THE CLINTON SYNTHESIS: DOMESTIC PRESSURES AND GRAND STRATEGY FORMATION

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This paper explores the Clinton administration's search for a grand strategy in the context of a domestic debate about America's foreign policy purpose following the end of the Cold War. The possibility of a 'peace dividend' that might be used to address America's pressing domestic needs created pressures for a strategy of retrenchment that was rejected by a foreign policy elite favouring the maintenance of primacy and a central role for the United States in the hegemonic management of international order. The Clinton administration's response, a grand strategy focused on open markets and the institutionalisation of global trade, was an attempt to associate the need for an active internationalist American foreign policy to domestic economic renewal. This grand strategic synthesis successfully used the logic of globalisation to address domestic calls for retrenchment and to maintain a grand strategy of liberal internationalism in the face of domestic pressures.
Introduction

The foreign policy strategy of Bill Clinton remains understudied in the literature. The intervention of the events of September 11th 2001 changed the rules of the game, not only for policymakers but also for academics and historians interested in American foreign policy. Understanding this new dynamic of asymmetric threat and response, of modernity and religious fundamentalism, became the key research priority in International Relations literally overnight.\(^1\) Moreover, the controversy with which George W. Bush’s administration’s response to international terrorism met very quickly shifted the focus of US foreign policy scholars.\(^2\) As John Dumbrell notes in his introduction to one of the few analytical assessments of Clinton’s foreign policy, the 1990s became “that most remote of historical periods: the day before yesterday... the era from which political analysts, journalists and political scientists have retired, and to which professional, document-orientated historians have yet to direct their attention.”\(^3\) The 1990s therefore became an interregnum, an interlude between more clearly defined eras, a period in which International Relations theory – as well as international politics more generally – was in a state of flux, lacking a focal point around which to organise itself.\(^4\)

That the foreign policy of the Clinton administration is yet to be subjected to the same scrutiny as that of his successor reflects the political priorities of the time. In 1992, “anti-internationalism” and “foreign-affairs bashing” prevailed on the hustings and in

\(^{1}\) As Tony Blair understood very quickly, moments of change are moments to seize, telling the Labour Party Conference on the 2nd October, “The Kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.” For an early, and distinctly European view of the implications of 9-11, see Mark Leonard, ed. Re-Ordering the World (London: Foreign Policy Centre,2002).


Congress as Americans focused on a struggling domestic economy and anticipated a peace dividend to accrue from victory. The new President himself, having spent very little time during the campaign talking about foreign policy, was clearly in no mood to be distracted by international affairs. Indeed, the President seemed to hold on to the hope that he might avoid foreign affairs distracting from the domestic agenda of his Presidency by doing such a good job of diffusing issues and preventing problems arising that, in the words of Tony Lake, the President’s first National Security adviser, “dogs won’t bark.”

Yet Clinton was under no illusions that his in-tray contained “a whole kennel full of barking hounds”. As one commentator put it, in debunking the “enduring myth” that Clinton came to power without a foreign policy, the new President “assumed office with a fairly clear view of the world and the sort of policies he would have to pursue in order to enhance American power.” Far from being a reluctant internationalist, Clinton secured American internationalism in the face of calls to turn inward, and in doing so developed a grand strategy that although never particularly successfully articulated was coherent, and broadly successful.


6 During transition, Clinton excoriated Lee Hamilton, the Democratic Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, for focusing on geostrategic issues such as Russia and China. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 168.


8 Ibid., 502.

**Ending the Cold War at Home**

“When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world and we knew exactly who ‘they’ were. It was us versus them. And it was clear who ‘them’ was. Today, we’re not so sure who the ‘they’ are, but we know they’re there.”

Governor George W. Bush, at a campaign stop in Iowa, January 2000.\(^{10}\)

“How about this for foreign policy vision?” remarked the new President as he reviewed a selection of his own misspeaks and malapropisms for a light-hearted Washington dinner in March 2001. Yet perhaps unwittingly, beneath the humour the 43\(^{rd}\) President of the United States had revealed a deeper uncertainty undercutting US foreign policy and summed up the overriding problem that had faced both his own father and the man he had replaced in the White House – how to think about the nature of international order and the United States’ role in it following the collapse of the Cold War.

A cartoon by James Borgman in the Cincinatti Enquirer captured the peculiar challenges of 1989 and after. It showed a bewildered President George H.W. Bush sat at his desk, thinking: “Communism is dead, the Wall is down, Apartheid is falling, Mandela is free, the Sandanistas are ousted, Germany is reunited, the Cold War is over, I’ve returned all my calls, and, heck, it’s not even lunchtime.”\(^{11}\) Yet even ousting Saddam Hussein from Iraq, kicking Vietnam syndrome in the process, was not enough to secure the President re-election. James Carville’s pithy précis of Democratic candidate Bill Clinton’s agenda – ‘it’s the economy, stupid’ – reflected the American public’s focus on the pressing necessities of a recession that had hit the middle classes, and it was their assessment of Bush’s economic performance that proved decisive.\(^{12}\) That Ross Perot, with his “long record of gun-slinging hypernationalism” was a plausible candidate, gaining almost 19% of the popular vote,\


revealed that the American public had already grown out of its Cold War mindset that judged potential Presidents on their likely calm in a crisis in the shadow of nuclear war.\textsuperscript{13}

On either side of party-political divide candidates in Presidential primaries exploited this inward turn to advocate domestic agendas and attack foreign policy elites. On the democratic side Paul Tsongas focused on the scale of the budget deficit necessitated by high military spending, arguing that “if our security needs have lessened, our level of military spending should reflect that change.”\textsuperscript{14} America’s Cold War leaders were out of touch, Jerry Brown said, “more interested in a new world order 10,000 miles away than they are in a full employment economy”, adding that he “wouldn’t give a penny for foreign aid until every small farmer, businessman and family [in the United States] are taken care of.”\textsuperscript{15} That a realignment of American strategic concerns was so important now that the Cold War had ended was reflected in the serious challenge made for the sitting President’s Republican Party nomination by Pat Buchanan, the flag-bearer of the new American nationalism. Ross Perot’s independent candidacy in the general election itself was made possible by the success of Buchanan’s challenge in the primary campaign, and he subsequently defined himself as an economic nationalist committed to balancing the federal budget.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus the foreign policy story of the 1992 election was that an Arkansas governor with no previous military or foreign policy experience was able to get elected on a promise not to be a foreign policy president. In 1992 “the national mood was clearly to lessen the burdens of international leadership and to ask others to accept more responsibility


