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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

THE GREAT DEBATE

COMPETING GRAND STRATEGIES FOR
AMERICA

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THE GREAT DEBATE

Competing Grand Strategies for America

Introduction

It is now a truism that we have no consensus on grand strategy. There is a lively debate, but no *apparent* favorites, either among foreign policy elites or general public--though everyone, it seems, could do a better job than the Clinton administration. Judging from tone of the discussion, much is riding on specific choices that must be made soon. There are great lamentations that the U.S. is adrift, strategyless, playing catch-up with each crisis as it comes along. For some, the U.S. is likely to fall victim to an "arrogance of power." For others, the U.S. is excessively conciliatory towards other states. Some observers foresee America's preeminence itself prompting, in accordance with inescapable laws of nature, the appearance of an antithesis--either a new great power or a hostile alliance. Many warn of overextension, imperial or otherwise, and consequent exhaustion, gradual or otherwise. This debate has been going on for most of 1990s and shows every sign of continuing well into the new decade, at least.

Another aspect of lack of a grand strategy consensus is particularly evident to those of us working in the Department of Defense. Despite nominal coherence between the National Military Strategy and the Clinton administration's National Security Strategy, the military establishment and the administration do not seem to share the same vision. The primary indicators of this divide are recurring frictions over what constitutes a vital interest and over

what justifies the use of military force.

My aim in this study is not to create a new entrant in an already crowded field—the spectrum of real alternatives is probably already covered in one form or another. My objective here is to define the major alternatives based on the actual debate (rather than on a priori logic), identify where and why these alternatives differ, and weigh the pros and cons in a comparative fashion consciously striving **not** to be an advocate for any of the alternatives. I am not impartial; so let me make clear my own bias, which is somewhat toward the broad engagement end of the spectrum. My primary goal is to set forth pros and cons so that any other observer can apply his own weightings and tradeoffs. My second aim is to find the most basic underlying sources of disagreement among the different strategies/alternatives.

Methodology

From the start, I sought to give my study a firm empirical grounding. My starting point was the spectrum of grand strategies actually proposed by politicians, scholars, officials, commentators, and others.¹ Using a technique to be described below, I reduced the universe of actual grand strategy proposals to a small number of conceptually distinct composite strategies representing the key poles (not necessarily limited to two) of the debate.²

The poles I developed are most certainly not the only possible, reasonable way of parsing the debate. However, I believe that they are logical and useful and that they flow upward from empirical phenomena rather than downward as deductions from theoretical definitions.

¹ Curiously, relatively few military professionals showed up as I cast my net for entries in the great debate.

² Throughout this study, I will use the terms “composite,” “alternative,” and “pole” interchangeably, all standing for the representative strategies to which I had reduced the real-world universe of grand strategy proposals.

As my final step, I evaluated the pros and cons of each alternative strategy, first in isolation and then relative to each other.

What Is Grand Strategy?

A good place to begin is to be clear about we are studying. Stripped to essential elements, a grand strategy consists of:

- A set of goals for the U.S.
- A plan for using American power to move toward those goals.

Implicit in a grand strategy are a world view (including a concept of how international politics work and expectations for the future) and an image of what the American role in the world is or should be.

With goals and, implicitly at least, self-image thrown in, it should be no surprise that grand strategies need not be based on purely pragmatic calculations.

A grand strategy is likely to be fairly general--more like a strategic concept. Its primary function is to define broad goals and--almost as important--establish a self-image of the role we are to play. It provides guidelines regarding the application of force. One of the things distinguishing a grand strategy from "run-of-the-mill" military strategy is that defining the goals is an integral part of the strategy. In the typical military context, the goals are a given, obtained from outside (from higher headquarters, so to speak). For grand strategy, there is no "higher headquarters." Setting goals may be the most important function of grand strategy.

Classifying Grand Strategies

There are many proposed strategies, so we must find a means of reducing the field to a manageable set of distinct--but not necessarily "pure"--alternatives. The first problem facing us is to determine the best method for classifying grand strategies. Keeping in mind that I aim at an empirical method of reducing the field, it is worth digressing for a moment to point out that there are probably only two fundamentally different methods for classifying grand strategies. The two methods flow directly from the condition that a grand strategy has only two essential elements. One method is based on the means or methods employed; the other is based on the goals sought.

Classification based on means or methods appears to be the more common by far. One example is the following typology suggested by Posen and Ross: neoisolation, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy.³ Another typology, devised by Eric Nordlinger, uses two dimensions: level of firmness of engagement, and level of activism of engagement.⁴

Goal-based typologies are less common, possibly because there are many ways to describe goals. A simple and elegant solution to this problem is to distinguish between status quo goals and non-status-quo goals. This begs the question, "status quo of what?" Since our subject is grand strategy, we would define our "what" as the international system. If one does not like the way the current system operates, there are—cutting through a lot of possible confusion—only two fundamentally different directions to take. One is in the direction of a far more integrated, institutionalized and regulated world order. The other is in the direction of a less integrated and institutionalized world, at least in so far as American

³ Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* (Winter 1996--97), 5--53.

