a way of both capitalising upon and reinforcing America’s ‘soft power’.²⁰ It recognised the fact that coercive power can repel, and concluded that there was therefore “a much bigger payoff in ‘getting others to want what you want’,” a process which involves using ideological attractiveness and the power of “agenda setting” to hold out prizes for cooperation.²¹ Faced with the overriding requirement to establish an international order for the post-Cold War world that was legitimate and durable, liberals argued that the United States needed to seek a general settlement in a process of ‘constitution building’ that drew upon a multilateral consensus.²² The United States needed once again to realise that its long-term interests were best served by embedding its preponderance in multilateral regimes that would provide the basis of future international order. Indeed, as one scholar had observed as much as fifteen years before, every state had an interest in a network of global rules, and even deep disagreements on what the rules should be did not prevent that interest being recognised.²³

¹⁸ For an overview of these arguments see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "International Relations Theory and the Case against Unilateralism", *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 3 (2005).

¹⁹ Stanley Hoffmann, "Clash of Globalizations", *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2002).

²⁰ Soft power is the ability to obtain desired results through co-option and attraction, for “one country to get other countries to *want* what it wants”. Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power", *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990), 166.

²¹ Josef Joffe, "America the Inescapable", *The New York Times*, 8/6/1997.

²² G. John Ikenberry, "Constitutional Politics in International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 2 (1998).

²³ Stanley Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order: American Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 273-4.

Although international law and institutions had evolved since their mostly postwar inception they had failed to keep pace with changes in the world, but with the end of the Cold War the United States had an “extraordinary opportunity for updating the world order”, since “most of the nations in the world... appear refreshingly open to discussion, negotiation and agreement.”²⁴ Indeed, there was already a striking amount of underlying global agreement in terms of the so-called ‘Golden Rule’ of reciprocity of conduct which could underpin an expansion of international agreements.²⁵ This opportunity might allow the United States to adopt an idealistic foreign policy which embraced multilateral norm-generation, with the specific aim of generating a security architecture in which the global arms trade was regulated and curbed and the United Nations empowered and updated to reflect new geopolitical realities.²⁶ President Clinton’s Secretary of State appeared to agree, arguing that a key task of American statecraft was to “adapt and strengthen” the postwar institutions of Western democracies to “build the security, political and economic structures for the more integrated world of the twenty-first century.”²⁷ The liberal vision for establishing multilateralism in the new world order then, was nothing less than a call for “a new Dumbarton Oaks”.²⁸

²⁴ John H. Barton and Barry E. Carter, "The Uneven, but Growing, Role of International Law", in *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order*, ed. Graham T. Allison and Gregory F. Treverton (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 280.

²⁵ Michael Shuman and Hal Harvey, *Security without War: A Post-Cold War Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 149.

²⁶ David Callahan, *Between Two Worlds: Realism, Idealism, and American Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 291-308.

²⁷ Warren Christopher, "America's Leadership, America's Opportunity", *Foreign Policy*, no. 98 (1995), 13.

²⁸ Carnegie Endowment National Commission on America and the New World, *Changing Our Ways*, 53. The original Dumbarton Oaks conference in 1944 had laid the foundations for the postwar future of international organisations.

“A Jungle Full Of Poisonous Snakes”

Such a visionary order would be necessary for the international community to address the new dynamics of threat that were emerging in that more integrated post-Cold War world. The new international landscape that was forming brought with it, for many members of the American foreign policy establishment, a sense of uncertainty and trepidation. Established landmarks had been removed and new, ambiguous reference points were being tentatively established. Although liberated from the existential threat of nuclear war, a whole raft of lesser, indistinct and uncertain issues simmered away on the surface of international politics, leaving officials unsure where and when a problem might boil over.

Many commentators, policymakers and scholars continued to focus on the traditional political-military concerns of national security. Some worried about the potential for disorder that would result from the dismantling of the Cold War order, particularly the dangers arising from the disintegration of the former Soviet Union’s military establishment and the related danger of proliferation of military hardware and technological knowledge, in particular with reference to weapons of mass destruction (WMD).²⁹ The proliferation of military capabilities was particularly worrying in the cases of ‘rogue states’ determined to undermine the international order either through expansionist aims or by the deliberate creation of regional instability. Standing outside the international order, these states tended to be ruled coercively by cliques opposed to the liberal values that dominated the system, and exhibited aggressive and defiant behaviour, the most worrying element of which was a shared desire to gain WMD capabilities in order to protect their own regimes or

²⁹ Ashton B. Carter, William James Perry, and John D. Steinbruner, *A New Concept of Cooperative Security* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1992), 44-53.

threaten their neighbours. The danger they therefore represented to the stability and peacefulness of the international order was “clear and present”.³⁰

Rogue states were also considered to be a source of terrorism that threatened American interests both abroad and at home, raising the costs of doing business in the process.³¹ Concerns about terrorism grew during the 1990s, as incidences of terrorism increased along with the number of actors resorting to terrorist tactics, ranging from state-sponsored, well-organised groups to individual persons, and as attacks became more lethal and effective. Such was the concern by the late-1990s that Bill Clinton used his address to the United Nations in 1998 to call for the issue to be placed “at the very top of the world’s agenda”. Militant Islamic terrorism received state sponsorship from Iran, Sudan and Afghanistan that enabled it to flourish in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, and to carry out a number of international attacks against Western interests.³²

Terrorism could also flourish in areas of the world where governance was weak and social cohesion threatened by ethnic and nationalist conflicts. These failed and failing states were “utterly incapable of sustaining themselves as members of the international community”, and suffered internal civil and often ethnic conflict alongside economic collapse. The resultant descent into violence and anarchy not

³⁰ Bill Clinton, “Remarks To Multinational Audience Of Future Leaders Of Europe”, Brussels, 9/1/1994. On rogue states see Thomas H. Henriksen, “The Rise and Decline of Rogue States”, *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 2 (2001); Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States”, *Foreign Affairs* 73 (1994); Raymond Tanter, *Rogue Regimes: Terrorism and Proliferation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998). The states most regularly cited during the 1990s were Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Syria. Cuba was also included to a lesser extent, though its designation that owed more due to the United States’ own historical reasons than any genuine security concerns.

³¹ Paul Rogers, *Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Pluto, 2000), 108-16.

³² Peter Chalk, “The Evolving Dynamic of Terrorism in the 1990s”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (1999). Islamist attacks on Western interests included the World Trade Center, New York City, 1993; US air force personnel at the Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia, 1996; Western tourists in Luxor, 1997; the US Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, 1998; USS Cole in the port of Aden, 2000. For a representative overview of perceptions of terrorist threats in the 1990s see Walter Laqueur, “Postmodern Terrorism”, *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (1996).

only threatened their own citizens, who often became subject to massive human rights abuses, but also their neighbours, who were forced to deal with the destabilising consequences migration flows and the presence of conflict on their borders.³³ As the Director of the Agency for International Development put it in 1994, “disintegrating societies and failed states with their civil conflicts and destabilizing refugee flows have emerged as the greatest menace to global stability.”³⁴

Yet at the same time new ‘security threats’ seemed to emerge by the week in the early 1990s. Formerly domestic issues of crime and poverty became subsumed into the national security debate.³⁵ This manifested itself most clearly in the attempt to go to ‘war’ on drugs. By taking a supply-side approach to the admittedly severe social problem of illegal drug use, policies and rhetoric surrounding the issue came to regard those responsible for importing drugs into the United States as threats to national security. Even the Lord-High-Priest of hard-headed realism concurred, arguing that the internal situation in Colombia, a weak state in which a guerrilla movement controlled most of the countryside and which was the world’s largest supplier of cocaine, was “the most menacing foreign policy challenge in Latin America for the US.”³⁶

This process of ‘securitising’ domestic social problems and other issues that required political action as threats to national security even extended to issues of the physical future of the planet. Formerly the preserve of the natural sciences, political commentators now argued that the range and extent of these problems were so great

³³ Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States", *Foreign Policy*, no. 89 (1992).

³⁴ J. Brian Atwood, "Suddenly, Chaos", *The Washington Post*, 31/7/94.

³⁵ Then Secretary of State Warren Christopher confirmed this blurring of domestic and foreign threats by citing a domestic crime bill as a foreign policy achievement. Christopher, "America's Leadership, America's Opportunity", 26.

³⁶ Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 90.

that some argued that the “social fabric of our planet” was being destroyed as a result of demographic, environmental and societal stresses. The global environment was threatening to become “the national security issue of the 21st century” with the effects of environmental degradation, surging populations and scarce resources felt in the political impacts of migration, civil conflict and war.³⁷ Although only occasionally leading directly to conflict, the vicious cycle of human and resource impoverishment would exert a downward pull on economic performance and political stability and feed existing religious and ethnic conflicts.³⁸ These effects were likely to be felt most sharply in what used to be called the Third World and which was becoming increasingly disconnected from the world of the advanced nations, creating a rich-poor divide that would fuel conflict and resistance that would be impossible for Western states to keep the lid on.³⁹ The bleak conclusion, according to one former National Security Council official who would return to government in the Clinton administration, was that human population and economic growth was rendering ever scarcer the planet’s finite resources, and that therefore, in Einstein’s words, “we shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive”.⁴⁰

This expansion of what constituted security issues during the 1990s was both rhetorical and practical, as policymakers engaged daily with the complexities and possibilities of ‘security’ in a wider sense; and conceptual, reflecting a shift away from neorealist theory and its focus on the state as the object to be ‘secured’.⁴¹ The concept of security was therefore both broadened to consider non-military security

³⁷ Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy", *The Atlantic*.

³⁸ Mathews, "Redefining Security".

³⁹ Rogers, *Losing Control*.

⁴⁰ Mathews, "Redefining Security", 177. For a rebuttal of Mathews’ views, see Daniel Deudney, "The Case against Linking Environmental Degradation and National Security", *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* (1990).

⁴¹ Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods", *Mershon International Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (1996).

threats, and deepened, to consider the security of individuals and groups, rather than focusing solely on external threats to states.⁴² As a United Nations Report explained, the rationale for this expanded definition of security was that:

“The concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly: as security of territory from external aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global aggression, or as protection of national interests in foreign policy or as global security from the threat of nuclear holocaust. It has been related more to nation-states than to people... Forgotten were the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who sought security in their daily lives.”⁴³

It was not that many of these issues had not existed during the Cold War, of course they had. Indeed some were addressed by the superpowers, both separately and in concert. Others were considered useful and even actively fomented as a tool of superpower competition. But all were subsumed by the bipolar system itself and their importance judged within the framework of Soviet-American rivalry. Absent that barometer in the 1990s, each threatened to become urgent.

For liberal multilateralists, this proliferation of security issues only reiterated the need for multilateral system management and cooperative responses to security issues, to both reduce the likelihood of conflict and address the humanitarian suffering that resulted when it did. One nation alone, no matter how powerful, could not function as the world’s policeman, but a cooperative order could establish institutions and regimes to both prevent security threats arising and seek to address them when they did.

⁴² Roland Paris, "Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?", *International Security* 26, no. 2 (2001), 97.

⁴³ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994: New Dimensions of Human Security* (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

Liberalism Reincarnate

Apart from the instrumental utility of institutions and regimes, they provided a unique opportunity to establish liberal principles within the structure of the international system. The end of the Cold War therefore represented the second coming (or rather a third chance) for the liberal approach to international relations. The first attempt had ended in the failure of Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations, having comprised an "institutionally thin" liberal order organized around the principle that states would act virtuously to uphold open trade and national self-determination. It was simultaneously massively ambitious – seeking a universal transformation of both international order and the ways of doing of international politics – and strikingly limited, its foundations resting not on serious security commitments or limitations on state sovereignty but rather in the hoped-for power of the force of moral suasion.⁴⁴ Yet despite the isolationism that followed the Senate's refusal to ratify the League American diplomats continued to commit themselves to multilateral arrangements for disarmament and conflict prevention.⁴⁵

The second instantiation of liberalism in the international system arose from the war that Wilson's League could not prevent, and whilst it envisioned a similar "one-world" liberal system as the League it recognized the importance of wedding the great powers to that order first and foremost, and of creating a thicker network of institutions through which the international politics of the liberal order could be conducted. In both economic and security affairs, multilateral institutions embedded liberalism in the international system, helping to sustain and share the burden of America's Cold War commitment.⁴⁶ However, the combination of the sheer power

⁴⁴ G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order", *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 01 (2009), 75.

⁴⁵ Callahan, *Between Two Worlds*, 59.

⁴⁶ John Gerard Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

of the United States and the advent of the Cold War swiftly turned an international liberal order into a liberal hegemonic order, with the United States cast in the role of owner and operator. Thus the second major attempt to embed liberalism resulted not in an international liberal order but in a Western liberal order, based around the security commitments of NATO and the economics of free trade that together stood in opposition to communism.⁴⁷

Whilst admitting that “the liberal imagination is vast”, it is possible to identify a number of consistencies that delineate the liberal approach to international order and which link historical attempts to make liberal multilateralism the organizing principle of the international system. Liberals envision an open, rule-based system in which states trade and cooperate to achieve mutual gains. This cooperation rests on the assumption that international actors have a common interest in the establishment of a cooperative world order, and that states can overcome the constraints of anarchy to achieve collective and cooperative ends. That the restraint and commitment necessary is possible is underpinned by the view that international trade has a pacific effect on states, presenting incentives to cooperation and in the institutions that are established between states, reinforcing collective action and creating a sense of responsibility in the international community. Finally and crucially, democratic states are the most able and willing to cooperate to create and abide by the rules of an open system, because they are inherently peaceful in their dealings with other democratic states. Liberal states have therefore been able to ‘co-bind’ each other by locking themselves into mutually constraining institutions.⁴⁸ “National security liberalism”, in Tony Smith’s conception, is therefore fundamentally about the promotion of three ideas: democracy, open markets and

⁴⁷ Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0", 73-8.

⁴⁸ Ibid. The liberal theory of international relations is vast and fragmented literature, but an excellent short statement of the structure of the liberal international system is Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order", *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 02 (1999). For a more in-depth exposition of liberalism alongside the other great schools of international relations thought, see Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: Norton, 1997).

international institutions to regulate conflict.⁴⁹ These ideas were once again the central themes around which liberal multilateralists in the 1990s argued for an expansion of the Western liberal order of the Cold War to encompass the entire international system.

Inseparable Siblings: The Indivisibility Of Peace And Prosperity

The case for liberal multilateralism rests most fundamentally on an understanding of the international system that states on the one hand that peace in the system is effectively indivisible; and on the other that economic interdependence binds the prosperity of nations to one another. Moreover, prosperity and peace are bound together in a virtuous circle of liberal economic and political norms. America's own security and prosperity was therefore intimately bound up in the peacefulness and prosperity of the rest of the world. Free markets and democracy formed a "symbiotic and reciprocal relationship that produced free, stable and prosperous societies... What was important, from the US perspective, was that the existence of one increased the probability of the existence of the other, and that both produced benefits for the United States."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Tony Smith, "National Security Liberalism and US Foreign Policy", in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Rick Travis, "The Promotion of Democracy at the End of the Twentieth Century: A New Polestar for American Foreign Policy?", in *After the End: Making U.S. Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. James M. Scott (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 253.

Democracy, Politics and Peace

The peaceful nature of democracy is perhaps the most important single idea of the post-Cold War period. Although its origins go back as far as Kant's advocacy of a league of democratic states in *Perpetual Peace*, the arguments of democratic peace theory became particularly prominent only with the opportunity to engage in principled order-building in the absence of the constraints resulting from the aftermath of great power war, the usual precursor of major structural change. Democratic principles, it was argued, had to be placed at the very centre of the new world order, because of one salient fact: "constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another".⁵¹

This assertion is as bold as it is simple. It can be disputed empirically: Wilhelmine Germany was at least semi-democratic immediately before the First World War; Peru and Ecuador were nascent democracies when they went to war in the nineteenth century; the United States was certainly involved in undermining democratic regimes – most notably Allende in Chile – during the Cold War. Yet that these counter-examples are so few and so marginal only serves to highlight how strong the empirical case is.⁵² The democratic peace therefore constitutes "one of the strongest nontrivial or nontautological generalisations that can be made about international relations."⁵³ In a social science that struggles to justify the description,

⁵¹ Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part I", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1983), 213. It has further been argued that democracies are more peaceful in general. Rudolph J. Rummel, "Democracies Are Less Warlike Than Other Regimes", *European Journal of International Relations* 1 (1995). However, the liberal arguments for democratisation in the 1990s tend to draw on democracies' relations with each other, so I will restrict my comments to this core argument. Indeed Doyle, in advancing the primary empirical finding, notes that the very processes that promote peace among democracies can exacerbate conflict between liberal and nonliberal societies. Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part II", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (1983), 324-5.

⁵² Hulsman, *A Paradigm for the New World Order*, 22-3.

⁵³ Bruce M. Russett, *Controlling the Sword: The Democratic Governance of National Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 123.

here is a repeatable finding, a truth about its subject matter – democracies do not go to war with one another.⁵⁴

If the fact of the democratic peace is relatively uncontroversial, the reasons for it are fiercely disputed. Why should states with a particular similar form of government be able to overcome the imperatives of structural anarchy? Kant had posited three causal hypotheses: the force of public opinion which eschews belligerence; democratic states' trade interactions that establishes peaceful relations; and the role of shared values and common institutions in creating norms of peaceful interaction. A great deal of research took place in the 1990s based around each of these hypotheses, with results that were at best inconclusive. The role of public opinion varies between states, and seems to exercise a restraining effect only in the case of the outright use of major military force. Although countries with extensive trade ties are statistically less likely to go to war, the direction of the cause-effect relationship between trade and peace is unclear. Similarly, whilst the historical evidence supports the idea of a norms-based pacific union amongst democracies, it is unclear whether that union reflects cultural or historical ties rather than anything intrinsic to democracy itself.⁵⁵

Further causal hypotheses, such as the shared expectation deriving from domestic politics of the non-violent contestation of power; the high risks to democratic leaders' political futures associated with foreign wars; and the transparency of democratic societies which allows for mutual recognition of both peaceful intent and the costs of war, have proved equally difficult to demonstrate beyond doubt.⁵⁶ Yet at the same time the basic fact of the democratic peace remained, and since liberal ideology seemed to prohibit war against liberal democracies liberals saw in the

⁵⁴ For a survey of the statistical studies that have shown this result, see Steve Chan, "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise", *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (1997).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-77.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 77-82.

democratic peace a self-fulfilling prophecy that the further that democratic peace was extended, the more peaceful the world would be.⁵⁷ Liberal states, Michael Doyle had noted, had created a “separate peace”, but with democracy now the dominant form of political organisation, liberal foreign policy ideology held the key to world peace.⁵⁸

For liberal multilateralists, “preserving the legacy of the liberal peace without succumbing to liberal imprudence”, was the key task of American grand strategy in the post-Cold War period.⁵⁹ Thus their prescriptions for American foreign policy were two-pronged: democracy promotion on the one hand, and multilateral means on the other. It was therefore on the issue of means that the liberals differed from the neoconservatives in their shared goal of spreading democratic governance. Whilst the democratic globalists advocated the unashamed use of American primacy to remake the world in its own image, liberal institutionalists favoured embedding liberal norms in the international system through the use of organisations and regimes that would create incentives for democratic reform, and thought it “critical” to avoid the temptation to promote democracy through force or threats of force.⁶⁰

Despite eschewing unilateral or militaristic means, liberals sought to make exporting democracy the cornerstone of American grand strategy, believing it could replace anticommunism as the organising principle of American internationalism, capable of sustaining a domestic consensus that would enable American order-building.⁶¹ To some extent the United States had relied on the rhetoric of democracy promotion during the Cold War, but high ideals were often subsumed by the need to support

⁵⁷ John Owen, "How Liberalism Produces the Democratic Peace", *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994), 95.

⁵⁸ Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics", *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986), 1152; Hulsman, *A Paradigm for the New World Order*, 23.

⁵⁹ Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics", 1163.

⁶⁰ Shuman and Harvey, *Security without War*, 104.

⁶¹ Travis, "The Promotion of Democracy".

any and all non-communist forces, which more often than not meant that the United States supported right-wing dictatorships rather than encourage truly democratic forces out of the fear of the rise to power of left-wing elements sympathetic to the Soviet Union. As President Kennedy had explained America's dilemma following the assassination of the Dominican Republic's tyrannical but anti-communist dictator, Rafael Trujillo: "There are three possibilities in descending order of preference; a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the Trujillo regime, or a Castro regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we really can't renounce the second until we are sure that we can avoid the third."⁶² During the Cold War then, anticommunism had trumped democracy, and order was valued above freedom. Henry Kissinger's attitude towards Allende's Chile neatly summed up the order of America's Cold War priorities: "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people."⁶³

The end of the Cold War therefore represented the opportunity to right the necessary evils of superpower competition, and to reengage with the ideals of the American revolution to support and extend the democratic revolution that was taking place in the world.⁶⁴ Typically, American policymakers drew lessons for others from the historical experience of the United States. Thus in preaching patience with democratisation efforts, Strobe Talbott noted that following American independence, "it took 11 years to draft a constitution, 89 to abolish slavery, 144 to give women the vote, 188 to extend full constitutional protections to all citizens. And four score and seven years along the way, we were in the midst of a civil war."⁶⁵

⁶² Quoted in Jervis, "The Future of World Politics", 66.

⁶³ Quoted in William Blum, *The CIA, a Forgotten History: US Global Interventions since World War 2* (London; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1986), 235.

⁶⁴ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁶⁵ Strobe Talbott, "Democracy and the National Interest", *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 6 (1996), 63.

Yet far from being “some starry-eyed crusade”, a commitment to support, promote and defend democracy was consistent with America’s national interest.⁶⁶ Peace was indivisible since modern communication has expanded both what people knew and cared about beyond their borders, a process that was beginning to break down the exclusivity of identity. Moreover, security issues that had traditionally been thought the domestic preserve of other states were more likely to produce “spillover effects” to neighbouring states, for example in refugee flows. In this “turbulent” world, as one author put it, chaos, complexity and disorder were rendering more porous the barriers between states.⁶⁷ Thus the basis for placing democracy promotion at the heart of United States grand strategy was that American values and interest reinforce each other, since “In short, the well-being of Americans is increasingly tied to that of ‘foreigners’.”⁶⁸

“In an increasingly interdependent world Americans have a growing stake in how other countries govern, or misgovern, themselves. The larger and more close-knit community of nations that choose democratic forms of government, the safer and more prosperous Americans will be, since democracies are demonstrably more likely to maintain their international commitments, less likely to engage in terrorism or wreak environmental damage, and less likely to make war on each other.”⁶⁹

Whilst the liberal commitment to democracy promotion rested primarily on the arguments of the democratic peace, it was not just about the reliable nature of liberal states internationally. Domestically too, democratic regimes tended to respect the human rights of their populations, seek to improve social conditions avoid economic disasters. Democracy promotion was therefore not just about the moral imperative

⁶⁶ Christopher, "America's Leadership, America's Opportunity", 14-15.

