

The Case for Finite Containment: Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy

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The Case for Finite Containment

Analyzing U.S. Grand Strategy

Stephen M. Walt

Since the Second World War, the main objective of U.S. grand strategy has been to prevent territorial expansion by the Soviet Union while avoiding a major war. Although both ends and means have varied over time, the central elements of this strategy—commonly known as “containment”—have been military alliances with Western Europe and Japan and the deployment of U.S. armed forces in Europe and the Far East.¹ Despite initial misgivings and occasional flurries of criticism, the strategy has enjoyed substantial popular support, largely because it has worked so well.

In recent years, however, containment has come under increasing attack. Given the widespread belief that U.S. power has declined (at least in relative terms), and the possibility that domestic reforms in the Soviet Union imply a reduction in the Soviet threat, it is not surprising that the fundamental principles of U.S. grand strategy are now the subject of a growing debate.²

A slightly different version of this essay will appear in Daniel Kaufman, David Clark, and Kevin Sheehan, eds., *The Future of U.S. National Strategy*. Some portions draw upon my “Two Cheers for Containment: Probable Allied Responses to U.S. Isolationism,” in Ted Galen Carpenter, ed., *Collective Defense or Strategic Independence? Alternative Strategies for the Future* (Lexington Books, 1989). I would like to thank Richard Betts, Ivo Daalder, Charles Glaser, Robert Johnson, Deborah Welch Larson, John Mearsheimer, Warner Schilling, Jack Snyder, and Kenneth Waltz for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am especially grateful to Stephen Van Evera, whose work on this subject has shaped my thinking considerably, and to the MacArthur Foundation and Princeton’s Center of International Studies for financial support.

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1. On the evolution of postwar U.S. grand strategy and the shifts in ends and means, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Gaddis, “Containment and the Logic of Strategy,” *The National Interest*, No. 10 (Winter 1987–88), pp. 27–38.
 2. The best-known discussion of U.S. decline is Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), chaps. 7–8. For arguments questioning this trend, see Bruce Russett, “The Mysterious Case of Vanishing Hegemony; or, Is Mark Twain Really Dead?” *International Organization*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 207–231; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), chaps. 7–9; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Understating U.S. Strengths,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 72 (Fall 1988), pp. 105–129; and Samuel P. Huntington, “The U.S.—Decline or Renewal?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Winter 1988/89), pp. 76–96.

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Unfortunately, this debate has not been conducted in a systematic way. In particular, the beliefs and assumptions that support different prescriptions are rarely identified or evaluated. As a result, assessing the relative merits of the various alternatives is extremely difficult.

Accordingly, this essay has two main goals. First, it presents a way of analyzing U.S. grand strategy that may help participants in this debate organize their discourse more effectively. In the simplest terms, a state's grand strategy is its plan for making itself secure. Grand strategy identifies the objectives that must be achieved to produce security, and describes the political and military actions that are believed to lead to this goal.³ Strategy is thus a set of "contingent predictions": if we do A, B, and C, the desired results X, Y, and Z should follow.⁴ Ideally, a state's grand strategy should be based on empirically grounded hypotheses that explain why a particular set of actions will produce greater security. Thus, the best—indeed, the *only*—way to assess the merits of different strategies is to evaluate the competing hypotheses on which they are based. This article attempts to perform this task.

Second, by comparing the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of several alternative U.S. grand strategies, this essay will demonstrate the advantages of a strategy of *finite* containment. Before outlining this strategy in more detail, however, let us first consider the main alternatives.

ALTERNATIVES TO FINITE CONTAINMENT

At some risk of oversimplification, alternative U.S. grand strategies can be divided into several distinct schools of thought.⁵ At one extreme are those who may be termed the "*world order idealists*." These writers argue that the

3. According to Barry Posen, grand strategy is a "political-military means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself." See Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13. For similar conceptions, see Edward Mead Earle, "Introduction," in Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), p. vii; Bernard Brodie, "Strategy as a Science," *World Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 1949), pp. 467–488; B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1967), pp. 335–336; and Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 142–144.

4. See Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, "Theory for Policy in International Relations," in *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 617–625.

5. For a similar but not identical taxonomy of alternative U.S. grand strategies, see Colin S. Gray, *The Geopolitics of Super Power* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), chaps. 10–13.

main threat to the United States arises not from other states but from collective global problems such as the threat of nuclear war, ecological decay, and poverty. Because they believe that a system of independent states cannot deal effectively with these issues, these writers seek a fundamental transformation of the existing state system. The United States, they argue, should direct its efforts toward the creation of a more humanitarian world order through disarmament, moral education, greater reliance on international law, and strengthened international institutions. In the unlikely event that this approach were adopted, military power and alliance commitments would be of minor importance.⁶

A second grand strategy is "neo-isolationism." This strategy assumes that the United States has few security interests beyond its borders, that threats to these interests are modest, and that very limited means (a small army, a coastal navy, and a modest nuclear deterrent) are sufficient to protect them. Neo-isolationists argue that U.S. allies are capable of defending themselves, that U.S. alliance commitments entail escalatory threats that lack credibility, and that current economic conditions require massive reductions in U.S. defense expenditures. Accordingly, these writers advocate the rapid dissolution of U.S. alliance commitments, a drastic reduction in U.S. defense spending, and a return to hemispheric or continental defense.⁷

A third school favors *disengagement* from the traditional U.S. commitment to Western Europe, although most of these writers do not want to eliminate

6. See, e.g., Richard A. Falk, *A Study of Future Worlds* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Robert C. Johansen, *The National Interest and the Human Interest: An Analysis of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Randall Forsberg, "Confining the Military to Defense as a Route to Disarmament," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1984), pp. 285–318.

7. Advocates of this view include Earl Ravenal, *NATO: The Tides of Discontent* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1985); Ravenal, "Europe Without America: The Erosion of NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 5 (Summer 1985), pp. 1020–1035; Ravenal, "The Case for a Withdrawal of Our Forces," *New York Times Magazine*, March 6, 1983, pp. 58–75; Laurence Radway, "Let Europe Be Europe," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1983), pp. 23–43; Christopher Layne, "Ending the Alliance," *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1983), pp. 5–31; and Layne, "Atlanticism Without NATO," *Foreign Policy*, No. 67 (Summer 1987), pp. 22–45. Some supporters of withdrawal also argue for greater efforts to promote international economic coordination, a view that analysts like Ravenal would reject. See Jerry W. Sanders, "Security and Choice," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1984), pp. 698–707; Jerry W. Sanders and Sherle R. Schwenninger, "Foreign Policy for the Post-Reagan Era," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 369–418 and "A Third-World Policy for the Post-Reagan Era," Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 1986–87), pp. 1–50; and Richard J. Barnet, "The Four Pillars," *The New Yorker*, March 9, 1987, pp. 76–89. Also advocating a U.S. withdrawal is Melvyn Krauss, *How NATO Weakens the West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

it entirely. Some favor reducing the U.S. role in Europe in order to devote greater effort to the Third World or the Pacific Rim, while others favor withdrawal in order to reduce the U.S. defense budget. Unlike the neo-isolationists, these writers acknowledge that Europe is still a vital U.S. interest and that the United States should play an active role in deterring Soviet expansion. However, they also believe that U.S. allies should do more for their own defense, thereby allowing the United States to reduce or redeploy its military forces.⁸

Although there are important differences between these various schools (and among different representatives of each one), these analysts generally favor reductions in the United States' global role. By contrast, a number of other writers advocate a strategy of *global containment*, which would maintain or expand present U.S. commitments. This strategy seeks to contain Soviet or communist expansion on a global basis, on the assumption that the emergence of pro-Soviet regimes anywhere in the world is a positive addition to Soviet power. Contemporary advocates of this strategy also argue that the United States faces a diverse and growing array of other threats (such as international terrorism) which can best be met by continued increases in U.S. military capabilities and by a greater willingness to use these forces.⁹

8. The best example of this view is David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). For a proposal that the United States focus greater attention on the Western hemisphere and the Pacific, see James Chace, "A New Grand Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, No. 70 (Spring 1988), pp. 3–25. Strategists advocating a reduction in Europe in order to increase U.S. capabilities in the Third World include Jeffrey Record, *Revising U.S. Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984); Eliot A. Cohen, "The Long-Term Crisis of the Alliance," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Winter 1982/83), p. 342; and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Game Plan: The Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.-Soviet Contest* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), p. 181 and *passim*. Overall, Brzezinski's recommendations suggest that his views lie closer to "global containment." Similarly, although he is essentially a neo-isolationist, Christopher Layne has suggested that a U.S. withdrawal from Europe could permit "reallocating remaining defense resources to stress strategic mobility and naval power projection." See Layne, "Atlanticism Without NATO," p. 45.

9. See, e.g., Samuel P. Huntington, ed., *The Strategic Imperative: New Policies for American Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1982), especially Huntington's essay "The Renewal of Strategy," pp. 1–52; Aaron Wildavsky, ed., *Beyond Containment: Alternative American Policies Toward the Soviet Union* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1983); Fred C. Iklé and Albert Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence: Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office [U.S. GPO], January 1988); and Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power*, chap. 11. The grand strategy of the Reagan administration reflected this view as well. See Barry R. Posen and Stephen Van Evera, "Reagan Administration Defense Policy: Departure from Containment," in Kenneth A. Oye, Robert J. Lieber, and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Eagle Resurgent? The Reagan Era in American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), pp. 89–98; and Richard Melanson, *Writing History and Making Policy: The Cold War, Vietnam, and Revisionism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 200–204.

A final alternative is *rollback*, which seeks to eliminate communist influence worldwide. Although it resembles global containment, this strategy rests on ideological preferences rather than an overriding concern for military security. The objective of rollback is not simply the containment of Soviet or communist power (though that is important) but the elimination of Marxism as a significant political force. Thus, rollback also prescribes active U.S. support for anti-communist forces (such as the Nicaraguan *contras* or pro-U.S. dictatorships) even if U.S. security interests are not involved.¹⁰

FINITE CONTAINMENT

Finite containment resembles the grand strategy outlined by George F. Kennan, Hans J. Morgenthau, and Walter Lippmann, which focused on containing direct Soviet expansion on the Eurasian landmass.¹¹ In addition to maintaining a robust nuclear deterrent, this strategy would preserve present U.S. alliances with Western Europe, Japan, and Korea (at roughly the current level of ground and air forces), along with the U.S. commitment to protect Western access to Persian Gulf oil.¹²

Finite containment is not simply a continuation of the status quo, however. For most of the Cold War, U.S. grand strategy has leaned towards global

10. The classic statement of the rollback strategy is James Burnham, *Containment or Liberation? An Inquiry into the Aims of United States Foreign Policy* (New York: John Day, 1952). For more recent versions, see Joseph Churba, *Soviet Breakout: Strategies to Meet It* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988); Irving Kristol, "Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology," *The National Interest*, No. 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 6–15; Charles Krauthammer, "The Poverty of Realism," *The New Republic*, February 17, 1986, pp. 14–22; and Norman Podhoretz, *The Present Danger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).

11. The goal of preventing Soviet expansion reflects the traditional U.S. interest in preventing any single power from controlling the combined resources of the Eurasian landmass. See Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, chap. 2; George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 63–65; Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), pp. 108–113 and passim; Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982 reprint of 1951 edition), pp. 5–7 and passim; and Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1942), part 1. These prescriptions were not always consistent; for example, Kennan supported U.S. entry into the Korean War and remained ambivalent about intervention in other peripheral areas. See Walter L. Hixson, "Containment on the Perimeter: George Kennan and Vietnam," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 149–163.

12. See Stephen Van Evera, "American Strategic Interests: Why Europe Matters, Why the Third World Doesn't," testimony prepared for hearings before the Panel on Defense Burdensharing, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, March 2, 1988; and Posen and Van Evera, "Departure from Containment," pp. 75–114.

containment, with occasional attempts to roll back Soviet clients.¹³ Unlike global containment, finite containment seeks to prevent Soviet expansion only in the areas Kennan identified as “key centers of industrial power” (Western Europe and Japan). Thus, with the partial exception of the Persian Gulf (upon whose oil the industrial world depends), finite containment rejects a substantial U.S. military role in the Third World. And unlike rollback, finite containment does not entail a global crusade against Marxism. The United States would remain a global military power under this strategy, which would nevertheless permit substantial reductions in U.S. military capabilities. Thus, this strategy would help alleviate current U.S. fiscal problems without jeopardizing vital U.S. interests.

KEY QUESTIONS

The remainder of this essay examines four issues that divide the different schools of thought on U.S. grand strategy. How one answers these questions will determine the interests the United States should defend, the scope of possible threats, and the best way to overcome these challenges.

The first issue is the identification of *key areas of vital interest*: apart from U.S. territory itself, which regions are critical to U.S. security and which states are most likely to threaten them? The second issue is the *offense-defense balance*: is conquest easy or difficult, particularly in the regions that matter? In general, if offense is relatively easy, then vital regions will be more difficult to defend, and U.S. military requirements will increase. Third, what are Soviet intentions: how large are Soviet aims and how difficult are they to deter? If Soviet intentions are extremely hostile and if the Soviets are willing to run large risks, then U.S. security is reduced and providing an adequate deterrent is more difficult. Lastly, what are the *causes of alignment*: what factors will determine the level of support that the United States can obtain from others? If other states support U.S. strategic objectives, then the United States can safely do less. But if other states are unreliable, or hostile, then the United States must do more either to preserve its allies’ allegiance or to overcome the additional opposition.

