

MATCHING U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS AND CAPABILITIES IN THE 1990s: THE CHALLENGES FOR PRESIDENT BUSH

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Caught between the economic costs of overstretch and the political perils of understretch, the Bush administration will attempt to manage the contest much like its predecessors. Nicholas Dujmović explores the options for reconciliation, but finds few prospects for immediate success.

America has enjoyed its place in the sun as the greatest power in history and is now destined, as all great powers, for an inevitable slide in global strength and influence. Americans, in other words, should think of their country not as a permanent superpower able to shape the course of human events, but as a country susceptible like any other to the inexorable decline suffered by all empires.

So predicts Paul Kennedy, until recently a relatively little known professor of history at Yale University, in his surprise bestseller *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.¹ In fact, refuting Kennedy's thesis has become somewhat of a cottage industry. Perhaps the most pointed critique comes from Australian diplomat Owen Harries. In his essay "The Rise of American Decline,"² Harries excoriates Kennedy for falling prey, *à la* Marx, to the seductive illusion of history as a science, and specifically for accusing the United States of "imperial overstretch" without addressing the potentially disastrous costs of "understretch."

Clearly, Professor Kennedy has struck a nerve among intellectuals not quite ready to admit an America on the geopolitical skids. But has the United States imperiled its superpower status by neglecting economic trends? Are Kennedy's "emotional" critics fully aware of America's impending decline and shouting loudly today to overcome their own worst fears? Many Americans feel intuitively what Kennedy has postulated: the budget deficit will cause the gap between US interests and capabilities to widen, necessarily diminishing American world influence. Annual defense budgets of \$300 billion (representing one quarter of the entire federal budget) and an annual budget deficit of approximately \$150 billion will force difficult choices on American statesmen.

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1 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

2 Owen Harries, "The Rise of American Decline," *Commentary* 85 (May 1988), 32-36.

The problem of reconciling long-term interests and capabilities is far more complicated for a community such as the United States which recognizes global interests, yet has a cultural-historical aversion to the military, to the use of power, and to "entangling alliances," and which ultimately relies on seemingly unusable nuclear weaponry to defend interests and alliances both. Add to this complex equation the democratic factor, which means that the American people are the final arbiters of this interest versus capability dilemma, and the problem for American policymakers appears intractable.

In order to gain domestic support for his programs to increase US security while improving his chances for reelection in 1992, President Bush will have to find a way to close the perceived gulf between the nation's interests and capabilities. The obvious, if grossly simplistic, answer to this timeless problem is twofold: either bolster one's capabilities by running to the edge of bankruptcy or cut back on one's interests to the point of dangerously strengthening adversaries. As John Lewis Gaddis demonstrates in his study of postwar US security policy, *Strategies of Containment*,³ the successive administrations of US presidents from Truman to Carter succumbed to this simplification. To contain the communist threat, the United States has taken either a "symmetrical" approach, reacting to perceived Soviet advances with little regard for the resources available, or an "asymmetrical" approach, which recognizes that resources are limited and therefore protects only the most vital interests.

Both approaches are flawed, says Gaddis. Inherently reactive, "symmetry" allows an adversary to choose the time, place and nature of confrontations and puts the United States continuously on the defensive, at ever increasing costs. "Asymmetry," by contrast, allows the United States to choose actions consonant with resources; the difficulty lies in determining which interests to defend. The obvious solution is to devise some combination of the two strategies. Yet the US government is seemingly unable to reconcile the vicious competition between interests and capabilities.

Clearly, what is needed is a new approach to this old problem. The stakes are high. The 1990s is the decade in which the United States must move closer to one of two scenarios: a reconciliation of global interests with the ability to protect those interests, or a recognition that "overstretch" has relegated the United States to a lesser world status.

Samuel Huntington defines seven options to address what he describes as the "Lippmann Gap." Back in 1943 Walter Lippmann noted the necessity of bringing into balance "the nation's commitments and the nation's power."⁴ Huntington offers the old standard documented by Gaddis, as well as the currently popular call for "burden-sharing." He suggests that adopting more effective strategies and utilizing cheaper forms of power will wring more out of existing resources. But his most innovative proposition stresses the importance of the nature of the threat. Too many analyses of US national security,

3 John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

4 Samuel P. Huntington, "Coping with the Lippmann Gap," *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Winter 1987-88), 453-477.

including Gaddis', assume a static or uniform threat to US interests. Finally, Huntington argues that the United States can reduce threats either through diplomacy or through violence.