⁴ Eric A. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 31-34.

relationships are concerned.⁵

Other schemes for classifying grand strategies are probably variations of these two methods. It would be quite surprising if the classification scheme I derive from empirical examination should not be a variant of these two elemental classification methods.

Applying Filters

Returning to my main theme, how do we go about devising an empirical method of reduction? My solution is to apply a set of filters to a sampling of proposals. The filters are dimensions--defined by dichotomies--related to key factors in the strategy debate. I devised seven such dimensions and ranked each of my sample proposals against each dimension. The seven dichotomies/dimensions are:

- American power is declining versus increasing
- Threat-based versus opportunity-based
- Engagement versus nonengagement
- Status quo goals versus non-status quo
- Narrow definition of American interests versus broad definition of interests
- Traditional concept of American power versus nontraditional concept⁶
- Unchanged international system versus fundamentally changed system

The next step was to examine how the proposals clustered, looking for repetition or

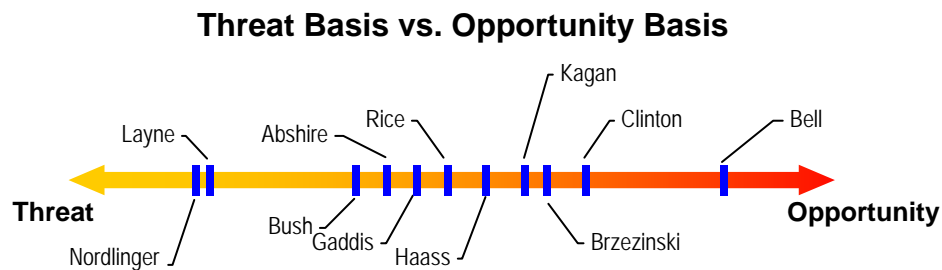
⁵ The absolute in one direction would be world government (voluntary or otherwise); in the other, a classic, undiluted anarchy of sovereign states. These absolutes should not be overemphasized. They are ideologically loaded and elicit immediate gut reactions, both positive and negative. The fact that a strategy is in one direction or the other does not mean—in fact, almost never means—it is aimed at the theoretical absolute in that direction or would have any realistic chance of achieving it.]

⁶ Traditional concepts of power cite components such as political, economic, military and a will or moral element. Nontraditional concepts recognize power multipliers such as soft power and bandwagoning. Coral bell has provided one of the best descriptions of the bandwagoning effect.

pattern across multiple dimensions. Once having identified repetitive clusters, which I will refer to as “poles” of the debate, I attempted to identify what factors and assumptions link together the disparate proposals making up a pole and the factors and assumptions that distinguishing them from the other poles.

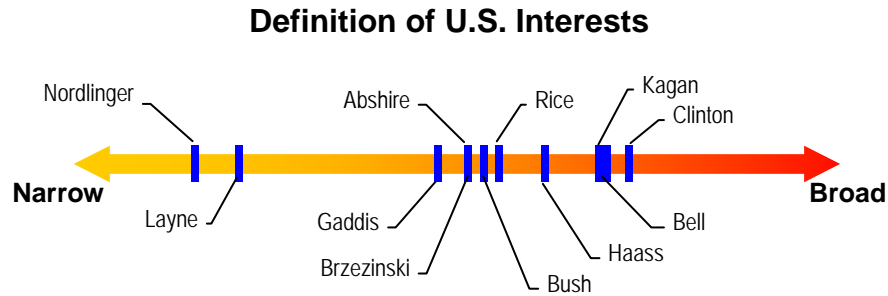
In my survey, I evaluated eleven grand strategies. One is that of the Clinton administration, the only one that can claim to be in actual practice. The others are all proposals. One is that advanced by presidential candidate George W. Bush as part of his official campaign. The remainder are those of the following scholars: David Abshire, Coral Bell, Condoleezza Rice, Christopher Layne, Robert Kagan, Richard Haass, John Gaddis, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Eric Nordlinger.⁷

In practice, ranking individual strategies along the various dimensions was often highly subjective. Slight differences are probably not significant. Other observers would likely differ on many specific evaluations even though reaching similar relative rankings. In the end, one should not regard this procedure as anything other than a rough filtering procedure. Regarded as such, the procedure proved useful. The resulting rankings appear below.



