

THE NOBLEST FORM OF POWER: IMPLICATIONS FOR 21ST CENTURY STRATEGY

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**THE NOBLEST FORM OF POWER: IMPLICATIONS FOR 21st CENTURY
STRATEGY**

by

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Self-coined as his “freedom speech,” President George W. Bush’s second inaugural address boldly set forth a grand vision and seemingly open-ended commitment to support the spread of democracy as the means to “ending tyranny in our world.” His address clearly cemented the inextricable connection between American ideals and values and our nation’s most vital interests, marking what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared “a really big change in American foreign policy.” Although the concept of ‘national interest’ at first appears self-evident, upon a more thorough analysis, it is one riddled with ambiguity and juxtapositions. This is perhaps even more so in American foreign policy, where the United States finds itself very active in the affairs of the world. This project examines the notion of national interest from a uniquely American perspective. While defining interests often proves to be a descriptive rather than prescriptive task, the ensuing discussion proposes that enduring issues provide a starting point from which to examine interests as a process, rather than an end-state. In conclusion, it will develop a caution to strategists regarding long-term planning decisions, given that the United States’ ability to project decisive, physical power abroad is synonymous with the Americanized concept of self-defense.

THE NOBLEST FORM OF POWER: IMPLICATIONS FOR 21st CENTURY STRATEGY

America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.

—President George W. Bush,
2005 Inauguration Speech

Self-coined as his “freedom speech,” President George W. Bush’s second inaugural address boldly set forth a grand vision and a seemingly open-ended national commitment to support the spread of democracy as the means to “ending tyranny in our world.”¹ Although the President attempted to clarify within days that this was a “commitment of generations” and not a shift in foreign policy, his powerful address clearly cemented the inextricable connection between American ideals and values and our nation’s most vital interests.² Promoting American ideals alongside the pursuit of self-interests is not a new concept, as this ‘Wilsonian’ appeal, in one form or another, has spanned presidential administrations over the last century. The United States led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, however, has elevated this linkage to a new level, demanding a significant dedication of national resources, and marking what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice eventually declared “a really big change in American foreign policy.”³

Although the concept of “national interest” at first appears self-evident, upon a more thorough analysis, it is one riddled with ambiguity and juxtapositions. This is perhaps even more so in American foreign policy, where the United States, in its self-anointed role as “the city upon a hill,” continuously finds itself very active in the affairs of the world.⁴ This project examines the notion of national interest from a uniquely American perspective in order to provide context for analyzing the current National Security Strategy. While defining American interests often proves to be a descriptive

rather than prescriptive task, the ensuing discussion offers that enduring issues provide a solid starting point from which to examine interests as a process, rather than an end-state. In conclusion, it will develop a caution to strategists regarding long-term planning decisions, given that the United States' ability to project decisive, physical power abroad is synonymous with the Americanized concept of self-defense.

An American Perspective on Interests

The notion of national interest has been a central premise in American policy since the framers of the Constitution envisioned a government designed to protect and promote common interests in the New World.⁵ Charles E. Hughes, Secretary of State during the Harding-Coolidge presidential administration, explained, "Foreign policies are not built upon distractions. They are the result of practical conceptions of national interest arising from some immediate exigency or standing out vividly in historical perspective."⁶ Interests are thus the mechanisms that drive the machine of foreign policy. Unfortunately, one cannot simply disassemble the machine and scientifically examine its components in order to map the policy process. The mechanisms themselves fluctuate and vary with circumstance so greatly, that although many of their properties are immutable, the variance produces a seemingly arbitrary output at times. With such ambiguity, examining the idea of national interest usually produces descriptive rather than prescriptive results. With this caution, it is still accurate to posit that a nation's interests drive foreign policy and that examining the origin and matter of the former is indeed essential to comprehending the strategic nature and implications of the latter.

