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## The Idea of the National Interest

Prior to diplomacy is policy, which guides the diplomats in their actions; prior to policy are the ideas that inhabit the heads of the policymakers, shaping their perceptions of the world and informing their responses to those perceptions. Monarchs and dictators may manage to determine policy on the basis of narrow notions of personal self-interest, although most even of the autocratic sort persuade or delude themselves of a coincidence between self-interest and national interest. Democracies are hardly spared selfishness in their leaders, but democratic politics demand that policies be defended, even when they do not originate, in terms of national interest – of a conception of an overriding common good transcending the specific interests of parties, factions, and other entities smaller than the nation as a whole.

In American politics and diplomacy, the search for the national interest has been constant, from the founding of the Republic to the present. The first enunciation of national interest coincided with the proclamation of the existence of the United States of America, and indeed the coincidence was as much conceptual as chronological, for until the Treaty of Paris of 1783, national existence – that is, independence – *was* the essential national interest. National existence remained an issue through the War of 1812, as the British invasion of Washington demonstrated; it was contested in another, more deadly form in the sectional crisis that culminated in the Civil War. Americans in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not so preoccupied with the existential issue as to ignore other elements of national interest – Did republicanism in America require republicanism elsewhere, as in France in the 1790s or Latin America in the 1820s? Could American commerce be sacrificed, as by Jefferson in 1807, without fatal loss of profit and prestige? Was the Western Hemisphere actually an American bailiwick, as intimated by James Monroe in 1823 and amplified by assorted successors? Was territorial expansion, whether by purchase, coercion, or outright war, vital to the American future? – but not until the memories faded from Antietam and Gettysburg was the existential question sufficiently settled that Americans could take it for granted, and define national interest in predominantly external terms on a consistent basis.

This is precisely what they did starting in the late 1890s and continuing throughout the twentieth century. During that period they subsumed a number of notions under the rubric of national interest; these included the pursuit of prosperity, identified diplomatically with the acquisition and retention of

foreign markets for trade and investment; the defense and promotion of democracy and associated American values and institutions (not least among them, capitalism); and national security, a catch-all that took up where the original existential issue left off but expanded after 1945 until it nearly swallowed every other consideration of national interest. The end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the concomitant reduction of the threat of nuclear armageddon restored much of the balance among the elements of national interest, allowing Americans at the end of the twentieth century to remember just *what* it was their security apparatus was designed to defend.

Prosperity was on the minds of Americans in the 1890s; democracy and security less so. This followed the simple rule of human nature that people value most what they have least. The country was as secure from external assault as anyone could reasonably expect; democracy, having been vindicated in the Civil War, appeared equally unchallenged. Prosperity, however, was problematic. The Panic of 1893 presaged the worst depression in American history to date, a depression that eventually eased but left vivid marks and memories across the land.

One proposed solution to the prosperity problem was the acquisition of foreign markets. Actually, this solution was not simply *proposed*; it was almost universally endorsed. Foreign markets were good; the more the better. The only real question was whether the markets should be acquired with or without the territory they encompassed.

The territorial acquisitionists adduced a variety of reasons in arguing that additional real estate would further the national interest. Navalists like Alfred Thayer Mahan coveted coaling stations and bases for the fleet they thought America deserved (and which, after lobbying by Mahan and allies, it was in the process of building). There was a security angle to this argument, although it followed from the prosperity argument, rather than standing alone. The fleet would safeguard the markets America acquired, and ensure access thereto. Preemptive imperialists and others afflicted with Europe-envy remarked the rapidity with which Britain, France, and Germany were snatching colonies in Africa and Asia, and fretted that if the United States did not act forthwith, all the promising places on the planet would be taken.

The territorial acquisitionists failed to achieve critical mass until another argument augmented their numbers and amplified their voices. The nationalist revolt in Cuba that began in 1895 produced a bloody stalemate, with attendant atrocities that stirred the sympathies of the American people (after arousing the cupidity of the American press). By 1898 even the reluctant William McKinley was coming to believe that American intervention might be necessary to end the suffering of the Cubans. Side effects of intervention would include, certainly, the expansion of American influence in the Caribbean; likely,

the enlargement of American markets; possibly, the multiplication of American territory; conceivably, the extension of democracy.

Thoughtful discussion of the national interest rarely takes place with war looming ahead; it is more commonly encountered in the cooler aftermath of conflict. So it was with the Spanish-American War. Americans took up arms against Spain almost rashly, to terminate an intolerable situation in Cuba; only amid the peace negotiations did they consider carefully what the war meant for their country. The framing question was whether the country should annex the Philippines and Puerto Rico, seized as spoils in the fighting. Put most bluntly: Was empire in the national interest?

A curious collection of progressives and reactionaries, farmers and industrialists, philanthropists and racists, said no. Far from extending democracy, they warned, empire would extinguish it – in the United States. Empire would spit on the graves of the founders and impugn the wisdom of the God Who put two oceans between American shores and the broils of the Old World. Empire would raise taxes. It would threaten civilian control of the military and foster the growth of a garrison state. It would saddle Americans with responsibility for lesser breeds beyond the pale – and probably beyond the possibility – of civilization.

The pro-annexationists matched the antis progressive for progressive, reactionary for reactionary, and so on, down to racist for racist. They decried the pessimism of their opponents in projecting doom for a country that was the model of strength and resilience. They puffed the prosperity argument, plumping the Philippines as the entrepot to the China market. They turned the democracy argument against the antis: far from endangering democracy, annexation would enable Americans to carry it across the Pacific and into the Caribbean. Albert Beveridge, the most eloquent (or egregious) of the annexationists, asserted that the annexation question turned on one more fundamental: What was America *for*? What was Americans' purpose in the world? Boldly essaying to speak for the Deity, Beveridge declared, "He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth."<sup>1</sup>

The imperialists – to use the name the annexationists eschewed but that accurately described them – won the battle but lost the war. They convinced the Senate to approve the treaty transferring the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the United States, but they ultimately failed to convince the American people that colonialism was consonant with the American national interest. Annexation sparked a revolt by Filipino nationalists that quickly dimmed the luster of the late splendid little tiff against Spain; soon Americans found themselves in the thuggish role the Spanish had played in Cuba. The Philippine war proved

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1. Quoted in H. W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York, 1992), 33.

long and utterly demoralizing; although the American side won, even Theodore Roosevelt, who generally judged hoisting the white man's burden bully pre-breakfast exercise, had to admit in the aftermath of the Philippine war that Americans lacked the stomach for empire. Rather than forming a strong point for American expansion in East Asia, Roosevelt said, the Philippines had become "our heel of Achilles."<sup>2</sup>

Cured of the colonial temptation (although unsure how to divest themselves of their current colonial commitments) Americans pursued prosperity – more precisely, foreign markets – by non-territorial means. The trouble with this approach was that it left American commerce vulnerable to depredation by other countries. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison had encountered the problem a century earlier; fortunately for American merchants and merchantmen, the hundred-years peace that followed the fall of Napoleon minimized, to the point of provoking amnesia, the exposure of Americans to collateral damage in conflicts among their principal customers.