13. Not only has the United States used military force in a variety of Third World countries (e.g., Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon), but it sought to overthrow a number of leftist or Marxist regimes on several occasions (e.g., Cuba, Iran, Guatemala, and the current targets of the “Reagan Doctrine”).

Each of these issues has been debated throughout the Cold War, although these disputes have rarely been conducted openly. Fortunately, we now have over forty years of experience upon which to base our assessments: at the very least, it should be possible to reduce the range of disagreement. Taken together, the available evidence on these issues supports the strategy of finite containment.

Identifying Vital Interests

When formulating a grand strategy, the first step is to identify the key regions that comprise U.S. vital interests. For strong states who can afford to worry about more than just the defense of their own territory, the identification of vital interests will depend primarily on the distribution of global power: Which regions contain important assets? Which states possess the means to threaten these regions?

DEFINING POWER

National power is usually seen as a function of material assets like size of territory, population, military power, industrial capacity, and resource endowments.¹⁴ These factors are often related (e.g., modern military power is based largely on industrial capacity), and together they determine a state's capacity to defend its interests, especially in war.¹⁵ Moreover, it is a state's *combined* capabilities that are important; states that lack critical elements of power will be more vulnerable than states that possess a diverse array of capabilities.¹⁶ There is no precise formula for weighing the different elements of power (which lack leads to recurring disputes about the relative importance

14. On the importance and measurement of national power, Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed., rev. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), part 3; E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), chap. 8; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 98, 129–31; and Klaus E. Knorr, *The Power of Nations: The Political Economy of International Relations* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), chaps. 3 and 4.

15. Because no supreme authority exists to protect states from each other, the capacity to wage war is the ultimate guarantee of independence and source of influence in the international system. See Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 109.

16. On this point, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 129–131.

of different components),¹⁷ but most writers on strategy agree that power rests on a state's material assets and capabilities.

This conception of power is not universally accepted, however. Both world order idealists and proponents of rollback tend to focus more on ideas and ideology than on the physical capabilities of different states. Because they believe that the United States and its allies are threatened more by global problems than by other states, world order theorists devote little attention to the relative capabilities of different nations. For them, the relative power of nations is less important than the power of ideas; as mankind learns new values and forms new loyalties, the dangers inherent in the present system will be ameliorated.¹⁸

At the other extreme, advocates of rollback view contemporary international politics as a quasi-religious conflict between communism and democracy. Ideology is more important than the physical elements of power; interests are identified not by comparing capabilities but by examining political beliefs. States that embrace U.S. values deserve support, states that do not are suspect, and Marxist states are especially objectionable.¹⁹ Coexistence

17. Some prominent theorists of international politics have emphasized the growing importance of economic capabilities in contemporary international relations, although they are careful to acknowledge the continued role of military power in shaping the behavior of states. See, for example, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 8, 16–17, 24–29, 227–229; Keohane and Nye, "Power and Interdependence Revisited," *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Autumn 1987), pp. 727–729; and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), especially pp. 40–41. Echoing this view (albeit in less sophisticated form), some writers on U.S. grand strategy argue that the United States should abandon containment and focus on promoting international economic cooperation. See Sanders, "Security and Choice," pp. 698–707; Barnett, "The Four Pillars," pp. 88–89; and Sanders and Schwenninger, "Foreign Policy for the Post-Reagan Era," pp. 375–382. This view understates the role that containment plays in facilitating cooperation among the advanced industrial countries. If the Soviet threat declined dramatically or the U.S. abandoned containment, the other industrial powers would worry more about their positions relative to one another. From this perspective, economic cooperation among the industrial powers has been facilitated by the fact that the Soviet threat and the strategy of containment created a stable security environment and strong incentives for political collaboration in the West. Thus, declining cooperation among the industrial powers may be due as much to decreased concern about the Soviet Union as to the erosion of U.S. economic primacy. See Robert Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation: The Political Economy of Foreign Direct Investment* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp. 104–109. For useful theoretical background, see Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 485–507.

18. See Falk, *A Study of Future Worlds*, chap. 5; and Johansen, *National Interest and Human Interest*, pp. 20–37.

19. Thus Norman Podhoretz criticized the U.S. rapprochement with communist China by lamenting "the loss of political clarity it inevitably entails. Playing one Communist power off

with communism is assumed to be impossible, which justifies active efforts to undermine leftist or Marxist regimes.²⁰

Ignoring the material elements of power raises several problems for these two schools of thought. Even if various global problems pose a threat to all states, world order idealists tend to overlook the fact that states also still threaten each other. The record of past efforts to erect moral barriers against war is not encouraging, and the various norms these writers extol would have to command near-universal acceptance before the danger of war would be gone. As a result, these writers cannot tell us how to preserve peace or defend other interests while the new world order is being created.

For their part, advocates of rollback err by exaggerating the importance of ideology in international politics and by downplaying the role of national power. Historically, no ideology has ever attracted a universal following, and neither superpower shows signs of doing so today. Even more important, a state's ability to promote ideological principles is largely a function of its economic and military capabilities. Communist ideology would be irrelevant if Albania were its chief sponsor; it is Soviet power that makes communism seem dangerous to the United States, not the specific content of the ideology itself. Thus, even if ideological beliefs do matter in certain circumstances, the relative power of their proponents matters far more.

WHY CONTAINMENT?

More than anything else the distribution of power, defined in terms of relative capabilities, identifies the regions that are strategically significant. As a continent-sized state lying far from the other major centers of power, the United States can be seriously threatened only if a single state were able to control the combined resources of the Eurasian landmass. Such an accumulation of power would dwarf U.S. capabilities, thereby placing U.S. security in jeopardy.²¹

against another may be sound geopolitics, but it increases the difficulty of explaining to ourselves and our friends what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against." See *Present Danger*, p. 98. Similarly, Irving Kristol suggests that many U.S. allies are of little value because they do not support the "assertive American foreign policy" he favors. See "Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology," p. 14.

20. See Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?* pp. 176–182; Kristol, "Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology"; and Krauthammer, "Poverty of Realism."

21. See Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 5–7 and passim; Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 108–113; Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, Part I; and Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power*, pp. 69–70.

The strategy of finite containment follows directly from this insight. In George F. Kennan's original formulation, containment was intended to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining control of the "key centers of industrial power" that lay outside its grasp. Apart from the United States itself, these "key centers" were Western Europe and Japan.²² More recently, the United States has added the goal of preserving Western access to oil from the Persian Gulf, because oil is a critical commodity for the United States and its industrial allies. Thus, as originally conceived, containment was deliberately finite in scope; it applied only to regions whose domination by the Soviet Union might enable it to assemble greater economic and military capacity than the United States. The point is crucial and bears repeating: the fundamental rationale for containment is derived from the distribution of power, defined in terms of military and industrial capability.²³

DOES CONTAINMENT STILL MAKE SENSE?

Four developments might justify abandoning containment. First, if the Soviet share of world power were to increase dramatically, the United States might be forced to take more aggressive measures in order to keep from falling too far behind. Second, if Soviet power declined substantially, then containment might be unnecessary (though the U.S. interest in keeping Eurasia divided would remain). Third, if the economic and military power of the United States were to erode significantly, maintaining its present commitments might be impossible. Finally, if other regions were to acquire greater strategic importance, then the traditional locus of containment might become obsolete. Because most analysts who advocate alternative grand strategies usually invoke one or more of these arguments, let us consider the merits of each of these claims.

22. For a summary and analysis of Kennan's reasoning, see Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, chap. 2.

23. This perspective helps explain why Lippmann and Morgenthau opposed U.S. intervention in places like Vietnam. Communist control of Southeast Asia could not affect the global balance of power, both because the unity of international communism was illusory and because this region did not contain any militarily significant assets. It was therefore foolish for the United States to squander its own capabilities to defend it. See Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 565–567 and passim; and Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 129–156. Not surprisingly, the preeminent contemporary realist, Kenneth Waltz, opposed the war on essentially the same grounds. See Waltz, "The Politics of Peace," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (September 1967), pp. 199–211.

THE MYTH OF SOVIET GEOPOLITICAL MOMENTUM. First, do increases in Soviet power and global influence suggest that containment has failed?²⁴ The answer is a resounding no. Not only do the United States and its major allies surpass the Soviet alliance network on the principal indices of national power, but this favorable imbalance of power has remained roughly constant for the past four decades. The Western Alliance leads the Soviet bloc by nearly 3:1 in gross national product (GNP), by over 2:1 in population, by roughly 20 percent in annual defense spending, and it has slightly more men under arms.²⁵ Whereas the Western Alliance includes virtually all of the world's strategically significant states, the Soviet Union's main allies suffer from serious internal problems, widespread regional opposition, or both.²⁶

In addition, reports of "Soviet geopolitical momentum" have been wildly exaggerated. Contrary to right-wing mythology, Soviet influence in the developing world has probably declined since the 1950s. Soviet gains in countries like Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Angola, or South Yemen are more than offset by their setbacks in Indonesia, China, Egypt, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and most recently, Afghanistan.²⁷ Soviet ideology attracts few converts, and even most so-called radical states look primarily to the West for educational assistance and economic exchanges.²⁸ Most important of all, the United States has successfully prevented the Soviets from expanding into any of the "key centers" identified by Kennan four decades ago. In terms of the global balance of power, therefore, containment has worked quite well.

24. The danger of imminent Soviet military superiority or of "Soviet geopolitical momentum" has been invoked repeatedly to justify increased U.S. defense spending or greater overseas commitments. For examples of these arguments, along with useful critiques, see Robert H. Johnson, "Periods of Peril: The Window of Vulnerability and Other Myths," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Spring 1983), pp. 950-970; and David T. Johnson and Stephen D. Goose, "Soviet Geopolitical Momentum: Myth or Menace? Trends of Soviet Influence Around the World From 1945 to 1986," *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (Center for Defense Information, 1986).

25. For the data on which these figures are based, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 263-265 and Appendix II.

26. On the burdens of the Soviet empire, see Valerie Bunce, "The Empire Strikes Back: The Evolution of the Eastern Bloc from a Soviet Asset to a Soviet Liability," *International Organization*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Winter 1985), pp. 1-46.

27. A contrasting view is Charles Wolf's assertion that "the gains and extension of the Soviet empire have vastly exceeded its losses and retrenchments." Unfortunately, Wolf does not provide any evidence to support this far-reaching claim. See Wolf, "Extended Containment," in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment*, p. 154; and also Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, pp. 8-9. The most systematic examination of this issue reaches the opposite conclusion. See Johnson and Goose, "Soviet Geopolitical Momentum."

28. See Richard Feinberg and Kenneth A. Oye, "After the Fall: U.S. Policy Towards Radical Regimes," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1983), pp. 199-215.

WHY CONTAINMENT IS STILL NECESSARY. Second, do the internal difficulties currently afflicting the Soviet Empire (e.g., economic stagnation, increasing ethnic tensions, declining health standards) mean that containment is no longer necessary? Such a conclusion is, at best, premature. The Soviet Union is still the world's second or third largest economy, and possesses abundant economic potential. Its military capabilities are still formidable—especially its ground and air forces—and lie close to the key centers of industrial power. Although Gorbachev has eschewed direct confrontations with the West, has shown a willingness to resolve a number of persistent regional conflicts, and clearly hopes to reduce Soviet defense burdens through arms control or unilateral reductions, there is no guarantee that this restraint will not give way to more adventurous policies in the future. Indeed, if the United States abandoned containment, Soviet leaders might be more inclined to address their internal problems through a more aggressive foreign policy, because the risks would be smaller and the prospects for success would be greater. Grand strategy must take both capabilities and intentions into account, and at present, reports of the Soviet Union's demise have been greatly exaggerated. Barring a more substantial reduction in Soviet capabilities, the basic rationale for containment remains intact.

WHY CONTAINMENT IS STILL POSSIBLE. Has the relative decline of U.S. power left it too weak to bear the burden of containment?²⁹ Once again, this conclusion is premature at best. In particular, the tendency to blame U.S. economic ills on "strategic over-extension" (i.e., its overseas military commitments and defense spending) greatly oversimplifies the source of U.S. economic problems.³⁰ For example, defense spending is not the sole (or even the most important) cause of the U.S. budget deficit; increased social services, the expansion of indexed entitlements, and a chronic unwillingness to levy adequate taxes are equally responsible.³¹ Similarly, those who blame declining U.S. competitiveness on military expenditures tend to overlook the other

29. Representatives of this view include Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, chaps. 6 and 7; Layne, "Atlanticism Without NATO," p. 43; Sanders, "Security and Choice," pp. 700–701; and Chace, "A New Grand Strategy," pp. 3, 12. For additional background, see Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 514–535.

30. For example, Earl Ravenal has argued that the costs of containment "will wreck our economy and warp our society," and David Calleo suggests that present U.S. military commitments have produced a "fiscal nightmare." See Ravenal, "The Case for a Withdrawal of Our Forces," p. 75; and Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, p. 165 and *passim*.

