“Foreign Policy Legacies of the Clinton Administration for American Administrations in the Twenty-first Century

James M. McCormick
Iowa State University, jmmcc@iastate.edu

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Abstract
On the first day of the NATO air campaign against Serbian forces in Kosovo in March 1999, President Clinton addressed the American people and justified American participation in those air strikes by asserting that "we are upholding our values, protecting our interests and advancing the cause of peace."1 The United States, Clinton declared, was acting out of a "moral imperative" to help the people of Kosovo, but he also justified American actions as an effort to defend its "national interest" by preventing the conflict from spreading into the rest of Europe and by demonstrating the effectiveness of the NATO alliance in the post-Cold War era.2 By early 1999, foreign policy was an important issue for the administration, and its policy rationale now exhibited elements of both idealism and realism.

Disciplines
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Comments
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On the first day of the NATO air campaign against Serbian forces in Kosovo in March 1999, President Clinton addressed the American people and justified American participation in those air strikes by asserting that “we are upholding our values, protecting our interests and advancing the cause of peace.” The United States, Clinton declared, was acting out of a “moral imperative” to help the people of Kosovo, but he also justified American actions as an effort to defend its “national interest” by preventing the conflict from spreading into the rest of Europe and by demonstrating the effectiveness of the NATO alliance in the post–Cold War era. By early 1999, foreign policy was an important issue for the administration, and its policy rationale now exhibited elements of both idealism and realism.

Six years earlier, its foreign policy approach was different in at least two ways. First, foreign policy was not a central concern for the administration. Indeed, Clinton came to office with little foreign policy experience and with little interest in foreign affairs. Anthony Lake, Clinton’s first national security adviser, was told to “keep foreign policy from becoming a problem—keep it off the screen and spare Clinton from getting embroiled as he [goes] about his domestic business.” Second, to the extent that foreign policy was an issue, the Clinton approach was steeped in idealism. Two fundamental premises shaped its initial “strategy of enlargement” as the administration sought to create a more peaceful global community: (1) enlarge the number of democracies, since “democracies don’t fight one another”; and (2) expand the number of market economies and global prosperity, since prospering nations do not have time to fight one another. According to this design, global peace and security would be pur-
sued indirectly—and without the emphasis on alliances, force, and threat of war that had marked the previous forty-five years.

Despite the change in foreign policy emphasis during the Clinton administration, a common thread held its foreign policy process together: a concern for linking American domestic politics and American foreign policy. At the outset of its term, for instance, the emphasis on the growth of market democracies was driven by candidate Clinton’s commitment to follow a foreign policy “grounded in America’s democratic values” and by the desire to pursue a foreign policy that would assist the American economy. At the time of the Clinton administration’s actions in Kosovo, the impact of domestic politics had not diminished. Because of the American public’s opposition to the use of U.S. ground forces abroad, President Clinton felt compelled to eschew sending troops to Kosovo in his March 1999 address. Furthermore, he had to proceed cautiously since Congress was divided over the wisdom of Kosovo policy.

I begin this chapter by outlining the initial approach of the administration and by describing how it changed over time. Next, I discuss several international and domestic challenges that the Clinton administration faced in the foreign policy arena and their impact on its foreign policy approach. During this discussion, I use several major foreign policy crises (e.g., Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo) to illustrate the international challenges that the administration faced, and several domestic disputes over foreign policy issues to illustrate the effects of Congress, political parties, interest groups, and public opinion on Clinton’s foreign policy approach.

Several themes thus shape the subsequent analysis. First, I will contend that these domestic and international challenges focused greater presidential attention and involvement on foreign policy; that these challenges altered the Clinton administration’s heavy dose of foreign policy idealism and produced a greater sense of political realism by its second term; and that the domestic constraints—whether from Congress, interest groups, and the public—were often crucial in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy responses. Based upon this analysis, I conclude by identifying several short-term and long-term legacies of the Clinton administration for American foreign policy—legacies in terms of both the policy priorities that the administration pursued and the policymaking process that it employed.

THE CLINTON FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH:
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Bill Clinton came to office under some unusual foreign policy circumstances and with several apparent foreign policy disadvantages. As Clinton assumed the presidency, the fundamental rationale for American foreign policy over the past five decades had been lost, the importance of foreign policy was in question, and the level of public support for foreign policy actions seemed uncertain. Furthermore, unlike his two immediate predecessors, Bill Clinton came to office
neither with a strong ideological view on foreign affairs nor with much foreign policy experience. In addition, he promised to focus on the domestic economy, not on foreign policy.

Despite these disadvantages, Bill Clinton also enjoyed a major advantage: the Cold War was over, and he had some margin for error in shaping and conducting American foreign policy. As such, he announced that he wanted to change American foreign policy from the “ad hoc” approach of the Bush years and establish a foreign policy based on American values. That is, instead of a foreign policy that had been “rudderless, reactive, and erratic” under the Bush administration, Clinton would have a foreign policy that was “strategic,” “vigorous,” and compatible with American values. At the outset of his administration, President Clinton sought to outline a policy that would do so.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The administration started by identifying three key principles to serve as guides to its foreign policy: (1) achieving economic security for the United States, (2) maintaining an appropriate defense posture for the post-Cold War era, and (3) promoting democracy worldwide. In addition, these principles were expected to serve as means for linking the foreign and domestic arenas.

The first principle, achieving economic security, was an especially important initial policy guide and a crucial link between the two arenas. In his campaign for the presidency in 1992, Bill Clinton declared that the United States “must tear down the wall in our thinking between domestic and foreign policy.” The isolation of one policy arena from the other was hampering America’s ability to build an effective policy for the United States as a whole, especially in light of the dramatic changes in global politics and in light of the stagnant domestic economy. Hence, the United States would take several domestic actions to improve America’s global competitiveness and several international actions to open foreign markets. Moreover, these foreign economic actions would be pursued as vigorously as the United States had waged the Cold War.

