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AMERICA AS THE GRAND FACILITATOR

by *Alberto R. Coll*

The United States now has a dramatic opportunity to redefine its global role and develop a new strategy to meet the requirements of security in a rapidly changing international system. Whereas containment was a response to a well-defined Cold War threat, any new American defense strategy will have to take into account threats that are increasingly ambiguous and diffuse, and will require a scaffolding of political and diplomatic strategies to support it.

The world facing the United States in the 1990s will not be safer in all respects or require less attention than that of the Cold War years. It will be more volatile, more uncertain, and full of new challenges. We have entered a transitional and possibly turbulent phase of international politics—comparable to a period such as 1789–1815—during which long-established configurations of political and military power are changing before new structures of order are securely in place.

Designing a defense and foreign policy that will promote American interests in this uncertain environment requires understanding the defining characteristic of the international system in the 1990s: the accelerating fragmentation and diffusion of power and the prospects for considerable international disorder. Except in Western Europe and North America, the growth of economic and technological interdependence is not being accompanied by greater political integration. While opportunities for multilateral cooperation will continue to open up, U.S. efforts to forge a “new world order” will be challenged by powerful forces pulling

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the international system toward greater decentralization and anarchy.

That tension is perhaps most visible in the dissolution of the USSR, a process that is dramatically altering the international landscape. The collapse of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe and the subsequent demise of the Warsaw Pact have alleviated America's most pressing strategic problem since 1945: preventing a hostile power from dominating Eurasia. Meanwhile, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the ongoing erosion of its military capabilities have made the newly independent republics much less capable of and hardly interested in challenging Western interests.

However, it is too early to say whether Russia's transition to democracy will founder on the shoals of economic crisis and ethnic strife. Authoritarian currents, albeit temporarily defeated, continue to have a powerful appeal among large segments of Russian society and within many of the other former Soviet republics. Only time will tell.

Shorn of its non-Russian republics, the Russian state will still command approximately 150 million people, a modern nuclear arsenal, and a large army. Even without an attractive ideology, it will be a powerful actor on the European and world stage by virtue of its sheer weight and proud past. Its internal evolution and external behavior will continue to affect Western security intimately. Hence, a future reversal of its current pro-Western political orientation is a contingency of such serious strategic consequences that the United States cannot afford to remain totally unprepared for it.

More generally, as international power diffuses, the number of regional powers with sufficient clout to decisively affect their respective local balances of power is growing. Their rise is furthered by the proliferation of advanced weaponry, including nuclear weapons technology, a trend that is certain to gain momentum as a result of the Soviet Union's breakup. The CIA estimates that by the year 2000 at least 15 developing countries will be able to build ballistic missiles, and 8 of them may be nuclear-weapons capable. Thirty countries will have chemical weapons, and 10 will be able to de-

ploy biological ones. Some of these new powers will be tempted to dominate their surrounding regions, posing difficult choices for American policymakers in cases where the independence of that region is beneficial to U.S. interests.

The fragmentation of power will be exacerbated by another factor: a deepening crisis of governance in much of the developing world, including portions of South America, the Middle East, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of massive economic, demographic, and political problems, some societies are becoming less governable, and some governments less able to govern. During the Cold War, many Third World governments received large amounts of military and economic aid from the contending superpowers and their allies. In many cases, that aid postponed the breakdown of social, political, and economic institutions that were otherwise unsustainable because they could not cope with the tremendous pressures generated by modernization. As Third World governments are increasingly left to their own devices, many of them will be unable to survive a yawning crisis of legitimacy and competence.

Not all Third World states are equally important to the United States. It would, however, be a mistake to ignore the spillover effects of this crisis of governance on international order and on American interests. Some states may well cease to exist as we know them today, creating regional vacuums of power and tempting aspiring regional hegemony. Amid the resulting turmoil, there will be large-scale migrations and flows of refugees, some of which will be harmful to the domestic well-being of the United States. And in some societies, ungovernability and its ramifications will give rise to atavistic regimes whose international conduct will be far from peaceful.