The concept of national interest is most often understood as the core tenant within the international relations theory of “political realism.” Fathered by German-born political theorist Hans Morgenthau, his seminal work, *Politics Among Nations*, sought to explain international politics through objective laws rooted in human nature in order to rationalize decisions in a world comprised of competing interests and conflict. Morgenthau defined national interest in terms of power and explained that nation-states survive within an anarchical system through the rational and systematic application of their military and industrial power against other nation-states.⁷ As critics readily point out, however, this realist-based conception distorts foreign policy into pure power politics, absent of moral or value-based preferences. Morgenthau himself acknowledged as such, opining that “there can be no political morality without prudence.”⁸

In contrast, idealists believe that nations should conduct themselves in accordance with transcendent ideals and that political leaders should focus on purpose more than power.⁹ There is a belief that universal abstract principles, rather than a balance of power, can create political order among nations. Security analyst and limited war expert Robert Osgood aptly summarizes the idealists’ view as “a standard of conduct or a state of affairs worthy of achievement by virtue of its universal moral value.”¹⁰ Thus, idealists believe that a state’s security and interests are not solely guaranteed through the systematic application of power mathematics, but rather that nations can overcome power politics through cooperation and bargaining. Furthermore, international institutions and established norms can quell individual state fears, remove the fallacy of a zero-sum power game, and provide universal benefits to all members within the system.

Although the theories of realism and idealism serve as valuable reference points for abstract purpose, the opposing viewpoints present a false dichotomy when analyzing or predicting American foreign policy in practical application. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright explains that the debate between the two theories “moves back and forth like a pendulum because neither extreme is sustainable. A successful foreign policy must begin with the world as it is but also work for what we would like it to be.”¹¹ A unique American strategic culture helps further explain this apparent fluctuation between the schools of realism and idealism. Centered on a system of common political values and self-evident truths, rather than cultural or ethnic superiority, Americans hold a very strong sense of nationalism.¹² Created through the act of revolution, the founding of the American Republic—well removed from Old World historical paradigms—catalyzed a uniquely pervasive ideological belief that the United States holds a special status among nations. This American exceptionalism, as it is often called, when combined with America’s powerful nationalistic fervor creates a propensity for what National War College professor Terry Deibel characterizes as “swings between crusades to save the world and withdrawal as too good for the world.”¹³ Although this offers insight as to why external audiences often perceive United States policy as hypocritical, the key point is that Americans—due to their unique strategic culture—both understand and expect their nation to get involved internationally, for reasons of both self- and selfless interest.¹⁴

An American willingness or expectation to intervene in the affairs of other nations has not always been the case. President George Washington warned in his 1796 farewell address to the nation: “Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have

none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns.”¹⁵ Focused on internal growth and expansion and guarded by the favor of geography, America pursued an overarching isolationist foreign policy until the end of the nineteenth century. This was far from a universally agreed upon vision, however, as there existed a fundamental rift between the purported Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian views on national interest, with the first focused internally on agrarian westward expansion and the latter on the eastern seaboard's commerce and access to global markets.¹⁶ Regardless, as a struggle for power grew in the once distant European and Asian continents, America had little choice but to acknowledge the shrinking nature of the world and embrace the necessity for overseas involvement.

The growing tendency for American involvement developed on the notion that threats to its national interest could only come from outside the Western Hemisphere.¹⁷ Historically, this concern was over maintaining a balance of power in Europe to prevent the rise of a hegemonic nation which could monopolize American trade and commerce, or worse yet, focus its ambitions and resources westward across the Atlantic. In 1917, Germany was not threatening the American homeland's physical security, yet the United States entered the Great War; this was primarily a consequence of the German submarine threat to American commerce in the Atlantic, but also because the United States was unwilling to accept the risk of a German-dominated Europe.¹⁸ Again, during World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt could not accept the risk associated with a victorious Hitler and although there was little perceived threat by the domestic population, the United States joined the Great Alliance against the Axis Powers.¹⁹

Following the Second World War, the emergence of the Soviet Union and United States as the world's lone superpowers ensured continued American involvement in not only Europe, but also in Southeast Asia and Latin America, as the United States led nations and alliances in attempts to "contain" and even "rollback" Soviet-supported Communist revolutions.

The trending international strategic environment since the end of the Cold War has lifted the historically narrow focus on Europe and expanded it to all corners of the globe, as well as to threats beyond traditional nation-states. In an increasingly globalized world where the ability to transfer information has integrated people, ideas, and goods across traditional boundaries, conventional state-centric threats are now augmented by threats from the rising power and influence of non-state and transnational political actors. It is in the face of these very threats, that President Bush outlined his national strategy of direct global involvement based on the premise that "The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."²⁰