Since 1981 the United States has acted to reduce threats through violence in Grenada and Libya. It also has moved to reduce threats through diplomacy; witness the INF Treaty. Yet the Reagan administration primarily sought increased capabilities through much larger military budgets. The fiscal reality forced by the resulting federal deficit was clear in the 1988 presidential campaign. Both camps recognized the need to reduce the defense budget and neither party proposed major cuts in social spending, acknowledging the limits of public tolerance. Savings from the recently enacted welfare reform bill notwithstanding, the public expectation is that in the 1990s defense must pay for the reconciliation of US interests and capabilities.

In attempting to bring in line America's interests and capabilities, President Bush will seek to apply, with more success than his predecessors, the Huntington typology of options. What is certain is that Bush will have more difficulty than President Reagan in reconciling US global interests and resources, precisely at a time when such reconciliation seems most crucial to stave off "overstretch."

OPTION 1: LARGER MILITARY BUDGETS

The most obvious way to bridge the gap is to spend more for military resources. This was the approach taken by the Reagan administration to restore capabilities lost during the post-Vietnam period. A recent survey indicates two-thirds of the American public believe the Reagan military buildup was necessary. Further, a majority thinks the world is still a dangerous place: 56 percent believe the Soviet Union might attack the United States or its allies if the West appears weak.⁵

Despite popular affirmation of the necessity of the military buildup, 84 percent of the American public believe no further buildup is required for the 1990s. Indeed, 86 percent think American overcommitment may hurt the economy. At the time of the survey (February 1988), nearly two-thirds also favored a president who would "strengthen our economy"; only one-third would vote for a candidate who would "protect our national security interests."⁶ Apparently in Bush the American people expect a president who will do both.

While no increase in the defense budget is expected, significant cuts under a Bush administration seem unlikely. Most Americans still regard the Soviet Union as the greatest military threat and as a result, only one-third favor any reduction in US military spending.⁷

In 1986 the Secretary of Defense established the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, a board of prominent civilian and ex-military strategic

⁵ Daniel Yankelovich and Richard Smoke, "America's 'New Thinking,'" *Foreign Affairs* 67 (Fall 1988), 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

thinkers. In its January 1988 report, *Discriminate Deterrence*, the commission noted that the current ratio of US defense spending to GNP — 6 percent — was relatively small. It recommended the executive and legislative branches commit themselves to holding the defense budget to this ratio, which would allow 3 percent annual growth.⁸

President Bush probably will accept the commission's recommendation and try to work with Congress to avoid major cuts and provide a stable level of funding with modest real growth. But given the unchanging or even expanding nature of US interests, the gulf between interests and capabilities will have to be made up elsewhere.

OPTION 2: REDUCED US COMMITMENTS

From the time of George Kennan's containment strategy, through the era of massive retaliation, to the present era of flexible response and limited nuclear options, US global strategy has consisted of two immutable elements: first, to deny an aggressor the ability to acquire through conquest of intimidation the means to threaten our society, and second, to support stable governments which share our concerns.

It is unlikely President Bush will challenge either of these long-held tenets of American strategy. Isolationism, a once powerful factor in the American *weltanschauung*, has been relegated since World War II to the fringe of American politics. As the democratic superpower, the United States has obvious global interests and responsibilities. The United States will continue to seek the cooperation of allies and friendly states which look with confidence to American world leadership.

What must be avoided, however, is a global crisis of confidence in US commitments, similar to that which occurred as a result of American involvement and withdrawal in Vietnam. Reducing commitments, then, could well be counterproductive. As US Senator Richard Lugar, former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recently stated,

it is far easier to demand a reduction in commitments than to define with clarity those commitments that can, in fact, be safely reduced. In practice, we must decide whether the loss of prestige from abdicating responsibilities will reduce the effective use of American power more than the reduced claims on our resources might enhance our standing.⁹

While credibility can be a powerful and effective means to deter aggression against US interests, it cannot be made an end in itself. Such confusion in strategic thinking helped to prolong, beyond any rational assessment of US interests, American involvement in Vietnam. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, the government had to choose between credibility and dishonor; it chose credibility and it got dishonor.

8 *Discriminate Deterrence*, Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, Fred C. Ikle and Albert Wohlstetter, co-chairmen, Washington: G.P.O., January 1988.