Finally, transnational actors will find new freedom of action as developing country governments face collapse and as global financial, communications, and transportation networks mushroom. Drug traffickers, insurgents, and terrorist groups are already exploiting these advances to engage in low-intensity conflict that can be detrimental to the interests of the United States and its friends. In parts of Latin

FOREIGN POLICY

America and Southeast Asia, insurgents and drug traffickers have become largely self-sustaining, taking advantage of weak civil authority to develop cooperative relationships with local officials. They continue to export massive quantities of illegal narcotics to the United States, wreaking considerable havoc on the country's social and legal order.

At the same time, terrorism will remain a security concern even if a durable Middle East settlement is achieved. The growing lethality and availability of technology usable for terrorist purposes, coupled with parallel increases in the vulnerability of urban, industrial society will make terrorism a tempting political weapon for disgruntled individuals or groups. The severe terrorist epidemic that shook Western Europe in the 1970s—most of it unrelated to the Middle East conflict—suggests as much.

Finally, economic competition between the United States and its allies is intensifying, creating political dangers that will require careful management lest they damage the fabric of U.S. international relationships. In particular, the United States will face rising tensions with Europe and Japan as a consequence of disagreements over trade and transfers of technology to Third World countries and as a result of protectionist and isolationist pressures within segments of the American public.

As national economic and political competition accelerates, there will be strong temptations for the major industrial democracies to cut side deals and pursue "highest bidder" policies in their relations with the Third World. It will be difficult for the United States to restrain an ever more numerous and dynamic collection of economic competitors who will stop at little to improve their political and economic leverage over Third World states. Western transfers of sophisticated ballistic missile components and chemical weapons technology to Iran, Iraq, and Libya illustrate this problem. In such an environment, regional powers with hegemonic aspirations could gain widening freedom of action.

In sum, profound political uncertainties—underscored by the dramatic events of the past three years—will be accompanied by ad-

vances in military technology that will demand continuous adaptation and adjustment on the part of the United States. The military-technical revolution that provided the United States with the means to prevail in the Persian Gulf war continues to accelerate. Potential adversaries of the United States will take note of Saddam Hussein's shattering defeat and attempt to avoid a similar fate, either by resorting to ambiguous, low-intensity violence or by acquiring their own high-technology military capabilities, or by doing both. We are far from the end of history.

U.S. Objectives

Despite radical changes in the international system, the fundamental interests of the United States and its objectives in foreign and defense policy will remain largely unchanged from what they have been in the last five decades. Beyond the defense of American society, its institutions, and values against foreign attack, these objectives are five-fold:

Maintaining a global balance of power and regional balances of power favorable to the United States and its allies. The United States will not object if friendly democratic powers exercise—as they already do—a high degree of regional influence by virtue of their economic and political weight. It will continue to oppose, however, attempts by hostile states to gain regional hegemony, even of an economic or political nature, as well as efforts by any state whatsoever to pursue military domination, if the region in question is critical to long-term U.S. security.

Several regions are critical to America's security for a number of reasons. In some, such as Europe and the Pacific Basin, America's trade, investment, and military ties are vital to its economic health and overall security. In others, such as the Middle East, control by a hostile power would give it the economic resources with which to acquire advanced military capabilities and threaten the United States and its allies. Finally, America's location compels it to remain closely engaged in nurturing the Western Hemisphere's evolution toward a peaceful community of successfully functioning societies.

In some regions a combination of factors, including the continued engagement of American power, may facilitate collective security. For example, the evolution of Russia, Ukraine, and other East European countries toward full democracy, coupled with a continuing U.S. commitment to NATO, could permit the eventual inclusion of the former communist states in a NATO-anchored security community of democratic states encompassing the entire region.

Promote an international trading and monetary system conducive to American economic prosperity. The United States must foster an international economic system in which it can prosper. That includes supporting countries moving toward free-market systems, away from the statist and mercantilist economic practices of the past. A world in which states encourage the free movement of goods, capital, and labor across their boundaries (and within their national economies) is one in which the United States will be able to compete economically and flourish.