President Bush's idealistic vision as a method to promoting the nation's interests is not new to American foreign policy. Woodrow Wilson's view that "the world must be made safe for democracy" remains the cornerstone of an idealistic conviction that the spread of democracy should take a forefront in American foreign policy.²¹ With these words, he entered the United States into World War I, aiming to defeat the Imperial German government and subsequently dismantle the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Soviet empires in support of this idealistic crusade. Presidents Roosevelt and later Truman continued the pursuit of global democratization with the post-war aims for World War II, imposing democratic reform on the German and Japanese governments,

supporting decolonization of the European powers, and opposing expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence as it liberated Eastern Europe, even if the latter was not a discernible American priority during the war itself. President Eisenhower similarly called for self-determination in order to weaken Moscow's 'puppet' governments in the early years of the Cold War, while President Kennedy's establishment of the Alliance for Progress was an attempt to confront Latin American communism and secure American security, at least in part, through democratization in the Americas. As a last example, President Clinton, early in his administration, called for a "strategy of enlargement" for the world's market democracies as the successor to previous United States containment policy.²² Thus, while the circumstances of the twentieth century perhaps forced the United States out of its protective shell and deeper into the arena of global power politics, American idealism never failed to influence American foreign policy.

Defining the American National Interest

International relations theorist Joseph Nye explains, "A democratic definition of the national interest does not accept the distinction between a morality-based and an interest-based foreign policy."²³ If the United States national interest is indeed a combination of self-interested power politics and a unique form of American idealism, then how does one attempt to define the national interest in order to formulate or support strategic policy? In the search for a definition that is useful to understanding American foreign policy, it is first necessary to return to the idea of national interest in the abstract.

Defining the term national interest in any practical sense is a difficult task. Foreign policy expert Paul Seabury offers, "The national interest may be regarded as

those purposes which the nation, through its leadership, appears to pursue persistently through time.”²⁴ International relations professor Donald Nuechterlein defines it as “the well-being of American citizens and American enterprise involved in international relations and affected by political forces beyond the administrative control of the United States government.”²⁵ Joseph Nye offers very simplistically that the national interest “is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world.”²⁶ Robert Osgood actually divides the concept into its respective components with national self-interest defined as “a state of affairs valued solely for the nation” and national idealism as “the disposition to concern oneself with moral values that transcend the nation’s self-interests.”²⁷ While these definitions offer insight and direction, they all suffer from the critique of being both too broad and self-evident.

Hans Morgenthau further complicates the issue by asserting, “The kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history depends upon the political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated.”²⁸ While a nation may in fact have a broad set of enduring national interests, it is easy to understand how historic context can shape and formulate priorities and policies. At certain times, a particular interest will rise in importance, partly due to the context of the issue itself and partly due to its relative standing against other enduring interests. It accounts for why in the face of significant physical threats, Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush focused national policy on security while internal domestic issues forced Presidents Bill Clinton and now Barack Obama to center efforts on economic prosperity. It also clarifies why Presidents Abraham Lincoln and George W. Bush were willing to impinge on domestic personal freedoms in the face of internal threats, while Presidents Jimmy

Carter and again George W. Bush emphasized the projection of American values overseas, even if the former saw it as an opportunity and the latter a necessity.

Given the broad-brush strokes inherent in the notion of national interest, it is perhaps best to view the national interest as a continual process rather than as a set of absolutes. Political scientist Harvey Hoffman explains this when he aptly states, "The national interest is not a self-evident guide, it is a construct."²⁹ Paul Seabury offers that the national interest is "a kaleidoscopic process by which forces latent in American society seek to express certain political and economic aspirations in world politics."³⁰ Seabury further explains, "If one regards the national interest as a conglomeration of purposes fashioned in a system of political power, change, and conflict, one sees it then as malleable, plastic, provisional, the "step-child" of a governmental process."³¹ In addition to the complications created from an infinite number of variables, it is also impossible to distinguish between the often ambiguous and contradictory nature of decisions that appear grounded in both self-interest and ideals. Thus while there may exist a tangible set of criteria or components that are inherent in the concept of national interest, the notion itself is most practical to strategists and policy makers when utilized as a place of origin from which to then apply context and circumstance. In other words, the idea of national interest can only serve as a starting point, not an end state.

