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REVIEW ESSAY

THE SEARCH FOR STRATEGY

William C. Martel

Ikenberry, G. John, and Anne-Marie Slaughter. *Forging a World of Liberty under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century: Final Report of the Princeton Project on National Security (plus seven Working Group Reports)*. Princeton, N.J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, 27 September 2006. 96pp. Available at www.wws.princeton.edu/ppns/report.html

The Princeton Project on National Security describes itself as a “three-year, bipartisan initiative to develop a sustainable and effective national security strategy for the United States of America.” Consisting of the final report and seven working group reports (on Grand Strategic Choices, State Security and Trans-

national Threats, Economics and National Security, Reconstruction and Development, Anti-Americanism, Relative Threat Assessment, and Foreign Infrastructure and Global Institutions), this study, like so many others, wrestles with the great unresolved problem that plagues contemporary policy makers and scholars: What is the central organizing principle behind American national security policy?

Declaring that their aim was to “write a collective ‘X article’” (a reference to George Kennan’s “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” published in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947), the codirectors of the Princeton Project sought to “do together what no one person in our highly specialized and rapidly changing world

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could hope to do alone.” The central arguments of this study fall into several predictable categories. Beginning with the premise that the world lacks a “single organizing principle for foreign policy” and seeking to remedy this deficiency by bringing order to the chaos surrounding grand strategy, the project stipulates that the “basic objective of U.S. strategy” is to “protect the American people and the American way of life.” It describes “three more specific aims” of American strategy as a “secure homeland,” “healthy global economy,” and “benign international environment.”

The study goes on to define “six basic criteria” that must be implemented. This strategy must be “multidimensional,” “integrated,” “interest-based rather than threat-based,” “grounded in hope rather than fear,” “pursued inside-out,” and “adapted to the information age.” What emerges from this framework is the commonsensical and unremarkable conclusion about the fundamental principle of American foreign policy—that “America must stand for, seek, and secure a world of liberty under law,” because a world inhabited by “mature liberal democracies” will make the American people “safer, richer, and healthier.” To implement “liberty under law,” the project proposes three broad sets of policies.

First, governments must be brought up to PAR (acronym for “popular, accountable, and rights-regarding governments”). Reaffirming that “democracy is the best instrument that humans have devised for ensuring individual liberty,” U.S. strategy must foster the “preconditions” necessary for successful liberal democracies, and those conditions go “far beyond” merely holding elections.

Second, a liberal order must be built that, resting on a system of international institutions, diminishes the ability of one state to wield unilaterally the power that breeds “resentment, fear, and resistance.” The ability to build this liberal order depends on establishing a global “concert of democracies” that will “institutionalize and ratify the ‘democratic peace.’”

Third, the United States, and presumably the self-selected members of the concert of democracies, must rethink the role of force in international politics. Beyond the sensible argument that “liberty and law must be backed up by force,” the study holds that the United States must retreat from the principle of military primacy, while building the collective military might of the liberal democracies. If successful, the United States can avoid the destabilizing consequences that flowed from great-power competition during the Cold War. In practical terms, the study recommends that policy makers and scholars update the doctrine of deterrence and “develop new guidelines on the preventive use of force against terrorists and extreme states.”

The analytical framework developed in *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* concludes with a discussion of “major threats and challenges,” which fall into the usual categories of the Middle East, global terror networks, the proliferation and

transfer of nuclear weapons, the rise of China and order in East Asia, global pandemics, sources of energy, and a protective infrastructure.

In addition to the final report, several of the working group reports also merit examination. The report of the working group on grand strategic choices, cochaired by Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins University and G. John Ikenberry of Princeton, focuses on the eminently worthy question: “Toward what ends should America use its power, invest its resources, and concert its energies?” Among its several key findings are that “East Asia is likely to pose the greatest challenges to the United States”; that Washington needs to “move toward an Asia-centric grand strategy”; and that the “ongoing war in Iraq” is the “main stumbling block” toward a strategic shift in American strategy. If these conclusions appear commonplace, so too are some of the report’s recommendations—such as that the United States “ought to be very careful” about the preemptive and preventive use of force, “institutions are the tools of American power [and] we must relearn the benefits of multilateralism,” and the war on terrorism is a “global counterinsurgency” rather than a “clash of civilizations.” The argument that the United States should rebuild a “series of new grand bargains” with other democracies, however, is worthy of deeper consideration.

