

# *Fordham International Law Journal*

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*Volume 19, Issue 4*

1995

*Article 2*

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## Policy and Principles: The Clinton Administration's Approach

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## **Abstract**

In last night's State of the Union message, President Clinton challenged the United States to sustain our role as the leader in the fight for freedom and peace. Three years of American leadership by President Clinton have already produced great benefits for the American people and for the world community. Through determination and the exercise of American leadership, we have repeatedly turned challenges into real gains for Americans. In the Office of Policy Planning, we often are torn between helping to coordinate day-to-day policy and longer-term planning. In our fast-forward world, long-term sometimes means next Monday, and history is what happened last Friday. That said, as the director of the office responsible for helping frame policy in a larger context, I would like to take a step back tonight, and talk about the broader principles and strategies that lie behind the President's remarkable foreign policy accomplishments.

## ADDRESS

### POLICY AND PRINCIPLES: THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH

*James B. Steinberg\**

In last night's State of the Union message,<sup>1</sup> President Clinton challenged the United States to sustain our role as the leader in the fight for freedom and peace. Three years of American leadership by President Clinton have already produced great benefits for the American people and for the world community. Had America not led, the war in Bosnia would continue today with mounting casualties — a war threatening European stability, eroding the NATO alliance, and damaging U.S. credibility. Had we not led, peace in the Middle East would not be on the horizon, and we would face a growing crisis in Haiti. Without U.S. leadership, the prospect for new American jobs and economic growth through important trade agreements such as the WTO, NAFTA, and successful auto negotiations with the Japanese would remain beyond reach. The Mexican economy would be in free-fall, threatening our economic security and the stability of the world's financial markets. The President's leadership assured that nuclear weapons programs were halted in North Korea and Iraq, and that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty<sup>2</sup> was indefinitely and unconditionally extended. Through determination and the exercise of American leadership, we have repeatedly turned challenges into real gains for Americans.

In the Office of Policy Planning, we often are torn between helping to coordinate day-to-day policy and longer-term planning. In our fast-forward world, long-term sometimes means next Monday, and history is what happened last Friday. That said, as the director of the office responsible for helping frame

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\* Director of Policy Planning, U.S. Department of State. This Address was given to the Foreign Policy Association in New York City, January 24, 1996. All footnotes contained herein were provided by the *Fordham International Law Journal*.

1. See *Prepared Text for the President's State of the Union Message*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 24, 1996, at A14.

2. Treaty for the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, *opened for signature* July 1, 1968, 21 U.S.T. 483, 729 U.N.T.S. 161.

policy in a larger context, I would like to take a step back tonight, and talk about the broader principles and strategies that lie behind the President's remarkable foreign policy accomplishments.

Policy planners contend daily with the legacy of our first director — George Kennan. Mr. Kennan served from 1947-49, at a time when the United States was resisting its instinct to turn inwards once more, and was instead helping build a stable post-war order. He earned his place in American history, of course, by arguing that “the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.” With that single word — “containment” — he set the direction for more than forty years of U.S. foreign policy.

“Containment” primarily was a prescription for U.S. policy. Yet containment rested on an understanding of the international system dominated by the threat of communist aggression. This one word became the bumper-sticker of the Cold War. Containing the Soviet Union was used to justify almost every foreign policy activity, from regional interventions and the building of security alliances, to supporting economic institutions and foreign assistance.

Since the collapse of the Soviet external and internal empire, many analysts have sought to find a new bumper-sticker, one that would characterize the post-Cold War international system and set the new paradigm for U.S. foreign policy. So many theories have surfaced, in fact, that they've exhausted the memory of the State Department's antiquated computer system.

At first, optimism was the prevailing sentiment. We were told that a New World Order was within reach, where American power would tame lawless aggressors. Others claimed that we had reached the End of History, where market democracy had become accepted worldwide as the only possible — indeed, historically inevitable — form of government. Others told us of a Borderless World, where international commerce would wash over governments and erase territorial boundaries, and where the invisible hand of the market-place might overcome every ill, from authoritarianism in China to famine in Africa to poverty in India.

Pessimists soon made a comeback. They told us of the Com-

ing Anarchy, where unchecked environmental damage and rapid population growth will make many parts of the world ungovernable, and will unleash floods of economic and political refugees to our own shores. Others warned that we live at the early stages of a Clash of Civilizations, where antagonistic cultures with irreconcilable values and objectives will engage in constant conflict with one another, tearing at the fragile economic and political ties that bind the world's peoples.

Each of these grand theories contains within it many important truths. But whatever the merit of physics' never-ending search for a Great Unified Theory, the world we face today is far too complicated to describe in one theory or fit on a bumper sticker. Our interests are too broad, our challenges too diverse. And too often, broad oversimplifications either hide or distort reality.

Kennan, to his credit, rejected simplistic understandings of the communist threat. He eventually came to oppose our involvement in Vietnam, for instance, because he saw Southeast Asia as peripheral to our core national interests and the war itself as about nationalism, not communism. And while Kennan accurately predicted (nearly fifty years ago) that the Soviet system would collapse, he did so based on a careful analysis of its component parts: the ideology of its leaders, the fundamental weaknesses of the command economic system, and the weariness of the Russian people. He came to reject the more extravagant extensions of containment policy as ignoring communism's greatest weakness — the communist system itself.

