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**COLLECTIVE SECURITY: A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE POST-COLD
WAR PERIOD**

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COLLECTIVE SECURITY: A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD

What is an appropriate national security strategy for the post-Cold War period? For strategists, this question is especially relevant given the changes in today's world. My purpose here is to assess past national security strategies and recommend an appropriate strategy for the post-Cold War period.

My assessment will focus on the most prominent of past national security strategies. These include isolationism, hemispheric defense, balance of power, and collective security arrangements. There have been others, but these strategies represent four of the most significant ones. Of the four, I consider collective security as the best strategy for U.S. national security during the post-Cold War period. But before discussing my reasons for selecting collective security, I'll first offer a brief assessment of the other strategies.

America's first truly discernible national security strategy was **isolationism**. Its roots go back as far as the late eighteenth century. America's geographical location, and the fact it had achieved independence from Britain, set the nation on an initial course of isolationism. As an emerging nation, America consciously and at times, unconsciously, practised isolationism.

But this strategy presented America with a dilemma: how was the nation to prosper, grow and access European markets, and at the same time, avoid entanglement in the European balance of power struggle? America's initial experiences with isolationism drove home the answer to this question. The nation's leadership quickly realized that isolationism interfered with national prosperity.

Since its founding, America had been linked historically, socially and economically to most of the world. But a national security strategy which isolated the nation, also ignored its linkage to the rest of the world, thus retarding national prosperity.

Furthermore, world linkage and its associated activities - especially economic ones - created an interdependence requiring government protection. This posed an additional dilemma for the nation: how to protect its interests from a position of isolation? America discovered early on that it couldn't protect its interests from isolation. Thus isolationism as a national security strategy was not only counterproductive to prosperity, it also made it virtually impossible to protect ones interests around the world. These dilemmas are as applicable today as they were in the past. And it is for these reasons, isolationism offers us little value as a post-Cold War security strategy.

For reasons similar to those just cited, I do not support a **hemispheric defense** strategy either. It too places serious limitations on the nation's ability to

prosper and protect its interests in an interdependent world. Furthermore, hemispheric defenses tend to be no more than hybrid strategies of isolationism.

Few national security strategies reflect better the shortcomings of hemispheric defense than the Monroe Doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine was designed to deter European states from intruding into western hemispheric politics, the Doctrine became a revered and even sanctified policy, an end in and of itself.¹ But as with its predecessors - neutrality and isolationism - the Monroe Doctrine was inflexible and unresponsive to the demands of an interdependent world.

President Theodore Roosevelt was instrumental in correcting the shortcomings of the Monroe Doctrine. Long before the first world war, he accepted the inexorable logic of things international as they had become. "More and more," Roosevelt in 1902 declared to Congress, "the increasing interdependence and complexity of international political and economic relations render it incumbent on civilized and orderly powers to insist on the proper policing of the world...." This was to be the basis of the Roosevelt Corollary. Like the Monroe Doctrine which it emphatically amended, it pertained to the policy of the United States not only in the Americas but also - implicitly - in other parts of the world.²

Roosevelt clearly saw the need for maintaining world order especially when it came to protecting American

interests. He appreciated the various instruments of statecraft, but more importantly, he felt that national security strategies should facilitate intervention by military forces when needed anywhere in the world. He was unwilling to accept the limitations of hemispheric defense in the form of the Monroe Doctrine. Roosevelt's Corollary was *preceptive* and a lesson to America about its future. By amending the Monroe Doctrine, he demonstrated the importance of flexibility in security strategies in order to protect national interests.

Having briefly assessed isolationism and hemispheric defense, the next strategy for assessment is **balance of power**. In *American National Security - Policy and Process*, Amos A. Jordan and William J. Taylor, Jr. described balance of power as, "several major actors, generally three to five, depending upon which theorist is consulted, vie back and forth, forming and reforming alliances to protect themselves against hegemony of any one or group of the others. Historically, to make such a system work, there has had to be an exceptionally flexible major party willing to shift sides as necessary in order to preserve the balance. The "theory" springs straight from the experience of eighteenth - and nineteenth - century Europe in which England played the swing role." This is a traditional and useful definition for purposes this balance of power discussion.