The second principle, maintaining an effective defense, emphasized downsizing and reshaping America’s military for a new era. The Clinton administration’s “Bottom Up Review” outlined the kind of new military that it sought—a military that was smaller, more mobile, and more capable of new missions for the changing threat environment. This new military, too, would produce savings on defense expenditures. The result of this effort—and of a follow-up study in 1997, the Quadrennial Defense Review—was to produce a smaller, more technologically sophisticated military with the ability to fight two major regional conflicts (MRCs) simultaneously (or nearly simultaneously) and to undertake several new tasks, such as international peacekeeping.

The third initial principle, promoting democracy worldwide, was an effort to move away from the status quo approach that the administration claimed the Bush administration followed and to embrace global democratic reform. "My
administration,” Bill Clinton declared, “will stand up for democracy.” The emphasis on democracy was embraced not only to espouse American values but also as a mechanism to achieve a more peaceful world. As noted above, the more democracies in the world, the more likely peace would be maintained.

A synergistic relationship existed among these principles for American foreign policy. As America’s economy rebounded, a strong and flexible defense posture would be possible, albeit one that would not burden the American economy. A sound American economy, bolstered by a solid defense, would allow the United States to promote democracy across the world. In all, the creation of more democracies across the world would produce a safer international environment.

THE STRATEGY OF ENLARGEMENT

By September 1993, these initial principles were expanded and incorporated into a broader statement labeled the “strategy of enlargement.” This strategy was designed to replace the containment strategy and to give a more dynamic vision to the Clinton administration’s overall approach. In the words of Anthony Lake the strategy of enlargement meant the “enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies.” The strategy had four major components: “[1] strengthen the community of major market democracies...[2] foster and consolidate new democracies and market economies where possible...[3] counter the aggression—and support the liberalization of states hostile to democracy and markets...[and] [4] pursue our humanitarian agenda not only by providing aid but also by working to help democracy and market economies [develop].”

As this strategy was outlined, Lake and other key foreign policy officials reiterated several other foreign policy principles that would shape administration policy: the United States was committed to a global role; it would act unilaterally or multilaterally, depending on the circumstances, to achieve its goals; and it would use American force when necessary. Responding to critics who argued that Clinton’s policy was driven too much by global considerations and not enough by U.S. interests, Lake maintained that American national interests would always be the guide to policy actions.

SOME CONCERNS ABOUT THE INITIAL APPROACH

Despite the effort to refocus and reshape American foreign policy in a more coherent way with this strategy, it soon became a source of weakness when the strategy of enlargement did not gain much support at home. The overall approach was criticized outside the administration as being less a strategy and more a statement of principles, as overly ambitious and lacking “operational terms” (Kissinger, 1994, 74), and as approaching “foreign policy as if it were on a supermarket shopping spree, grabbing whatever it takes a fancy to.”
Senator John McCain characterized the approach as lacking "a conception of what they want the world to look like in ten or 20 years." It was even viewed skeptically inside the administration. Secretary of State Warren Christopher saw the strategy of enlargement simply as "a trade policy masquerading as foreign policy" and not as a way to address significant international problems that required attention on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, as one official said, "Christopher just refused to use the 'E' word."

Furthermore, the strategy did not provide a clear enough guide to American policy in several key arenas that the Clinton administration faced. For instance, how did the strategy suggest specific policy direction for American actions in Bosnia or Somalia? How did it help specify the actions that the United States ought to pursue toward the changes in Russia and China? How did it guide policy for the new kinds of strategic and transnational threats, whether from the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center or from the perfidy posed by Saddam Hussein?

**SOME REVISIONS IN APPROACH**

By early 1995, Secretary of State Christopher sought to give more concrete definition to the administration's foreign policy. He did so by outlining several specific policy principles and linking them to American actions in key areas of the world. While Christopher once again committed the United States to global engagement and leadership, he also indicated that America would pursue cooperative ties with other powerful nations, seek to adapt and build sound economic and security institutions in the international community, and support democracy and human rights. In turn, these principles would lead to a focus on opening up the global trading order, building a new security system in Europe, seeking a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and combating international crime. These principles and proposed actions would also do something else: they would increasingly emphasize the political/security arena, even as the economic policy focus remained, and would increasingly involve the president directly in policy direction.

Two years later, near the beginning of the second term in March 1997, the new national security adviser—Samuel (Sandy) Berger—gave an even more pronounced security focus to the Clinton administration's foreign policy. Berger now identified "six key strategic objectives" that the Clinton administration would seek to address in the new term: "working for an undivided, democratic peaceful Europe ... forging a strong, stable Asia Pacific community ... embracing our role ... as a decisive force for peace in the world ... building the bulwarks through a more open and competitive trading system ... and maintaining a strong military and fully funded diplomacy." These kinds of objectives appeared to be much more concrete than those in the original strategy of
enlargement and were also more typical of American objectives in earlier decades.

Two months later, the Clinton administration also reported to Congress on its “National Security Strategy for a New Century” and, significantly, inverted two of the three policy principles originally identified in 1993. It now identified America’s core objectives as seeking “to enhance our security with effective diplomacy and with military forces that are ready to fight and win, to bolster America’s economic prosperity [and] to promote democracy abroad.” In essence, the traditional political/military emphasis gained increased primacy among the key objectives or policy principles, even as the economic security goal and the democracy goal remained important objectives. By this time, too (and most likely dating back to 1994, over Haiti and Bosnia), President Clinton had become fully engaged in the foreign affairs arena and the direction of policy.

