

# ROLES AND MISSIONS

by Donald Kagan

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, American military forces have been used to remove the ruler of Panama, to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait and later to deter its return, to alleviate a famine in Somalia, to remove a military junta from Haiti and restore the elected president to power, to compel warring ethnic factions in Bosnia to stop fighting and then to enforce the resulting truce until elections could be held, and to deter a threat from China against Taiwan, among other interventions.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, American forces have been stationed in Korea to deter an attack from the north and in the Persian Gulf to deter aggressive actions by either Iran or Iraq.

## Two Constrained Visions

The end of the Cold War has removed the danger of a war between the two superpowers, but plainly it has not removed the need for strong and competent American military forces to deal with problems around the world that engage the attention of the United States. The relative clarity that underlay America's Cold War policy and strategy is gone, replaced by confusion, debate, and a denial of reality. At the extreme is a call to bring America home, to focus attention on domestic problems, and to cut the budget for international affairs and military forces to the bone in order to pay for domestic programs and tax cuts. This call is often connected to the assertion that there is no credible threat to American security, that American military power and expenditure are colossal compared with those of any other state, and that no danger to the general peace and security is anywhere in view. Such problems as arise, it is said, can be dealt with by regional powers or the United Nations. The United States should stand aloof and avoid unilateral intervention; it should not even involve itself as the senior partner of an alliance.

More common than this view are less-extreme demands for

<sup>1</sup>This essay originally appeared in *Orbis*, Spring 1997, and arose from the Foreign Policy Research Institute conference "The Demilitarization of the Military?" Philadelphia, Pa., July 17-18, 1996.

limiting American involvement. These assert that America cannot afford the cost of widespread engagement, and that involvements abroad for the purpose of humanitarian intervention or for establishing and keeping the peace run a high risk of "mission creep," military escalation, and descent into a deadly quagmire similar to Vietnam. To avoid such mistakes, advocates of this position insist, a set of rigid requirements should be met before any engagement of American forces. But these requirements are so rigid that they would, in practice, prevent any use of American military power in instances short of a direct attack on the United States or its allies.

Advocates of both these arguments agree that American military forces should be used only in defense of the country's vital interests, which are generally defined in a limited fashion to include only the defense of the United States, its allies, and its critical economic interests. That is the place to begin considering the missions for the various elements of American military forces: What are the country's interests? Which are most important? Need interests be "vital," a matter of life and death for the country, before military force can be used? What strategy should the United States adopt to protect its interests, and where does the use of military power fit? A discussion of the proper missions for military forces must respond to these questions, and a responsible policy must follow from the answers.

## America in Today's World

American grand strategy must begin with the recognition that the United States is a satisfied power. It has no desire to extend its territory and no unsatisfied territorial claims. It has the world's largest and most powerful economy and has achieved that status under the current rules of the game. Even after making severe cuts in expenditures, it is by far the world's greatest military power. Historically, such predominance causes fear and jealousy among other states, who usually band together to balance and oppose such hegemony, but that has not been the response to American preeminence. The United States is allied with most of the world's wealthiest nations, many of whom possess impressive military forces of their own. The United States is the world's leading democratic state and the exemplar of free enterprise and trade at a time when these values are admired and widely shared. Though annoyed from time to time by America's policies and its ability to have its way, U.S. allies do not fear American aggression, but

rather fear the United States will withdraw from active involvement and leadership.

Few, if any, nations in the history of the world have ever enjoyed such a favorable situation. It stands to reason that the key-stone of American strategy should be an effort to preserve and sustain the situation as well and as long as possible. America's most vital interest, therefore, is maintaining the general peace, for war has been the swiftest, most expensive, and most devastating means of changing the balance of international power. But peace does not keep itself, although one of the most common errors in modern thinking about international relations is the assumption that peace is natural and can be preserved merely by having peace-seeking nations avoid provocative actions. The last three-quarters of the twentieth century strongly suggest the opposite conclusion: major war is more likely to come when satisfied states neglect their defenses and fail to take an active part in the preservation of peace.

