

Military Strategy and the Millennium: The Role of Force in the Post-Cold War Era

by Beth Morales, CC '01

The end of the Cold War signified the demise of the bipolar international system and the relative stability that accompanied it. Consequently, the operating assumptions of international politics have been called into question in the form of a debate that has arisen within the discipline. Some scholars argue that the end of the Cold War means that states need to redefine their objectives concerning security and interests, as well as reassess the efficacy of the means traditionally used to pursue them; namely, military might. Others believe that nothing significant has changed since the end of the Cold War; the international arena is still an anarchic, self-help system in which military capability requires as much attention for national security as it received during the Cold War years. The ascendant way to determine and pursue foreign policy, however, seems to lie somewhere in the middle. While some of the fundamentals that define the international system have remained intact despite the end of the Cold War, there have also been changes significant enough to warrant a reevaluation of the goals and means of foreign policy. The assertion that the foreign policy objectives of states must be both defined and dominated by the need to ensure military security seems to be misguided due to the decreased utility of force in a world of interdependence.

The Cold War has been described in many ways: An ideological struggle between communism and democracy, a great power conflict resulting in an unchecked military buildup, and a clash between economic systems. Despite this variety of descriptions, however, the Cold War was marked by "routine patterns of thought and action" between the protagonists.¹ These patterns allowed the US and the USSR to know what to expect from one another, and surprises that could have led to instability became infrequent.² The world during the Cold War, then, was characterized by the stability of two nations dominating the balance of power and deterring one another from nuclear war.³

The strategy of the United States during this period was clear: the "pole star" of containment, which began with Kennan's telegram to the State Department, became the foundation upon which every foreign policy decision was predicated. In *The Erosion of American National Interests*, Samuel Huntington writes, "For forty years virtually all the great American initiatives in foreign policy, as well as many in domestic policy, were justified

by this overriding priority." Furthermore, when other interests clashed with this purpose, they were subordinated to it.⁴ Popular domestic support for the ideologies that the US sought to defend helped to legitimate the policy of containment, and thus a large defense budget to promote deterrence and resultant nuclear stability could be rationalized. The bipolar milieu of the Cold War gave the United States a defined world role, marked by a popular, cohesive ideology - i.e., keeping the world "safe" for democracy—that could be pursued by preponderant military capabilities.

With the end of the Cold War era, there naturally followed changes in the framework of global politics. First, the bipolar world that derived its stability from the fear of mutually-assured destruction (MAD) changed into a world without such evident "poles." The threat of a systemic, all-out war seems less likely with the demise of bipolarity; however, many sources of conflict still remain across the globe, and these manifest themselves in the small wars that continue to erupt. With the demise of a pronounced Soviet military threat has also come a minimized security dependence on the United States by nations such as Germany and Japan - which also happen to be great economic powers.⁵ It appears, then, that while military security is needed to protect territorial integrity and deter nuclear holocaust, methods of force do not play the prominent role in international relations that they did during the Cold War.

New dimensions of security have arisen that states must consider. As threats have shifted from military ones to economic and ecological ones, formation of national security policy has become more complicated.⁶ Because force has "become more costly for modern great powers to use than in earlier centuries," Nye asserts, "instruments such as communications, organizational and institutional skills, and manipulation of interdependence have become important instruments of power."⁷ This decrease in the efficacy of force in the post-Cold War era has cleared the way for a host of new issues to come to the forefront of the international arena. States must modify their agendas in response to the challenges this change in focus presents. Nye writes that "... the new issues in international politics—ecology, drugs, AIDS, terrorism... require organizing states for cooperative responses." He goes on to claim that a good foreign policy strategy would simultaneously focus on both classic security concerns and these new problems of interdependence.⁸

For the United States, the end of the Cold War should not only highlight issues of complex interdependence on the foreign policy agenda, but should also signal that it is time for the breakdown of the domestic military establishment. Historically, the United States has made it a habit to keep only minimal military forces available in times of peace. According to

A.J. Bacevich,

Threats foreign or domestic and the imperatives of destiny might (and frequently did) impel the nation to raise great and powerful armies, but once the emergency passed Americans quickly dismantled those forces. ... The United States adhered to this routine in every subsequent military crisis up to and including the Second World War.⁹

Rejecting the historical pattern, however, the United States has "chosen to retain a large and powerful standing military force in the absence of any proximate threat to its own security."¹⁰ This fact raises questions about the ability and willingness of US foreign policy makers to adapt to the changes that the post-Cold War environment presents.

With the absence of prominent threat comes the diminished need for a large military establishment, and with tacit reticence to use nuclear weapons, strategic force is only useful for deterrence strategy. Why, then, does the United States seem to cling to the Cold War doctrine that the military capabilities define power status? Recent history indicates that the United States is attempting to reassert the traditional terms of power and carry the policy objectives of the Cold War into a markedly changed post-Cold War environment.