31. See Peter G. Peterson, "The Morning After," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1987, pp. 43–69.

factors that hinder U.S. productivity, such as the low rate of personal savings and the lack of a coherent industrial policy. The evidence that defense spending hurts economic performance is ambiguous at best; although *excessive* defense spending can hurt any economy, its overall effects depend heavily on specific macroeconomic circumstances.³²

Most important of all, even if excessive defense spending has weakened the U.S. economy somewhat, the strategy of containment is not to blame. The United States alone controls more industrial power than the entire Warsaw Pact; with adequate allied support, mounting an effective and credible defense of the key centers of industrial power should not be beyond its means. Instead, problems emerge when the United States adopts goals beyond those of finite containment (as it did in Vietnam), or when it combines an extravagant and poorly managed defense buildup with fanciful fiscal policies like Reaganomics. As always, the real question is not whether the United States is capable of maintaining its present commitments, but whether they are worth the cost. And if a reduction in defense burdens is now advisable, the logical approach is to liquidate peripheral commitments while maintaining the essential ones. By focusing on the key centers of industrial power, finite containment does exactly that.

WHY U.S. VITAL INTERESTS HAVE NOT CHANGED. Finally, do changes in the distribution of power imply that the United States should reduce or redirect its overseas military commitments? Once again, the evidence suggests that this would be unwise. Although Japan, Korea, and the ASEAN nations (Association of South East Asian Nations) have achieved impressive growth rates over the past two decades, Western Europe remains the largest economic prize. Western Europe produces approximately 22 percent of gross world product, while the Far East (counting Japan but not China) produces only 12.5 percent.³³ Even more important, U.S. allies in the Far East do not

32. On these points, see Gordon Adams and David Gold, *Defense Spending and the Economy: Does the Defense Dollar Make a Difference?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 1987), especially pp. 2, 6–11; Huntington, “The U.S.—Decline or Renewal?”; Nye, “Understating U.S. Strengths”; Francis M. Bator, “Must We Retrench?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Spring 1989), pp. 93–123; and Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Political Economy of American National Strategy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (April 1989), pp. 381–406.

33. With the People’s Republic of China included, the percentage reaches 14.7 percent of gross world product (GWP), still substantially less than Western Europe. These figures are based on data in U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1986).

face as great a threat. The bulk of Soviet military power is directed at Western Europe; as a result, the U.S. commitment in the Far East can remain relatively modest.³⁴

Furthermore, the relative decline of U.S. power suggests that the case for a U.S. commitment to Europe (and to a lesser extent, to its allies in the Far East) may be even stronger today than it was immediately after World War II. At the beginning of the Cold War, the loss of Western Europe would have been serious but not disastrous; the U.S. controlled nearly 40 percent of gross world product in 1949 and Western Europe was just beginning its postwar recovery. Since then, however, the European contribution to NATO's economic and military strength has grown steadily while the U.S. share has declined.³⁵ If conquered and exploited, Europe's economic and military potential would increase Soviet warmaking capabilities far more now than it would have several decades ago. Thus, while the Western Alliance retains an impressive lead over its main adversary, the United States is increasingly dependent upon allied contributions to achieve this favorable result.³⁶ Advocates of isolationism or disengagement should consider how the world might look were these assets either absent from the equation or arrayed against us. The prospect is not comforting: Soviet control over Western Europe would provide the Soviet Union with an advantage of more than 2.5:1 over the United States in population and gross national product, to say nothing of tangible military assets. In other words, as the U.S. ability to defend Europe unilaterally has decreased, the U.S. interest in making sure that Europe remains independent has grown. Because Europe remains the

34. See International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 1988–89* (London: IISS, 1987), pp. 39–44.

35. From 1969 to 1979, for example, Western Europe's share of NATO's combined expenditures rose from 22.7 percent to almost 42 percent. The Reagan administration's rapid defense buildup reversed this trend, however, and Western Europe's share of NATO's combined expenditures had fallen to 32 percent by 1986. See Robert Art, "Fixing Transatlantic Bridges," *Foreign Policy*, No. 46 (Spring 1982), p. 70; and Gordon Adams and Eric Munz, *Fair Shares: Bearing the Burden of the NATO Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 1988), pp. 6, 18.

36. The United States produced 39 percent of gross world product in 1950, with Western Europe and Japan contributing a total of 17 percent. By 1984, the U.S. share had dropped to 26 percent while the allied share had grown to roughly 27 percent (NATO Europe plus Japan). In terms of military spending, the U.S. share of the global total declined from 51 percent in 1960 to 28 percent in 1984, while that of Europe and Japan had grown to more than 13 percent. See ACDA, *World Military Expenditures 1986*. Western Europe now contributes over 50 percent of NATO's active manpower, main battle tanks, and combat aircraft, roughly 45 percent of NATO artillery, and nearly 80 percent of NATO's trained reserves. See Adams and Munz, *Fair Shares*, pp. 26–28.

largest concentration of economic and military power (apart from the two superpowers) and because the Soviet Union poses a larger threat there than in the Far East, the United States should continue to devote its main military effort to NATO.³⁷

WHY THE THIRD WORLD DOESN'T MATTER. By contrast, the case for a greater U.S. commitment in the Third World is extremely weak. Although several studies have recently proposed that the United States reduce its commitment to Europe in order to increase its capacity for Third World intervention, there is little or no strategic justification for such a shift.³⁸ With the exception of oil, U.S. interests in the Third World are minor at best. The entire Third World produces less than 20 percent of gross world product, scattered over more than 100 countries. Africa has a combined GNP less than that of Great Britain; all of Latin America has a combined GNP smaller than that of West Germany. Because modern military power rests primarily upon industrial might, the strategic importance of the Third World is small.³⁹

Nor does the United States have critical economic interests there. Foreign trade is only 14 percent of U.S. GNP, and nearly two-thirds of all U.S. trade is with its industrial allies in Western Europe, Canada, and Japan. In 1986, U.S. trade with the entire Third World (including OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) was only 3.5 percent of U.S. GNP, spread across nearly 100 Third World trading partners.⁴⁰ The same is true for overseas investment: U.S. direct investment abroad is a small fraction of total U.S. wealth, and most of it is in Europe and Canada.⁴¹ Because U.S. trade

37. See Van Evera, "American Strategic Interests," pp. 12–13; Posen and Van Evera, "Departure from Containment," p. 79; and Keith A. Dunn, "NATO's Enduring Value," *Foreign Policy*, No. 71 (Summer 1988), pp. 156–175.

38. See Cohen, "Long Term Crisis of the Alliance," p. 342; and Brzezinski, *Game Plan*, pp. 182–184. The authors of *Discriminate Deterrence* point out that "nearly all the armed conflicts of the past forty years have occurred . . . in the Third World," and conclude that "the United States will need to be better prepared to deal with conflict" in these regions. Yet they offer no evidence for why these events are vital to U.S. interests; the importance of the Third World is simply assumed. See Iklé and Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence*, pp. 13–22.

39. See Van Evera, "American Strategic Interests," p. 25; and Posen and Van Evera, "Departure from Containment," pp. 95–96.

40. Calculated from *The State of the Economy: Report by the President 1987* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1987); and *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 1987* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1987), pp. 404–406.

41. In 1986, total U.S. direct foreign investment (DFI) was \$259.89 billion, equivalent to 6.5 percent of U.S. GNP for that year. Seventy-one percent of total U.S. DFI is invested in Canada, Western Europe, and Japan (nearly half in Western Europe alone). See Russell B. Scholl, "The International Investment Position of the United States in 1986," *Survey of Current Business*, June 1987, pp. 38–45.

relations and foreign investments are dispersed over many separate countries, the danger of a costly disruption is greatly reduced. In short, the United States has few economic interests to protect in the developing world.

Alarmists often point to alleged U.S. dependence on raw materials from the developing countries. According to this view, the U.S. economy requires reliable access to a wide variety of "critical strategic minerals" like cobalt, chromium, the platinum group, or manganese. Together with South Africa, several Third World countries are among the leading exporters of these minerals, which raises fears of a possible cutoff arising from Soviet penetration, leftist revolutions, or endemic political instability. Accordingly, some analysts argue that the United States must be prepared to intervene in order to preserve Western access to these raw materials, and to defend the sea lines of communication to these regions. Support for pro-Western mineral exporters (such as South Africa or Zaire) is often cited as a further consequence of alleged U.S. dependence.⁴²

Fortunately, such fears rest largely on propaganda. Although the United States imports a large percentage of its annual consumption of certain raw materials, it does so because foreign suppliers are the least expensive, not because they are the only alternative. The magnitude of a state's imports does not determine its dependence on others; what is important is the cost of replacing existing sources of supply or doing without them entirely.⁴³ A lengthy embargo is a remote possibility—why would a poor Third World country cut off a major source of revenue?—and the United States can rely upon alternative suppliers, substitutes, and plentiful stockpiles.⁴⁴ An em-

42. For pessimistic appraisals of Western raw materials dependence, see Uri Ra'anana and Charles M. Perry, eds., *Strategic Minerals and International Security* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985); Alan C. Brownfeld, "The Growing United States' Dependency on Imported Strategic Minerals," *Atlantic Community Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1982), pp. 62–67; Council on Economics and National Security, *Strategic Minerals: A Resource Crisis* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980); Robert J. Hanks, *Southern Africa and Western Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1983), pp. 10–15, 53; and Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, *Annual Report to the Congress, FY 1984* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1983), p. 29. For other examples and a critique, see Richard E. Feinberg, *The Intemperate Zone: The Third World Challenge to U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Norton, 1983), chap. 2.

43. See Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Myth of National Interdependence," in Charles P. Kindleberger, ed., *The International Corporation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), pp. 205–223; and also Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, chap. 7.

44. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), "the United States has a considerable range of policy options to reduce its dependence on nonfuel imported minerals and limit the impact of any shortages that might result from such dependence." See CBO, "Strategic and Critical Nonfuel Minerals: Problems and Policy Alternatives" (Washington, D.C.: CBO, 1983), pp. xi–xii and *passim*. For other reassuring analyses on this issue, see Michael Shafer, "Mineral

bargo might have some modest economic effects, but not much more than that. In short, the danger of a "resource war" is minuscule.

There is a final argument for a greater U.S. role in the Third World. Third World countries are said to be important for geopolitical reasons, because they occupy "strategic real estate."⁴⁵ The fear is that these countries might provide military facilities to the Soviet Union in time of war, thereby allowing the Soviets to threaten critical lines of communication. Thus, even if these states lack meaningful capabilities of their own, their geographic positions may give them some modest strategic value.

Once again, the importance of this factor is exaggerated. Given the low intrinsic value of the Third World, military bases there are important only if they can be used to affect events in areas that do matter. With the possible exception of Cuba (which might be able to delay—though not prevent—U.S. reinforcement of Europe), the Soviet Union's Third World clients could not affect the outcome of a major war. And because the Soviet Union cannot easily defend these regimes, they are likely to opt for neutrality, knowing that they would be among the first targets of a U.S. counterattack.⁴⁶ In short, although a few Third World states may have some modest strategic value,

Myths," *Foreign Policy*, No. 47 (Summer 1982), pp. 154–171; Stephen D. Krasner, "Oil is the Exception," *Foreign Policy*, No. 14 (Spring 1974), pp. 68–84; Brian McCartan, "Resource Wars: The Myth of American Mineral Vulnerability," *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. 14, No. 9 (Center for Defense Information, 1985); Joel P. Clark and Frank R. Field III, et al., "How Critical Are Critical Materials?" *Technology Review*, Vol. 88, No. 6 (August/September 1985), pp. 39–46; and Jock A. Finlayson and David G. Haglund, "Whatever Happened to the Resource War?" *Survival*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (September/October 1987), pp. 403–415. Hanns Maull argues that Western raw materials dependence is substantial and should be taken seriously, but he notes that a variety of measures can minimize these risks rather easily. See Maull, *Energy, Minerals, and Western Security* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), chap. 4; and Maull, "South Africa's Minerals: The Achilles Heel of Western Economic Security?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Autumn 1986), pp. 619–626.

45. Obvious examples are states that border on major international waterways, such as Vietnam, Cuba, South Yemen, or Indonesia. See Robert E. Harkavy, "Soviet Conventional Power Projection and Containment," in Terry L. Deibel and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Concept and Policy*, Vol. II (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1986), pp. 311–400; Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power*, p. 101; Peter J. Duignan, "Africa Between East and West," in Dennis L. Bark, ed., *To Promote Peace: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Mid-1980s* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), p. 187; and Michael Gordon, "Reagan's 'Choke Points' Stretch from Sea to Sea," *New York Times*, February 13, 1986, p. A12.

46. If the United States lost a major war in Europe, it would be likely to seek revenge against states like Cuba or Nicaragua, particularly if they had aided the Soviet Union during the war. Such a defeat would also give the United States ample incentive to eliminate the threat of a Soviet "bridgehead" in the Western hemisphere. If the Soviets' Third World allies understand this (and U.S. leaders should make sure they do), they are unlikely to invite such an attack by supporting Moscow.

the overall strategic importance of the Third World remains small.⁴⁷ Those who would reallocate U.S. military assets toward the Third World have their priorities exactly backwards: they would weaken the U.S. position in the places that matter in order to stand guard in places that do not.

To summarize: the rationale for finite containment rests upon the current distribution of world power, defined in terms of economic and military capabilities. Although the balance of power has changed somewhat since the late 1940s, these trends in fact strengthen the case for finite containment.

The Offense-Defense Balance: Is Conquest Easy or Difficult?

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has suggested that the offense-defense balance plays a major role in the frequency and intensity of international conflict.⁴⁸ If offense is or is thought to be relatively easy (i.e., states can expand at low cost), then national leaders must worry more about security and do more to protect it. By contrast, when defense is easier (especially when it is easy to distinguish between offensive and defensive capabilities), states can protect their territory with greater confidence at lower cost. The probability of war declines because potential aggressors will realize that they will pay a high price for relatively small gains.⁴⁹ As one would expect, therefore, competing assessments about the ease of offense or defense lead to different prescriptions for U.S. grand strategy.