Support the gradual spread of open and democratic political systems that secure the rule of law and respect for human rights. The world's multicultural diversity makes it unrealistic to expect that all societies will want to live with Western forms of government. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to ignore the many countries where there are genuine opportunities for the development of solid, lasting democratic institutions. It is in the interest of the United States to support democratic forces and institutions to the extent that it is able. Open societies with free economic and political systems not only tend to be more stable over the long run, they are also more likely to develop a kinship with the United States than are their closed statist counterparts.

Strengthen the framework of international norms and practices to protect elemental standards of order, justice, and human rights. International diversity is a fact of life, and it is beyond America's power to remake all the world in its own image. Nevertheless, the United States must attempt to integrate diversity into a basic framework of norms and practices. That approach will help restrain those mani-

festations of diversity that may be unduly corrosive of the international order upon which America's long-term well-being rests. The normative core of such a framework consists of the classic prohibitions against aggression, crimes against humanity, and war crimes as defined during the Nuremberg Trials. Those prohibitions, embodied in modern international law from 1945 to the present, are also the normative basis of President George Bush's conception of international order. Forms of pluralism that abide by those norms are tolerable; those that do not are unacceptable.

Without those norms, and without strong practices and institutions to uphold them, today's pluralism could easily degenerate into unrestrained disorder and violence. The resources of the United States, including the judicious application of its political will and military power, will be indispensable in the arduous, checkered process of shaping international norms and breathing life into them through multilateral articulation and enforcement. International law is a living entity that requires continuous nurturing and validation, and those are best provided not by some abstract system of collective security, but by a concert of states with the requisite power and reciprocal accountability to enforce the law often enough to keep alive its underlying normative principles.

Manage change and instability in such a way that core American values and interests are not undermined even while different societies and the international system itself are allowed to evolve in new directions. As uncertain as the future is, there is no question that the end of the Cold War has released a torrent of forces, some of them seemingly frozen for decades, that will create considerable turmoil, altering the social and political landscape across the globe. In the nineteenth century, the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt observed that the course of history is shaped by the incessant interaction of "three powers": religion, culture, and the state. As recently as two decades ago, that notion seemed outmoded to most social scientists, who saw ancient cultural and religious traditions as increasingly

irrelevant to the course of world politics. In 1992, however, Burckhardt appears to have been much more prescient. As the problems of modern industrialized society—including its inability to meet the deepest human needs for personal identity and recognition—intensify, we can expect a growing hunger for religious fundamentalism, cultural and ethnic pride, and grassroots movements for social and political change, all with serious repercussions for international order. Change and instability are an inevitable feature of international politics; the United States can no more prevent all forms of instability than Metternichean Austria could at the height of its power.

The American challenge is to face those myriad instabilities with balance, creativity, and clear-headedness, mediating where Americans can play a constructive role, containing or easing threats where appropriate, and prudently ignoring those that can do them no harm. In this pursuit, U.S. political and economic diplomacy must be preeminent, with American military power playing a supporting but nonetheless important role. In concert with other states, the United States can provide security guarantees as a basis for political settlements that would otherwise be impossible. It can help selected friendly governments ameliorate some sources of instability by providing humanitarian, infrastructure, and military assistance. And, when instability generates a sufficiently serious threat to American interests, U.S. military power can be used to deter and contain it.

Indeed, given the nature of American interests and objectives, and the peculiar international environment ahead, a sophisticated set of political, diplomatic, and military strategies will be required. No such strategy will have the conceptual elegance or attractive simplicity of containment. Instead, the most appropriate political strategy for the United States will be to act as a “grand facilitator” of the existing international order. That role will require that America help maintain a global balance of power and regional balances favorable to the United States and its allies, and that America serve as a benevolent arbiter or a mediator in regions critical to its security.

