

Changes in the U.S. National Security Concepts after the Cold War

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During the Cold War the so-called grand strategy of the U.S. did not change a lot. By ‘grand strategy’ we mean the relationship between the military tools and the international commitments; that is, the assessment and the determination of the potential threats to a country and what tools this country wishes to use to counter them. (Layne 1994:19). Washington was pursuing a ‘*positional grand strategy*’ for about forty years between the late 1940s and the early 1990s: it treated one country (the Soviet Union) or, by extension, one group of countries (the Communist states) as the single most threatening challenge to its national security and did all its best to weaken and contain these potential adversaries. In contrast, the U.S. seems to have adopted a so-called *milieu grand strategy* after the conclusion of the Cold War, that is, the collapse of Communism in East and Central Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union; in the lack of a concretely defined enemy country or group of countries The Americans have been trying to shape the international environment in accordance of their long-term security interests.

Acquiring the position of a hegemon—and later on, retaining it—enjoyed a priority among the Cold War objectives. By hegemony we mean a preponderant military, economic, and political power. Under the definition, the U.S. obtained the status of a hegemon in the non-Communist parts of the world during the Cold War. The system thus created can best be likened to a hub and spokes. The U.S. stood in the center of each of the military alliances in the capitalist world (NATO, ANZUS, SEATO), the financial and commercial organizations (IMF, World Bank, GATT—the ‘Bretton Woods’ system), as well as the political ones (OAS, UN) in the early Cold War years. This situation was

modified by the appearance of the so-called non-aligned countries (the Bandung Conference, 1955); in other words, the gradual fading away of the bipolar world and the zero-sum game approach and the emergence of the concept of a multipolar world in place of it. The acceptance of the hegemony of the U.S. in the capitalist world was based on three factors. One, the potential competitors had been defeated during the World War (Germany, Japan) or weakened dramatically (Great Britain, France). Two, the Americans offered useful 'services' in the military, economic, financial, and political fields; that is, they were behaving as a 'benevolent hegemon' (Layne 2002:187). Three, at least as far as the European and Asian capitalist countries were concerned, the U.S. put a security umbrella over them and, thus, made it possible for these countries to build up the welfare state. The military preponderant power was realized in developing a nuclear triad (ground-, sea-, and air-based) of both tactical (theater) and strategic nuclear forces. The 'massive retaliation' of the 1950s was replaced by the 'flexible response' and the tendency started in the late 1950s and early 1960s seems to survive even nowadays. More specifically, the transformation of the U.S. armed forces has been moving towards as ever more flexible, mobile, smaller, and more lethal strategies in harmony with the concept of attempting to shape the *milieu* in the first place. At the same time, preponderant power determines more than ever the grand strategy of the U.S.: currently, Washington is spending roughly as much on-defence related issues as the rest of the world. However, it does not translate itself into a more secure environment for the U.S.; in fact, some even argue that the U.S. has to face more complex and less manageable challenges now than during the Cold War.

It was the so-called Westphalian system that characterized the international relations between the mid 17th century through the very end of the 20th century; that is, it was almost exclusively the (nation)states that were the actors in international life. However, with the ending of the Cold War, a great number of non-state (supra. and substate) actors appeared on the world stage. It turned out that the U.S. was able to play the role of a hegemon in the capitalist world during the Cold War, but it is unable to assume the role of a global hegemon. Military, political, and economic power has become more and more dispersed; in fact, this process occurred within a number of states as well. The emerging 'failed' and 'failing' states, that is, those which are unable to assume the functions characterizing the 'normal' states, have substantially contributed to a more unstable world and forced the U.S.—and some other members of

the international community (e.g., NATO during the Kosovo-crisis)—to reconsider their security concepts. The Cold War ‘grand strategy’ of the U.S. became useless; a number of asymmetrical challenges emerged in place of the symmetrical threat posed by the Soviet Union. The two pillars of the Cold War ‘grand strategy’, *containment* and *deterrence*, or the ‘mutually assured destruction’ (MAD) proved to be effective against states which were pursuing rational goals. Nowadays, a lot of terrorist groups are different from the ‘traditional’ terrorists, insofar as they are pursuing irrational goals; while containment and deterrence are also inefficient against ‘failed’ or ‘failing’ states either. At the same time, the *security agenda* has become wider; it includes from fighting international terrorism through drug abuse to environmental degradation. Meanwhile, the international positions of the U.S. have weakened in areas apart from the military one: while the U.S. produced close to 50 percent of the world’s GDP in the late 1840s and about a third a decade later, now it accounts for only about a fifth of the total industrial production in the world. Moreover, her political hegemony has also weakened: the European allies are heading for a post-Westfalian, post-modern interpretation of international relations with a heavy dependence of ‘soft power’, while the majority of the American strategic thinkers still view the world in terms of power relations (similarly to the Russians and Chinese among others).