47. For an excellent analysis of this issue, see Robert H. Johnson, "Exaggerating America's Stakes in Third World Conflicts," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Winter 1985/86), pp. 32–68. On Latin America, see Lars Schoultz, *National Security and United States Policy Toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Jerome Slater, "Dominos in Central America: Will They Fall? Does it Matter?" *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall 1987), pp. 105–134. For more pessimistic views, see Michael C. Desch, "Turning the Caribbean Flank," *Survival*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (November/December 1987), pp. 528–551; and Alvin H. Bernstein, "The Soviets in Cam Ranh Bay," *The National Interest*, No. 3 (Spring 1986), pp. 17–29.

48. On the effects of offensive and defensive advantages, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214; Stephen W. Van Evera, "Causes of War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1984); and George Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: John Wiley, 1977). For a sympathetic critique of this literature, see Jack S. Levy, "The Offensive/Defensive Balance of Military Technology: A Theoretical and Historical Analysis," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1984), pp. 219–238.

49. When the offense has the advantage, states are more likely to: 1) spend more on military capabilities; 2) adopt offensive military doctrines; 3) seek to acquire territory because it is both easy to do and because territory is more valuable; and 4) engage in a more aggressive foreign policy (including preemptive or preventive wars). See Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma"; and Van Evera, "Causes of War."

In general, those who endorse strategies of rollback or global containment believe that offensive action is easy, and that the United States and its allies are thus extremely vulnerable to attack by the Soviet Union or by other hostile forces. Some also assume that the United States can score significant gains through offensive actions of its own. By contrast, those who favor isolationism, disengagement, or finite containment usually stress the relative advantage of defense. Even if the Soviet Union is extremely aggressive and U.S. interests are extensive, these writers see protecting U.S. interests as a relatively easy task. By the same logic, these writers see inherent limits in what the United States can accomplish; efforts to expand U.S. influence through force or subversion are likely to be difficult and costly.

This general debate appears in many guises, corresponding to the different ways that states can threaten one another.⁵⁰ Throughout the Cold War, for example, communist subversion has been seen as an offensive threat that required and justified an expanded U.S. commitment to distant regions.⁵¹ Advocates of rollback have also argued that the Soviet empire is vulnerable to subversion, propaganda, and other forms of “political warfare.”⁵² Taking this belief a step further, writers like James Burnham claimed that rollback was necessary because the United States and the Soviet Union represented antithetical political values whose very existence threatened each other’s legitimacy.⁵³ By this logic, both superpowers were vulnerable to ideological subversion, so it was rational for the United States to undermine communist regimes before their subversive efforts could succeed.

50. In addition to direct military action, states can also threaten each other by subversion or propaganda. However, such campaigns rarely succeed, even against relatively weak governments, because the targets usually respond quickly to attempts by foreign powers to mobilize domestic discontent. For evidence and further discussion, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, pp. 242–251.

51. When seeking congressional support for aid to Greece and Turkey, for example, Dean Acheson warned that “a highly possible Soviet breakthrough might open three continents to Soviet penetration. Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa . . . , and to Europe through Italy and France. . . . The Soviet Union was playing one of the greatest gambles in history at minimal cost.” See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 293. For a more recent version of this argument, see “President Reagan’s Speech Urging Support for Nicaraguan Contra Rebels,” *Facts on File*, March 21, 1986, p. 180.

52. See Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?* chaps. 9–11; Aaron Wildavsky, “Containment Plus Pluralization,” and Max Singer, “Dynamic Containment,” in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment; and Churba, Soviet Breakout*, pp. 130–132.

53. This theme is echoed by neo-conservative writers like Irving Kristol. See Kristol, “Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology,” pp. 7–9. See also Churba, *Soviet Breakout*.

Advocates of global containment also stress the offensive nature of Soviet military forces and suggest that it would be relatively easy for them to conquer Western Europe, the Persian Gulf, or the Middle East.⁵⁴ Predictably, these writers assume that contemporary politico-military conditions favor the attacker.⁵⁵ By contrast, those who downplay the danger of Soviet expansion generally believe that defenders enjoy a substantial advantage over attacking forces, at least when fighting from prepared positions.⁵⁶

This dispute also reflects differing views on the impact of nuclear weapons. On one side, advocates of rollback and global containment almost always favor continued increases in U.S. counterforce capabilities. To justify this recommendation, they suggest that nuclear weapons make conquest easier by inhibiting the U.S. ability to resist conventional aggression or diplomatic pressure. In the 1970s, for example, Paul Nitze and others suggested that the *theoretical* vulnerability of U.S. land-based ICBMs could enable the USSR to extract major political concessions from the United States without firing a

54. Recent analyses stressing the danger of a Soviet offensive in Europe include James A. Thomson, "An Unfavorable Situation: NATO and the Conventional Balance," N-2842-FF/RC (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1988); "An Exclusive AFJ Interview with: Phillip A. Karber," *Armed Forces Journal International*, Vol. 124, No. 11 (June 1987), pp. 112–117; Eliot A. Cohen, "Toward Better Net Assessment: Rethinking the European Conventional Balance," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Summer 1988), pp. 50–89; and Huntington, "Renewal of Strategy," pp. 22–23. With respect to the Persian Gulf, Huntington writes that "if the Soviets were free to concentrate their forces on Southwest Asia, they clearly could overrun any force that the Western allies and Japan might deploy in a reasonable amount of time." See "Renewal of Strategy," p. 27. For an especially dire view on the Gulf, see Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, chap. 7.

55. As Huntington puts it: "the great advantage to the offensive is that the attacker chooses the point [of attack] and hence can concentrate his forces there." Huntington believes that NATO's forces are weaker than those of the Warsaw Pact, but he suggests that "history is full of successful offensives by forces that lacked numerical superiority." Thus, NATO's forces cannot defend their own territory but are somehow strong enough to conduct a "prompt retaliatory counter-offensive" into Eastern Europe. A clearer example of the belief in offense dominance would be hard to find. See Huntington, "The Renewal of Strategy," pp. 29–30; and Huntington, "Conventional Deterrence and Conventional Retaliation in Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Winter 1983/84), pp. 46–47. For a similar appraisal, see Iklé and Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence*, pp. 27–28.

56. For relatively optimistic appraisals of the balance in Europe, see Barry R. Posen, "Measuring the European Conventional Balance: Coping with Complexity in Threat Assessment," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Winter 1984/85), pp. 47–88; and Posen, "Is NATO Decisively Outnumbered?" *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 186–202; Joshua M. Epstein, "Dynamic Analysis and the Conventional Balance in Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 154–165; John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 3–39; and Mearsheimer, "Numbers, Strategy, and the European Balance," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 174–185. All of these writers assume that defenders have a tactical advantage in a European battle.

shot.⁵⁷ Similarly, other writers argue that an effective deterrent requires U.S. nuclear superiority, because threats to use nuclear weapons will not be credible unless the United States possesses “escalation dominance.” Rather than reducing U.S. defense requirements, in short, nuclear weapons make the requirements of deterrence even more demanding. Writers who endorse this view call for the United States to regain meaningful strategic superiority through increased counterforce capabilities and “defensive” weapons programs like the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).⁵⁸

By contrast, advocates of isolationism, disengagement, or finite containment usually claim that nuclear weapons make defense easier. In this view, the physical characteristics of nuclear explosives make it impossible for either superpower to escape the world of Mutual Assured Destruction.⁵⁹ Crises thus become contests of will; it is the balance of commitment and interests, not the balance of forces, that determines the outcome. Because the side defending the status quo should possess greater resolve, nuclear weapons aid defenders, irrespective of force levels. In this view, the imposing deterrent effects of nuclear weapons increase each side’s ability to defend its vital interests.⁶⁰

57. See Paul H. Nitze, “Assuring Strategic Stability in an Era of Détente,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (January 1976), pp. 207–232; and Nitze, “Deterring Our Deterrent,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 25 (Winter 1976–77), pp. 195–210. For an even more far-reaching version, see Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, chap. 5. For critiques, see John Steinbruner and Thomas Garwin, “Strategic Vulnerability: The Balance between Prudence and Paranoia,” *International Security*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1976), pp. 138–181; Albert Carnesale and Charles Glaser, “ICBM Vulnerability: The Cures Are Worse Than the Disease,” *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 76–78; and Jan M. Lodal, “Assuring Strategic Stability: An Alternate View,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (April 1976), pp. 462–481.

58. For representative examples, see Huntington, “Renewal of Strategy,” pp. 32–40; Colin S. Gray, “Nuclear Strategy: The Case for a Theory of Victory,” *International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Summer 1979), pp. 54–87; Iklé and Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence*, pp. 35–37; Brzezinski, *Game Plan*, pp. 159–168; and Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, pp. 108–111, 120–122.

59. Both superpowers would have thousands of warheads and hundreds of equivalent megatons left after the *best* first strike that the other could inflict. See Michael A. Salman, Kevin J. Sullivan, and Stephen Van Evera, “Analysis or Propaganda? Measuring American Strategic Nuclear Capability, 1969–1988,” in Lynn Eden and Steven E. Miller, eds., *Nuclear Arguments: Understanding the Strategic Nuclear Arms and Arms Control Debates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Joshua M. Epstein, *The 1988 Defense Budget* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987), pp. 21–27. Another recent study concludes that even drastic arms reductions would not confer a first-strike capability on either superpower and would not reduce civilian casualties significantly in a nuclear war. See Michael M. May, George F. Bing, and John D. Steinbruner, *Strategic Arms Reductions* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1988).

60. See Robert Jervis, *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, Adelphi Paper No. 171 (London: IISS, Autumn 1981).

Finally, world order idealists adopt a somewhat different view of the offense-defense balance. On the one hand, they agree that defensive strategies are desirable and feasible, and they support a variety of schemes for territorial and “non-offensive” defense.⁶¹ On the other hand, they reject reliance upon nuclear deterrence, arguing that the risks of a nuclear war outweigh the stabilizing effects of these weapons. Instead, these writers favor far-reaching efforts at nuclear and conventional disarmament, leading to the rapid and total elimination of all nuclear weapons.⁶²

In short, competing appraisals of the offense-defense balance exert a powerful impact on the assessment of military requirements and the development of grand strategy. If offense is easy, then U.S. strategic requirements increase significantly. Strategies of rollback or global containment become more attractive under these conditions. If expansion is hard, however, then U.S. leaders can take a more relaxed view of potential threats and adopt less demanding goals. The question, therefore, is which of these views provides the best guidance for U.S. grand strategy today?

WHY DEFENSE HAS THE ADVANTAGE

The available evidence suggests that defense enjoys a major advantage in the contemporary world. This may not be true for all states in all circumstances, but in general, and especially with respect to key U.S. interests, conquest has become particularly difficult.

This condition results from four key developments. First, the spread of nationalism has increased the costs of expansion and foreign occupation. The British experience in India, the French and American experience in Vietnam, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, and Israel’s occupation of Lebanon all support this conclusion: native populations enjoy superior knowledge of local conditions and are usually willing to bear greater costs than foreign invaders, which makes conquering and holding foreign territory often more expensive than it is worth.⁶³ Similarly, the growth of modern

61. See Dietrich Fischer, *Preventing War in the Nuclear Age* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984); Forsberg, “Confining the Military to Defense,” esp. p. 310; and the symposium on “Nonoffensive Defense,” in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 44, No. 7 (September 1988), pp. 12–54. For a summary and critique of some of these ideas, see David Gates, “Area Defense Concepts: The West German Debate,” *Survival*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (July/August 1987), pp. 301–317.

62. See, for example, Forsberg, “Confining the Military to Defense.”

63. As Ho Chi Minh told a French diplomat in 1945: “You will kill ten of our men, but we will kill one of yours and it is you who will finish by wearing yourself out.” Quoted in John T. McAlister, Jr., *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 296.

nationalism makes it more likely that efforts to acquire and manipulate clients through subversion or covert penetration will backfire.⁶⁴

Second, this trend is enhanced by the increased availability of modern weapons, especially small arms.⁶⁵ During the heyday of European expansion, the colonial powers enjoyed enormous technological superiority over their opponents. In the modern era, however, resistance movements can readily obtain the military means of inflicting protracted costs on a foreign invader, as the conflicts in Afghanistan, Indochina, and Lebanon illustrate.

Third, despite the creative efforts of some writers to plead the offensive implications of nuclear arms, they are overwhelmingly an advantage to the defender. Not only do nuclear weapons make a direct attack on the United States virtually unthinkable, but they deter threats to other interests as well. Although the historical record is not definitive, the evidence suggests that political leaders in all nuclear states have been reluctant to challenge each other's vital interests in the face of even weak nuclear threats. One cannot *prove* that nuclear weapons have helped keep the peace and inhibit expansion, but the record of the past four decades is extremely persuasive.⁶⁶

Fourth, U.S. security is enhanced by the fact that its vital interests are relatively easy to defend. In particular, the Central Front in Europe provides an excellent setting for a prepared defense against armored attack.⁶⁷ Defend-

See also Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175–200.

64. Such tactics might include supporting a coup by a dissident faction, or attempting to influence emerging elites through military or educational assistance. Because impeccable nationalist credentials remain an important qualification for leadership in most states, however, leaders who are perceived as foreign puppets are unlikely to reach positions of power or to remain in them for long. For further discussion, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, pp. 244–251.