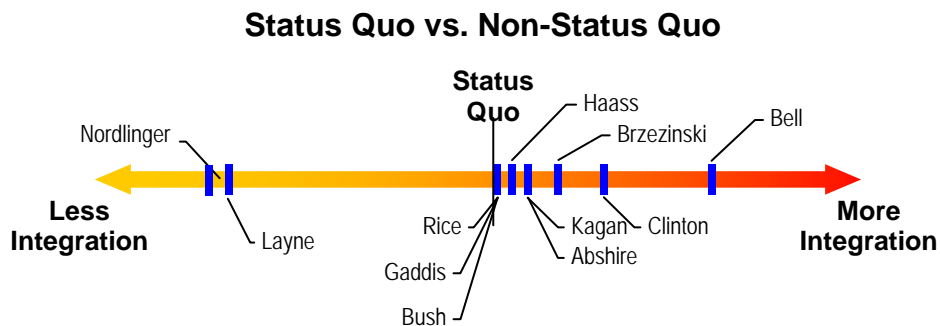
⁷ The specific works that I used for each individual are listed in the bibliography. For my analysis of the Clinton strategy, I relied heavily on Coral Bell ("American Ascendancy and the Pretense of Concert," *The National Interest* 57 (Fall 1999). Database on-line, accessed February 20, 2000. Available from ProQuest information service, ISSN 08849382) and Andrew J. Bacevich ("Policing Utopia: the Military Imperatives of Globalization," *The National Interest* 56 (Summer 1999). Database on-line, accessed April 9, 2000. Available from ProQuest information service, ISSN 08849382).

As I examined how these eleven placed on the various dimensions, it was clear that Nordlinger and Layne frequently established one end of the spectrum, separated by a marked gap from the other strategies (see first two dimension diagrams, for example). Given that these were the only neoisolationist strategies in the sample, the result is not surprising



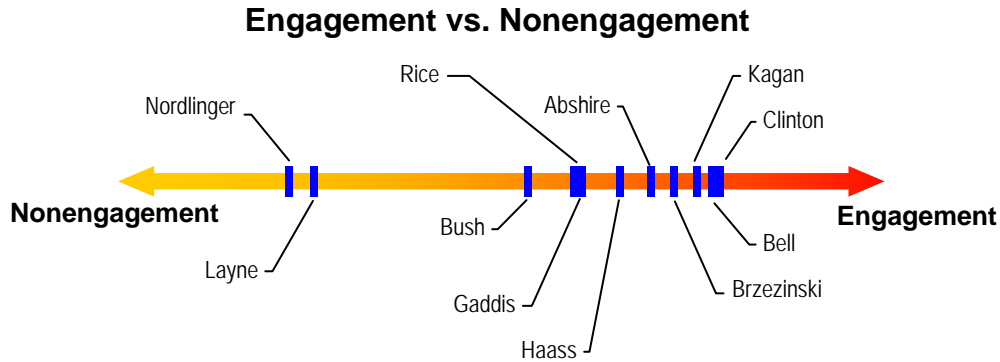
and does suggest them as one of the poles of the debate.

The remaining strategies showed less distinct patterns. Bell often formed an endpoint of the spectrum (the opposite end to Nordlinger and Layne), as, for example in the status quo dimension diagram. Clinton and, to a slightly lesser degree, Haass and Kagan frequently showed up in some proximity to Bell. Forming a sort of middle ground (speaking spatially

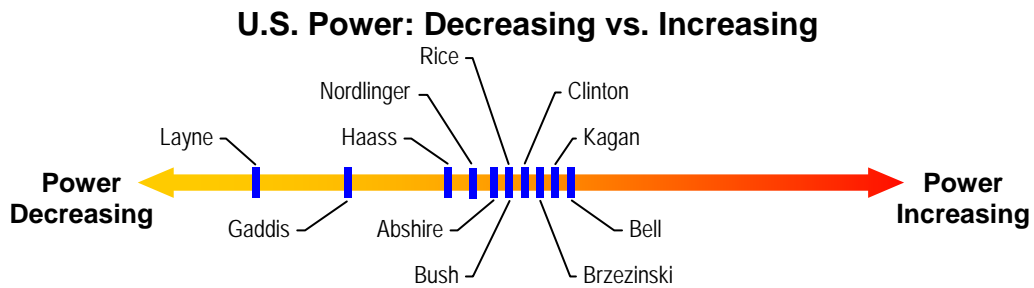


with respect to my spectrums, not necessarily ideologically) was a loose grouping consisting of Bush, Rice, Gaddis and Abshire. Brzezinski tended to jump between what I will tentatively refer to as the Rice group and the Bell group.