Finally, in February 1999, President Clinton again outlined a new foreign policy direction by identifying five major challenges that the United States faced at the dawn of the new millennium. Significantly, the first two challenges revealed the continued emphasis on political/military concerns by calling for building “a more peaceful 21st century” by renewing alliances, whether through NATO expansion or renewing alliances with Japan and Korea, and by bringing “our former adversaries, Russia and China,” into international policy “as open, prosperous, stable nations.” The third challenge, too, had a security ring to it, although it was directed more toward the new threats and dangers in the international arena than the past ones. The United States must seek “to build a future in which our people are safe from dangers that arise . . . from proliferation, from terrorism, from drugs, from the multiple catastrophes that could arise from climate change.” Only the fourth and fifth challenges reflected the kind of emphasis that the administration originally brought to foreign policy in 1993. They focused on creating “a world trading and financial system that will lift the lives of ordinary people on every continent around the world” and keeping “freedom as a top goal for the world of the 21st century.” In short, security relations and state-to-state relations were now receiving a greater emphasis by the administration than the restructuring of the global society through democratic enlargement that marked the beginning of the administration.

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC POLICY CHALLENGES: SOURCES OF POLICY REVISIONS

These revisions in foreign policy priorities—moving from the original three principles and the strategy of enlargement, and then to Christopher’s, Berger’s and Clinton’s reformulations—may be perceived as refinement of policy direction or may be viewed as a more significant transformation from idealism to realism. Whatever one’s ultimate assessment, these changes do reveal two important modifications: (1) the president now saw foreign policy as a crucial area
of policy interest, and (2) the emphasis in foreign policy had shifted from the earliest days of the administration.

These changes, of course, did not occur in a vacuum; instead, they were the result of policy successes and failures in both the international and domestic arenas for the Clinton administration. By examining key foreign policy actions in these two arenas, we can gain a better sense of how these changes in policy priorities came about and can begin to judge the likely stability of these changes for American foreign policy at the start of a new millennium.

International Challenges

Early on in the Clinton administration, several international challenges required the administration (and the president) to focus more fully on foreign policy and to rethink its initial approach. As noted, the three key principles and the strategy of enlargement proved less than adequate foreign policy guides for addressing specific problems in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Russia, and Central Europe. As a result, policy became somewhat ad hoc and often driven by domestic political considerations. In fact, one critic characterized the early Clinton approach as foreign policy by “social work” and not as an approach protecting American interests. Such criticism only added to the budding controversy over foreign policy and accelerated the call for policy reformulation.

The cases of Somalia and Bosnia in particular serve to illustrate the uncertainty in policymaking during the early years of the Clinton administration. Although the Bush administration had intervened in Somalia in December 1992 to provide humanitarian assistance to those suffering from the warring tribal clans, the Clinton administration sought to expand the mission there. The new administration enlarged the mission to include a nation-building goal in which the United States would help to restore both order and a functioning government in Somalia. By the fall of 1993, the new mission had failed, owing to the sustained resistance of some clans and the ambivalence of the Clinton administration over how much force it wanted to use. In October 1993, the killing of eighteen Army rangers, the dragging of a dead American through the streets of Mogadishu, and the public display and ridicule of a captured American produced a sharp response from both the U.S. Congress and the American public. The Clinton administration and Congress moved quickly to end American involvement there. The direction of American foreign policy was very much in doubt.

The effectiveness of the administration’s initial policy toward Bosnia proved equally troubling. Bosnia, a former republic of Yugoslavia, had declared its independence in 1992, an action that precipitated a civil war among ethnic Serbs, ethnic Croats, and Muslims living there. While the Bush administration had largely adopted a hands-off stance regarding that conflict, Bill Clinton asserted that his administration would take decisive action by adopting a “lift and strike” policy—lifting the arms embargo for the Bosnian Muslims to allow them to defend themselves, and striking the Serbs with American air power. Once in
office, Clinton did neither. Instead, the administration's initial inaction was caricatured as one of "rift and drift"—a rift with its European allies over appropriate policy, and drift due to its indecisiveness over what to do next. Clinton administration policy eventually changed toward Bosnia by mid-1995, due to the increased atrocities that occurred in Bosnia and to Congress's prodding to lift the American arms embargo. President Clinton became more fully engaged, and the situation on the ground changed due in part to NATO bombing. The Dayton Accords were eventually negotiated and signed in Paris among the conflicting parties. In essence, a rather detached policy from early on in the administration had evolved into a policy of substantial American engagement by late 1995.

Several other international crises in the administration's early years also illustrate the difficulty that it faced in providing a clear and firm direction in foreign policy. On the one hand, the Clinton administration did very little when Rwanda erupted in genocide in April 1994, even though the administration's human rights concerns would seemingly have driven it toward substantial involvement. The reason was that the Somalia experience paralyzed the administration, producing a reassessment of how and when American military power should be used. On the other hand, the Clinton administration acted more robustly when Saddam Hussein sought to challenge the no-fly zones imposed on Iraq by the international community. In October 1994, the administration ordered 36,000 American forces into Kuwait to serve as a deterrent to any contemplated Iraqi action. Similarly in September 1994, the administration adopted an interventionist policy toward Haiti, when its earlier diplomatic and economic measures failed to budge the military leaders from power.

Several other international issues pulled the administration toward greater involvement in foreign policy. In post-Communist Russia, for example, the situation was quite unsettled, and the stability of the new government under Boris Yeltsin was in doubt. The Clinton administration thus moved to provide a substantial amount of economic assistance to Russia and diplomatic support to Yeltsin. Similarly, while the negotiations in the Middle East peace process had produced agreements between Israel and the Palestinians and between Israel and Jordan by 1993 and 1994, respectively, the administration quickly saw that further progress would require sustained attention by the president.