\textsuperscript{16} Walter J. Stone and Ronald B. Rapoport, "It's Perot Stupid! The Legacy of the 1992 Perot Movement in the Major-Party System, 1994-2000," \textit{PS: Political Science and Politics} 34, no. 1 (2001): 52. It is easy to forget that Perot was the front-runner, achieving as high as 39% in the polls in June 1992 with 49% believing he could win the election in July when he dropped out of the race. Samuel James Eldersveld and Hanes Walton, \textit{Political Parties in American Society} (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 69.
for military security, foreign aid, and support for international organization.”¹⁷ For the previous forty years American politics on issues from technology to sport had been totally subsumed by the foreign policy framework of the Cold War. The first post-Cold War presidential election was a reminder, as the Heritage Foundation noted in its contribution to the debate, of the long-forgotten truth that:

“Foreign policy is domestic policy... [it] is not an end in itself, but a means to secure the greatest possible degree of liberty, freedom and opportunity for Americans from foreign threats. It has no other purpose.”¹⁸

Such was the dominance of domestic issues in the prevailing mind-set in 1992 that for two scholars of American history “It was only a short step from that attitude to isolationism, 1930s style.”¹⁹ That the United States should consider a policy of withdrawal from internationalism raised familiar passions, as internationalists dismissed “the rhetoric of Neo-Know-Nothings”.²⁰ Yet the arguments for foreign policy retrenchment were in reality made with some skill and from a range of perspectives. Defensive realists argued that the use of American power in the world would provoke threats in reaction to it, and so a reduction in the United States’ foreign entanglements was required to increase American security whilst providing the domestic fillip of cost savings in the defense budget. Conservative neoisolationists based their arguments on the exceptionalist “conviction that America is pristine and the world corrupt, and hence maintaining America’s purity requires that it stay out of the evil world”.²¹ The security and prosperity of the American people was most likely


¹⁹ Ambrose and Brinkley, Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938, 370.


²¹ Robert W. Merry, Sands of Empire: Missionary Zeal, American Foreign Policy, and the Hazards of Global Ambition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 75.
to be assured by a focus on domestic policy and a watchful but disengaged and uncommitted foreign policy.

The doctrine of containment, one author argued, had “warped our sense of national interest” and left America entangled “in areas and issues of marginal utility to the United States while eroding America’s wealth and prosperity.” In this reading, the Cold War was an anomaly, the bulk of a “seventy year detour” from the main road of American diplomatic history. With victory assured and totalitarianism vanquished the immediate post-Cold War years in particular were characterised by a desire for America to withdraw from its global position and reap the benefits of its victory in that long and tiring conflict with the Soviet Union. The United States was secure; its power total, its ideology unquestioned. At the same time, many saw new threats to the United States arising from within rather than without, issues of public policy that had been neglected during the interminable emergency of the Cold War years. It was time for the United States to discard its Cold War mindset, to resist the imperial temptations of its sole superpower status and ‘come home, America’.

Thus the neoisolationist movement in the 1990s was chiefly concerned with rebuffing new foreign policy visions – denying that the ‘hole in the doughnut’, as the American political scientist Michael Mandelbaum characterised it, needs to be filled. The domestic arena had been long neglected as a result of the attitudes of the “globalist elites” and “bureaucratic-military empire” that had come to hold a grip on American foreign policy during the Cold War, a power which they were loath to yield. These elites viewed the position of the United States in the world as a reflection of their own status, and worried that that following the break-up of the Soviet Union their


\[25\] Clarke and Clad, *After the Crusade: American Foreign Policy for the Post-Superpower Age*, 2.

importance would be reduced by a more circumscribed role for the United States. As one academic noted, the notion that America may not have global interests is hard for foreign policy professionals with three generations’ experience of running the world to deal with.

“Experts... often know a great deal about their subject. But as with every speciality, they are particularly attached to it. They tend to elevate it in importance above everything else. Often they have little perspective, and lost track of the concerns of the person in the street. They tend to get contorted in considerations of ‘credibility’, ‘national prestige’ and ‘influence’. They are suckers for abstractions like ‘leadership’ and ‘stability’.27

Now that their defining bipolar contest was over, the subsequent threat to their professional identity helps to explain the “frantic” search for new missions and visions for United States foreign policy, efforts that the CATO Institute concluded “are so wide ranging as to constitute a campaign of threat procurement.”28 Realists and neo-isolationists were therefore united in their concern to debunk constructed threats, to ensure that American foreign policy could not persist at a level of engagement that was more reflective of bureaucratic inertia than the strategic environment.

Such arguments were therefore present both in the reactionary nationalism of Pat Buchanan and the more sophisticated realism of some significant luminaries of the foreign policy establishment. Charles Maynes, the influential editor of Foreign Policy magazine, wrote that the Cold War had fundamentally changed the nature of American society and in particular the relationship between its people and its government. America’s separation of powers meant that in foreign policy the country had been unable to speak with one voice, placing the United States at a disadvantage compared to the Soviet Union’s ability to communicate accurately and act swiftly.29

Morton H. Halperin concurred, arguing that compensating for this weakness in the “bellicose climate” of the ultra-securitised Cold War conflict had led “policymakers to adopt, and led the public to accept, restraints on freedom unprecedented in peacetime.” The power of the military-industrial complex; the designation of enemy ideologies; the annexation of constitutional powers by the executive from Congress; the culture of classifying information; the secret institutions of the national security infrastructure; all redefined the American people’s relationship with their government to the detriment of their constitutional rights.  

Although the Cold War was over the institutions of containment survived, “a burgeoning bureaucracy in search of a new mission.” The consequences of this bureaucracy on the health of American democracy had been little considered during the Cold War, due to an establishment consensus that elevated national security above the usual political debate. But now that liberalism had triumphed, the preservation of liberty at home was no longer an issue of protecting the United States from foreign foes but of protecting the American people from their government, which in the field of international affairs, as the editor of Foreign Policy noted, had more capacity to affect the American people’s lives and welfare than in any other area. The end of the Cold War therefore needed to stimulate a debate about foreign policy that was prior to its domestic effects, to reap a peace dividend that was “not just about the money that will be freed up” but is also about “the categories of thought that will finally be opened up.” The lack of any significant reassessment of the national security infrastructure of the Cold War after 1989 led Halperin, a veteran of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, to go as far as to call for Congressional hearings on the domestic legacy of containment in a bid to “End the Cold War at Home.”

