

May 2, 1990

A WISEMEN COMMISSION TO CRAFT AMERICA'S POST-COLD WAR FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

American foreign policy, as must be clear to anyone watching world events, is approaching a turning point. At no time since the end of the World War II have United States foreign and defense policy makers been faced with so much rapid change and so many bewildering questions. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, the crisis of the Soviet empire, and the advance of democracy, free markets, and technological progress throughout the globe will require U.S. foreign policy and military strategy to change fundamentally. U.S. policy makers will have to develop new foreign policy and defense concepts and strategies to guide America through this tumultuous period of human history.

The transformation of international relations today are no less momentous than those that occurred at the birth of the Cold War in the late 1940s. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, America called on its best minds to craft a policy to deal with the new threat of Soviet power and expansionism. Such intellectual founding fathers of American Cold War policy as diplomat George Kennan, arms control expert Paul Nitze, and military strategist Albert Wohlstetter forged the conceptual tools for the policy of containment and the military strategy of nuclear deterrence.

Probing Deeply. If the rise of the Cold War caused a major reassessment of U.S. foreign policy in the 1940s and 1950s, surely now the demise of the Cold War warrants a similar reassessment. The U.S. needs to marshal the best minds of the country to probe as deeply about the purposes, goals, and strategies of U.S. foreign and defense policy in the 1990s as the founding fathers of containment policy did at the beginning of the Cold War.

To craft a post-Cold War foreign and defense policy for the U.S., George Bush should create a presidential "wisemen's" commission composed of fifteen or twenty foreign policy and defense experts dedicated to a strong national defense, free enterprise, and technological progress. Due six months after the first meeting, the

commission's report should define America's enduring national interests, identify and analyze old and new threats to U.S. security, establish the unwavering principles governing U.S. policy during this time of change, and set out U.S. foreign policy and defense goals for the future. The commission's report should develop new concepts either to replace or modify the ideas of containment and nuclear deterrence. It should recommend new military strategies for protecting Americans and advancing U.S. interests. Once completed, this report should be a blueprint for guiding the U.S., first through this uncertain time of transition, and then toward the goal of ensuring America's greatness in the 21st Century.

THE SEA CHANGE IN GLOBAL POLITICS

The U.S. and the West may have won the Cold War, but it could lose the peace unless American policy makers fully understand the political forces at work in the world today and design new strategies to advance American interests in a changing world. Washington's successful containment policy, particularly as pursued in the 1980s, may have driven up the costs of the Soviet empire and forced Moscow to adopt a less expansionist foreign policy, but victory is leading the U.S. into uncharted waters. The U.S. ultimately may find there a more democratic and peaceful Soviet Union – or a Soviet Union more like a wounded bear, cornered and dangerous. Either way, American foreign policy will be challenged more by the implications for peace and stability of a Soviet crackup than by the now dwindling prospects for communist revolution throughout the world.

Global politics have been thrown into flux by the easing of U.S.-Soviet tensions and the moral, economic, political, and ideological bankruptcy of communism. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communist regimes, and the emergence of nationalist, ethnic, and religious tensions long thought dormant have thrown U.S. policy makers into confusion. The U.S., of course, should welcome the spread of democracy and free markets into Eastern Europe, Nicaragua, and eventually Cuba and other communist regimes. But new and unforeseen threats to U.S. security surely will emerge, and although Gorbachev's "new thinking" has defused tensions in Europe, superpower relations remain strained by clashing interests in Lithuania, Afghanistan, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere.

Obsolete Paradigm. One thing is certain. The post-World War II paradigm for U.S. foreign policy is obsolete. It no longer is possible to base U.S. foreign policy on the idea of containment. Soviet military power is on the verge of being rolled back in Europe, not merely contained. And the strategy of containing Soviet power provides little guidance on how to deal with the rise of other threats to U.S. interests not exclusively related to the Soviet Union, such as Islamic fundamentalism, international terrorism, the spread of missiles and chemical and nuclear weapons, trade protectionism, and international drug trafficking. As American policy makers look at Third World threats in the next century, for example, they may no longer find communist dictatorships allied to Moscow and armed with *Kalashnikov* machine guns, but fanatical and anti-American nationalists armed with nuclear-tipped missiles.

The main question facing U.S. policy makers in this new decade may be less how to contain Soviet expansionism than how to protect U.S. interests in a world racked by the death throes of a collapsing Soviet empire. The Soviet Union has a total of about 25,000 nuclear weapons. Who controls these weapons in the event of a civil war in the Soviet Union is a concern of the utmost importance to U.S. national security.

Facing New Threats. Neither the policy of containment nor the U.S. military strategy of nuclear deterrence (whereby war is deterred by threatening massive nuclear retaliation) provides much guidance in dealing with these new dangers to U.S. security. The threat may not be calculated Soviet expansionism, as at the height of the Cold War, but uncalculable military escalation arising from Soviet civil war. A nuclear attack on the U.S. may not result from a Soviet preemptive strike to achieve military victory, as U.S. strategists today assume, but from an irrational act of desperation emerging from the violent clash of warring factions inside the U.S.S.R., each with its own nuclear weapons.