9 Richard G. Lugar, "A Republican Looks at Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Winter 1987/88), 249.

Similarly, the United States cannot afford to confuse ends and means when it comes to its interests and the bases thought necessary to defend those interests. For example, American Pacific interests could be defended from Guam if the United States was asked to remove itself from Clark Airbase and Subic Bay in the Philippines. Political pressure in Greece could result in a shift to Turkey analogous to the recent movement of F-16s from Spain to Italy. The point is that despite their importance, overseas bases themselves have little intrinsic value and should not be considered as interests in themselves.

Secretary of State George Shultz reaffirmed last July that the United States will continue to be "the fundamental guarantor of the balance of power" in the Pacific basin.¹⁰ Given the growing economic power of nations in this region, the thaw between the USSR and the People's Republic of China, and the increasing strategic importance of the US space program, American interests in the 1990s could well expand. The next decade will not likely witness a US withdrawal from its interests and commitments, despite domestic budgetary constraints.

If there is little chance of major changes in either American interests or defense spending, how will the Bush administration and its successors close the gap between resources and capabilities? A new strategy will require pursuance of other options posited by the Huntington typology.

OPTION 3: INCREASED CAPABILITIES THROUGH BURDEN-SHARING

The Reagan administration succeeded in convincing Japan to increase the percentage of its GNP spent on defense, moving past the 1 percent mark heretofore considered insurmountable. The Japanese government also agreed in principle to increased responsibilities for antisubmarine warfare and air defense in the Western Pacific, and increased payments to the United States to defray the costs of stationing US personnel in Japan. The challenge for the Bush administration will be to broaden this limited success to include other allies.

While prospects for increased burden-sharing in the Far East appear favorable, negotiations with NATO allies are unpromising. For years the United States exhorted its allies in Western Europe to increase defense spending annually by 3 percent. For political reasons these European allies, all of which spend about twice the proportion on social welfare programs as the United States, found it impossible to comply. The twelve European members of NATO, the so-called Eurogroup, reject arguments that the European contribution to NATO is inadequate. The Eurogroup claims it has increased defense spending at more than twice the rate of the United States since 1970. Since that time, it argues, Eurogroup per capita defense spending increased by more than 20 percent while the US rate actually decreased by 3 percent. In addition, the Eurogroup is quick to note that it provides not only 90 percent of NATO's

¹⁰ "U.S. Role in the Pacific is Reaffirmed by Shultz," *International Herald Tribune*, 23-24 July 1988, 1.

manpower and artillery, 80 percent of NATO's tanks and combat aircraft, and 65 percent of NATO's major warships, but also shoulders the incalculable cost posed by the possible battlefield use of nuclear weapons on European soil.¹¹

US Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci admitted last year:

Based on a review of all factors, one may conclude that our NATO allies . . . are making a substantial contribution to the common defense. They are certainly doing much better than is commonly recognized.¹²

The dilemma for the Bush administration is compounded by the Soviet Union's recent portrayal of itself as a diminished threat to the European democracies, which thus are less inclined to increase defense spending at a time when the INF treaty makes it necessary to beef up conventional defense. The demographics of Western Europe give further cause for pessimism: by the year 2000 the number of men aged 18-22 years will decrease by more than 20 percent. The number of young men available for service in the Federal Republic of Germany will drop by 42 percent. These figures led one observer to point out, "there is virtually no possibility that NATO will maintain current force levels through the end of this century."¹³

The United States is placed in the uncomfortable position of preparing not only to fight the Warsaw Pact, but of waging a diplomatic battle against its own allies. Immense political, economic, and demographic pressure in Western Europe renders the prospects for NATO burden-sharing bleak. Because of the unchanging character of US interests in Europe, however, the United States will no doubt continue to carry what it considers most of the defense burden for NATO.

OPTION 4: REDUCE THREATS THROUGH DIPLOMACY

Bush may avoid "overstretch" if existing threats can be made less menacing through diplomacy. Foremost among the achievements of the Reagan administration is the treaty to eliminate intermediate nuclear forces (INF) in Europe. Grave questions do exist, however, on whether the treaty has resulted in a diminution or an enhancement of the Soviet threat. Such eminent experts as Henry Kissinger, former NATO Supreme Commander Bernard Rogers, and US Congressman Les Aspin have expressed fears that the INF treaty has made Europe "safe for conventional war."¹⁴ The remaining nuclear weapons available to NATO are either of inadequate range or of insufficient reliability to pose a credible deterrent. In post-INF Europe, NATO now must rely on American

11 *Western Defense: The European Role in NATO*, Eurogroup, Brussels, May 1988, 10-19.

12 Frank Carlucci, *Report on Allies Assuming a Greater Share of the Common Defense Burden*, March 1988, cited in *NATO Review* 36 (August 1988), 10.