It is vital to understand that the current relatively peaceful and secure situation is neither inevitable nor immutable. It reflects two conditions built up with tremendous effort and expense during the last half-century: the great power of the United States and the general expectation that Americans will be willing to use that power when necessary. The diminution of U.S. power and credibility, which would follow on a policy of reduced responsibility, would thus not be a neutral act that would leave the situation as it stands. Instead, it would be a critical step in undermining the stability of the international situation. Calculations based on the absence of visible potential enemies would immediately be made invalid by America's withdrawal from its current position as the major bulwark supporting the world order. The cost of the resulting upheaval in wealth, instability, and the likelihood of war would be infinitely greater than the cost of continuing to uphold the existing international structure.

### The Main Task

The chief mission of American military forces, therefore, must be to maintain their superiority, that is, their ability (in cooperation with their allies) to fight and win wars at such a level as to deter possible disturbers of the peace from seeking to change the international situation by violence or the threat of violence. That is no easy task, especially for modern democratic countries at this

moment in history. The achievements of deterrence are always hard to see and to appreciate. If there is no war and no immediate threat in sight, opponents of the policy will denounce it as an unnecessary expense diverting resources from more desirable causes. They will regard the peaceful international situation as natural and unconnected to what has helped produce it: the effort and money expended on military power. The only time in its history that the United States has steadily maintained powerful military forces in order to deter war was from 1950 through the end of the Cold War, a period that concluded with the peaceful collapse of its major rival. Throughout that time, the policy was under domestic attack on the grounds that it was either unnecessary or provocative, or both. In the absence of an obvious, already-powerful opponent, it is even harder to convince many people that the current advantageous situation rests on a base to which preponderant American military power is essential.

Yet it is remarkable how swiftly an apparently secure peace can be shattered by a sudden challenge to the complacency of the satisfied states from an unexpected source. In 1919 Germany was defeated, isolated, disarmed, and strategically contained. The situation was fundamentally unchanged when Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime came to power in 1933. Yet by 1941 Germany had launched a world war, conquered France and all of Western Europe, and was on the point of bringing the entire continent under its control.

As late as the 1920s, the notion that Japan might be a threat to peace seemed absurd even to the former first lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. As chancellor of the Exchequer (1924–29), he repeatedly reduced naval appropriations to help pay for social programs, dismissing future dangers in the Far East: "Why should there be a war with Japan? I do not believe there is the slightest chance of it in our lifetime." The Admiralty, he said, should make plans "on the basis that no naval war against a first class Navy is likely to take place in the next twenty years."<sup>2</sup> In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria. Several years later it launched an invasion of China, and in 1941 it attacked British, French, and Dutch colonies and American forces at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere, bringing World War II to the Pacific.

In 1990, few would have believed that a third-rate power such as Iraq would offer a military challenge to the sole remaining

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), p. 203.

superpower, but in that year Saddam Hussein's army invaded Kuwait, compelling the United States to send a vast military force to drive the Iraqis out, at enormous expense.

### Lesser Tasks

Deterrence of war at the level of at least theater campaigns—through strength and the evident willingness to use it—must be the most important mission of America's armed forces. It cannot, however, be the only one, as the uses of American forces abroad in the last decade show. Neither the Bush nor the Clinton administration can fairly be described as looking for trouble. Both made deep cuts in expenditures for defense, and both faced serious domestic opposition to interventions abroad. Thus, whatever the wisdom of any particular involvement, each one resulted from a decision by a government not eager to take it. There is little reason to doubt that similar problems and challenges will continue to arise in the future. Challenges to peace and security arise naturally from the conflict for power between and within states. Some conflicts, like the fighting in Bosnia and the Chinese menace to Taiwan, involve principally the interests and security of America's friends and allies. But a consistent American refusal to take action to meet threats to peace and security that fall short of invasions or similarly obvious dangers will raise questions about the U.S. willingness and ability to do so, undermining the confidence and support of friends and allies. The current, unusually stable condition of the world rests heavily on the belief in America's military power and commitment. If these are seen to decline, the stability and security of the world will decline apace. The United States need not involve itself in every challenge that arises; it need not take action whenever it takes part. However, it must face the fact that whenever it chooses to stand aloof from challenges that may concern it, there is a price to pay in damage to the credibility of its policy of deterrence.

Still, decisions to intervene or not must be made. And the nice calculations needed to make the decision in each case are far from the various rigid checklists that some analysts wish to have filled out before any use of military force is undertaken. Serious and continued study and discussion of basic principles and historical experience will always be needed to alert decision makers to the risks of both intervention and abstention, but there is no magic formula that can make decisions in advance. That is what statesmen are for.