Historians know that decaying empires are particularly dangerous. The fading Ottoman Empire, called "The Sick Man of Europe," dragged Europe into eleven wars and conflicts in the 19th Century, the most devastating being the 1854-1856 Crimean War where Britain lost over 18,000 lives in a war to stop Russian expansion into Ottoman territory. And World War I began in 1914 as a result of the collapsing Austro-Hungarian Empire, as ethnic conflicts between Serbia and the Austrian imperial authorities escalated into a world-wide war. Whether a dying U.S.S.R., too, will lash out at the world is an open question which deserves attention as serious as that historians reserve for the study of Ottoman Turkey, Austria-Hungary, or even the Roman Empire.

THE NEED FOR A WISEMEN COMMISSION

At the beginning of the Cold War, American policy makers often called on committees of "wisemen" or experts to advise them on shaping U.S. foreign policy. A small group of State and Defense Department officials headed by Paul Nitze convened in 1950 to flesh out the doctrine of containment first outlined by George Kennan's "Mr. X" article in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. The resulting document, drafted in April 1950 and called National Security Council Paper No. 68, called for a major defense buildup to provide the muscle needed to contain Soviet expansionism.

Another committee was established by the National Security Council in 1957 to address growing concerns of national vulnerability at the dawn of the ballistic missile era. Called the Gaither Committee, after H. Rowan Gaither, a trustee and advisor to the RAND Corporation, this group concluded that the only way to protect the American people from nuclear war was to deter aggression by developing and deploying a nuclear retaliatory strike force. It therefore recommended that making the U.S. Strategic Air Command more survivable against Soviet nuclear attack to assure U.S. retaliatory capability should be given a higher priority than a massive civil defense program. Albert Wohlstetter reinforced this consensus in his January 1959 article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Delicate Balance of Terror,"

which concluded that a survivable U.S. nuclear force with an assured second strike or retaliatory capability was needed to deter a Soviet nuclear attack.

The U.S. now is confronted with a rapidly changing world situation that requires a sea change in policy. It is time to reset the policy gyroscope. Presidential commissions on foreign and defense policy in the 1980s, such as the Kissinger Commission on Latin America and the Scowcroft Commission on strategic nuclear arms, both of 1983-1984, and the 1985-1986 Packard Commission on defense management, focused on specific issues. What is needed now is a broad and comprehensive reappraisal of U.S. foreign and defense policies in light of the climatic change in superpower relations.

CREATING THE COMMISSION

To prepare the U.S. for this new world, George Bush should appoint a commission of "wisemen" to identify, analyze, and address the new challenges to American foreign and defense policy. To provide him and succeeding Presidents with the advice they need, Bush's blue ribbon commission on foreign and defense policy should include fifteen to twenty prominent experts with a wide variety of backgrounds in the national security, military, intelligence, economic, diplomatic, and scientific fields. The "wisemen" and "wisewomen" should be selected according to the originality of their thinking, not the length of time they spent in government. The commission should not become a vehicle for elder statesmen to restate the conventional wisdom, but a source of new and imaginative thinking. Commission members should be Republicans and Democrats who share a commitment to a strong national defense, the free enterprise system, and technological progress. These three elements of U.S. policy are rolling back Soviet power and moderating Soviet foreign policy, thus ensuring the West's victory in the Cold War. They should be present in a post-Cold War foreign policy as well.

Realistic Views. Commission members also should be tough-minded and realistic about the Soviet Union. What has brought the U.S.S.R. to its knees is not the diplomacy of detente or arms control negotiations but Ronald Reagan's military buildup in the 1980s, particularly the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). If Reagan's critics had blocked INF deployment or stopped SDI, the Cold War might still be underway. This is not the time for a presidential commission on foreign policy to heed the views of those who argued for detente while Moscow built up its military in Europe and expanded its power into Afghanistan, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central America in the 1970s.

The commission's report, due six months after the first meeting, should include dissenting viewpoints, presented either as footnotes or as separate papers in the appendix. This would reduce the tendency to produce a homogenized report reflecting the lowest common denominator of opinion. These footnotes and papers could become signposts highlighting sharp disagreements and dilemmas, enabling Bush and his successors to anticipate and thus avoid the many pitfalls likely to exist in creating a post-Cold War foreign policy.

The commission should issue two reports: The first would chart the course for a post-Cold War foreign policy; the second would define America's enduring national security interests and military strategy to protect them.

The foreign policy report should establish the principles and new premises governing U.S. foreign policy. It should analyze the changing international environment, identify America's unchanging national interests, and recommend strategies to uphold them that can command bipartisan and public support.