Thus in the 1990s neoisolationist sentiment, broadly conceived, was about more than simply retreating to a fortress America to celebrate a famous victory. Having 

31 Ibid., 141.  
32 Maynes, "America without the Cold War," 6, 25.  
33 Halperin and Woods, "Ending the Cold War at Home," 143.
concluded that America’s security from external threats was effectively assured, neoisolationists repeat a strategic assessment at the domestic level to assess the threats to liberty that come from inside the state. Neoisolationists therefore focused inward, recognising that American identity as defined during the Cold War was unsustainable, that liberty could no longer be sustained simply by anticommunism, and that America therefore needed to realign its priorities from the inside-out, once again paying most attention to issues of domestic liberty and prosperity.

“For as long as most of us can remember, foreign policy has dominated our national agenda. Our domestic needs have consistently been sacrificed to it. We have turned security against foreign challengers into a shibboleth. But we have neglected the threats to our own security that come from within.”

**Domestic Pressures: Immigration and the Economy**

The most prominent of these threats arises from the linked issues of immigration, demographics and multiculturalism, which together threatened to push the United States towards heterogeneity and social fragmentation. In the absence of an external other to bind the nation together, America’s ideological national identity – summarised in the motto *a plurabis unum* – was under threat. American foreign policy had become one of ‘particularism’, devoted to promoting highly specific ethnic and commercial interests, which substitutes the rights of individuals for the rights of ethnic groups and lobbies.

Indeed, it was the lack of direction and the open debate of the early post-Cold War period that allowed lobbying by ethnic minorities to make their kinsmen’s cause

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34 Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 23.

America’s cause. Whether it was relations with Britain being made more difficult by Irish Americans’ closeness to republicans in Northern Ireland; the easing of restrictions towards Cuba being blocked by swing-vote Cuban Americans; the Israel lobby’s effect on Middle East policy or NATO expansion being driven by the need to appeal to voters of East European origin, “pandering to ethnic constituencies” had become an “accepted norm” in post-Cold War American foreign policy. For Stephen Walt, this constituted a dangerous imbalance in American foreign policy, between the organised and particular interests which constantly push the United States to do more things in more places, “and the far-weaker groups who think we might be better off showing a bit more restraint.”

For realists and neoisolationists, this hijacking of the national interest threatens to undermine the American identity that it purports to serve. No less powerful a voice than Samuel Huntington regarded the fate of the Soviet Union as a ‘sobering example’:

“The United States and the Soviet Union were very different, but they also resembled each other in that neither was a nation-state in the classic sense of the term. In considerable measure, each defined itself in terms of an ideology, which, as the Soviet example suggests, is likely to be a much more fragile basis for unity than a national culture richly grounded in history. If multiculturalism prevails and if the consensus on liberal democracy disintegrates, the United States could join the Soviet Union on the ash heap of history.”

Immigration without assimilation was therefore a malignant force undermining American identity and distorting the national interest. As a nation based on the idea of liberty, the dilution of commitment to that founding ideology was as great a threat as to the United States itself as any threat to the integrity of American territory. For Patrick Buchanan mass immigration and the radical demographic alteration that it

36 Buchanan, A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny, 334.
might cause constituted “the most immediate and serious problem facing the United States in this hemisphere”.\textsuperscript{40} Liberal attitudes towards immigration therefore struck at the heart of America itself:

“When we say we will put America first, we mean also that our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved, and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped into some landfill called multiculturalism.”\textsuperscript{41}

This kind of rhetoric reflects that strand in American history that relies less on the abstract idea of the preservation of American identity as liberty than it does on racial and religious prejudice. Charles Krauthammer, no leftist liberal himself, was moved to accuse Buchanan of “subliminal appeals to prejudice”.\textsuperscript{42} Yet at the same time it was clear that the American public was expressing a conscious preference for European over Asian and Latin American immigration, and growing concerns about the integrative nature of a multicultural society had led twenty-one states to pass legislation making English their official state language.\textsuperscript{43} Writing in \textit{The National Interest}, James Kurth went so far accuse the American intellectual class, in their advocacy of a multicultural America, of being “present at the deconstruction of Western civilization.”\textsuperscript{44}

If all-out racism accounted for some of the politics of immigration, it was also a useful tool of nationalism, in that securitising domestic issues allowed advocates of separation and exceptionalism to capture the intellectual space and resources that might otherwise be devoted to internationalism. But whether the underlying motivation arose from the belief that American identity requires a sustained and

\textsuperscript{40} Buchanan, \textit{A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America’s Destiny}, 370-1.


\textsuperscript{44} James Kurth, "The Real Clash," \textit{The National Interest} 37(1994).
consistent ideological commitment or whether this stream of conservative neoisolationism is simply the refuge of the disgruntled white man, there is no doubt that throughout the 1990s immigration was as contentious an issue as any aspect of foreign or domestic policy.

The main catalyst of immigration’s rise as an increasing concern of the American public during the early 1990s was their economic worries. In 1993, nearly two-thirds of survey respondents felt immigration should be lowered, nearly seventy percent believed that most new immigrants were in the country illegally, a majority felt that immigrants tended to cause problems for American society and over a third felt immigrants took American jobs. Such sentiments confirmed a sustained trend in US public opinion in which the desire for reduced immigration is highly correlated with levels of unemployment.45 Indeed, by the mid-1990s it was possible to discern a new “fiscal politics of immigration” in which immigration, and in particular the cost of providing social services for immigrants, were depicted as a drain on government funds, as “growing anti-immigrant sentiment coalesced with the forces of fiscal conservatism to make immigrants an easy target of budget cuts.”46

The recession of the early 1990s was the overriding feature of all areas of American policy debate. By 1990 US economic expansion had ground to a halt, labouring under the burdens of rising oil prices, a capital shortage, tightening credit markets and a burden of public and private debt. Growth in the 1980s had been fuelled by a “borrowing binge” to fund trade and budget deficits, and the United States had taken the dubious title of the world’s largest debtor nation.47 With the federal budget deficit restricting government’s ability to use fiscal policy to stimulate the economy, balanced-budget conservatism became a major force in American politics, in particular with neoisolationists who believed that the major areas in which


government had become too big were expressions of a sustained Cold War internationalism that was now redundant. With its “omnipresent focus on deficits, spending cuts and tax avoidance” balanced-budget conservatism was used by conservatives to “celebrate meat-axe approaches” to public spending. Its legislative expression was the Republican Party’s 1994 Contract with America, which of the ten policy-planks it set out for a Republican-led Congress only one related to foreign policy, and that was a pledge to prevent American troops coming under foreign command. The Contract was a manifesto for small government, calling for zero baseline budgeting of the entire Federal budget and a legislative bias against tax increases.