⁶⁷ James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

⁶⁸ Lesser, "Multilateral Security", 39.

⁶⁹ Talbott, "Democracy and the National Interest", 48-9.

of human freedoms, it was about human needs, and democracies were most consistent in fulfilling those needs. As Amartya Sen noted, it was “a remarkable fact in the terrible history of famine” that no significant famine had ever “afflicted any country that is independent, that goes to elections regularly, that has opposition parties to voice criticisms, that permits newspapers to report freely and to question the wisdom of government policies without extensive censorship.”⁷⁰

Democracies then, could free people not just from tyranny and violence, but from privation and want. Liberals therefore posited a connection between democratic economics and politics in which the liberty of the individual to consume became as important to generating peaceful relations between states as did his political freedom.

Interdependence, Prosperity and Peace

Interdependence became the *leitmotif* of the arguments for liberal multilateralism in the 1990s, which embraced globalisation as the defining feature of the post-Cold War order. There was of course nothing particularly new in the lionising of economic interdependence as the source of peaceful relations between states. Norman Angell’s *The Great Illusion*, published in 1909, although often presented as an argument about the impossibility of war and whilst admittedly a liberal anti-war tract, was actually a far more sophisticated material argument concerning the costs and benefits of war, the ideas of which formed the basis of liberal internationalist arguments for open markets.⁷¹ The “Great Illusion”, wrote one contemporary reviewer, was the idea that military and political power gave states commercial and socio-political advantages and that the prosperity of militarily weak states was

⁷⁰ Amartya Sen, "Freedoms and Needs", *New Republic* 210, no. 2/3 (1994), 34.

⁷¹ Cornelia Navari, "The Great Illusion Revisited: The International Theory of Norman Angell", *Review of International Studies* 15, no. 4 (1989).

somehow at the mercy of the stronger ones.⁷² Angell's was a statement of the effects of what he called 'modern economic civilisation', and sat among a related body of 'utopian' work in the early part of the twentieth century that dealt with the economic bases of peace, the conditions of peaceful change, the role of public opinion and the effect of rules, regulations and agreements.⁷³

The central ideas of this early body of work were revived in the post-Cold War period by International Relations theorists studying the effects of globalisation and international economic regimes, and articulated as a new liberal economic order by political leaders. Two distinct arguments are advanced by modern liberals, both of which seek to enunciate the rationale behind the dictum that "prosperous neighbours are good neighbours".⁷⁴ The first holds that trade leads to prosperity, which in turn leads to democracy which is peaceful.⁷⁵ That trade leads to economic growth is undisputed, and the correlation between prosperity and democracy is clear.⁷⁶ At the same time, the causal processes that explain this correlation are hotly disputed.⁷⁷

⁷² Amos S. Hershey, "Review: The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage", *The American Political Science Review* 5, no. 2 (1911).

⁷³ Peter Wilson, "The Myth of the 'First Great Debate'", *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 05 (1998), 14.

⁷⁴ This phrase is attributed to the US Treasury official Harry Dexter White, quoted in G. John Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Grand Strategy: Democracy and National Security in the Post-War Era", in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115-6.

⁷⁵ The argument was originally popularised by Seymour Martin Lipset, who revisited his thesis in his Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in 1993. See Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993 Presidential Address", *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994); Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959).

⁷⁶ John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole, "Does High Income Promote Democracy?", *World Politics* 49, no. 1 (1996).

⁷⁷ A good short overview of these debates is Michael Mousseau, Havard Hegre, and John R. O'neal, "How the Wealth of Nations Conditions the Liberal Peace", *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 2 (2003). Also see Edward D. Mansfield and Brian Pollins, *Economic Interdependence and International Conflict: New Perspectives on an Enduring Debate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Gerald Schneider, Katherine Barbieri, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, *Globalization and Armed Conflict* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Nonetheless, ideas about the positive effects of modernisation through trade have been a constant feature of liberal proposals for United States foreign policy from Wilson onwards, and continued to be prominent during the 1990s. The second rationale asserts that trade leads to interconnectedness which in turn creates mutual dependencies that lead to peace. Trade itself is a source of order because it creates commercial linkages that blur national boundaries, undermining a state's ability to act upon nationalistic economic interest, and increasing a state's stake in the maintenance of a stable international order.⁷⁸ Participation in an open trade order, moreover, can have socialising effects on states that can act as a kind of "democratic solvent", opening up societies and dissolving the political supports of undemocratic regimes.⁷⁹

However, this literature recognised that the economic realities of the 1990s were significantly different from either the late-nineteenth century European trading system or the world economy of the previous fifty years. The system was far larger, having integrated new states from the former communist bloc into a system of free trade and witnessed the emergence of rising economic powers from the developing world, but the connections within it were more multiple and less deep as a result. Cold War allies were beginning to regard themselves as economic competitors to the United States, which instead of accounting for fifty percent of global GDP as it had in 1945 now accounted for around twenty-one percent. Information and communication technologies were speeding up the pace of economic interactions, particularly in global financial markets, which were increasingly replacing governments as the arbiter of capital allocation worldwide.⁸⁰ 'Globalisation' became the buzz-word to describe these changes, which emerged concurrently with

⁷⁸ Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Grand Strategy", 116-7.

⁷⁹ G. John Ikenberry, "Why Export Democracy?: The 'Hidden Grand Strategy' of American Foreign Policy", *The Wilson Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1999).

⁸⁰ W. Bowman Cutter, "A New International Economic Order?", in *At the End of the American Century: America's Role in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Robert L. Hutchings (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 136-45.

an increasingly associated global social order that meant that interconnectedness now went “farther, faster, deeper”, thickening and intensifying as well as broadening the networks of interdependence.⁸¹

However, despite the siren calls of globalisation, economic nationalism was becoming increasingly prominent, giving rise to protectionist and mercantilist sentiments in the early period of the decade. Since American power was based on economic and technological leadership, “the debate on competitiveness must become a debate on national security.”⁸² Poor educational attainment; unacceptable poverty and associated crime levels; persistently declining median income; all threatened America’s ability to sustain its fundamental values and institutions, which was to say, its national security.⁸³ Others pointed to the erosion of America’s technological superiority, and in particular the need to integrate military research towards civilian commercialisation purposes or face being overtaken by economic competitors.⁸⁴ These considerations would be so important in the post-Cold War world that failure to make progress on this domestic economic and social agenda “threatens America’s long-term national security more than the traditional preoccupations of security and foreign policy.”⁸⁵ Trade ‘hawks’ therefore argued that the reduced military security imperative had opened the way for the vigorous

⁸¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Globalization: What's New? What's Not? (and So What?)", *Foreign Policy*, no. 118 (2000). On globalisation, see Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000); David Held, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999).

⁸² Michael Borrus and John Zysman, "Industrial Competitiveness and National Security", in *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order*, ed. Graham T. Allison, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 136.

⁸³ Peter G. Peterson and James K. Sebernius, "The Primacy of the Domestic Agenda", in *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order*, ed. Graham T. Allison, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 66-9.

⁸⁴ B.R. Inman and Daniel F. Buton Jr., "Technology and U.S. National Security", in *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order*, ed. Graham T. Allison, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

⁸⁵ Peterson and Sebernius, "The Primacy of the Domestic Agenda", 69.

unilateral promotion of American trade interests, and did so with not inconsiderable success, particularly in Congress.

Others, however, retorted that the dichotomy between foreign and domestic policy on which the trade hawks' arguments rested was becoming increasingly false.⁸⁶ It was simply not true that states could act unilaterally in pursuit of narrow economic interests without ultimately harming their own economic prosperity in a world in which economic success was a function of interdependence. Paul Krugman, the outspoken liberal economist, described the focus on economic competitiveness as "a dangerous obsession" which threatened the international economic system, and was not alone in warning that neo-mercantilist ideas threatened the rise of military conflict between competing trade blocs.⁸⁷ In such an environment, cooperation was essential to provide "institutions that promote international economic stability and effective crisis management" and to generate "consensus on common approaches to key global problems."⁸⁸ The President therefore needed to "zero in on the global economy", update his campaign slogan to "the international economy, stupid", and confront the deeper economic issues of a globalised world by means of common rules and joint commitments.⁸⁹

An updated economic architecture needed to integrate the emerging economies – China, India and Brazil in particular – into the multilateral governance organisations, most pointedly the G7.⁹⁰ The Clinton administration's focus on "Big Emerging Markets" (BEMs) was therefore justified as more than simply a trade strategy targeted at economic growth and job creation. As part of what was termed 'global

⁸⁶ Lesser, "Multilateral Security", 37.

⁸⁷ Paul Krugman, "Competitiveness: A Dangerous Obsession", *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994). See also C. Fred Bergsten, "The World Economy after the Cold War", *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 3 (1990).

⁸⁸ James R. Golden, "Economics and National Strategy: Convergence, Global Networks, and Cooperative Competition", *The Washington Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1993), 289, 306.

⁸⁹ Robert Kuttner, "Clinton Has to Zero in on the Global Economy", *Business Week*, 21/12/1992.

⁹⁰ Cutter, "A New International Economic Order?", 151.

economic engagement”⁹¹, it was also a means of integrating and sustaining emerging states within the liberal order, both to prevent domestic failures that might provoke humanitarian or sectarian-separatist security concerns, and to further isolate potential “backlash” states from the broader will of the international community. By focusing on the rising players and smoothing their introduction to the stability of “transnational civil society”, the United States could ensure that everyone kept playing the same game, to prevent “any credible alternative ideology to open markets and, by extension, to liberal democracy.”⁹²

This was a strategy of ‘transnational integration’ designed to ‘ensnare’ foreign economies and make an open capitalist order an international *fait accompli*, and to enhance the likelihood of mutual rather than relative gains.⁹³ In order to establish the regimes necessary to manage this changed international order the United States, liberals argued, needed to work collaboratively with the other major economic powers, Europe and Japan in particular. Together, the ‘Big Three’ needed to assert control of economic management to shape the evolution of the new world economic order, to build an order of “true multilateral cooperation” which could simultaneously revive America’s economic performance whilst establishing multilateral agreements to contain the threat of mercantilist behaviour.⁹⁴ The United States, therefore needed multilateralism “to ensure that the playing field is level” through the revision of existing commercial architecture “to provide a consistent

⁹¹ Joan E. Spero, “The New Centrality of Economics in US Foreign Policy”, speech to EC Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce, Brussels, 11/3/1993

⁹² John Stremmler, “Clinton's Dollar Diplomacy”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 97 (1994).

⁹³ Theodore H. Moran, *American Economic Policy and National Security* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993), 74-6. The Clinton administration was clear that it considered both Europe and Asia as integral partners on trade, which was the “leading edge of foreign policy”. Jeffrey E. Garten, “Clinton’s Trade Priorities for 1994... and Reflections on Europe”, speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany, Frankfurt, 24/1/1994

⁹⁴ Michael Borrus, Steve Weber, and John Zysman, “Mercantilism and Global Security”, *The National Interest* 29 (1992).

framework for trade agreements” and the “continued integration of the world economy”.⁹⁵

The expansion of democracy, the opening of markets and the embedding of liberal norms in the regime architecture of the international system – here was the liberal multilateral approach to creating and managing international order. Such a strategy was intended to be preventative, seeking to avoid conflict by offering the carrot of integration and the promise of prosperity. It saw peace as a condition that could be created and sustained, rather than a happy accident, a transitory pause amidst the norm of anarchy and conflict. In a truly liberal multilateral system, “a genuine new world order”, military conflict would be “a symbol of defeat because it would mean that the most critical non-provocative policies – the tools of economics, democracy, diplomacy and law – had failed.”⁹⁶

Collectivising security

Whilst institutional cooperation, democratisation and the riches of integrated liberal capitalism might create substantial incentives to prevent war, they could not be expected to restrain all leaders all of the time. The security provisions of military power would not therefore become redundant no matter how successful liberal multilateralism proved. At the same time, liberals believed, the indivisibility of peace and prosperity meant that the fate of nations was bound up with each other, and so the provision of security must be collectivised.

The liberal multilateral approach to collectivised security in the post-Cold War period featured two distinct and complementary approaches for international security provision, collective security and cooperative security.

⁹⁵ Peter F. Cowhey and Jonathan D. Aronson, "A New Trade Order", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1992).

⁹⁶ Shuman and Harvey, *Security without War*, 233.

Collective Security

Collective security is a commitment by states, when necessary, to band together to balance against states in transgression of multilaterally agreed rules of conduct. Stability is therefore the product of regulated cooperation, rather than the unregulated balancing of competition under anarchy.⁹⁷ Collective security makes for more effective balancing because it confronts aggressors with preponderant force.⁹⁸ Indeed, its proponents claim, even when collective security fails, the residual balancing of the directly threatened states is roughly equivalent to the coalition that might be formed as a result of balancing under anarchy.⁹⁹ Collective security, in short, is a win-win:

“The case for collective security rests not on woolly-headed moralism or naiveté about the demands imposed on states by power politics. It rests on a more nuanced understanding of international politics than that offered by structural realism. The post-Cold War era offers an excellent laboratory in which to pit these competing theoretical perspectives against each other.”¹⁰⁰

Laboratory experiments in collective security got underway quickly, as Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait on the 2nd August 1990 led to a series of United Nations resolutions calling for Iraq to withdraw unconditionally. Multilateral economic sanctions were applied and a US-led international coalition waged an air and ground war to liberate Kuwait. On the surface, here was a textbook example of collective security in operation, in which the international community balanced together to reverse an aggression committed against one of its members. However, the United States’ decision to invade had in fact been taken unilaterally, with the

⁹⁷ Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "The Promise of Collective Security", *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995), 52-3.

⁹⁸ Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe", *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991), 117-8.

⁹⁹ Kupchan and Kupchan, "The Promise of Collective Security", 55.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

United Nations simply legitimising military action, which although contributed to by American allies was undertaken under US command.¹⁰¹

The Gulf War showed that collective security could not help but reflect the realities of individual states' own capabilities. Thus even for the most idealistic liberals, it had to be the responsibility of the United States to underpin any global collective security regime. America's military dominance meant that was only realistic, as President Bush's National Security Strategy had made clear. "As the world's most powerful democracy, we are inescapably the leader... The pivotal responsibility for ensuring the stability of the international balance remains ours."¹⁰²

At the same time, collective security in a system dominated by one power contains real difficulties, necessitating as it does either American leadership in material contribution and therefore policy-setting, or a smaller American contribution and truly multilateral decision-making. Yet few who argue for a liberal multilateral strategy advocate that the United States defer to other members of the international community. Indeed, truly multilateral security enterprises would be *more* difficult to sustain, since American dominance brings with it the possibility of providing collective goods efficiently, avoiding the inevitable burden-passing and resultant discord if a sizeable number of states are asked to contribute relatively equal shares to a collective enterprise.¹⁰³ Joseph Nye therefore borrowed from economics to note that "if the largest consumer of a collective good, such as order, does not take the lead in organising its production, there is little likelihood that the good will be produced by others."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, liberals see American provision of the public good of security as a source of international order not only in

¹⁰¹ The best account of the thinking of the Bush White House towards Iraq can be found in Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration*, 86-128.

¹⁰² White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, March 1990

¹⁰³ Jervis, "The Future of World Politics", 68-9.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph S. Nye, "What New World Order?", *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 2 (1992), 95.

terms of other states' behaviour but also the actions of the United States, since binding itself to act multilaterally would:

“...provide a safeguard against the excessive use of American power. This might benefit all concerned: the United States would not be able to act on its own worst impulses; others would share the costs of interventions and would also be less fearful of the United States and so, perhaps, more prone to cooperate with it.”¹⁰⁵

Collectivising security might therefore mitigate the perceived threat that American military dominance gives rise to in others, and legitimise America's position as the sole superpower. Moreover, the United States could not sustain a position as the multilaterally-authorized unilateral supplier of security. Indeed, most security issues did not require the sophisticated and overpowering application of American military force, but multilateral commitments across a spectrum of other areas.

Cooperative Security

It was in the engagement of more plural security concerns than interstate war that security needed to be cooperative rather than collective. Cooperative security ideas focused on preventing the means for large scale organised aggression from being assembled rather than countering threats once they arise. In this sense, cooperative security differs from collective security “as preventative medicine differs from acute care.”¹⁰⁶ In practice this involved building upon the binding international agreements that restrain military operations – from global non-proliferation treaties

¹⁰⁵ Robert Jervis, "International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle?", *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993), 66.

¹⁰⁶ Carter, Perry, and Steinbruner, *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*, 7.

to intelligence sharing and establishing regional cooperative security arrangements – to “thicken and unify” this web of commitments.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, cooperative security would be required to do more than simply build security norms and institutions. In “the age of deregulation” security issues were more pervasive and interrelated than ever before.¹⁰⁸ This complex, unstructured order brought with it a litany of threats and challenges, and the danger that “chaos is an infectious disease”.¹⁰⁹ Cooperative humanitarian interventions in cases of ethnic conflict, civil war or genocide, would therefore be required to maintain order and prevent the spread of insecurity.¹¹⁰ And since in such cases historic national interests might prevent conflicts being regarded as collective security threats, organisations such as NATO, which are more flexible than the United Nations, were therefore “invaluable international networks for coordinating common responses” in a host of situations, with “precisely the kind of command, control, communications, intelligence and logistics networks required for cooperative security or humanitarian efforts”.¹¹¹

Cooperative security is not an alternative to collective security, rather they two are intended to be mutually reinforcing. There remained a need for collective security as a “residual guarantee” in the event of aggression.¹¹² Yet cooperative security sought to establish security through collaborative and institutionalised consent, and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 9, 58-65. Examples of cooperative security arrangements working proactively include The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (CSCE) diplomatic missions in Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, and Moldova, among others in the early 1990s. Gareth Evans, “Cooperative Security and Intrastate Conflict”, *Foreign Policy*, no. 96 (1994), 16.

¹⁰⁸ Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff*, 21-48.

¹⁰⁹ Madeleine K. Albright, “Use of Force in a Post-Cold War World”, Address at the National Defense University, Washington DC, 23/9/1993

¹¹⁰ David Callahan, *Unwinnable Wars: American Power and Ethnic Conflict* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

¹¹¹ Golden, “Economics and National Strategy”, 108.

¹¹² Janne E. Nolan, *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994), 4-6.

to replace deterring aggression with mechanisms that make preparation for it more difficult. At the same time, it justified security actions which collective security guarantees could not validate, to address security threats where states' traditionally conceived vital interests might not be engaged, despite the danger to international order more generally. In this, cooperative security favoured activist, pre-emptive action through specialised institutions and regimes, as well as *ad hoc* and partial coalitions, to the spontaneous universal balancing of collective security. Taken together, the collectivisation of security was a key tenet of a liberal multilateralist strategy for the United States, allowing it to set the international security agenda and act internationally to address threats without the constraints imposed by the twin stigmas of unilateralism or self-interest.

Conclusion: America's Liberal Grand Strategy

For liberal multilateralists, the proliferation of post-Cold War security threats mandated the means of American grand strategy be based around a commitment to multilateral instruments, democracy promotion, open markets and collectivised security. This school of thought is the grand strategic expression of the key ideas of liberal international relations theory: that democratic, interdependent and prosperous states are inherently peaceful, and that states are both able and willing to cooperate and bind themselves to norms, institutions and regimes to create and sustain order. The nature of the post-Cold War security environment made such cooperation essential: its threats and challenges could not be dealt with by a strategy of 'liddism'. Only by actively seeking to extend and deepen an integrative international system could a balance be maintained in favour of order over chaos.

At the same time, it was inevitable that American internationalism should have a liberal and democratic character – the values of individual freedom, rights and democracy, after all, were the defining features of the United States' self-image, the

content of American identity.¹¹³ Therefore the central argument of liberals in the 1990s was that an American policy that advocated universal liberal principles of human rights and democratic governance was actually profoundly in the national interest of the United States. As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it on the eve of a Presidential trip to Africa, promoting liberal values “is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do”.¹¹⁴ A liberal grand strategy was not mere ideas or ideals, it had real practical value for the US government, because a world in which liberalism was dominant was a world in which the United States could most effectively pursue its interests, foster a stable order and reduce security threats.¹¹⁵

However, the rhetoric of liberal strategy also lay in the perceived need to articulate an idealist vision of American grand strategy in order to sustain support for American internationalism, since “the American people have never accepted traditional geopolitics or pure balance-of-power calculations as sufficient reason to expend national treasure or dispatch American soldiers to foreign lands... [they] want their country’s foreign policy rooted in idealpolitik as well as realpolitik.”¹¹⁶ Curiously this was a perception not borne out by poll data which showed “very limited support among either the general public or opinion leaders for the expansion

¹¹³ Henry R. Nau, "America's Identity, Democracy Promotion and National Interests: Beyond Realism, Beyond Idealism", in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Tony Smith, "Making the World Safe for Democracy", in *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in The "American Century"*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45. Albright had made the same point with reference to Indonesia the previous week. Madeleine Albright "Remarks at 1998 Asia Society Dinner", New York, 17/6/1998

¹¹⁵ Ikenberry, "America's Liberal Grand Strategy", 103.

¹¹⁶ Talbott, "Democracy and the National Interest", 49.

of democracy abroad, and that the end of the Cold War has not given rise to heightened approval for that goal.”¹¹⁷

Since the vast majority of liberal multilateralist thinking had its origins in academia and left-of-centre politics, it is unsurprising that much of this liberal thinking appeared in the Clinton administration’s 1995 *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, which advocated preventative diplomacy, open markets, democracy promotion and security cooperation to address a diverse range of threats.¹¹⁸ This strategy based the necessity of American engagement in the world on sustaining and expanding the community of market democracies which bought it peaceful relationships. Democratic enlargement was “the Clinton Doctrine”, the result of the “Kennan sweepstakes” to define a new “compass word” for American foreign policy in the post-Cold War era. Presented with the opportunity to establish the strategy by managing the transition of states of the former Soviet Union from communism to market democracy, the President likened the strategy of enlargement to the domino-theory in reverse; encouraging and supporting rather than preventing a succession of mutually reinforcing societal changes that were in the interests of the United States.¹¹⁹

Liberal multilateralism then, was an attempt to embed the fundamental features of the United States within the international system, to universalise American society in the norms and institutions of the world economic and political system. Whilst many of its suggested means were prosaic, the daily grist of international lawyers and technocrats, its ambition was startling. For here was an attempt to extend the Western settlement of 1945 to the entire world, to capitalise on the ideological

¹¹⁷ Ole R. Holsti, "Promotion of Democracy as Popular Demand?", in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 177.

¹¹⁸ William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, White House, February 1995. See also Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement".

¹¹⁹ Douglas Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine", *Foreign Policy* 106 (1997).

vacuum the Soviet Union had left, and to make Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis a *fait accompli*.