Rather than carrying on its shoulders, Atlas-like, the entire burden of containing local hegemons, the United States should play a role of "holder of the balance" akin to that played by Great Britain during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For the foreseeable future, the United States will have the geographical security, political prestige, and military power to organize and lead coalition-building efforts geared to check the expansionist tendencies of local powers in specific regions. The Persian Gulf war demonstrated America's unrivaled capabilities in this regard. In future efforts, U.S. military and economic clout will be amplified considerably by that of other states. The United States will supply political will and leadership, naval and air forces capable of global reach, advanced military technologies and intelligence support, and, if necessary, ground forces to complement those provided by others.

Maintaining regional balances of power will require a diplomatic strategy that complements established alliances with NATO and Japan with a set of "flexible alliances" or "shifting coalitions," through which the United States will enter into temporary cooperative political and military arrangements with parties that share its goals in a particular region. In the Middle East, for example, there will be some Arab states, as well as a few European powers, prepared to act in concert with the United States to safeguard the chief oil-producing countries. In addition to the Japanese-U.S. alliance, American efforts to maintain a balance-of-power in Asia will continue to enjoy the support of states in the region that do not want to see their independence eroded. A diplomatic strategy of "flexible alliances" will be difficult to implement and will require large doses of patience and skill. But, as demonstrated by the Gulf war, it is a strategy that can work if the United States performs its leadership role with due regard for the interests and concerns of its partners.

The second component of U.S. global political strategy will be the role of benevolent arbiter, or of, in the words of former diplomat Paul Nitze, an "honest broker." That role implies that, apart from balance-of-power consider-

ations, the United States should be actively engaged in mediating major regional disputes and conflicts to help resolve them in ways that further America's larger international objectives. U.S. interests as an established global capitalist power dictate that existing political and military tensions in certain key regions be managed in an orderly manner. The American aim in nurturing durable political settlements will include preventing the rise of major threats to American interests and reducing those threats that already exist. The United States is uniquely suited for the role of benevolent arbiter in such situations: Its geographic isolation, its historic aversion to wars of conquest, its character as a democratic, pluralistic society of immigrants of all faiths and nationalities, and the relative success of its economic and political system give it greater universal appeal and credibility than any other country.

Hence, the United States has opportunities to exercise its power and influence, discreetly and selectively, to prod, cajole, and reassure others into political arrangements that serve their interests as well as U.S. interests. For example, the U.S. presence made it possible to integrate Germany—peaceful, democratic, and newly reunified—with the other countries of Western Europe; the United States will also insulate its NATO allies and the new East European democracies from any future pressures from a resurgent authoritarian Russia. American power, in combination with that of other allies, could play a similar role in the Middle East by providing a network of political and military guarantees within which Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians, and Syria might be willing to reach a lasting accommodation. In Asia, as the economic and political rivalries between China, Japan, and South Korea grow, U.S. military and economic power could be the benevolent arbiter that will help moderate security anxieties, restrain destabilizing arms races, and channel economic competition for the common good.

One of the great achievements of American statecraft has been the creation of a multicultural community of democratic states bound together by a network of political and military ties. Within this community, great powers such

as Germany and Japan have found the requisite security to forgo nuclear weapons and other destabilizing military capabilities. Without the glue of American military power, this community could fracture, triggering a return to the kinds of unrestrained nationalism and militarism that proved ruinous to international security and peace in the first half of this century.

The grand facilitator role is one that only a few states in history have been able to play. Examples of past grand facilitators include Athens in the period between the Persian invasions and the onset of the Peloponnesian war, before Athenian preeminence gave way to naked imperialism; the medieval papacy during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; Austria from 1812 to 1818, before its diplomacy became somewhat ossified; and Great Britain during most of the nineteenth century.

Historically, grand facilitators have been coordinators, cajolers, and occasionally initiators. They provide seed political capital, as well as considerable impetus, but generally in the context of multilateral efforts in which the facilitator persuades others to join their economic and military clout to its own on behalf of a specific common enterprise. The distinguishing mark of a grand facilitator is its ability to relate its national interests to the interests of other states and the larger purposes of international society. With the assistance of others it can manage the evolution of international politics and economics in directions that benefit both the facilitator and its core partners and associates.