The postwar military and security planning in the U.S. can be divided into three distinct phases. First, the period between 1989 and 1991, that is, from the collapse of Communism in East and Central Europe to the Gulf War; then from the Gulf War to September 11, 2001; and, finally, the period since 9/11. In general, the first one was characterized by George H. W. Bush’s “New World Order” concept, a sort of neo-Wilsonian idea, according to which the Soviet Union had ceased to be an enemy, instead, it had become a (strategic) partner in settling the conflicts all over the world, the primary forum of which should be the international organizations and settlements should be based on the principles of international law. The Gulf War in 1991 was the culmination but, at the same time, the conclusion of this strategic thinking. As regards the former idea, Saddam Hussein’s aggression against Kuwait brought about an agreement rarely if ever seen before by the major powers in the world; the United Nations Security Council unanimously authorized the international community to restore the *status quo ante* in Kuwait and dozens of different states took part in the military

operations under American leadership. Regarding the latter idea, the Iraqi invasion put an end to the dream that armed aggressions had disappeared from international life. It showed the the small and medium-sized states on the peripheries still wished to settle pent-up tensions by resorting to the use of force, and the world was still far from a post-modern world in which violence does not play a significant role in international relations. In sum, the use of force had become 'legitimate' in the relations between states. (Tucker and Hendrickson 7). Moreover, the dissolution of formerly multiethnic countries (primarily Yugoslavia but also the Soviet Union) drove home the lesson that non-state actors did play a decisive role in international relations; the number of the variables dramatically increased and this fact made strategic planning more, and not less, complicated and difficult in areas such as force planning or force structures.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that though caesure was real it was not as sharp as meets the eye; continuity seems to have been more dominant than discontinuity in strategic thinking. The official positions taken by both the Republican and the Democratic administrations in the 1990s, as well as such unofficial documents like the *Defense Policy Guidance* (1992) or the *Report of the Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States (The Rumsfeld Report)* (1998) unanimously called for the maintenance of the hegemony of the U.S. The *Defense Policy Guidance*, which was written by such 'hardliners' as Paul Wolfowitz, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Perle, Andrew Marshall and I. Lewis Libby stated that the U.S. should maintain such mechanisms which would deter the potential competitors from even trying to play a more prominent regional or global role. It defined the 'vital' regions for the U.S.; they incorporated Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia. It basically meant that the authors were still thinking within the geopolitical framework as defined by Nicholas Spykman in the early 1940s; that is, the paramount strategic goal of the U.S. should be the prevention of the emergence of a Eurasian hegemon. The next year (1993), the strategic defense review initiated by the first Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, of the Clinton Administration officially put the strategy of containment to rest and envisioned the future of the national security policy of the U.S. in strengthening the existing international organizations and the creation of new ones in the spirit of the structuralist approach to international relations and the liberal internationalist traditions. However, it wished to use these instruments for strenghtening deterrence. (*Report on the Bottom-Up Review*). It is

obvious, that ‘deterrence’ remained relevant to some extent from among the Cold War strategies; while ‘containment’ received a new lease of life insofar as George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton alike attempted to apply ‘dual containment’ concerning Iraq and Iran—with mixed results. These two states, together with North Korea, featured prominently in the so-called Rumsfeld Report in 1998 as the most imminent danger to the U.S. because they—or, in general, countries wishing to produce nuclear weapons—tried to diminish the capability of the U.S. to resort to the use of force in regions close to them. In sum, their overall goal is to deny unrestricted U.S. influence—that is, to challenge U.S. hegemony. The *Quadrennial Defense Review* of 1997, mandated by Congress to be prepared every four years, also identified these three states as the most dangerous regional adversaries. The document, among others, claimed that the U.S. should expect an armed action on behalf of these emerging powers against the U.S. or her allies before 2015. In addition, it calculated with the appearance of a global competitor after 2015—in the person of Russia or China. The defense posture, accordingly, provided for the prevention of adversarial regional powers, as well as for the deterrence of any potential aggression against the U.S. or her allies. In general: prevention and deterrence constituted the core of national security strategy besides the creation of regional stability.