CHAPTER 5: AMERICAN PRIMACY – ENSURING NO RIVALS DEVELOP

Introduction

As chapter four made clear, liberals were ambitious in their vision of the capacities of American leadership. Yet their world-making paled in comparison with the diverse arguments that argued for the aggressive promotion of American primacy. Rejecting liberals' arguments for self-binding, this school drew on offensive realist theories of international relations that emphasised the structural imperatives for expansion, and on theories of hegemonic stability that highlighted the possibility of a stable unipolar order. This chapter begins by making the case that, unlike many contemporary approaches to policies of American dominance, discussions of neoconservative foreign policy are an unhelpful way of analysing this debate, which requires instead a broader and less ideological approach to understanding the sources of arguments for American primacy. It then proceeds to discuss the history of arguments for primacy in the post-Cold War era, and expand upon primacists' approach to making strategic assessments, one that hinges on the possibility of one state maintaining a preponderant position of power. Since primacy serves to universalise American interests, the chapter then discusses the universal threats to those interests, and the emphasis on primacists' advocacy of unilateral military responses to them. It then disaggregates the advocates of American primacy into two distinct camps on the basis of their differentiated goals for that primacy: assertive nationalists on the one hand and democratic globalists on the other. The chapter concludes by emphasising offensive realism's theoretical contribution to this school of thought, which argues that the United States should take on the burdens of empire.

The Neoconservative Convergence: The Diverse Sources of Primacy

This chapter assesses the arguments that were put forward during the 1990s in support of a grand strategy of American primacy. Advocates of strong American leadership could be found among liberals, indeed it can be argued that perhaps the most high-profile advocate of liberal grand strategy, the political scientist John Ikenberry, was also a primacist, in that he recognised the importance of American power in building and sustaining liberal institutions.¹ Yet the advocates of primacy do more than advocate the utility of American power. In their rejection of multilateral institutions as an unacceptable constraint on American freedom of action, and their overwhelming focus on the use of military means, primacists stand in direct opposition to the arguments of liberals that emphasise the necessity of self-binding.

Foremost among the advocates of American primacy are neoconservatives, a loose grouping of public intellectuals prone to “highly politicized and often polemical language” that, as Michael Williams notes, often “sits uncomfortably with the culture of scholarly discourse and with overtly theoretical debate in particular.”² If they were initially a movement of former Marxists who became disillusioned by the value-relativism of Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ liberalism, by the 1990s few neoconservatives had ever railed against the New Left or been anything other than card-carrying Republicans.³ If the original neoconservatives were better understood

¹ Ikenberry’s “general argument” is that the liberal political order is “cemented by the hegemonic power of the United States.” G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition: Essays on American Power and World Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 2.

² Williams, “What Is the National Interest?”.

³ Much of the work on neoconservatism is polemical, lacking in either historical rigour or philosophical insight, and overly focused on the philosophical role of Leo Strauss. Kenneth R. Weinstein, “Philosophic Roots, the Role of Leo Strauss, and the War in Iraq”, in *Neoconservatism*, ed. Irwin M. Stelzer (London: Atlantic, 2004). A good, if by now a little outdated, history covering the core ideas is John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). For an overview of neoconservative thought on a range of policy issues see Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The* (continued overleaf)

as “a group of people rather than as a group of ideas”, the movement’s growth and progress only emphasized that philosophical heterogeneity.⁴ Moreover, the level of vilification that has been attached to neoconservative thought in the wake of the 2003 Iraq War means that the term has ceased to have a great deal of analytical usefulness.⁵

Indeed, by the end of the 1990s the majority of would-be practitioners of ‘neoconservative’ grand strategy had no history in the movement in terms of its broader philosophical ideas.⁶ Some prominent neoconservatives had reacted to the end of the Cold War by advocating a return to realism – for them, the ideological challenge of the Soviet Union had been defeated and America needed to abandon its idealistic moralism and revert to being a ‘normal country’.⁷ Although the neoconservatives did make a significant contribution in arguing for primacy, as many of those who made the case for American dominance after the Cold War did so from different intellectual backgrounds and for reasons that were far removed from neoconservative rationale.

Perhaps even more importantly, there has been a tendency in academic circles to treat neoconservative thought as an aberration, a temporary affliction in the American foreign policy tradition. It is not uncommon in the critical literature on neoconservatism to find conspiratorial notions of cabals, references to godfathers

Autobiography of an Idea (New York; London: Free, 1995); Irwin M. Stelzer, *Neoconservatism* (London: Atlantic, 2004). Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke’s book is perhaps the most thoughtful critique of recent neoconservative foreign policy prescriptions. Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*. Michael Williams usefully discusses neoconservative thought in terms of international relations theory. Williams, “What Is the National Interest?”.

⁴ John Guelke, “The Political Morality of the Neo-Conservatives: An Analysis”, *International Politics* 42, no. 1 (2005), 98.

⁵ Jonah Goldberg, “Kill This Word - Poor, Abused, Unrecognizable, Meaningless 'Neocon'”, *National Review*, 2/4/2007.

⁶ Charles Krauthammer, “The Neoconservative Convergence”, *Commentary* July-August (2005), 26.

⁷ Irving Kristol, “Defining Our National Interest”, *The National Interest* Fall (1990).; Kirkpatrick, “A Normal Country in a Normal Time”.

and a tendency to view neoconservative intellectuals as agents of Israel's Likud party, intent on subverting US foreign policy for Zionist ends.⁸ Focusing on these myths has meant that scholars have often failed to address the arguments of neoconservatives on their own terms, and to appreciate that they and their intellectual antecedents, far from being a 'blip', have actually been ever-present in debates over American grand strategy. There have been self-confessed neoconservatives in American administrations since Nixon, and arguments for a hard-power based, activist American foreign policy have a history as long as the republic itself.⁹

For the philosophical and practical reasons outline in this introduction, arguments for American primacy can and should not be identified purely with neoconservatism. The assumptions, ideas and analysis that underlie the arguments for a grand strategy of American primacy need to be assessed on their own merits, and understood in terms of the historical environments in which they arise – international and domestic; ideological and empirical. The next section will address the history of those arguments following the Cold War.

“Bully on the Block”

For Colin Powell, America at end of the Cold War had to send out a message: “We have to put a shingle outside our door saying, ‘Superpower Lives Here’... we exist to go kick someone's butt if necessary. I believe that if you look like you can kick

⁸ For overviews of the conspiratorial treatment of neoconservatives see Max Boot, "Neocons", *Foreign Policy*, no. 140 (2004); Joshua Muravchik, "The Neoconservative Cabal", *Commentary* September (2003).

⁹ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*.

someone's butt, more often than not it will not be necessary.”¹⁰ Thus the crux of primacy arguments is that the end of the Cold War left America in a dominant position, and from that position America needed to not only maintain but extend its superiority. Primacy would ensure security, because no potential adversary could hope to get close enough to the power of the United States in order to challenge it.¹¹

Early in 1992 the world became aware of how American primacists envisaged President Bush's 'new world order' taking shape, as leaked drafts of the Pentagon's 'Defense Planning Guidance' found their way into the offices of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. According to these reports, the classified document made the case for “benevolent domination by one power” of the post Cold War world, requiring “concerted efforts to preserve American global military supremacy and thwart the emergence of a rival superpower in Europe, Asia or the former Soviet Union.”¹²

“Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival... the U.S. must show the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture... There are other potential nations or coalitions that could, in the further future, develop strategic aims and a defense posture of region-wide or global domination. Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.”¹³

¹⁰ "Hearing on Defense Authorization, 1/2/1990", in *Senate Armed Services Committee*; "Hearing on the Fiscal Year 1993 Defense Budget, 3/1/1992", in *Senate Armed Services Committee*.

¹¹ Brooks and Wohlforth argue that once a country achieves material primacy it passes a threshold beyond which counterbalancing dynamics cease to operate. Stephen G. Brooks and William Curti Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹² Barton Gellman, "Keeping the U.S. First: Pentagon Would Preclude a Rival Superpower", *Washington Post*, 11/3/1992; Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Ensuring No Rivals Develop", *New York Times*, 8/3/1992.

¹³ "Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival'", *New York Times*, 8/3/1992.

The leaked documents were part of a process of debate within the Pentagon that was being carefully orchestrated by Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, assisted by hawkish policy aides including Paul Wolfowitz, who was responsible for the Pentagon's plan and I. Lewis 'Scooter' Libby.¹⁴ The leak was embarrassing for the Bush presidency, and the document's importance was hastily played down.¹⁵ A softer version was leaked to the press and the controversy subsided.¹⁶

However, the ideas behind the plan didn't go away, and although some of the more blunt language was softened the plan that Cheney published after Bush lost the election was essentially the same as the draft Wolfowitz's policy team had produced. The United States intended "to lead in shaping an uncertain future so as to preserve and enhance this strategic depth won at such great pains." This would be achieved by maintaining "highly capable forces" capable of precluding "hostile competitors from challenging our critical interests."¹⁷ As David Armstrong summarised, the Defense Strategy for the 1990s was still a plan "for the United States to rule the world... It was kinder, gentler dominance, but it was dominance all the same. And it was this thesis that Cheney and company nailed to the door on their way out."¹⁸

Some of this was bureaucratic, a function of Cold Warriors such as Powell and Cheney arguing for primacy in order to ward off congressional budget cutters.¹⁹ Yet even once Clinton's election on a mandate to exploit the peace dividend for domestic purposes swept such interests out of office, arguments for American

¹⁴ Gary J. Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30-1.

¹⁵ The *New York Times* quoted an Administration official who described the document as a "dumb report" that "in no way or shape represents U.S. policy." Patrick E. Tyler, "Senior U.S. Officials Assail Lone-Superpower Policy", *New York Times*, 11/3/1992.

¹⁶ David Armstrong, "Dick Cheney's Song of America", *Harpers*.

¹⁷ Dick Cheney, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy ", (1993), 2, 7.

¹⁸ Armstrong, "Dick Cheney's Song of America".

¹⁹ Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 29.

primacy remained prominent. In July 1996, the Joint Chiefs of Staff demonstrated that the Pentagon was still thinking along the lines of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance by issuing Joint Vision 2010. This stated that “Full Spectrum Dominance will be the key characteristic we seek for our Armed Forces in the 21st century”, and tasks the military to remain “preeminent in any form of conflict” in order “to prevent threats to our interests from emerging, deter those that do, and defeat those threats by military force if deterrence fails.”²⁰ This conceptual framework was expanded the following year into a fuller strategy that reiterated the goal of full spectrum dominance, defining it as “the ability to dominate any adversary and control any situation in any operation across the range of military operations.”²¹ Here was evidence, wrote one of the few major publications to cover either of these military blueprints, that American military doctrine continued to rest fundamentally on notions of massing military might that drew heavily from the Cold War in order to continue to justify a \$250 billion defense budget.²²

Outside of government, more political advocates of American predominance took up posts as foreign-policy intellectuals in Washington think-tanks – coalescing at the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute and the Center for Security Policy²³ – and wrote influential opinion pieces, particularly in magazines such as *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Commentary*, the *New Republic* the *National Interest*. This kind of public intellectualism meant the ideas of American primacy remained very much alive in the political consciousness as a muscular alternative to the policies of the Clinton administration.

²⁰ United States. Joint Chiefs of Staff., *Joint Vision 2010* ([Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996).

²¹ United States. Joint Chiefs of Staff., *Concept for Future Joint Operations: Expanding Joint Vision 2010* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 56.

²² Bradley Graham, "Pentagon's Plan for Future Draws Heavily from Cold War Past", *The Washington Post*, 11/5/1997.

²³ On the role of think tanks in formulating foreign policy, see Donald E. Abelson, *American Think-Tanks and Their Role in US Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

Some on the right had actually switched their allegiance to the Democratic candidate, whose criticisms of the incumbent's strict interest-based realism and advocacy of American values in the international arena went down well with primacists. However, it was not long into Clinton's presidency before primacists began to criticise the appeasement, misguided interventions and lack of moral courage which would become their scathing characterisation of the Clinton era.²⁴ Effectively utilising the popular news media, in particular *Fox News*, advocates of American predominance were able to take their message to a far larger audience. When Rupert Murdoch launched *Fox News* in 1996, his claim that it would represent both sides of the political spectrum was seen by conservatives as an indication that *Fox* wouldn't pander to what they believed was a liberal bias in the American news media.²⁵ So it proved, as Fox signed up prominent advocates of American primacy such as William Kristol, resulting in news coverage that was significantly to the right of both all other television news networks and the views of the average elected American official.²⁶

By the end of Clinton's second term, the primacy arguments from opposition conservatives had coalesced into a fully articulated strategy of global dominance published by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century* took the ideas of the earlier Defense Planning Guidance and developed them into an overwhelmingly thorough, meticulously detailed and unashamedly primacist grand strategy for the United States. This entailed maintaining an ability to "fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars"; a commitment to

²⁴ Joshua Muravchik, "Lament of a Clinton Supporter", *Commentary* August (1993).

²⁵ Jim Rutenberg, "Cable's War Coverage Suggests a New 'Fox Effect' on Television", *New York Times*, 16/4/03.

²⁶ Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (2005). The introduction of *Fox News* is thought to have had a significant impact on the vote share in Presidential elections between 1996 and 2000. Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan, "The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting", (National Bureau of Economic Research 2006).

performing the “constabulary’ duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions”; control of “the new ‘international commons’ of space and ‘cyberspace’” and a network of bases and long-range capabilities to allow the United States to “project military power around the globe”.²⁷

“The United States is the world’s only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world’s largest economy. Moreover, America stands at the head of a system of alliances which includes the world’s other leading democratic powers. At present the United States faces no global rival. America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible. There are, however, potentially powerful states dissatisfied with the current situation and eager to change it, if they can, in directions that endanger the relatively peaceful, prosperous and free condition the world enjoys today. Up to now, they have been deterred from doing so by the capability and global presence of American military power. But, as that power declines, relatively and absolutely, the happy conditions that follow from it will be inevitably undermined.”²⁸

Thus, “in a collective voice, PNAC spelled out the particulars of a global empire strategy”.²⁹ The strategy required funding increases: from \$70 billion to \$95 billion per year for the army; from \$91 billion to \$110 billion for the Navy and Marine Corps; and from \$83 billion to \$115 billion for the Air Force, a combined increase for the three services of almost one-third. All this to maintain “the enormous disparity between US military strength and that of any potential challenger [that] is a good thing for America and the world.”³⁰ As the British historian Bernard Porter put

²⁷ "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century", (Project for the New American Century, 2000).

²⁸ Ibid., i.

²⁹ Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 137.

³⁰ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996), 26.

it, rather than denying American empire, a certain type of American not only “grasped the nettle, but rather likes the feel of it”.³¹

America Unrivalled – Building Preponderance

Primacists approach the process of assessing the international environment by asking whether the United States is preponderant. The first subject of analysis is not other states’ capabilities or their threatening postures, but America’s strength. Is America strong enough to afford her freedom of action in the international system? If not, what are the constraints placed upon that freedom, and what is required to free the United States from those shackles? Primacy, before all other considerations, is itself the goal and the means of strategy.

Approaching the international system in this way betrays certain theoretical assumptions about the nature of the international system, and particularly, about the possibility of a stable unipolar order. Unipolarity is a structure in which one state’s capabilities are too great to be counterbalanced.³² In the main, International Relations theory rejects unipolarity. For structural realists, it can only be a temporary phenomenon, since “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads other states to balance against it.”³³ For realists, the costs of a strategy of preponderance may actually provide other potential great powers with relative advantages that enables them to rise to challenge the hegemon. States will always attempt to balance because no matter how benign the hegemon may appear, its

³¹ Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.

³² William C Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World", *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999), 9.

³³ Kenneth Waltz, "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective", *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24, no. 4 (1991), 669.

future intentions cannot be guaranteed.³⁴ Elsewhere, the very idea of the kind of power concentration implied by unipolarity is anathema to liberal and constructivist theorists of International Relations.³⁵

Advocates of primacy however reject these traditional ways of thinking about power concentrations in international politics. They concur with structural realists that states will attempt to balance power, not because power is threatening, but rather because anarchy creates powerful incentives for states to expand. Thus where defensive realism sees states as security maximisers, offensive realists believe that states seek to maximise their power. This offensive realist way of understanding the international system implies that rather than being a game of chess, with powers jostling for position, international relations is in fact a perpetual race in which the aim is to gain, keep and extend a lead. Therefore, “status quo powers are rarely found in world politics, because the international system creates powerful incentives for states to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals, and to take advantage of those situations when the benefits outweigh the costs. A state’s ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system.”³⁶

Primacists use the logic of a world of revisionist powers to justify continued American expansion.³⁷ In doing so they regard a unipolar system, with the United

³⁴ Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion". Layne sums up this point in a 'revisiting' of his 1993 article: "In international politics there are no benevolent hegemons." Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming of the United States' Unipolar Moment", *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006), 27.

³⁵ William R. Thompson, "Systemic Leadership, Evolutionary Processes, and International Relations Theory: The Unipolarity Question", *International Studies Review* 8 (2006), 5.

³⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 2001), 21.

³⁷ Significantly, this is not Mearsheimer’s view. He argues that the stopping power of water makes attaining global hegemony nearly impossible. *Ibid.*, 40-42. Christopher Layne, although no primacist, responds as part of an excellent analysis of Mearsheimer’s arguments that the logic of “robust offensive realism suggests that global hegemony is the best grand strategic response to the fear and uncertainty that are endemic to international politics.” Christopher Layne, "The Poster Child for Offensive Realism: America as a Global Hegemon", *Security Studies* 12, no. 2 (2006), 130.

States maintaining a significant lead over all other states, as not only attainable but desirable, and a source of security and justice. Unipolarity is a peaceful state of international politics, because it removes two of the major sources of instability from the system: hegemonic rivalry and balance-of-power politics among the major powers. In a system that is unipolar, there are no aspiring or potential hegemons seeking to alter the status quo since no state can hope to get close to the sole superpower. The goal of primacy is therefore to present second-order states with the inconsequential strategic options ranging from enthusiastic bandwagoning with the polar power to studious avoidance of direct enmity.³⁸ Thus primacy aims to deter balancing and force bandwagoning behaviour: so long as the US remains committed to, and consistent in, its hegemonic role, peaceful stability should follow.

The key critique of unipolarity from a structural realist perspective, is not its peacefulness but its durability. In international relations overwhelming power repels and states balance against hegemons, because international structure impels great power emergence.³⁹ As Paul Kennedy puts it, “the only answer” to the question of whether the United States can maintain predominance “is ‘no’ – for it simply has not been given to any one society to remain *permanently* ahead of all the others”.⁴⁰ At the same time, how long we should expect the inevitable process of adjustment to take is not specified by neorealist theory, and it is for this reason, and the lack of any clear moves towards balancing behaviour in the course of the 1990s that a range of scholars provide explanations of the possibility of a more enduring unipolar system.⁴¹

³⁸ Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World", 23-28.

³⁹ Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion". and Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics", *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993).

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 689.

⁴¹ Ethan B. Kapstein, "Does Unipolarity Have a Future?", in *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War*, ed. Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Both Layne and Waltz expect balancing within 20 years of the end of the Cold War, or as Waltz puts it, “sooner or later, usually sooner” because it is a ‘structural anomaly’ for (continued overleaf)

For Wohlforth, both the extent of the United States' dominance and its peculiar advantages of geography, and in particular, its enduring alliances to the north and south, reinforce the likely longevity of American unipolarity.⁴² This idea draws on Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, which suggests that states balance against their perception of threat rather than power *per se*. Thus "states that are viewed as aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them... intention, not power, is crucial."⁴³ Balance of threat theory therefore suggests that balancing behaviour may be overcome by powerful states reassuring weaker states, thus mediating the power-disequilibrium and leading other states to regard the status quo as preferable to the rivalry of multipolarity.⁴⁴

Unipolarity may then be durable, or at least, longer-lasting, if the polar power is considered 'benign', that is, if the other states in the system do not have a sense of threat commensurate with the difference in capabilities. Charles Kupchan argues that this can be achieved through 'self-binding', a process which sanitises power through restraint, multilateralism and the promotion of joint gains. "Self-binding is the mechanism through which states render their power benign... [it] entails a state's willingness to withhold power, to refrain from fully exercising its resources and influence."⁴⁵ This fits in with an idea derived from international political economy, hegemonic stability theory, which emphasises that dominance may be reflected in

a country to choose not to become a great power and that choice is difficult to sustain. Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion", 7; Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics", 66.

⁴² Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World", 28-37. This argument is expanded upon in Brooks and Wohlforth, *World out of Balance*.

⁴³ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 25-26. See also Brooks and Wohlforth, *World out of Balance*, 60-97.

⁴⁴ Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War", *International Security* 21, no. 4 (1997), 60.

⁴⁵ Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity", *International Security* 23, no. 2 (1998), 46.

‘leadership’ rather than exploitation.⁴⁶ In a unipolar system, a polar power that is prepared to lead may provide the public goods of security and stability through its willingness to exercise its power for systemic ends.

Some who advocate forms of American leadership believe that ‘self-binding’ is necessary to its success.⁴⁷ However, a grand strategy of predominance is predicated on not diluting American power and freedom of action. It does not envisage America leading *primus inter pares*. Rather than rendering American power benign by submitting to self-binding, primacists assume that the United States will be seen as benign because, quite simply, the United States *is* benign – a truth that rests on distinctively American ideas about the special nature of their own nation. American leadership will be accepted because it is American, and, therefore, unipolarity need not be transitory.

For primacists, American dominance is not only good for America, but also good for the rest of the world. Familiar ideas from the history of American grand strategy were used to justify both the United States’ position as the sole global superpower and its determination to build upon that status. America could be trusted with unipolar power because its values were the values of all men. Indeed, the identification of America with the universal rights of Liberty was such that the protection of American hegemony should not just be the priority of the United States, but the priority of most of the rest of the world as well. Indeed, for Kagan:

“The identification of others’ interests with its own has been a striking quality of US foreign policy. The conviction that American well-being depends on the

⁴⁶ Duncan Snidal, “The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory”, *International Organization* 39, no. 4 (1985), 612. The defining application of hegemonic stability theory to international relations is Gilpin, *War and Change*.

⁴⁷ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

well-being of others is based on enlightened self-interest that in practice comes dangerously close to resembling generosity.”⁴⁸

For the proponents of primacy then, the world had nothing to fear from American dominance, and felt assured that “most of the world’s major powers... prefer America’s benevolent hegemony to the alternatives.”⁴⁹ The United States should be prepared to “pay the bill” because in providing security for others in Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific it buys security for itself in the form of stability. Power “exacts responsibility, and responsibility requires a vision that transcends niggardly self-interest.”⁵⁰ The durability of the American system rests therefore rested simply on America’s own choice: that as long as the United States was prepared to bear the burden of global leadership the rest of the world would be happy to follow. The absence of balancing and the increasing gap in economic capabilities through the period of the two Clinton administrations only served to reinforce that impression.⁵¹

The Universality of American Weakness

Given America’s predominant position in the international system, the central idea behind a strategy of primacy is not security but continued dominance. One might assume that dominance would be an auxiliary goal of states, one that can be contemplated once all threats to security have been dealt with and a surfeit of power is left. But for primacists, states are power seekers not security seekers, and so dominance is the origin of everything else, and the source of continued American freedom of action. Threats are identified after the strategy has been chosen, threats

⁴⁸ Robert Kagan, "The Benevolent Empire", *Foreign Policy* 111, no. Summer 1998 (1998), 28.