The United States should play a role of “holder of the balance” akin to that played by Britain during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is proper to question whether the United States, in the face of a diminished Soviet threat and serious domestic economic and social ills, should expend the resources required by such a role. The answer is that, precisely because of the sharply reduced Soviet threat, the United

States can serve as a grand facilitator while spending a historically low 3.4 per cent of its gross national product (GNP) on its military.

The Defense Department expects that by fiscal year 1997 its budget will have declined 37 per cent in real terms from a fiscal year 1985 baseline, and will consume only 3.4 per cent of GNP, the lowest such figure since 1940. As a share of the federal budget, defense will drop from 27 per cent in 1987 to 16 per cent in 1997. The size of the armed forces will be cut by 25 per cent from its 1987 post-Vietnam peak. Congressional pressures for more drastic cuts could make those reductions even steeper. American efforts to project power around the globe will have to take into account budgetary realities and rely on greater contributions by allies and partners for mutual security efforts.

Still, that modest share of the national economy should be seen as not only an insurance premium against unexpected dangers, but also a reasonable contribution toward management of the international system. The international order cannot be left unattended without serious consequences. In that regard, sharp dichotomies between U.S. domestic priorities and international commitments can be misleading. In the tightly interconnected world of the 1990s, the domestic well-being of the American polity cannot be separated from the health of those international political and economic arrangements upon which U.S. security and prosperity rest. The defense budget should be reduced so that domestic priorities can be addressed, but only up to a reasonable point; a defense budget at 3.4 per cent of the GNP is just such a target. That figure compares favorably with the 6.2 per cent of GNP the United States spent on defense in 1985 or the 8.2 per cent spent in 1960.

The defense policy to complement the political and diplomatic strategy encompassed by the role of grand facilitator was described by the president on the day of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as "peacetime engagement." In the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States intends to remain militarily engaged in the world, selectively applying its military weight in concert with that of allies and friends to protect

and nurture its long-term interests. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney has articulated the military strategy derived from that policy by underlining its four key elements: strategic deterrence and defense, forward presence, crisis response, and reconstitution.

With regard to strategic deterrence and defense, the new strategy broadens the traditional focus on deterring nuclear war to include slowing the proliferation of ballistic missiles and all weapons of mass destruction and developing defenses against them. Depending on the outcome of future negotiations with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United States might be prepared to reduce its strategic nuclear warheads to levels as much as 50 per cent below those outlined in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, something that would have seemed unthinkable a few years ago. Nevertheless, it will be prudent to retain a nuclear arsenal large enough to insure the stability of nuclear deterrence and to discourage other states from initiating a nuclear arms race with the United States. Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to invigorate and expand the non-proliferation regime will proceed along with the design and deployment of limited anti-ballistic missile defenses. In short, the new strategy will balance nuclear concerns with an expanded focus on the spread of chemical and biological weapons and missile technology. And to its long-standing emphasis on deterrence the United States will add defensive preparations that take into account the rapid spread of ballistic missiles and the likelihood that some of them will be launched accidentally or intentionally, or used to blackmail America and its allies.

The second element of the defense strategy, forward presence, recognizes that, as an "island nation" dependent on global economic and military ties, the United States needs to maintain a degree of military presence in areas important to American interests. Despite the large cuts planned in U.S. forces and the closure of numerous bases overseas, forward presence will continue in many forms, including smaller numbers of forces deployed in Europe and East Asia, training exercises with foreign forces, military exchanges, security assistance, access

agreements, and the repositioning of equipment.

While forward presence aims to strengthen ties with allies and friends, defuse nascent crises, and deter potential adversaries, it also provides the political and military foundation for the third element of the strategy: crisis response. The United States needs to be ready to respond to crises affecting its interests around the world. This requires fast, lethal forces capable of global reach, and enough airlift and sealift to transport them across vast distances. All of this is expensive, and it helps explain why the United States cannot cut its defense budget beyond a certain point and still remain capable of actively shaping its international security environment.