Part of this emphasis on budget deficits stemmed from the need to compete with Japan, which had emerged as the world’s most competitive economic power and biggest creditor, having exploited the ‘new industrial revolution’ in manufacturing and invested heavily in research and development. Japan’s economy had grown rapidly and consistently as a de facto American protectorate during the Cold War, and by 1991 it was the second-largest economy in the world with growth rates over the previous three years above 5%, whilst in the same year America slipped into recession. Concern about trade relations with Japan had been building since the mid-1980s, but with the end of the Cold War came the realisation that America’s alliance with Japan could no longer proceed upon the premises it had for the previous forty years.

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49 “Republican Contract with America”, available at http://www.house.gov/house/Contract/CONTRACT.html. Leading the resistance to Clinton’s foreign policy was Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who claimed to have never voted for a foreign aid bill. See Dumbrell, Clinton’s Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000, 39.


51 Source: World Development Indicators Database

Ironically, Japan’s economic accomplishments that now so concerned American policymakers were the result of America’s long-term economic strategy in the Pacific rim.⁵³ Since the United States had focused its resources on defeating communism it had been unable to invest domestically, and now its economy was structurally deficient compared to Japan’s, which had been a free-rider on American security guarantees for the better part of forty years. With the disappearance of the Soviet threat Tokyo no longer needed to defer to the United States, with the result that by the early 1990s the relationship was becoming more fractious, “its tone increasingly acrimonious and its original post-war rationale now largely irrelevant.”⁵⁴ One contribution to the debate, which was translated into both Japanese and Chinese, went as far as to argue that a second war in the Pacific was unavoidable.⁵⁵

The suggestion that the success of Japan’s export-led growth could be in large part attributed to the security umbrella provided by the United States was an open goal for neoisolationists who argued for a drawdown of American overseas commitments in favour of domestic investment.⁵⁶ Yet at the same time the less nationalist amongst them were cautious not to fall into the trap of regarding Japanese growth as a security threat requiring American political and military engagement.⁵⁷ As the realist editor of Foreign Affairs noted, “efforts to depict Japanese economic success as a security threat comparable to the Soviet military menace can succeed only if hysteria replaces common sense.”⁵⁸

Such hysteria was not in short supply. Jeffrey Garten, an investment banker who had worked on economic policy for the Nixon administration, presented the idea that it

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⁵³ Cox, *Us Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Superpower without a Mission*, 84-101.
⁵⁸ Maynes, “America without the Cold War,” 4.
was not just Japan, but the newly reunified German economy, that were the two poles
to which power was shifting, and that the economic rivalry between those two pacifist
trading states and the world’s policeman might constitute a ‘Cold Peace’ in the
coming era. This economic competition represented the most severe challenge the
United States had faced since 1941.

“We are in danger of becoming a hobbled power, and, based on current trends, a
second-rate country in the areas that will count most in the coming world order.
More significantly, we risk the prospect of a declining standard of living, with
attendant social strife and increasing dependence on other nations for critical
capital and technology... with all that and more, is there any wonder why we
should be thinking about Japan and Germany and all they represent in terms of
the competition we face, the cooperation we need, and, most of all, the urgency of
getting a grip on ourselves at home?”

That this type of thinking was so salient during Clinton’s first term in office was made
clear by Garten’s selection by the new administration as Under Secretary for
International Trade, whose work would be closely monitored by an activist and
inward-looking Congress that that for the first time in forty years refused to extend
fast-track authorisation to a US trade negotiation.\(^{60}\) The political difficulty that the
ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) presented
reflected the fact that the early 1990s was a period in which “protectionism in trade
has much greater support than at any time since the 1930s.”\(^{61}\) Agreed and signed by
George H.W. Bush before he left office, NAFTA was initially opposed by a good deal
of Congressional opinion on the basis of a populist and nationalist desire to maintain
America’s industrial base in an era where outsourcing was already transforming the
United States into a services-dominated economy.\(^{62}\) Largely based around the
representatives of organised labour within the Democratic Party but led by the
activism of Ross Perot, opposition to the agreement was unusually heated and public

\(^{59}\) Jeffrey E. Garten, *A Cold Peace: America, Japan, Germany, and the Struggle for Supremacy* (New

\(^{60}\) See Cox, *Us Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Superpower without a Mission*, 21-37.


for what remained a “dull as dishwater” trade agreement. Portraying Mexico as weak, dependent and corrupt, neo-isolationist sentiment stoked fears that NAFTA would force American workers to accept lower wages and higher taxes.

Following NAFTA’s eventual ratification after a political-capital-sapping campaign by the Clinton administration, a 1994 ABC News/Washington Post poll showed 67% of respondents favoured reducing American involvement in world affairs. The midterm elections later that year that ushered in one of the least internationalist Congressional memberships ever could therefore be understood as Americans “stampeding back into the laager from which they were forced to emerge in 1941.” Over half of the members of the 104th Congress had served less than five years on the Hill, and many proudly declared they did not even have passports. Responding to criticism that the new Congress was isolationist, Newt Gingrich argued that America’s ambitions had to have a limit.

“A conservative watching a feckless liberal throw away American money in an utterly infantile pursuit of projects that have no hope, it’s not isolationism to say that’s stupid.”