Unquestionably, the world became bipolar at the end of World War II. This set into motion a world-wide struggle

between America and the Soviet Union. The East-West split influenced the policies and strategies of most nations of the world for the next 45 years. A consequence of the East-West split was an American grand strategy designed to contain the Soviet Union.

Up until today, the principal strategy by which American presidents and their administrations contained the Soviet Union was management of the East-West balance of power. This strategy entailed recognition of balance of power as both a "situation" and "policy." The only administration which refrained from stressing the East-West balance of power was President Carter's. Generally though, by use of the various instruments of statecraft, military alliances and occasionally actual military forces, America's management of the East-West balance of power was successful in the long run.

The Soviet threat has not disappeared, particularly its nuclear capability which remains impressive. However, as a superpower, it is a less formidable threat. With the relative demise of the Soviet Union as a superpower, America must now adjust its strategy of balance of power. This strategy may have utility from a regional standpoint, but no longer as a grand strategy. Balance of power was an effective strategy as long as it was focused against a major threat- the Soviet Union. Maintenance of an East-West balance of power strategy will be problematic in the post-Cold War period without significant modification.

This leads me to the national security strategy which offers America its best chance of success in the post-Cold War period - **collective security**. Reference to collective security specifically pertains to a strategy and arrangement at the global level. Organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations represent global collective security arrangements. The essential ingredient to the success of such organizations is "the hope that peace can be preserved if all states are prepared to unite in opposition to aggression."³

Staunch opponents to collective security contend that the stakes are too high for America as a superpower to risk compromise of its national interests in global and international organizations. Additionally, it's argued that Third World and regional resolutions rendered by, let's say the United Nations, do not necessarily serve America's broad long term interests. In the past, America compensated for this by establishing various selective security arrangements around the world (i.e. NATO, SEATO, CENTO).

Also, the argument against collective security arrangements points to the difficulty of executing national strategy and foreign policy when these activities become anchored to the deliberations and decisions of world organizations. Simply put, arguments against collective security arrangements center on how much freedom of maneuver a superpower is willing to surrender.

Admittedly, world government bodies can claim few major successes. However, we should not forget that most world governing bodies were conceived and organized at a time of world instability. The United Nations for example, has operated for the most part of its existence during the East-West balance of power struggle.

We have a new world order today, one in which super power struggles have diminished. Elements of a unified international community are beginning to take shape because of the breakdown in the communist system. The East-West split which influenced the United Nations' activities for years is no longer the dominant variable in the national security equation.

The time is right for our national strategy to shift to collective security. We can best implement this strategy by elevating the United Nations to a higher level of importance than was done in the past. But why elevate the United Nations? Careful consideration of the following reasons may provide answers: First, the international arena is far too complex for nations to act unilaterally; second, the aggressive activities of one nation-state against another normally impact on neighboring countries; third, today's world is economically interdependent; fourth, America's fiscal situation necessitates collective security arrangements; fifth, natural resources and the world environment are too perishable to be left to the devices of

any single nation; sixth and finally, it is in the best interest of a civilized world and its people.

As world events continue to unfold in the Persian Gulf, the importance of a strong United Nations and collective security arrangements becomes increasingly evident.

President Bush and his strategists were wise to frame America's response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait around the United Nations and Arab participation. His strategy recognizes the reasons listed above which support the need for collective security arrangements.

Of course, the final outcome of the Persian Gulf crisis is yet to come. The approach taken by the United States is encouraging. By including the United Nations and Arab nations in collective security arrangements, our strategy to resolve the first real crisis of the post-Cold War period may have established a precedent.

Whether this crisis is settled peacefully or by war, it's serving as a precursor for future security strategies for the post-Cold War period. Moreover, we should probably not be astonished by the ease at which American decision makers achieved support from the United Nations and the rest of the world. In fact, maybe the world has naturally evolved into a state of decorum beckoning unity and stability. If so, America should not miss this opportunity to transition its national strategy to collective security in anticipation of the post-Cold War period.

FOOTNOTES

¹Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense*, (New York, 1969), 438.

²John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt*, (Cambridge, 1977), 127.

³Amos A. Jordan and William J. Taylor, Jr., *American National Security - Policy and Process* (Baltimore, 1981), 14.