The notion of an American national interest is best viewed as a construct, a process in determining foreign policy that is both value and power-based, as well as temporally and contextually dependent. There is still considerable value in attempting to categorize levels of a nation's interests, however, in order to provide a more accurate starting point from which to formulate policy decisions. Hans Morgenthau offers a

simplistic yet useful categorization for national interests as either vital or secondary. Examined within the context of determining when a nation should go to war, his realist perspective defines vital interests as those non-negotiable issues involving “security as a free and independent nation and protection of institutions, people, and fundamental values.”³² By default, secondary interests include everything else and thus are more difficult to identify given that “mutually advantageous deals can be negotiated” since they do not threaten the state’s existence or the internal nature of its character.³³

Donald Nuechterlein further differentiates the national interest into four levels of intensity: survival, vital, major, and peripheral.³⁴ A survival interest refers to the “credible threat of massive destruction to the homeland if an enemy state’s demands are not countered quickly,” examples of which include the Athenian ultimatum vis-à-vis Melos during the Peloponnesian War, the Battle of Britain, and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.³⁵ Nuechterlein defines a vital interest as an issue “so important to a nation’s well-being that its leadership refuses to compromise beyond the point that it considers tolerable.”³⁶ He argues that this differs from survival in that a nation has time to engage in discourse, pursue alternate courses of actions, and perhaps demonstrate the consequences that might result from the action. Nuechterlein’s fundamental premise is that “A vital interest exists when a country’s leadership believes that serious harm will come to the country if it fails to take dramatic action to change a dangerous course of events.”³⁷ The Cuban missile crisis, the 1999 NATO-led air campaign against Yugoslavia’s Slobodan Milosevic, and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan are examples of United States vital interests. A major interest is defined as those that are serious and can even cause harm to a nation, but that ultimately “negotiation and compromise,

rather than confrontation, are desirable,” while peripheral interests consist of those lower order issues that do not seriously affect a nation’s well-being.³⁸ The 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russian troops is an example of a recent major United States interest, while ongoing human rights violations in Tibet, and all but the most egregious violations in general, tend to remain at the peripheral level.

Although categorizing the national interest by levels of intensity provides a useful lens through which to view foreign policy decisions, this construct fails to provide consistent and accurate strategic predictions. Morgenthau’s binary categories clearly explain why the United States did not intervene in the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide, yet fails to explain why the United States would lead NATO airstrikes to stop the violence against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Likewise, although Nuechterlein’s categories offer more fidelity, they still leave a great deal to interpretation and permit revisionist political analysis. Were the thirteen days in October 1962 a survival or vital threat, given the limited number of Soviet missiles in Cuba? Was the invasion of Iraq and subsequent ousting of Saddam Hussein a vital or major interest considering the aftermath of the Twin Towers and the possible existence of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a dictator? Unfortunately, events—or rather interests—can only be categorized and understood after the event has occurred based on the actions a nation pursued. Michael Roskin explains this when he warns that secondary interests “...can grow in the minds of statesmen until they seem to be vital.”³⁹ Michael Handel further complicates this issue by explaining “whenever political or military leaders feel certain of success...they will find a convincing explanation as to why the contemplated action protects and enhances the vital interests of their country.”⁴⁰

Given the inability to define practically the concept of national interest or present explicit categorizations that accurately link intensity levels to political actions, then perhaps it is best to examine the utility of national interest within a construct of enduring interests. Categories of long-term, essential interests, although perhaps overly broad in nature, can then serve as foundational pillars from which to vary levels of intensities depending on circumstance.

Even when attempting to catalog enduring national interests, there is no absolute consensus among political scientists. However, the similarities greatly outweigh the differences. For example, Donald Nuechterlein outlines four long-term interests that guide policy makers: defense of the homeland, economic well-being, a favorable world order, and promotion of values.⁴¹ Terry Deibel also groups national interest into four broad categories: physical security, economic prosperity, value preservation at home, and value projection overseas.⁴² Deibel differs from Nuechterlein in that he views physical security and value preservation as two distinct categories, whereas many theorists believe the latter is an integral component of survival and defense.⁴³ Robert Art expands the list to six interests: defense of the homeland; deep peace among great powers; secure access to Persian Gulf oil at a stable, reasonable price; international economic openness; democracy's consolidation and spread, and the observance of human rights; and no severe climate change.⁴⁴ While Art goes into detail, providing specific means within groupings, his first five categories align with Nuechterlein and Deibel's broader strategic descriptions.