After August 1914 the memories came flooding back. As Europe went to war, Americans reflected on where lay the national interest in the present crisis. By a stretch of only the most fevered imagination was American security, in the normal sense of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, at risk in the fight over there. Yet American prosperity probably depended on continued access to European markets, if not immediately then in the long term. To suffer the interdiction of American trade was to jeopardize American prosperity.

To parse the issue so finely, however, was to miss the point. Not for the last time (or the first: it happened during the Napoleonic wars as well) did a threat to American trade trigger larger concerns. "We wrap ourselves around our money-making, and transfigure it," Walter Lippmann wrote in 1917. "It is then identified with all that is most precious. The export of bicycles or steel rails is no longer the cold-blooded thing it looks like in statistical reports of commerce. It is integrated with our passion. It is wife and children being respected. So when trade is attacked, we are attacked."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, between 1914 and 1917, attacks on American neutral rights – attacks that might have been obviated by a Jeffersonesque embargo – came to be seen as an assault on America itself. "We will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated," Woodrow Wilson asserted in requesting a war declaration in April 1917.

Besides, the German challenge was not simply a challenge by one foreign country to America; it was autocracy's affront to the principle of democracy. As currently ruled, Wilson said, Germany was the "natural foe to liberty"; if it

2. *Ibid.*, 84.

3. Walter Lippmann, *The Stakes of Diplomacy* (New York, 1915, 1917), 75–76.

remained so ruled, it would remain freedom's foe. "A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations." Consequently, in taking up the gage the German emperor had thrown down, the United States was assuming democracy's defense. "The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty."<sup>4</sup>

Conflation of causes is a chronic hazard of American (and probably democratic) war-making; in lining up support for belligerence, the bellicose cast their net as widely as feasible, hoping to catch anyone with half a mind for war. Such had happened in the run-up to the war with Spain; such happened in the approach to war with Germany. The war was about neutral rights; it was about American security; it was about democracy.

But if conflation is the rule on going to war, parsimony guides peacemaking. The divergent objectives among the war party are masked, once war is declared, by the overriding objective of winning the war; let peace approach, however, and the coalition begins to crumble. Put otherwise, while definitions of the national interest may differ going into a war, these differences are suppressed in the immediate interest of victory. Once that immediate interest has been achieved, the divergence among the larger definitions reappears.

Such had been Wilson's convenience in 1917; such was his undoing in 1919. The deliberate pace of the peace negotiations left Americans to ponder at their leisure the national interest of the United States in the international structure their president proposed. Recognizing the tendency of wartime coalitions to break up (not just in the United States, but between the United States and the Allies), Wilson offered something for everyone: Fourteen Points' worth. His blueprint proved too ambitious; after the Allies demurred at Paris, Americans objected when Wilson brought the Versailles treaty home.

The sticker for the Senate (admittedly for a minority there, but a vetoing minority) was the League of Nations. In asserting the necessity of the League and the primacy of the principle of collective security, Wilson made the revolutionary claim that the American national interest was inseparable from the larger *international* interest. Americans as a group were not ready to accept this idea. Their version of the national interest was considerably narrower. *He* would save America by saving the world; *they* would save America and let the world fend for itself.

Wilson, in the end, reluctantly acknowledged that the nation knew its national interest better than he did. "I think it was best after all that the United States did not join the League of Nations" he said in 1924. "Now, when the American people join the League it will be because they are convinced it is the right thing to do, and then will be the *only right* time for them to do it."<sup>5</sup>

4. Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton, 1983), 41:519-27.

5. Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, 1995), 272.

The right time took more time than Wilson imagined. Disillusionment with the internationalist interpretation of the national interest only grew with increasing distance from Versailles. During the 1920s Americans revised not simply their interpretation of what the American national interest *should be*, but what it *had been*. The most influential commentators on American foreign policy during that Republican decade stripped away the layers of Wilsonian idealism that had colored American intervention in the Great War; what remained was economic self-interest, and cynical self-interest at that. “The World War is on all fours with every other war in having an economic foundation,” said C. Hartley Grattan.<sup>6</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes concurred, calling Wilson’s pre-intervention neutrality a sham and moaning, “We have been played for a bunch of suckers.”<sup>7</sup>

This feeling grew as a fresh crop of leaders in Europe emerged, apparently intent on proving that all the carnage had been for nothing. Japan’s simultaneous evolution into an East Asian nemesis gave Americans cause for judging war – recent and incipient – to be the ground state of world affairs, and for concluding that whatever the American national interest might be, it had little to do with the interests of other countries.

Charles Beard put this attitude most persuasively. Beard had shocked respectable American opinion in 1913 by questioning the motives of the Founders with his *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*; now he spied similar motivations – rather more easily and more convincingly – behind American foreign policy. In *The Idea of the National Interest* Beard identified two historical strains in American interpretations of the national interest. The first he associated with Thomas Jefferson; agriculturally based, it put primary importance on domestic markets and the development of America’s resources at home. Let Americans cultivate their own garden, said Beard’s Jeffersonians, and what the rest of the world did wouldn’t much matter. The second strain, linked to Alexander Hamilton, promoted manufactures and overseas trade. Beard’s Hamiltonians held that Americans could ignore the world only at peril to their prosperity, if not their safety.