The Clinton Administration did not pay too much attention to foreign and security policy initially; the Democrats had won the presidential election in 1992 partly because they had placed domestic politics into the center of their platform. The continuity in security policy was first broken to a certain extent in 1993 when National Security Adviser Anthony Lake suggested that the administration move away from containment towards *enlargement*. The origins of this concept can be traced back to Woodrow Wilson, who claimed that the national security of the U.S. depended on the international environment. So long as parliamentary democracy and a functioning market economy prevail in the majority of the countries in the world, the U.S. is safe. As regards the premise, there is more or less a consensus in the American national security elite; the difference that has emerged within it centers around the question whether the U.S. should only show an example or she should actively promote the spread of such systems (‘democracy export’). Lake’s view found its way into the national security doctrine of the Clinton Administration in 1995. The document entitled *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* unambiguously endorsed the

latter option: it declared that the increase of the number of ‘market democracies’ was standing in the center of the national security of the country, while the threats should still be ‘deterred and contained’ (*A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* 2). The goals were traditional, however, some new tools could be discovered, as least as compared to the Cold War ones. Thus, the ‘opening of foreign markets’ and ‘the spread of democracy abroad’ were given special emphasis besides the creation of ‘cooperating security structures’ (2-3). However, one can already discern one of the most controversial decisions of the American administrations after the Cold War: the reinterpretation of the ‘Westphalian’ sovereignty. The *NSS* of 1995 mixed no words in stating that “sovereignty does not protect any government if it violates human rights” (ii). Such an interpretation of international law was later expanded by the Bush Administration in the early 2000s; it maintained that if one state is unable to function properly (e.g., to exert exclusive control over its territory), then it should not be entitled to enjoy sovereignty because a failed or failing state poses a threat to the whole international community. This is the point when the U.S. officially expanded its national security concern and commitment globally after the Cold War. This horizontal expansion started with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, then it was complemented in quick succession after the Second World War with the Truman Doctrine (American security guarantees to Greece and Turkey); the Eisenhower Doctrine (the Middle East); and the Carter Doctrine (The Persian Gulf). This principle also denotes the meeting point of the geographic and the functional aspects of the extended U.S. national security concept. It is true that the strategy—to a certain in a contradictory manner—stated that the armed forces of the U.S. would only be deployed “where the interests and values are threatened to a large extent” (ii). This way the Clinton Administration took a step toward “selective’, though ‘cooperative’ hegemony; in other words, the administration left a door open to define the venue of armed intervention while watering down the prior universalistic rhetoric (Posen and Ross 43-44). However, the Clinton Administration was criticized severely for intervening in places such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosni, and Kosovo where American interests were not directly threatened.

The intervention in Kosovo in 1999 has special relevance to the topic. Here, one of the basic principles of the national security strategy of the Clinton Administration was challenged: the ‘enlargement’ of the democratic community in Central and Eastern Europe. Second, the

future of NATO was on stake too after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. The supporters of the realist school of international relations and those of isolationism both argued that there was no need for the North Atlantic Alliance any more. However, keeping the Soviet Union 'out' of Europe had only been one of the main reasons of the conclusion of the Washington Treaty in 1949. The other two, that is keeping the U.S. 'in' and Germany 'down', still seemed to be relevant. (Regarding the latter, one should recall the British and French worries about the re-unification of Germany.) As a matter of fact, 'keeping Russia out' became a priority of the Central and East Europeans after they (re)gained their independence. The way out was moving forward, i.e., on the one hand, incorporating the so-called out-of-area operations into the missions of NATO and, on the other one, using the Alliance as a tool for expanding the zone of security and stability and to create a Europe 'whole and free', which could become an appropriate partner for the U.S. in handling the new challenges which emerged outside of Europe. One can also add that the U.S. wanted to prevent the 're-nationalization' of military matters in Europe by maintaining NATO and, thus, continuing assuming a substantial burden in the defense of the continent. (Layne 1994:27). Kosovo was also a touchstone of the 1998 *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, which placed the following three goals into the center of the country's national security: the enhancement of security at home and abroad alike; the increase and spread of economic wealth in the world; and the support of democracies. Moreover, it categorized national interest as follows: vital (e.g., the physical security of the territory and population of the U.S.); important (affecting the security of the U.S. indirectly, such as mass immigration from Haiti); and humanitarian and other interests (e.g., preventing or alleviating natural and man-made catastrophes). (*A National Security Strategy for a New Century* 5). Kosovo got into the category of 'humanitarian disaster'; in addition, the government had lost its legitimacy—and national sovereignty—by having used excessive force against certain groups of its own people. In final analysis, the Clinton Administration—as an unintended consequence—helped undermine the legitimacy of one of the most important organizations created after World War II with the strong support of the U.S.—the United Nations—as well as the principle of national sovereignty.