Two other important policy issues—most favored nation (MFN) status for China and the question of NATO expansion—prompted the Clinton administration to address foreign policy but also revealed the difficulty that the administration faced in reconciling some of its foreign policy principles with its actions. The issue of granting MFN status for China, of course, was not a new one. It had vexed past administrations, especially in light of documented human rights violations by China (e.g., the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989). Indeed, the Democratic Congress challenged the Bush administration on its granting of MFN status and nearly passed a resolution overriding a presidential veto on at least one occasion. What was new was that candidate Bill Clinton asserted that
he would stand up to the tyrants in Beijing and promote democracy. However, in a quick policy reversal, shortly after his election in November 1992, Clinton announced that he would continue the past Bush policy. Indeed, in May 1993, Clinton granted China provisional renewal of MFN status, but he required that China make real progress in the human rights area for subsequent renewals. In May 1994, however, the Clinton administration not only decided to renew MFN status, but also delinked future renewals from human rights considerations. Since then, the Clinton administration routinely renewed MFN status, arguing that a free trading relationship is the most practical way to promote political (democratic) change in the long term. At least in the short term, the administration's economic principle trumped its democratic reform principle.

The issue of NATO's future was hardly new either. The Bush administration had already sought to enhance consultation and cooperation with the countries of central Europe after the end of the Cold War. The Clinton administration, however, needed to decide how far NATO change would go, especially in light of its effort to nurture better ties with Russia. Its initial NATO proposal called for creating "Partnership for Peace," a kind of "junior membership" for states of central Europe, including Russia, in which individual states would complete an agreement with NATO on cooperative and "confidence-building" measures between them. Some countries of central Europe were not satisfied with the partnership idea and desired full membership instead. As a way to put a firmer stamp on Clinton administration foreign policy (and perhaps to appeal to central European ethnic voters at home), several advisers within the administration urged the president to offer full membership to some states. The proposed new NATO states—Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—wanted full membership to ensure their own security, while the United States saw it as a way to facilitate democracy in the region. Russia objected strongly to this initiative because NATO expansion represented yet another kind of encirclement and another way to divide up Europe. After several maneuvers, the United States and its NATO alliance announced at the Madrid Summit in July 1997 that it would go ahead with the expansion plan in April 1999—the fiftieth anniversary of the alliance. Thus, the Clinton administration ultimately opted for promoting democracy (and security) in Europe rather than focusing so singularly on solidifying American-Russian relations.

**Domestic Challenges**

A number of domestic challenges over foreign policy also encouraged greater presidential attention to international issues and, ultimately, some change in policy direction. The first and most difficult domestic challenge on a foreign policy issue was the administration's effort to gain approval from Congress for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Although the American public had consistently supported efforts to provide greater economic security through international actions, domestic critics raised serious questions about
NAFTA. Substantial opposition to NAFTA came from members of the president’s own party, especially from labor unions, who were anxious about the loss of jobs to cheaper labor in Mexico; producer groups (e.g., citrus and fruit growers), who would suffer from the trade pacts; and environmentalists, who were concerned about the enforcement of pollution and water standards along the Mexican border. As a result, the administration spent a considerable amount of time bargaining to gain congressional approval. In the end, the Clinton administration was forced to rely more on Republicans than Democrats to ensure the passage of the NAFTA agreement in the House of Representatives.31

A second area of domestic foreign policy challenge emerged over American military involvement abroad. The public’s view of such actions had been quite stable—and quite negative—for some time. That is, the public was generally opposed to interventions by the Clinton administration that sought to change domestic regimes or interventions that might entangle the United States in ongoing civil wars.32 Further, the public was not very supportive of foreign policy efforts that emphasized the promotion of democracy and human rights, albeit generally sympathetic to the suffering of the peoples in these countries.33 Hence, the Clinton administration faced an uphill battle in gaining public support for undertaking military measures, be they in Somalia, Bosnia, or Haiti. Moreover, the level of public support for President Clinton’s foreign policy leadership during the first two years of his administration suffered as a result.34 Indeed, public caution over the use of American troops continued to influence the administration’s actions, as evidenced by its reluctance to discuss this option during the war in Kosovo.

Domestic political opposition on foreign policy crystallized when Republicans won control of both houses of Congress in the 1994 congressional elections. Not surprisingly, Republicans were skeptical of the Clinton administration’s domestic policy priorities, but they were also at odds with much of the administration’s foreign policy goals and actions. To be sure, most Republican members of Congress supported the Clinton administration’s efforts at liberalizing trade around the world, but they generally opposed undertaking humanitarian interventions, participating in United Nations peacekeeping efforts, promoting sustainable development, and cutting the defense budget and the size of the American military. Hence, the new congressional majority rather quickly undertook actions seeking to trim America’s foreign assistance and international affairs budget, stop the sending of American forces abroad, and reverse the cuts in defense spending that the administration had initiated. Congress’s overall record on these efforts was mixed, but they did take some actions that stopped, slowed down, or questioned some Clinton administration foreign policy initiatives. In this sense, Congress had an effect on the direction of foreign policy during the Clinton years.

In the economic area, for instance, three significant actions illustrate the efforts of Congress to alter the Clinton agenda. First, Congress objected to an American bailout of the Mexican government after the Mexican peso plunged
in late 1994 and early 1995. The Clinton administration saw the bailout as vital to the success of NAFTA and to the economic health of the United States, but Congress saw it as leading to rescuing other insolvent countries around the world at America’s expense. The Clinton administration eventually used its own executive authority to fashion a $50 billion assistance package. Second, Congress was most reluctant to refinance the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after the 1997 Asian financial crisis had engulfed several nations there—Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea, among others. Congressional debate and discussions in various forums surrounded this executive branch request for $17.9 billion. Finally, after extensive White House, business, and farm group lobbying, Congress did approve a $17.9 billion appropriation to replenish the IMF, albeit more than twelve months later, in October 1998. Congress did so only after adding several conditions on IMF actions. Third, and perhaps most significantly, Congress failed to renew “fast-track” negotiating authority for the executive branch in November 1997. Under fast-track authority, Congress empowered the president to negotiate trade agreements with other countries, leaving Congress only the right to vote the pacts up or down, without benefit of any amendments. The authority offered the executive (and other nations) a considerable advantage, since once a pact is completed, it could not be changed. Ironically, Democratic opposition in the House to fast-track authority ultimately doomed congressional action on this measure.

