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FROM CONFRONTATION TO COOPERATION
A Security Strategy for the Nineties

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FROM CONFRONTATION TO COOPERATION
A Security Strategy for the Nineties

The architects of American security policy are faced with an enticingly difficult task -- the opportunity to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the major centers of world power, which can lead to the ability, working jointly, to reduce tensions in less central but more volatile parts of the world. The rich lessons of the last ninety years provide an excellent basis for forging successful US security policy and goals for hitherto unimaginable circumstances. In developing a strategy, however, we must bear in mind that the world flipped in the eighties. Our assessments of the future may also be equally wrong.

What environment will the strategists address?

The nineties could see the realization of Kissinger's goal of a pentagonal, stable world power structure, but with the extraordinary difference from what Kissinger envisioned that none of the five may have either the territorial ambitions or the ideological compulsions to pose a significant threat to stability.

In a world of reduced military tensions, economic power and interests will, as Carter foresaw, become predominant. It will be even more apparent that domestic economic health is a pivotal element of national power and influence, as Reagan and Eisenhower before him believed (from different perspectives). But as Eisenhower saw, economic power must be real to be sustained, and must not be sacrificed over the long-term for short-term advantage. It is now virtually incontrovertible

that resources are limited; the relative power of the United States is declining. Adaptation to that circumstance, rather than masking it as Kissinger and Reagan tried, will be the better course.

We must expect increasing regional instabilities, despite the spread of internal pluralism that ultimately bodes well for stability in many areas. While we can hope that the anti-communist strain in American foreign policy of the Eisenhower/Dulles/Reagan variety was correct, I fear that the Kennedy/Carter recognition of the inherent instability stemming from circumstances and history in many troubled regions will prove more prophetic. Local conflicts will continue.

We are also likely to see increasing concern and focus on non-traditional threats as evidence of deterioration of the environment accumulates and more and more countries confront active drug cultures. These issues that no one country can profoundly affect unilaterally provide a possible means to enhance international cooperation.

What are the primary US interests and how will they be threatened?

As President Carter's world view encompassed a broadly defined set of interests and interest-driven threats, so inevitably will our own. A fundamental challenge will be to harness innate American enthusiasm and idealism to avoid a lapse into isolationism in a world, as Gorbachev has noted, in which the United States has been psychologically deprived of its "enemy". As Carter saw opportunities to limit weapons proliferation, economic decline and abuse of fundamental human rights, we now have an opportunity to address the threats flowing from global issues. The virtual collapse of ideological antagonism has provided the opportunity to replace the predominant role of perceived local threats with the

dangers facing us all -- degradation of the environment, depletion of resources, progress against drugs and debilitating diseases, relevant education, pollution, etc.

Ironically, the relaxation of global tension and progress toward more rational and economically sustainable patterns of armament may lead to aggression in many part of the world which, at the same time, can be both less dangerous and more difficult than previous regional instabilities. The collapse of superpower competition in third world areas will mean significantly less chance of escalation of local conflicts, but will also be destabilizing, as client states become more independent actors without the potentially constraining force of a superpower. The very absence of superpower competition for their loyalties can mean that local states will feel freer to pursue parochial interests. The outcome of the current Gulf crisis is central to the future of regional conflicts and stability. As Ambassador Nitze said in his recent War College lecture, the outcome of this crisis will be pivotal. If the Bash hard line is perceived both at home and abroad as successful, either through war or negotiation, we will face one set of problems and conditions. If it is not seen as successful, those factors will be wholly different.

In either of these environments, we will have a particularly strong interest in working to forge an effective system of world order and control, primarily through strong support and careful nuturing of the United Nations to enhance its legitimacy. A successful UN-led effort against Iraqi aggression would be a major indication that the UN will now begin to fulfill Wilson's expectations for its antecedent. The dangers are obvious. If Brzezinski told Carter that he had to be Truman before he could be Wilson, Bush, in a sense, must be both at once. Only

decisive, determined leadership in facing aggression and making the system function can advance the ideas President Bush is advocating -- peaceful settlement of disputes and the abandonment of territorial aggression.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the UN system is dependent on the underlying relationship of the major powers that will remain its motive force. In that regard, we must be actively engaged in working toward common goals, demonstrating interdependence and the mutual benefits of cooperation with the Soviet Union, as Kennan and Kissinger sought to do. One of the major threats to this ability, however, would be a resurgence of US isolationism just at the time that we can, perhaps, be most effective in shaping the future. The Harding/Coolidge isolationism of the twenties and thirties, in both security and economic policy, shows us the danger -- a danger that could loom large should the current confrontation in the Gulf not be perceived by the American public as successful, including after the inevitable cost/benefit calculation that would follow even a successful military operation.

Finally, retaining some measure of economic autonomy in the face of a growing threat of economic subservience will be a major challenge of the nineties. Without more effective action to restore long-term economic equilibrium, we will increasingly lose flexibility in the use of policy instruments in our domestic economy as a result of dependence on foreign funding for financial stability.