⁴⁹ Kristol and Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy", 21.

⁵⁰ Josef Joffe, "How America Does It", *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (1997).

⁵¹ On the reality of unipolarity in the 1990s, see chapter 6.

not to the national security of the state, but to the unipolar nature of the system, to the grand strategy of primacy itself.

Perversely, all this dominance may reduce a state's security - as Robert Jervis has observed, empires, whether territorial or ideological, have a larger frontier: thus the very extent of the polar power's influence means that all sorts of disturbances can threaten it.⁵² This insecurity is a function of perception rather than reality, a 'myth of empire' that has historically fuelled the overexpansion of great powers.⁵³ Yet for advocates of primacy, dominance and threat exist in a virtuous circle, since the grand strategy itself may be justified by the myriad of threats to it. Indeed, primacists regarded *complacency* about the United States' strategic situation as the greatest danger of all:

“In fact, the ubiquitous post-Cold War question – where is the threat? – is misconceived... Our present danger is one of declining military strength, flagging will and confusion about our role in the world. It is a danger, to be sure, of our own devising. Yet if neglected, it is likely to yield very real external dangers, as threatening in their way as the Soviet Union was a quarter century ago.”⁵⁴

Therefore, as one might then expect, during the 1990s the primacists' ideas of where the threat to American security lay was both expansive and vacillated with events, to such an extent that it would be almost impossible to construct an exhaustive list of the threats which proponents of American preponderance constructed between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the War on Terror. Such nervous hyperactivity reflected a definition of American interests that was global in scope

⁵² Robert Jervis, "The Remaking of a Unipolar World", *The Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2006), 13.

⁵³ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*.

⁵⁴ Peter W. Rodman, "Russia: The Challenge of a Failing Power", in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, ed. Robert Kagan and William Kristol (San Francisco, Calif.: Encounter Books, 2000). The following chapters in this volume are a laundry-list of threats and challenges to American military, economic and ideological dominance.

and which therefore apparently regarded each and every occasion where America's interests were not met in full as representing a reduction of American power.

Hardened – and hard-line – Cold Warriors initially treated the notion that the Cold War was over with caution, both unsure of the durability of the Soviet Union's internal political changes, wary of the challenges the Soviet leadership faced and conscious of its still-massive military capabilities.⁵⁵ Later in the decade, that prediction was in part realised as Russia became both increasingly nationalist and bellicose under Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer who had made his reputation sanctioning gross human rights violations in Chechnya and whose regeneration of Russian nationalism involved the systematic undermining of the democratic reforms of the immediate post-Cold War years.⁵⁶ At the same time the rise of Russian organised crime posed a direct threat to the peace and stability of the United States and even to world order.⁵⁷ As a Department of Justice Report noted in early 2001:

“The nature and variety of the crimes being committed seems unlimited... but no area of the world seems immune to this menace, especially not the United States. America is the land of opportunity for unloading criminal goods and laundering dirty money.”⁵⁸

Russia was also implicated in exacerbating the threat from Iran, both as a principal supplier of conventional weapons and nuclear assistance and by aligning themselves

⁵⁵ Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 31. Senior members of the Bush administration, including Cheney, Gates, Eagleburger and Quayle believed that Gorbachev's real motive in rolling back the Soviet Empire was to revitalise the existing system. Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration*, 46-7. Outside the inner circle of the administration worries were raised about the instability that might result from the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Post-Communist Nationalism", *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 5 (1989).

⁵⁶ Michael McFaul, "Vladimir Putin's Grand Strategy. . . For Anti-Democratic Regime Change in Russia", *The Weekly Standard*, 17/11/2003.

⁵⁷ Louise Shelley, "Transnational Organized Crime: An Imminent Threat to the Nation-State", *Journal of International Affairs* 48 (1995).

⁵⁸ James O. Finckenauer, I. U. A. Voronin, and National Institute of Justice (U.S.), *The Threat of Russian Organized Crime, Issues in International Crime* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2001), 1.

with Iranian positions on a number of issues in the Persian Gulf. Here was a tactical alliance, wrote the director of National Security Programs at the Nixon Center, designed to fill a geopolitical vacuum in the Middle East and make a common cause against American hegemony.⁵⁹ Iran, for its part, was seeking nuclear weapons in a bid to fundamentally realign the balance of power in the Middle East away from Israel, and, in what was more than a happy coincidence for the Iranian leadership, the United States.⁶⁰ At the same time, Iran's treatment of women was an affront to the American model of moral leadership in the international system that emphasised liberty and equality.⁶¹

The problem of Iranian proliferation was mirrored more urgently with regard to North Korea, where Pyongyang's "deliberately menacing" external policies had placed it in near-permanent conflict with the international community, and in doing so, exposed the United States' weakness by threatening American allies in East Asia and even the United States itself with long-range ballistic missile and nuclear programmes. According to one scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, North Korea was an "unappeasable state", and the United States' "engagement policy" perversely used Western power and resources to preserve, and indeed magnify, North Korea's threat to the West."⁶²

Not that the West was itself necessarily a benign entity. In 1992 separate RAND studies talked of the need to "reduce Japanese incentives for major rearmament" and prevent Germany becoming "a heavy handed rouge elephant in Central Europe."⁶³

⁵⁹ Rodman, "Russia: The Challenge of a Failing Power", 87-90.

⁶⁰ Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Iran's Nuclear Menace", *The New Republic*, 24/4/1995.

⁶¹ Azar Nafisi, "The Veiled Threat", *The New Republic*, 22/2/1999.

⁶² Nicholas Eberstadt, "North Korea: Beyond Appeasement", in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, ed. Robert Kagan and William Kristol (San Francisco, Calif.: Encounter Books, 2000).

⁶³ Richard L. Kugler, "The Future U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Forces and Requirements for the Post-Cold War Era", *RAND Report R-4194* (1992), 11; James A. Winnefeld et al., "A New Strategy and Fewer Forces: The Pacific Dimension", *RAND Report R-4089/2* (1992), 11.

European Union state-building efforts after the end of the Cold War too, were “stirrings of independence bordering on insubordination”.⁶⁴

North Korea’s fellow Communist remnant to the north was even more dangerous. Chinese economic expansion was fuelling its military spending and resulting in short-sighted policies of attempting to engage this anti-democratic human rights violator as a strategic partner. Yet China’s weapons exports and its continued ambitions for regional hegemony meant that the United States could not afford such appeasement if it were to stand with its allies in the region for the hopes of peace, democracy and prosperity in East Asia.⁶⁵

However, the most pressing of these ideologically opposed ‘rouge states’, regarded as challenging America’s predominant position in the international order, was Iraq. The continued presence of Saddam Hussein’s government was regarded by former Bush administration officials as unfinished business from the first Gulf War when a cautious President had failed to cement the new –American – world order by removing a revisionist regime from the strategically important Middle East. Instead, a policy of containing Saddam had allowed him to continue to thumb his nose at American power by stoking regional instability and abusing his own population, whilst all the while attempting to gain weapons of mass destruction with which to threaten Iraq’s neighbours and the United States interests in the region.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Jolyon Howorth and John T. S. Keeler, "The EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy", in *Defending Europe: The EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy*, ed. Jolyon Howorth and John T. S. Keeler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7.

⁶⁵ See Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: A.A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1997); Charles Krauthammer, "Why We Must Contain China", *Time*. See also William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "The Appeasement Gamble", *Weekly Standard* 5, no. May 29, 2000 (2000); William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Call of the Engagement", *Weekly Standard* 4, no. May 24, 1999 (1999).

⁶⁶ The definitive neoconservative case against Iraq is made in William Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan, *The War over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2003).

The litany of threats presented by primacists indicate that they saw the ability of the United States to control international order, rather than the security of the American state, as the essential frame of reference in the post-Cold War world. American dominance is therefore “hub-and-spokes” strategy, in which American unipolarity is the key feature of the international system that had to be defended.⁶⁷ The resulting expansion of American interests to encompass what would normally be thought of as local issues amounted to a ‘Global Monroe Doctrine’ in which the United States extended the principles of non-interference in its own hemisphere worldwide.⁶⁸

The drive for American primacy thus constructed an image of the world as being far more anarchic and unstable than the bipolar conflict that had preceded it. Given the consistent enthusiasm with which he advocated using American power to lay down and enforce the rules of world order, Charles Krauthammer was surely being disingenuous when he wrote in 1991:

“Compared to the task of defeating fascism and communism, averting chaos is a rather subtle call to greatness. It is not a task we are any more eager to undertake than the great twilight struggle just concluded. But it is noble and just as necessary.”⁶⁹

There is of course some irony in those arguing for a grand strategy that explicitly rejects one of the key tenet of traditional realist thought – the innate instability of unipolarity – doing so on the basis of a most extreme form of Hobbesian realism. Yet the idea that the world is intrinsically an incredibly dangerous place, and had become more so with the collapse of the familiar enmity with the Soviet Union,

⁶⁷ Josef Joffe, “‘Bismarck’ Or ‘Britain’? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity”, *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995).

⁶⁸ Adam Quinn, “The Global Monroe Doctrine under Bush and Beyond: Benign Hegemony as Strategic Paradigm”, paper presented at the *ISA-ABRI Joint International Meeting*, Rio de Janeiro, (2009).

⁶⁹ Martin Wallop, “The Ultimate High Ground”, in *America's Purpose: New Visions of U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Owen Harries (San Francisco, Calif.: ICS Press, 1991), 33.

necessitated that the United States have all possible strings to its bow. Robert Kagan worried that “there is no certainty that we can correctly distinguish between high-stakes issues and small-stake issues in time to sound the alarm.”⁷⁰

For Powell that level of uncertainty as to the threat you might face meant “putting it in the mind of an opponent that there is no future in trying to challenge the armed forces of the United States.”⁷¹ Those arguing for primacy fundamentally agreed that the main threat to the United States arose from its being perceived abroad as weak and irresolute.⁷² Therefore, however challenged, the United States had to be able to respond emphatically. “I believe in the bully’s way of going to war. I’m on a street corner, I got my gun, I got my blade, I’m a kick yo’ ass.”⁷³

American Militarism

The grand strategy of primacy requires first and foremost that the United States maintain or extend its geostrategic advantage over the rest of the world. Maintaining primacy then, is about maintaining power – the ability to influence the behaviour of other actors in the system.⁷⁴ Thus the formulation of primacy as a grand strategy does not involve the selection of particular means to address particular threats – we have already seen that the identification of threats is subordinate to the maintenance

⁷⁰ Robert Kagan cited by Owen Harries, "American Power - for What? A Symposium", *Commentary* 109, no. 1 (2000), 28.

⁷¹ "Hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, 6/2/1992".

⁷² Frank J. Gaffney Jr., "American Power - for What? A Symposium", *Commentary* 109, no. 1 (2000), 27.

⁷³ Powell interview with Henry Louis Gates Jr., quoted in Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Powell and the Black Elite", *New Yorker*, 25/9/95.

⁷⁴ Samuel Huntington, "Why International Primacy Matters", *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993), 68.

of primacy. Instead, it involves the creation of policies to maintain America's power dominance, that is, in Mead's conception, they seek to maintain a monopoly on hegemonic power at a global level. As we saw, hegemonic power is dependent on pre-eminence in other areas of power, so it is to these that primacists address their policy prescriptions.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the arguments that advocate American primacy is the extent to which their policy prescriptions were focused on the development of and willingness to use American *military* power. During the 1990s the United States held a military position unmatched since Rome dominated the Mediterranean world.⁷⁵ With the Soviet Union's military capabilities outdated and lacking in the ability to mobilise, the United States was free to take command of the global commons of the sea, the air and of space.⁷⁶ Primacy viewed maintaining this command as the key element in deterring potential adversaries from pursuing military build-up; it is a strategy to "create barriers to entry into the global military power club that are so high as to seem insurmountable."⁷⁷

Yet the proposed increases in defence spending already sketched out should not be seen purely as spending for its own sake. Primacists were highly vocal in advocating a system of missile defence, a 'son of star-wars' in keeping with many primacists' ardent admiration for the muscular foreign policy of Ronald Reagan, and which would require the United States to unilaterally withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.⁷⁸ Primacists tend to reject the possibility that non-proliferation treaties can buy security, because the states from which security may be

⁷⁵ Rodman, "Russia: The Challenge of a Failing Power".

⁷⁶ Barry Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony", *International Security* 28, no. 1 (2003), 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁸ Missile defense was seen by its neoconservative adherents not as a means of reducing American involvement with the world but as a "vital shield that would free the United States to play its leading role". Robert Kagan and Gary Schmitt, "Now May We Please Defend Ourselves?", *Commentary* July (1998), 25.

needed are the ones who are most likely to violate them.⁷⁹ Underlying this is the conviction that the United States should be powerful enough not to need to enter into agreements with hostile powers that will only encourage potential adversaries. Missile Defense therefore, is intended to nullify a potential threat through nothing other than the employment of American power to make the threat obsolete. It is both an accumulation of military power, and a show of might.

A grand strategy of primacy also requires a reconfiguration of American military forces to be able to respond to any of the myriad of potential threats. To this end, primacists' advocacy of full spectrum dominance to take advantage of the revolution in military affairs so that the US could rapidly deploy forces wherever they might be required across the globe. As one prominent commentator put it: "If someone invades your house, you call the cops. Who do you call if someone invades your country? You dial Washington."⁸⁰

American military power would maintain primacy by undertaking a number of global missions. Apart from the usual security requirements of national defence, the American military also needed to continually provide 'insurance' against new and emergent threats. Further, in order to maintain primacy the US military would need to maintain systemic order, preventing or limiting the ability of others to gain certain capabilities, specifically WMD, and punishing those who undermine that order.⁸¹

The literature on primacy is therefore overwhelmingly dominated by recommendations for US defense policy. Primacy is about being by far the strongest military power. So although a strong economy is necessary to maintain America's ability to fund that military strength, economic policy must not undermine

⁷⁹ Jeane Kirkpatrick, "American Power - for What? A Symposium", *Commentary* 109, no. 1 (2000), 34.

⁸⁰ Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World", in *2004 Irving Kristol Lecture* (American Enterprise Institute: 2004).

⁸¹ Elliot A. Cohen, "What to Do About National Defense", *Commentary* 98, no. 5 (1994).

America's military situation. On this basis, Michael Ledeen was moved to describe the dismantling of the export-control system that deprived the Soviet Union of military technology and the subsequent military-technological sales to China as "the greatest crime committed by the Clinton administration".⁸² Yet by in large, primacists take the continued dominance of the American economy for granted, and agree that, at 3.5% of GDP, American military dominance is being purchased "on the cheap".⁸³

Primacists, then, favour the qualities of military power above all else. In spite of, or perhaps because of, their fundamentally coercive nature, primacists reject the notion of softening or sweetening the exercise of that power by deploying it through multilateral mechanisms. Deeply sceptical about the ability of international institutions to play an effective role in international security, primacists argue that the United States can and should act as it chooses, with allies welcome to share the burden but not to constrain strategic choice.⁸⁴ It is for this reason that liberal multilateralists who advocate policies designed to sustain American unipolarity to underpin the strength of international institutions should not be considered primacists – primacy asserts that it is unilateral decisionmaking by the sole superpower that is the best way of managing the international order.⁸⁵

This rejection of multilateralism has a number of sources. Like primacy itself, unilateralism may be considered beneficent on the basis of the ideas of American exceptionalism, which see the United States as a righteous nation founded upon universal values. Some of the critiques of multilateralism reflect a genuine

⁸² Michael Ledeen, "American Power - for What? A Symposium", *Commentary* 109, no. 1 (2000), 37.

⁸³ Paul Kennedy, cited in William C. Wohlforth and Stephen G. Brooks, "American Primacy in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2002), 22.

⁸⁴ Asmus, *The New U.S. Strategic Debate*, xi.

⁸⁵ Charles Krauthammer asserts that "The virtue of unilateralism is not just that it allows action. It forces action." Charles Krauthammer, *American Unilateralism* (2003) available from <https://www.hillsdale.edu/news/imprimis/archive/issue.asp?year=2003&month=01>.

frustration with the failure, both of the theoretical foundation and the practical operation, of the institutions of international society. Thus Charles Krauthammer can pose the question: “By what possible moral calculus does an American intervention to liberate 25 million people forfeit moral legitimacy because it lacks the blessing of the butchers of Tiananmen Square or the cynics of the Quai d’Orsay?”⁸⁶

Some of it derives from the fact the multilateralism constrains the strongest most. For as long as America must coexist with untrustworthy and tyrannical regimes for whom “moral suasion is a farce”, multilateral agreements to which America would bind herself entail a loss of power to those regimes.⁸⁷ Treaties constrain ‘good guys’ who will adhere to them; ‘bad guys’ will either not sign, cheat or openly violate the agreements. On this basis, primacists reject any multilateral policy which might result in the weakening of the relative power of the United States.⁸⁸

The United States’ own military supremacy then, is to all intents and purposes the sole means to the end of primacy. Primacy itself allows the United States to choose to deal with whichever threats present themselves in the post-Cold War world, by virtue of the ability to resort to incontestable force if that threat refuses to be deterred. Sustaining the enormous military gap between the United States and the rest of the world itself sustains American primacy by preventing other powers from even attempting to balance against it, either alone or in concert, as it “raises still higher the coordination and collective action barriers against external balancing.”⁸⁹ It is therefore a grand strategy that seeks to provide America with strategic choice whilst limiting strategic choice to America.

⁸⁶ Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism".

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ John R. Bolton, "Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?", *Chicago Journal of International Law* 1, no. 2 (2000).

⁸⁹ Brooks and Wohlforth, *World out of Balance*, 36.

American Interests and Noble Goals

The major debate between advocates of primacy is the extent to which that primacy should be used for the management of the existing international order versus a more radical reordering of the international system. If, as we have seen, primacy is both a means to the end of security and an end in itself, should it be a means to other ends? And if so, what should those goals be, how important are they, and with which elements of American dominance should they be pursued?

These questions exist on a sliding scale on which there are essentially as many strategies as there are strategists. However, in the 1990s it was possible to identify two distinct camps – those of more realist disposition, that believe that primacy is solely for defeating direct threats to American security; and idealistic muscular Wilsonians, or democratic globalists, who seek to use American power to entrench radical system-wide change to universalise liberal norms through policies of democratisation.

Assertive Nationalists

The first of these groups are simply prepared to accept both the fact of American power and the necessity of its use to defeat threats to US security. In essence then, the United States should have no auxiliary goals, despite its unipolar power. For these assertive nationalists, threats are identified on a traditionally realist conception of the national interest, largely ignoring the ideological character of the threat or any moral imperatives that a situation might be thought to imply.⁹⁰ Highly sensitive to the levels of domestic political capital required for overseas missions, this group of policymakers prefer to husband that capital for times when it's really required –

⁹⁰ Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "It's Hawk vs. Hawk in the Bush Administration", *Washington Post*, 27/10/02.

when vital American interests are threatened.⁹¹ In this sense primacy is maintained primarily for deterrent purposes, with America only being prepared to flex its military muscles when an undeterred revisionist state threatens America's strategic interests, for example, when Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was considered a first step towards a hostile regime gaining control of the oil fields of the broader Middle East.⁹²

The flip-side of this concentration on serious security threats is that the United States should avoid the 'wasteful activism' of humanitarian, nation-building and peacekeeping missions. This rejection of a global policing role was neatly summed up by the former chief of the Central Intelligence Agency's Afghan Task Force. When asked why the CIA had no intention of sorting out the squabbles of Afghan tribal leaders after the organization had been so active in helping to evict the Soviets from Afghanistan, the agent replied that "superpowers don't do windows."⁹³ This has become the organisational imperative for assertive nationalists, who prefer to let regional powers take responsibility for regional issues that do not affect US strategic interests. "America proclaims that "superpowers don't do windows," so if you want your local windows washed, you had better gear up to do them yourselves... History shows that another major conflict is never far away and is usually unpredictable. The United States is the only nation capable of forestalling or fighting that conflict. It must remain focused on doing so, for that is the task no one else can do."⁹⁴

⁹¹ See for example the comments of former secretary of defense James Schlesinger in Harry Summers, "Achilles Heel of Keeping the Peace", *Washington Times*, 17/10/1996.

⁹² Norman Podhoretz, "Strange Bedfellows: A Guide to the New Foreign-Policy Debates", *Commentary* 108, no. 5 (1999), 23.

⁹³ Jonathan Clarke, "Don't Keep U.S. Troops in Bosnia", *Los Angeles Times*.

⁹⁴ John Hillen, "Superpowers Don't Do Windows", *Orbis* 41, no. 2 (1997).

Democratic Globalists

The dominant primacist viewpoint, however, rests on an American exceptionalism in which American action in the world should be predicated on nobler goals than simply the national interest. Having won the Cold War on behalf of the free world, America should continue to defend the universal values on which the nation itself had been founded.

“Barring extraordinary events, the United States will always feel obliged to defend, if possible, a democratic nation under attack from non-democratic forces, external or internal. That is why it was in our national interest to come to the defence of France and Britain in World War II. That is why we feel it necessary to defend Israel today, when its survival is threatened. No complicated geopolitical calculations of national interest are necessary.”⁹⁵

Some primacists, however, go further than simply defending democratic nations from expansionist forces as America had done in the past. Rather, the American national interest requires its foreign policy to actively work against regimes whose values clash with those of the United States. Just as if American values were material elements of the national interest, competition to them must be resisted.

“The nature of the regime is crucial, rather than some alleged underlying, geographically, or economically or culturally determined ‘national interest.’ The priority of the political order implies a morally informed American foreign policy.”⁹⁶

In emphasising this moral component to American grand strategy, these democratic globalists cite the muscular idealism of Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. American primacy provides the opportunity to ensure the universal spread of those values that are bound up in America itself, and the very idea of America as Liberty

⁹⁵ Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion", *The Weekly Standard*, 25/8/03.