65. For surveys of the global arms market, see Anthony Sampson, *The Arms Bazaar: From Lebanon to Lockheed* (New York: Viking Press, 1977); Stephanie G. Neuman and Robert E. Harkavy, eds., *Arms Transfers in the Modern World* (New York: Praeger, 1979); and Andrew Pierre, *The Global Politics of Arms Sales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

66. Virtually all scholarly studies of the impact of nuclear weapons on diplomacy suggest that national leaders believed these weapons greatly inhibited their freedom of action, irrespective of the precise state of the nuclear balance. See Marc Trachtenberg, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Summer 1985), pp. 137–163; Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987); McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), pp. 378–382, 445–453, 589–597; and Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Military Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1978), pp. 127–129. For a provocative argument that nuclear weapons have had little impact on stability, see John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 1988), pp. 55–79.

67. Among other things, attack routes in Central Europe are heavily congested, forcing an

ers enjoy considerable advantage in this type of warfare, because they can fight from prepared positions and exact a favorable casualty-exchange ratio on the attacking forces. Similarly, a Soviet attempt to seize the Persian Gulf oil fields would be a risky and difficult operation. Not only is Iran likely to mount a fierce resistance, but the oil fields lie roughly 1000 kilometers from the Soviet border. The terrain is inhospitable and road networks are primitive; thus Soviet armored forces would be extremely vulnerable to air interdiction. These factors do not guarantee that a Soviet attack would fail, but they suggest that deterring or defeating a Soviet attack is not beyond present U.S. capabilities.⁶⁸

In sum, obstacles to large-scale aggression may be greater now than at any time in modern history. This does not mean that expansion is impossible, of course, but since World War II, successful examples are few in number and involved substantially greater costs than were originally anticipated.⁶⁹ Those who believe that offensive advantages render U.S. security especially precarious have yet to present strong evidence for their position. Indeed, the evidence strongly supports the opposite view.

Are these defensive advantages so great as to permit the United States to reduce its overseas commitments? Advocates of isolationism or disengagement tend to believe that they are, in part by assuming that nuclear weapons render the traditional focus on industrial power obsolete. In this view, even if the Soviet Union were able to seize Western Europe, it would be unable to exploit Europe's industrial potential and would still be deterred by the threat of nuclear retaliation from attacking the United States directly.⁷⁰ Sim-

attacker into narrow and well-defined attack routes. See Paul Bracken, "Urban Sprawl and NATO Defence," *Survival*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (November/December 1976), pp. 254–260.

68. On the obstacles to a Soviet invasion, see Joshua M. Epstein, "Soviet Vulnerabilities in Iran and the RDF Deterrent," *International Security*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 1981), pp. 126–158; and Keith Dunn, "Constraints on the USSR in Southwest Asia: A Military Analysis," *Orbis*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 607–629.

69. Examples of successful expansion include Israel's conquest of the Golan Heights and West Bank, India's seizure of Kashmir, Sikkim, and Goa, China's conquest of Tibet, North Vietnam's expansion into South Vietnam and Cambodia, Libya's occupation of the Aouzo Strip, Morocco's seizure of the Western Sahara, Turkey's occupation of Cyprus, and Indonesia's conquest of East Timor. Perhaps only Kashmir, Goa, Sikkim, and East Timor are not being actively contested at the present time.

70. See Ravenal, *NATO: The Tides of Discontent*; Richard J. Barnet, *Real Security: Restoring American Power in a Dangerous Decade* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), pp. 90–98; Layne, "Atlanticism Without NATO," pp. 27–28; Sanders and Schwenninger, "Foreign Policy for the Post-Reagan Era"; Sanders, "Security and Choice," p. 710; Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, chap. 9; and Chace, "A New Grand Strategy," pp. 12–16.

ilarly, analysts with great confidence in the credibility of extended deterrence have suggested that the United States could deploy just a "trip-wire" force in Europe or the Persian Gulf and rely primarily upon the threat of escalation to deter an attack.⁷¹ In either case, the advantage currently enjoyed by defenders is used to justify bringing U.S. forces back to the United States.

These arguments are not without some basis, but the conclusion should be rejected for at least three reasons. First, the current condition of defense dominance is not independent of U.S. policy; the U.S. commitment to oppose Soviet expansion raises the obstacles to such actions considerably.⁷² Europe would still be difficult to conquer if the United States withdrew, but it would certainly be easier. Thus, the U.S. commitment provides a valuable insurance policy against a remote but very important contingency.⁷³ Second, although the United States can easily maintain its second-strike capability today, an arms race with a Eurasian hegemon with the combined technological and industrial assets of the Soviet Union, Western Europe, and Japan (and more than twice the U.S. GNP) would be a daunting prospect. Third, although nuclear weapons enhance the defender's advantage through deterrence, this advantage is not as great in third areas as it is when deterring direct attacks against one's homeland. A "trip-wire" strategy might work, but in the absence of large U.S. conventional forces, the Soviets could more easily convince themselves that the strategy was a bluff. By contrast, maintaining a substantial U.S. presence in Europe offers a convincing demonstration of its importance to the United States and provides a credible capacity to respond to a Soviet conventional assault. Given the costs and risks of *any* war in Europe and the fact that NATO is far wealthier than the Warsaw Pact, the deployment of U.S. ground and air forces on the continent seems well worth continuing.⁷⁴

All things considered, the prevailing state of defense dominance supports a strategy of finite containment. Preventing Soviet expansion is the central

71. Among those advocating a "trip-wire" force is Kenneth N. Waltz, in "A Strategy for the Rapid Deployment Force," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Spring 1981), pp. 49-73; and Waltz, "Spread of Nuclear Weapons," p. 7.

72. For example, the resistance movement in Afghanistan was greatly strengthened by the U.S. decision to provide ground-to-air missiles and other military supplies.

73. Some writers complain that the U.S. commitment to Europe is an expensive burden directed at a low-probability event. This view ignores the fact that the U.S. commitment is part of the reason why such an event is so unlikely.

74. It is also in the U.S. interest to ensure that it retains the dominant influence in NATO decisions regarding the deployment and use of nuclear weapons. Maintaining a large conventional commitment to Europe is probably the best way to do this.

goal of this strategy; the fact that conquest is difficult makes it feasible and affordable. U.S. commitments in Europe and the Far East increase the obstacles to aggression and should be maintained for precisely this reason. Finally, defense-dominance cuts both ways: the same factors that make it easy to defend U.S. interests make U.S. efforts to seize key *Soviet* interests both costly and extremely risky. For all of these reasons, therefore, arguments for rollback, isolationism, or disengagement are not persuasive.

What Are Soviet Intentions?

One's view of the merits of alternative grand strategies is also influenced by one's image of the adversary. Obviously, states that are strongly motivated to alter the status quo pose a greater threat than those that seek only to defend their own territory. When facing a highly expansionist regime, therefore, states will seek additional allies and increased military capabilities in order to improve their chances of deterring or defeating an attack.

Not surprisingly, then, disagreements about U.S. grand strategy are shaped by differing views about Soviet intentions.⁷⁵ Rollback and global containment rest on the assumption that the Soviet Union is highly expansionist. Writers who favor these strategies tend to portray the Soviet Union as equivalent to Nazi Germany; for them, it is a ruthless totalitarian power driven to relentless expansion by ideological convictions or domestic political requirements. Efforts at appeasement are doomed to fail; deterring Soviet expansion or reversing Soviet gains requires superior military power and unquestionable U.S. resolve.⁷⁶ By contrast, isolationist or idealist writers

75. On this general point, the classic analysis is Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3. See also Richard Herrmann, *Perceptions and Behavior in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), chap. 1; Robert E. Osgood, et al., *Containment, Soviet Behavior, and Grand Strategy* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1981), pp. 8–15; and Barry R. Posen, "Competing Images of the Soviet Union," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (July 1987), pp. 579–597.

76. This view goes back at least as far as NSC 68. For other examples, see Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?*; Podhoretz, *Present Danger*, pp. 91–95; Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, chap. 2; Wildavsky, "Containment Plus Pluralization," in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment*; Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power*, chap. 9, especially pp. 95–96; Committee on the Present Danger, "What Is the Soviet Union Up To?" and "Is America Becoming Number 2?" reprinted in Charles Tyroler II, ed., *Alerting America: The Papers of the Committee on the Present Danger* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984), pp. 10–14, 39–40; H. Joachim Maitre, "Soviet Military Power," in Bark, *To Promote Peace*, pp. 215–230; and Iklé and Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence*, p. 63. Harsh assessments of Soviet intentions often portray the Soviet Union as a "paper tiger" that will back down if confronted. As Richard Herrmann points out, this image is impossible to falsify because

often assume that the Soviet Union is a highly insecure status quo power. This view implies that deterrence is unnecessary and that the United States should concentrate on alleviating Soviet fears through cooperative diplomacy.⁷⁷ Finally, those who favor limited forms of containment tend to see Soviet foreign policy as reflecting both insecurity and ambition. They conclude that a combination of deterrent threats and positive inducements, corresponding to shifts in Soviet behavior, offers the greatest chance of protecting U.S. interests.⁷⁸ Each of these prescriptions follows directly from an assessment of Soviet intentions.

At the onset of the Cold War, there was considerable uncertainty regarding the scope of Soviet aims and Soviet willingness to take risks to achieve them. After forty years, however, we have considerable experience upon which to base this appraisal. The evidence is not definitive, of course, because aggressors that have been successfully deterred behave much like status quo powers. Nor does it provide a perfect guide to future conduct. Nonetheless, the experience of the past four decades should not be ignored.⁷⁹

The historical record does not support an image of the Soviet Union as either a highly aggressive power or an insecure status quo state. Unlike the great expansionist states of the past (revolutionary France, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, etc.), the Soviet Union has yet to engage in a direct test of military strength with any of its major adversaries.⁸⁰ Nor has

"proponents . . . can interpret evidence inconsistent with the expansionist proposition as evidence of Soviet restraint in the face of U.S. strength; the USSR was simply 'compelled to behave'." See Herrmann, *Perceptions and Behavior*, p. 12.

77. The most extreme version of this approach is the revisionist school of Cold War historiography, which places primary responsibility for the Cold War on the United States. Contemporary writers who take a benign view of Soviet intentions include Radway, "Let Europe Be Europe," pp. 34–38; Richard J. Barnet, "Why Trust the Soviets?" *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring 1984), pp. 461–482, and Barnet, "The Four Pillars," p. 80; Forsberg, "Confining the Military to Defense," pp. 292–293; and Sanders, "Security and Choice," pp. 709–710.

78. This view formed the basis for George Kennan's original prescription for containment. See "X" [Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1947), pp. 566–582. For more recent versions, see Posen, "Competing Images of the Soviet Union"; Kenneth N. Waltz, "Another Gap?" in Osgood, et al., *Containment, Soviet Behavior, and Grand Strategy*, pp. 79–80; John Lewis Gaddis, "Containment: Its Past and Future," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Spring 1981), pp. 74–102; and Ernst B. Haas, "On Hedging Our Bets: Selective Engagement with the Soviet Union," in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment*, pp. 93–124.

79. For a summary of these different images, combined with a careful attempt to test their relative validity, see Herrmann, *Perceptions and Behavior*. For an earlier assessment of Western views, see William Welch, *American Images of Soviet Foreign Policy: An Inquiry into Recent Appraisals from the Academic Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

80. Among other things, this behavior casts grave doubt on the belief that Soviet leaders would risk the lives of millions of Soviet citizens in a nuclear confrontation, even if their own survival

Soviet foreign policy been significantly more aggressive than that of the United States; Soviet interventions in Eastern Europe and support for Third World clients mirror the U.S. role in Latin America, the CIA's assorted covert action campaigns, and U.S. support for its own array of Third World allies. Furthermore, the Soviet's most aggressive postwar action—the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979—occurred in an area that the United States had long indicated was of minor interest at best. Even the deployment of missiles to Cuba in 1962 is most accurately seen as a defensive act, given the strategic situation facing the Soviet Union at that time and its resemblance to the U.S. deployment of nuclear missiles in Turkey.⁸¹ Finally, the Soviet Union has shown a capacity to reverse course when costs and risks outweighed benefits, as it is now doing in Afghanistan.⁸² Although testing motivations is inherently difficult and the available evidence is incomplete, an image of the Soviet Union as an ambitious but cautious great power is probably closest to the truth.⁸³

Does the “Gorbachev revolution” justify altering this conclusion? In particular, does the Soviet Union's recent interest in defensive military doctrines, together with its recent offers to withdraw thousands of troops and tanks from Eastern Europe and to reduce total Soviet military manpower by 500,000 troops, suggest that the United States should adopt a new grand strategy?⁸⁴

were assured. For examples of this belief: Richard Pipes, “Why the Soviet Union Believes It Can Fight and Win a Nuclear War,” *Commentary*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (1977), pp. 21–34; and Seymour Weiss, “Labyrinth Under Moscow,” *Washington Post*, May 25, 1988, p. A19.