13 Susan L. Clark, "Who Will Staff NATO?," *ORBIS*, 4 (Fall 1988), 521-523.

14 Jeffrey Record and David B. Rivkin, Jr., "Defending Post-INF Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Spring 1988), 735-754. See also Dan Quayle, "After the INF Treaty: the NATO Defense Initiative," *Strategic Review* 16 (Winter 1988), 9-13.

strategic nuclear weapons to deter a conventional attack. Given the conventional superiority of Warsaw Pact forces, there is little choice.

Even if the credibility of extended deterrence were unquestioned — and our allies always have questioned whether the United States would really commit itself to defending Europe with strategic nuclear forces — a major problem remains for US strategy in the 1990s. If the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) should succeed in reducing by 50 percent American and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons, or if the INF treaty is extended to include all nuclear weapons in Europe, then negotiations must be linked to conventional force reductions in Europe. Two ex-secretaries of state with generally divergent world views agree:

It is clear that any [conventional] reductions will have to be highly asymmetrical in order to create a stable balance. This factor alone means that conventional arms negotiations are certain to become the most difficult arms control problem for the NATO alliance in the 1990s.¹⁵

It also seems clear that the Soviet leadership, interested in arms cuts in order to strengthen its domestic economy, is serious about negotiating substantial decreases in strategic nuclear weapons. If so, reductions in conventional forces can be negotiated for the costs of current Soviet and American nuclear forces, which are much less than those of conventional forces by a ratio of about 10-to-1. Nuclear and conventional forces, then, are clearly linked. Bush should pursue reductions in strategic nuclear forces only after an agreement on reducing conventional arms has been reached.

A more troublesome concern centers on whether or not the United States should link progress in arms reductions with improvements in human rights within the Soviet bloc. Some observers, such as Kissinger and Cyrus Vance, find this approach counterproductive, but others argue now is precisely the time to make such a connection. Yuri Orlov, a Soviet physicist and dissident imprisoned for exposing non-compliance with the Helsinki accords, writes that Mikhail Gorbachev so desperately seeks to improve the Soviet economy he would accede to Western pressure and increase emigration, expand *glasnost*, and allow for real expression of civil liberties. Above all, Orlov argues Gorbachev's assumption that the Soviet state can dictate economic liberalization while resisting changes in the political order must be proven wrong.

Preliminary US-Soviet negotiations on conventional arms suggest a Reagan administration emphasis on human rights.¹⁶ A well-orchestrated policy under Bush could mean greater political freedom for the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as substantial reductions in the most costly part of the US defense budget.

Bush should use the diplomatic power and prestige of the United States to strengthen both the 1925 Geneva Convention which prohibits the first use of

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger and Cyrus Vance, "Bipartisan Objectives for Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Summer 1988), 905.

¹⁶ "Mood upbeat for new conventional arms talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 October 1988, 7-8.

chemical weaponry, and the Biological Convention of 1972 which forbids the production, stockpiling, and use of biological agents. Though a worldwide ban on these weapons would save the United States few defense dollars, an effective prohibition on chemical and biological agents would constitute a significant diplomatic success.

OPTION 5: REDUCING THREATS THROUGH VIOLENCE

The Reagan administration's two uses of military violence, one to eradicate a Cuban threat in the Eastern Caribbean and the other to quell a major player in international terrorism, both occurred in the Third World. Since 1945 the Third World has been the location for all wars involving the United States and it will continue to pose challenges to US security.

Today, argues Zbigniew Brzezinski, the United States must shift its emphasis from apocalyptic visions of superpower nuclear war or a Soviet/Warsaw Pact conventional attack on Western Europe to an emphasis on limited conflict in the Third World. The United States should de-emphasize the Eurocentric focus of its present military force structure, maintain forces capable of deterring one major war and develop the ability to respond to lesser threats worldwide.¹⁷

The United States may be forced in the 1990s to reduce its conventional troops in Europe (which currently consume half the US defense budget) in order to fund a global version of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) to deal with future threats. Or, as one defense expert suggests, the United States could transform its "garrisoned" NATO troops into an "expeditionary" force ready to respond to crises in the Middle East, for example.¹⁸ Though the Reagan administration improved US air and sea lift capabilities by 50 percent, Bush must expand current capabilities to achieve this strategy.