⁹⁶ William Kristol, "Morality in Foreign Policy", *The Weekly Standard*.

renders that opportunity a responsibility. If in the 19th Century it had been America's Manifest Destiny to expand the rights of liberty across the continent of North America, the end of the Cold War had bestowed the responsibility to spread liberty worldwide.⁹⁷ Here was an argument for "Neo-Manifest Destinarianism" in which "a unipolar world is a good idea, if America is the uni."⁹⁸

However, it is not just the providence of American history that compels anti-tyranny policies of regime change and support for democratic movements. Democracy is in America's national interest because democracies are inherently more peaceful and, although not always non-irritant, fundamentally sympathetic to America. As Joshua Muravchik points out, the United States could "live comfortably indeed in a world where our worst antagonists were an Olof Palme, a Charles de Gaulle, an Indira Ghadhi, or an Oscar Arias"⁹⁹

This view draws heavily on the ideas of democratic peace theory, famously described by Jack Levy as "as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations".¹⁰⁰ For democratic globalists, the democratic character of a state is the most important variable of all in establishing its behaviour. Their teleological argument states that world peace would inevitably flow from an international system in which liberal democratic governance was universal. Linking personal freedom to the economic doctrine of the free market, democratic globalists

⁹⁷ Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny* (Washington, D. C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1991).

⁹⁸ Ben Wattenberg, "Neo-Manifest Destinarianism", in *America's Purpose: New Visions of U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Owen Harries (San Francisco, Calif.: ICS Press, 1991). In the same volume Martin Wallop humbly refused to claim that "it is our manifest destiny to plant the flag of freedom and human dignity on distant planets" but nevertheless believed that "the high ground of space is where the United States may... find new national purpose." Wallop, "The Ultimate High Ground".

⁹⁹ Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics and War", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988), 662. Democratic peace theory is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5. See Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics"; Owen, "How Liberalism Produces the Democratic Peace"; Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

subscribe to a development formula in which “liberty yields peace, and peace yields prosperity, in exactly that sequence. Elections come first.”¹⁰¹ Thus if the United States can use its overwhelming power to create the conditions of human freedom and democratic elections, not only will America live in a safer world, it will live in a more prosperous world with greater export market potential. As Paul Wolfowitz summed up the democratic argument, “if people are really liberated to run their countries the way they want to, we’ll have a world that will be very congenial for American interests.”¹⁰² Pursuing the “global advance of liberal democracy” was therefore “an overarching American interest.”¹⁰³

In doing so, democratic globalists are more likely than American nationalists to see the value in enhancing America’s alliances with market democracies, both as a tool of regional burden sharing and as a reinforcement of unipolarity. One commentator even went so far as to call for a “confederated West”, a super-sovereign grouping of economically, culturally and technologically linked industrialised democracies whose linked interests could define the international order “all the way”, stopping at “nothing short of universal dominion”.¹⁰⁴

At the same time, democratic globalists view America’s interests as the world’s interests. Rejecting cultural relativism, this school argues that individual liberty is a universal characteristic and aspiration of all human beings, regardless of societal differences, and that therefore liberal democracy, as the socio-political form of

¹⁰¹ Wallop, "The Ultimate High Ground", 224.

¹⁰² Paul Wolfowitz, quoted in Daalder and Lindsay, "It's Hawk vs. Hawk in the Bush Administration".

¹⁰³ Larry Diamond, "Building a World of Democracies", in *Foreign Policy for America's in the Twenty-First Century: Alternative Perspectives*, ed. Thomas H. Henriksen (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), 51.

¹⁰⁴ Wallop, "The Ultimate High Ground". The idea of sharing systemic leadership with other Western states was largely shunned by advocates of American predominance until it was recently revived by Robert Kagan as a league of democracies. See Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

organisation that reflects that universality, can be applied everywhere.¹⁰⁵

Extrapolating from the singular American experience to the universal applicability of that historical success-story, democratic globalists reflect a long tradition of American exceptionalism in their belief that the values on which America was founded and flourished constitute a model for the world.¹⁰⁶ That model of development constituted a single narrative of social and economic modernisation in which modernity is defined as the establishment of American ideas of liberal values and free market economics.¹⁰⁷

Michael Ledeen was not alone in recognising that America's "inescapable mission to fight for the spread of democracy" was a highly revolutionary strategy, but he was certainly one of the most rhetorically robust about it.

"Whenever I hear policy-makers talk about the wonders of "stability", I get the heebie-jeebies... In just about everything we do... we are the most revolutionary force on earth... Without a mission, it is only a matter of time before public opinion will turn against any American administration that acts like an old-fashioned European nation-state... That is why I find the realist position highly unrealistic. The only truly realistic American foreign policy is an ideological one that seeks to advance the democratic revolution wherever and whenever possible."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ See Nicholas Kitchen, "Universalism and Resistance: Rationalising the Iraq Experience," *Paper presented at the ISA - ABRI Joint International Meeting*, Pontifical Catholic University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 22/7/09, available at http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/3/8/0/9/5/p380959_index.html

¹⁰⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, "The American Style: Our Past and Our Principles", *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 2 (1968).

¹⁰⁷ Jahn, "The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy (I)". See also Foley, *American Credo*.

¹⁰⁸ Ledeen, "American Power - for What?". Of course, for realists, a revolutionary hegemon is something of a contradiction in terms: Jervis, "The Remaking of a Unipolar World".

Conclusion: Offensive Realism meets American Exceptionalism

Primacy essentially relies on three core ideas: the offensive realist notion that states are inherently expansionist; the idea that unipolarity is a sustainable structure within the international system; and the nationalist and exceptionalist notion that the United States is the rightful leader of the world. This last notion provides support for the policies prescribed by the first, since primacists believe that only a grand strategy that is aligned with fundamental American values will generate the necessary support to maintain the primacy with which to carry out those missions. As Williams notes, there is a sense in which a “‘moral’ foreign policy reinforces those virtues and values in the citizenry of the US, and helps get their support for pursuing the national interest which they can actually see as an expression of their values, and which they can identify with.”¹⁰⁹ This need arises from the constraints on American power that arise from the nation’s history, identity and political structures, as well as the domestic socio-political issues that threaten to divert resources away from the United States’ hegemonic role.¹¹⁰ This combination of a moral purpose derived from liberty being used to justify a national interest defined as power was summed up in the views of Ben Wattenberg, Chairman of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority and a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, who argued in 1989 that a future strategy based around America’s “‘destiny” of exporting democracy would persuade the American people to keep defense budgets high, whilst all the while acting as a hedge against Soviet imperial recidivism.¹¹¹ In essence, a grand strategy of primacy that articulates a ‘vision’ of support for democracy and human rights

¹⁰⁹ Williams, "What Is the National Interest?", 323.

¹¹⁰ David Mosler and Robert Catley, *Global America: Imposing Liberalism on a Recalcitrant World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), 61-82.

¹¹¹ Ben Wattenberg, "Democracy: Our Mission", *Ludington Daily News*, 14/3/89, 3. The Coalition for a Democratic Majority was formed in 1972 in response to George McGovern’s Presidential candidacy and represented so-called Jacksonian Democrats in attempting to get the Democratic Party to adopt more conservative defense policies.

around the world is a grand strategy that the American public will be prepared to vote for and pay for.

Maintaining domestic support is central to a grand strategy of primacy because the rest of the world needs to be assured of the United States' continued commitment, commitment which will reassure allies and deter enemies and thus prevent challenges to American predominance arising. American power therefore needs to be matched by American willingness to bear its burdens, as noted by a prominent report of the Nixon Center:

“In the real world, our predominant strength is not enough by itself to ensure against a range of potential disasters. Whether America's physical preponderance translates into predominant influence over events depends, for one thing, on a variety of intangibles – like political will and staying power, the credibility of our commitments, our perceived willingness or unwillingness to take risks, our reputation for reliability and competence.”¹¹²

Essentially, the United States needed to be prepared to take on the burdens of empire, to be prepared to set the systemic agenda and to intervene globally to protect and promote its interests and the principles of the system that it sustained.¹¹³ As Colin Powell put it, whilst advocating a Base Force of 1.6 million men, “You've got to step aside from the context we've been using for the past forty years, that you base [military planning] against a specific threat. We no longer have the luxury of having a threat to plan for. What we plan for is that we're a superpower. We are the major player on the world stage with responsibilities [and] interests around the

¹¹² Peter W. Rodman, "Uneasy Giant: The Challenges to American Predominance", (The Nixon Center, 2000), vii.

¹¹³ See the discussion of intervention policy in James G. Roche and George E. Pickett Jr., "Organizing the Government to Provide the Tools for Intervention", in *U.S. Intervention Policy for the Post-Cold War World: New Challenges and New Responses*, ed. Arnold Kanter and Linton F. Brooks (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994). The volume is notable for the universal assumption among its contributors that American intervention is both necessary and justifiable, leading to debate surrounding the tools, structures and methods required for interventions to be most successful.

world.”¹¹⁴ As one commentator pithily put it, here was “an Empire, if you will keep it”.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Callahan, *Between Two Worlds*, 135.

¹¹⁵ Charles Krauthammer, “impiously” paraphrasing Benjamin Franklin, offers this challenge. Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment Revisited”, *The National Interest* 70 (2003), 17.

CHAPTER 6: STRATEGIES OF EMPIRE

Introduction

As we saw in Chapter 5, a section of the debate surrounding American grand strategy held ostensibly imperial ambitions. Yet despite the prescriptions of the advocates of American primacy during the 1990s, thinking about the United States as an empire didn't take hold until the second Bush administration embraced an unashamedly primacist grand strategy after 9-11. This chapter argues that American empire was both an empirical fact and a conceptual reality following the Cold War and that the notion of the United States as an empire informed each of the grand strategic options in the post-Cold War debate. The chapter begins by assessing the reasons why debate about empire was largely absent during the 1990s, chief of which was the idea that the United States, as a liberal polity, did not fit the imperial blueprint. It contests that notion by demonstrating both the congruence of the United States with earlier imperial polities and by recapturing the definitional specificity of hegemony, the term that has replaced empire in much of the contemporary debate. It then proceeds to discuss the nature of the modern United States as an empire, arguing that the United States became an imperial power following the Second World War and that after the end of the Cold War it pursued a policy of liberal empire building that mirrored its earlier postwar planning. This policy drew on each of the grand strategic options presented during the 1990s without fully embracing any single one, resulting in an approach to the second American empire that I characterise as 'uni-multilateralism'.

Denying Empire

Considering the United States as an instance within empire has a long historical tradition, beginning with the establishment of the American Anti-Imperialist League in the aftermath of the Spanish American war and gaining credence with America's rise to great power status after 1919 and its embrace of that role after 1945. Yet it was not until after September 11th when the United States began to look, walk and talk like an empire, that International Relations literature really began to engage enthusiastically with the debate concerning the suitability of empire as a descriptive term, and to think about what kind of an empire the United States was, if it was one at all.¹ Before George W. Bush's imperial turn, it was only the margins of intellectualism – radicals on the left who regarded American empire as the fulfilment of Marx and Galtung's predictions, and neoconservatives on the right who found political inspiration in the notion – that were prepared to use the term 'empire' in relation to the United States.² Indeed, the raft of literature that emerges in response to the post-9/11 policies of the United States largely accepts without qualms a metamorphosis whereby America is assumed to have gone from *primus inter pares* among the liberal democracies in the 1990s to becoming an empire in the post-9/11

¹ Dimitri K. Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma", *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2003). The post-September 11th, and particularly post-Iraq, literature on American empire is vast. A survey of the different approaches and attitudes towards the American empire under George W. Bush would include A. J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Alejandro Colás, *Empire, Key Concepts* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2007); Ferguson, *Colossus*; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003); Merry, *Sands of Empire*; Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome?: The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007); Porter, *Empire and Superempire*.

² On the right see Kagan, "The Benevolent Empire"; Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership*. Radical approaches include Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. The writings of Noam Chomsky animate the radical critique of American empire, a good overview is Noam Chomsky, *Detering Democracy* (London: Vintage, 1992). For Chomsky's views on the nature of post-Cold War American imperialism see Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* (Monroe, Me: Common Courage Press, 1999); Noam Chomsky, *World Orders, Old and New* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

world.³ But why had this shift occurred after 9/11, and not after the end of the Cold War?⁴ The answer is that the shift had happened with the end of the Cold War, and that the post-9/11 move was not as great as supposed. The strategic ideas detailed in the preceding chapters and which informed United States foreign policy following the Cold War were fundamentally predicated on the assumption that the defining feature of the post-Cold War international system was American empire. Where they differ is in their attitude towards that empire – declinist or revivalist; celebratory or denouncing.

The paucity of analysis of American empire in the decade preceding 2001 is not entirely surprising. Although historians had long studied empires, political scientists only really began to take an interest in understanding imperial systems as decolonisation was making European empires obsolete.⁵ In the 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union also elicited renewed interest in the sustainability of empires, although not directed at the empire that had survived.⁶

There are three reasons that explain why the 1990s has been overlooked, not only in terms of debates about empire but also in the analysis of American grand strategy more generally. The first is that September 11th 2001 changed the rules of the game,

³ Asle Toje, "The End of the American Empire", *Transatlantic Studies Newsletter* May (2008). The Bush doctrine's apparently drastic departure from US foreign policy tradition was summed up by two former members of Clinton's National Security Council staff: "What made Bush's proposed foreign policy different – and potentially even radical – were not its goals but its logic about how America should act in the world. It rejected many of the assumptions that had guided Washington's approach to foreign affairs for more than half a century." Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2005), 40.

⁴ Legro, *Rethinking the World*, 166. Legro sees a shift from an "Atlantic Pact" strategy following World War II to an "American Supremacy" strategy following 9/11.

⁵ The most thorough examination of this type is S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (1963).

⁶ See Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen, *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *The End of Empire?: The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective, International Politics of Eurasia Vol.9* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

not only for policymakers but for academics and historians interested in American foreign policy. Understanding this new dynamic of asymmetric threat and response, of modernity and religious fundamentalism, became the key research priority literally overnight.⁷ And the fact that the second Bush administration had therefore apparently picked primacy ‘off the shelf’, and that the Global War on Terror could now provide the unifying threat around which to sustain such a strategy, very quickly generated a raft of literature on this newly assertive American empire.⁸

The 1990s became an interregnum, an interlude between more clearly defined eras, a period in which International Relations theory – as well as international politics more generally – was in a state of flux, lacking a focal point around which to organise itself.⁹ Once the ‘war on terror’ and the Bush Doctrine provided that focal point, the ideas and policies of the preceding decade were instantly forgotten, automatically deemed irrelevant in this new world of religious fanaticism and terrorist mass destruction. As John Dumbrell notes in his introduction to one of the few analytical assessments of Clinton’s foreign policy, the 1990s became “that most remote of historical periods: the day before yesterday... the era from which political analysts, journalists and political scientists have retired, and to which professional, document-orientated historians have yet to direct their attention.”¹⁰

⁷ As Tony Blair understood very quickly, moments of change are moments to seize, telling the Labour Party Conference on the 2nd October, “The Kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.” For an early, and distinctly European view of the implications of 9-11, see Mark Leonard, ed., *Re-Ordering the World* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2002).

⁸ The Bush administration contained a number of individuals associated with the proposals of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, most notably the Vice-President, Dick Cheney, and the Deputy Secretary of State for Defense Paul Wolfowitz, as well as neoconservative advocates of American primacy in policy positions within the administration. See Jim Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York, London: Viking, 2004).

⁹ Michael Cox, Ken Booth, and Timothy Dunne, eds., *The Interregnum: Controversies in World Politics 1989-1999* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*.

The second reason that the 1990s did not produce a theoretical revival of the notion of empire on a large scale was that it was only America's economic revival – and the relatively poor performance of its potential challengers – during that decade that established the United States as the uncontested supreme leader of the international order. In the early part of the decade, as the debates in the run-up to the 1992 Presidential election showed, the United States was not so much an imperial behemoth as an insecure power, worried about its relative economic decline and uncertain about the future of its relationships that had been defined by the Cold War. Beneath the Cold War triumphalism lay a deep insecurity, and the notion that the 21st century would inevitably be as American as the first seemed fantastical.¹¹

Third, and most fundamentally, it is historically unsurprising that notions of empire were little addressed within the United States before the Bush doctrine brought the question into particularly sharp relief. There was a reluctance to associate the United States with the empires of the past, since 'empires' had come to be thought of almost exclusively as ugly polities, responsible for the subjugation of peoples. Indeed, having spent the better part of the twentieth century fighting imperialism and encouraging decolonisation, the United States had done more than anyone else to establish 'empire' as little more than an insult in contemporary political debate.¹² America, in contrast to the European empires against which it had historically defined itself, was about emancipation, and had based its foreign policy on principles of self-determination and individual liberty.

If the United States was an empire, ran this line of thinking, it was a 'funny sort of empire', one that exhibited self-restraint and that used its power to keep the peace rather than rule, and whose so-called imperialists didn't "wear pith helmets, but

¹¹ The exception to the rule came from outside America itself, first published in France in the spring of 1993. Alfredo G. A. Valladolid, *The Twenty-First Century Will Be American* (London: Verso, 1996).

¹² Dominic Lieven, 'The Concept of Empire', *fathom.com* (2002) available at <http://www.fathom.com/feature/122086>.

rather baggy jeans and backward baseball caps.”¹³ As Lawrence Summers, the Harvard and World Bank economist who served in the Treasury under Clinton, liked to say, the United States was history’s only non-imperialist superpower.¹⁴ American empire was an oxymoron, and to associate the United States with previous empires nonsensical. So although America might wield enormous power around the world, “like a school child on the playground it does not like to be called names.”¹⁵

Thus, if the British had acquired their empire in a fit of absent-mindedness, the United States was an imperial power “in a state of deep denial.”¹⁶ However, this reluctance to associate the United States with empire reflected negative imperial stereotypes more than it did a reasoned appreciation of the form and function of earlier empires.¹⁷ This chapter attempts to redress that failing, and to argue for the restoration the theoretical utility of the term empire. In doing so it makes no claim to the moral desirability or otherwise of empire, whether American or any other, but rather seeks to show that only by conceptually treating the United States as an empire during the 1990s can we really understand the strategic ideas that informed American foreign policy in that decade, and – crucially – ever since.

¹³ Victor Davis Hanson, "A Funny Sort of Empire", in *National Review Online* (2002).

¹⁴ Sebastian Mallaby, "The Reluctant Imperialist", *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (2002).

¹⁵ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots", *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008), 329.

¹⁶ Michael Cox, "Empire? The Bush Doctrine and the Lessons of History", in *American Power in the 21st Century*, ed. David Held and Mathias Koenig-Archibugi (Oxford: Polity, 2004), 28.

¹⁷ Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma".

One Man's Order, Another Man's Empire

Empires arouse intense political passions, both by their defenders and opponents. Their historical rarity and for the main their temporal singularity, makes each case unique, differentiated by its polity, its policies and the reactions to them. Moreover, arguments that ascribe the term 'empire' to a particular polity usually do so with a case to make, whether it be to decry imperial suppression or encourage progressive modernisation. Defining 'empire' is therefore a task laced with difficulty on the one hand and expediency on the other.

Approaches to defining empire generally consist of a kind of historical distillation, a process that attempts to extract from all of the past instantiations of empire the essential predicates that link these distinct entities together. This has its weaknesses, in that 'empire' becomes an essentially constructed term, defined by subjective responses to a particular polity rather than anything objective about that polity itself, but for a concept whose instances are so historically diverse and individually contextualised a prior, objective definition would be arbitrary. This is the "pornography definition" of empire – "I can't say what they are but I know one when I see one".¹⁸ However, it does allow for the differences – as well as the similarities – of historically associated polities to be highlighted, a process which trains the analytical spotlight on the essential nature of the instance in question.

Treating empires individually recognises that in form and function they differ enormously. Whilst empires are clearly multinational and politically centralised, what state is not? At the same time, empires' "hybrid nature" – as simultaneously international actors and structured political systems – makes comparing them both to each other and other types of polities difficult.¹⁹ Take for example, the difficulties

¹⁸ Kathleen D. Morrison, "Sources, Approaches, Definitions", in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. Susan E. Alcock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

¹⁹ Motyl, *Imperial Ends*, 1-3.

produced by Niall Ferguson's "simple typology" of empires, which consists of seven columns with four to eight variations in each.²⁰ As Motyl points out, "A simple mathematical calculation shows that his menu results in 184,320 possible combinations!"²¹ Ferguson may need to further distil his imperial liquor, but nevertheless his attempt shows that empires are not easily typed, or their characteristics rigidly defined. So whilst this chapter makes the case that the modern United States is best understood as an empire rather than as anything else, it simultaneously claims that the United States is not historically identifiable with any other empire. It, like all empires, is a unique instance of an historical regularity. Alejandro Colás recognises the difficulties involved:

"any useful understanding of what empire involves requires a strong historical, indeed, historicist, approach to concept formation... not only does the meaning of empire vary throughout time and space (that much is obvious), but its deployment as an explanatory concept requires being especially sensitive to the historical particularity of different imperial experiences – their unique structures of political rule, their specific modes of social reproduction and their correspondingly singular forms of cultural self-understanding."²²

To demonstrate the point, a fairly limited and uncontroversial list of major historical empires might include the following: the Soviet Union; the axis empires of Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy; the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires of the late nineteenth century; the Spanish, French, Portuguese and Dutch colonial empires, which existed in the shadow of Britain's 'imperial century'; the Chinese Qing empire; the Mongol empire; the Islamic Caliphates; and the classical empires of first Athens, and then Rome. And although such a list is hopelessly incomplete, including only the obvious candidates, it swiftly becomes clear that imperial polities

²⁰ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 11.

²¹ Alexander J. Motyl, "Is Everything Empire? Is Empire Everything?", *Comparative Politics* 39 (2006), 234.

²² Colás, *Empire*.

vary enormously both in comparison with each other and over time as each rises and falls.²³

Comparisons between the United States and any or all of these historical antecedents are thus never likely to be exacting. Yet comparisons have continually been made, and not just in the period in which the United States has been acknowledged as the world's sole superpower. As early as 1920, the *New York Times* was speculating that the United States might be a 'new Roman Empire' fated to dominate Europe. America could even follow Rome's example, and "leave the European nations in the enjoyment of a shadowy independence, thus saving herself the trouble of governing them, look on while they tear at one another's throats, grow steadily weaker, come more and more under her economic and financial tutelage, sink steadily to the position of helpless victims for exploitation by Americans."²⁴ Many years later, twenty-first century writers thinking about American dominance made comparisons with Rome's military strength and engaged with the possibility of similar decline.²⁵ Others speculated that the character of American imperium was more liberal and progressive, as their immediate predecessors in the role of global hegemon – the British – had been.²⁶

Moreover, the intervening century – the American century – had witnessed an ongoing debate about that most associated of imperial concepts, decline. The

²³ Yale H. Ferguson, "Approaches to Defining 'Empire' and Characterizing United States Influence in the Contemporary World", *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008), 274.