The notion of a national interest contains an inherent tautological component that can seemingly permit one to define it as anything that a nation considers to serve its

purpose. Specifically concerning waging war, military historian Martin van Creveld accurately points out that this path “is as self-evident as it is trite.”⁴⁵ The concept has to have enough substance that it provides boundaries for understanding international relations and preferably direction to analyze and formulate strategic policy. Through the preceding discussion, it is apparent that the national interest is a concept that is often ambiguous and vague and that the power of context can significantly alter its level of intensity and heavily influence the courses of action pursued by a nation’s leadership. Thus, while even the categories of American enduring interests are open to deliberation, the author offers Donald Nuechterlein’s taxonomy for the ensuing discussion: defense of the homeland, economic well-being, a favorable world order, and promotion of values.

A Caution to Strategists

The 2006 National Security Strategy codified President Bush’s idealistic foundations as the underpinning of a new era in American foreign policy. In order to guarantee the security of the American people—our nation’s most vital interest—the United States would take the lead role in promoting freedom, liberty, justice, and human dignity through the spread of effective democracies across the globe. At a current cost of over \$860 billion and over 4,900 American deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is self-evident that President Bush’s assertion that “America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one” is more than idealistic ‘Wilsonian’ rhetoric—it is a shift of national interests that has in turn, placed a significant demand on American resources.⁴⁶

Although Nuechterlein, Deibel, and Art all differed in their categorizations, it is not coincidental that each list begins with physical defense of the homeland. Although a

nation will certainly pursue its interests simultaneously, they are in fact hierarchical and a nation's fundamental moral obligation is to protect its citizens and their liberty over all other interests. The continental United States' geographic separation from other major powers provides a natural physical defense to the homeland that cannot be overstated. By establishing and maintaining a military with the capability to project decisive forces forward, the United States has capitalized on this strategic opportunity and thus has the unique ability among the great powers to pursue its national interest on foreign soil, far away from the homeland.

Maintaining a favorable world order is a principal means with which the United States addresses threats to its national interests, primarily concerning physical security. American interventions on the European continent during both World Wars clearly demonstrates this premise, along with the vast amount of military resources committed to the Cold War, including the hotter portions of the ideological struggle fought by proxy in Korea and Vietnam. Thus one must understand that the American view of protecting the homeland is not limited to the prevention of physical attacks on United States soil, but also includes the capability to shape, influence, and even control events well outside its borders before they reach the homeland. A unique form of American idealism often portrays these efforts in a 'Wilsonian' manner based on the often-stated axiom that democracies do not fight fellow democracies. The nation-state, however, acting against its highest obligation, will pursue a realist approach when required to secure its physical survival and preserve its internal character and values. The United States currently has the ability through the wealth of its industrial power base to accomplish this objective far from the homeland. There should be little doubt that maintaining at least a balanced

power relationship with China or Russia—both in terms of military and economic measurements—is a vastly more important interest to the United States than the framework of either of their internal governments. Although admittedly an overstatement, it is not far off the mark to consider that the United States' ability to project decisive physical power abroad is synonymous with the Americanized concept of self-defense.

What then is the difference between the Bush administration's idealistic strategy "to protect the security of the American people" and previous attempts at a 'Wilsonian' approach to foreign policy?⁴⁷ The difference is not in the notion that the spread of democracy and its principles can improve stability and security and thus create political order among nations. Rather, the difference is in the methodology to achieve those lofty goals. The 2006 National Security Strategy is founded on two pillars: "promoting freedom, justice, and human dignity" and "confronting the challenges of our time by leading a growing community of democracies."⁴⁸ While the document acknowledges the threat from traditional military armed forces, it offers only that the United States "will provide tailored deterrence" against traditional nation-states and it will balance its military capabilities against traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive events.⁴⁹ The result, largely based on the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been a significant shift in the anticipated role for military forces in support of the pillars that form the nation's new security strategy.

Military theorist B. H. Liddell Hart very simply defined strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy."⁵⁰ Thus the implication is that with a significant change in national policy, the armed forces are