Today, Kennan continues to speak out against the danger of seizing too quickly on any single policy prescription, but he still counsels us to define sound principles — “principles that accord with the nature, the needs, the interests, and the limitations of our country.” These principles should define the real-world demands on a nation's capacity to act, and the limits on its ability to do so. Leaders have a responsibility to articulate principles, to inform the public about their perception of the national interest, especially when dangers and opportunities are not immediately obvious.

Last week at Harvard, Secretary Christopher reaffirmed four core principles that have come to guide foreign policy in the

Clinton Administration. These principles are designed to meet today's opportunities and dangers.

Our first and most important principle is that America must lead if we want to protect our national interests and values. No other nation has the power, the resources, the respect, and the authority to lead. Leadership means that we will act alone when we must, but work with others when we can.

Whether bringing peace to troubled regions, strengthening our role in the global economy, or fighting transnational threats from nuclear proliferation, crime, terrorism or environmental decay, our leadership has often meant the difference between success and failure. Leadership does not come cheap. Forces in Congress have proposed cuts in our foreign affairs budget that would cripple our diplomacy just when we are beginning to reap the benefits of the end of the Cold War. Of course we have important responsibilities to attend to at home. But we can't create jobs if foreign markets are not open. We can't build a secure future if drug trafficking is flourishing or if dangerous nations develop nuclear weapons. Think about how short-sighted it is for Congress not to find \$22 million to implement KEDO, and freeze North Korea's nuclear program. In fact, for less than one third of one percent of our GDP, and just a little more than one percent of all government spending, we could fund the entire foreign affairs budget. These are modest outlays by the world's standards, but they represent an American commitment to the world that will, in turn, catalyze major contributions by our allies and friends.

A second principle is the need to strengthen the institutions that provide an enduring basis for global peace and prosperity. For half a century, institutions such as NATO, the U.N., GATT, the IMF, and the World Bank have helped the United States to share the burdens of leadership. Some critics argue that we should significantly diminish our links to these institutions. These critics would leave the United States with only two choices: do nothing or do it by ourselves. That's the choice we would face in Bosnia without NATO, the U.N., the OSCE, or the World Bank. That's the choice we would have faced when Mexico's economy collapsed, without the International Monetary Fund. And that's the choice we would have faced without the U.N. when nations like Haiti, El Salvador, Cambodia and Angola needed help to recover from civil war and famine.

That's why we're reinvigorating old institutions, and building new ones. We are adapting and adjusting proven institutions such as NATO, and extending their benefits to new members. We are creating new arrangements with our neighbors and our European allies, such as the Summit of the Americas, and the Transatlantic Marketplace. And the President has taken major steps towards strengthening consultation and cooperation in Asia — on economic matters through the annual APEC leaders' meetings, and on security issues through the Asean Regional Forum and the Northeast Asian Security Dialogue.<sup>3</sup> This is why we are giving a hard look at institutions, such as the U.N., that must reform to meet new challenges.

Cutting funding for the U.N. means limiting our ability to address vital development needs and to negotiate important environmental agreements and share needed information on climate change, on ozone depletion, on oceans and fisheries. In an integrated global economy, environmental damage in one part of the world can affect economies everywhere. Pollution's impact on our nation's health takes an enormous toll on our manufacturing, service, and agricultural productivity. Disappearing cropland worldwide, coupled with a projected doubling in world population, may lead to dramatic rises in world food prices. Whether we like it or not, these threats to our well-being are best addressed through negotiations at international organizations like the U.N.

Our third principle is that we must support democracy and human rights if we want a policy that not only reflects our ideals, but also reinforces our interests. Promoting democratic values amplifies our authority and credibility in the world. Our interests are most secure in a world where the rule of law protects both political rights and free market economies. From working with courageous reformers in South Africa, Mexico, or the new democracies of Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, to supporting the War Crimes Tribunal and elections process in the former Yugoslavia, this principle both closely reflects our im-

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3. See Secretary of State Warren Christopher, *Ensuring Peace and Stability on the Korean Peninsula* (November 9, 1994), Remarks to the Korea-America Friendship Society, Seoul, Korea, in *DEP'T ST. DISPATCH*, November 1994. The Northeast Asian Security Dialogue also provides a valuable forum for advancing the United States' common interest in regional stability. *Id.*

age of ourself and accepts that there are limits to our ability to help others set themselves free.

Our fourth principle is constructive relations with the great powers — our long-standing allies in Western Europe and Japan, as well as our former adversaries in Russia and China. We live in a world where these four powers, each in its own way, have the ability to significantly affect our security and prosperity.