The ‘infantile pursuits’ in which the American government was engaged were numerous. In search of a low tax, small government economy, balanced-budget


\[66\] Cox, Us Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Superpower without a Mission, 18-19.

\[67\] Sidney Blumenthal wrote that the key consequence of the 1994 midterms was the “shattering of the foreign policy consensus” as a result of the most overtly isolationist campaign since 1938. Sidney Blumenthal, "The Return of the Repressed," World Policy Journal 12, no. 3 (1995).

\[68\] Quoted in Derek H. Chollet and James M. Goldgeier, America between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 109.
conservatives advocated swathing cuts in a range of areas, most deeply in what might collectively be characterised as the United States’ internationalism budget. Any federal money spent for the benefit of anything other than a highly narrow definition of national security was waste. The means of Cold War strategy were to be re-appropriated so the American people could have a balanced budget and lower taxes, in a set of proposals that amounted to “the most severe restructuring of the US foreign policy apparatus since these institutions were established in the late 1940s.”

Redefining American Foreign Policy

The domestic context in which the Clinton administration set about reviewing United States grand strategy was therefore both highly politicised and with a distinct anti-internationalist bias. Moreover, for the foreign policy community, the experts whose attachment to their subject Ronald Steel had bemonaned, the ending of the Cold War was an experience that consisted at least in part of a profound sense of loss. The comforting knowledge of clear enmity and purpose was replaced by moral and strategic ambiguity. As Paul Kennedy wrote in 1993, “the relief that the Soviet Union is no longer an “enemy” was overshadowed by uncertainties about the United State’s proper world role.” The irony was that whilst vindicating their past policies, ‘victory’ forced policymakers to rethink their assumptions and redefine American national interests. Doing so in a domestic political climate hostile to the very internationalism that America’s foreign policy establishment was founded upon made the task all the more unwelcome.

Underneath the ideological overlay of the Cold War it was a classic conflict between states fought with the classic tools of statecraft. It was a zero-sum game that everybody could understand, in which “every arena was critical, every problem, by definition, a crisis.” \(^{72}\) In setting up the struggle for the minds of men, for their choice between the two universal ideologies of political and economic organisation, it provided a set of axioms for understanding the world. The Cold War gave the United States a cause, deferent allies, and “a role of undisputed boss of the realm we called the “free world’” and it neatly divided the world along clear lines of good and evil. \(^{73}\) It had changed the United States from a republic normally at peace into a national security state perpetually prepared for war, with a massive military-industrial complex. \(^{74}\) Anticommunism was nothing less than the “sextant by which the ship of state has been guided since 1945”, \(^{75}\) and for its intellectual clarity and economic and bureaucratic largesse it was, according to one commentator, “not surprising” that some “actually miss the Cold War.” \(^{76}\)

If as Robert Jervis noted, American had previously “at least agreed on the crucial questions most of the time” having to leave the Cold War behind called into question the very concepts, coalitions even vocabulary of foreign affairs. \(^{77}\) The Cold War had expanded the American state, leaving a more powerful presidency, a more secretive government and less constraining Congress. For many outside the foreign policy establishment the debate that needed to be had was not one of America’s role in the world, but of the role in American life of the executive and legislative branches, the media and the military, of public opinion and freedom of information, of the restructuring of domestic liberties and industrial organisation in the move from war to

\(^{72}\) Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 3.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{74}\) Moynihan, “The Peace Dividend.”

\(^{75}\) Maynes, “America without the Cold War,” 5.

\(^{76}\) Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower*, 10.

peace. Yet there is little evidence that these questions were addressed among a policy elite – in think tanks, universities and the bureaucracies – that owed its twentieth century growth to the grand strategy of anti-communist containment. The debate in the 1990s was not therefore about how to dismantle containment, but about what to replace it with. Within the administration none-too-humble insiders referred to the process underway to define and articulate a Presidential vision as the ‘Kennan sweepstakes’, but even after the publication of the 1995 NSS few commentators were clear on the principles and scope of the Clinton Doctrine. However, the Clinton administration did develop a grand strategy that justified continued American internationalism in the face of domestic pressures for retrenchment, by effectively tying America’s domestic prosperity to its role in the world.

A Grand Strategy of Geoeconomics

Predictably, the search for a Clinton Doctrine began particularly early in the President’s tenure. Ever since George Washington’s farewell address, DC-watchers and Presidents themselves have obsessed around devising ideological mission statements around which policy can be fashioned, and the first President of the post-Cold War – following one who was by his own admission uncomfortable with ‘the vision thing’ – was always likely to be under pressure to produce the right slogan for US foreign policy. As candidate, Clinton had criticised George H.W. Bush for “coddling dictators from Baghdad to Beijing”, but what comes easily as stump rhetoric is more difficult to translate into strategy.


79 Chollet and Goldgeier, America between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror, 65-6.

The consensus on Bill Clinton’s foreign policy is that the administration lacked strategic vision. It allowed its agenda to be set by CNN, it lacked a sense of priorities and failed to articulate a rationale for why America must engage in the world.\textsuperscript{81} Far from emulating Kennan and defining American strategy for the age, the foreign policy record of the Clinton administration was “indecisive, contradictory and confused”.\textsuperscript{82} The result, or perhaps the cause of this confusion, was Clinton seemed to have as many doctrines as there were pundits to proclaim them. Reviewing the record of the administration with the benefit of some hindsight after it had left office, John Dumbrell suggested five candidates as possible Clinton doctrines, and could have cited significantly more.\textsuperscript{83} This is perhaps the result of circumstance: any lack of coherence in the administration’s approach, particularly in its first term, lay in the need to deal with the fallout, entanglements and unfinished business of the ending of the Cold War, which bequeathed a series of new world disorder challenges.\textsuperscript{84} At the same time, “all was not mere reactive and random confusion”: there was some “developmental consistency” to the administration’s foreign policy.\textsuperscript{85} The President himself, reflecting on the Truman administration’s struggle to frame the rules after the end of World War II, thought his own efforts during the first term not too bad.\textsuperscript{86} Moreover, whilst the administration may have sought a way of putting its foreign policy on a ‘bumper sticker’, Clinton eventually gave up the search. As one member of his National Security Council staff was later to argue, in a world characterised by

\textsuperscript{81} Graham Allison, "Get Ready for the Clinton Doctrine. (Cover Story),” \textit{New Statesman} 125, no. 4309 (1996).

\textsuperscript{82} Evans, "The Vision Thing: In Search of the Clinton Doctrine."