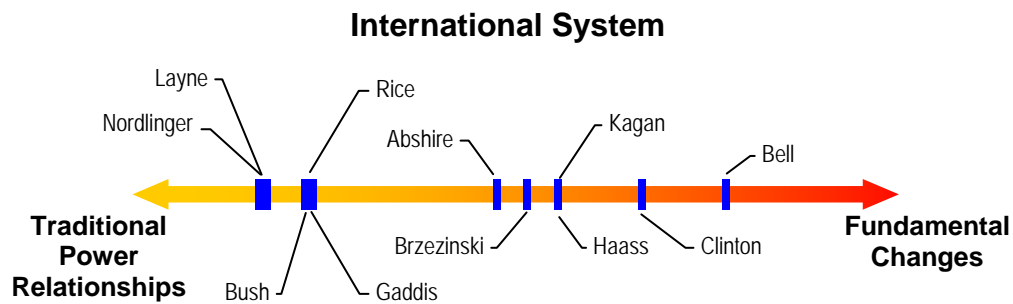
Along a number of the dimensions, the Rice group and the Bell group weren't that far apart and might overlap. However, clear differentiation occurred along the dimension dealing with the character of the international system. For Rice *et al*, the international system



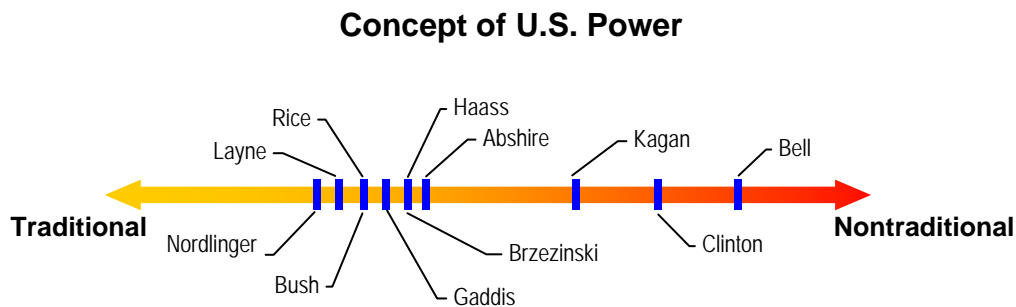
continues to operate pretty much as it always has: power relationships and the balance of power are the keys. For Bell *et al*, fundamental, even epochal, changes have taken place or are underway to the effect that the Westphalian model of state interactions is no longer operable.



Other dimensions showing a substantial degree of differentiation between the Rice group and the Bell group were U.S. power (traditional definition versus nontraditional), U.S. interests (narrow definition versus broad), and the goals dimension (status quo versus non-status quo). On these dimensions, the Rice group consistently rated as traditional/status quo; and the Bell group consistently rated as nontraditional/non-status quo.



Based on these observations, I concluded that three poles--one based on the Nordlinger-Layne group, one on the Rice group, and one on the Bell group--offered a fair characterization of the grand strategy debate. I had not aimed at a mere three poles and had, in fact, expected rather more. My evidence, though--admittedly limited--simply does not support a larger number of poles.



The Rice group consists of Rice, Bush, Gaddis and Abshire. The Bell group consists of Bell, Clinton, and Kagan. The Nordlinger-Layne group consists of just those two. (Haass and Brzezinski tended to jump between the Rice and Bell groups.) What links the members of each group together and distinguishes them from the other two groups? On examination, the key factor is choice of goals, together with the world view underlying those goals. The Rice group shares essentially status quo goals. The other two are as clearly non-status-quo strategies aimed in diametrically opposite directions. Further, the results of our empirical efforts match quite nicely with our earlier discussion of classifying grand strategies on a

conceptual basis. For these reasons, my set of alternative, composite grand strategies will consist of the following three strategies: the status quo strategy (based on the Rice group), the global integration strategy (based on the Bell group), and the independence strategy (based on the Nordlinger-Layne group).

It is important to remember that the descriptions I will give of these three composite strategies in the next section are *representative*. Each stands for a number of real strategic proposals that, collectively, constitute an identifiable pole of the great strategy debate. They do not represent "pure" types, nor do they represent the logical but abstract limits of the status quo-non-status quo dimension. Equally, no real proposal matches exactly with a composite strategy. Indeed, some of the real proposals showed characteristics of more than one of the composite strategies.

We now turn to describing the content and evaluating the merits of the three composite grand strategies.

The Status Quo Strategy

Key Elements of the Status Quo Strategy.⁸

The primary goal of the status quo strategy is to manage the current world system so as to benefit from positive economic and political trends without fundamental redistribution of power or loss of American preeminence.⁹ As one particularly clear statement puts it:

⁸ This section relies heavily on the views set forth by Condoleezza Rice in her recent *Foreign Affairs* article (Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79 no. 1 (January-February 2000). Database on-line, accessed February 20, 2000. Available from ProQuest information service, ISSN 00157120).