²⁴ T. R. Ybarra, "America as the New Roman Empire", *New York Times*, 31/10/1920. Whilst the article was a review of a German book, *Pax Americana, a historical look at the turning point of European history*, the piece is notable for its approving tone, the author noting that "something tremendous... has happened... for the first time a non-European nation has been recognized as arbiter over the fate of European nations not only by one side... but by every nation concerned. The reviewed text is Ulrich Kahrstedt, *Pax Americana; ein historische Betrachtung am Wendepunkte der europäischen Geschichte*, (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1920).

²⁵ Riccardo Monaco, "Ancient and Modern Empires: The United States as the New Rome", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2008).

²⁶ Ferguson, *Colossus*.

consequences of America's long-distance victories in two global wars was that the United States had become the unrivalled global power in 1945. Yet with all of its potential rivals toiling under the burdens of reconstruction this level of dominance was of course illusory – their recovery would mean that the United States “was almost fated to decline”.²⁷ And after the Soviet Union, with its antithetical ideology confirmed, tested its own atomic bomb and emerged as a rival superpower, a new pessimism concerning American vitality surfaced amidst the cultural and economic upheavals of the 1960s, confirmed by the twin political shocks-to-the-system of Vietnam and Watergate.²⁸ Despite the astonishing demonstration of American technological prowess represented by the moon landings; despite Reagan's ‘morning in America’ rhetoric, the success of Paul Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* owed its success to America's obsession with its own decline. Such naval-gazing prompting one apologist for American imperium, observing from afar, to remark that “the American government might be well advised to ban books like Paul Kennedy's, or even burn them. It might be wiser still to follow the sound advice of the poet Heine, who suggested that every state should imprison its prophets of doom until such time as their prophecies come true.”²⁹

If the United States is an imperial construction, identifiable by the fact of others' responses to it, the decline debate would seem to provide internal confirmation of its status as an empire, one whose rise was meteoric and fall torturous. Yet as Motyl notes, whilst when a word comes to dominate the discourse we may be certain that we are in the presence of a cultural phenomenon, we may remain uncertain about whether we are in the presence of empire itself.³⁰ The constructivist analysis thus tells us little about empire itself, or what kind of an empire the United States was

²⁷ Cox, "Whatever Happened to American Decline?", 314-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 316-21.

²⁹ Christopher Coker, *Reflections on American Foreign Policy since 1945* (London: Pinter, in association with John Spiers, 1989), 144.

³⁰ Motyl, "Is Everything Empire?", 226.

and is, it simply tells us that people have regarded, to greater and lesser extents, the United States as an empire. Yet to understand why, and assess the accuracy of such a judgement, we need to consider the nature of its imperium, its power and its policies. If America is considered an empire just as those historical great powers of Britain and Rome were, what unites them, and how do they differ?

Hegemony and Empire

Modern literature on international relations has come to describe the role of great powers in building international order as hegemony, where in the past those functions had been attributed to empires. Admittedly, language changes over time and our descriptors shift. Yet regarding the usage of these terms as a matter of pure semantics would be to miss the importance of the rhetorical shift in academia and public policy away from empire and towards hegemony. As empire has increasingly become a synonym for oppression, hegemony has become a means of disguising and avoiding talk of empire. The result is a debate that skirts around the most fundamental question of whether imperial systems are desirable or not – and of whether beneficial order-building and system-maintenance can be provided without unwanted dominance.

This section will show that hegemony and empire describe two very different phenomena. In order to do so, we require at least a minimal definition of what historically constitutes empire, a maxim that even the most ardent of constructivist theorists of empire would admit that, if falsified, would constitute an inappropriate use of the designation. Such a definition needs to be loose enough that no polity that has been regularly thought of as an empire would not fall within its remit, and yet differentiate an empire from other types of polity, in particular the ‘normal’ nation-state.

A number of definitions from the contemporary literature serve such a purpose: Michael Doyle’s, for example, regards empire as “a system of interaction” in which “the dominant metropole exerts political control” over the “internal and external policy – the effective sovereignty – of the “subordinate periphery”.³¹ Stephen Rosen, similarly, sees empire as the “rule exercised by one nation over others both to regulate their external behaviour and ensure minimally acceptable forms of internal

³¹ Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, N.Y. ; London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 12.

behaviour within the subordinate states.”³² For David Lake, empire constitutes “a political relationship” in which “one partner cedes substantial rights of residual control directly to the other” so that it effectively “surrenders judgement” to the dominant state.³³ This is a view with which Gier Lundestad agrees, stating that empire “simply means a hierarchical system of political relationships with one power being much stronger than any other.”³⁴

Each of these definitions contain their useful ambiguities, in particular the specific nature of Doyle’s ‘interaction’ and ‘control’; Rosen’s ‘rule’ and Lake and Lundestad’s ‘relationships’. These differentiated conceptions indicate the myriad ways in which political authority may be manifested in an empire. Yet whatever specific formulation is preferred, the key elements are that is that empire is a social relationship in which elements of a number of states’ political autonomy, both internationally and domestically, are limited by the preferences of another single state.

This definition allows us to demonstrate that a number of the most obvious features of historical empires are not in fact essential to their nature, being features of imperial form rather than functions of empire. The first and most obvious is the idea that empires must directly control territory, to have formal sovereignty over their domains. This was certainly not the case with Athens, or indeed in the early period of the Roman empire. Modern empires such as Austria-Hungary did establish sovereignty over their territories, although the Soviet Union came to abandon direct control in favour of indirect domination after Stalin’s death.³⁵ The British Empire simultaneously mixed formal sovereign rule in some territories with informal

³² Stephen P. Rosen, "An Empire, If You Can Keep It", *The National Interest* 71 (2003), 51.

³³ David A. Lake, "The New American Empire?", *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008), 34, 282.

³⁴ Lundestad, *The American Empire*, 37.

³⁵ Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma".

dominion in others, its influence in parts of China and in Argentina sometimes exceeding that which it held within its formal dominions.³⁶ In the absence of formal sovereign rule, an informal empire is therefore a different kind of power relationship, which creates “structures of transnational political authority that combine an egalitarian principle of *de jure* sovereignty with a hierarchical principle of *de facto* control.”³⁷

Rule or dominion is therefore a social relationship which can take different forms: it can be imposed (as was the case with the Soviet Union’s control of Eastern Europe); it can be unopposed (as was a great deal of the historical period of British imperial rule); or it can be welcomed as protection from other threats, which is one understanding of how the America’s European empire came about in the postwar years.³⁸ Moreover, whilst the United States influenced the internal and external policies of European states it certainly did not control them in the traditional sense of colonial rule.³⁹ Instead, European autonomy was limited by their dependence on the United States, rather than the United States’ imperial desires.

A second common error of approaches to empire is to assume that empires are imperial powers. At first sight this may appear a rather strange statement: to deny that empires are imperial is ostensibly counter-intuitive. Imperial is simply the state of being of empires, they can no more avoid it than a circle might avoid being circular. Indeed, Doyle’s definition of empire contains the addendum that “imperialism is the process of establishing and maintaining an empire.”⁴⁰ Yet the

³⁶ Lundestad, *The American Empire*, 38.

³⁷ Alexander Wendt and Daniel Friedheim, "Hierarchy under Anarchy: Informal Empire and the East German State", *International Organization* 49, no. 4 (1995), 695.

³⁸ Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-52", *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986).

³⁹ Hendrik Spruyt, "'American Empire' As an Analytic Question or a Rhetorical Move?", *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 3 (2008), 297.

⁴⁰ Doyle, *Empires*, 19.

shared etymology of the two terms can mislead.⁴¹ Empire may entail the existence of hierarchies and authority, but it need not imply expansionism, repression or even subjugation. Imperialism on the other hand, reflects not the facts of dominance, but a particular philosophy or emotional attitude towards that dominance.⁴² Imperialism then is a policy, whereas empire is a set of governmental relationships that comprise a polity. Imperialism is always a choice, where empire is generally not.⁴³

The notion that empires are necessarily imperial in nature is not only conceptually and empirically wrong, it is also politically problematic. Imperialism carries with it a pejorative element, because it implies the active agency of the imperial power to subjugate its imperium. Imperialism, in short, entails that the dominant state seeks its empire and desires its political control, and it implies a range of behaviour in keeping with those motivations. Thus to define something as imperial today almost always implies hostility to it.⁴⁴ Hereafter therefore, I use ‘imperial’ to mean simply ‘of empire’, nothing more, nothing less.

A third, related, error is to attribute empire formation to policy choice, in particular by identifying the existence of empire with previous or existing imperialism. Such a view sees empires as the result of aggression and military conquest, and certainly many empires have come into being that way. But empires need not be brought about by belligerence and militarism, as Reinhold Niebuhr notes:

“The word ‘imperialism’ to the modern mind connotes aggressive expansion.
The connotation remains correct in the sense that empire, in its inclusive sense,

⁴¹ Empire and imperialism derive from the Latin verb *imperare*, to order or command. The related noun *imperium* was the power to order, or more formally to apply the law – what we would today call sovereignty.

⁴² Lake, “The New American Empire?”, 286.

⁴³ Motyl, *Imperial Ends*, 32.

⁴⁴ Imperialism was not always a Bad Thing – to be an ‘empire builder’ in Victorian times was to be “an adventurer, a hero, and a selfless labour for others’ well-being.” S. R. Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10.

is the fruit of the impingement of strength upon weakness. But the power need not be expressed in military terms. It may simply be the power of superior organisation or culture.”⁴⁵

Indeed, whilst some states may achieve empire through their deliberate policies, it is difficult to believe that empire formation might proceed as the result of some conscious cost-benefit analysis; indeed if it were, most empires would have been more modest.⁴⁶ Rather than being the result of careful planning and deliberate choice, in many cases states, at least initially, have their empires thrust upon them.⁴⁷ America’s informal Cold War empire in Europe had its origins in the postwar settlement which left Western Europe with a distinct sense of vulnerability to Soviet power, prompting European governments to attempt to get the Americans to take greater interest in their affairs.⁴⁸ America’s security and economic commitments in Western Europe, was then an “empire by invitation” rather than conquest, an empire not sought, but instead offered.⁴⁹

That imperialism “can sometimes wear a grimace and sometimes a smile”, has presented difficulties for scholars.⁵⁰ The alternative conception that some have

⁴⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires: A Study of the Recurring Patterns and Problems of the Political Order in Relation to the Unique Problems of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Scribner, 1959), 66.

⁴⁶ The orthodox view is that the British empire was a net burden to the United Kingdom, albeit one that the British taxpayer was willing to pay for. Patrick K. O'Brien, "The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846-1914", *Past and Present* 120, no. 1 (1988).

⁴⁷ The historian Ernest May observed that “Some nations achieve greatness, the United States had greatness thrust upon it.” E. R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, 1961), 270.

⁴⁸ Callahan notes that whether the Cold War had begun or not, it was clear that the United States was prepared to play a much greater leadership role after World War II than it did after World War I in sustaining a new global trading system. Although there was little enthusiasm for the option of a *Pax Americana* through active American domination, the Cold War served to both make the United States’ role more far-reaching and militarised than it would otherwise have been, and to sustain the consensus that American engagement was needed to assure balanced power abroad. Callahan, *Between Two Worlds*, 24, 30.

⁴⁹ Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation?"

⁵⁰ Michael Cox, "Empire by Denial? Debating US Power", *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 2 (2004), 232.

therefore used, particularly to describe the American order that was built during the Cold War, is hegemony. Hegemonic orders are similar to empires in that they are hierarchical orders established and maintained by the preponderance of power of the leading state, but under hegemony the secondary states are formally sovereign and the mechanisms of domination looser and less formal than empires. Yet the British 'ruled' India as an imperial power indirectly through the East India Company, and the same author as provides this definition of hegemony admits that in practice, "imperial orders have varied widely in their degree of hierarchical domination and control."⁵¹ Hegemony at first sight therefore serves to confuse at least as much as it clarifies. Indeed, Robert Gilpin, in his influential book *War and Change in World Politics*, appears to equate hegemony with empire, apparently seeing it as a replacement term at a time when, as a consequence of decolonisation, empire had gone out of intellectual fashion.⁵² For Niall Ferguson, hegemony is nothing more than a way to avoid talking about empire.⁵³

There is however a distinction between hegemony and empire that can and should be made to prevent both terms becoming analytically blunted. Having said that, hegemony and empire have become intertwined in a definitional knot that is not easy to untangle. Robert Cox defines hegemony as "a structure of values and understandings about the nature of order that permeates a whole system of states and non-state entities [which] appear to most actors as the natural order." For Cox, a state's dominance is not sufficient to create hegemony without "the acquiescence of the dominant social strata of other states" to the ways of thinking underpinned by the structures of power.⁵⁴ Gramsci, too, eschews the kind of domination traditionally associated with empires, to argue that hegemony "is a relation, not of domination by

⁵¹ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 27.

⁵² Gilpin, *War and Change*.

⁵³ Niall Ferguson, "Hegemony or Empire?", in *Foreign Affairs* (Foreign Affairs, 2003), 160.

⁵⁴ Robert W. Cox and Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 151.

means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organisation of consent.”⁵⁵

Doyle, in contrast, denies that hegemony impacts upon the internal policies of states, arguing that hegemonic powers only control external policy of states.⁵⁶ Yet Cox’s neo-Gramscian perspective asserts the exact opposite, that the acceptance of hegemonic ways of thinking strikes right at the heart of the state. Doyle’s definition of hegemony stands with a school of thought that regards hegemony merely as a less complete form of the power of one state over others than empire. In this reading hegemony utilises alternatives and more indirect forms of power than conquest.⁵⁷ Yet this is simply a definition of informal empire. Alternatively, hegemony is a ‘nicer’ form of empire, acting in pursuit of its own national interest but also providing public goods or externalities for the international system as a whole.⁵⁸ Yet the subjects’ answers to the question ‘what did the Romans ever do for us?’ were multiple.⁵⁹

Hegemony can and should be separated from empire, however, whilst admitting that the two are not mutually exclusive. The neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony has its roots in political economy – it is about the expansion and infiltration of the ideas of capitalism as an answer to the historical problem of social change arising

⁵⁵ Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, Rev. and reset. ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), 24.

⁵⁶ Doyle, *Empires*, 12, 40.

⁵⁷ S. Ryan Johansson, "National Size and International Power: A Demographic Perspective on 'Hegemony'", in *Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846-1914 and the United States 1941-2001*, ed. Armand Cleese and Patrick Karl O'Brien (Aldershot; Ashgate: 2002), 336.

⁵⁸ Patrick K. O'Brien, "The Pax Britannica and American Hegemony: Precedent, Antecedent or Just Another History?", in *Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846-1914 and the United States 1941-2001*, ed. Armand Cleese and Patrick Karl O'Brien (Aldershot; Ashgate: 2002), 4.

⁵⁹ "...apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?" "Brought peace?" "Oh, peace - shut up!" Terry Jones, "Monty Python's Life of Brian", (Warner Brothers/Orion Pictures, 1979).

from Marxist analyses. Whilst it is extended to international relations more generally to describe the shared assumptions that underpin an international order, first among those are ideas about capital and the modes of production, followed by ideas about forms of states and world orders.⁶⁰ This foundation in international political economy continued through the work of the likes of Charles Kindleberger, Stephen Krasner, and Susan Strange, who speak about hegemony primarily in terms of economic power.⁶¹

Empires, in contrast, operate above that underlying hegemony on a *political* level, generating explicit rules for the governance of states and the interactions between them. The rules of empires may be consented to, but they are nonetheless set – and enforced – by the dominant power. Hegemony on the other hand reflects the prevailing system of rules, norms and constraints within which empires may operate – it is the *zeitgeist* of the international political economy. Hegemony then is unconscious, a description of the historical progress of ideas of economic and social organisation; empires, in contrast, leave their mark on history.

That is not to say that empires cannot impact upon and even come to define hegemonic structures, or that economic power is not a central component of imperialism. It is simply that the two orders, and the two words, mean different things, and that their conflation and confusion is to the detriment of good scholarship. The analytical concept ‘empire’ is consequently worth reviving alongside a clearer and more restrictive version of hegemony that reflects its Gramscian heritage in focusing on the underlying maxims of international political economy. In particular, empire can be differentiated by three aspects that

⁶⁰ Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, "A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations", *Capital & Class* 82 (2004), 87-88.

⁶¹ Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (London: Allen Lane, 1973); Stephen D. Krasner, "State Power and the Structure of International Trade", *World Politics* 28, no. 3 (1976); Susan Strange, "The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony", *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (1987).

characterise the centre's relationship with its periphery: first, empires' political dissemination and enforcement of ethical norms and rules; second, the spread of cultural practices from the centre to the periphery; and third, what might be called the political necessity of empire, that in order for any major issue of international importance to be addressed the imperial polity needs to be engaged. The modern United States, in exhibiting these characteristics, should therefore be properly conceptualised as an empire.

Beyond Hegemony – The Nature of the modern American Empire

As noted earlier the revival of the notion of 'American empire' in the post-Cold War context did not take place until the second Bush administration dusted down the Defense Planning Guidance and concluded that in an age of global terrorism, America would have to prevent and pre-empt security threats, wherever they might arise and through whatever means. You were either with us or against us, and by God, you didn't want to be in the latter camp. The United States had an emperor, and this one wore cowboy boots.⁶² Yet despite such a stark shift in overt policy and rhetoric the debate over the concept of American empire was heated. Michael Cox, who led the way in attempting to revive the analytical usefulness of empire was branded an "old-fashioned" imperial apologist by one liberal American contributor to an academic journal's discussion of Cox's thesis.⁶³

⁶² Sterling-Folker, "The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots".

⁶³ Benjamin R. Barber, "Imperialism or Interdependence?", *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 2 (2004). Cox's original argument is made in Michael Cox, "The New Liberal Empire: US Power in the Twenty-First Century", *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 12 (2001). Updated versions appear in Michael Cox, "The Empire's Back in Town: Or America's Imperial Temptation - Again", *Millennium* 32, no. 1 (2003); Cox, "Empire by Denial?"; Michael Cox, "Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine", *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 4 (2004); Michael Cox, "The Imperial Republic Revisited: The United States in the Era of Bush", in *The War on Terrorism and the American* (continued overleaf)

It was somewhat strange that Cox's contention should have been so controversial. The United States had been an empire since the inception of the Cold War, and following the demise of the Soviet Union it entered a second imperial phase which lasted throughout the 1990s. This second American empire built on the achievements of the first, entrenching the assumptions of Cold War victory in the universal ideology of free market democracy that more than anything else defines American imperialism. In actively creating and sustaining that ideological hegemony, the second American empire, dominant in each category of capabilities, has three central characteristics. First, it is a system of largely informal authority, exercised in the main through international organisations built in America's image and which it is able to control. Second, it is global in scope and integrative in nature. Third, it is underwritten by the willingness to engage American military power.

Imperial Antecedents and the First American Empire

The United States has, in some ways, always been an imperial power. Regarded by the Founding Fathers as an 'empire of liberty', it was geographically expansionist in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and maintained an informal empire in Latin America under the guise of the Monroe Doctrine, particularly in its expanded Roosevelt corollary form, under which the United States intervened militarily in the region over 30 times in the first three decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁴

'Empire' after the Cold War, ed. Alejandro Colas and Richard Saull (London: Routledge, 2006); Michael Cox, "Still the American Empire", *Political Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (2007). Two notable discussions of his work appear in *Security Dialogue* 35(2), 2004 and *Review of International Studies* 30(4), (2004).

⁶⁴ For a history of America's imperial ambitions before the Cold War see Frank A. Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism, Problems in American History* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

However, it was not until after World War II America could truly be regarded as an empire. The scale of American superiority in 1945 was unprecedented. The American economy had grown by over fifty percent during the war and now constituted over half of the world's economic product, and the United States held over two-thirds of the world's gold reserves.⁶⁵ Moreover, the United States had 'only' lost 400,000 men during the war and suffered minimal domestic damage, compared to the Soviet Union's 20 million dead and agricultural production cut in half.⁶⁶ In the years between the end of World War II and the Korean War, the United States' industrial capacity outstripped that of every other nation, its national income doubled, and its trade surplus was so great that the world's current account deficit with the United States reached \$35 billion.⁶⁷

America's economic strength underpinned its military dominance. It had by far the strongest air force in the world, comprising over 3,000 heavy bombers, and its control of the seas was absolute, thanks to the US Navy's 1,200 major warships. The United States was also in sole possession of atomic weapons, even if there were very few in stock and their usefulness as a strategic weapon was disputed.⁶⁸ It may have taken the Korean War to expose the weakness of America's British and French allies and convince the United States of the need to maintain a level of readiness commensurate with its superpower status, but that was not an indication, as one scholar had it, that the United States "drifted into the Cold War between 1944 and 1948 not as a superpower with overwhelming military might, but as a deeply insecure power", both unsure if it sought and unable to undertake conflict with the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ Instead, as Kennedy notes, the United States' outward imperial

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 460-61.

⁶⁶ Lundestad, *The American Empire*, 40.

⁶⁷ Coker, *Reflections on American Foreign Policy*, 36-7.

⁶⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 461-2.

⁶⁹ Coker, *Reflections on American Foreign Policy*, 37-40.

reluctance reflected a policy choice derived from America's longstanding antipathy towards standing armies rather than a lack of real military potential.⁷⁰

The United States was the strongest power in centuries, with a lead over its rivals in both absolute and relative terms that amounted to unchallenged American pre-eminence.⁷¹ But American policymakers were beginning to see a challenge on the horizon in the Soviet Union's ideological antipathy, diplomatic intransigence and old-style imperial preferences. For George Kennan, writing in 1948, America's "real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships that will allow us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security."⁷²

That disparity was already functionally an empire. As Harold Laski had written a year earlier:

"America bestrides the world like a colossus; neither Rome at the height of its power nor Great Britain in the period of its economic supremacy enjoyed an influence so direct, so profound or so pervasive. It has half the wealth of the world today in its hands, it has rather more than half the world's productive capacity, and it exports more than twice as much as it imports. Today literally hundreds of millions of Europeans and Asians know that both the quality and the rhythm of their lives depend upon decisions made in Washington. On the wisdom of those decisions hangs the fate of the next generation."⁷³

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 461.

⁷¹ Lundestad, *The American Empire*, 41.

⁷² George Kennan, 'PPS/23: Review of Current Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy, 24/2/1948', in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948. General; the United Nations, Volume I part 2*, 524.

⁷³ Harold J. Laski, "America - 1947", *The Nation*, 641. In the first of three articles that urged America to take on an imperial role, Laski had noted that "in a vital sense, the question of whether Europe has a future will be decided in Washington." Harold J. Laski, "Is Europe Done For?", *The Nation*, 550.