Beard – a successful part-time farmer – much preferred the Jeffersonian version, and he was encouraged to note that the current administration showed signs of heeding the counsel of the patron saint of the Democratic party. “Fragments of a new conception of national interest appeared in the policies and measures of President Franklin D. Roosevelt,” Beard wrote in 1934. “Amid them was the central idea: by domestic planning and control the American economic machine may be kept running at a high tempo supplying the *intrnational* market [emphasis added], without relying primarily upon foreign outlets for ‘surpluses’ of goods and capital.”<sup>8</sup>

6. C. Hartley Grattan, *Why We Fought* (New York, 1929), 127.

7. Harry Elmer Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War* (New York, 1926), 646.

8. Charles A. Beard, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1934), 1, 552.

This kind of thinking, combined with a visceral revulsion to war that, while powerful, didn't really qualify as *thinking*, gave rise to the neutrality legislation of the mid-1930s. Echoing the embargo of Jefferson, the neutrality laws represented a rejection of Hamilton and a repudiation of Wilson. In 1917 the United States had gone to war to defend Americans' right to trade and travel during wartime; now Congress was effectively surrendering that right even before the war began.

Yet the new neutralists of the 1930s ran into the same problem as the old neutralists of the 1910s (including originally Wilson himself, despite what Harry Elmer Barnes alleged). Diplomatic neutrality need not imply moral neutrality, but moral *un*neutrality makes diplomatic neutrality difficult, especially in a democracy. As the unmitigated evil of Nazism and the unabashed aggression of Japan became undeniable, neutrality became untenable to a growing number of Americans. Those, like Beard, who clung to a narrowly nationalist view of the national interest – “Anyone who feels hot with morals and is affected with delicate sensibilities can find enough to do at home, considering the misery of the 10,000,000 unemployed, the tramps, the beggars, the sharecroppers, tenants and field hands right here at our door,” he wrote<sup>9</sup> – found themselves attacked as closet Nazis and fascist fellow-travelers.

The discomfort this caused might not have been enough to push America to war, but as the experience of the Spanish war and the Great War demonstrated (and as Lippmann had observed in 1917), the distinctions among issues become blurred once the guns start going off. From a recognition of Hitler's malevolence to a belief that he somehow threatened the United States was a logical step, albeit one the cautious Roosevelt took carefully. After the summer of 1940, there was little lingering disagreement in America that Hitler had to be halted; the debate between the America Firsters and the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies was mostly over where the halting would occur, and who would do it. It was harder to make the case that the Japanese threatened essential American interests – so Roosevelt, who was convinced they *did*, backed them into a corner from which the only escape, as Tokyo surveyed the scene, crossed American territory. The attack on Hawaii, and to a lesser extent on the Philippines, foreclosed further discussion.

From December 1941 until mid-1945 the overriding and universally agreed upon national interest was the defeat of Germany and Japan; as that defeat drew near, debate resumed, much as it had after the two previous wars.

Strikingly, the starting point for the debate after World War II was the ending point for the debate after World War I – the point on which Wilson's version of the national interest had foundered. For the first time, a working majority of Americans accepted the Wilsonian argument that the national interest was

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9. Charles A. Beard, “A Reply to Mr. Browder,” *New Republic*, 2 February 1938.

inextricable from the international interest. Unilateralism, isolationism even, had been conceivable after the Great War; it was inconceivable after the Greater War. American prosperity rested on the prosperity of other countries. American democracy depended on the survival of democracy elsewhere. American security could not be achieved separate from the security of Europe and Asia.

These views were not universally held, nor were they immune to differences of interpretation. But it quickly became clear that they formed the basis for American policy in the postwar period. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin airlift, NATO, the American defense of South Korea – all were based on a fundamental understanding of the national interest that was decidedly international in orientation.

International, however, was not the same as *internationalist*, nor was collective security in the Cold War quite what Wilson had envisioned. For a time the true heirs to Wilson had their say, although the fact that Henry Wallace became their leading voice revealed the decreasing seriousness with which they were taken. Wallace decried the confrontational approach of the Truman administration, which, he said, needlessly antagonized the Russians, polarized the world, and jeopardized the mission of the United Nations. The way to peace was through peace, informed by a spirit of cooperation, not through the hostility of a Cold War.

Countering Wallace were those who contended that an international outlook was best informed by nationalist attitudes. No, the United States must not turn its back on the world; but neither should it place its fate in the hands of those who, by the evidence of hundreds of statements since 1917, wished ill to American values and institutions. The Soviets had been indispensable allies against Hitler, but Hitler died in his bunker. Stalin still lived. And while he did, Americans had better keep their powder dry. Twenty years earlier, ten years even, it would have been entirely unnecessary to emphasize what this group now stressed: the *national* in national interest.

The nationalists in the post-1945 period developed a theoretical justification for their position; the most influential of the theorists was Hans Morgenthau. A refugee from Nazi Germany who wound up in the political science department at the University of Chicago, Morgenthau explained that internationalism was a will-o'-the-wisp chased after by woolly-minded Wilsonians who failed to understand how the world worked. He proceeded to provide a primer:

International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim. Statesmen and peoples may ultimately seek freedom, security, prosperity, or power itself. They may define their goals in terms of a religious, philosophic, economic, or social ideal. They may hope that this ideal will materialize through its own inner force, through divine intervention, or through the natural development of human affairs. But whenever they strive

to realize their goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power.<sup>10</sup>

Careful readers of this text noted that it did not deny the existence of idealism, nor even contend that idealism – of the Wilsonian or any other sort – had no role in international affairs. But for Morgenthau, idealism lay beyond the portfolio of the practicing policymaker, who needed to inquire into ultimate causes no more than the ordinary policeman needed to know the root causes of urban poverty.

In this book, the quickly classic *Politics among Nations*, and several others, Morgenthau propounded, expounded, and just plain pounded on the idea that power constituted the coin of the international realm (of the domestic realm too, but such was for others to argue). Peace would come not through the good offices of the United Nations but through careful attention to the balance of international power.