In the security area, Congress also took actions that challenged the Clinton approach. Perhaps the most dramatic measures occurred over Somalia, Bosnia, and, more recently, Kosovo. After the October 3, 1993, incident in which eighteen Americans were killed in Somalia, Congress quickly voted to require American troops to be withdrawn from that country by March 31, 1994. As the Dayton Accords were being completed in November 1995, and the president announced that American forces would be sent to that troubled country, both chambers of Congress passed resolutions supporting American forces in Bosnia but opposing the Clinton policy toward that country. In March 1999, just as the NATO operation was about to begin over Kosovo, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution of support, but it did so only by a very tepid margin (58–41), with most senators voting along party lines. At the same time, the House backed the American military personnel involved in the air attacks virtually unanimously (424–1), but it did not debate the merits of the air attack as such. However, on a tie vote (213–213) in April 1999, the House rejected a resolution authorizing American participation in the air war.

More generally, Congress sought to reshape defense spending away from the priorities of the Clinton administration. Under the Clinton defense plans, for instance, the American military was trimmed back significantly, with each service undergoing personnel reductions. The army and air force had the biggest cuts, each with a 45 percent reduction since 1989, and the navy and marines had reductions of 36 percent and 12 percent, respectively. Similarly, overall spending on defense was cut during the Clinton years, although the Clinton
administration began to recommend some increases near the end of its term. When the Republicans gained majority control of the Congress, they called for increases in spending on defense preparedness—additional training for personnel and modern weaponry—and questioned whether the United States military was currently equipped to fight two MRCs simultaneously. In addition, the Republican Congress and the White House continually clashed over a variety of other issues—an anti-defense missile system for the United States, the extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the passage of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the ratification for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Although Congress only enjoyed limited success with several of these measures, it still succeeded in making it more difficult for the administration to continue its foreign policy direction.

Perhaps the major impact of Congress on the Clinton administration’s foreign policy occurred on two recent security questions related to nuclear weaponry. On one issue, the Republican Congress prodded the administration toward its favored position on a national missile defense system, and on the other, it stymied the administration’s effort in gaining approval for a ban on nuclear testing. On the former, Congress succeeded in keeping a theater missile defense program alive in the mid-1990s despite opposition from the Clinton administration, and ultimately enacted the National Missile Defense Act in 1999, with President Clinton’s signature. Under this legislation, the United States must deploy a limited system “as soon as technologically feasible,” and the Clinton administration had promised a decision by June 2000.39 That decision was later postponed and left to the new administration, assuming office in January 2001. On the latter, the Senate rendered a stinging foreign policy defeat by recommending against the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty because it viewed the treaty as flawed.40 While the treaty passed the Senate by a narrow margin (51–48), largely along party lines, that margin was still sixteen votes short of the necessary two-thirds support required. The defeat was characterized as a “humiliating setback” for a treaty that “was supposed to be the crowning achievement of his foreign policy.”41 In this sense, Congress sought and succeeded in redirecting American foreign policy toward its own priorities in these areas.

Finally, a domestic issue also contributed to greater attention to foreign policy—the impeachment of President Clinton by the House of Representatives and the trial in the Senate in late 1998 and early 1999. Although these actions resulted from President Clinton’s involvement with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and his lying about this affair to the American public and federal authorities, they also had an indirect effect on foreign policy. During the lengthy investigations and hearings over this matter, the president seemed to take on more foreign policy duties—including traveling overseas—to illustrate that he was continuing to conduct the matters of state, to present a sense of normalcy, and to downplay this issue. In short, foreign policy received more and more attention by the administration and the president by 1998 and 1999.
THE LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM FOREIGN POLICY LEGACIES

While it is difficult to assess fully the foreign policy impact of the Clinton administration at close range, let me suggest some possible short- and long-term legacies left by the administration. For analytic purposes, these legacies will be divided between the administration's likely impact on policy priorities toward other nations and its likely impact on the policymaking process within the United States, but in essence they are intertwined, because domestic politics continue to play a prominent role in the shaping of American foreign policy.

Policy Priorities

On the policy side, the first and perhaps most important legacy of the Clinton administration is the commitment to continued American involvement in global affairs after the end of the Cold War. Voices from several different political quarters—and ranging all along the political spectrum—called for various forms of isolationism or unilateralism with the end of the Cold War, but the Clinton administration never wavered in its commitment to maintaining a global role for the United States. Presidential and executive branch statements throughout the administration's two terms, virtually without exception, confirmed (and reinforced) this commitment to global involvement.

The commitment to sustained international engagement was manifested more fully through the several significant economic and military actions that the administration undertook. The passage of NAFTA and GATT are important indicators of this engagement, as are the continued presence of American military personnel in Europe (roughly at 100,000) and in Asia (also at roughly 100,000 in Japan and Korea). Specific American military actions, however, provide an even greater sense of the commitment to a sustained global role. Whether it was enforcing the no-fly zones over Iraq, sending a significant military component for the peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, conducting the war with Serbia against Kosovo (and subsequently sending in peacekeeping forces), or proposing (and achieving) NATO expansion, the Clinton administration consistently sought engagement over nonengagement after the Cold War. In this sense, the commitments and engagements initiated by the Clinton administration seem to ensure a global role for the United States, in both the short and the long term.