The United States had plenty of decisions to make, but as John Ikenberry puts it, “the United States found itself in a rare position. It had power and choices.”⁷⁴ The most pressing of those choices involved what to do about the postwar destruction in Europe and Japan. In approving the Marshall Plan, the United States committed itself to the reconstruction of the socio-political bases of the major states devastated by the war, states which would provide the basis of international capitalist economic revival as a bulwark against communist expansionism. The coordinated reconstruction of those economies was an investment in building an economic order that was open and interdependent, which held the United States at its centre, and effectively internationalised American modes of production.⁷⁵

The United States therefore picked up the baton the British Empire had laid down in 1914 and took on the role of hegemonic guarantor of the international trading system. In doing so it re-laid the foundations of an open economic hegemony that persists to this day, establishing the first pillar of what we might call the American system.⁷⁶ The Marshall Plan was hardly a policy of American benevolence, or even a policy structured around a notions of the American national interest, although strings attached to the aid did aim to liberalise trade and encourage American investment, broadening and deepening the liberal economic order.⁷⁷ Instead, it was a piece of empire-building that reflected the emerging ideas about the nature of

⁷⁴ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 169.

⁷⁵ Mark Rupert, *Producing Hegemony: The Politics of Mass Production and American Global Power* (New York, N.Y.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42-45. See also Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 121-52.

⁷⁶ Robert Gilpin, "The Rise of American Hegemony", in *Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846-1914 and the United States 1941-2001*, ed. Armand Cleese and Patrick Karl O'Brien (Aldershot; Ashgate: 2002).

⁷⁷ Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation?", 268.

Stalin's Soviet Union and sought to tie Western Europe ever more closely to the United States.⁷⁸

The judgement was increasingly shared by America's European allies, who sought security guarantees from the United States to accompany their economic ties. Now American economic hegemony would be overlain with American political preferences. The social systems of Western Europe and the English-speaking parts of the British Commonwealth coalesced to form what came to be referred to as 'the West' or 'the Free World', but which was to all intents and purposes an American empire.⁷⁹ Between 1945 and 1960 American economic hegemony came to be supplemented by a massive military empire, which by 1955 consisted of 450 bases in 36 countries. Japan was to all intents and purposes an American colony, its foreign policy an extension of Washington, and the United States took on many of the commitments of the impoverished European colonial empires, filling vacuums in Greece, Turkey, South-East Asia and most significantly the Middle East, where the United States confirmed the reality of its imperial dominance by forcing the humiliation of its strongest ally at Suez.⁸⁰

The centrepiece of this military and political empire was the American commitment to defend Western Europe expressed in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The United States may have been invited to take on the tasks of European reconstruction and defense, but these were roles that the United States itself was already convinced it would have to be committed to – first in order to contain Germany, and later in

⁷⁸ Michael Cox and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "The Tragedy of American Diplomacy? Rethinking the Marshall Plan", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005). Kennan's diagnosis of the implacability of Stalin, contained in his anonymous Foreign Affairs article, was perhaps the most important single factor influencing the elements of the Marshall Plan that were intended more to subvert communism than promote pan-European economic recovery. X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", *Foreign Affairs; an American Quarterly Review* 25 (1946).

⁷⁹ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (London: Time Warner, 2002), 20.

⁸⁰ Lundestad, *The American Empire*, 46-54.

order to deter the Soviet Union. Indeed, the process of creating NATO was cooperative, with the Americans agreeing to security commitments in return for French support for German revival.⁸¹

Despite the extent of America's imperial commitments, states within the American sphere of influence were allowed considerable freedom, partly as a consequence of the United States' ideological commitment to political self-determination – “Americans still found it difficult to think of themselves as an imperial power” – and partly because it lacked the capability to administer a large formal empire itself.⁸² American rule was therefore largely exercised indirectly, using the massive disparity in capabilities between the United States and each of its individual protectorates that rendered them dependent to induce collaboration rather than by imposing its dominance. The United States therefore created the reality of empire without the conventional form of rule.⁸³ Having said that, the United States was not afraid to act as a more traditional imperial power, intervening in the internal affairs of states both inside and outside its orbit. Anticommunist containment and the ideas of domino theory may have provided the pretext, but the involvement by the United States in upwards of fifty foreign interventions and wars euphemistically grouped as ‘proxy conflicts’ struck many as being no different from old-style colonialism.⁸⁴

This first American empire that extended during the Cold War might have arisen as much in response to external factors as it did from imperial design; it may have been invited, the result of processes of mutual cooperation in many areas; and most of its

⁸¹ Klaus Schwabe, "The Origins of the United States' Engagement in Europe, 1946-1952", in *NATO: The Founding of the Atlantic Alliance and the Integration of Europe*, ed. Francis H. Heller and John Gillingham (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

⁸² Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 38-9.

⁸³ David Lake neatly sums up the US role in Europe as “proscriptive rather than prescriptive.” David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy, and the Variety of International Relations", *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996), 25.

⁸⁴ William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 126-56.

extent might have only been informally ruled. Yet its extent was global, and its maxims held sway both within and between its members, which included four of the six major power centres – the United States itself, Britain, Western Europe and Japan. By 1970, the United States had more than one million soldiers stationed abroad, was committed to five regional defence alliances, was a leading member of 53 international organisations and was furnishing military or economic aid to nearly one hundred nations.⁸⁵

However, the most important aspect of the first American Empire, and that which would form the basis of the second American Empire once the Cold War passed from the scene, was the extent to which the United States used its power to create and embed new norms of international relations within its half of the bipolar international system. In a highly influential work, John Ikenberry argued that there were two postwar settlements – the one that created the containment order in response to deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union, and the one that built a range of institutions based around “economic openness, political reciprocity and the multilateral management of an American-led liberal political order.”⁸⁶ Whilst the claim that there are two distinct settlements overlooks the extent to which their origins were inextricably interlinked – in particular with regard to the ideological completion that characterised the Cold War – it does capture the difference between the instrumental and the structural components of the first American empire.

What we might term the ‘structural power’ of the American empire derived from the institutions that it constructed to manage the American system.⁸⁷ Built in America’s

⁸⁵ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 502.

⁸⁶ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 170-99.

⁸⁷ I define structural power as the extent to which institutionalised features of the international system to which all states must submit are a reflection of the interests and preferences of a single state or group of states. This definition draws on the ideas of both international political economy and anthropology. Susan Strange for example, distinguished structural power from relational power in international economic relations as “the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other states, their political institutions, their economic enterprises, (continued overleaf)

own image to serve American interests, these institutions became features of international order that defined the rules by which relations between states were conducted. Whilst the Cold War did not see American policymakers' detailed plans for the postwar world manifested exactly as envisioned – what William Appleman Williams called the “benevolent Americanization of the world [that] would bring peace and plenty without the moral embarrassment and administrative distractions of old-fashioned empires” – the United States was certainly by no means reluctant to take on the imperial task of order-building.⁸⁸

Foremost among the institutions of structural power was the role of the dollar as the international reserve currency. Not only did it provide the United States with the power to depreciate others' assets (as when the US unilaterally shut the gold window in 1971), it also meant that when the United States changed the direction of its monetary policy other states had no choice but to adjust their own domestic policy to such changes.⁸⁹ For Susan Strange, America's monopoly on the creation of dollar assets which sustained its ability to run persistent balance-of-payments deficits was evidence of the structural power of the United States.⁹⁰ Indeed, since when foreigners held dollars they provided the equivalent of an interest-free loan to the United States, the American empire was effectively being paid for by its subjects – a situation which reflected the currency blocs of the nineteenth century empires.⁹¹ As

and (not least) their scientists and other professional people have to operate... structural power, in short, confers the power to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises.” Susan Strange, *States and Markets* (London: Pinter, 1988), 25. An anthropological perspective sees structural power as “Power that organizes and orchestrates the systemic interaction within and among societies, directing economic and political forces on the one hand and ideological forces that shape public ideas, values and beliefs on the other.” William A. Haviland, Harald E. L. Prins, and Dana Walrath, *The Essence of Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning/Wadsworth, 2009), 346.

⁸⁸ William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1961), 17. On the ‘myth of the reluctant superpower’, see Bacevich, *American Empire*, 7-31.

⁸⁹ Susan Strange, *Casino Capitalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 22.

⁹⁰ Strange, “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony”, 568-9.

⁹¹ Eric Helleiner, “Below the State: Micro-Level Power”, in *International Monetary Power*, ed. David M. Andrews (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006).

many domestic economies, particularly in the third world, became ‘dollarized’, not only were transaction costs of commerce between the core and the periphery reduced, generating closer ties, in addition, a hierarchy was created in which the dollar became “a highly visible sign of elevated rank in the community” whilst the identity of second-order states was simultaneously eroded by their use of imperial currency.⁹² The structural power of the dollar thus created an aspirational economic imperium of which ancient Rome would no doubt have approved.

American structural power was not limited to the universal convertibility of the dollar. The United States’ centrality in the international economic order meant that it dominated international economic organisations, institutions that it had itself created for the management of the economic order, and which reflected American beliefs in open markets and free trade. The United States was the key driver in the establishment of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which formed the bedrock of the capitalist economic order for the next fifty years. American institution-building was extended to the political order, as collective security was rebuilt around the victorious powers in the United Nations Security Council, and as the Cold War stymied that organisation, through the various regional alliances that committed the United States to the security of the free world.

The United States therefore created its empire in an “almost hyperactive” spate of institution-building between 1944 and 1952, a rewriting of the rules of international relations that was historically unprecedented.⁹³ It embedded American power within an order that was outwardly multilateral, but whose terms reflected American liberal ideology and interests. Right from the beginning of American postwar planning there was “a missionary zeal to remake the international system” that saw Roosevelt’s Wilsonian Secretary of State Cordell Hull tell Congress that having laid

⁹² Benjamin J. Cohen, *The Geography of Money* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 120-21.

⁹³ Ikenberry, *Liberal Order and Imperial Ambition*, 5.

the groundwork for the United Nations, “there will no longer be the need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power.”⁹⁴ That is not to say that the United States got exactly what it wanted out of its postwar institution-building – it didn’t and had to compromise in significant areas.⁹⁵ But getting one hundred percent of what the United States wanted in the short-term was not as important as creating, from its necessarily fleeting position of unparalleled strength, an order that combined American values with systemic durability. Yet contrary to Hull’s hopes for the abolition of spheres of influence, what the United States did in the postwar era was to create an order whose undergirding and future management its members were prepared to cede to the United States. The institutions that would be the arbiter of right and wrong within the international system, and that would define the rules of conduct within and between states, were therefore an expression of American structural power, and the United States was the power principally responsible for defining their remit and which had been given responsibility for their maintenance.

The ideas that the United States embedded in the postwar order were the ideas of liberalism – the economic promotion of free and open markets; the political promotion of individual liberty and self-determination. Indeed, the very export of those ethical and political maxims of self-determination and human rights – what we loosely term anti-imperialism – may be held responsible for the rhetorical and theoretical replacement of empire with hegemony in the twentieth century.⁹⁶ Yet that should not lead us to conclude that the first American empire was simply an economic hegemony, limited to the nations of the free world. The structural imperatives of the Cold War bound the ‘free world’ together as a political, security

⁹⁴ Callahan, *Between Two Worlds*, 59.

⁹⁵ G. John Ikenberry, "Rethinking the Origins of American Hegemony", *Political Science Quarterly* (1989).

⁹⁶ One of the consistent tensions of American empire, and the source of its denial, is America’s liberal universalism, that saw the UN Declaration of Human Rights declare democratic governance to be a universal right; and anti-imperialism, expressed in the UN Charter’s enshrinement of the principles of sovereign non-interference. Callahan, *Between Two Worlds*, 61.

and economic unit, dominated by the leadership of the United States, leadership that was animated and legitimated by the shared commitment of the members of the American empire to anticommunism.

Strategies of Empire – Retrenchment, Management and Dominance and the Establishment of the Second American Empire

With the breakup of the Soviet Union the United States was left the sole remaining empire, global in scope and yet more limited in its capacity to exert its dominance than it had been during the Cold War absent the common threat that acted as the glue of America's informal empire. The immediate post-Cold War system exhibited a striking imbalance – the economic order, whilst still structurally biased towards the United States, had become tripolar (United States, Europe and Japan) yet the military order was unipolar. As Noam Chomsky was hardly radical in noting (Paul Kennedy might have said much the same thing) military power that is not backed up by a comparable economic base has its limits as a means of coercion and domination.⁹⁷ Thus at the beginning of the 1990s, America might have been an victorious empire but it was an empire whose grip on its imperium had been loosened, by both its own relative economic decline (inevitable though much of it might have been) and – perversely – by its victory in the Cold War itself.

Yet by the end of the 1990s the United States was an empire renewed, its dominion enlarged, its ideology unchallenged, its economy once again dominant, its military lead unsurpassable, its institutions revived. Indeed, the transition from the first to the second American empire was remarkably smooth. The strategies outlined in the preceding chapters were each addressed to the fact of American empire. In drawing

⁹⁷ Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, 2-3.

on elements of each, the first Bush and particularly the Clinton administration established the terms of the second American empire, renewing its structural power and reconceptualising its legitimacy.

The Empire of Money

The most neglected of the post-Cold War grand strategies, neoisolationism or strategic retrenchment, recognised American empire for what it was and concluded from its realist underpinnings that its decline was inevitable. The United States therefore needed to ensure its future prosperity by refusing to shoulder international burdens, since America could remain a great power only if it avoided the perils of overstretch. Retrenchment then is best characterised as an imperial strategy in keeping with Hadrian's Rome – in recognising that America's future is imperilled by foreign commitments that extend too far, it seeks to retrain imperial focus on the core and in doing so maintain American strength in the longer term.

The United States incorporated very little of the neoisolationist analysis into its post-Cold War foreign policy. That should not be so surprising, since although there was some neoisolationist sentiment among the public, the ideas were marginalised from the policy process, situated on the outside looking in at the foreign policy establishment. The return of isolationism to the popular debate did have an impact however in demonstrating that in order for America to sustain an international foreign policy – let alone manage an empire – it was fundamental to bring about a revival in the American economy. At the same time, the Clinton administration rhetorically succumbed to what one liberal internationalist advocate called the “lure of minimalism”.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff*, 58.

However, American economic revival would not be an internal matter, and whilst minimalist rhetoric might have been politically useful it did not mirror an inward-looking strategic posture on the part of the United States, even at the very beginning of Clinton's administration. As one commentator put it, in debunking the "enduring myth" that Clinton came to power without a foreign policy, the new President "assumed office with a fairly clear view of the world and the sort of policies he would have to pursue in order to enhance American power... by linking the material aspirations of ordinary Americans to the pursuit of his wider economic goals, Clinton calculated that he would be able to counter any drift to isolationism."⁹⁹ Indeed, so strongly did Clinton link American foreign policy to domestic prosperity that critics viewed Clinton's economic team as nationalist trade warriors practising unilateral dollar diplomacy.¹⁰⁰ Yet the effect of prioritising what Secretary of State Warren Christopher called "economic security" was that the United States had a better decade than any of the other great powers thought potential challengers to its throne.¹⁰¹ Between 1990 and 1998, the US economy grew by twenty-six percent, compared with Europe's seventeen percent and Japan's seven percent.¹⁰² The long boom that came after 1992 even allowed the United States to eradicate its near three-decades-old budget deficit. One assessment ranked Clinton as the most successful President in economic terms Lyndon Johnson.¹⁰³ Ironically fuelled by the demands of neoisolationists for a focus on the American domestic economy, the result of a decade of American revival was that having begun the decade as the world's only

⁹⁹ Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 27, 35.

¹⁰¹ Christopher described the rationale behind "the new centrality of economic policy in our foreign policy" to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, listing "economic security" as the number one priority of the Clinton administration. Warren Christopher, "The Strategic Priorities of American Foreign Policy", *US Department of State Dispatch* 4, no. 47 (1993).

¹⁰² G. John Ikenberry, "American Power and the Empire of Capitalist Democracy", *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 5 (2001), 191.

¹⁰³ Raymond Tatalovich and John Frendreis, "Clinton, Class and Economic Policy", in *The Postmodern Presidency: Bill Clinton's Legacy in U.S. Politics*, ed. Steven E. Schier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

superpower, by the turn of the millennium America's unipolar dominance was unquestioned. The United States had turned into "a unipolar global power without historical precedent":

"Today the American economy is equal to the economies of Japan, United Kingdom, and Germany combined. The United States' military capacity is even more in a league of its own. It spends as much on defense as the next fourteen countries combined. It has bases in forty countries. Eighty percent of world military R&D takes place in the United States."¹⁰⁴

Yet even whilst accounting for around half of all world military spending, the United States was able to reduce its defense budget as a percentage of GDP in the course of the 1990s from over 5% at the start of the decade to 3% in 1999.¹⁰⁵ As William Wohlforth pointed out, the reality of American preponderance was much more dramatic than implied by calculation 'bipolar minus one equals unipolar'. The United States had been by far the most powerful state, with twice the GNP and manufacturing production, even as Ronald Reagan was urging increased defense spending in the early 1980s.¹⁰⁶ In 1991 the only military competitor to the United States collapsed, and in the next few years the economic challenges that had been expected from Japan and Europe melted away. The United States accounted for around one quarter of world GDP throughout the 1990s and remained the most technologically advanced major economy with expenditures on research and development nearly equalling the rest of the G-7 combined. Only in the immediate postwar era had the United States been more economically dominant, and never had any nation combined such levels of economic and military dominance, a

¹⁰⁴ G. John Ikenberry, "Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity", in *National Intelligence Council 2020 Project* (2003), 5-6.

¹⁰⁵ Data from SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, available at <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>.

¹⁰⁶ Bruce M. Russett, "The Mysterious Case of Vanishing Hegemony; or, Is Mark Twain Really Dead?", *International Organization* 39, no. 2 (1985), 212.

symmetrical concentration of power resources that was unique among previous hegemons.¹⁰⁷

The second American empire was then arguably even more dominant than the first, particularly as it was now the leader of a single international system, communism as an organising principle of economic and political order having departed the scene. Yet there was more to this re-establishment of American economic empire than simple dominance, and more to America's post-Cold War foreign policy than the focus on out-competing potential rivals. Here strategic ideas of liberal multilateralism provided the ideological foundation for another bout of institution-building that reinforced the structural power of the United States. Two major trade agreements, NAFTA and APEC, placed the United States at the centre of regional trade structures in North America and the Pacific. Alongside these regional trade structures, the Uruguay round of the GATT served to integrate developing nations more fully into the international trading system, and gave birth to the more empowered World Trade Organization (WTO) with stronger enforcement powers and mechanisms for dispute settlement. These integrative institutional structures were part of a broader strategy of empire that tied states to each other in multilateral regional frameworks as part of an open global economy, within which the United States retained structural advantages as both the "system-maker and privilege-taker".¹⁰⁸

This emphasis on the institutional integration of a truly global economy alongside American economic revival made Clinton the 'globalization president', ever keen to embrace its inexorable logic of integration. Yet globalisation remains a fundamentally unequal process, like the free market, in which strength begets strength. Some therefore accused the United States of exploiting its unipolar

¹⁰⁷ Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World".

¹⁰⁸ Michael Mastanduno, "System Maker and Privilege Taker: U.S. Power and the International Political Economy", *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (2009). See also Cox, *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 29-31; Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*, 50-61.

moment to drive through changes in the multilateral management of the international economy that amounted to a programme of forced liberalisation that allowed for the exploitation of the periphery by the imperial core.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the 1990s saw the United States rule over not only the economic relations between states, under the banner of globalisation, but also their internal policies, usually by means of organisations like the IMF, under the banner of neo-liberalism. What became known as the Washington Consensus involved coordinated efforts to pry open banking, stock, and bond markets. Even after the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, the Clinton administration prescribed further liberalization (via the IMF) as the route to economic recovery.¹¹⁰ United States economic strategy was then nothing less than an attempt to universalise their economic empire, as one author put it, “to ‘go global’: in other words, to entrench the United States as the power that will control the major economic and political outcomes across the globe in the twenty-first century.”¹¹¹

It has been argued against this view that the inexorable growth of globalization actually undermines American empire, highlighting as it does the role of markets, financial institutions corporations and private actors. Thus since the height of American empire in the period after World War II authority in international relations has become increasingly fragmented, and America’s ability to extract political outcomes from its capabilities reduced.¹¹² In essence, globalisation is driving the ‘hollowing out’ of the American empire, a process which “erodes the centre's capacity to steer the system – its capacity for governance.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999), 84-89.

¹¹⁰ Mastanduno, "System Maker and Privilege Taker", 144.

¹¹¹ Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, vii.

¹¹² Ferguson, "Approaches to Defining 'Empire'", 278-9.

¹¹³ R. A. W. Rhodes, "The Hollowing out of the State: The Changing Nature of the Public Service in Britain", *Political Quarterly* (1994). The notion of ‘hollowing out’ in political science has been (continued overleaf)

However, as Michael Cox has pointed out, governments still play a key role in the international economic system, and the huge resources of the United States invest it with a central role both in shaping “the material environment in which we all happen to live” and in directing the policies of the organisations charged with managing the world economy, within which the United States “gets its way more often than not”.¹¹⁴ Quoting Joseph Stiglitz, he observes that “IMF programmes are typically directed from Washington.”¹¹⁵ Mastanduno concurs, noting that during the 1990s the United States was able to set about “enlarging the liberal order geographically and deepening it functionally”, establishing an economic order in which the American economy flourished while countries in Latin America, East Asia, and Central Europe moved from state-directed industrialisation to reliance on market forces. Although “the liberal project” was not complete, the second American empire had made remarkable progress on the achievements of the first after World War II.¹¹⁶

Thus the United States conducted an imperial economic strategy throughout the 1990s, using its dominant position and the ideas of liberal multilateralism to create and manage a global economic system largely for its own interests, and skilfully using the globalisation argument to link the demands of neoisolationism to such an internationally activist course.

discussed primarily with regard to domestic governance capacities, particularly in the UK. In the international economic context, see Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State: Governing the Economy in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

¹¹⁴ Cox, "Empire by Denial?", 233.

¹¹⁵ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 24.

¹¹⁶ Mastanduno, "System Maker and Privilege Taker", 123, 45.

Sanctions and War: Political Intervention in the Empire of Liberal Values

Alongside the focus of economic integrationism, the largely successful goal of which was to globalise the American capitalist model, there was another set of ideas deriving from liberalism that governed the ethical norms of political conduct in the second American empire. Ethical prescriptions that had been defined by anticommunism were now replaced by more positive notions of humanitarianism and democracy promotion. On the one hand – as we have seen in both the ideas of liberal multilateralism and primacy – ideas of the peaceful nature of democracies and the proposition that peace and security were now indivisible intersected to compel democracy promotion as an imperial strategy of order maintenance. On the other, humanitarianism was an assertion of the values of the second American empire, a global liberal vision in which political principles of individual liberty everywhere were guaranteed by American power.