81. Given the small size of the Soviet strategic arsenal and its vulnerability to surprise attack, the United States may have been close to a first-strike capability in the early 1960s. The decision to deploy missiles in Cuba was thus a “quick fix” for the strategic balance and possibly an attempt to deter U.S. efforts to overthrow Castro. See Raymond L. Garthoff, “Intelligence Assessment and Policymaking: A Decision Point in the Kennedy Administration,” Staff Paper (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1984), pp. 29–31; and Garthoff, “Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Story,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 72 (Fall 1988), pp. 63–66; Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, pp. 415–420; and James G. Blight and David Welch, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Rerexamine the Missile Crisis* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), pp. 228–244.

82. On declining Soviet interest in the Third World, see Elizabeth K. Valkenier, “Revolutionary Change in the Third World: Recent Soviet Assessments,” *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (April 1986), pp. 415–434; Jack Snyder, “The Gorbachev Revolution: A Waning of Soviet Expansionism?” *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Winter 1987/88), pp. 93–131; and Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World*, R-3337-USDP (Santa Monica: RAND, 1986).

83. See Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-taking and Crisis Behavior: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

84. These proposals were originally announced in Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations on December 7, 1988. See the *New York Times*, December 8, 1988, p. A1. The Soviets proposed further reductions in May 1989, as part of the conventional arms control negotiations that began in March 1989.

The answer is no. Although these reforms may lead to a reduction in Soviet military capabilities (thereby reducing U.S. force requirements), it does not justify abandoning the fundamental premises of containment. Gorbachev's efforts to "restructure" Soviet society have been only partially successful thus far, and they have yet to make a significant dent in Soviet military power. Even more important, the belief that *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) imply a permanent reduction in the Soviet threat rests on the widespread but unproven hope that a more open Soviet society will be less inclined to expand.⁸⁵ This conclusion may be too optimistic: the Soviet Union will remain an authoritarian regime, and if *perestroika* succeeds in reinvigorating the Soviet economy and increasing the Soviet Union's relative power, the West could face a more formidable adversary in the future than it does today. Furthermore, the domestic tensions unleashed by *perestroika* (such as the resurgence of ethnic nationalism) may have unpredictable effects on Soviet foreign policy. Thus, there is little reason to abandon the basic tenets of containment at present.

These warnings do not mean that the United States and its allies should ignore the hopeful prospects raised by Gorbachev's reforms. The West should continue to seek a more durable détente—both for its own sake and to prevent Gorbachev's diplomatic initiatives from undermining Western cohesion. So long as the Soviet Union remains the most threatening Eurasian power, however, the fundamental rationale for containment remains intact. As the threat declines (through reductions in Soviet forces or a more defensively oriented military posture), the United States and its allies can reduce their own military preparations as well.⁸⁶ In short, Gorbachev's recent initiatives do not alter the case for finite containment, but they may allow this strategy to be implemented at lower cost.

All things considered, the available evidence suggests that deterring Soviet expansion does not require the extraordinary efforts proposed by advocates of rollback or global containment. At the same time, Soviet capabilities are still potent and one cannot be sure that the Soviets would not exploit op-

85. For a sophisticated presentation of this view, see Snyder, "The Gorbachev Revolution." For an alternative appraisal, Stephen M. Meyer, "The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 1988), pp. 124–163.

86. An obvious example is President Bush's recent proposal that the United States withdraw 30,000 U.S. troops from Europe as part of a conventional arms control agreement. This proposal was endorsed at a NATO summit meeting in Brussels on May 29–30, 1989, and reflects an awareness that substantial decreases in Soviet military power can reduce—though not eliminate—the need for U.S. troops in Europe.

portunities when they arise. In terms of grand strategy, therefore, isolationism and disengagement run the risk of encouraging Soviet expansion, but rollback and global containment are both provocative and largely unnecessary. Finally, although the United States should welcome Gorbachev's efforts to reform the Soviet domestic order, U.S. leaders should not exaggerate their ability to influence this process or to predict its impact on foreign policy. For all of these reasons, finite containment remains the best alternative for the foreseeable future.

What Are the Causes of Alignment?

When formulating a grand strategy, national leaders must also consider the forces that will lead other states to join forces with them or to unite in opposition.⁸⁷ As a result, debates about foreign policy and grand strategy also turn on disputes about the causes of alignment. In general, advocates of rollback and global containment argue that U.S. allies are likely to "bandwagon" with the Soviet Union should U.S. power or credibility begin to wane.⁸⁸ Since the beginning of the Cold War, this fear has been invoked repeatedly to justify military buildups or overseas intervention.⁸⁹ This argument is still popular: when seeking support for the Nicaraguan *contras* in 1983, for example, President Reagan predicted that "if we cannot win in Central America, our credibility will collapse and our alliance will crumble."⁹⁰ These writers often maintain that ideology is a powerful cause of alignment as well, which implies that leftist or Marxist states will be strongly inclined to ally with the Soviet Union. If these hypotheses are true, the United States

87. The discussion in this section draws heavily upon Walt, *Origins of Alliances*.

88. Examples of this belief include Iklé and Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence*, pp. 13–14; Aaron Wildavsky, "Dilemmas of American Foreign Policy," in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment*, p. 13; Podhoretz, *Present Danger*, pp. 40–41, 58–60; Burnham, *Containment or Liberation?* pp. 245–247; and Churba, *Soviet Breakout*, pp. 42–45, 70–71.

89. See "U.S. Objectives and Programs for National Security" (NSC 68), reprinted in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 404, 414, 418, 4343. On the impact of U.S. leaders' concerns about credibility in motivating Third World intervention, see Bruce W. Jentleson, "American Commitments in the Third World: Theory vs. Practice," *International Organization*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Autumn 1987), pp. 667–704.

90. See "Speech to a Joint Session of Congress on Central America," *New York Times*, April 28, 1983, p. A12. For other examples of bandwagoning logic, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, pp. 3–4, 19–20; and Deborah Welch Larson, "The Bandwagon Metaphor and the Role of Institutions," in Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Superpower Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

must act to prevent Marxist regimes from coming to power or must attempt to overthrow them if they do.⁹¹

By contrast, less ambitious strategies—including finite containment—reflect precisely the opposite view. These strategies assume that states are more likely to balance against threats rather than bandwagon with them; in this view, Soviet efforts to expand will trigger increased opposition from other powerful states. Similarly, finite containment assumes that ideology is a rather weak force for alignment. Although U.S. leaders may prefer democracy, this strategy assumes that U.S. security is not endangered by ideological diversity.⁹²

Which of these competing beliefs is correct? The available evidence overwhelmingly supports the latter view. First, as I have argued at length elsewhere, balancing behavior predominates in international politics. This tendency defeated the various attempts to achieve hegemony in the European great power system and helps explain why the U.S. defeat in Indochina led to increased cooperation among the ASEAN countries and accelerated the Sino-American rapprochement. These cases are hardly isolated examples; similar behavior is characteristic of international politics in the Middle East and South Asia as well.⁹³ Second, as the history of international communism reveals (e.g., the quarrels between Stalin and Tito, Khrushchev and Mao, and the fratricidal conflict between Kampuchea, Vietnam, and China), Marxist ideology has been a relatively weak motive for alignment. Indeed, centralized ideological movements (such as international communism or pan-Arabism) are especially prone to ideological divisions, just as George Kennan once predicted.⁹⁴

These results expose the poverty of much of the justification for U.S. foreign policy since World War II. Contrary to the prescriptions of finite

91. For a recent statement of this view, which also attempts to resurrect the “domino theory,” see Singer, “Dynamic Containment,” in Wildavsky, *Beyond Containment*, p. 173.

92. Disagreements about the importance of ideology divide those who advocate finite containment (which focuses on containing *Soviet* power) from those who advocate either rollback or global containment (which seeks to contain or eliminate *communist* power). On this point, see Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, chap. 3.

93. See Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, chap. 5; Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Spring 1985), pp. 3–43; and Walt, “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia,” *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 275–316.

94. See Kennan’s memo, “U.S. Objectives with Respect to Russia,” in Etzold and Gaddis, *Containment*, pp. 186–187; and Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, pp. 43–45. On the impact of ideology more generally, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, chap. 6.

containment, the United States has consistently sought commitments beyond the defense of the “key centers of industrial power” and has occasionally tried to reverse leftist revolutions in the Third World. In other words, the United States has for the most part adopted the strategy of global containment, with occasional efforts at rollback. This strategy was justified in part by the fear that allies would bandwagon or by the belief that leftist forces in the Third World would inevitably be drawn towards alignment with Moscow.⁹⁵

In retrospect, however, neither fear was well-founded. Although a number of Third World countries have chosen to ally with Moscow, this is primarily because they faced serious internal and external threats (often including the United States) and could not obtain other allies. Soviet military power was confined to Eurasia, and the Soviet Union was publicly sympathetic to Third World nationalism. By contrast, the United States denounced neutralism as “immoral” and intervened directly in a number of developing countries. Thus, Soviet power threatened the industrial powers but not the former colonies; American power did just the opposite. Given this fundamental difference, it is not surprising that the United States has been closely allied with the industrial powers of Europe and Asia while the USSR has done relatively better (although not especially well) in the Third World.

We may draw several lessons from these results. The forces that create international alliances make finite containment relatively easy to accomplish; in particular, the United States does not need to intervene in peripheral areas in order to maintain the alliances that matter.⁹⁶ The Soviet Union’s geographic proximity and military power make it the main threat to Europe and Japan; because states tend to balance, virtually all of the world’s strategically significant nations are inclined to ally with the United States. By the same logic, strategies of rollback or global containment should be rejected. Adopting these strategies would require the United States to use force more often and in more places, thereby increasing the likelihood that other states will unite against it.

95. The fear of bandwagoning explains why some early proponents of containment (including Kennan) supported U.S. intervention in Korea and were reluctant to advocate an early withdrawal from Vietnam. See Hixson, “Containment on the Perimeter,” pp. 149, 159.

96. It is worth noting that most U.S. allies opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, just as most opposed U.S. support for the Nicaraguan *contras*.

WILL U.S. ALLIES BALANCE IF THE UNITED STATES WITHDRAWS?

As noted above, writers who favor a reduced U.S. role tend to invoke the logic of balancing in order to justify this recommendation. After accusing U.S. allies of "free-riding," advocates of isolationism or disengagement argue that Europe and Japan would balance a U.S. withdrawal by greatly increasing their own defense efforts. Instead of letting its allies "free-ride," in short, the United States should start "free-riding" on them.⁹⁷

The tendency for states to balance means that a reduction in U.S. support is unlikely to trigger a stampede towards the Soviet bloc. Moreover, U.S. allies will probably do more if the United States does less. Yet the conclusion that the United States can substantially reduce its commitment to Europe should be rejected for at least five reasons.

First, the claim that a U.S. withdrawal is justified by allied free-riding greatly oversimplifies the issue of burden-sharing within the alliance. Although its allies spend a smaller percentage of GNP on defense than the United States does (measured in terms of annual defense budgets), focusing solely on percentages of GNP ignores or understates the full range of allied contributions.⁹⁸ Moreover, when comparing budget figures or shares of GNP, U.S. defense costs are inflated by its reliance on an all-volunteer force rather than conscription.⁹⁹ Most important of all, the disproportionate burden borne by the United States may be due less to free-riding than to differing percep-

97. See Chace, "A New Grand Strategy," pp. 12-13; Kristol, "What's Wrong with NATO?" p. 71, and Kristol, "Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology," p. 14; Layne, "Atlanticism Without NATO," p. 32, 38-39; Ravenal, "NATO: The Tides of Discontent," pp. 86-88; Krauss, *How NATO Weakens the West*; and Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, pp. 165-171.

98. According to a recent study of NATO burdensharing, "Data that count military equipment and personnel show that the large and small member states make a significant contribution to NATO's military capability, well beyond their shares of the alliance's economic resources or defense spending." The authors conclude that "it cannot be said that the NATO allies have obtained a 'free ride' in the alliance since it was created." See Adams and Munz, *Fair Shares*, pp. 7, 17, 25-30. See also Klaus E. Knorr, "Burden-Sharing in NATO: Aspects of U.S. Policy," *Orbis*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 517-536; CBO, "Alliance Burdensharing: A Review of the Data," Staff Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1987); James Steinberg, "Rethinking the Debate on Burden-sharing," *Survival*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January/February 1987), pp. 56-78; and Dunn, "NATO's Enduring Value," pp. 164-165.

99. According to several rough estimates, abandoning conscription might raise European defense expenditures by as much as 20 percent. Given their sensitivity to fluctuating exchange rates and differences between European and U.S. labor markets, these figures should be used with caution. See Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1981* (Leesburg, Va.: World Priorities, 1981), p. 37; Knorr, "Burden-Sharing in NATO," pp. 529-530; CBO, "Alliance Burdensharing," p. 12; and Adams and Munz, *Fair Shares*, pp. 18-20.

tions of the threat. Because U.S. allies do not believe that the Soviet Union is as dangerous as the United States does and because they do not share the U.S. fear of leftist forces in the developing world, they do not spend as much to counter either threat. Thus the United States spends more because its leaders (and taxpayers) have accepted a more pessimistic view of the threat and have adopted more ambitious goals for dealing with it, not because U.S. allies are lazy or decadent.¹⁰⁰

Second, advocates of withdrawal take the logic of balancing to an illogical extreme. The real question is not whether its allies will do more if the United States withdraws; it is whether they will do *enough*. To replace the U.S. commitment, the rest of NATO would have to mobilize at least 500,000 more troops along with the associated military hardware.¹⁰¹ Given present demographic trends in Europe, that is an unlikely event.¹⁰² Those who call for a U.S. withdrawal have yet to provide a detailed analysis of what an independent European force would look like, what it would cost, and how effectively it could fight or deter.¹⁰³ In this respect, the suggestion that the United States withdraw within four or five years—as Melvyn Krauss and Christopher Layne have proposed—reveals a worrisome disregard of basic military realities.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the “logic of collective action” would still operate after a U.S. withdrawal. Because security is a collective good, the separate European states would inevitably try to pass the burden of deterring the Soviets onto each other.¹⁰⁵ Even if Europe did balance by building up after a U.S. with-

100. If one excludes non-NATO U.S. expenditures, the U.S. share of NATO’s combined defense spending falls from 68.8 percent to 56.8 percent in 1986 (for comparison: U.S. GNP is 53.6 percent of the alliance total GNP). This figure probably understates the total U.S. contribution, but it does suggest that U.S. defense burdens are greater in part because U.S. strategic objectives are more ambitious than those of its allies. See Adams and Munz, *Fair Shares*, pp. 72–73; and Van Evera, “American Strategic Interests,” pp. 16–18.

