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ANOTHER CHANCE FOR A COLLECTIVE SECURITY STRATEGY

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ANOTHER CHANCE FOR A COLLECTIVE SECURITY STRATEGY

The United States should construct a strategy of collective security among a community of nations with similar interests and provide the leadership necessary to expand that community through promotion of democratic ideals. Our fundamental national interests of physical security, economic well-being, and a stable world order have not changed since Woodrow Wilson attempted a similar strategy, but today's environment offers modern policy makers a greater opportunity for success. Our national security policy must be tailored to this new environment and the common sense of traditional American values. Consistency with these values must be maintained as we form our goals and choose the tools of statecraft for policy implementation. Our leaders must constantly review our basic objectives to ensure our policy implementation is balanced and coordinated.

Each of these notions about the nature of national security policy will be discussed to demonstrate that a strategy of collective security is the proper approach to maintain the physical survival of the United States in the post Cold War period.

The Environment

There are many similarities between today's environment and the period following WWI prior to the Versailles Treaty. The US emerged from the First World War with the greatest power potential in the world. Similarly, we remain the world's only true superpower at the apparent end of the Cold War. The threat then,

as now, was multi-faceted and not concentrated against a single hegemonic foe. At home, both periods are characterized by movements for isolationism, disarmament, and a return to the primacy of domestic issues. As compelling as these similarities are, the differences between Wilson's time and ours offer the best hope that collective security is an idea whose time has come.

The most significant difference is the greater strength relative to the United States of the key post Cold War players compared to the participants of WWI. The Cold War "victors" are economic power houses while the "defeated" Soviet Union, although weak economically, remains a military superpower with commensurate international influence. Since the "victory" was achieved without resorting to total war, the vengeful animosity that characterized the peace talks of 1919 is not a hindrance to collective progress today. The Soviet Union is not being treated as a loser and pariah; in fact, their full partnership in the present Gulf crisis is critical to the consensus formed to counter the threat of Saddam Hussein.

As the Soviets assume a new role as a constructive partner in world affairs, the unity of Europe and world economic interdependence suggest a coincidence of interests that was not present after the Great War. The focus of national power today is centered on economic strength. This causes a further increase in interdependence with a corresponding rise in challenges to US power and opportunities for international cooperation. Although still the only superpower, the US does not enjoy the degree of

superiority present in 1919 or 1945. Our position now is one of first among several equals rather than unquestioned leader.

This relative decline of American power means that we cannot and should not shoulder the full load of post Cold War reconstruction as we did after WWII and to a lesser extent after WWI. We can, however, lead a collective effort to assist and stabilize the new democracies of Europe and other parts of the world as the decline of Communism continues.

Some fear^{that} the loss of an anti-Communist ideological focus for the mobilization of national unity will cause the American people to return to isolationism and withdraw from world affairs. Isolationism is an unlikely alternative because of a better educated public, the proliferation of communications that has brought the world into American living rooms, and a widespread recognition of economic interdependence. A properly formulated strategy of collective security will benefit from the less ideological nature of the environment as the perceived need for a US reaction to a monolithic threat has disappeared. US domestic interests are better served since the relative share of American effort abroad is reduced.

The proper formulation of a strategy of collective security must consider many other opportunities and constraints imposed by the international and domestic environments. Opportunities will not be exploited, however, if statesmen cannot mobilize and sustain supportive public opinion. Public support can only be sustained if a strategy remains within the limits imposed by a nation's value

system.

National Values and Collective Security

The Cold War threat to our physical security tended to loosen the limits imposed on our leaders by our national value system. The general trend in the last forty years has been the subordination of some of our democratic values such as openness in foreign policy and the balance of powers. The *realpolitik* of Kissinger and Nixon marked the peak of this trend and awakened the American people to the increasingly amoral pragmatism of our foreign strategy. The election of Jimmy Carter was a course correction that served to remind leaders that Americans still wanted our nation to stand for morality and that human rights should form a part of our policies abroad. We returned to a more pragmatic confrontation of the Soviet threat in the late 70's and 80's, but administration officials were more careful to include appeals to democratic ideals in their anti-Soviet rhetoric.