Others joined Morgenthau in the cleverly christened (by themselves) school of Cold War “realism.” George Kennan cabled at length from Moscow warning of Stalin’s designs on the West; he sequed with a catchy piece in *Foreign Affairs* prescribing a policy of political and ideological encirclement of the Soviet Union. Deeper than Kennan and almost as catchy was theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose previous *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* prepped readers for *Christian Realism and Political Problems*. The difference between Christian realism and the infidel brand was what gave America its moral edge in the contest with the Communists. Yet Niebuhr, tempering his realism with realism, cautioned Americans against assuming that the mere fact of their semi-institutionalized Christianity would afford them victory over the atheists of the Kremlin. “The final victory over man’s disorder is God’s and not ours,” Niebuhr homilied.<sup>11</sup>

Niebuhr had reason to warn against facile assumptions of Providential partisanship. By the early 1950s Americans had come to interpret the national interest in almost religious terms. Not since the imperialist moment at the turn of the century – and, considering the substantial dissent of the anti-imperialists, perhaps not even then – had Americans as a nation been so convinced of the divine, or at least divinely guided, righteousness of their country’s foreign policy. Harry Truman took the first step on the path of righteousness in the speech that announced the Truman Doctrine. “At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life,” Truman said, and he proceeded to delineate the difference between those alternatives.

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<sup>10</sup>. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, 1948), 13.

<sup>11</sup>. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York, 1953), 116.

One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.

The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.

It went without saying that the United States headed the first camp; what *did* require saying was that the United States would be taking upon itself responsibility for defending the first camp against the second. "It must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." Although the context of this speech was an aid request for Greece and Turkey, the principle apparently applied to other countries, perhaps *all* countries. "The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms," Truman asserted. "If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world – and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own Nation."<sup>12</sup>

The Manichaeism that informed Truman's statement grew only more marked during the next few years. It probably peaked, institutionally, in NSC-68, that over-the-top manifesto of American Cold War thinking. To an even greater degree than Truman in his Greek-aid speech, the NSC-68 authors hammered upon the conflict of values between West and East, and they did so in explicitly religious terms. Freedom of religion characterized the democratically tolerant West; just the opposite motivated the dictatorially intolerant East, where a "perverted faith" bent all to its evil will. "It is the first article of this faith that he [the ordinary individual] finds and can only find the meaning of his existence in serving the end of the system. The system becomes God, and submission to the will of God becomes submission to the will of the system."<sup>13</sup>

Officially, of course, the United States could not wage war, even Cold War, in the name of religion. The First Amendment forbade it, and prudence cautioned against gratuitous insults to potential allies in Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist countries. (Since the Christian God was frequently spoken of as the "Judeo-Christian" God, Israel presumably would be less sensitive. It was, but only *less* sensitive.)

Unofficially, however, the contest against communism was commonly construed religiously, as a struggle against "Godless communism." Americans who knew nothing else of communism knew that it was atheistic, and therefore a threat to every God-fearing nation and person on the planet. Americans of the Cold War were hardly original in dragooning God into service on their side; other zealots had done it in other countries for centuries, and in America the

12. *Department of State Bulletin*, 23 March 1947.

13. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1950 (Washington, 1977), 1:235–92.

ranks of the religiously inspired ran from Puritans through abolitionists and imperialists to prohibitionists. Yet never had the national interest assumed such pervasively religious overtones. The ideological struggle with the Communists became almost theological; a naive observer of Cold War America could have been forgiven for thinking that the fate not merely of the world, but of heaven and earth, hung on the outcome of the contest with the Kremlin.

Such enthusiasm had policy consequences – or would have if certain groups had had their way. If communism was fundamentally evil, then mere containment of communism was a pact with the devil, either figuratively or literally. During the early 1950s conservatives within the Republican party advocated a more forceful method of dealing with the Communists. “Liberation” or “roll-back” would lift the communist yoke from the necks of the millions upon whom it now weighed. This would certainly benefit those millions, by replacing totalitarianism with democracy; it would benefit Americans, by eradicating the primary threat to American security.

Actually, whether the liberationists were conservatives or something else – perhaps radicals – was a fair question. It was also an indication that, regardless of whether politics stopped at the water’s edge, any meaningful nomenclature of foreign policy preference according to accepted categories of left and right did.

Robert A. Taft made precisely this point in opposing most Cold War initiatives of the Truman administration. The Ohio Republican considered himself a conservative, and he may well have been the last true conservative of the Cold War. Taft opposed the Cold War on the same grounds that he had opposed the New Deal: that it would increase the size of government. Taft had not learned nothing from World War II; he recognized that American welfare depended to some degree on the welfare of other countries. “It does not follow, however,” he said, during the 1951 Senate debate over the dispatch of American troops to Europe, “that because we desire the freedom of every country in the world we must send an American land army to that country to defend it.” To Taft’s way of thinking – which echoed the anti-imperialists of 1898 and Charles Beard during the interwar years – an overly ambitious formulation of the national interest would actually undermine the genuine national interest. “If we commit ourselves to more than we can carry out, we weaken the whole nation.”<sup>14</sup>

Hans Morgenthau, no conservative, nonetheless counseled caution as well. Morgenthau worried that American policymakers would get carried away with the anti-Communist ideology that was sweeping the land. Ideology, however satisfying to the national ego, was no guide to the national interest. The matter moved Morgenthau to capitals and exclamation points:

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14. *Congressional Record*, 8 February 1951, 1117–21.

## FORGET AND REMEMBER!

FORGET the sentimental notion that foreign policy is a struggle between virtue and vice, with virtue bound to win.

FORGET the utopian notion that a brave new world without power politics will follow the unconditional surrender of wicked nations.

FORGET the crusading notion that any state, however virtuous and powerful, can have the mission to make the world over in its own image.

REMEMBER that the golden age of isolated normalcy is gone forever and that no effort, however great, and no action, however radical, will bring it back.

REMEMBER that diplomacy without power is feeble, and power without diplomacy is destructive and blind.

REMEMBER that no nation's power is without limits, and hence that its policies must respect the power and interests of others. . . .

And, above all, remember always that it is not only a political necessity but also a moral duty for a nation to follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action:

THE NATIONAL INTEREST.<sup>15</sup>

If Americans seemed obsessed with the apocalyptic struggle of good and evil, it was at least partly because after 1945, and especially after 1949, the apocalypse appeared nearer than in recent millennia. The invention of nuclear weapons raised the grim possibility that six thousand years of human development, by the reckoning of Bishop Ussher, or six million years, by Charles Darwin, might be canceled in a flash. It was enough to make anyone think in apocalyptic terms.