In *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy has written that the end of the Cold War reduced "the significance of the one measure of national power in which the United States had a clear advantage over other countries"—that being the military.¹¹ The sense of uncertainty that has characterized the national mood since the end of the Cold War may point to the reasons that US foreign policy makers have continued to emphasize the importance of military force in the present. The action taken against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War provides a key example—of the reluctance of the US to move away from asserting itself militarily. In *The Imperial Temptation*, Tucker and Hendrickson describe the "pursuit of a new world role"—a role that was not required by security—as the reason that the Bush administration gave "military force a position in our statecraft that [was] excessive and disproportionate" during the war with Iraq.¹²

The fact that the United States does not maintain a clear and consistent role in the post-Cold War global system has been noted by domestic critics and international leaders alike. Kennan maligns our nation's lack of defined principles and interests in conducting foreign policy, suggesting that the United States needs to lead by example rather than overextending its military resources.¹³ Huntington describes the 'Lippman surplus' which forces

American foreign policy makers to "search frantically for new purposes that would justify a continuing US role in world affairs comparable to that in the Cold War."¹⁴ International leaders have criticized Clinton's "lack of a coherent, long-term strategy or vision."¹⁵ Bacevich claims a more nefarious reason for the failure of the US to articulate a "coherent grand strategy appropriate for the post-Cold War era," asserting that the problem isn't a lack of strategy, but an unwillingness to acknowledge that "the Pentagon is in the business of projecting American power in order to undergird American influence around the world."¹⁵

While it may be questionable as to whether or not the United States is in the business of maintaining an imperial military that is "explicitly *designed* to dominate" as Bacevich believes, one thing remains certain in the post-Cold War world: It is a difficult task to craft foreign policy for a nation playing an ambiguous leadership role in a time when there is no clear enemy and no cohesive national support for a defined foreign policy agenda. The newly problematic nature of foreign policy making in the wake of the clear goals of the Cold War years is indicative of the changes in the questions and answers that guide foreign policy. Such widespread criticism as the US has garnered in its continued acceptance of the importance of military strength further attests to the fact that states must decrease the emphasis on security in the traditional terms and develop new means that are more appropriate to the post-bipolar era.

Notes

¹ Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992) 7.

² Tucker and Hendrickson 7

³ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (US: Basic Books, 1990) 18.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Erosion of American Natural Interests," *Foreign Affairs* September/October (1997): 30.

⁵ Tucker and Hendrickson 8.

⁶ Nye 179.

⁷ Nye 180.

⁸ Nye 20-21.

⁹ A.J. Bacevich, "Tradition Abandoned," *The National Interest* Summer (1997): 18

¹⁰ Bacevich 20

¹¹ Nye xiii.

¹² Tucker and Hendrickson 16.

¹³ Huntington 125.

¹⁴ Huntington 36.

¹⁵ Moises Naim, "Clinton's Foreign Policy: A Victim of Globalization?" *Foreign Policy* Winter (1990): 34.

¹⁶ Bacevich 20.

For Whom The Dragon Stirs: China's Defense Policy Influences

By Christopher Sandersfeld, CC '00

The death of Deng Xiaoping in February 1997 was a symbolic end of an era in the People's Republic of China, and the initiation of a new one. Thus, it is a convenient point for examination of the current defense policy of the country. President Jiang Zemin, Deng's successor is currently undertaking programs aimed at fundamental and wide-spread reform with implications on foreign and defense relations. President Jiang's China can be viewed in light of three major defense policy goals: Development of a military-economic modernization program; placement of priority on reform of China's internal and external defense; and assertion of sovereignty through formation of a more assertive Taiwan policy. What then have been the reforms designed to implement the defense policy of no-first-use of force, protection of sovereignty, and a strictly limited aims warfare? And perhaps, more importantly, what has been the impetus for policy change? It is my purpose in this article to show that China's reforms and policy changes are instrumental to a larger goal—becoming a superpower.

China's military-economic modernization is the result of the widely held view within the Chinese government that the military has become inefficient, ineffective, and out of date. In fact, concern over the military's preoccupation with making money rather than emphasis on developing and maintaining a well-oiled fighting force is a major part of this view.¹ As an important step in pursuing this policy, the government has ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to begin to divest itself of the companies it owns or controls. In the words of one Chinese embassy official in Washington, "The PLA should be the PLA. It should concentrate on national defense."²

Related closely to this is the placement of a greater priority on reform of China's internal and external defense systems. Internally, the Chinese military is being streamlined. China's mechanism for reform of the armed forces has been centered around the transition from a numerically superior combat force to a qualitatively efficient type and from a manpower-intensive type to a technology-intensive type.³ Internal defense of China must be accompanied by a more effective, professional army. Thus, the PLA intends to accomplish this by reducing the number of troops from approximately 3 million to 2.5 million, diverting funds from personnel to improving quality of the adjusted forces.⁴ Defense from external threats is another top priority.