The *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* states on the first page that U.S. security requires that American should play a leading

role in the world if the Americans wish to live in safety at home. The organic linking of internal and external security enjoys an overwhelming support within the national security establishment with the possible exception of the isolationists (such as, for instance, Patrick J. Buchanan). At the same time, the intervention in Kosovo exposed some potentially ominous frictions within NATO as well. The difficulties arising from the necessity of coordinating with each of the NATO members and the problems of interoperability between the U.S. and the European forces in general strengthened the positions of the supporters of the *ad hoc* coalitions; as Donald Rumsfeld put it later, the “mission should define the coalition” and not the other way round. In a broader context this approach means that the U.S. should not take too many views by the allies into consideration and, therefore, can put more stress on realizing purely American interests and values; in other words, can act *unilaterally*. Although it is generally the George W. Bush Administration that is credited with lifting unilateralism into the U.S. national security strategy, practically no American President has ever excluded unilateral action in case it was needed; more specifically, the *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* in 1998 already declared that “We should always be ready to act alone” when this step is the most advantageous to the U.S. (2).

The attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 meant a turning point in the national security strategy of the U.S., though we cannot speak about a U-turn at all. We can speak about the opening of various *windows of vulnerability* since at least Pearl Harbor. The Japanese attack on December 7, 1941 destroyed one of the pillars of contemporary American national security: the belief that the two oceans were able to keep away any potential enemy. The second ‘pillar’ of contemporary U.S. national security, the Royal Navy, was weakened beyond repair as well. The next ‘window of vulnerability’ was opened in 1949, with the explosion of the Soviet atomic bomb, then in 1957, with launching the Sputnik, that is, a vehicle capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) over the territory of the U.S. The attacks against New York City and Washington, D.C. dramatically changed the threat perception in the U.S.; the *Quadrennial Defense Review* of 2006 states in its introduction that the country is for a long war (1) and *The National Security Strategy of the United States* published the same year starts with these threatening words: “America is at war ...” (1). *The National Security Strategy of the United States* of 2002, that is, the one that was born immediately after 9/11, identified the greatest threat to the U.S. in the meeting of ‘radicalism and

technology'; the nightmare scenario for the American national security elite is the one in which radical (predominantly Muslim) groups acquire WMD with the help of mediation of rogue or failed or failing states. To counter these threats, special attention is paid to the support of open societies because they constitute the basis of "internal stability and international order". (iv.) One of the basic principles of the strategy is the idea of liberal internationalism: to make the world not only safer but also better. (1) The tools to achieve these goals have become commonly known as the Bush Doctrine; the various elements of the doctrine appeared in the 2002 NSS and the different speeches of the President (specifically, the *State of the Union* speech on January 29, the speech at West Point on June 1, 2002, and the second Inauguration Address on January 20, 2005). The most important points are as follows: the prevention of the spread of WMD (non-proliferation); deterring the so-called rogue states; the active support of freedom and the institutions of democracy; unilateral steps if the security of the U.S. requires it, and preventive or pre-emptive use of force if needed. Besides deterrence, great stress was put on the development of force structure and technological assets for meeting the challenges under the nuclear threshold, that is, the so-called *full spectrum dominance, real time battleground control*, and the C⁴ (*Command, Control, Communications, Computer, and Intelligence*). It also stressed the so-called *staying power*, that is, the capability to invade and keep territories in the counterinsurgency operations, as this ability may prove to be decisive in wars on terrorists and/or guerillas. (Shanker 1).