The last element, reconstitution, assumes that the United States must be prepared to build new military forces quickly if the international security environment sharply deteriorates. As the current drawdown proceeds, selected existing industrial and military capabilities should be nurtured and new ones developed, providing both a springboard in case vigorous rearmament becomes necessary and a series of critical advantages over any potential enemy.

In addition, the United States will invest in several areas where it has a reasonable prospect of maintaining its lead over any future adversary, including space, military research and development, intelligence, the quality of military personnel (especially their training and military education), and special operations forces. Of these, space appears to be the one where the administration intends to leave its most lasting imprint. The American aerospace industry is the most advanced in the world, and few if any potential military rivals are likely to match the sophistication of U.S. aerospace-military technology anytime in the next two decades. Hence, the Bush administration seems to count on the continued development of space capabilities as a source of new realms of military technology where the United States can outpace future adversaries and cancel certain advantages they may otherwise enjoy.

The administration will follow a similar approach to military research and development in

general. As difficult budgetary choices are implemented over the next few years, the Defense Department will slow down or cancel the production of several existing weapons systems—especially those like the Seawolf submarine that have limited usefulness without a Soviet global threat—in exchange for continued research and development of new capabilities that can be placed “on the shelf” in case they are needed. As Cheney has argued before Congress, the wisest course of action is to reduce the defense budget through a balanced mix of force reductions, the cancellation of weapons programs, and base closures, while protecting the department’s commitment to research and development, education, training, and readiness. Such an approach should leave the United States with smaller but highly skilled armed forces.

The administration will also resist congressional pressures to drastically cut back intelligence capabilities, correctly insisting that investments in intelligence increase the transparency of potential adversaries and, therefore, contribute to stability and security. The president’s recent appointment of Robert Gates as director of central intelligence indicates his intention to give high priority to intelligence issues. Further evidence of the administration’s determination is the recently completed effort led by Cheney to reorganize the Defense Department’s own intelligence resources.

Finally, special operations forces are one of the few military capabilities singled out by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, for exemption from significant cuts under the new strategy. Those air, army, and naval forces are intensely trained for a wide variety of missions ranging from humanitarian relief and civil affairs to psychological operations, unconventional warfare, counter-terrorism, and commando-style actions. They number about 40,000 and consume less than \$3 billion a year, slightly over 1 per cent of the defense budget. Because of their linguistic skills, cultural adaptation training, and small logistical support requirements, they have low political visibility and are therefore useful, discreet instruments for projecting American military power. The Gulf war proved the value of those

forces for conventional conflict.

One of the many implications of the new defense strategy is that the U.S. military will remain selectively engaged in peacetime efforts to provide humanitarian relief, assist with development-related infrastructure projects, and improve the professionalism of local military and police forces. Those activities are regularly coordinated with the State and Justice Departments and thoroughly integrated with U.S. international assistance programs, and they cost less than \$1 billion a year. Given the intractability of many of the problems afflicting developing countries, the goals of that form of "peacetime engagement" must remain necessarily modest and the resources devoted to it limited by good sense and a realistic awareness of the limits of American power to transform other societies. Yet, so long as such efforts are carried out discriminately, they can generate useful doses of good will toward the United States at low cost. In some countries, they may even yield tangible political dividends for the United States, and in others they may encourage evolution toward more open, humane political and economic systems. The U.S. military will also be increasingly involved in drug interdiction and in support for peacekeeping operations organized by the United Nations and various regional organizations.

The United States must be prepared for the likelihood that some future adversaries will challenge American interests not only through open, direct military action, but also through ambiguous, indirect forms of warfare and violence encompassed under the term "low-intensity conflict." Such forms of warfare include terrorism, support for insurgencies, violent destabilization and subversion of friendly governments, instigation of coups d'état, and political assassination. In the Middle East and Central Asia, for example, states such as Iran may be tempted to use that type of conflict to weaken and overthrow governments supportive of U.S. security interests, and to diminish the prestige, credibility, and influence of the United States and its regional allies. In other regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, low-intensity conflict, while not directly targeted

against the closest U.S. friends and allies, nevertheless could affect U.S. interests significantly by triggering migration waves or other forms of instability. The United States needs to ensure that it has the kinds of forces and specialized political-military strategies and programs to deal with such threats.