⁹ Few of the actual proposals that I here lump under the classification "status quo strategy" explicitly call for indefinite preservation of American global preeminence. Some variants even look forward to a future that will be more multipolar or multilateral. Even so, I contend that the effective thrust of status quo strategies is to preserve preeminence. Few, if any, actually advocate that the U.S. gratuitously abdicate its current position of preeminence in any identifiable time span. Some proposals point out the dangers of "arrogant" use of power, but this is an argument for restrained use of preeminent power,

Our task here, then, becomes one of preservation: we seek not to alter a menacing global system, as we did during World War II and the Cold War, but to hang onto as much as we can of the relatively benign system we already have.¹⁰

America will achieve these goals by rejuvenating alliances (meaning improved burden sharing), paying special attention to relationships with the big powers, and maintaining robust military capabilities. Opportunities exist as well as threats, but answering threats takes priority. The strategy is cautious with respect to sharing power or diluting American autonomy.

This strategy springs from a world view that emphasizes the continuing centrality of great power relationships and the existence of multiple potential challenges and numerous real and potential threats. "World politics remains a modified form of anarchy in which power and influence are at stake."¹¹ State sovereignty is still a guiding principle in theory and in practice. For this world view, the "international community" and "international norms" are illusory concepts.

Well managed, American power is durable; the only real threat to America's power base is self-induced overextension. American power derives from strong political, economic and military components; and all should be used to defend and advance American interests. However, military power needs special attention to ensure capabilities remain robust and are not wasted on other than vital interests.

not for abdication. In short, while a status quo strategy may look forward with equanimity to a time when the U.S. is no longer preeminent, it makes no provision for speeding the process along.

¹⁰ Gaddis, John Lewis. *Muddling Through? A Strategic Checklist for the United States in the Post-Cold War World*. Paper presented at the symposium "Networking the Security Community in the Information Age" at the 3rd International Security Forum and 1st Conference of the Pfp Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Zurich, Switzerland, October 19-21, 1998. Internet publication, accessed March 30, 2000. Available at http://www.isn.ethz.ch/securityforum/Online_Publications/WS4/Gaddis.htm.

¹¹ David M. Abshire, "U.S. Global Policy: Toward an Agile Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly* 19 no. 2 (Spring 1996). Database on-line, accessed February 20, 2000. Available from Northern Light information service (www.northernlight.com), document ID GG19970922010107779.

The definition of American interests is neither narrow nor broad. For example, American interests do include fostering positive economic and democratic trends around the world, though neither of these are necessarily vital interests.

Pros and Cons of the Status Quo Strategy

Implementation of any plan is likely to fall short of the original concept. That said, the status quo strategy has a number of positive propensities. Relative to other strategies to be considered, this is the low-risk option. It suggests a cautious approach to committing military resources so that OPTEMPO (operational tempo) strain could be reduced (compared to the current situation under the Clinton administration) and more resources allocated to future capabilities. That, in turn, could reduce friction between the military and civilian leaders. A more cautious use of military force would also remove a source of friction in American relations with key powers such as China and Russia. The strategy seems to imply a flexible and pragmatic approach to handling the challenges those two states pose now or might in the future--subject to the restraint, of course, that basic American preeminence is preserved.

But there are negatives as well. Despite reduced OPTEMPO, the costs of defense could actually increase as more money is spent on future force development and on ballistic missile defense, which many advocates of this strategy support.

Further, the strategy does not really solve the inherent problems caused by perpetuating and asserting American preeminence in a world of big and small powers likely to be suspicious of our intentions. It is a strategy of primacy--however benign and well managed--rather than balance of power. In this regard, the strategy may not be entirely consistent with its own underlying world view.

I have described this strategy as the low-risk option. That assessment really only

applies with any clarity to the short term. It's probably still a good bet into the mid term. However, all bets are off for the long term. The reason is that it is not clear how this strategy will react to a less benign global environment. An assumption underlying this strategy is that it will be possible to forge reasonable *modi vivendi* with potential challengers such as China and Russia that recognize American global preeminence. Should this assumption fail, what are our alternatives? Large military buildup? A new strategy of containment against a challenger? In short, the status quo strategy may appear low risk now but may not be optimal preparation for varied long-term futures.

Finally, if this strategy is wrong about the illusory nature of the international community and international norms, an historic opportunity may be lost.

The Integration Strategy

Key Elements of the Integration Strategy¹²

The integration strategy has ambitious goals. It aims to provide for security and prosperity by creating a widely based, consensual, stable international security system with American economic and military power as the core organizing forces, at least initially. The system could take a variety of forms ranging from a “concert of powers” form to a fully institutionalized collective security system.