The two most controversial elements of the so-called Bush Doctrine are reserving the right of unilateral military steps in case there is no authorization from the appropriate international organizations (primarily, the U.N.) and the right of preventive or pre-emptive military strikes. First, it must be noted that neither of them is new in American national security thinking. As regards the former one, let it suffice to refer to the Clinton Administration; while concerning the latter one, the U.S. (NATO) reserved the right of the first use of WMD throughout the Cold War (it is still part of the official strategy of NATO) and endeavored to keep the potential adversaries in suspense as to when and what military measures the U.S. would take in case of an international conflict. The Bush Administration was attacked for these ideas primarily because the majority of the rest of the world professed a different threat perception and, therefore, took a different view with regard to the possible counter-

measures. First, the Bush Administration believed that the potential synergy of the new security challenges (terrorists + rogue/failed/failing states + WMD) constituted an existential threat to the U.S. and the international order at large. Second, the Republican administration was convinced that the existing international organizations and legal tools were inadequate to handle the new security challenges and, therefore, Washington was forced to take, if it was needed, unilateral measures in defense. (Thus, for instance, China and Russia are predominantly interested in—soft—balancing the U.S. globally and, therefore, take every opportunity to weaken the U.S., even at the price of supporting or propping up regimes which harbor and assist terrorists or states which are engaged in producing WMD; both of these great powers are members of the UNSC, where they can veto any measure to be introduced to punish, for instance, proliferating countries.) From the above premises, the idea of preventive or pre-emptive steps derives logically: given the current technological capabilities and the relatively easy access to sensitive information, these measures appear in new light. A next logical step from this notion is the revision of the principle of state sovereignty. The Bush Administration strongly believed that the U.S. would face ‘probably’ asymmetrical challenges in the future. Therefore, force structure should be adjusted to the new environment: as the potential adversary is not so easily foreseeable as it was during the Cold War, the U.S. should develop a new, ‘capability based’ model. (*Quadrennial Defense Review*, September 30, 2001, iii). Besides the military measures, the Bush Administration committed itself to ‘*transformational diplomacy*’; that is, encouraging the creation of democratic institutions so that the political leaders of the countries could be made responsible for whatever happens in their state.

In contrast to the analysis of the Bush Administration, most of the people outside the U.S., and some inside as well, do not consider international terrorism a strategic threat. They believe that the roots of the problem is predominantly economic and social, so military steps are misplaced. Moreover, unilateralism is also rejected partly because of the danger of precedent, and partly because the neo-conservative approach to state sovereignty, *ad absurdum*, may threaten the security of *any* state in the world and, in the spirit of *Realpolitik*, the latter will increase their efforts to provide for their own security which, in turn, may result in a global arms race and a dangerously high level of arms buildup. Third, the critics call attention to the fact that these ‘existential threats’ require the

efforts by the whole or the majority of the international community; therefore, resorting to unilateral steps could not eradicate the problem. In addition, there were structural problems in the Bush Administration's approach to alliances. The Rumsfeldian 'the mission determines the coalition' requires that the common platform should be found again and again in each new 'coalition of the willing', while there is no need for such complicated and time-consuming process in an alliance based on commonly professed interests and values. (Brooks and Wohlforth 51; Daalder, Lindsay and Goldgeier 413.) Zbigniew Brzezinski added that *ad hoc* coalitions are, by definition, for a short time and of tactical nature, while what the U.S. really needs are strategic alliances. (Brzezinski 35). The former National Security Adviser to President Carter also suggested that these strategic partners should come from Europe as the European countries are the ones sharing the more or less similar interests and values with the U.S. and not Russia or India. (Brzezinski 60).

As it was already mentioned, other great powers, primarily Russia and China, consider U.S. dominance/hegemony a threat to their national interests and, therefore, do their best to balance the Americans. At the same time, retaining the leading role (hegemony) in the world is at the very center of the U.S. national security strategy. As *The National Security Strategy of the United States* (2006) puts it: "We wish to *shape* the world" instead of being just a part of the transformation of the world order. (1). The U.S., consequently, wishes to maintain '*hegemoniac stability*' and '*democratic peace*' in the world. (Owens 26) Hegemony means trying to create an international environment which is most beneficial to the country concerned. Though hegemoniac stability is not necessarily a zero-sum game, that is, it can bring greater stability and prosperity to other states as well (the post-World War II West European situation is a case in mind), a number of countries which do not profit from this system are bound to attempt to alter the situation and, thus, are likely to make the international order less stable. (Layne 2002:177). The American 'transformational diplomacy' (democracy export) may be perceived as an attempt to undermine the authoritarian rule—certainly this is the prevalent view in Russia and China. Moreover, most of the European countries have grave doubts about the feasibility of exporting democracy; they believe that any democratic transition should be a bottom-up organic process, in which the creation of appropriate political institutions (e.g., a representative body, etc.) should only follow genuine and gradual economic and social transitions. It must be mentioned that

while the first Bush Administration made relatively huge efforts at democracy export (nation building), especially in the Middle East, it shifted toward stability—a more restrained and realistic goal between 2005 and 2009.