101. This figure includes both U.S. forces currently deployed in Europe and designated reinforcements based in the United States. According to Keith Dunn, if the U.S. were to remove 100,000 troops, the allies would have to increase their defense spending by 18 to 30 percent over two years to offset it. See Dunn, “NATO’s Enduring Value,” p. 170.

102. For example, the number of West German males between the ages of 17 and 30 will decline by more than 30 percent by 1999. Similar trends apply to France and Britain as well. See IISS, *The Military Balance 1983–84* (London: IISS, 1983), pp. 145–147.

103. The best attempt is Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony*, chap. 9. Calleo argues that Europe can easily match the Warsaw Pact through greater reliance on reserves, but he does not provide an adequate description of the force he envisions or its likely effectiveness against the Pact.

104. See Krauss, *How NATO Weakens the West*, p. 237; and Layne, “Atlanticism Without NATO,” p. 33.

105. The classic analysis of the “collective goods” problem in alliances remains Mancur Olson

drawal, the effort would still be weaker than it is with the United States included.

Third, advocates of withdrawal overlook the stabilizing effects of the U.S. presence in Europe and the Far East. America's global presence helps safeguard its allies from one another; they can concentrate on balancing the Soviet Union because they do not need to worry about other threats. Although the Soviet Union would remain the principal adversary in the short term, rivalries within Europe would be more frequent and more intense if the U.S. withdrew. This possibility may appear far-fetched after forty years of peace, but it should not if one recalls the four centuries of conflict that preceded them.¹⁰⁶ This problem could be even more serious in the Far East, where a U.S. withdrawal would encourage renewed regional tensions.¹⁰⁷ And even if U.S. allies balanced after a U.S. withdrawal, they might do so in ways the United States would soon regret. Withdrawal would encourage Britain and France to increase their nuclear capabilities, it would tempt West Germany to acquire a nuclear force of its own, and it would probably encourage a *rapprochement* between the Soviet Union and either China or a militarily resurgent Japan, depending on how regional relations in the Far East evolved.

Fourth, even if U.S. allies increased their defense efforts considerably, a U.S. withdrawal from Europe would still weaken deterrence. With the United States firmly committed, the Soviets face a coalition possessing vastly greater combined capabilities. But if the U.S. withdraws its forces, Soviet decision-makers could more plausibly expect a blitzkrieg to succeed.¹⁰⁸ Students of history will recognize that this situation resembles the deterrence failures that produced World Wars I and II.¹⁰⁹ The U.S. presence in Europe helps

and Richard Zeckhauser, "An Economic Theory of Alliances," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (August 1966), pp. 266–279. A recent review of this literature is Wallace J. Thies, "Alliances and Collective Goods: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (June 1987), pp. 298–332.

106. See Josef Joffe, "Europe's American Pacifier," *Foreign Policy*, No. 54 (Spring 1984), pp. 64–82; and Dunn, "NATO's Enduring Value," pp. 171–172.

107. This point is nicely made in Henry A. Kissinger, "The Rearming of Japan—and the Rest of Asia," *Washington Post*, January 29, 1987, p. A25.

108. On the conditions for successful conventional deterrence, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

109. Because Britain did not make its commitment to France clear in 1914, Germany's leaders concluded that Britain would not fight. Because Hitler doubted the Allied commitment to Poland in 1939, he ignored Britain and French warnings. And had Germany's leaders known that they would eventually face the United States, both wars might have been avoided.

prevent a similar miscalculation today, because it provides a potent reminder that the Soviet Union cannot attack Western Europe without directly engaging the bulk of U.S. ground forces, backed by U.S. nuclear weapons.

Finally, it is unwise to assume—as some isolationists do—that the United States could easily stay out of a major war on the Eurasian landmass.¹¹⁰ Despite its isolationist traditions and modest military assets, the United States was eventually drawn into three of the last four major European wars.¹¹¹ The United States is better off with its present policy, which reduces the likelihood that the United States will be forced to fight *any* war in Europe.

In short, although balancing is much more common than bandwagoning, this tendency does not mean that the United States would be better off leaving the defense of Eurasia to others. The neo-isolationists are correct to discount the danger of “Finlandization,” but their confidence that Europe and Japan would fully compensate for a U.S. demobilization is too optimistic.

Alternative Perspectives on U.S. Grand Strategy: A Summary

As Table 1 reveals, there is a marked tendency for a given analyst’s views about U.S. grand strategy to display a self-reinforcing consistency—i.e., each to support the same general conclusion—even when the different issues appear to be logically unrelated.¹¹² For example, those who favor either rollback or global containment tend to believe that the United States has

110. This view is most evident in the writings of Earl Ravenal. See his “NATO: The Tides of Discontent,” pp. 60–63, 72–75.

111. A “major war” is defined here as involving more than two great powers and lasting at least two years. The United States eventually entered the Napoleonic Wars (the War of 1812) and World Wars I and II; the Crimean War is the exception. As Stephen Van Evera notes: “History warns that in the past, [the United States] got into great European wars by staying out of Europe—not by being in.” See Van Evera, “American Strategic Interests,” p. 20.

112. The tendency for an analyst’s beliefs to reinforce each other is often attributed either to irrational cognitive consistency or to efforts to assemble convincing arguments during a political debate. On the role of cognitive psychology, see Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, pp. 128–142, and Jervis, “Beliefs About Soviet Behavior,” in Osgood, et al., *Containment, Soviet Behavior, and Grand Strategy*, pp. 57–58. It should be noted, however, that logical connections do link different issues. For example, beliefs about the offense/defense balance are related to inferences about an adversary’s intentions: if offense is easy, then aggressors are more likely to conclude that an attack might succeed. Similarly, when offense has the advantage, bandwagoning may be more likely because weak states fear being conquered before allies can come to their aid. And if national leaders believe war is likely, then the need for reliable access to raw materials will grow, expanding the scope of vital interests. Thus, the tendency for a strategist’s beliefs to reinforce each other may be due less to psychological distortions than to the logical connections between different elements of grand strategy.

Table 1. Alternative U.S. Grand Strategies.

	Main Objectives	Areas of Vital Interest	Expansion Easy or Hard	Soviet Intentions	Causes of Alignment
STRATEGY					
World Order Idealism <i>Falk, Johansen, Forsberg</i>	Promote new world order, solve collective global problems	None	Very hard	Benign	Irrelevant
Neo-Isolationism <i>Ravenal, Layne, Sanders, Barnett</i>	War-avoidance, promote economic prosperity	U.S. territory	Very hard	Probably benign and may not matter	Balancing; allies will do more
Disengagement <i>Chace, Calleo</i>	Deter Soviet expansion; restore U.S. "solvency"	Varies: Western hemisphere, Far East, etc.	Hard	Hostile but very cautious	Balancing; allies may do more
Finite Containment <i>Early Kennan, Lippmann, Morgenthau, Posen, Van Evera, Walt, Waltz</i>	Deter Soviet expansion in industrial Eurasia	Key centers of industrial power (W. Europe, Japan and Persian Gulf)	Hard but not impossible	Hostile but easy to deter	Balancing
Global Containment <i>Weinberger, Brzezinski, Huntington, Ikle, Wildavsky, Wohlstetter</i>	Prevent Soviet or Marxist expansion, terrorism, etc.	Entire world	Easy	Hostile, difficult to deter	Bandwagoning; also ideological solidarity
Rollback <i>Burnham, Churba, Kristol, Krauthammer, Podhoretz</i>	Eliminate communism; promote democracy	Entire world	Very easy, via military action or subversion	Very hostile; will conduct relentless political warfare	Bandwagoning; ideological solidarity very powerful

NOTE: Placement of authors by category is approximate; individual authors may not share all of the beliefs associated with each strategy.

critical economic and security interests in all parts of the globe, that the Soviet Union is extremely aggressive, that conquest is relatively easy, that bandwagoning is commonplace, and that communist ideology is both a powerful force for alignment and a potent weapon of subversion. By contrast, advocates of isolationism or disengagement tend to believe that U.S. interests are extremely limited, that Soviet intentions are benevolent and would be worsened by U.S. pressure, that expansion is virtually impossible irrespective of U.S. policy, and that current U.S. allies are certain to balance effectively if the United States withdraws. Finally, proponents of finite containment tend to believe that U.S. interests are confined to a few critical regions, that conquest is difficult provided that the United States remains committed to opposing Soviet expansion, that the Soviet Union is a cautious but potentially dangerous rival, and that other states will tend to balance against whichever superpower appears most threatening.

The analysis in the preceding pages suggests that a strategy of “finite containment” remains the best choice for the United States. The other strategies examined here fail on one or more grounds; by contrast, finite containment is most consistent with the present state of the international system. Of course, if further research were to reveal that my assessment of these different factors was wrong, then different conclusions might be in order. This possibility suggests that additional research on the four questions examined above should be part of further efforts to refine U.S. grand strategy.

There is a final rationale for finite containment, however. In international politics, large changes are usually dangerous; national leaders are more likely to miscalculate when facing novel circumstances. After World War II, the United States and its allies devised a geopolitical formula for peace that has proven to be remarkably durable. Following the precept that “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” the United States should be reluctant to discard arrangements that have worked so well thus far. Although circumstances do change and strategy must eventually adapt, the burden of proof should remain with those who now seek to abandon a successful strategy. They have yet to make an adequate case.

Implementing Finite Containment

Finite containment would be a modest, but important departure from the expansive form of containment that the United States has followed since 1950. As a result, implementing this strategy would entail a number of

adjustments in U.S. foreign and defense policy. Although a detailed description of its implications is beyond the scope of this essay, the central elements of the strategy can be sketched briefly.

OBJECTIVES AND CAPABILITIES

First, and most importantly, finite containment strategy would maintain the present United States commitment of ground and air forces in Western Europe and the Far East. These forces are the best symbol of the U.S. interest in preserving the independence of these regions. Because the main threat in Europe is the Soviets' powerful land army, U.S. ground and air forces are also the most valuable contribution that the United States can make to the defense of Europe in time of war. Contrary to much of the conventional wisdom, the prospects for a successful defense in Europe are reasonably good, provided that the United States does not withdraw the bulk of its forces.¹¹³ To improve its chances even more, NATO should spend less on improving its offensive capabilities—such as deep-strike aircraft for so-called Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA)—and spend more on defensive measures designed to thwart a Soviet armored assault.¹¹⁴

Second, finite containment would drastically reduce U.S. preparations for intervention in the Third World. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration conducted a major buildup in U.S. naval forces and increased U.S. intervention capabilities by creating "light divisions" in the army, by increasing U.S. amphibious warfare and air- and sea-lift capacity, and by establishing a separate Special Operations Command responsible for "low intensity conflict." Under finite containment, these programs could be eliminated. Of the twenty-one active U.S. Army and Marine divisions, only sixteen are assigned to missions in Europe, the Far East, or the Persian Gulf. The remaining five divisions (including three "light divisions" and one Marine division) should be viewed as intervention forces; among other things, these forces would be

113. For optimistic appraisals of the conventional balance, see the references in footnote 56. More pessimistic views can be found in Kim R. Holmes, "Measuring the Conventional Balance in Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 166–173; Andrew Hamilton, "Redressing the Conventional Balance: NATO's Reserve Military Manpower," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Summer 1985), pp. 111–136; Cohen, "Toward Better Net Assessment"; and Thomson, "An Unfavorable Situation."

114. For example, close support aircraft like the A-10 are preferable to high-priced items like the F-15 or Tornado, because the deep interdiction mission performed by the latter is both more difficult and less important to a successful defense. Greater attention to terrain preparation and other types of fixed defenses would slow a Pact advance and improve exchange ratios as well.

of little value against the Soviet army. Because the United States has few economic or strategic interests in the Third World, it can eliminate some or all of these intervention forces, along with most of its special forces and covert action capabilities.¹¹⁵

Third, finite containment would maintain the U.S. commitment to protect Western oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. As noted earlier, pessimism about this mission is excessive: the impressive barriers to a Soviet invasion of the Gulf and the likelihood that regional powers would actively oppose Soviet aggression give the United States a good chance of deterring or defeating a Soviet attack.¹¹⁶ Thus, finite containment would call for maintaining the U.S. Central Command at roughly its present size.¹¹⁷

Fourth, because finite containment focuses U.S. commitments on the key centers of industrial power, the obvious target for reductions is the U.S. Navy. In a major war, the navy's main mission would be to defend the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) between the United States and its European and Far Eastern allies.¹¹⁸ The main threats to the SLOCs are Soviet land-based aircraft and Soviet attack submarines. Primary defenses against these forces are NATO's own submarines, its ASW (anti-submarine warfare) ships and patrol aircraft, and land-based interceptors, in a strategy of "defensive sea control."¹¹⁹ Although U.S. aircraft carriers can play a role in SLOC de-

115. After these reductions, the United States would still possess an adequate intervention capability (e.g., the 82nd Airborne and 101st Air Assault divisions, as well as the remaining Marine forces). Because these units are assigned missions in the Persian Gulf, the U.S. ability to intervene in the Third World would be limited in the early stages of a global war. But in the event of a major war in Europe or the Gulf, intervention elsewhere in the Third World would be of little concern.