The truly novel aspects of the defense strategy outlined by Cheney are two-fold. First, the focus of defense planning has shifted from global war with the Soviet Union to regional conflicts in which the United States may intervene to contain aggression or maintain the regional balance of power. More important, perhaps, the new strategy is less concerned with a specific threat than with giving the United States the military capabilities with which to move the post-Cold War international order in a favorable direction. It is no longer a strategy designed to deter a hostile superpower, but rather a strategy designed to promote U.S. interests in an international system within which military power remains an important source of influence.

History's Choices

Historical analogies can be misleading, but carefully considered with an appreciation for the indeterminate nature of history they can serve as warnings against overly optimistic projections of the future. Within the Defense Department today, the decade of the early 1920s is perceived as a historical period that has relevance for America's present circumstances. Then, the United States and its associates enjoyed military and political primacy and a seemingly large window of opportunity to shape the international system before potential rivals such as Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union began to pose serious threats. Substantial reductions in the size of armed forces and military stockpiles took place, together with a vigorous resurgence in international law and organization. The West was optimistic that a new world order was dawning, a world in which routine economic competition would displace the more destructive antagonisms of world politics as the dominant feature of international life. The United States and its wartime partners, howev-

er, failed to shape the multipolar, decentralized international system of the 1920s into a lasting international order where their temporary pre-eminence would have been more solidly secured. By the late-1930s, a menacing combination of political, economic, and military factors, most of them largely unanticipated as late as 1928, had spawned an international system markedly inhospitable to American security.

Many students of international politics agree that the United States now has 10 to 15 years to put its domestic house in order and help direct the evolution of the international system in ways congruent with its long-term interests. At this point, America faces two broad choices. In the name of paying more attention to its undeniably serious domestic problems, it can reduce defense spending drastically to give its domestic concerns overriding priority over any competing strategic considerations, withdrawing the U.S. military presence altogether from Europe and the Pacific, and sharply curtailing military involvement in the world. That option appears especially attractive to some Americans who see an emerging economic union of the United States, Canada, and Mexico as an adequate replacement for what they perceive to be an increasingly untenable and outmoded Atlantic Alliance.

Yet that option would erode America's military weight, and hence its international political influence; it would throw away the means through which America can exercise its role as grand facilitator of the international system. The consequences are not difficult to foresee and are part of the tragic and predictable cycle of the past: a Europe breaking its Atlantic ties and plunging into unabashed mercantilism, a Middle East heading toward catastrophe, a Pacific Rim riven by resurrected political jealousies and arms races, and an international system in which aspiring regional hegemons—now armed with weapons of mass destruction—would be tempted to expand their power through aggression against weaker neighbors. A militarily feeble and politically withdrawn America would accentuate current tendencies toward greater international anarchy. The resulting international system would hardly be

congenial to Americans' long-term welfare.

The second option is to remain engaged in the world with all the instruments of power at America's disposal. By remaining open to the world, fully invested in it politically and militarily, the United States may succeed in facilitating the transition of the international system from its current post-Cold War uneasiness and fluidity to more solid and durable structures of order. While cutting military spending as a percentage of GNP to pre-World War II levels, the new defense strategy is flexible enough to allow further adjustments in the pace and size of defense reductions as the international environment evolves. Indeed, the strategy's focus is not to keep the defense budget or current forces at a particular level, but to ensure that the United States remains engaged, with the political and military resources it needs, in the task of shaping the postwar world. It would be tragic if the United States, beset by weariness in the aftermath of a titanic four-decade struggle, were to ignore its current opportunity to help fashion an international order less chaotic than history gives us the right to expect.