Two features distinguish international entities (formal and informal) in this vision from apparently similar entities in the status quo vision. First, integrationist entities will have preventive as well as reactive and deterrent functions. That is, they would make some attempt at adjudicating or regulating underlying social and political tensions, both inter- and

¹² The clearest statement of the integrationist view (though she does not use this term) is found in Bell, "American Ascendancy and the Pretense of Concert."

intrastate, before they erupt into full-blown security challenges demanding a military reaction. And second, integrationist entities would involve some form of shared authority. No one state would have dictatorial powers. Even the most powerful state would have to gain consensus before acting.

The potential for this vision is supported by a world view that asserts that the Westphalian system of sovereign states engaged in balance of power operations has come to an end, at least temporarily. In its place is American ascendancy (which is likely to last at least several generations) and incipient norms governing state behavior (e.g., rulers are accountable for how they treat their citizens). Absolutely crucial to achieving this vision is the concept of “bandwagoning.”¹³

According to the "security dilemma" associated with the realist school, any state's efforts to increase its own security inevitably also increase the insecurity of other states. The traditional solution would be for the other states to take countermeasures, such as military build-ups or alliance formation. But there is an alternate solution. Other states may simply choose to ally themselves with--jump on the bandwagon of--an ascendant state rather than oppose it. Hence the term bandwagoning. In the integrationist view, American ascendancy gains more from bandwagoning than it loses to determined opposition.

This strategy implies active engagement in political, economic and military issues around the world and a broad notion of American interests. Integrationists would point to NATO, based on its intervention in Kosovo, as an example of a security institution evolving in a direction consistent with the integrationist vision.

¹³ Ibid.

Pros and Cons of the Integration Strategy

The primary virtue of the integration strategy is that it has the potential to exploit an opportunity to transcend the flaws of the Westphalian system and tame human destructiveness. The key advantage is that "...the likelihood of war in a unipolar system[i.e., a U.S.-led concert of powers] is much less than in either a bipolar or a multipolar balance."¹⁴ This opportunity is unprecedented in history and may not last forever. Seizing this opportunity meshes well with those elements of the American psyche that believe in American exceptionalism and mission.

The strategy has an inherently long-term outlook. It seeks to put in place self-sustaining institutions that make American ascendancy more palatable as long as it lasts (which may be a long time) and at the same time prepare for a period when American may not possess unequivocal ascendancy.

The emergence of a security community in Western Europe--where war among the major states is all but unthinkable and transnational institutions and norms appear to be taking serious shape--suggests that integrationist goals are not a totally impractical dream.

The risks of this strategy are the flip side of its virtues. If this historic opportunity is a mirage, the effort to exploit it will probably be counterproductive and probably undermine American ascendancy. There is certainly no consensus among Americans that the opportunity is real. Hence, this is a risky strategy.

Even if the trends integrationists see--international norms, diluted sovereignty--are real, there is no assurance these trends will or can be made to play out to the desired conclusion.

¹⁴ Ibid.

There are other risks, as well. The open-ended nature of interests under this strategy suggests a strong propensity toward varied military missions. Military resources could easily be strained with negative effects on training, readiness, and future force capabilities. Long-term sustainability is a serious question mark.

Is it possible to make time distinctions for these risks as we did for the status quo strategy? For most of the short term, the risks generated by mild integrationist policies are probably modest. The extent of American ascendancy provides a respectable cushion. By sometime into the mid term, however, the risks of overextension and uncooperative trend lines could be substantial. In the long term, though, successful institutionalization of security structures and international norms could result in much lower risk levels.

Finally, this strategy implies the U.S. should cede some authority to international institutions—a very controversial issue in American politics.

The Independence Strategy

Key Elements of the Independence Strategy¹⁵

The goal of the independence strategy is radically fewer foreign strategic entanglements. This in turn would minimize expensive and risky commitments, allow the U.S. to maximize its options by assuming the role of insular balancer with respect to Eurasia, and allow the U.S. to redirect resources towards economic competitiveness.¹⁶

The world view underlying this strategy asserts that traditional great power politics, in

¹⁵ To clear up a point of possible confusion: the "status quo strategy" does not mean the current strategy of the Clinton administration. It refers to the current structure of the international system, particularly the distribution of power. The Clinton strategy is actually weighted towards the integrationist camp.