fundamentally obligated to examine the strategies, operational capabilities, and resources it has available to support new policy objectives. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates has indeed accomplished this task with a defense strategy of “striking the right balance,” specifically outlining three sets of juxtaposed requirements for the defense department: prevailing in the current fight while being prepared for future contingencies; institutionalizing irregular warfare and related competencies while maintaining our edge against other nation-states; and retaining cultural traits that enhance the armed forces while shedding those that create barriers to what needs to be done.⁵¹ While Gates admits, “U.S. predominance in conventional warfare is not unchallenged,” he argues that the United States retains sufficient firepower in air and sea forces to deter or punish aggressors and that the risk is prudent, manageable, and acceptable in the medium term.⁵² Therefore, he argues for capabilities “needed to win the wars we are in, and of the kind of missions we are most likely to undertake in the future.”⁵³ Specifically, he offers, “Where possible, kinetic operations should be subordinate to measures that promote better governance, economic programs to spur development, and efforts to address the grievances among the discontented.”⁵⁴ This shift in focus is not simply a pragmatic reaction to the ongoing wars, but rather a long-term shift in defense planning based on a future that envisions a “prolonged, worldwide irregular campaign” where “the most likely catastrophic threats to our homeland...emanate from failing states [rather] than from aggressor states.”⁵⁵

Not all strategists agree with the seemingly popular assessment that a war, in only the most general of senses, against terrorism, insurgencies, or failed states on a global and enduring scale is either the most likely or the most dangerous threat to the

United States. British-American strategic thinker Colin S. Gray, director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Reading, is perhaps the most pointed when he claims that “compared to interstate conflict, terrorism—even terrorism armed with weapons of mass destruction—is a minor menace.”⁵⁶ Former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff Colin Powell expressed his views on the subject with these rhetorical questions and answers during a 2007 interview:

What is the greatest threat facing us now? People will say its terrorism. But are there any terrorists in the world who can change the American way of life or our political system? No. Can they knock down a building? Yes. Can they kill somebody? Yes. But can they change us? No. Only we can change ourselves.⁵⁷

More importantly, Gray provides stern counsel to strategists and policymakers when he clearly warns, “terrorism does not threaten our civilization, but our over-reaction to it could do so.”⁵⁸

Accurately predicting the future is a difficult, daunting and perhaps most importantly, an impossible task. Yet it appears many decision-makers at the highest levels, both military and civilian, have forecast a permanent change in the nature of warfare based on events over the last decade. Although the often-cited phrase is a requirement for military capability “across the spectrum of conflict,” the recent emphasis is on the lower end of the spectrum, with irregular warfare and its associated tasks such as peacekeeping, counterinsurgency, and nation building. Even if only on the merit of national credibility, the United States must not fail in its current wars; and as representative examples of the changing strategic environment, there is almost universal agreement that the United States needs to retain the lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan concerning irregular warfare and stability operations. Gray’s strategic warning, however, should still send a strong caution to strategists and policy makers

alike. For as he explains, the goal of establishing a defense posture is not to avoid the inevitable element of surprise, but rather, "...to have planned in such a manner that the effects of surprise do not inflict lethal damage."⁵⁹ With regards to threats emanating from the other great nation-states, Grey warns specifically, "If we get it wrong...the negative consequences could be dire."⁶⁰

The debate over the correct balance between conventional and irregular warfare capabilities should extend well beyond asking which capabilities are most practical today, or what threats are most likely to appear in the near future. Strategists and decision makers must ask how these capabilities support the nation's enduring interests. Although their intensity will vary depending with circumstances, there is, nevertheless, a prioritized set of enduring national interests, the utmost of which is the nation's moral obligation to secure its physical survival and preserve its internal character and values. As history has shown in the last century, the American preference is to pursue proactively its interests abroad, far from the homeland. Although a unique form of American idealism has been entrenched throughout its foreign policy, the United States has never faltered on its obligation to defend its citizens. The tragic events of the Twin Towers was both a wake-up call and unambiguous example of the damage extremists can inflict on even the greatest of nation-states, but this event should only further reinforce the priority of the nation's enduring interests. The caution to all involved in the strategic decision-making process is that long-term defense planning decisions, such as program acquisition and force structure, not only provide the resources to support the nation's enduring interests in what they predict as the future strategic environment; the decisions themselves actually shape that very future. Despite the best

efforts and perhaps purest of intentions, these are unfortunately not so much predictions about what threats or crisis the nation will inevitably face, but in the choices that the nation will have at hand to respond.