It also led to a dramatic reconfiguration of the elements of national interest. Security, in the sense of physical protection against external attack, had always been part of the mix, but not since 1814 had the home territory of the United States been seriously at risk. (Hawaii in 1941 was a *territory*, and therefore not quite home.) Nuclear weapons in the hands of the Soviets changed the situation entirely. A Soviet takeover – invasion followed by occupation – remained the stuff of better-dead-than-red fantasy, but a Soviet attack of devastating proportions, by aircraft-borne bombs or missile-delivered warheads, was not at all out of the question. And precisely *because* Americans had for so long been immune from physical attack, the knowledge that they were no longer so was all the more traumatic.

From the trauma arose an inordinate concern with security, a concept and term that trumped every other aspect of the national interest for nearly two generations starting in the late 1940s. The concept took institutional shape in

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15. Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1951), 241–42.

the National Security Act of 1947, which created the National Security Council, as well as such other security mainstays as the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. The conversion of the War Department to the Defense Department fairly well captured the new thinking of the nuclear era. Heretofore war had been clearly distinguishable from peace; now the nation's security was at risk, and needed defending, full-time.

Likewise with spying. Henry Stimson had closed the State Department's "Black Chamber" during the Hoover era on grounds that gentlemen did not read each other's mail. As war secretary under Franklin Roosevelt, Stimson evinced no compunctions about running spies, presumably on the reasoning that war suspended gentlemanly obligations. The establishment of the CIA suggested that the suspension was permanent – or at least for the duration of the Cold War. Gentlemen or no, the cost of ignorance of the intentions and capabilities of one's enemies escalated enormously once nuclear weapons entered the arsenals of the great powers.

What patriotism was in Samuel Johnson's day, security became in the Cold War. Security sanctioned disregard for civil liberties during the McCarthy era; it justified an enormous enlargement of the defense budget and the creation of what Dwight Eisenhower ruefully called the "military-industrial complex"; it led to an extension of American military alliances, formal and informal, until they girdled the globe; it afforded a rationale for American support of regimes in Latin America, Asia, and Africa that would not have passed muster under the most latitudinarian definition of democracy, or even decency; it provided cover for activities that would have been rejected out of hand by an earlier generation of Americans.

General James Doolittle explained this last point to Eisenhower in the context of a 1954 review of American intelligence and covert operations. The rationale applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to many of the other activities undertaken in the name of security.

It is now clear that we are facing an implacable enemy whose avowed objective is world domination by whatever means and at whatever cost. . . . If the United States is to survive, long-standing American concepts of "fair play" must be reconsidered. We must develop effective espionage and counter-espionage services and must learn to subvert, sabotage and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated, and more effective methods than those used against us.<sup>16</sup>

Nor was the security card playable only in foreign and defense policy. Or, to put the matter more suggestively, under the aggrandized concept of security,

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16. United States Senate, Select Committee to Study Government Operations with respect to Intelligence Activities, 94th Cong., 2d sess., *Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Foreign and Military Intelligence* (Washington, 1976), 4:52-53.

*everything* was part of foreign or defense policy. When Eisenhower wanted to complete the St. Lawrence Seaway, he trotted out the security argument, saying that the steel mills of the Great Lakes would be starved of ore if the ships could not get up the big river of the north. When he sought support for the interstate highway system, he pointed out how useful the thruways would be in the evacuation of cities in the event of Soviet atomic attack. When John Kennedy started the countdown to America's mission to the moon, he (and many others) couched the challenge in terms of a race against the Russians; to lose would be to damage American prestige and thereby undermine American security. Lyndon Johnson justified the War on Poverty with the argument, among others, that how America treated its least favored would go far toward winning or losing the allegiance of that large majority of the human race for whom poverty was a fact of everyday life.

The security argument was highly elastic, as evidenced by its employment on both sides of many policy debates. Perhaps most striking in this regard was the connection made between national security and race relations, by both the advocates of integration and their opponents. Since the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, agitators for change have been branded Communists; consequently it was to no one's surprise that opponents of the Jim Crow system of segregation in the American South were so labeled during the 1950s and 1960s. Yet by elevating communism to the major threat to American security, the Cold War lent a bite to the red-baiting slanders they had previously lacked. Moreover, the security angle brought the big guns of the federal government to bear, and, with disgraceful frequency, those guns targeted reformers whose only crime was to demand that America live up to its promises. Martin Luther King, Jr., to cite the most conspicuous example, faced a concerted campaign of surveillance, disinformation, and sabotage by J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation – a campaign that included an ominous anonymous letter warning King to quit the civil rights movement or perhaps even kill himself (this part of the letter was suggestive rather than explicit) lest “your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet the connection between race and security could cut the other way as well. Dwight Eisenhower was hardly a progressive on race; he regretted as social engineering the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision banning school segregation (almost as much as he regretted appointing Chief Justice Earl Warren, who orchestrated the unanimous decision). But once civil rights became an issue that drew worldwide attention – as it was bound to do in the age of decolonization in Asia and Africa – Eisenhower recognized that America could not afford to be backward thereon. To Orval Faubus's Arkansas challenge in 1957, Eisenhower responded by explaining the stakes:

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17. David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, 1981), 126.

At a time when we face grave situations abroad because of the hatred that Communism bears toward a system of government based on human rights, it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm that is being done to the prestige and influence, and indeed to the safety, of our nation and the world.

Our enemies are gloating over this incident and using it everywhere to misrepresent our whole nation. We are portrayed as a violator of those standards of conduct which the peoples of the world united to proclaim in the Charter of the United Nations. There they affirmed “faith in fundamental human rights” and “in the dignity and worth of the human person” and they did so “without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”<sup>18</sup>

Much as it galled Eisenhower to be Earl Warren’s enforcer, the security of the nation required it. The general sent in the troops to force open the schoolhouse doors.

Conceptions of security may have grown like kudzu during the Cold War, covering every other element of national interest, but they didn’t quite choke out those other elements. Prosperity and democracy continued to exist as items worth worrying about, although in an age of obsession with security, they were frequently redefined in terms of security.