Moreover, this political component of the American empire, structurally corresponding to the American empire of capital, was creating an emergent global civil and political society reflective of the United States. For one author, the United States' encouragement of this 'polyarchy' or 'low intensity democracy' during the 1990s created "new modalities of domination" that stemmed not from the exercise of political power but from the possession of structural power.¹¹⁷ The extent of America's ideological reach in a globalising world was reflected in the worldwide dominance of its popular culture, from music to soft-drinks and movies to jeans. Often misrepresented as a feature of America's 'soft power', this was instead an

¹¹⁷ William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11. Robinson goes so far as to argue that the United States leads not its own empire, but a "transnational configuration" that has coalesced around the principles of *Pax Americana*.

expression of a cultural empire that was reminiscent of Rome and which contained within it the potential of empires “to homogenize their populations”¹¹⁸

If the United States’ position in an increasingly globalised system meant that its political ideas and values had global reach, its structural power meant that to address international issues American assent was always required, and more often than not, American activism was necessary. As the British polemicist Christopher Hitchens put it, “the plain fact remains that when the rest of the world wants anything done in a hurry, it applies to American power.”¹¹⁹

That power had unrivalled global reach. The United States’ economic and technological dominance allowed it to sustain military expenditures that meant it had command of the global commons as no other nation had done before, underwriting world trade, travel and global telecommunications.¹²⁰ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States combined both economic and naval dominance with the world system’s lead army. Historically, as William Thompson noted, “the leading whale is not also the leading elephant” but the United States now occupied that hitherto unprecedented position.¹²¹ Moreover, the technological revolution in military affairs meant that the United States was now in a position to manage conflicts by remote control, to wage “virtual war” in which military power could be

¹¹⁸ Spruyt, "American Empire", 295. Russell Smandych makes the point that recent apologists for American cultural imperialism have substituted the more innocuous terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘soft power’ as part of an excellent overview of modern cultural imperialism. Russell Charles Smandych, "Cultural Imperialism and Its Critics: Rethinking Cultural Domination and Resistance", in *Cultural Imperialism: Essays on the Political Economy of Cultural Domination*, ed. Bernd Hamm and Russell Charles Smandych (New York: Broadview Press, 2005). Joseph Nye refutes what he sees as the trivialising of the concept of soft power in Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Christopher Hitchens, "Imperialism: Superpower Dominance, Malignant and Benign", in *slate.msn.com* (2002).

¹²⁰ Posen, "Command of the Commons".

¹²¹ Thompson, "Systemic Leadership", 14.

used to extract desired outcomes without endangering the lives of American personnel.¹²²

The new features of American military dominance meant that the arguments of liberal multilateralists and primacists coalesced to justify American intervention in the world to protect and promote the principles of democracy and norms of human rights. The overwhelming force requirements of the Powell and Weinberger doctrines that had their roots in the Vietnam war were now being increasingly questioned by the availability of surgical strike airpower and the possibility of ‘micro-interventions’ to turn the tide of conflict decisively whilst maintaining a safe distance.¹²³ During the 1990s the United States engaged military force to address ostensibly humanitarian concerns in conflicts in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans; whilst authorising and supporting the international coalition in East Timor.¹²⁴ Conducted largely with United Nations mandates, only in Rwanda was the new norm that placed imperial power at the service of humanitarian concerns overtly not upheld.¹²⁵ It was here that the tensions of power and values in the second American empire were most clear, with one commentator seeing in the United States’ commitment to humanitarianism “all the contradictions of liberal good intentions in

¹²² Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000). See also Christopher Coker, *Humane Warfare: The New Ethics of Postmodern War* (London: Routledge, 2001). On the revolution in military affairs see Eliot A. Cohen, "Change and Transformation in Military Affairs", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27, no. 3 (2004); Colin S. Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

¹²³ Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*, 66-7.

¹²⁴ See Richard Haass, *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World*, Revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

¹²⁵ The US approach to the Rwandan genocide was one of avoidance, reflecting the concerns of the Clinton administration following the crisis in Mogadishu. See Jared Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence: America and the Rwanda Genocide* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

a post-imperial era that wants to do good in faraway places without taking up the burdens of empire.”¹²⁶

Yet at the same time as American military might was made available to the international community for humanitarian purposes, so it was also used against ‘rogue regimes’ that refused to accept the dominance of the American system and follow its rules of international behaviour.¹²⁷ The clearest example was Iraq, where George Bush had asserted America’s right to determine the strategic balance Middle East. The United States swiftly came to regard it as unimaginable that Saddam Hussein would adhere to the United Nations’ demands and followed up Saddam Hussein’s ouster from Kuwait first with a covert CIA operation to bring about regime change authorised by George H.W. Bush, and then with consistent air-strikes throughout Clinton’s time in office.¹²⁸ At the same time, North Korea and Iran were also the target of the coercive force of American power in the form of economic sanctions in response to their WMD development programmes, although these policies were directed less at regime change (as in the Iraqi case) than they were at forcing engagement.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Michael Ignatieff, "The Reluctant Imperialist", *The New York Times*, 6/8/2000.

¹²⁷ Roche and Pickett Jr., "U.S. Intervention Policy for the Post-Cold War World", 200.

¹²⁸ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America between the Wars*, 178-89.

¹²⁹ Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy*, 117-22, 58-59.

Conclusion: ‘Uni-Multilateralism’: Rules and Enforcement in the Second American Empire

By the end of the 1990s the terms of the second American empire were well established. In realist terms “American power, and the world that power helped to create, has not just been preserved, but in many important ways is now more complete than it was back in 1941 or even 1945.”¹³⁰ Paul Kennedy summed up the comprehensiveness of the American imperium:

“Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing. I have returned to all of the comparative defence spending and military personnel statistics over the past 500 years that I compiled in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, and no other nation comes close. The Pax Britannica was run on the cheap, Britain's army was much smaller than European armies, and even the Royal Navy was equal only to the next two navies -- right now all the other navies in the world combined could not dent American maritime supremacy. Charlemagne's empire was merely western European in its reach. The Roman empire stretched farther afield, but there was another great empire in Persia, and a larger one in China. There is, therefore, no comparison.”¹³¹

A liberal view concurred that the United States “stands at the centre of an expanding democratic-capitalist world order that is itself, 50 years after its creation, the dominant reality in world politics.”¹³² Noting approvingly that United States “dominates world politics by providing the language, ideas, and institutional frameworks around which much of the world turns”, John Ikenberry identified the institutional connections linking the United States to the other regions of the world as “a sort of primitive governance system. The United States is a central hub

¹³⁰ Cox, "Whatever Happened to American Decline?", 332.

¹³¹ Paul M. Kennedy, "The Eagle Has Landed: The New U.S. Global Military Position", *The Financial Times*, 1/2/2002.

¹³² Ikenberry, "American Power and the Empire of Capitalist Democracy", 191.

through which the world's important military, political, economic, scientific, and cultural connections pass.¹³³

This situation had been actively built during the 1990s by American policies. The two immediate post-Cold War presidents had pursued “a largely consistent and effective policy of expanding the authority of the United States into new areas... to broaden and deepen its range of economic and security hierarchies.”¹³⁴ Bill Clinton in particular, by prioritising the creation of an integrated global economy, may be considered an empire builder *par excellence*, to be compared with the likes of Augustus and Palmerston.

Above all, the fact that no state attempted to balance against the United States even as it augmented its preponderance during the 1990s reflected Clinton's success. His imperial policy was tempered by the United States' willingness to involve and make concessions to others, particularly its Western allies, and by its preparedness to undertake humanitarian interventions and provide other international public goods. This “democratic and anti-imperialist tradition” allowed others to see “limited political ambitions at work” and the general commitment to multilateral means “granted other states a say over American policy and, more important, signalled a willingness to work within existing international norms.” Thus the United States was perceived as an “authoritative rather than imperialist state”.¹³⁵

This perception was far from universal. As one commentator noted, the project of the second American empire reflected the United States' true historic goal to lead and integrate the world's nations into a liberal and peaceful world system. This was though, he suggested, a “revolutionary” vision of a world “without a general balance of power” that would necessarily antagonise states that fear decline as well as those

¹³³ Ibid., 192.

¹³⁴ Lake, “The New American Empire?”, 285.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 286.

that anticipate improvement, and that far from being perceived as a friend or benefactor of mankind America's "unipolar fantasy" was certain to provoke resistance.¹³⁶ First among the complaints about America's imperial management of a supposedly liberal order were accusations of hypocrisy, demonstrated by the incredulous anger of the French-Tunisian journalist Sophie Bessis, writing in early 2001:

"The paradox of the West lies in its ability to produce universals, to raise them to the level of absolutes, and to violate in an extraordinarily systematic way the principles that it derives from them, while still feeling the need to develop theoretical justifications for those violations... the West's inexhaustible capacity to dissociate what it says from what it does has long made its modernity both unintelligible and illegitimate for those it designates as others."¹³⁷

America's post-Cold War project of political empire-building, of globalising the Western order, paradoxically drew most on the two strategies that at first sight appeared at odds with each other – primacy and liberal multilateralism. Both are best characterised as strategies of and for empire, yet they envisage American empire in very different ways, with the former envisioning dominance through military predominance and the latter a cooperative multilateral order based primarily around an open international economic order, albeit one in which American leadership was indispensable. Yet if the means of imperial management were in opposition, the notion that the ultimate end of the creation of a liberal empire was in America's national interest was fundamentally the same. As Andrew Bacevich writes:

"The Big Idea guiding U.S. strategy is openness: the removal of barriers to the movement of goods, capital, people and ideas, thereby fostering an international

¹³⁶ David P. Calleo, "The Tyranny of False Vision: America's Unipolar Fantasy", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 50, no. 5 (2008).

¹³⁷ Sophie Bessis and Patrick Camiller, *Western Supremacy: Triumph of an Idea?* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 5-6.

order conducive to American interests, governed by American norms, regulated by American power, and, above all, satisfying the expectations of the American people for ever-greater abundance.”¹³⁸

The result of this marriage of openness and military primacy was an approach to the second American Empire after the Cold War that might be best characterised as ‘uni-multilateralism’. If a global integrative order could be created with others then the United States would work with likeminded allies to do so; where it met with resistance the United States would use its power to establish its will. The second American empire was biased towards regulating international order through new and existing institutions and alliances and by means of *ad hoc* coalitions or ‘posses’ in preference to unilateral action.¹³⁹ At the same time, others were left in no doubt that the United States, like any imperial power, reserved the right to act on its own and for its own ends, as the principle of uni-multilateralism was summed up in the mantra of the Clinton administration: “with others when we can, but alone when we must.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 88.

¹³⁹ Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff*, 90-100.

¹⁴⁰ William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, White House, February 1995.

CONCLUSIONS

Epilogue: 9-11 and The Bush Doctrine

Debate about American grand strategy in the post-Cold War world was abruptly suspended on September 11th 2001, as the American empire suffered ‘blowback’ on home soil in the form of massive terrorist attacks targeted at the economic, political and military symbols of the second American empire.¹ Sporadic resistance to America’s imperial strategy had been encountered before, but had “never quite risen above the level of nuisance.”² The response of the Bush Administration was to ‘unveil’ the second American empire. As Johnson later noted, September 11th didn’t so much change the world as it did the thinking of American leaders, who abandoned notions of self-binding and multilateralism to reach directly for an unashamedly imperial strategy in the democratic globalist variant of primacy.³ Constructing this change as “a new kind of war”, the United States committed itself to a sustained military engagement without deadlines, exit strategies, or fixed rules about how to deploy American troops.”⁴

This strategic shift on the part of the Bush Administration was significant, not only because it temporarily shelved the debate surrounding American grand strategy as US foreign policy executive – and, at least initially, the broader foreign policy discourse within the United States – coalesced around the unifying threat of Islamist terrorism. It thus shifted the terms of the

¹ Chalmers Johnson did not credit himself with having predicted the events of September 11th, but his conclusion in the late 1990s that the United States’ commitment to maintaining a global empire was imprudent was prescient. “World politics in the twenty-first century will in all likelihood be driven primarily by blowback from the second half of the twentieth century – that is, from the unintended consequences of the Cold War and the crucial American decision to maintain a Cold War posture in a post-Cold War world.” Johnson, *Blowback*, 238.

² Bacevich, *American Empire*, 226.

³ Chalmers A. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic* (London: Verso, 2004), 3.

⁴ Donald H. Rumsfeld, "A New Kind of War", *New York Times*, 27/11/2001.

post-Cold War debate, placing the question of security from terrorism at the centre of the American strategic thought. The Bush Administration's approach, summarised in the National Security Strategy of 2002, also marked a shift in imperial management from unimultilateralism to unabashed unilateralism, and the means of American strategy became more obviously identified with its military capabilities than any other aspect of its power.⁵ 'Globalisation' and 'enlargement' gave way to the 'war on terror' and 'freedom' in America's imperial rhetoric.

Thus September 11th did change the world, precisely because it changed the thinking of American leaders. This thesis has argued that domestic ideas make an important contribution when they intervene between systemic imperatives and state strategy. It is not clear that the murder of three thousand American civilians in downtown New York constituted a change in the dynamics of the international system. It may have changed – or brought home to leaders a change in – the systemic rules of the system, establishing concepts of asymmetry and non-state-actors within the framework of international security. But it had no clear affect on the structure of the international system – it did not alter the balance of power. However, precisely because it caused a shift in ideas and perceptions at the unit level of the most powerful state in the international system, 9-11 precipitated systemic change. If the strategic ideas of great powers contribute to the nature of relations between them, the strategies of global empires define the international order itself.

⁵ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002. For an assessment of the Bush National Security Strategy in the context of American foreign policy tradition see Adam Quinn, "'The Deal': The Balance of Power, Military Strength, and Liberal Internationalism in the Bush National Security Strategy", *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (2008).

Summary Of Argument

The end of the Cold War has been described as a postwar moment, comparable to the ends of other major wars and in particular the United States' efforts at order building in 1919 and 1945.⁶ Yet the end of the Cold War was not like the aftermath of other major wars – as Ikenberry notes, the “destruction of societies and political regimes resulted from the collapse of the Soviet empire and not from the violence of war.”⁷ So although there was a ‘victor’, the end of the Cold War’s peaceful nature did not allow for a root and branch systematic restructuring of the international order. There was no Versailles, no Bretton Woods, no Yalta at which the victorious powers met to decide the fate of their vanquished foe and impose a new vision of order upon the international system.

Instead of a conference whose outcomes would constitute a new statement of order, the world looked to the United States’ reaction as the world’s sole superpower for a sense of vision. Given the extent of American power, it was the strategy of the United States that would define international order. Yet as we have seen, the United States was unsure, divided, mourning the loss of the certainties that sustained its Cold War internationalism.

The grand strategy debate that took place in the 1990s is not clearly defined, nor do the adherents of particular views hail from pre-existing political groupings or ideologies. Instead, alignments in the new strategy debate were *ad hoc*, bringing political enemies together and dividing allies. Republican nationalists united with dovish Democrats in a bid to retrench American international commitments, liberals united with neoconservatives to argue for American interventions in far flung parts of the world, and organisations as fundamentally at odds as the Heritage Foundation and the Rainbow Coalition joined forces to endorse cuts in military budgets. The spheres of social, economic and foreign policy became blurred, and the established continuities of opinion across them disintegrated. And it was, and perhaps

⁶ K.J. Holsti, "The Post Cold War 'Settlement' in Comparative Perspective", in *Discord and Collaboration in a New Europe: Essays in Honor of Arnold Wolfers*, ed. Arnold Wolfers, Douglas T. Stuart, and Stephen F. Szabo (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Policy Institute, 1994); Ikenberry, *After Victory*; John Gerard Ruggie, "Third Try at World Order? America and Multilateralism after the Cold War", *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (1994).

⁷ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 215.

continues to be, a “slow and messy” realignment process.⁸ Yet even as they denied the United States was an imperial power, at a fundamental level the major schools of thought were in unspoken, even unconscious agreement that the United States had the structural functions and power of an empire. It may have been an empire in decline, an expensive danger to American security that needed rolling back; it might have been an invited empire of universal values organised by multilateral consent; or it could be thought an unfinished empire in which military power was sustained against the expansionism of others; but whichever conception was preferred, the fact of America’s dominance over the rest of the world constituted the starting point for each grand strategy proposal.

The argument made by this thesis is first and foremost that ideas matter in international politics, that human beings have the capacity to order the world we inhabit. That the world is not wholly determined by the structural relations of material capabilities might not be controversial, but how ideas and power together create the international system certainly is. In seeking to better understand how ideas contributed to US grand strategy and international structure following the Cold War, the thesis makes two important moves.

The first concerns the nature and content of ideas within the United States. For forty-five years the doctrine of containment had harnessed the nature of bipolarity to mandate liberal universalism as the central tool of American national security, defined by the protection of the ideas of liberty that themselves constitute the United States of America. It was therefore historically predictable that the persistent historical tensions at the heart of American identity would resurface in the 1990s, as they had – with very different outcomes – in 1919 and 1945.⁹ Thus a consistent theme in the post-Cold War grand strategy debate are the two competing imperatives that have caused the historical tendency of American foreign relations to swing between extremes of “indiscriminate isolationism and an equally indiscriminate internationalism or globalism.”¹⁰ On the one hand, the protection of American liberty is seen in the neoisolationist impulse, the drive towards economic mercantilism and the deep

⁸ Tonelson, "Beyond Left and Right".

⁹ Legro, *Rethinking the World*, 49-83.

¹⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (London: Pall Mall Press for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1969), 15.

suspicion of both primacists and neoisolationists of the constraints on America's freedom of action implied by membership of multilateral institutions. On the other hand, the commitment to liberty as a set of universal ideas of American identity drives the advocacy of democratic enlargement and underpins an implicit embrace of empire. That the ideational competition within the United States' foreign policy establishment would take the form that it did after the end of the Cold War was therefore foreshadowed by the history of two hundred years of American foreign policy.

The second feature of the argument is systemic. Since neoclassical realism prioritises the structural imperatives that the system creates, it should expect a grand strategic outcome on the part of the United States to reflect its status as an empire. In as far as each of the three ideal-type grand strategies identified in the course of thesis are best understood as strategies of empire the theory's expectations are fulfilled. In order to discover which set of strategic ideas will emerge from the process of ideational competition as a foreign policy outcome neoclassical realism defers to the analysis of that domestic debate.

Significantly, the fact that the ideas of primacy and liberal multilateralism – strategies that embrace the notion of imperial management – were more significant in US foreign policy during the 1990s than the alternative of retrenching the American empire, would indicate that there is an inbuilt systemic bias towards internationalism. This might exist at the level of the state, within the foreign policy executive that arbitrates between strategic ideas, as neoisolationists suggest. Alternatively, the bias may exist at the level of the international system, if anarchy does, as Mearsheimer claims, generate expansionary imperatives. What is perhaps more important is that imperial strategies serve to embed particular ideas in the international system itself: in the norms and rules of international cooperation; in the institution of international order; in the agenda-setting capacity of international leadership; and in the underlying assumptions of international system that are a product of hegemony. In its construction of the second American Empire during the 1990s, the United States thus enhanced and extended its structural power, ensuring that we continue to live in a distinctly American system.

Theoretical Implications

In addition to the main argument that is specific to the historical period in question, the thesis suggests three more generalisable theoretical implications for the neoclassical realist framework presented here.

1) International Structure Shapes But Does Not Determine

The fact that the result of the grand strategy debate during the 1990s was a preference for the strategies of liberal multilateralism and primacy suggests that although international structure establishes the general form and shape of a state's grand strategy it does not specify or determine the particular type of strategy the state will choose. A state's geostrategic position restricts the choice of strategic options that the foreign policy executive will consider. The United States' position of overwhelming predominance determined that it would pursue an imperial grand strategy after the end of the Cold War, taking on the role of global leader. However, features at the system level cannot explain its choice of imperial strategy, which was determined by the balance of ideas within the state, and within the foreign policy executive in particular.

This perception is reinforced by the domestic rather than systemic sources of the alteration in imperial strategy after the events of 9-11. That structure determines form but does not specify type of strategy might lead to generalisable expectations for neoclassical realist theory of state postures given particular international structures, whilst leaving the specific threat perceptions and policy choices to the balance of ideas at the domestic level.

2) The Absence Of Threat – A Wicked Problem?

In the 1990s, American leaders struggled to identify or construct either an agreed threat or animating concept around which to unify American grand strategy. The strategies of the 1990s produced such differing assessments of the strategic environment and the goals of American strategy that it is tempting to regard grand strategy formulation in the absence of threat as a *wicked problem*, that is to say that the problem cannot be understood until after the

formulation of a solution. Thus each strategy, rather than assessing the strategic situation and responding to threats, approaches the strategic assessment from the United States position of strategic invulnerability and constructs threats to suit its own purposes. Thus liberal multilateralism emphasises dangers to global interests such as the pressures of climate change in order to justify an institutional approach based on multilateral cooperation.

Neoisolationism focuses on economic competitiveness as a means of casting the spotlight on the domestic sphere. Primacy stresses the military threats of rogue states and rising powers to bolster the requirements for defense spending.

3) Implications for Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism expects that when states are very powerful the international system imposes less constraints on their behaviour, increasing the role of ideas in forming strategy. Indeed, particularly in states like the United States with a relatively fragmented and institutionally diverse foreign policy structure, featuring a plurality of relatively weak ideational couriers, the use of ideas to create ‘clear and present dangers’ around which a national consensus can be established is to be expected when international structure does not provide such threats.

Classical realists would have warned against this kind of mutual constitution of threat and response, which eschews the rational, empirical investigation of the strategic reality and avoids what Morgenthau called the “subtle distinctions, complex choices and precarious manipulation which is the proper sphere of foreign policy.”¹¹ The United States, despite the strains on its power in Iraq and Afghanistan and as a result of the financial crisis, and despite the loss of ideological self-confidence those travails have precipitated, retains an imperial superiority that means that it is little threatened in the world. Although the Bush Doctrine may now seem to be an aberration, it should be remembered that it stands in line with both the debates of the 1990s that foreshadowed it and balance of power that followed it. The structural power of the second American empire remains unchallenged – despite the economic

¹¹ Ibid., page 15.

rise of China, there are no challengers to America's role as the political, economic and ideological leader of the international order. America remains an empire whose strategy defines the nature of the world in which we live.

What this thesis has tried to show is that ideas play an important role in the formulation of states' grand strategies, and that their role is both greater and more significant when they inform the strategies of empires. The grand strategies of great and imperial powers are the building blocks of the international system that they define, and the ideas at the heart of them should be the focus of scholars of international relations. This conclusion has a profound implication in the final analysis for neoclassical realists as inheritors of the classical realist tradition, since it entails that they should take on the classical realists' role of analysing the links between the international system and grand strategy, warning of idealism and counselling caution in American foreign policy. The neoclassical realist project is therefore as much normative as it is descriptive, with a clear idea of the role of scholars within society. The purpose of neoclassical realists then, should be to provide policy advice and criticism, to identify the national interest in terms of power and highlight where ideological motivations may distort it, in short, to embrace Morgenthau's dictum and accept the responsibility to speak truth to power.

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