Although a change in the US force structure toward a global RDF may represent real improvement in the ability to protect US interests worldwide, two major obstacles exist. First, NATO countries regard this recommendation as an attempt by the United States to "decouple" itself from the conventional defense of Europe.¹⁹ According to the Europeans, such a transformation would make the use of nuclear weapons in Europe more likely. Second, even if alliance unity on this issue could be assumed, no real evidence suggests that shifting resources from a "garrison" mode to an RDF capability will result in a net savings to the US defense budget. Indeed, additional costs for sufficient transportation capabilities, as well as for training, pre-positioned supplies and specialized equipment, may negate any savings gained in a move away from permanently-based forces. Significantly, the Commission on Integrated Long-

17 Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America's New Geostrategy," *Foreign Affairs* 66 (Spring 1988), 680-699. See also *Discriminate Deterrence*, 11.

18 John L. Endicott, "Flexible Military Containment: Forward-Deployed Expeditionary Forces," in Terry L. Deibel and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Concept and Policy*, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1986) 230-254.

19 Christopher Coker, "Discriminate Deterrence and the Alliance," *Strategic Review*, 16 (Spring 1988), 51-59.

Term Strategy foresaw no change in the defense budget resulting from such restructuring.²⁰ Neither military mix diminishes the drain on US resources.

OPTION 6: MORE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

President Bush inherits a wealth of new, imaginative, and controversial strategies which seek to address the gap between interests and capabilities. These Reagan-era strategies include: AirLand Battle, which aims to deter a Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe; the Maritime Strategy, an extended, large-scale, retaliatory maritime offensive; the Strategic Defensive Initiative (SDI), an attempt to relink the concepts of defense and deterrence, separated with the advent of mutual assured destruction; and Follow-On Forces Attack (FOFA), a NATO doctrine which attempts to deny a Warsaw Pact victory through Allied destruction of rear echelons.

Space here does not allow even superficial discussion of each strategy. Assuming merit, technological capability, and public support, the Bush administration will be hard-pressed to fund them. Each addresses a real strategic shortcoming, whether in Europe, at sea or against ballistic missiles. Each depends on new or emerging technologies in lasers, computers, aircraft, ships, tanks. None will represent a cut in defense spending. Nonetheless, the Bush administration will, in all probability, move to deploy at least some of the systems envisioned by the strategists of the Reagan administration, arguing US global interests mandate their use. These strategies will not alleviate the defense budget dilemma; indeed, they will exacerbate the problem.

OPTION 7: ALTERNATE FORMS OF POWER

When a political entity, whether state, political party, or "national liberation movement" determines that conventional warfare is too expensive or somehow unsuitable to gain its objectives, that political entity will often resort to unconventional, or irregular, warfare. The United States used "low intensity conflict" (LIC) successfully in its own War of Independence (although the United States later became a victim of LIC in Southeast Asia). In the nuclear age, LIC by proxy forces has become the superpower weapon of choice.

Two and a half decades after Khrushchev first proclaimed Soviet support of "national liberation movements" in the politically vulnerable Third World, the United States responded with the "Reagan doctrine." Although US support for anti-communist insurgencies had been established early in President Reagan's first term, the second term saw this support expand from mere *realpolitik* to an explicit ideological crusade. According to statements by President Reagan and Secretary Shultz in early 1985, the United States has a moral responsibility to support "freedom fighters."²¹

²⁰ *Discriminate Deterrence*, 59.

²¹ For a thoughtful summary of the origins of the Reagan Doctrine, see William R. Bode, "The Reagan Doctrine," *Strategic Review* 14 (Winter 1986), 21-29.

Three major difficulties slowed implementation of the Reagan doctrine. First, the doctrine has come under fire for applying itself indiscriminately to political situations widely divergent in nature. Only the Nicaraguan resistance, known accurately, if pejoratively, as *Contras*, as well as the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) group fighting the Cuban-backed MPLA government of Angola, can be described as democratic in nature. Because the "freedom fighters" of Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan are not schooled in Locke and Jefferson, the doctrine has been criticized for inconsistency, despite the fact that these insurgencies represent something at least marginally better both for indigenous peoples and for US interests than a communist, Soviet-aligned Third World state.

Second, anti-communist insurgencies, whether democratic or not, rarely act as unified movements. The effectiveness of the Nicaraguan *Contra* groups has been denigrated, much like the White opposition to the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, by a lack of political consensus. Similarly, the rebel opposition to the Kabul regime consists of seven groups, and the anti-Vietnamese Cambodian insurgencies number at least three factions.