The prosperity issue, which had indirectly elicited American intervention in World War I, before being abandoned during the neutralist thirties, staged a comeback during the Cold War. In fact, the comeback commenced while World War II was still under way. At Bretton Woods in 1944, American negotiators insisted on the establishment of an international financial regime designed to prevent a recurrence of the Great Depression, which seemed as good an explanation of World War II as any – and one more amenable to the kind of governmental activism favored by the New Dealers who directed American postwar planning than such alternatives as original sin. The means to the end of depression-prevention was the familiar one of opening foreign markets to American commerce. Dean Acheson, at that time assistant secretary of state for economic affairs, sounded like any number of expansionists from the 1890s when he told a congressional committee, “We cannot have full employment and prosperity in the United States without the foreign markets.”<sup>19</sup>

Once the Cold War started, the prosperity brief was folded into the security argument. Unless the United States remained economically strong, ran the reasoning, it could not defend itself militarily or ideologically against the Communists. This argument informed most discussions of economic issues during the Cold War, and was codified in such official documents as NSC-162/2,

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18. *Public Papers of the Presidents*, 24 September 1957 (Washington, 1958), 694.

19. United States Congress, House of Representatives, 78th Cong., 2d sess., *Hearings before the Special Committee on Post-war Economic Policy and Planning* (Washington, 1945), 1083.

which in 1953 asserted that a vital interest of America was to “maintain a sound economy based on free enterprise as a basis both for high defense productivity and for the maintenance of its living standards and free institutions.”<sup>20</sup>

The prosperity argument infused domestic as well as foreign policy; for the first time the federal government undertook on a regular basis to manage the economy. Whether, in political terms, this could have been accomplished without the Cold War and the security rationale it provided, is an intriguing question; memories of the Great Depression might have sufficed.

But the prosperity argument, as translated into terms of free trade and the opening of foreign markets, certainly formed a reliable element of American foreign policy from 1945 through the end of the 1990s. Beginning at Bretton Woods, continuing past the 1948 inauguration of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, to the subsequent “rounds” of negotiations that extended the GATT, and ultimately to the transformation of the GATT into the World Trade Organization, one presidential administration after another defended the opening of markets as essential to the prosperity of America and what, until the 1990s, most presidents were happy to call the “Free World.”

The prosperity argument had a couple of corollaries, each directly related to national security. The first was that prosperity per se was an antidote to the unrest that provoked revolutions and other disturbances of the international peace. This corollary provided the basis, and many of the votes, for the Marshall Plan and subsequent programs of American economic aid to other countries. The second corollary applied specifically to the GATT and associated ventures in economic integration; this held that where goods crossed borders, armies didn’t. If France and Germany learned to trade with each other, they would forget to fight with each other.

Critics of American policy saw the apparently inexorable expansion of the American trading and investment system as a form of imperialism. Indeed, it was worse than imperialism, the critics contended, in that *real* imperialists at least recognized that responsibility accompanied power, and felt some obligation, however paternalistic, to the peoples under their sway. The new imperialists – multinational corporations and their power-elite lackeys – exercised power but acknowledged no responsibility to anyone but their stockholders.

It probably wouldn’t have appeased these critics to hear the market-expanding policies of the United States described as a kind of economic Wilsonianism. Where Wilson contended that democracy could not be safe in one country, the free traders contended that capitalism could not be safe in one country. (In fact, Wilson himself had made freer, if not *free*, trade point three of his famous fourteen.) In enunciating the elements of the national interest, American leaders much preferred promoting democracy to flacking capitalism; but it was almost an article of faith in postwar America that the two went together.

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20. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954* (Washington, 1984), 2:577–97.

This had not always been so. As late as the 1930s, at a time when capitalism was covering itself in neither glory nor dividends, alternatives to capitalism exerted a strong appeal upon the American intelligentsia, a not inconsequential number of whom joined the Communist party. But the Cold War changed things in two ways. First, it placed communism so far beyond the realm of respectability in America that democratic socialism, though practiced by some of America's closest allies, came to seem oxymoronic. Second, the economic Wilsonians delivered the goods, quite literally. The Cold War years were the most prosperous in American history. Hair-splitters could debate whether this was due to the growing globalization or to the military Keynesianism of the Cold War, but there it was. Conflating democracy and capitalism in defining the national interest might have made lousy logic, but it made potent political economy.

Historically minded students of the national interest perhaps wondered what had happened to that other aspect of the prosperity argument, the one that provoked American intervention in World War I (a century after fueling a quasi-war with France and a real one with Britain), and that in a reactive form had furnished much of the reason for the neutrality legislation of the 1930s: namely, the defense of neutral rights in wartime. The short answer was that after 1945 the issue of wartime neutrality essentially ceased to exist for the United States. Few Americans, either leaders or public, could conceive of a meaningful war – one that would threaten any important American interest, economic or otherwise – that the United States would not join at the outset. Neutral rights had always been a worry of the weak or diffident; after 1945 the United States was neither weak nor diffident.

As the dueling applications of the security mantra to such issues as race demonstrated, citing security as the overriding national interest hardly ended discussions of the subject. The hard question was *what* constituted security. Did the security of the United States require, for example, the defense of every non-communist government that appealed to Washington for help? Harry Truman had implied that it did, and for a decade and a half after the enunciation of Truman's doctrine, Americans tended to take him at his implication. The exceptions – China being the most spectacular – simply proved the rule, or perhaps the corollary that while the "fall" of a non-communist country might or might not gravely endanger the United States, it inflicted unacceptable damage on the party in power at the time.

Yet the question would not go away, and it reemerged with a vengeance in Vietnam in the 1960s. Here the question became: How much must the United States invest, by way of blood and treasure, in preserving the government of South Vietnam? Actually, phrased that way, it was a trick question, for as American involvement in the overthrow of the Diem government in 1963 demonstrated, the United States was not defending a *government* in South

Vietnam. Nor was it clearly defending a people, considering how grievously the war wounded the South Vietnamese and their society.

What the United States was defending, by the time the serious chips were being pushed onto the table, was American credibility. In this regard the Vietnam War made sense (for the United States, if not for the Vietnamese), at least according to what passed for sense in an era beguiled by the security argument. For all of America's nuclear might, the safety of the Free World depended on the confidence of America's allies that the United States would do what it promised to do. Washington had said it would defend Saigon; therefore Washington *must* defend Saigon. By this means was credibility converted into a vital national interest.

Yet the credibility argument, like most subspecies of the security argument, was two-edged. The allies surely worried about America's credibility, its resolve for fulfilling commitments; but they also worried about America's judgment. By the mid-1960s, the Europeans – the allies that really mattered – were seriously concerned that American leaders had become so obsessed with Vietnam that they might forget what the Cold War was really about. With half-a-million men in Vietnam, and half-a-hundred-thousand dead, could the Americans respond, either militarily or emotionally, to a crisis on the central Cold War front in Europe?