What seems clear, however, is that interventions on a scale smaller than war should and will take place from time to time. Opinions differ on how frequent these will be, but experience suggests that they will be most frequent and most difficult when the powers that wish to preserve peace are, or seem to be, unable or unwilling to resist its breach. The Korean War, for instance, broke out when the United States appeared both unable and unwilling to defend its South Korean ally. Swift and enormously deep reductions in the size and quality of the U.S. Army right after World War II brought it down in just a few years from some 10 million to about 552,000, half of them on occupation duty overseas serving as clerks and policemen, the other half in the United States performing various administrative tasks. General Omar Bradley, who inherited this army in 1948, described it as one that "could not fight its way out of a paper bag."<sup>3</sup> Early in 1950, the American secretary of state gave a speech that mentioned a number of states in the Far East that the United States would fight to defend. South Korea was not among them. The combination of America's evident military weakness and its apparent lack of will encouraged North Korea to launch an attack and its Soviet sponsor to permit and support it. The ensuing war almost ended in swift defeat and disaster for South Korean and American forces. In any case, it lasted for years, cost a great fortune, and took thousands of American lives before ending in a stalemate that has required the emplacement of American forces in Korea for more than four decades.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 took place at a time when American military power was far stronger—the foremost in the world, the power of the Soviet Union having declined. Saddam Hussein could nevertheless challenge U.S. might because he had good reason to doubt American willingness to use its military power to prevent or reverse an invasion of Kuwait, a doubt strengthened by the absence of significant American ground forces in the vicinity.

There is good reason to believe that the violence and loss of life involved when Yugoslavia disintegrated, and the threat that these have posed to the stability of Europe, could have been avoided by timely intervention on the part of the United States and its allies. Given the power of American military forces, then recently demonstrated in the war in the Persian Gulf, there would probably

<sup>3</sup>Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 474.

have been no need to use those forces had the United States and NATO made clear that violence would not be tolerated. Instead, both attempted to avoid the responsibility of intervention, thus permitting and encouraging the horrors and disruptions that followed, only to decide in due course that these were not tolerable. When at last NATO resorted to intervention, it required the serious use of arms and the deployment of a considerable force for at least a year. But all of that happened after the Bosnian horrors had taken place. And the end of the difficulties and of American involvement are far from evident.

These examples show that the denial of American interest and attempts to avoid involvement, such as the threat or use of military force, can have a result opposite to what is desired. Instead of preventing the expenditure of resources and the risk of American lives, such avoidance may encourage conditions that cause greater expenditure and risk. There is no realistic alternative to the requirement that America's armed forces be able both to fight and to win real wars, as well as to engage in smaller actions to deter war, to establish peace, and to keep the peace for some period after it has been established.

### **The Checklist Illusion**

Unimpressed by such proposals, yet fearful that peacekeeping and similar assignments would seriously degrade the army's war-fighting ability, some people propose an approach that would keep these involvements to a minimum and, indeed, make them rare events. To this end, they insist that an established canon of criteria be met before American armed forces are introduced abroad. One set of suggestions, not meant to be unduly restrictive, requires a determination prior to any intervention (1) that the action has some reasonable chance of success; (2) that the United States has resources adequate for its execution; (3) that its purpose is to protect American interests; (4) that the U.S. government is able to define and explain the mission; and (5) that the mission solves a greater problem than it creates. These are all sensible considerations, and no government should commit armed forces abroad without thinking about them, among others. But they do not help much. The third item will almost always be debatable, and the fourth amounts to little more than an exercise in rhetorical skill. And determinations about the others cannot be made in advance. Statesmen responsible for deciding will have to act on their best

judgment, as they have in the past. There can be no guarantee that they will make the right decision, but there is no escape from deciding.

The one criterion not yet discussed, common to most lists of requirements, presents the greatest difficulty. It would require evidence of a national, or at least political, consensus before a decision is made to use armed force. This suggestion arises from the understandable desire to avoid involvements that have been seen as disasters in the past and that have arisen from the commitment of American armed forces in situations short of declared war. The instance most frequently cited is Vietnam; another is the peace-keeping intervention in Lebanon during the Reagan years, which led to the death of 241 marines. The humanitarian mission to Somalia is a third example.

