

Keeping America Great: Toward a New Foreign Policy Doctrine

By Malcolm Wallop

Let me begin simply. America is entitled to greatness. Americans bought it with tears, toil, and sweat, to say nothing of their blood and treasure. Historians will have a field day with the last quarter of the 20th century. This most dark century of history seemed to be coming to an end full of the bright hope of mankind to be shed of the global state of war and violence. The condominium of interest between East and West seemed to have come apart as the aging giant Soviet Union collapsed under the intense competition so vigorously engaged by the Reagan Administration.

How could anyone help but rejoice as America and her democratic allies emerged triumphant from the Cold War and its persistent hot spots? Americans had ponied up billions of dollars to contain Communism, support democracy, and defend our allies. Behind the Iron Curtain lay nations, lives, and environments in tatters. America had emerged as the world's remaining superpower.

What a moment! We could lead, promoting peace and economic freedom. We could and did defend our interests in the Gulf War. We could and did demonstrate purpose, commitment, and power. Yet, with the Gulf War America's new world role collapsed.

It had in fact been collapsing from the very first moments of the Bush Presidency. And, sadly, it was all too visible from the very first moments. As fascination with Gorbachev began to become our policy and "stability" became our god, the "end of history" zealots began to dismantle the greatest military machinery ever assembled. Who now needed military might?

It was dismantled mindlessly. We had not the first thought of what America's role or interests were in this newly liberated world. No one thought to ask. Worse still, it became the order of the day to have summits and conjure up new slogans. These made long periods of thought unnecessary. Arms control agreements, ever the substitute for difficult political commitment to military superiority, became more frequent and less objective. One treaty after another—START I, INF, START II, CSCE—rolled in to shore up political fortunes and to be the excuse for summits.

And one after the other the slogans came to describe what had never been designed. "New World Order" led the list. But what order—and ordered to do what? What was America's role to be? What were our interests? What policies would define them? What power would project them? What was needed to protect both our interests and our homeland, and from what?

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Then came “It’s the economy, stupid”—and America had no interests abroad.

In the vacuum of serious thought, the American far right and American left gradually moved in opposite directions to the same conclusion: We didn’t need much since we had no external interests. Isolationism had returned.

In the late winter of ’91, I sat on the Armed Services Committee and became alarmed at the visible effects of the utter vacuum of policy. With containment having done its chore, there was no need to think and nobody did. The “peace dividend” was going to fund everything from the deficit to day care.

The DOD budget became the cash cow for the Administration and its opponents. They milked that cow without feeding her and the size of the defense budget, already shrinking in the last years of Reagan, came straight down and continues to this day.

My alarm became so intense I asked for a meeting with President Bush. I met with John Sununu and Brent Scowcroft. I explained the need for a new doctrine to replace containment. Historically America has foundered without such a purpose and moved pretty directly with one.

What was happening without a doctrine was that there was no architecture for foreign policy and hence for defense spending. Members were taking things out of the budget and leaving things in, and only seniority or domestic economic constituencies affected the outcome. A military purpose was not needed. Not only was the defense budget in free-fall, but its structure was totally amoebic—changing by the hour.

My pleas for a new doctrine were met with polite but undisguised amusement. It was explained to me that “containment” was needed because the Soviets had exploded their nuclear bomb and “nothing like that is around now.” In 15 polite minutes I was dismissed, and the fall continued.

The Gulf War came as the last elements of America’s great power in Europe still remained. We were propositioned. Our Navy, though diminished, was still strong, and the Air Force still had lift, bomber, fueling, and fighter capacity. For a moment our dream held—but we learned no lesson.

We piled out of the Gulf for the States. Military personnel came home as often as not to discharge. Equipment came home. Europe emptied. The “new strategy” became the new slogan. But strategy needs purpose, and we had none. The new strategy was designed to do nothing for American foreign policy because there was none. We seemed ashamed to be the world’s only superpower. We did not want to unsettle the Russians. We wanted to be able to fight a couple of Gulfs or maybe something else—our foreign policy could define no other interest than “stability,” but not the stability of policy driven by purpose. The New Stability was doing business with familiar people—even including Saddam Hussein—in Iraq, in Russia, in Bosnia, in the Pacific. We left Iraq too soon. We sided with Russia against Ukraine. We meddled in Yugoslavia but had no opinion. We unsettled the Pacific Rim’s confidence in our security commitment.

State had no defined interest. Defense had no stake. President Clinton came to town with no policy in place. They were quite content to ignore policy. It was, after all, “the economy, stupid!”

The left’s view of the declining relevance of the nation state is more easily digestible if there are no national interests. If we are just another band of global inhabitants, we need fear nothing if the United Nations is there.

Two Machiavelli quotes come quickly to mind: "Among other evils which being unarmed brings you—it causes you to be despised," and "The prince who relies upon...words, without having otherwise provided for his security, is ruined; for friendships that are won by awards, and not by greatness and nobility of soul, although deserved, yet are not real, and cannot be depended upon in time of adversity."

So now a premise: No great nation can remain great, free, and prosperous without strength, purpose, and courage. Today America has the latter, some of the former, and none of the middle.