The judgment issue arose in another context as well, and not only among America's allies. And it arose on a point that perhaps better than any other demonstrated that security as a national interest meant nothing in the absence of an accepted definition of what security entailed.

From that Alamogordo dawn in 1945, nuclear weapons held the dual promise of securing America's future or eliminating it. Opinions split, with the pro-nuclearists seizing the high ground of government and the anti-nuclearists occupying the lowlands at the fringes of the Cold War consensus. During the 1950s and early 1960s the direct threat of nuclear war escalated with the introduction by both superpowers of hydrogen weapons and intercontinental bombers and missiles; meanwhile an indirect threat – of nuclear poisoning via radiation-exuding fallout – emerged with the testing of nuclear warheads in the atmosphere. Consequently, even as the official national security apparatus of the United States built more and bigger bombs, claiming that the national interest required it, a growing group of dissenters held that the national interest required just the opposite.

"A sober nation can become drunk with victory," Albert Einstein had said in 1946, by way of calling for a reconsideration of the role of nuclear weapons in American security planning.<sup>21</sup> Linus Pauling, another Nobelist (once already, for chemistry; he would garner a second, for peace), reached the same conclu-

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21. *New York Times Magazine*, 23 June 1946.

sion. Referring to strategies for the use of nuclear weapons, Pauling declared, "We cannot accept the idea of such monstrous immorality. The time has now come for morality to take its proper place in the conduct of world affairs. The time has now come for the nations of the world to submit to the just regulation of their conduct by international law."<sup>22</sup>

If the free traders were economic Wilsonians, Einstein and Pauling and such other advocates of disarmament as Norman Cousins were nuclear Wilsonians – although in this case they weren't making the world safe *for* something, but safe *from* something, namely nuclear weapons. (Here again Wilson had actually anticipated them. Point four of his fourteen called for disarmament.) But the principle was the same: the national interest of the United States was so tied up in a larger international interest that the former could not be achieved, or even credibly addressed, without fundamental consideration of the latter.

Until the late 1970s the nuclear Wilsonians had better luck than the original Wilsonians, although worse than the economic Wilsonians. The last group got GATT, the first the Partial Test Ban of 1963 and the SALT I Treaty of 1972. The test ban essentially terminated the production of atmospheric fallout, while SALT I made a beginning on arms control without materially mitigating the threat of nuclear war.

It was only one of the many ironies of Richard Nixon's remarkable career that he turned out to be the answer to the antinuclearists' prayers (admittedly, an unsatisfactory answer, but better than anything else available). A larger irony was that after doing so much to ratchet up the Cold War, Nixon did his best to end it. And he essentially succeeded, although his success was subsequently forgotten.

Nixon's insight was that ideology had become obsolete – worse than obsolete, downright counterproductive. Anti-Communist ideology prevented the United States from exploiting the most important development in international affairs since 1945: the bitter and ever-bitterer rivalry between the Soviet Union and China. And the failure to exploit this rivalry prevented a graceful exit from Vietnam, which grew more imperative with each passing month after the Tet offensive of 1968.

Nixon cut the Gordian knot by announcing plans to visit China. At a blow the charter Cold Warrior signaled that geopolitics had supplanted ideology in American diplomacy. The Truman Doctrine was already a dead letter, killed on the ground in Vietnam, with its *Nunc Dimittis* contained in the Nixon Doctrine, which warned small nations not to count on the United States to fight their wars. Now, by jaunting to Beijing – on his way to Moscow, to no one's surprise – Nixon declared that it was diplomatic business as usual with foreign governments regardless of their ideological hue. For twenty-five years, the

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22. Linus Pauling, *No More War!* (New York, 1958), 209.

fundamental national interest had been the containment of communism; with Nixon embracing Communists in both the Forbidden City and the Kremlin, the national interest quite obviously was being redefined.

Had Nixon survived in office, détente would have been recognized for what it was – the peace settlement of the Cold War – and the redefinition of the national interest could have proceeded in an orderly and sensible fashion. But Watergate sank Nixon and left détente to his far less experienced and less deviously capable successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.

Following the Ford interregnum, Carter strove manfully to refashion the national interest to suit the new post-Cold War era. “For too many years we’ve been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs,” he said. “We’ve fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is better quenched with water.” Vietnam was the best, or worst, example of the intellectual and moral poverty of this approach. But the nation had learned from that tragic experience. “Through failure we have now found our way back to our own principles and values.” These principles and values pointed to a foreign policy freed from an “inordinate fear of communism” and inspired instead by genuine respect for democracy, including basic human rights, and a desire to promote the prosperity not only of the United States but of the less-developed countries. “Our policy is rooted in our values,” Carter concluded. “Our policy is designed to serve mankind.”<sup>23</sup>

For a time, Carter made progress in his effort to release the national interest from the security straightjacket that had encased it since the start of the Cold War. His emphasis on democracy and human rights raised the visibility of those subjects in international forums even as it raised the cost to American clients of undemocratic behavior and human rights violations. His ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, announced a reorientation of American thinking from the East-West security axis of the Cold War to a North-South economic dialogue.

Unfortunately for Carter, influential groups within America loved the Cold War too much to let it go. Whatever it did for American national security, the end of the Cold War challenged the psychological security of the many people who had grown up with the Cold War and learned to accept it as the basis of international affairs; it simultaneously undermined the economic security of the defense industry and others that had made a good living from the Cold War.

The Cold War-revivalists found their voice among the “neoconservatives,” refugees, in many cases, from the prewar left who found renewed certitude at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Led by the likes of Norman Podhoretz and Jeane Kirkpatrick, the neoconservatives decried détente as the

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23. *Public Papers*, 22 May 1977 (Washington, 1977), 954–62.

contemporary equivalent of appeasement, derided Carter's emphasis on democratic rights and economic egalitarianism, and demanded that security be restored as the touchstone of the national interest.