The report of the working group on anti-Americanism, cochaired by Tod Lindberg of the Hoover Institution and Suzanne Nossel of the Security and Peace Institute, examines the rise of anti-Americanism and its effects on American policy. It discusses the varieties of anti-Americanism, its effects and implications for violence and its economic and political impacts, responses to anti-Americanism, and recommendations for dealing with the problem. Not a systematic analysis of global public opinion, this report essentially restates data collected by the Pew Global Attitudes Surveys since the late 1990s. Its entirely predictable conclusion is that “many forms of anti-Americanism may be addressed only through changes in substantive U.S. policies.” However, since this analysis concludes that it is “difficult to measure how much tangible friction anti-Americanism” creates for U.S. foreign policy, its broad observations are hardly reassuring unless we know whether anti-Americanism is a transient phenomenon or simply a reaction to Washington’s current policies toward Iraq and in waging the global war on terror.

By far the most analytical and interesting report is that on economics and national security, cochaired by Adam Posen of the Institute for International Economics and Daniel K. Tarullo of Georgetown University. Against the backdrop of the relative economic influence of Asian states whose power is “shifting gradually but steadily,” the report proposes that the United States integrate economic policy into national security policy in its governmental and interagency processes, arguing that the importance of integrating these policies is “self-evident.”

It discusses the reasons for integration and examines impediments and challenges to the United States in formulating and implementing global economic policy. Also outlined are suggestions for strengthening linkages between economic and national security policies. Fundamentally, the report suggests that “traditional foreign policy thinking [about economics as a tool of statecraft] must change” because the influence of economics in national security is on the ascent.

Outlined are four “generally valid assumptions”: “globalization of the economy increases both U.S. capabilities and U.S. vulnerabilities”; Washington’s “ability to restrict commerce and technology transfer to other countries is more limited”; “international economic development and integration should enhance U.S. national security”; and “U.S. economic policy mistakes” affect national security. Also examined are five “mistaken or misleading assumptions” about economics and national security: American security is “threatened by relatively faster economic growth in other parts of the world”; “economic development policies abroad” enhance U.S. security; globalization has made the U.S. economy “vulnerable to the fate, practices, and whims of other countries”; as has been prosaically observed, “economic trends and capabilities are changing rapidly”; and as has been more trenchantly noted, economic globalization makes “economic sanctions and similar measures applied by the United States . . . more effective.” As the study concludes, “it is more accurate to say that a globalized economy magnified the effects of our own policies, positive and negative.”

Each of these developments has had profound consequences for national security. One is that U.S. interagency processes fail to integrate economic policy into the “guiding principles” that policy makers should use to balance properly economic and traditional security interests. Arguing that policy makers have generally dismissed economic policy as a “lower” form of security policy, this report identifies the National Economic Council as precisely the type of “institutional bridge” needed to integrate economics and foreign policy. This report also outlines significant economic problems facing the United States, notably budget deficits, low personal savings rate, its status as the world’s largest debtor nation, and Washington’s dependence on global markets for investing in the United States and thereby supporting its spending habits. All these trends mask the dangerous possibility that the ability of the United States to harness its economic power in pursuit of global “goods” is in decline. In addition, highlighted by China’s gradual ascent into the ranks of the most powerful states, the report examines how China’s growth as a potential global superpower could have significant implications for U.S. policies. In broad terms, it argues that Washington must carefully redefine how it uses economic power to support a broad global agenda.

All in all, *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* offers a comprehensive analysis of how to organize American thinking in the aftermath of the Cold War. The architects of this study are to be commended for the breadth and depth of their systematic efforts to examine the principal problems in global politics. That said, policy makers and scholars must consider several criticisms as they contemplate whether this study provides the intellectual foundations for a fundamental realignment of U.S. national security policy.

The study elevates the idea of promoting liberal democracies and organizing them into a “concert of democracies” as the paramount objective of American strategy. However, this emphasis on democracy, liberty, and the rule of law is a long-standing principle in American strategy. The defeat of totalitarian regimes in World War II, the Marshall Plan, NATO and various other alliances, and the enduring legacy of promoting and supporting democracies are as central to American foreign policy as any principle in the history of the republic. Thus, the Princeton Project’s proposal that the pursuit of liberty under law establishes a “grand strategy for making America more secure” merely reaffirms a deeply enshrined precept in this society’s core beliefs about foreign policy, but does not represent a new organizing principle for U.S. strategy or a conceptual breakthrough.

A problem with the Princeton Project’s emphasis on liberty under law and its corollary, liberal democracy, is its decidedly imperial overtones, implying the need to exercise imperial oversight for countries that have yet to “make the grade” to democracy. Two prominent examples: the United States must bring “governments up to PAR,” and Washington’s role is critical because “without U.S. leadership and determination, the best we can hope for is a series of half measures.” While this is not to suggest that U.S. strategy should avoid serious commitments and responsibilities in its efforts to promote freedom and liberty, policy makers and scholars are prudent to avoid any language or intonations that others could interpret as evidence of an imperial design in American foreign policy. Such undercurrents only erode support for American policies.