\textsuperscript{83} John Dumbrell, "Was There a Clinton Doctrine? President Clinton's Foreign Policy Reconsidered,” \textit{Diplomacy & Statecraft} 13, no. 2 (2002).

\textsuperscript{84} Evans, "The Vision Thing: In Search of the Clinton Doctrine."


disorder there was simply no one monolithic threat that justified the prioritising of a single security issue above all others.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, whilst clearly enamoured of the need to define American purpose in the post-Cold War world, the administration simultaneously rejected the labelling by others of specific principles as 'doctrine', and by the end of his term in office when asked directly if there was, in his mind, a ‘Clinton doctrine’ the President refused to give much credence to the notion.\textsuperscript{88} So whilst the Clinton team had come to office eager to define a new foreign policy for the United States to replace containment, they themselves recognised that they had failed to successfully articulate its overall foreign policy goals to a public still used to a single clear point of focus, containing the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{89}

That is not to say however, that Clinton did not have a grand strategy. Presidential doctrines – in the bumper sticker sense – often reflect specific policies, red lines or warnings, rather than representing the results of serious analysis of the strategic environment. Whilst Clinton may not have been able to find the pithy phrase that would gain traction in the public discourse and neatly characterise his thinking about international affairs and the role of the United States, he did think seriously about the nature of the post-Cold War world and develop a strategic analysis for American foreign policy.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 96-7.


\textsuperscript{89} Soderberg, \textit{The Superpower Myth : The Use and Misuse of American Might}, 95.
The False Choice between Domestic and Foreign Policy

Upon entering office, the Clinton team were sure of one thing: that the Cold War was over. This was not to say that Russia would not continue to be a major foreign policy issue for the United States; indeed, far from delegating issues such as Russia, as he had hoped, Clinton became deeply involved in the heavy lifting as the US government’s “principal Russia hand”, reflecting the immense importance that the reinvention of Russian foreign policy had for the United States.\(^90\) Clinton would make the relationship with President Boris Yeltsin a particular priority, and would develop a “particular affection” for the Russian leader.\(^91\) Nevertheless, what had happened was that the United States’ approach to foreign policy could no longer be determined by an assessment of where an issue stood vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. For the first time in a half-century, an administration had the task of conducting a strategic assessment from first principles.

In the post-Cold War world, nuclear deterrence was no longer the inescapable foundational logic, indeed, it had been escaped; now that the Soviet Union and the United States were not in competition the world was not on the cusp of nuclear war. Here the President led in identifying and articulating the nature of this new world. “Overarching everything else” the President argued, was the “amorphous but profound challenge in the way humankind conducts its commerce”.\(^92\) This was not perhaps the most inspiring piece of rhetoric, and the President could certainly wax more lyrical about the opportunities presented by the forces of globalisation, but it crystallised how Clinton began his strategic assessment: economics came first.

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\(^91\) Joe Klein, *The Natural : The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 74. “We can’t ever forget”, reflected Clinton, “that Yeltsin drunk is better than most of the alternatives sober.” Talbott, 2003 #2876@185

This focus on foreign economic policy was to some extent “an accurate expression of the Clinton administration’s strong domestic priorities”\(^\text{93}\), and reflected how Clinton thought of foreign policy in the round, in that he refused to consider foreign policy as distinct sphere from domestic policy. Keenly aware that the festering state of the US economy had been crucial to his election and now formed the backbone of Republican critics of foreign policy in Congress, the President promised to “focus like a laser beam on this economy”, pledging that “foreign policy will come into play in part as it affects the economy.”\(^\text{94}\) As he repeated “over and over, increasing global interdependence was erasing the divide between foreign and domestic policy.”\(^\text{95}\) The administration railed against the rhetoric of neo-know-nothings, and those that would choose “escapism over engagement”.\(^\text{96}\) Clinton denied that the United States could reap a peace dividend by retrenching: instead, in order to prioritise domestic prosperity, the United States had to embrace the logic of a global economy. Speaking to Georgetown University in 1991, Clinton laid out his logic in stark terms, criticising the ‘false choice’ between domestic policy and foreign policy:

“We must understand, as we never have before, that our national security is largely economic. The success of our engagement in the world depends not on headlines it brings to Washington politicians, but on the benefits it brings to hardworking middle-class Americans. Our ‘foreign’ policies are not really foreign at all… So let us no longer define national security in the narrow military terms of the Cold War, or afford to have foreign and domestic policies isolated from each other.”\(^\text{97}\)


Clinton’s globalised world looked very different to how those who had grown up on ‘Kremlinology’ and nuclear strategy saw it. It was difficult for officials to think about diplomacy in different terms, to jettison old assumptions and assess the world afresh. 98 Anthony Lake recalled being unsettled by Clinton’s mantra upon meeting the democratic candidate in 1991. ‘He kept saying, ‘Foreign policy is domestic policy.’ That was not an immediately attractive concept for someone like me, and it took me more than a year to understand the implications of it – but he was right.’ 99 Indeed, Clinton’s focus on the economic as opposed to the diplomatic aspects of foreign affairs had the effect of protecting much of the foreign policy establishment. By linking the material aspirations of ordinary Americans to the pursuit of wider economic goals the administration was able to make the case for continued engagement and American leadership in international affairs and counter the arguments of those who felt the United States could retrench from its global role.

Clinton’s strategic focus therefore held within it payoffs for his domestic agenda, and could be analysed as a consequence of two-level games. Certainly, the strategic assessment the administration made can be presented as a synthesis between domestic pressures political pressures, the interests of the foreign policy bureaucracy, and the requirements of an international environment that the administration considered to fundamentally characterised by globalisation.

Clinton’s analysis of the international context was controversial. Prioritising the economic dimension of power sat awkwardly with the situation in which he entered office, with more US troops engaged in more countries than any new President since 1945. 100 The breakup and decline of the world’s largest nuclear weapons power had created the strategic challenge of three new nuclear states, in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, within the context of the nuclear ambitions of Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Pakistan. The lid that the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence had kept on


the religious and ethnic fault lines in the Balkans had been lifted, with the concomitant revelation that absent the communist threat, European states were both less acquiescent to American priorities and less capable of defining and acting in Europe’s own interest. Humanitarian crises erupting throughout what had become during the Cold War ‘the third world’ turned the world’s gaze on its most powerful nation to ‘do something’. The demands on American military and diplomatic resources were thus at least as great as they had been during almost any point of the Cold War. Moreover, all these strategic imperatives had to compete for priority and funds in a domestic political context in which Americans felt that the international burdens they had borne during the Cold War entitled them to reap a dividend now that the United States had returned the world to ‘peacetime’.