Carter got no help from events. While he was arranging the return of the Panama Canal to Panama, a move the neoconservatives (and some others) castigated as a giveaway of an asset vital to American security, revolutions in Nicaragua and Iran unseated regimes friendly to the United States and installed groups unfriendly – in the case of Iran, actively hostile. Iranian radicals proceeded to seize several dozen American diplomats and hold them hostage for more than a year, causing Carter's foreign policy plausibility to plunge further. Moscow delivered the coup de grace to détente by invading Afghanistan at the end of 1979. Whether this signaled a reversion to totalitarian form, as the neoconservatives said, or principally a response to instability among the Afghans, it cut the last of the ground from under Carter's (and Nixon's) efforts to push America past the Cold War.

Ronald Reagan was the darling of the neoconservatives, partly because he gave them jobs and partly because he restored security, defined in traditional Cold War terms, to primacy among American national interests. Reagan's big arms buildup allowed America to "stand tall" again, in the Republican phraseology of the day, and to slam shut what the neoconservatives styled the "window of vulnerability" to Soviet nuclear attack. Meanwhile the Reagan Doctrine of aid to anti-Communist insurgencies in Central America and elsewhere institutionalized the "liberationist" philosophy of the early 1950s – and of which scant had been heard since then. Combined with rhetoric that made the Soviet Union out to be an "evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world," the Reagan approach represented a concerted effort to rev up the Cold War once more.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the effort never really took hold. Rearmament was applauded in the expected places – associations of defense contractors, metal-workers' union halls, chambers of commerce of Sunbelt cities surrounded by military bases – but the provocative rhetoric sent shudders through millions of Americans who worried that all the new weapons might actually be *used*. Indeed, the Reagan restoration provoked a resurgence of the antinuclear movement, with demands ranging from no-first-use to a freeze on deployment to total abolition. At the same time, the American public yawned in the face of administration demands for anti-Communist action in Central America. Congress did more than yawn; it repeatedly passed legislation to cut off aid to the Nicaraguan contras – legislation the Reagan administration just as repeatedly, if secretly, defied.

Consequently, it came as a relief to all but the most zealous neoconservatives (and single-minded arms makers) when Mikhail Gorbachev inherited power

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24. *Public Papers*, 29 January 1981 (Washington, 1982), 55–62; *Public Papers*, 8 March 1983 (Washington, 1984), 359–64.

in the Kremlin and intimated a desire to be done with the Cold War once and for all. He did *not* indicate a desire to be done with the Soviet system, but before the changes he set in motion ran their course, that was precisely what he accomplished.

Whether the Cold War ended in 1971, with Nixon's opening to China; or 1985, with Gorbachev's accession to power; or 1989, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall; or 1991, with the breakup of the Soviet Union – by the early 1990s none could doubt that the American national interest would have to be retooled for a world without another superpower.

And so it was, with the other elements of the national interest triumvirate – prosperity and democracy – regaining much of the ground they had lost to security during the Cold War. When George Bush responded to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by organizing for war to oust the invaders, Bush administration spokespersons adduced various explanations as to what was at risk in the Gulf. They were hard pressed to say that the defense of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would benefit democracy directly – neither country being remotely democratic – but democracy and its necessary precondition, self-determination, were clearly behind the “new world order” of which Bush spoke so frequently. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed an unprecedented sprouting of democracy around the globe; only if the new democracies, many of them weak and tentative, felt safe from external attack, would that blessed institution blossom.

For those who found the “new world order” unlikely, administration officials fell back on the prosperity argument. Should Saddam Hussein control the oil of the Gulf, they explained, there was no telling what havoc he could wreak on the economies of the West. Secretary of State James Baker was blunt about the crux of the matter: “If you want to sum it up in one word: it's jobs.”<sup>25</sup>

Security didn't disappear as a concern of Americans, but it took a decidedly different form than in the harrowing days of the Berlin blockade and the Cuban missile crisis. Terrorist attacks – on the World Trade Center in New York, on American airliners, on American embassies – demonstrated that security was never absolute. Although the Soviet Union had disappeared, many of Moscow's missiles remained, and they remained a worry to those who made a living worrying about American security.

Yet the case of Russia perhaps best indicated the approaching balance among the various elements of the national interest. The United States orchestrated international aid to Russia; the aid had three aims: to promote democracy in the former homeland of communism, thereby reinforcing the general democratic trend in international affairs; to put Russia on a path to prosperity, which

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25. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton, 1993), 224.

would benefit not only the Russian people (with positive effects on democracy there) but foreign merchants and investors, including Americans, as well; and to prevent a reversion to the authoritarianism (nuclearly armed) that had endangered American security for half of the twentieth century.

The restoration of balance was not irreversible. With the nuclear genie out of the bottle, security could never be assumed, the way it often had been before World War II. But as the twentieth century drew to a close, Americans remembered that there was more to the national interest than security. Two decades earlier, after the Cold War ended the first time, Jimmy Carter interpreted the connections among the three central elements of the national interest. Carter said: "The great democracies are not free because we are strong and prosperous. We are strong and influential and prosperous because we are free."<sup>26</sup> Carter's critics took issue with this, or at least with the implications he drew from it. Security came first, they said; prosperity and democracy would follow.

Whether or not either side to this debate realized it, their argument was as old as the century. Since 1898 Americans had agreed that the national interest encompassed prosperity, democracy, and security; but which of the three counted most in the national interest depended on who was counting and when. The imperialists of 1898 pushed prosperity, demanding access to foreign markets. Woodrow Wilson sought to make the world safe for democracy. American Cold Warriors turned security into the touchstone of foreign policy.

If the century taught anything, it was that none of the three elements could stand alone – or even stand out too far, without risk of damage to itself or the others. The pursuit of prosperity via annexation of the Philippines rendered the United States less secure in Asia without doing much for Asian democracy (or, for that matter, American prosperity); Wilson's crusade for democracy provoked an isolationist backlash that undermined both American prosperity and American security; the security obsession of the Cold War led to anti-democratic dirty tricks in the Third World, a terrifying arms race, and a war in Vietnam that tore America apart and cracked the consensus on which notions of Cold War security rested.

During the Cold War, American strategists constructed a nuclear "triad," a three-legged stool of ground-, sea-, and air-launched weapons. The reasoning was that stable deterrence required strength in each leg; should any one leg atrophy, deterrence might topple. The American national interest – with democracy, prosperity, and security as the three legs – was like that. If events of the twentieth century are any guide, it still is.

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26. *Public Papers*, 22 May 1977 (Washington, 1977), 954–62.