The section on the role of force appears determined to strike out in new directions. However, most of its thinking is derived from classic approaches to strategic analysis. Beginning with the unremarkable proposition that “liberty and law must be backed up by force,” this study proposes that the United States “should work to sustain the military predominance of liberal democracies” in order to “prevent a return to great power security competition.” But is it consistent, much less prudent, as the study seems to imply, for the United States to maintain a “high level of U.S. defense spending” while shifting decisions about military intervention in this “cooperative rules-based order” to the judgment of such liberal democracies as, say, France?

In its analysis of the role of force, the study's conclusion that "deterrence is out of fashion" rests on the truisms that bipolar competition between nuclear-armed superpowers is no longer the central organizing principle of deterrence and that the intersection of such terrorist organizations as al-Qa'ida and nuclear weapons is the stuff of which international catastrophes are made. It is confusing, however, when the study declares that deterrence is no longer fashionable and then asserts quite reasonably that "the United States must ensure that our deterrent remains credible." Which principle is true? Either deterrence is out of fashion or deterrent forces must remain credible. The study's analysis of the conditions that ought to govern the use of force—last resort, "overwhelming confidence in the intelligence and in the prospects for success," the ability to "deal adequately with the aftermath," and "approval from the U.N. Security Council" or "broadly representative multilateral body, such as NATO" (all transparent references to the 2003 invasion of Iraq)—is neither innovative nor terribly illuminating.

Indeed, the discussion on military force draws so heavily from present American difficulties in Iraq that its conclusions on defense planning seem more like generalities or mere clichés than serious analytical propositions. One exception, however, is the section that discusses the "preventive and preemptive uses of force." This argument is thought provoking, because it means that policy makers should understand the differences between using preventive force against terrorists and using it against states.

This work is notable for the panoply of problems addressed and its proposed range of solutions. Sometimes there is so much detail (almost at an engineering level, in contrast with Kennan's far simpler and more elegant style) that the reader is easily distracted. Since the study virtually leaves no problem in contemporary international politics untouched, one wonders if such a broad focus weakens the overall impact of its analysis. On the editorial level, the profusion of clever phrases in the study, such as "bringing government up to PAR," is unnecessary and distracting.

To understand to what extent *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* succeeds in developing an intellectual architecture for American national security policy, let us consider its strengths and weaknesses. There are several notable strengths.

The study tackles what virtually all scholars, strategists, and policy makers see as the central intellectual challenge created by the current strategic vacuum. Simply put, there is no more important problem to be addressed by the American national security and foreign policy communities than establishing the organizing principles of American foreign and national security policies. But perhaps of greater analytical importance, the Princeton Project elevates one strategic principle above all others in the conduct of foreign policy. That is, it argues, to the virtual exclusion of competing principles, that the unifying purpose

of American policy is to promote democracy, liberty, and a shared sense of multilateralism and cooperation. This precept correctly defines, to my mind, the central organizing principle on which Washington ought to base its policies for dealing with the rest of the world. The study's emphasis on multilateralism and cooperation is consistent with well established, if atrophied, principles in international politics. Its examination of this critical problem is, even by the standards of such studies, comprehensive and detailed. The study's final report is brimming with positive principles, suggestions, and policies for redefining the core concepts in U.S. national security, reorganizing the institutions and processes that govern statecraft, and ensuring their effective implementation.

As to weaknesses, although the project's authors planned to write a historically transcendent and innovative study, the work often borders on a pretentious and excessively self-conscious tone. The problem is that studies become historically significant more often by accident than by deliberate intent to write a "monumental" document. That is, it is preferable to write the study that helps to define American strategy than to declare one's intention to do so. Frankly, the argument is unconvincing, as the study states, that the world is too complex for one individual to bring order to strategy. This is, of course, the nature of conventional thinking until someone, in fact, fills the intellectual void.

One is struck, for instance, by George Kennan's modest and elegantly written article (only seven thousand words), which established in analytically concise terms the basis for the Cold War policy of containment. His aim was simply to understand and effectively counter "official Soviet conduct." The resulting policy of containment was predicated on the "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Implicit was the principle that the struggle with the Soviet Union ultimately threatened the survival of the United States. By contrast, the challenges in the current international order, while significant, hardly put at risk the *survival* of the United States, unless one concludes that al-Qa'ida's as yet unfulfilled desire to acquire nuclear weapons poses an existential threat to the United States. Since *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* deals with a world where challenges reside more on the managerial than the existential side of the ledger, the problem is how best to manage American power and responsibilities, not steeling the nation's resolve to contain a military superpower bent upon our destruction.

This study's suggested framework for American strategy, which it elevates above other approaches in grand strategy, promotes democracy and "liberty under law." But American strategy, at least since the end of World War II and arguably throughout the twentieth century, has been entirely and thoroughly consistent with the broad historical architecture of promoting democratic values. As noted earlier, many instruments of American policy consciously and

explicitly promoted the development of an international order based on liberty and freedom. To cite one prominent example, the Atlantic Charter, signed by Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 14 August 1941, declared that war was the only choice if the principles of democracy, freedom, and self-determination were to be defended (see the full text at www.politicalresource.net/atlantic_charter.html).