A second policy legacy—and the one that will likely represent the administration's greatest long-term, specific policy bequeath—is the placement of foreign economic policy at the center of America's international policy agenda. While global economic security issues have always been an important concern for post–World War II administrations, the Clinton administration placed an even higher policy priority on those issues with the end of the Cold War. In this sense, the bilateral and multilateral free-trade agreements negotiated by the administration are, and will remain, a significant policy legacy. The maintenance
and expansion of these agreements will necessarily continue as a high priority for future administrations as global economic interdependence accelerates and America’s economic hegemony continues to be challenged. If an enduring legacy of the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was for American presidents to assume more responsibility for assisting in managing the American domestic economy, a likely legacy of the Clinton administration will be for future American presidents to assume more responsibility in managing the global economy.

There is also an important global corollary to this economic legacy: through its bilateral and multilateral economic actions, the Clinton administration bequeathed a more liberal global trading order to the international community than when it took office. The ratification of the GATT accords was particularly significant, since it created a new successor global economic organization—the WTO, or World Trade Organization. This organization is more fully committed to enforcing the principle of free trade than ever before. Other multilateral actions—whether through passing NAFTA, prodding APEC to create a free-trade area, or initiating Western Hemisphere discussions on free trade—contributed to this more open trade environment, too. Further, the Clinton administration signed over 270 trade liberalization pacts with other countries during its tenure. These pacts include an extraordinarily important one with China from November 1999 in which the Clinton administration pledged its support to obtain permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) for China from the U.S. Congress and to support China’s membership in the WTO. In late 2000, Congress approved PNTR for China.

This free-trade legacy, however, continues to be controversial. The massive demonstrations at the WTO’s meeting in Seattle in December 1999 illustrate the concerns and anguish of many groups across many nations over the expansion of free trade. While some nations benefit from these efforts at opening the global market, both in the long and short run, other nations fear that they may be left behind. In addition, many environmental and labor groups fear that their interests will be seriously damaged if some limits are not placed on these free-trade agreements. Nonetheless, President Clinton reaffirmed his commitment to the free-trade principle and to the WTO in Seattle, even as he called for some reform within that organization.

A third long-term policy legacy is in the redefinition of the threat environment faced by the United States after the Cold War. Unlike the previous post–World War II administrations, the Clinton administration had to contend with a global threat environment that was now more diverse and more diffuse. While the Cold War largely represented a singular threat from the Soviet Union with its arsenal of nuclear weapons, the new environment presented new threats ranging from new (or old) regional and communal conflicts to any old (or new) great power rivalries. As regional powers seek regional dominance and acquire a variety of weapons of mass destruction (whether they be nuclear, biological, or chemical), they potentially pose dangers for the national interests of the United States.
As communal conflicts within and between states over religious, cultural, and ethnic identities increase, they, too, present the prospect that the United States might be drawn into them. The fighting over Kashmir between the newest nuclear power states, India and Pakistan, in the summer of 1999 illustrates the former, while the seventy-eight-day war over Kosovo, also in 1999, illustrates the latter. American quarrels with Russia over Kosovo or Bosnia, or American disputes with China over Taiwan, or spying within the United States illustrates the continuity of great power conflicts, too.

A fourth, and more troublesome, policy legacy flows from the third: While the Clinton administration recognized these new threats, it was less successful in developing a “strategic consensus” around them and in restructuring the military in a way to deal with them. That is, the administration failed to define and rank-order these threats and failed to outline a strategy (or set of strategies) to deal with them. Leading analysts, both implicitly and explicitly, touch on this policy shortcoming. Joseph Nye recently outlined the need to redefine the “new national interest” in the information age, and specified alternate responses to differing American interests (and threats). Earlier, Samuel Huntington worried about “the erosion of the American national interests” and was pessimistic that the United States could move beyond the current “foreign policy of particularism,” a policy largely driven by ethnic and commercial interests. As such, future administrations face at least a short-term Clinton legacy in seeking to put together a coherent policy consensus to deal with these differing threats.

To be sure, the Clinton administration sought to do so but for the most part did not succeed, as evidenced by the great gulf between opinion leaders and the public across a wide array of foreign policy issues. While creating a policy consensus has many dimensions and represents a formidable task for any administration, two components in the short term will remain particularly vexing for future administrations. The first focuses on the appropriate American response to regional and communal conflicts, and the second deals with devising the appropriate strategy for managing great power conflicts in the new millennium, especially with an emerging great power such as China.

The first component encompasses both reshaping the American military in a way to enable the United States to respond to regional and communal threats, and developing a clearer decision calculus of when and what kind of force should be used in these conflicts. For the former, the Clinton administration initially moved toward a considerable downsizing of the military and a substantial reliance on the “revolution in military affairs” to address emerging threats. While the administration has recently proposed greater funding for military preparedness, including some weapons modernization, resolving the debate over the size and shape of the military for the new century is an immediate short-term legacy for any new administration. For the latter, the administration issued Presidential Decision Directive 25 (or PDD 25) after the Somalia debacle. This directive identified specific conditions that needed to be met for American participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations. Although these conditions
represent an attempt to establish a closer linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy, they are hardly ironclad guides to policy, since they allow considerable judgment on the part of decision makers.

The second component of any effort to build a policy consensus requires a fuller strategy for dealing with great power conflicts. While Russia will continue to pose some uncertainty for the United States, China, as an emerging great power, poses a greater policy challenge for American administrations in the new millennium. The Clinton administration embraced a policy of "constructive engagement," manifesting itself in a variety of continuing contacts and interactions between the two countries. The rationale for this policy was that these contacts would stimulate Chinese economic and political reforms in ways compatible with American interests. (A similar rationale was used to support PNTR for China and for its membership in WTO.) This approach, however, created substantial domestic controversy. The Chinese have been accused of engaging in a litany of activities that jeopardize this relationship—whether it be spying within the United States, contributing illegal campaign funds in the 1996 elections, engaging in unfair trade practices, committing continuous human rights violations, promoting abortions, or threatening Taiwan. Thus, in the short term, future administrations will be faced with how to manage this relationship effectively as part of a more general effort to develop a new foreign policy consensus.