How will we preserve and mobilize US power?

Economic power is now critical to an effective national security strategy. As Eisenhower and Carter saw, means are limited, and should

not be stretched to the point of undermining the fundamentals of the system we are seeking to defend. A key challenge will be to develop a coherent and consistent system of marshalling available means to achieve our desired ends. This will require no less than the reemergence of a general consensus within the United States on US interests and how to pursue them.

Military power will remain an essential part of the equation. While the chances of a major land war in Central Europe seem significantly reduced, the coming decade could be markedly more unstable than the last. It is too early to predict whether the Soviet Union will emerge from the throes of crisis as a stable, increasingly prosperous confederation of states (or even beneficiaries of an amicable divorce), or whether the forces at work will spin out of control with profound implications for stability in areas like the Middle East, the Balkans, the Baltic or central Asia. China, too, is poised for an enormous transition -- with the eventual path not now clear. Two military needs seems apparent -- the preservation of a moderate, but credible, modern strategic nuclear deterrent and the need for a flexible, highly training and motivated, although undoubtedly relatively lean, military force.

The psychological dimension of power projection well be extremely important, not to mask military weakness, as Kissinger sought to do, nor to enhance the effect of a military build-up as occurred under Reagan, but to provide authority to the leadership needed in an increasingly unstructured world political environment. While US power will remain in relative decline, in a military sense the US is stronger relative to other power concentrations than at any time since the end of World War II, in view of the virtual collapse of the USSR as a credible superpower.

Ideas will also be power, as Wilson and Carter sought. The power of ideas will come not only from a strong move for collective security through the UN mechanism that now would seem to have a chance to develop, but even more importantly from the continuing strength of democratic pluralism, respect for human rights and the effectiveness of the market place.

Enormous opportunities, but limited means

Key factors in developing an effective US strategy will be to mold a domestic political consensus, modulate ends to means, provide a vision of US interests, and work patiently and incrementally toward cooperation both within the UN system and outside it, with all the instruments of statecraft, to expand the overlap of US and Soviet interests and concerns.

Effective political leadership at home is essential to maintain active, constructive US involvement in world affairs, with the resources needed to seize unprecedented opportunities. The collapse of the enemy that served for so many years as the rallying cry for the containment consensus can leave a vacuum into which isolationism will rush, particularly with greater awareness of the need to address domestic issues, unless our political leadership can marshal an ability, on the Reagan model, to unify and motivate the country.

Necessary to that task will be a compelling image of the goal of US activism in the world. A tempered Wilsonian philosophy, with elements of both Carter and Reagan value projection, will be a place to start. Toughness tempered with idealism, rather than guided simply by the highly professional but cynical calculation of power in the Nixon-Kissinger mold, is a sine qua non for a successful US outreach policy through the

nineties. To deny idealism is to deny what is best in America, and what can be used to rally the country to a cause. It is the strength from which we must deal. At the same time, idealism cannot be seen as separate from a hard-headed calculation of strength and US interest. The perception of soft-headed naivete hurt both Wilson and Carter's abilities to implement their policies.

We must also learn from Eisenhower the ability to respond effectively to prioritized interests and threats with necessarily limited means, realizing, as he did, that the biggest mistake would be to destroy what we are seeking to preserve in the name of its preservation. While uncertainty can have an effective deterrent role, as Nixon saw, greater stability will come from certainty about the importance of perceived interests, if not always about the means to preserve them. Truman's response to the invasion of South Korea, perhaps mirrored in the current Gulf situation, is a demonstration of how uncertainty can lead to serious miscalculation. More certainty should not, however, lead necessarily to a symmetrical policy, which is probably impossible in any case in an era of declining resources. What is important is that the scope and extent of interests be fully understood, and the surety of response, if not the means, be comprehended by potential aggressors.

In dealing with the Soviet Union, however it will emerge, we must remember that for Kennan it was Russian insecurity and expansionist mind-set we had to contain, not the Marxist ideology which he saw as merely the rhetoric of Soviet expansion. For Kissinger, his disciple in many ways, power politics, not ideology, was the concern. Both men saw clearly the prospect, if not necessarily the mechanism, to forge common interests for stability and negotiation to enhance common interests and reduce insecurity. A new, successful policy toward the Soviet Union will

need to continue careful calculation of interest, mutual benefit and recognition of legitimate Soviet security concerns and paranoia, as Franklin Roosevelt saw at the end of World War II. In this regard, a combination of a strong strategic deterrent, a patient, calculating approach, and openness to using all of the positive policy instruments available to assist a successful restructuring of virtually every aspect of the Soviet political, economic and social environment will serve us well.

While debate among China expert over means will continue, all agree that our goal should be to do what we can to encourage moderate change and reform and a successful leadership transition to an increasingly open, pluralistic and prosperous society with which we can maintain an expanding relationship.