The military strategy report should update the 1988 study by Ronald Reagan's Commission on Long-Term Strategy, co-chaired by strategists Fred C. Iklé and Albert Wohlstetter, to take into account the impact of the East European revolutions of 1989 and the possible retreat of Soviet power from the Third World. Many of that report's conclusions will still be valid, such as the importance of advanced technology for future weapon systems. Yet the demise of the Warsaw Pact as an effective fighting force, the decline of Soviet military spending, and other developments since the report's publication will have to be considered by the new commission.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

This commission's report should be guided by a set of questions establishing its purpose and direction. These should include:

- 1) **Is the Cold War ending everywhere or just in Europe?** What are the persistent flash points in U.S.-Soviet relations and how should the U.S. deal with them? Is there still a threat of Soviet expansionism in the post-Gorbachev era? And what should U.S. priorities be in assessing the relative importance of such regional military threats to U.S. interests as instability in the Middle East, armed revolution in Central America, and communist suppression of U.S. allies in Africa and elsewhere?
- 2) **What should be the organizing principle** around which an American foreign policy can be built if it is true that Soviet expansion has been contained successfully? Advancement of American interests? Democratic internationalism? American nationalism? A non-ideological policy of pragmatism and realism?
- 3) **What should be the aim of U.S. policy** if the Soviet Union continues to break up? Should the U.S. overtly aim to dismantle the U.S.S.R., which could happen peacefully or violently and will depend largely on events beyond Washington's control? Or should the U.S. stand aside for fear that the collapsing Soviet Union could, like dying empires of old, lash out at the world and start a major war?
- 4) **What are the dangers and opportunities** of a united Europe for U.S. interests? Is instability in Eastern Europe a reason to keep U.S. forces in Europe even if the Soviet threat subsides? Or will the spread of democracy and market economies into Eastern Europe create stability and reduce the role of military power in Europe altogether?
- 5) **What does the new international environment mean** for U.S. relations with its allies? Will the U.S. still need NATO if the Soviet military threat continues to

recede? And how will the U.S. and its allies define collective security in the future if no single threat emerges to take the place of the Soviet Union? Who, in fact, will be the major enemies of the Western community in the next century? Will it be a truncated Russia? A united Germany? A frustrated Japan? Who, for that matter, will be members of the Western community?

6) What can the U.S. do to ease the transition of former communist states to democracy and market economies?

7) What should be U.S. foreign aid priorities as communist countries make the transition to democracy and market economies? Should the U.S. reexamine not only who gets foreign aid but the manner in which it is given?

8) What can the U.S. do to encourage free market economic reforms in the developing world? What can ease the massive foreign debt and development problems of scores of Third World states?

9) What are the major obstacles to the expansion of free trade, which is the best guarantee of global economic growth?

10) How will changes in China and Japan affect U.S. interests and the balance of power in Asia? Could the collapse of the Soviet Union cause a major realignment in Asia, bringing Moscow and Tokyo closer together, while creating a renewed opening of China to the West?

11) What should be the relative weight assigned to security concerns, human rights, and the spread of democracy in the formulation of American foreign policy?

12) Where will military conflicts likely be in the next decades, and what military capabilities will be required to deal with them?

13) How should nuclear, chemical, and ballistic missile proliferation and the prospects of mounting Soviet instability affect U.S. defense strategy?

14) Will international changes cause the U.S. to rely less on foreign bases and troops deployed abroad to protect its interests, and more on the capability to project military force by air and sea over great distances?

15) How should the U.S. prepare for so-called low-intensity conflicts involving small numbers of military forces and unconventional military tactics?

16) Will the U.S. replace its strategy of threatening massive nuclear retaliation to deter aggression with a strategy of defensive deterrence based on the mix of offensive and defensive strategic forces?

CONCLUSION

At no time since the end of World War II has the world been in such flux. The thaw of the Cold War has come, but like the swollen rivers of springtime, the flow of events could rage into a disastrous flood. American policy makers need moorings to guide them through these promising but turbulent times. They need to know where America stands and where it is going.

Preparing for a New Age. To determine this, George Bush should create a blue ribbon commission made up of some of America's best minds and ask them to help him craft a post-Cold War foreign and defense policy. Made up of men and women dedicated to a strong national defense, free enterprise, and technological progress, this commission should identify and analyze the new challenges facing the U.S. as the Cold War winds down.

Due six months after the first meeting, the commission's report should take a bold look at America's future, preparing it for a new age, while ensuring that the transition be as safe and secure as possible. While only the beginning of what is sure to be a long debate, this commission's report could become the intellectual foundation of a new foreign policy as profound and enduring as those created by the founding fathers of containment policy and U.S. nuclear strategy in the late 1940s.

Kim R. Holmes, Ph.D.
Director of Foreign Policy and Defense Studies

James A. Phillips
Deputy Director of Foreign Policy Studies

All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "NEXIS" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation's Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.