The purpose of this requirement is to make such interventions impossible, or at least highly unlikely. In retrospect, it may seem improbable that the American people or their representatives would have given advance approval to missions of this kind, but the proviso offers no guarantee against unsatisfactory involvements. The interventions in Vietnam and Korea earned both political and popular support as long as the government was seen to be aiming at victory. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush would surely have won support had they sought public approval for the missions to Lebanon and Somalia, and there is no reason to be certain that the dismay caused by the mishaps in those places would not have been overcome and forgotten had the government in each case found a good reason to persist in the mission. The main effect of such a requirement would be similar to the effect of Bush's decision to gain congressional support before launching a military effort against Iraq—to give America's opponent further reason to doubt U.S. resolve and to refuse a peaceful conclusion to the crisis, and to give him time to improve his military or diplomatic situation.

The unspoken assumption underlying this and other restrictions meant to hamper interventions is that inaction is safer than action. But the history of this century does not support that opinion. In 1936 Adolf Hitler violated both the Versailles and Locarno treaties by sending a military force to occupy the demilitarized Rhineland. Had the leaders of France and Great Britain, or even France alone, acted to drive out his pitiful contingent they might well have destroyed his regime on the spot and avoided a war that ultimately caused some 40 million deaths. At the very least they

would have made impossible the swift German defeat of France in 1940. Given the climate of opinion at the time, leaders of Great Britain and France might have found it hard to convince their publics to support military action. But that will never be known, because the leaders were paralyzed by the bitter memories of World War I and believed that restraint and the avoidance of the use of military force were the only way to preserve peace. They found excuses for inaction, and the Nazis were able to take the first major step on the road to war and conquest.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is also instructive. The U.S. military leadership, badly scarred by public criticism and unsatisfactory outcomes during the Vietnam War, as well as by the affair in Lebanon, advised inaction. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that a line be drawn to defend Saudi Arabia, leaving Kuwait in Saddam's hands. Many members of the political opposition vigorously and publicly opposed military intervention. Had President Bush been guided by the need to test public support before deciding to take action he would not have acted. Instead, he decided at once that Saddam's *coup de main* "would not stand." With great effort, and the passage of valuable time, he was able to win, by only a few votes in the Senate, congressional support for the use of force to drive the Iraqis from Kuwait. But that was accomplished after he had already decided on action; mustering support would have been impossible had he not already made his decision. To win the congressional vote the president undertook a last attempt at diplomacy, and that had consequences. For one thing, it took time. For another, any chance that visible resoluteness and serious military preparations might convince Saddam to retreat without a fight was undercut by the efforts at last-minute negotiation, forced by the need to sway domestic opinion.

Moreover, if these diplomatic efforts had succeeded, if Saddam had withdrawn before the fighting began, the result would have been almost as bad as leaving him in place. He could have retreated with his large military force intact, a force that included chemical weapons and possibly nuclear and biological ones as well. He also could have retreated with the prestige of his forces undiminished. Doubt about American resolve and willingness to fight would have lingered and grown, undermining the confidence of friendly and moderate elements in the Middle East. The threat to peace and American interests would not have been defeated but only delayed. What was needed was a swift military response as soon as possible after Iraq's violation of Kuwait's

frontier. Public support would have been available, as it was once the president made his decision clear. Delay caused by the desire to win such support in advance could have been very costly had not Saddam proved to be such a convenient opponent.

These examples, and they could readily be multiplied, show that there may be dangers not only from military involvement but also from a refusal to undertake such involvement. Indeed, in countries like the Western democracies, there may be more danger from the latter than from the former. The avoidance of interventions short of full-scale war, therefore, is not a safe refuge but an illusion. In any case, there is no way to know in advance whether it is safer to stay out or go in, no escape from the judgment of statesmen, and no security in tying their hands. It is necessary, therefore, to seek the best ways to meet the challenge of varied and unforeseeable missions in a manner compatible with maintaining a military force capable of fighting and winning major conflicts.

### Trends Eroding U.S. Strength

Still, the question remains: can the armed forces carry out these smaller assignments without damaging their ability to carry out their primary mission—to win major wars? In particular, can the army do so? For it is to the army that these secondary assignments present the most serious difficulties; the other services find little in them that runs the risk of degrading their war-fighting capacities. But commitments of tens of thousands of soldiers to peace-making and peacekeeping missions for periods of months or years place a serious strain on the army, whose numbers are already below those of the inadequate force available at the outbreak of the Korean War.