Some have said that in the absence of an overwhelming common threat, America's relationship with its core allies would inevitably drift apart. After three years of close cooperation with our friends in Europe and Japan, we can fairly claim that the opposite is true. Our common action in Bosnia has done more for European cooperation and stability than years of sterile theoretical debates over competing "security architectures." And the New Transatlantic Agenda that we launched last month in Madrid will expand our economic ties, and strengthen our cooperation with the European Union in confronting global political and security challenges.

Our cooperation with Japan has also deepened in response to new opportunities and challenges. A year-long review of our alliance has revitalized our security ties. Japan has worked with us to end the North Korean nuclear program, and we have maintained our security relationship in the face of domestic challenges in both countries. While there continue to be important trade issues between us, the 20 market access agreements we have reached contribute to the recent sharp decline in our bilateral trade deficit — as you saw in today's *New York Times*.<sup>4</sup>

Nowhere is the task of the policy-planner, or of the policy-maker, more challenging than in dealing with Russia and China. The unprecedented and painful transitions that Russia and China are currently undertaking embody the range of challenges and opportunities we confront in the world today.

We have recognized that Russia's transition to a more democratic, market-oriented society would be long and difficult, and the outcome not foreordained. But there are vital U.S. interests at stake in our relations with Russia, and practical cooperation where possible increases both our countries' security and prosperity. In light of a half-century of confrontation, it is important

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4. Andrew Pollack, Japan Trade Surplus Shrinks for the First Time in 5 Years, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 24, 1996, at A1.



to reflect how far we — and the Russian people themselves — have come.

Of course it would be easy to enumerate our differences with Russia. Its ongoing struggle with the conflict in Chechnya, crime and corruption, and Moscow's nuclear cooperation with Iran indicate that this transition will not be easy, and may impact on American interests and Russia's own development. Russia is still struggling to define its future at home and abroad. Ultimately, the Russian people alone will decide whether they, too, can define a new path for Russia, or whether they will turn to the forces who prey on their fears. Russians face an important choice in the June Presidential elections. Our key obligation is to engage Russia by promoting democratic values and institutions, while keeping watch over our own national interest at all times.

For those who follow our relations with China, it will probably sound like an understatement to say that the last year has been difficult, and in important respects, disappointing. China remains an authoritarian state, though far from the totalitarian monolith it once was. Important differences remain between our two countries on issues such as human rights, proliferation, and trade. Having abandoned the substance of communism, and lacking a credible ideological replacement, China's leaders have sought to mobilize support by emphasizing nationalistic themes of order in confronting a deep-seated fear of chaos, and unfurling the banner of sovereignty in response to perceived foreign pressure and influence. Its continued insistence on the right to use force to protect its claims to sovereignty in Taiwan and the South China Sea will not ease regional tensions.

Our Administration does not seek to isolate or contain China. This is not because we want to do China a favor, but because engagement serves our interests and the interests of our friends and allies in the region. We seek to restore positive momentum to the relationship. We remain committed to the "one China" policy forged through successive Democratic and Republican administrations. We are also committed to finding constructive ways to address our differences, and to cooperate on common concerns.

Secretary Christopher has stated very clearly that the United States will do its part. But if we are to build a lasting, productive

relationship, China has a responsibility to take meaningful steps to address areas of our concern and to respect internationally accepted principles. Whatever our problems or disagreements, we need to understand that China will be a major — and growing — factor on the Asian regional scene, and in the world. Whether in terms of maintaining stability in the Taiwan strait, on the Korean peninsula or in the South China Sea, whether in terms of fostering an economic regime in the Asia Pacific that promotes our own prosperity as well as that of our trading partners, or whether in terms of the effective functioning of the United Nations and other institutions of the international system, China will be a key player.

As we have successfully confronted this world of opportunity and danger, it is ironic that the biggest challenge to securing our interests abroad may be a fraying consensus at home. Of course, we must address challenges in the United States. There is no disputing that. Those whom I call the “new isolationists” do not deny that we have a stake in the world. But absent the kind of immediate and overriding threat posed by communism, they fail to appreciate how early and effective actions by the U.S. to prevent crises, to build and maintain international institutions, to support democracy and human rights, and to maintain constructive relations with our key allies and other important global actors, can help us avoid much more costly and dangerous interventions in the future.

As the President argued last night, American leadership is crucial to advancing our economic interests abroad, and to creating a world safe from destabilizing conflicts, and threats from crime, terrorism, and environmental decay. Never has our engagement been more vital. Isolationism will always strike a responsive chord with Americans, in part because we have long been at peace with the countries on our borders, and in part because vast oceans separate us from Europe, Asia and Africa. But the countries on our borders share with us a free trade area that continues to create American jobs. And Europe, Asia, and Africa are no longer that far away, thanks to rapid communications and transportation, and thanks to our increasingly interdependent economies.

We cannot afford to look back nostalgically at the days of containment, nor wait for a new overwhelming security threat to emerge. As the President said last evening, today’s dangers

know no borders. The loss of nuclear materials from one country is a challenge to the security of all countries. We must work with others to confront these transnational problems. Though we no longer have a single enemy around which we can rally public support, the stakes are too high to withdraw from a world that we have helped to create and which reflects American interests and values more than at any time in our history.