Conclusion

“In politics force is said to be the *ultima ratio*. In international politics force serves, not only as the *ultima ratio*, but indeed as the first and constant one.”⁶¹ As Kenneth Waltz highlights, the threat of force permeates all foreign policy, during times of peace and war, obligating nations to analyze the risks of a prospective policy and weigh them against probable benefits. Thus, even the seemingly static composition of a military, in terms of organization, capability, doctrine, for example, factors into these ongoing calculations. An adversary with a formidable blue-water navy or long-range nuclear missile force provides a significantly different set of variables for a nation to consider than an infantry-centric land power with minimal strategic projection; the former can credibly threaten most nations, while the latter is restricted to intimidating its geographic neighbors. While a nation has varying forms of power or resources available to promote its interests, or foreign policy—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic to use a commonly accepted construct—it must be understood that the threat of force, whether existential or explicit, remains a nation’s unremitting influence in the international arena.

President Theodore Roosevelt’s dispatch of the Great White Fleet in 1907 to circumnavigate the globe perhaps symbolized the true beginning of America’s major role in international politics. It is not happenstance that this primarily diplomatic endeavor fell to the military arm of the nation. Military strength clearly demonstrates a

nation's power, and it is power that allows a nation to achieve its interests, whether these are to negate a threat or "make the world safe for democracy."

The primary threats to American interests continue to emanate from outside the Western Hemisphere. Thus, it serves the nation's interests to promote a stable, favorable world order, not only to fulfill its seemingly ordained role to promote freedoms and liberties, but as a means for the nation to secure its most fundamental obligation—the physical and ideological security of its populace. Nothing in this composition is meant to imply that the United States should not seek and support the spread of democracies or defend the rights of liberty, justice, and human dignity across the globe. It should simply serve as a reminder that the nation's enduring interests are prioritized, and that historically, the American preference is to secure the defense of the nation by shaping, influencing, and controlling events well outside its borders. While the ongoing crises have focused the nation's attention on international democratic reform, strategists must remember that the future is uncertain and the best one can hope for is to develop a long-term strategy that is operationally flexible and minimizes the risk of strategic failure when the enemy votes.

It would serve the nation well to remember Winston Churchill's profound caution: "The human race cannot make progress without idealism, but idealism at other people's expense and without regard to the consequences of ruin and slaughter which fall upon millions of humble homes cannot be considered as its highest or noblest form."⁶²

Endnotes

¹ George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2006), 1.

² Judy Keen, "Bush: Tyranny's End is Major Commitment," January 27, 2005, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2005-01-26-bush-usat_x.htm (accessed March 20, 2009).

³ Steven R. Weisman, "Democracy Push by Bush Attracts Doubters in Party," http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/17/politics/17democracy.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2 (accessed March 20, 2009). In his war address announcing the opening stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom, President Bush declared that the operations were "to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." George W. Bush, "President Bush's War Address," <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/03/19/iraq/main544714.shtml> (accessed March 20, 2009).

⁴ The phrase "city upon a hill" has become a common term in modern American political rhetoric to symbolize the notion that the United States holds a special place among other nations. Derived from biblical references, it entered American lexicon in 1630 when John Winthrop, minister and the newly elected governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, gave his famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" aboard the flagship *Arbella* prior to its landing in New England. Conveying to the Puritan settlers the ideal society they were set to create, he warned "...for we must consider that we shall be as a City Upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." Regarded as "America's first great speech," Presidents Kennedy and Reagan are perhaps best known for their usage of the phrase, but its direct quotation and variations continue throughout American political speeches. Matthew S. Holland, *Bonds of Affection: Civic Charity and the Making of America—Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 1-90.

⁵ Charles A. Beard, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy*, eds. Alfred Vagts and William Beard (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1966). 34.

⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 1985), 5.

⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

⁹ Robert Endicott Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations: The Great Transformation of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 8; and Terry L. Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 86.

¹⁰ Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest*, 4.

¹¹ Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 87.

¹² Minxin Pei, "The Paradoxes of American Nationalism," *Foreign Policy* 136 (May/June 2003): 30-37 in Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 83. Deibel highlights that Americans are "roughly twice as nationalistic as people in most other Western democracies, with over 90 percent glad to be Americans and over 70 percent very proud of their nationality."

¹³ *Ibid*, 84.

¹⁴ Ibid, 83.

¹⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 8.

¹⁶ Unlike most great powers, the U.S. did not develop its foreign policy across a long history of experience. Schools of differing political thought clashed from the founding of the new commonwealth, resulting in fundamentally different perspectives on the proper direction for American foreign policy. For a thorough history and understanding, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951); and Beard, *The Idea of National Interest*.

¹⁷ Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, 5.

¹⁸ Colin S. Gray, *The Implications of Preemptive and Preventative War Doctrines: A Reconsideration* (Carlisle, PA: US Army war College, 2008), 25.