During the Cold War the major adversary was a totalitarian ideology and, accordingly, the major ‘front’ was the struggle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people. After the attacks on 9/11, President Bush. For a very short time, held Islam responsible for the atrocities. However, the Administration soon changed the rhetoric and the main target became ‘radical *Islamists*’—that is, not the whole religion but those who used it for advancing their radical and violent agenda. Nevertheless, the ideological dimension did not disappear from the American strategic thinking: *The National Security Strategy of the United States* in 2006 unambiguously declared that the fight against terrorists would be a military one in the short run, but an ideological battle in the long run. (9).

There are several different theories to describe the current international situation. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. claims that the world is neither unipolar, nor multipolar. He likens the world to a three-dimensional chessboard. On one of its levels, that of military might, the U.S. enjoys undisputed superiority. On the second, economic level, there are several centers of power; while on the third one, on the relations among states, power is dispersed to a large extent because it is on this level that the non-state actors appear. (Nye 58). Fareed Zakaria writes about ‘the rise of the rest’ and he also suggests that power is widely dispersed among the state and non-state actors in international life. Parag Khanna does not only see the relative loss of power by the U.S. as the main dynamic in today’s international relations, but he also believes that the EU and China are losing influence on the global geopolitical ‘market’ as well. Robert Kagan speaks about the return of great power rivalry which characterized the 19th and 20th centuries, but he adds that the ideological struggle has also reappeared after being declared ‘dead’ by Francis Fukuyama in the early 1990s. Nina Hachigian and Mona Suthpen calls attention to the fact, though, that ideological rivalry belongs to the past because the potentially most dangerous centers of power to the U.S. from a strategic point of view—Russia, China, and India—in reality do not pose any serious ideological challenge to Washington; the challenge they do pose is predominantly technological. (Hachigian and Suthpen 43–44) Stephen Van Evera adds that the U.S. should break with Spykman’s geopolitical theory: it does not have any relevance in today’s world whether one

country gains hegemony in Eurasia or not. (Leffler and Legro 259). Moreover, these potential rivals are in the same security 'boat' with the U.S.: transnational terrorism, the proliferation of WMD, climate change, pandemics, environmental degradation, etc. affect them as much as they do the Americans. To solve these problems, strategic cooperation is needed; and the U.S. should reconsider its 'go-it-along' mentality and give up a portion of its sovereignty.

The Obama-administration has also committed itself to maintain the basic strategic goal of its predecessors: maintaining the leading position of the U.S. in the world. Besides the protection of the American soil and population, the Democratic Administration still concentrates on the nonproliferation of the WMD, the prevention of the synergy between transnational terrorist groups and WMD, the delay of the rise of global and regional rivals, as well as the support of parliamentary democracy and free market economy. However, a shift can be perceived toward the 'soft' areas: public diplomacy and the improvement of the image of the U.S. have been given a more prominent role than in the past few years. The other shift is toward a more hard-headed *Realpolitik*: the most obvious example is the attempt 'to reset' the relationship with Russia, which in practice seems to mean that Washington is willing to make concessions and symbolic gestures to Moscow in return for closer cooperation in such strategic matters as nonproliferation or Iran. (The question is whether Russia is willing and/or capable of cooperating in these and other strategic issues.) Barack Obama seems to be downgrading Europe to a certain extent; the question the successive American administrations asked for about half a century after 1945 was 'what we can do for you?'—as a strong Europe was absolutely necessary for the security of the U.S. Now, it seems that this question is put the other way round: 'what can you do for us?' The vital geographic and functional challenges to the U.S. fall outside of Europe nowadays and there is a perceptible shift of attention away from Europe to Asia in the first place in U.S. strategic thinking. The threat perception—and the recommended or preferred tools to handle them—continues to be different on the two sides of the Atlantic. The U.S. military posture has not changed a lot recently and the transformation of the U.S. armed forces continues to widen the capability gap between the U.S. and its allies within NATO. Therefore, the possibility of unilateral American action cannot be excluded in the future either. In sum, the U.S. 'grand strategy' that took shape in the 1990s shows more continuity than discontinuity under the

Democratic and Republican administrations; what has changed is mostly the rhetoric and not the goals.

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