No free and informed nation will sustain armed involvement without just cause. No cause can be seen to be just unless it lies in the national interest. No national interest can be trumped up for an occasion. Unless it will have been embraced by an informed public, nothing can sustain it. A multinational effort will never be undertaken unless one nation is willing and able to proceed on its own. NATO was nothing without America in the Gulf. With us, she was purposeful.

The Administration's timidity about expanding NATO despite Russian growls has diminished our stature in NATO, NATO's stature in America, America in Russian eyes, and—most important—the security link that anchors Germany to NATO.

A foreign policy without a military capability is but a prayer. A defense capability for no foreign policy is a fool's war or a despot's paradise.

I submit there is a need for a new doctrine. We do not wish or need to be the world's policeman, but a world with no police is a dangerous place. As Peter Rodman said, "What American people need from their leaders right now is both a reassurance that not every international problem requires an American solution along with a reminder that critical international problems do require American leadership or American participation." We have no architecture, and therefore we have nothing to argue.

The result: This building with no floors has been unnerving.

We had a bottom-up review whose only basis was the bottom line. Aspin had no view. Clinton has no view. Perry has no power. Congress reflects it. Kasich reflects it with his dangerously budget-driven approach to defense spending. He has no one to account to.

Absent a doctrine there are only circular arguments. Nothing direct directly supports or challenges. With no defined defense role, the Kasich freeze takes on a logic of its own, a sort of "Nice nations have defense and we're a nice nation." Thus it was that little alarm was raised, and none in the public arena, when defense is proposed to be underfunded by 150 billion dollars. With no national rationale, it is out of the political mind. Nobody knows what it cannot do because no one has designed what it is supposed to do.

What would such a doctrine contain?

First, the safety of the homeland is the paramount obligation. This means SDI.

Second, America has an interest in a world at peace, if only for economic reasons. If we cannot support the pillars of security for Europe and provide for the Rim, their economic needs will drive their rearmament. Our economic presence is sustained by our military presence.

Third, we are a trading nation needing markets as well as access to supplies. Safe sea lanes and airways are essential.

Fourth, we are a communicating nation, and that means access to space.

Fifth, we are a nation of travelers and scholars. This requires our citizens' confidence in our ability to protect them.

Sixth, we are a nation of conscience with an interest in freedom—not to impose it, but surely to support it. We were and are told that democratic liberation was an absurd part of the Cold War—but had we not, what then?

The Clinton Administration is uncertain of the power of power, and therefore of its use. They have become an abuser of power, ceding its command to the U.N., threatening its use and then shirking from it. These actions invite challenge and cynical responses, the latter not just military, but diplomatic as well. Note Korea, Iraq, and now Russia and India.

The reasons for the Clinton Administration's uncertainty are obvious. Absent a policy, they don't know whom to support. They use armed forces for domestic political purpose, as in Somalia and Haiti and maybe the Golan Heights. Their schizoid view of the military is that it is detestable as a national instrument but acceptable as a political instrument. As a consequence, through no fault of its own, our military is the less able because it has no purpose. The Vice President regrets the loss of lives in service to the U.N. The military career becomes merely a job like any other, and therefore gays are acceptable because no national role is contemplated.

Our allies can't trust us, and our enemies can be miscalculating. The cost is to be treasure and blood.

Mindlessly, the ABM treaty is unilaterally sought to be made multilateral. Clinton's purpose is to defend allies from missiles, but not American citizens. Force is not an American tool, but American force is a multilateral tool. This is not sustainable in a democracy.

They are, as Kim Holmes has called them, Strategic Doves and Humanitarian Hawks. They believe there to be no U.S. interest worthy of force and no television picture worth ignoring. Yet even these Humanitarian Hawks get cold claws when the going gets rough. This not only confounds the reputation of the military, but it draws scorn on American purpose and policy. It invites challenges, and we see them in Iraq, Iran, Korea, and—one has to say it—Japan, which grows weekly less certain of American resolve. Their support of North Korea is no accident.

Secretary Perry and President Clinton have decided to save money by using the U.N. as the force multiplier. They seem to think the U.N. can save at the budget box. A Perry speech refers to "the means of successful aggression being assembled." But Secretary Perry forgets two absolutes: One, it is not within the charter of the U.N., and even if it were the collective ability to make decisions is universally impossible.

The Clinton foreign policy seems as much as anything to want to purchase cooperation, democracy, and tranquillity—a poorish tool at any time, an idiotic one in times of deficit. There remains no substitute for clear-eyed policy goals with the courage to pursue them. Strangely that was the one thing missing in the Gulf—a defined statement of purpose. The quitting started early with no other judgment than that of the press to satisfy. Through it we lost the opportunity to reduce Saddam to Qadhafi status and elevate the Iraqi people.

So now the job of statecraft is to return an American greatness for an American reason. The world cannot do without it, and neither can we. Three times in this century we turned our back on greatness, and three times the world returned to darkness, war, and suffering. Americans paid in blood and treasure for politics as a substitute for statecraft.

American security demands it. Jefferson defined it: "We are not to be expected to be translated from despotism to liberty in a featherbed. Whenever hostile aggressions require a resort to war we must meet our duty and convince the world we are just friends and brave enemies."

And as Jefferson also wrote, "This country remains to restore light and liberty. In short, the flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776 have spread to too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism."

From its very inception our country has found great leaders in times of great need. If we are to remain a beacon to the world, great and secure at home and prosperous into the future, now is such a time.