¹⁶ My explanation of the independence strategy relies primarily on Christopher Layne, "Rethinking American Grand Strategy," *World Policy Journal* 15 no. 2 (Summer 1998). Database on-line, accessed September 13, 1999. Available from ProQuest information service, ISSN 07402775.

abeyance during the Cold War, will inevitably return. The reason is that preponderant powers always inspire their own fatal opposition via the law of the security dilemma. The practical proof is that "the history of modern international politics, which dates from about 1500, is strewn with the geopolitical wreckage of states that bid for hegemony."¹⁷ The U.S. will eventually suffer the same fate if it persists in the effort to perpetuate its own predominance. Indeed; the U.S. is already overstretched. Consequently, the U.S. should end its membership in all alliances and bring all troops home or it, too, will fall victim to the security dilemma.

Pros and Cons of the Independence Strategy

By minimizing security engagements and adopting a very narrow definition of national interests, the independence strategy appears to offer the strongest guarantees against overextension and against excessive commitment of military resources. In many ways, it seeks to implement an updated version of the England-as-offshore-balancer model, a not unattractive model as models go. In this respect, the strategy is a full-fledged balance-of-power approach, the object of which would be to prevent emergence of a Eurasian hegemon. As an updated version of Washington's admonishment to "steer clear of permanent Alliances,"¹⁸ this strategy is a continuation of the oldest tradition in American statecraft. Constituencies already exist for whom some version of this strategy would have appeal.

But what are the liabilities and risks of an independence strategy? For starters, I suggest that the argument that reducing foreign entanglements maximizes our options is not,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ George Washington, *The Farewell Address: Transcript of the Final Manuscript*, September 19, 1796. The Papers of George Washington (Alderman Library, University of Virginia). Project on-line, accessed May 3, 2000. Available at <http://www.virginia.edu/gwpapers/farewell/transcript.html>.

on reflection, self-evident. One could argue with equal justice that terminating relationships, particularly long-standing ones, *reduces* American options for exerting influence over situations as they develop over time. To use a crude metaphor: if you have a tiger by the tail, do you really increase your options by letting go?

In rejoinder, proponents of an independence strategy may argue that the United States would not be any less powerful since it could still maintain the premier military establishment in the world. There are several problems with their argument. For one, military capabilities do not automatically translate into effective political influence, especially when it would be well known that actual use of those capabilities was tightly constrained. For another, would or could the U.S. retain premier military status? Absent a clear threat and without strong obligations, it would probably be difficult to justify continuing military expenditures at even the current level. Indeed, another goal of this strategy--improving economic competitiveness, virtually demands decreasing military expenditures--what else would be the source of new resources to be invested in economic growth?

A key premise of the independence strategy is that standing alliances are an unnecessary burden because the U.S. can always throw its power into the balance when absolutely unavoidable to prevent emergence of a Eurasian hegemon. Britain seems to have followed such a course rather successfully for centuries. The imbedded problem here is one of strategic timing and implementation: one has to identify the right moment to intervene--not too early or, worse, too late--*and* be in a position to implement that choice. This implies two serious risks: first, that American leaders might misjudge the timing of intervention; and second, the even more serious risk that, having gauged the strategic crisis correctly, they could not overcome strong opposition to intervention.

Next, against whom do we need the offshore balancing option? We are already in a position to balance against Russia or China, if necessary. Is Europe the real target of new balancing options? If so, the strategy, in effect, calls on the U.S. to terminate a well-developed cooperative relationship so that we can be in a position to balance against former partners. Put another way, does it make sense to ditch relationships that, while not permanent, have stood a significant test of time because a certain phrase by Lord Palmerston sounds profound?¹⁹

The final negative consideration is a very basic reality check. How would the U.S. actually implement such a strategy? How does one pull out of functioning alliances and pull troops back from all over the world? Would not that effort itself risk immediate negative consequences?

Comparing Strategies

What can we say about the trade-offs among these three composite strategies? For starters, there is one relatively easy judgement to be made: the practical difficulties involved in adopting a strategy of independence virtually rule it out of serious consideration even though it should offer the strongest protection against the risk of overextension. The disruptions, costs, and risks incurred by moving from our current posture to one of nonengagement almost certainly outweigh the possible (and debatable) benefits of nonengagement. It is no accident this is a distinctly minority view.

Beyond this judgement, comparison of the strategies is not as straightforward as it might seem. Two significant but quite different difficulties stand in our way. First, as we

¹⁹ The allusion, of course, is to Palmerston's oft-quoted " We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual,..." Regarding eternal interests, I suspect that one would have to define Britain's interests in an extraordinarily generic manner in order to argue that Britain's interests have not change since Palmerston's day.

have seen, each of the strategies is, at base, an expression of a very specific world view. These world views themselves reflect the influence of three persistent American traditions of international relations thought: the realist tradition, the idealist tradition, and the isolationist tradition. How any observer evaluates the merits, costs, and risks of these strategies and the tradeoffs among them is likely to be closely related to his preexisting world view. As a result, there is probably no single standard of judgement that will be compelling for all observers.