Policymaking Process

Many of the Clinton administration's policymaking legacies flow from these foreign policy priorities and reveal more fully how domestic politics and foreign policy are closely linked today. While these legacies generally broaden domestic participation in foreign policy decision making, they also represent a continuation (and sometimes an acceleration) of trends already begun under previous administrations. In this sense, these legacies generally connote incremental long-term changes in the policymaking process rather than abrupt short-term trends tied to a particular administration. For convenience of discussion, these policymaking legacies may be divided between those that have developed within the executive branch and those that have developed beyond it.

In the executive branch, the Clinton administration left at least four policymaking legacies. First and foremost, the Clinton administration's experience illustrates the crucial role of the president's involvement in the foreign policy process. With the increasing domestification of American foreign policy, a president needs to be personally involved in the foreign policy process and must usually work to frame issues in a way consonant with the current domestic environment. At other times, the president must take clear—and sometimes difficult—stances, even in the face of public opposition, and work hard to achieve his preferred policy outcome. In short, and as the Clinton administration often found out, whether framing policy compatible with the domestic environment...
or framing policy at odds with popular views, direct—and continuous—presidential involvement in the foreign policy arena is crucial today.52

The next two policymaking legacies—the number of issues constituting the foreign policy agenda and the number of participants addressing them in Washington—emanate from the changing global threat environment in international politics today. While security issues remained an important component of the foreign policy agenda, especially as the Clinton administration’s policy approach evolved, the breadth of the issues that fall under the foreign policy rubric has broadened to include global environmental, economic, and social issues. As these kinds of issues expanded, the number of foreign policy participants within the executive branch (and beyond) necessarily grew as well. Now, virtually all cabinet departments and offices within the executive branch can place some claim on a foreign policy issue.

Consider, for example, the relatively new foreign policy issue of international drug trafficking from a South American country, and the array of agencies involved in addressing various aspects of that issue. The Department of State, the Department of Commerce, and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative would likely be involved in addressing the political and economic aspects of the relationship with the country where the drugs originate. The U.S. Customs Bureau, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Defense would likely be involved in efforts to control the transference of drugs into the United States. Finally, the Department of the Treasury, the FBI, and, more generally, the Department of Justice would likely be involved in tracking the attempts to launder the drug profits and bringing those responsible for these activities to justice.

A fourth policymaking legacy flows from these last two and reflects the economic policy priority underpinning the Clinton approach to foreign policy: the substantial increase in the number of individuals and institutions with economic expertise in the foreign policy making machinery of government at the start of the new millennium. At least four significant changes illustrate this enhanced economic role developed by the Clinton administration. First, the administration established a National Economic Council (NEC)—the equivalent, in theory, to the National Security Council—to provide economic advice on domestic and foreign policy concerns. Second, the administration formally included economic advisers as members of the committees forming the National Security Council decision-making system.53 Third, the administration restructured the Department of State to give a greater role to economic issues (e.g., the creation of the Office of the Coordinator for Business Affairs within the Undersecretariat for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs). Fourth, and finally, the Clinton administration has given increased prominence to the Department of the Treasury (and, particularly, the Secretary of the Treasury) in formulating economic policy and to the Department of Commerce in promoting trade policy around the world.54 While this legacy may be short term (since a new administration has substantial latitude to restructure the executive branch as it sees fit), the changing
global economy and the sustained involvement of "domestic" bureaucracies in foreign policy issues in earlier administrations suggest that these structural and process changes are more likely to be long term.

Outside the executive branch, several policymaking legacies remain from the Clinton administration, but they, too, largely reflect an acceleration of trends already under way. The first centers on the increasing role of Congress in dealing with foreign policy issues, and the second focuses on the increasing partisan divisions over the direction of American foreign policy. On balance, the intensities of these trends are probably short-term in that they may be ameliorated by a new administration or a new Congress; however, the general directions of these trends are unlikely to be reversed any time soon.

While an increased congressional role in foreign policy is hardly a new phenomenon, it quickened during the Clinton years, especially as the foreign policy issue agenda widened, and political differences surfaced. These institutional divisions ranged across the entire foreign policy issue spectrum—from security to economic to environmental to social issues. Witness the extended debate between the branches on such issues as NAFTA, Bosnia, foreign assistance, global human rights, and global warming. Since many of these issues permeate the foreign policy/domestic policy divide, and affect constituencies in a differential way (i.e., the passage of NAFTA helps some members’ districts but hurts others), members of Congress are more likely to act more independently on these issues, regardless of party affiliation or presidential leadership. Hence, the "domestification of foreign policy" has really come home to many lawmakers through these new international issues.

Second, and following from the first, the partisan and ideological foreign policy divisions intensified between the White House and Congress and within political parties during the Clinton years. Arms-control issues, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and foreign aid issues have particularly sparked partisan (and ideological) debate between Democrats and Republicans. Some issues, too (e.g., the NAFTA vote in 1993 or the fast-track vote in 1997) produced a sharp intra-party debate (among Democrats) by exacerbating ideological divisions over the direction of American trade policy. As one study demonstrates, partisan and ideological voting on foreign policy issues in both houses of Congress became more acrimonious in the Bush and Clinton years, with the level of executive/legislative bipartisanship lower than at any time since the beginning of the Cold War.