116. See Epstein, "Soviet Vulnerabilities," and Dunn, "Constraints on the USSR." For a more pessimistic assessment, see Jeffrey Record, *The Rapid Deployment Force and U.S. Military Intervention in the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge, Mass.: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1981).

117. The U.S. Central Command is assigned 4½ Army divisions, 1½ Marine divisions, 3 carrier battle groups, 7 tactical fighter wings, and a variety of special forces and support units. See John D. Mayer, Jr., *Rapid Deployment Forces: Policy and Budgetary Implications* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, 1983), p. xv; and Weinberger, *Annual Report to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1984*, p. 195.

118. The rationale for and primacy of this mission is explained in John J. Mearsheimer, "A Strategic Misstep: The Maritime Strategy and Deterrence in Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 1986), pp. 3–57.

119. A defensive sea control strategy would establish barriers across "choke points" like the Sea of Japan, and the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap. The Soviet Navy is unlikely to challenge these barriers, because its main mission is to defend Soviet SSBNs in the Arctic Sea. If it did attack the SLOCs, however, these barriers would pose a highly effective defense. See William W. Kaufmann, *A Thoroughly Efficient Navy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987), chap. 7, especially pp. 79–81.

fense, other forces will bear the major responsibility for this mission.¹²⁰ Aircraft carriers are primarily useful for “power projection” in the Third World, but with the exception of the Persian Gulf, this mission is of minor importance. Moreover, land-based aircraft can perform the “power projection” mission more efficiently in many cases. The United States should therefore abandon the misguided “Maritime Strategy” (intended primarily to justify an expensive 600-ship fleet), because it is infeasible, potentially destabilizing, and unnecessary.¹²¹ Instead of the fifteen carrier battle groups currently deployed, a force of eight to ten carrier battle groups could easily fulfill the requirements of finite containment.¹²²

Fifth, finite containment would also permit reductions in U.S. strategic nuclear forces. Whereas rollback strategies require strategic superiority (i.e., a first-strike capability), containment requires only that the United States maintain a robust second-strike force. This requirement is easy to meet; according to one recent estimate, the United States would have over 4000 warheads (totaling over 1000 equivalent megatons) left after a *successful* Soviet

120. Although aircraft carriers have their own anti-submarine and anti-aircraft capabilities, the United States “can operate patrol aircraft and fighters from land bases more efficiently than from the more costly and vulnerable carrier battle groups.” See Kaufmann, *A Thoroughly Efficient Navy*, p. 83.

121. The Maritime Strategy is *infeasible* because carrier battle groups are an inefficient means of projecting power (a battle group devotes most of its capabilities to defending itself), yet the strategy calls for direct naval attacks on heavily defended Soviet bases (e.g., the Kola Peninsula). The strategy is *destabilizing* because it includes attacks on Soviet SSBNs, thereby threatening the Soviets’ second-strike capability and tempting them to escalate. Finally, the strategy is *unnecessary* because it would have little or no effect on the critical ground war in Europe. On these points, see Epstein, *1988 Defense Budget*, pp. 45–55; Kaufmann, *A Thoroughly Efficient Navy*, pp. 12–21 and *passim*; Mearsheimer, “A Strategic Misstep”; and Barry R. Posen, “Inadvertent Nuclear War? Escalation and NATO’s Northern Flank,” *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 1982), pp. 28–54. For arguments in favor of the Maritime Strategy, see Admiral James D. Watkins, “The Maritime Strategy,” Supplement, *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 112, No. 1 (January 1986) pp. 2–17; Linton F. Brooks, “Naval Power and National Security: The Case for the Maritime Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 1986), pp. 58–88; and Bradford Dismukes, “Strategic ASW and the Conventional Defense of Europe,” Professional Paper No. 453 (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, April 1987).

122. Assuming two carriers are in overhaul at any time, a total of eight carriers would permit wartime deployment of three in the Persian Gulf (as currently assigned to Central Command), two in the Atlantic, and one in the Pacific. This force would be more than enough in a global war and would provide ample naval muscle for lesser contingencies. On the limited value of carriers for SLOC defense, see Epstein, *1988 Defense Budget*, pp. 49–50; and Mearsheimer, “A Strategic Misstep,” p. 55. Using extremely conservative assumptions, William Kaufmann suggests that 12 carrier battle groups would satisfy U.S. naval requirements in a major war with the Soviet Union. See Kaufmann, *A Thoroughly Efficient Navy*, pp. 84–99. All three authors agree that the current fleet is unjustified and extravagant.

first strike.¹²³ Much the same situation applies in reverse, of course, and because both superpowers have second-strike forces that are far larger than they need to destroy each other, both are deterred.¹²⁴ Recognizing the durable reality of Mutual Assured Destruction, finite containment would entail abandoning the costly and futile search for strategic superiority. Specifically, the United States could cancel the B-1B and B-2 bombers, the Trident D-5, the Midgetman and MX missiles, and various schemes for land-mobile ICBMs, and still possess an overwhelming deterrent.¹²⁵ The U.S. SSBN fleet would be modernized as needed, along with the current ICBM force and an expanded cruise missile arsenal (possibly incorporating stealth technology). The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) can be canceled as well: the available evidence suggests it will not work, and it would be undesirable even if it did. A modest research program should continue as a hedge against future breakthroughs, but plans for testing and deployment should be abandoned.¹²⁶

Sixth, finite containment does not require the United States to sacrifice its moral commitment to personal freedom and human rights. However, this strategy recognizes the inherent limits of an ideologically-based foreign policy and adopts a realistic set of goals. Specifically, U.S. leaders should realize that: 1) efforts to “promote democracy” via military force will place the United States at odds with most of the world (including its major allies); 2) the “freedom fighters” that the United States now supports are unlikely to establish democratic regimes if they win; 3) we lack an adequate theory explaining how states achieve stable democracy and thus cannot be confident of the U.S. ability to create democracy in these settings; 4) the record of past

123. See Salman, Sullivan, and Van Evera, “Analysis or Propaganda”; and Epstein, *1988 Defense Budget*, pp. 21–27.

124. One recent estimate shows that 100 one-megaton airbursts would kill 45–77 million Soviet citizens and cause 73–93 million lethal and nonlethal injuries. See Barbara G. Levi, Frank N. von Hippel, and William H. Daugherty, “Civilian Casualties from ‘Limited’ Nuclear Attacks on the Soviet Union,” *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Winter 1987/88), pp. 168–169.

125. On U.S. retaliatory capabilities after these reductions, see Epstein, *1988 Defense Budget*, pp. 21–32.

126. For studies challenging the feasibility of SDI, see Kurt Gottfried, “The Physicists Size Up SDI,” *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (July/August 1987), pp. 28–32; John Tirman, *Empty Promise: The Growing Case Against Star Wars* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986); and Sidney D. Drell, David Holloway, and Philip J. Farley, “Preserving the ABM Treaty: A Critique of the Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1984), pp. 51–91. For analyses suggesting that SDI would be undesirable even if it were possible, see Charles Glaser, “Why Even Good Defenses May Be Bad,” *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1984), pp. 92–123; and Glaser, “Do We Want the Missile Defenses We Can Build?” *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Summer 1985), pp. 25–57.

efforts (in Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Vietnam, Cuba, Lebanon, El Salvador, etc.) is not encouraging; 5) the rare successes (such as Germany and Japan after World War II) suggest that lengthy occupation and radical social reform would be necessary; and 6) crusades to promote American values usually require abandoning the very ideals that such campaigns claim to be defending.¹²⁷ Because U.S. security interests are not at stake in most of these situations, more modest but unambiguous objectives would be appropriate.¹²⁸ In addition to public support for the United Nations Declaration on Basic Human Rights, the United States should actively oppose all governments that engage in the systematic murder of unarmed opposition.¹²⁹ This criterion ignores what foreign leaders profess to believe and focuses on what they actually do. How U.S. leaders chose to respond to such regimes will vary on a case-by-case basis, but this general criterion is likely to command widespread support at home and abroad.

Adopting the strategy of finite containment would go a long way toward alleviating the fiscal pressures that the United States will face in the 1990s. It would concentrate U.S. defense capabilities in the places that matter and reverse the policies that have undermined U.S. prestige elsewhere in the world. It would also help correct the perception that Europe and Japan were “free-riding” on the United States. In effect, finite containment would bring U.S. grand strategy closer to its allies’ perspective, which focuses on the main threat (the Soviet Union), and downgrades the importance of the Third World and the futile quest for strategic superiority. Finally, the reduction in U.S. naval forces implied by finite containment would encourage Japan to continue expanding its responsibilities for sea and air defense in the Far East. And if the United States maintains a tangible presence in East Asia (such as

127. For example, the U.S. effort to “promote democracy” in Nicaragua has claimed over 20,000 civilian lives, led to the condemnation of the United States by the World Court, inspired a series of illegal arms shipments, and involved a carefully orchestrated U.S. government disinformation campaign intended to deceive U.S. citizens about the conflict in Central America. See Robert Parry and Peter Kornbluh, “Iran-Contra’s Untold Story,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 72 (Fall 1988), pp. 3–30.

128. Even some of the most fervent advocates of the “Reagan Doctrine” admit that U.S. security interests are not at stake in the Third World. For example, Charles Krauthammer has written that “if the security of the United States is the only goal of American foreign policy, all that is needed is a minimal deterrent arsenal, a small navy, a border patrol, and hardly any foreign policy at all.” See Krauthammer, “The Poverty of Realism,” p. 16. This view implies that the United States should spend over \$200 billion each year on defense and promote civil war against Marxist regimes solely in order to get other countries to adopt the U.S. vision of the ideal political order.

129. On these points, see Van Evera, “American Strategic Interests,” pp. 33–37.

its ground and air forces in Japan and Korea), increases in Japan's naval and air force capabilities are less likely to alarm other states in this region.

Of course, implementing finite containment would face impressive domestic obstacles. Because finite containment would reduce or eliminate several entrenched but unnecessary missions, service interests (e.g., the Navy) and defense contractors are certain to resist its adoption.¹³⁰ In order to succeed, a campaign to implement finite containment would require aggressive presidential leadership and a persistent and well-orchestrated effort to explain its rationale. The foremost task of this campaign would be to educate U.S. citizens on the finite scope of U.S. security interests and the limited means that are necessary to protect them.

Because they do not have entrenched interests to defend, experts outside official circles—in universities, foundations, independent “think tanks” and the media—must take a leading role in this “war of ideas.” By participating actively in the debate on U.S. grand strategy, and in particular, by performing rigorous and critical analysis of the assumptions that underlie competing proposals, independent analysts can provide the intellectual ammunition that meaningful reform will require. Without a lively and serious debate, the United States is likely to repeat past errors, postpone the necessary adjustments, or adopt misguided and excessive reforms. But if the debate on grand strategy attains reasonable standards of scholarship and rigor, then U.S. strategy in the 1990s is more likely to be consistent with U.S. interests and better suited to the evolving international system.

Conclusion

After four decades, the changing patterns of world power have led many to question the central premises of U.S. grand strategy. By provoking a rigorous reassessment, the recent wave of writings on U.S. grand strategy has made a valuable contribution to this debate. Unfortunately, many of the solutions that have been proposed—especially the growing interest in isolationism or disengagement—are too extreme. Where adjustments should be made, they call for radical surgery. But if their predictions are wrong—and the weight

130. On the political forces that distort the development of strategy, see Stephen M. Walt, “The Search for a Science of Strategy: A Review Essay on *Makers of Modern Strategy*,” *International Security*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), especially pp. 146–160.

of the evidence is against them—their prescriptions could have catastrophic results.

At the other extreme, those who believe that U.S. security can be enhanced by repeating past extravagances or by a renewed ideological offensive are equally misguided. A strategy of global containment will increase U.S. defense burdens in areas of little strategic value and will further tarnish the U.S. image in the eyes of its principal allies. Similarly, an ideological crusade to export U.S. ideals is more likely to compromise these principles than to convert other nations to democracy. At best, these programs waste U.S. wealth and other peoples' lives. At worst, they fan the flames of regional conflict and increase the danger of a larger war.

The essential elements of containment were identified four decades ago. They have never been implemented correctly, because America's dominant global position allowed it to indulge in a variety of excesses without incurring immediate penalties. For good or ill, this is no longer the case. By returning U.S. grand strategy to the original prescription for containment—*finite* containment—the United States can begin to ease its present fiscal worries without jeopardizing its vital interests. The essential elements of containment have worked remarkably well thus far; its main failures have occurred when the United States tried to extend containment beyond its original sphere of application. The strategy of containment has brought forty years of great power peace, and the key ingredients of that recipe should not be casually discarded. Although modest amendments are now in order, this strategy remains America's best choice.