Yet at the same time this profound shift in grand strategic focus emphasised the extent to which, as the President saw it, the end of the Cold War had changed the fundamental logic of the international system. The United States, as it had in the Cold War, would seek to “compete and win”, but the tools of victory would no longer be the hardware produced by the defense economy in the great game of military combat, but the innovations and productivity of American firms in the open trading system of the global economy.

The practical result of replacing geopolitics with geoeconomics as the central focus of American grand strategy was a focus on trade agreements as the central means of strategy. Capital, services and information had become global, and the United States, “woven inextricably into the fabric of a global economy”, needed “to make trade a priority element of American security” to deliver “the imperative of American leadership in the face of global change.”


103 Clinton, "Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration."
So strongly did Clinton link American foreign policy to domestic prosperity that critics viewed Clinton’s economic team as nationalist trade warriors practising unilateral dollar diplomacy.  

Clinton’s trade team may have driven hard bargains but the mercantilism critique was unfair. Clinton presided over a raft of multilateral agreements, including NAFTA and APEC, which placed the United States at the centre of trade in North America and the Pacific. Alongside these regional trade structures, the Uruguay round of the GATT served to integrate developing nations more fully into the international trading system, and gave birth to the more empowered World Trade Organization (WTO) with stronger enforcement powers and mechanisms for dispute settlement. These integrative institutional structures reflected a broader strategy that tied states to each other in multilateral regional frameworks as part of an open global economy, within which the United States retained structural advantages as both the “system-maker and privilege-taker”. By moving first on international trade, and acting as a guarantor of the deals made, the United States led by using its power establish multilateral norms that bound other states to its own preferences. Indeed, so strong was that leadership, exercised particularly through the IMF and the ideas of the Washington Consensus, that critics saw it as nothing less than an attempt to universalise the American economic empire.

Globalisation thus became the administration’s catch-all, the defining feature of the post-Cold War world in which the dynamics of the free movement of people, goods and information could bring peace or spark crisis. At times, the administration appeared to have totally bought into the excitement surrounding theories of globalisation. Much of Clinton’s talk about communication between ‘electronic pen

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104 Cox, *Us Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Superpower without a Mission*.


pals’ in the ‘global village’ sounds naïve from the perspective of fifteen years later. But it was a reflection of just how transformative the administration considered the integration of the global economy to be, as it placed international economics at the heart of American grand strategy, replacing the geopolitics of containment with the geo-economics of globalisation.

American leadership in this new world was essential to ensure that the course that globalization would take was one in which the benefits were felt and the dangers addressed. Clinton understood that the forces of globalization both enhanced and functioned as America’s soft power. The free movement of information underscored liberal values, as increasingly universal media and communications eroded the power of states to control the information their people could access. Yet whilst Clinton may have ‘got’ globalization, by his own admission he failed to convince the American people of its saliency, of the core truth that foreign policy was domestic policy, and that global challenges necessitated coordinated global action that could only be attained through American leadership.107

It wasn’t just the public that were unconvinced. Clinton’s focus on the global economy in the face of so many profound strategic challenges to international peace and security struck some schooled in classical diplomacy as showing insufficient understanding at best, and at worst dereliction of duty. Yet the art of good strategy is that it provides a bigger picture, a conceptual frame within which to make sense of everyday turbulence. The result of the focus on geoeconomics and globalisation was actually an expanded conception of interest, in which international stability, prosperity and security replaced the narrow geopolitical delineations of the Cold War.108 Just as the overarching framework of anti-communist containment gave focus to US interests during the Cold War, Clinton’s understanding of interdependence

107 Chollet and Goldgeier, America between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror, 288-90.

within a single global economy provided the framework for American priorities in the new era.

The Clinton administration may have failed to sell a bumper-sticker slogan for the post-Cold War world, but in terms of implementation the strategy itself did have notable successes. Presented with the opportunity to establish the strategy by managing the transition of states of the former Soviet Union from communism to market democracy, the President likened ‘enlargement’ in Eastern Europe to the domino-theory in reverse; encouraging and supporting rather than preventing a succession of mutually reinforcing societal changes that were in the interests of the United States. As Tony Lake argued in a speech to Washington’s School of Advanced International Studies, enlargement was the logical successor to containment; where the United States had sought to ensure the survival of the world’s free community of market democracies, it was now enlarging their reach.  

The bumper sticker spoke of ‘democratic enlargement’, but the reality within the administration was that enlargement was always thought of as much in economic as in political terms. Crucially, Clinton linked the domestic economic success of the United States to American engagement in the world. Markets for American goods, jobs for American workers in the new information age, all were based on sustaining and expanding the community of market democracies with which the United States could build prosperous trade relationships.

Trade was therefore placed at the heart of American foreign policy. In his first term, Clinton invested in heavily in economic diplomacy for the Uruguay round of the GATT that created the World Trade Organisation, made the ratification of NAFTA a higher political priority than even healthcare reform, and concluded a trade agreement with Japan as the most high-profile of some 200 bilateral trade agreements. Not only

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Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement."

Dumbrell, Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000, 45.

did these efforts require significant “presidential lifting” with governments abroad, they also required difficult negotiation with Congressional sceptics many of whom hailed from his own party.\textsuperscript{112}

Alongside the policy focus there was bureaucratic change too. The National Economic Council (NEC) was created, to parallel and supplant the National Security Council as the principal forum for economic issues, both foreign and domestic, where they might connect with foreign policy. One concerned commentator argued at the time that “the new structure will not just symbolize the new salience of economics but complete a shift of power inside our government to the economic side of the house and its perspective on our foreign relations.”\textsuperscript{113} Indeed, the primacy of economic policy meant key national security personnel were often sidelined by officials from the Treasury and Department of Commerce.\textsuperscript{114}

Administration foreign policy appointments reflected the primacy of economic issues. Les Aspin, Clinton’s first Secretary of Defense, held a doctorate in economics from MIT, and his Bottom-Up Review of October 1993 identified economic dangers as “perhaps the most important” national security consideration in the post-Cold War period, ranking alongside WMD spread, regional conflict, and the potential failure of democratic reform in Eastern Europe as the key military security issues for the United States. Indeed, the DoD suggested that America’s “primary task” as a nation was “to strengthen our society and economy for the demanding competitive environment of the 21st century.”\textsuperscript{115}

Clinton went so far as to appoint Sandy Berger, a trade lawyer, as deputy National Security Adviser, and to promote him to the full post in the administration’s second

\textsuperscript{112} Allison, “Get Ready for the Clinton Doctrine. (Cover Story).”