More recently, President George W. Bush's second inaugural address reaffirmed the nation's fundamental declarative policy as one of promoting liberty and freedom (which the study does not mention). On 20 January 2005, Bush declared that since the "survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands . . . it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture." It is permissible to debate the finer points of its implementation, but how much more clearly could the principle of promoting liberty and freedom be stated?

The Princeton Project argues that "the United States lacks a clear statement of national security principles with broad bipartisan support" for governing its behavior and policies. We can debate whether the United States needs new strategic principles and whether partisanship weakens the nation's foreign policy, but it is difficult to defend the proposition that liberty and freedom constitute a new strategy for the United States. In fact, the Bush administration's decision to promote liberty and freedom as a declaratory policy is a counterpoint to the argument that promoting liberty is somehow novel. The study could be interpreted to mean that the United States should rededicate its foreign policy to liberty and freedom; analytically, however, this is a bit of a stretch.

This study relies unnecessarily on rhetorical flourishes to imply that current U.S. policies are misguided and misdirected. Its authors can be forgiven for harboring this sentiment. From the occupation of Iraq, the global war on terrorism, and general discontent with American policies globally (drawing on the analysis presented in the working group report on anti-Americanism), one senses in American politics a weariness among both the public and the intelligentsia. By virtue of its discontent with the tenor and direction of American policy, the Princeton Project manifests unhappiness with the Bush administration through subtle yet systematic criticisms of current U.S. policies. While this tendency is understandable, the study's inclination to criticize current policies is disconcerting and distracting, for two reasons. First, to establish new principles for and a bipartisan consensus on national security a study ought to draw credibility and unanimity *entirely and singularly* from its analysis of international events and its implications for the United States, rather than criticize the current policy. The other criticism is historical in nature. Consider the neutral, analytical tone

adopted by Kennan, who never criticized President Truman's policies when, in the late 1940s, the administration and Congress had just begun to formalize the policy of containment. How easy it would have been to cavil as evidence mounted that Washington lacked a coherent policy for confronting the historically daunting challenges posed by Stalin's policies and about which Churchill had been warning Roosevelt since 1943.*

This study's overall impact is weakened by the uneven style in the working group reports and the lack of evident, systematic connections with the final report. Those linkages are missing, opaque, or simply unclear. Those reports unfortunately follow their own approach and organization; their overall quality and impact would have been immeasurably greater had they followed the same format. For example, some contain summaries of key findings and some do not. Some articulate major principles, some do not. This masks a more worrisome problem, however: since the final report putatively draws substantively from the efforts of the working groups, it is difficult to explain why disparate approaches and styles were not discouraged.

I offer three broad principles to help scholars, policy makers, and the public evaluate the value of *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* in charting new directions for American national security. One is that while this study reviews in normative terms the broad intellectual outlines of its preferred vision of American foreign policy, it is striking and in a sense reassuring just how conventional its thinking really is. The emphasis on promoting democratic principles is hardly new or revolutionary, and its analysis of the principles that should guide military intervention is similarly conventional. A notable exception is the study's analysis of the dangers posed by what it called "major threats and challenges," which merit serious consideration.

In strategic terms, the study draws essentially the same conclusions previously drawn about American foreign policy. Is it perhaps the case that despite the current partisan divide over Iraq, American policy might after all be more on track with this polity's historic approach to foreign policy than we realize? While I understand that this observation is debatable, we have an obligation to acknowledge that possibility.

The project's objective is so important in historical terms that while one can raise serious analytic questions about its weaknesses, the broader purpose that animated this study suggests that all observers should reflect carefully on its

* John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries 1939–1955* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), reports (p. 479) that in March 1944, "The P.M. . . . said that it was now obvious our efforts to forge a Soviet-Polish agreement had failed and that he would soon have to make a cold announcement in Parliament to this effect. It all seems to augur ill for the future of relations between this country and the U.S.S.R."

arguments and conclusions. If participants in the defense and foreign policy communities were to focus their energies on defining American strategy rather than debating partisan differences, the tone enveloping foreign policy debates would likely become more balanced. If this study represents an early step toward transcending domestic differences about foreign policy, and if it helps steer American society toward a new bipartisan consensus on grand strategy, it will have been a significant accomplishment.

This is an important work in the field of national security. Despite several analytic weaknesses, it explicitly tackles the transcendent problem of redefining the foundations of American grand strategy. It also contributes to the ongoing search for new organizing principles for security at a moment when various forces threaten U.S. security. While it has by no means resolved this central problem, *Forging a World of Liberty under Law* is a notable accomplishment in the continuing intellectual search for the principles that will define American strategy in a world whose forces must be restrained.