*Budget cutting.* Yet the desire to cut military expenditures has created pressure to reduce the army's numbers even further. That is justified by the assertion that wars of the future will rely heavily on new "smart" and "stealthy" weapons, many of them unmanned and many others released from ships and airplanes at a great distance, thus making large numbers of soldiers unnecessary.

But one must be cautious about claims that new technology will make traditional ground forces marginal or irrelevant. Previous advances in military technology, even when they have had important effects on the character of warfare, have produced

exaggerated claims and expectations. After the Franco-Prussian War, the officers of the German general staff ignored the complexities of traditional grand strategy and put their hopes and faith in mastery of the new technology. “Theirs was a narrow world of technical marvels: cartography, railroads, communications, weapons systems. They mastered statistical tables, devised intricate mobilization schedules, formulated complicated plans,” all of which, however, was not enough to overcome the traditional disadvantages of numbers and geography.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, British advocates of air power in the interwar years thought they could deter war or win it without the use of ground forces by developing the new technology of “strategic” aerial bombardment. “To the British Government rearmament came to seem almost a question of air power alone. Cabinet discussions tacitly assumed that the next war, if it came, would take the form of a direct, almost a private duel between the British and German Air Forces.”<sup>5</sup> The ensuing war nevertheless lasted more than five years, involved bitter warfare between enormous armies, and ended only when ground forces marched into the German capital.

The war to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait brought swift victory to the side with an overwhelming advantage in modern technology, including the first significant use of “smart” and “stealthy” weapons. Yet that victory required the employment of hundreds of thousands of ground troops even after a month-long pounding of Iraqi forces from the air. An air force colonel who flew in the Persian Gulf War rightly observed: “Airpower can only do so much; the Army must go in on the ground to defeat the enemy’s ground forces to finally win the battle.”<sup>6</sup> It is also true that the placement of ground forces in significant numbers is one of the most effective means of deterring breaches of the peace. But with inadequate numbers the army will be unable to perform its vital part in these jobs.

Unfortunately, the army is an attractive target for budget cutters because manpower, especially in the form of professional volunteers, is very expensive, and the army has by far the largest number of men and women. However, the United States must resist the temptation to save money by assuming that ground

forces in future wars will play a less important role, at least until it is clear that some better substitute will be available. Until that time, it would be reckless to assume that a modernized ground force of considerable size will not be needed to fight (and deter) the wars of the future.

The problem of numbers is intensified by financial considerations. Already there is broad agreement that currently projected forces will be inadequate to carry out the strategy of the Clinton administration’s Bottom-Up Review. Some analysts suggest that forces for the current strategic plan are underfunded for the period 1997–2002 by some \$130 billion. If they are right, then even without involvement in missions short of war U.S. forces’ capacity to do their job in both the short run and long run will be undermined.

The problem is also exacerbated by the need to keep pace with the advance of military technology. Whether or not America finds itself in the midst of a true revolution in military affairs, there is no doubt that the continued effectiveness of U.S. armed forces will require expensive investments to replace worn and obsolete equipment with the weapons and defenses of the future. There is already considerable tension within the armed forces over the need to maintain the forces at an adequate state of readiness to cope with current challenges and those of the near future, and the need for research, development, and procurement of the weapons of the next generation.

*Numerous non-war assignments.* The erosion caused by budget cutting is multiplied by involvement in secondary missions. The practice has been to carry out these missions without providing adequate additional funds, so that the decision to engage in them comes at the expense of general readiness and modernization. America’s peacekeeping force in Bosnia, for example, will cost at least \$3.5 billion for its first year of deployment.<sup>7</sup> The temptation, therefore, is to resist involvement in such missions in order to avoid degrading the war-fighting capacity of the armed forces.

Opponents of secondary missions also fear another source of degradation. They point to the danger that a focus on these lesser activities could undermine the army’s war-fighting capacity in more subtle, yet fundamental, ways. The skills and qualities needed for peacekeeping are not the same as those required for war fighting. The toughness, aggressiveness, and ferocity that are essential for the latter are the opposite of the tact, patience, and caution often needed for the former. The fear is that the training

<sup>7</sup>“Bosnia Force Costs U.S. \$3.5 Billion a Year,” *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1996.

<sup>4</sup>Holger H. Herwig, “Strategic Uncertainties of a Nation-State: Prussia-Germany, 1871–1918,” in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, ed. Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 251.