The evaporation of the Soviet threat in the 90's will generate new enthusiasm for the promotion of democracy abroad. Many analysts are suggesting that democratic evangelism replace anti-Communism as the focus for mobilizing American public opinion for our post Cold War national security strategy. They argue that the spread of true democracy significantly reduces the probability of conflict since democracies do not tend to fight each other. The obvious continuation of that argument is that nations with similar democratic values should work together for collective security against hegemonic threats. The popularity of this approach is

exemplified by the widespread support for President Bush's coalition-building in the Gulf crisis. The real question in the Mid-East (and similar future situations) is how to square a value-based strategy with policy implementation.

Consistency Between Values and Balanced Implementation

The key to success in policy implementation is consistency between values, strategy, and the tools of statecraft used to implement the strategy. George Shultz said: "Americans, being a moral people, want our foreign policy to reflect the values we espouse as a nation." Values, such as a belief in democracy, human rights, individual worth, and a desire for a stable, non-aggressive world order are peaceful in nature and imply a hesitation to resort to force for conflict resolution. How far the American people will want to go to promote a peaceful world order in areas perceived as peripheral to US physical security will determine the degree of this hesitancy. The definition of a physical threat to the US in such peripheral areas will be more difficult and will be less likely to support unilateral American intervention. Political and economic tools of statecraft with an emphasis on collective action should, therefore, be exhausted before the armed forces are called upon to achieve national objectives by force.

Political, economic, and military tools of statecraft must be balanced and complimentary to be effective. The international environment of the 90's with several economic power centers will make the economic tool the power element of choice. Since the US is no longer the overwhelmingly dominant economic power in the

world, our role will vary with the level of our national interest in a given area of conflict. Our influence will continue to be important as the world's most powerful democracy, but the new diffusion of power allows us the luxury of selective involvement. When we do choose a course of involvement, a strategy of collective security will make our participation more economical- an important consideration in an era of dwindling resources.

Forums for Collective Security

Our strategy for collective security should be pursued through the United Nations and the continuance of traditional military and economic alliances. In the post Cold War era, the United Nations should be an increasingly effective forum for the resolution of conflict since a permanent member veto is no longer an inevitable impediment to action by the Security Council. The lack of the traditional Cold War ideological basis for conflict should also decrease Third World attempts to play major powers off against each other in the General Assembly. Woodrow Wilson's dream for the League of Nations is approaching reality in the rejuvenated United Nations.

Even if the UN does not achieve its Wilsonian promise, traditional alliances will continue to be useful for the new world order. NATO, for example, which was formed to prevent the Soviet conquest of Europe, could be refocused to maintain European stability as new democracies struggle to survive while Cold War stifled internal rivalries reemerge. Economic organizations such as the European Economic Community provide member nations

additional opportunities for a convergence of interests. These and other international organizations should be expanded to include new members as the spread of democracy continues. The United States can hasten that spread by taking a place in organizations of democratic states that share goals that serve our national interests. We should assume a role of leadership by example through consistency of action with our traditional values.

Conclusions

Woodrow Wilson believed in democracy as the most advanced, humane, and in the long run most efficient form of government. He believed that the US, as the most powerful democracy in the world, had a unique opportunity to serve mankind through moral leadership and the advancement of peace and world unity. Wilson's vision for America, unsuited to his own time, may be realized in ours. A more hospitable international environment characterized by an unprecedented diffusion of power, interdependent economies, and the decline of ideological conflict between the world's major powers provide an opportunity unique in history.

To take advantage of this opportunity, the United States should take the lead in the democratization of world politics by supporting a strategy of collective security and leadership by example. A collective security strategy is inherently consistent with traditional American values and can reduce unilateral expenditure of dwindling resources. Collective security implies a more positive, progressive approach to a safer world than the antagonistic premise of a balance of power strategy or the apathy

of isolationism. A safer world maintained by the collective action of nations in their mutual self-interest is the best guarantee for our own physical security.