\textsuperscript{113} Peter W. Rodman, ”The Danger of Putting Economics First,” The Washington Post, 18/12/92 1992.

\textsuperscript{114} Dumbrell, Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000, 49-50.

term. Henry Kissinger memorably demurred that “you can't blame a trade lawyer for not being a global strategist” but it was precisely because Clinton’s global strategy was so focused around the interdependence of markets and the centrality of trade to American success that a trade lawyer was exactly the strategist required in a world defined by the global economy.  

As Berger saw it, “If we could look down at the earth from a distant planet, one of the most powerful phenomena we would observe are the effects of economic integration, reinforced by a communications and technological revolution that telescopes time and distance… These forces of integration – economic, technological, political – find practical if imperfect expression in international rules of the road that… form a structure for security and prosperity for all those who choose to live within them, and they define the terms of isolation of those that stay outside.”  

His predecessor had already defined “‘national security’ in terms of people’s daily lives”, placing economic well-being on the same level as the military security of the state.  

The focus on economic prosperity manifested itself most explicitly in a drive to increase American exports. One of the first major initiatives from the Clinton White House was the National Export Strategy, which was designed to coordinate the promotion of exports and advance the interests of US companies in the global economy.  

As if to emphasise the shift from a foreign policy focused on military security to one predicated around economic prosperity, upon launching the Strategy the President made a point of thanking the national security apparatus for their

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118 Anthony Lake, "Laying the Foundations for a New American Century," (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 1996).

support, noting that this was a “marked change” from times past. The strategy featured a number of significant departures from previous US trade policy, including overturning the US’s rejection of tied aid that had stood since 1978, and a revamping of export controls, many of which the administration regarded as relics of the Cold War. Moreover, it committed the United States to high-level advocacy of American companies and products overseas, coordinated by the Secretary of Commerce and involving embassies, foreign missions and Presidential activism.

Even critics of the concept admitted that globalisation was “at the very heart of the Clinton administration's approach to strategy”. Sustaining domestic prosperity through a policy of promoting open markets, creating a world which, in Madeleine Albright's words, would be “open to our exports, investments, and ideas” had long been a central aim of American statecraft: “In that sense, globalization offers a variation on a familiar theme.” Thus critics returned to the ideas of William Appleman Williams to argue that globalisation was nothing more than the rhetoric of hegemony. “To function properly, a system based on the principle of openness must have some mechanism for maintaining order. Hence the urgent requirement, endlessly reiterated by administration officials, for continuing U.S. engagement in world affairs.”

“‘Prize open markets.’ This is the essence of the Clinton doctrine. Its aim is the retention of global hegemony; its objective is to prize open markets, tear down tariff walls and open doors to American enterprise, expertise and money. Whereas the


economic implications of containment revolved around dollar diplomacy - massive government-directed foreign aid programmes often with the sole purpose of shoring up reactionary regimes - this new doctrine carries no such financial or human rights costs. All that Bill Clinton's 'Big Mac diplomacy' requires is a commitment to the promotion of US exports and a firm adherence to enforcing the principle of global free trade. The market does the rest.‖

If globalisation placed the interests of the world economic system at the very heart of American national interests, then threats to the functioning of that system became threats to the United States. In this sense, the key danger to the successful functioning of globalisation was the potential for disorder of all forms as the flipside of interdependence. Those aspects of globalisation in which Clinton invested such great hope – “the rapid movement of ideas, information, technology, and people across the borders of open societies” – also brought with them vulnerability to “forces of destruction” that arose from the enduring struggle between order and disorder. Thus “Clinton viewed the antagonists in his foreign policy as substantially transnational in nature. The interdependence of the world placed every region in common jeopardy, and recognition of mutual threats obliged the world to deal with them in concert, so dangers could be contained or prevented.”

In continuing to speak about the forces of globalisation, the reality of interdependence, and the fusion between the domestic and the international, Clinton attempted to define the overall strategic context, and by doing so establish a logic of appropriateness for American leadership and the international community as a whole, revolving around universal goals of security and prosperity. By tying America’s domestic prosperity to the smooth functioning of the global economy, the Clinton synthesis created a rationale not just for rejecting isolation, but for mandating American engagement everywhere. As one commentator put it, Clinton’s grand

124 Evans, "The Vision Thing: In Search of the Clinton Doctrine."
strategy broke new ground “in the sense that it avoids the historic American choice between reforming the world or withdrawing from it. It is at once a policy of global activism and a policy of retrenchment. It is a foreign policy that is also a domestic policy. At its core is a preoccupation with American growth and prosperity. As such, it is a reaffirmation of Clinton's belief in the primacy of domestic politics.”

Conclusion

The Clinton administration took office at a time of genuine polarisation over America’s national goals, when it was in no sense clear whether America’s Cold War military and strategic commitments would survive. The Clinton synthesis generated an explicit rationale for the maintenance of a global foreign policy apparatus in a relatively unaltered state. It addressed domestic demands for a focus on economic prosperity by fusing the success of the international economy to that of the American economy; in emphasising globalisation it eroded the distinction between what was foreign policy and what was domestic. In a way, it triangulated the debate surrounding America’s international ‘purpose’, taking liberal ideas about the benefits of trade and tying them to both American domestic prosperity and the United States’ international primacy. Where George H.W. Bush had struggled to define his ‘new world order’ in terms that might transcend Cold War modes of thinking, Clinton succeeded in offering a direction for US foreign policy that moved beyond the Manichean logic of the previous era. In short, the grand strategy of the Clinton administration is underappreciated and underrated.

127 Evans, "The Vision Thing: In Search of the Clinton Doctrine."