Two other policymaking legacies of the Clinton administration are likely to have more long-term effects and involve the incorporation of more and more domestic actors into the foreign policy process. One trend includes a greater role for interest groups in foreign policy making, the other a greater role for public opinion. Over the past decade, for instance, the number of interest groups—and particularly those interests lobbying on behalf of foreign nations (including apparently illegal campaign contributions from abroad)—has grown significantly. Virtually all the countries that used to be republics in the Soviet
Union have representatives in Washington, as well as Russia, China, and a myriad list of smaller countries from around the world. These foreign lobbies are now standard fare in the nation’s capital.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, lobbying by economic interest groups (e.g., over policy toward China) and new ethnic groups (e.g., the Central and East European Coalition over NATO expansion or aid to Central Europe) continue apace and have actually accelerated in recent years.

Lastly, the role of public opinion in the foreign policy process has been enhanced, especially since the Clinton administration relied so heavily on public opinion polling to shape or restrain its foreign policy actions. As foreign policy opinions remained remarkably stable after the end of the Cold War, especially toward American military involvement abroad,\textsuperscript{58} the degree of decision latitude for policymakers narrowed. The restraining effect of public opinion (or the public mood) for the Clinton administration was especially evident in its reluctance to send American ground forces abroad in civil conflicts and its concern about the possible loss of American lives in foreign lands. To be sure, the Clinton administration did on occasion act in opposition to the public mood (e.g., the intervention in Haiti), but it was still careful to assess the direction of the public on key foreign policy questions, especially as evidenced over the war in Kosovo. Whether these public constraints will continue to be as confining for future leaders remains an open question,\textsuperscript{59} but the legacy of increased attention to the public’s views remains.

Finally, the greater involvement of interest groups and public opinion represent opposite kinds of restraints on the foreign policy process as a legacy of the Clinton years—one directing policy toward narrower individual interests, the other directing it toward societal interests. Such conflicting policymaking legacies are a mixed blessing for any future administration, as it seeks to develop a coherent and consistent policy approach after the Clinton years. Yet this, too, represents a long-term legacy of the Clinton administration for the new millennium.

CONCLUSIONS

President Clinton came to office with limited interest in foreign policy but with a goal to change the direction of American foreign policy. Buffeted by both international and domestic challenges, the Clinton administration soon gave greater prominence to foreign affairs and adjusted its foreign policy approach as well. While its initial approach had a strong dose of idealism, the administration moved toward a sense of realism by the end of its time in office. Security concerns increasingly gained pride of place—whether dealing with changing relations with Russia or China, or the instability in the Balkans or the Middle East—over its commitment to economic and democratic concerns. To be sure, the administration’s commitment to democratic enlargement and economic liberalism remained important and prominent goals, but the political/military re-
quirements of several pressing international issues often trumped these concerns by the end of its tenure.

Still, the Clinton administration left several important policy legacies for future administrations. These included a commitment to a sustained global role for the United States in global affairs after the Cold War, an enhanced position for economic issues on the foreign policy agenda, and a redefinition of the global threat environment that the United States faces as it enters the new millennium. Another legacy, however, also remains. The administration did not succeed in developing and gaining widespread domestic support for a strategic consensus for when and how the United States should address regional and communal conflicts. Put more generally, the larger question on how values and interests should shape American foreign policy remains unresolved.

On the domestic front, the Clinton administration left several important legacies for the foreign policymaking process. Importantly, the Clinton administration broadened the number of issues and actors involved in foreign policy within the executive branch and also incorporated more economic participants into the foreign policy decision-making apparatus of the government. More troublesome, perhaps, are other lingering legacies in the decision-making arena. Foreign policy became an increasingly contentious issue between Congress and the executive branch (as witnessed most dramatically with the vote on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and more and more interest groups lobbied to influence the direction of American foreign policy, including an increasing number of foreign groups (as evidenced over trade policy with China). Finally, and in line with a more democratic emphasis in foreign affairs, public opinion and public polling also played a part in policymaking during the Clinton years. In short, then, domestic politics and foreign policy are increasingly linked in the new millennium.

As we gain some distance from the Clinton administration, its foreign policy impact will come into sharper relief, and its short- and long-term legacies will become more recognizable. That is, future administrations will likely have to grapple with a mix of policy and policymaking concerns similar to the ones faced by the first post–Cold War administration, and the answers to those concerns by succeeding administrations will go a long way in assessing more fully the legacies of the Clinton years. Some of the key questions to use in evaluating the impact of the Clinton years on future administrations include the following: How does the administration mix political idealism and political realism in an era with multiple foreign policy threats? How does the administration define the appropriate role for the United States in a world without a single opponent to shape its policy? How does the administration incorporate domestic politics to shape American foreign policy? How effective is the administration in developing a domestic consensus in an era when regional and communal conflict dominate the global agenda? While each succeeding administration will supply different answers, especially as the international context changes, the approach
of the Clinton administration offers a useful starting point in understanding the
direction of American foreign policy after the Cold War.

NOTES


5. According to nationwide poll results issued about the time of the Kosovo air campaign, in no instance did a majority of the public support the use of American troops in several hypothetical interventions, including one labeled "if Serbian forces killed large numbers of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo." John E. Rielly, ed., American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1999 (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), 26.


17. Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” 660.


27. Drew, On the Edge, 159.


34. President Clinton received low ratings on foreign policy in late 1994, often times lower than his overall approval rating, and also was rated behind most post-world war presidents in being “very successful” in foreign policy at that time. See John E. Rielly,


40. "Lott's View: 'It was not about Politics, It was about the Substance,'" New York Times, 15 October 1999: A13.


42. For another assessment of the foreign policy legacies of the Clinton administration, see Goldman and Berman, "Engaging the World."


44. Interestingly, on the one occasion in 1993 when the third-ranking official at the State Department raised the possibility of a reduced global role for the United States, he was quickly rebuked by Secretary of State Warren Christopher. McCormick, American Foreign Policy and Process, 220.

45. Clinton, "Remarks by the President on Foreign Policy," 8.


53. On the key economic officials attending National Security Council meetings under the Clinton administration, see Goldman and Berman, “Engaging the World,” 280.