The second difficulty arises when one considers the constraints that affect real-world policy execution. The arena of American grand strategy is not a clean slate. A president cannot simply declare a new grand strategy, however brilliantly conceived, and then expect that strategy to have full effect. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of the "fog" and "friction" of war, practical realities impede full expression of the vision of a grand strategy. Several examples come to mind: preexisting commitments; differing interpretations within an administration; resistance from the military establishment; Congressional opposition expressed in the budget; tradeoffs between conflicting interests accompanied by multiple uncertainties amidst a crisis situation. The general effect of these constraints, I suggest, is to dilute the impact of declared strategy. Consequently, there will be occasions when the practical actions of holders of one strategy might not significantly differ from holders of another strategy.

But constraints are not necessarily determinants. Here is where strategy plays its role, both directly and indirectly. First and most obviously, a strategy gives its adherents goals that serve as ultimate reference points and encourage some consistency in weighing conflicting interests. Equally important, but somewhat less direct, is the world view associated with the strategy. World views are powerful filtering agents that exert a profound and often subtle

influence over ones perceptions and, therefore, ones responses. And then, at a less elevated level, strategies provide their adherents with some general rules for weighing interests and taking action. When strategies differ so greatly in goals and in world view as our three grand strategies, they are bound to exhibit strong propensities in different directions even if occasional particulars may be similar.

In short, even if we cannot make final judgements regarding the merits of risks and tradeoffs, we can make a fair attempt at identifying what those risks and tradeoffs might be based on the likely propensities of each strategy.

Having effectively eliminated the independence strategy, our question at this point concerns the relative costs, risks and tradeoffs between the status quo and the integrationist strategies. On the integrationist side, we can identify two specific risks and one specific cost. Because it has a more expansive definition of national interests, and because this strategy seeks to promote international norms, the integration strategy implies, in comparison with the status quo strategy, a greater propensity for foreign activism and intervention and thus a greater risk of overextension. The second, and equally important, risk associated with the integrationist strategy is the risk that the international trends that are the foundation for the strategy will not be strong enough (or may not exist at all) to carry the strategy to its goals. The integration strategy also bears a notable cost not found in the status quo strategy: willingness to given up at least some American autonomy to shared international institutions.

In comparison, the status quo strategy has a lower risk of overextension--not nonnegligible, just lower. A more serious risk is that this strategy's emphasis on American primacy may, over time, lead to an increase in tensions with other great powers and, thus, a less secure world. As for costs, this strategy will spend no less and possibly much more on

military expenditures than the integrationist strategy.

Let us sum up the full tradeoff equation. The integration strategy accepts certain higher risks and costs in the near term in order to achieve a more stable, more secure, and more durable international order over the long term. It is difficult to assess the probability of success of this strategy, but we can observe that its goal represents substantial evolution beyond the current situation. Should the strategy fail, the U.S. would most likely slip back into some form of status quo strategy, though perhaps under disadvantageous conditions. The status quo strategy, on the other hand, offers lower risk now with the goal of keeping things relatively stable; but the risk level could increase substantially if great power relations cannot be managed as desired.

Conclusions

The apparent disorder of the great strategy debate resolves into three fundamentally different choices. There are many variations, but, in the end, only three underlying frameworks: the status quo strategy, the integrationist strategy, and the independence strategy. All have clear roots in venerable American traditions. All assert their origins in American national interests.

The choice among these three is not simply a matter of matching ends and means. We are dealing in the realm of *grand* strategy, after all. The critical question imbedded in the debate is: What direction should America head in? A closely related question is: What should America's role in the world be? There are innumerable follow-on questions, but these fundamental questions must be answered first.

Absent gargantuan efforts to disentangle the U.S. from the bulk of its alliances, special

relationships, treaty obligations, and other security entanglements, only two of the available grand strategies represent practical choices: perpetuate the status quo or develop even firmer global integration. Both strategies have costs and risks, and neither can guarantee it will deliver greater security and prosperity in the long term. The tradeoffs between the two amount to this: a somewhat higher risk level in the short-to-mid-term on behalf of constructing a more durable international order that would result in lower risks in the long term; versus lower risks in the short-to-mid term while intensively managing the international order from a position of American primacy.

This study cannot provide a choice between these two different strategic directions that would be compelling for all observers. The choice is closely related to world view. If your world view recognizes potential developments such as incipient norms and diluted sovereignty, you may be willing to lean toward the integrationist approach. If, on the other hand, your world view is skeptical regarding such developments, you will probably lean towards the status quo approach. In the end, one question encapsulates the essence of the great debate: which will better provide for American security and prosperity--some form of balance of power system, or some form of world order?

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