¹⁹ Ibid, 22-25.

²⁰ George W. Bush, "President Bush's Second Inaugural Speech: There is No Justice Without Freedom," January 21, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23747-2005Jan20.html> (accessed March 20, 2009).

²¹ Woodrow Wilson, "Declaration of War," April 2, 1917, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/filmmore/fm_war.html (accessed March 23, 2009).

²² Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 70.

²³ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (Jul/Aug 1999): 24.

²⁴ Paul Seabury, *Power, Freedom, and Diplomacy: The Foreign Policy of the United States of America* (New York: Random House, 1963), 86.

²⁵ For definitional purposes, Nuechterlein draws a distinction between the public and national interest. The public interest refers to the American people and enterprises within the territorial boundaries of the United States, while the national interest refers to those aspects outside the nation's borders. Although he highlights the two are not mutually exclusive, he assigns responsibility for the public interest to local, state and federal government, while the national interest is the President's responsibility as the nation's "principal authority...for the nation's welfare." Donald E. Nuechterlein, *United States National Interests in a Changing World* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 6-7.

²⁶ Nye, "Redefining the National Interest," 23.

²⁷ Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest*, 4.

²⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1954), 8, quoted in James N. Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 241.

²⁹ Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 125.

³⁰ Seabury, *Power, Freedom, and Diplomacy*, 87.

³¹ Ibid, 82.

³² Michael G. Roskin, "National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy," *Parameters* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1994-95): 8. For a practical example from the original author, refer to Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Impasse of American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 191.

³³ Ibid, 9.

³⁴ Donald E. Nuechterlein, *America Recommitted: United States National Interests in a Restructured World* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 18-22; and Nuechterlein, *United States National Interests in a Changing World*, 11-29.

³⁵ Nuechterlein, *America Recommitted*, 18-19.

³⁶ Ibid, 19.

³⁷ Ibid, 20.

³⁸ Ibid, 20-21.

³⁹ Roskin, "National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy," 9.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 131.

⁴¹ Donald E. Nuechterlein, *Defiant Superpower: The New American Hegemony* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), 58-60.

⁴² Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 125-128.

⁴³ Ibid, 127. For example, Osgood states, "The exact nature of the national self that must be preserved at all costs is open to various interpretations, but, above all, it is the nation's territorial integrity, political independence, and fundamental governmental institutions." See Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest*, 5.

⁴⁴ Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*, 131-132.

⁴⁵ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 217.

⁴⁶ Financial data includes "all war-related appropriations from FY 2001 through part of FY 2009 in supplemental, regular appropriations, and continuing resolutions." See Amy Belasco, "CRS Report for Congress: The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," October 15, 2008, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2009). Data on casualties is current as of March 12, 2009. Operation Iraqi Freedom casualty totals: 4,248 killed, 31,118 wounded in action. Operation Enduring Freedom casualty totals: 657 killed, 2,714 wounded in action. "The Human Toll," *Air Force Times* 69, no.

36 (March 23, 2009): 7. For President Bush's quote, see Bush, "President Bush's Second Inaugural Speech."

⁴⁷ George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2006), i.

⁴⁸ Ibid, ii.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 43-44.

⁵⁰ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2d revised ed. (New York: Penguin, 1991), 321.

⁵¹ Robert M. Gates, "The National Defense Strategy: Striking the Right Balance," *Joint Force Quarterly* 53 (1st Quarter, 2009): 2.

⁵² Ibid, 4.

⁵³ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Colin S. Gray, "The 21st Century Security Environment and the Future of War," *Parameters* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2008-09): 24.

⁵⁷ Powell followed the remarks with, "I would approach this differently, in almost Marshall-like terms. What are the great opportunities out there—ones that we can take advantage of? It should not be just about creating alliances to deal with a guy in a cave in Pakistan. It should be about how do we create institutions that keep the world moving down a path of wealth creation, of increasing respect for human rights, creating democratic institutions, and increasing the efficiency and power of market economies? This is perhaps the most effective way to go after terrorists." Walter Isaacson, "GQ Icon: Colin Powell," September, 2007, http://men.style.com/gq/features/full?id=content_5900&pageNum=3 (accessed March 23, 2009).

⁵⁸ Gray, "The 21st Century Security Environment," 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 16.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁶¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Anarchic Structure of World Politics," in *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, 6th ed. (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 2003), 64.

⁶² Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 219.