<sup>5</sup>Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (New York: Morrow, 1972), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in John Pimlott and Stephen Brady, *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Sterling Publishers, 1992), pp. 122–23.

needed to produce effective peace-keepers would degrade the trainees' capacity for war fighting. Some believe that the kind of soldier who excels in one assignment, regardless of training, is less well suited to the other. There is thus concern that as peace-keeping becomes more frequent, the peacekeeping type of soldier will be more readily favored and advanced, at the expense of the army's war-fighting capacity. This tendency, it is feared, will be increased if the army looks to the new, smaller missions as a means for building or protecting the size of the army against current and future reductions.

Various proposals have been suggested to meet these threats. One is to divide the army into two kinds of soldiers, each with its distinct kind of training. This plan would reduce at once the number of available fighting men, and in time it would create a sense that one group consisted of "real" soldiers while the other did not, with devastating consequences for morale. Most people believe that this would produce the worst possible degradation of the army's effectiveness, and they argue for a single kind of soldier with uniform training in both assignments. They place their hopes in a new kind of training that would allow soldiers to move comfortably and effectively from one kind of assignment to the other after a period of transitional preparation.

Another approach is to make greater use of reserves and guardsmen for peacekeeping purposes. That could increase the numbers available, since political support for these troops is strong. To make this approach work, however, training of reserves and guardsmen would need to improve to something like that employed by the marines with their reserves. Nevertheless, questions arise. If these auxiliaries are to be used in both types of assignments, will their training and duality be adequate for war fighting? If not, would not a two-tiered army emerge with the problems discussed above?

In sum, there is no real choice but to produce a doctrine and training program that will allow the army to carry out the range of missions that America's situation requires. Peace and American security depend on it.

This assignment is not easy and calls for both resolve and clear, hard thinking. The military and civilian leaders planning America's defense policy must be prepared to make the kinds of organizational changes, even radical ones, that may be needed in the new era, and to institute training to meet the new conditions. They also need to find better ways to reduce and control the cost

of acquiring and maintaining needed weapons, for financial restrictions will always be serious.

However, they must face the fact that more money than is now budgeted or anticipated will be needed to meet the challenge. Their natural tendency to withdraw from as much responsibility as possible as soon as possible, and to shape defense expenditures to meet domestic political rather than strategic needs, has twice in this century put the Western democracies at risk. The major responsibilities facing America's leaders today are to resist that tendency and to educate the American people and their representatives as to what is needed for peace and security and what it will cost.

### **A New Strategy Is Needed**

None of that can happen without the formulation of a clear national grand strategy to suit the international situation. In 1950, Paul Nitze (then head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff) was charged with producing a comprehensive statement of national security policy. The document, known as NSC-68, became the general foundation of the containment strategy that shaped American policy in the next half century. The policy of containment laid out in those years was a rare example of a state making a rational evaluation of the problems it faced, the nature of its opponent, and the character of the threat that opponent posed to stability and peace, and then deciding on a reasoned course of action, including the sacrifices and commitments needed for success. It was a realistic approach that rested on an understanding of the need for military power and the manifest willingness to use it when necessary. Yet it was a subtle approach that gave full weight to the importance of ideas, economics, institutions, culture, and the need to adapt to change.

The adoption of the fully shaped policy of containment required a sharp break with America's past. Contrary to its traditions, the United States joined in a continuing alliance with nations in Europe and, later, in other parts of the world. It consciously undertook the chief burden of preserving the peace, under conditions tolerable to itself and its allies, gearing its economy for the purpose and adopting military conscription in peacetime. American leaders took these taxing and extraordinary measures to meet what they believed to be a serious and imminent threat. But the policy of containment was also shaped by their

understanding of the origins of World War II. That war, they had concluded, originated in the failure of the Western democracies to meet their responsibilities after World War I, their withdrawal into isolation, and their unwillingness to bear the costs of keeping the peace, which required the capacity and will to resist detrimental changes in the balance of power caused by dissatisfied states that use subversion, threats, and military force to achieve their purpose.

To define the missions for America's armed forces in the decades to come requires a new NSC-68. There needs to be a full national debate, followed by the adoption of a grand strategy of continued engagement in the new constellation of international relations. The United States must take the lead in preserving the peace by deterring the resort to armed violence and intervening to prevent or stop it when necessary. With that goal established and understood, American military and civilian leaders can better turn to the difficult task of anticipating potential missions and preparing the means to make them successful.