Third, public opinion in democracies such as the United States favors in practice the anti-democratic or communist forces (whether they exist as an insurgency or as a government in power) by requiring that the democratic or anti-communist forces, if they are to receive American support, refrain from the use of terror. The normal, endemic attributes of irregular warfare, which include the use of terror, are denied by US public opinion to a democratic resistance. This stems from the well-meaning belief that "our freedom fighters" must somehow be held to higher democratic standards, even during violent conflict, than anti-democratic forces. Facing a ruthless, anti-democratic government, an insurgency might find its commitment to democracy to be an act of martyrdom.

Despite failure of the American government to reach a consensus between its executive and legislative branches on the implementation of the Reagan doctrine in Central America, the doctrine has seen significant successes. In Afghanistan, American Stinger missiles in the hands of the *Mujahedin* helped convince the Soviet leadership that the Afghan war was, as it is now advertised, a mistake. In Angola, continued US support of UNITA has compelled the Cubans to agree to withdraw 45,000 troops. In Cambodia, although little has happened, the Vietnamese are at least indicating a desire to end their occupation. In Nicaragua, American assistance to the *Contras*, however sporadic, has prevented the full consolidation of Sandinista power. It is clear that significant foreign policy successes have been achieved worldwide through the expenditure of few resources.²²

For its real and potential benefits, the Reagan doctrine is a bargain. The Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy recommends maintaining the Reagan doctrine under the security assistance portion of the defense budget;

²² For a recent evaluation of the Reagan Doctrine, see the series by Charles Waterman, "Reagan Era Revolutions: A Scorecard," in the *Christian Science Monitor*, 17-18 October 1988.

these expenditures are estimated at no more than 4 percent.²³ The Reagan doctrine, however, remains a reactive strategy of containment in areas on the relative periphery of vital US interests. There is little doubt that despite its advantages, the doctrine cannot bring down military spending.

CONCLUSION

It would appear there is little chance of effecting major cuts in the US military budget. The United States cannot return to the fantasy of isolation by pretending not to have the global interests it must have as the world's most powerful democracy. Before World War II, the United States thought it had brought its interests and capabilities into balance precisely because America did not recognize the true extent of its interests. As Hans Morgenthau observed,

The United States, in the period between the two world wars, furnishes a striking example of a potentially powerful nation playing a minor role in world affairs because its foreign policy refused to bring the full weight of its potential strength to bear upon international problems.²⁴

Today, the United States faces the opposite problem. US global interests and responsibilities are recognized fully, but America continues to operate under the illusion that adequate resources are available to meet commitments and protect these interests, should they come under attack. In order to avoid admitting "overstretch," an admission which causes cognitive dissonance to Americans accustomed to thinking of the United States as the leader of the free world, American interests and capabilities are reconciled by denying the existence of limited resources.

The United States under President Bush will attempt the options described in these pages. Because of factors beyond US control, such as immutable global interests and alliance reticence on burden-sharing, the defense budget will not be decreased significantly if at all. Nonetheless, Bush undoubtedly will feel immense political pressure from the American public to reduce military spending. The apparent choice for Bush will be between "overstretch" and the attendant American decline, or the "understretch" which characterized the interwar period. The Bush administration also will face the singular frustration experienced today by analysts, namely that it is impossible to tell which of these outcomes is most dangerous.

There is one seemingly easy way out of this dilemma which may prove seductive to an administration desperate to reconcile US interests and capabilities — both for the sake of those interests and to increase chances for reelection in 1992. This path, unfortunately, is as potentially disastrous as it is tempting. The real challenge to the Bush administration for the next four years is to avoid declaring that the major threat to US interests since World War II, the Soviet Union, has become benign in its long-term foreign policy

²³ *Discriminate Deterrence*, 13-17.

²⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 140.

objectives and that the United States no longer need bear the brunt of defending the free world because the Soviet Union is inexorably moving towards democracy via *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

The blunt truth is that the United States has a real stake in genuine change in the Soviet Union. The blunter truth is that the United States has a great deal more to lose by an incorrect assessment of the USSR as a fully committed partner in world peace than by remaining pessimistic about Gorbachev's motives and continuing to regard the Soviet Union as the major threat to that peace. Bush must avoid a premature evaluation, despite great temptation to do so, of *perestroika* as a genuine political revolution. Much more must be expected of Gorbachev before the United States declares the Cold War over.

In the meantime, while waiting for the true nature of change in the Soviet Union to reveal itself, the United States will continue to plod along as before, neither admitting that Paul Kennedy is correct about "imperial overstretch" nor doing much to reconcile the gap between interests and capabilities. For now, the emperor is not quite naked, but neither is he fully clothed.