

THEORETICAL ROOTS OF US FOREIGN POLICY

Machiavelli and American Unilateralism

Thomas M. Kane



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By the end of the 1990s, America's overseas critics had begun to describe the sole remaining superpower as, in the words of one writer, the 'original rogue state'. This book strives to explain why the United States finds unilateralist policies so attractive and finds a promising explanation in the works of Niccolo Machiavelli. In his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli constructed a theory about the grand strategy of republics, suggesting that foreign entanglements are peculiarly dangerous to republican societies, and that republics can master these dangers by adopting long-term strategies of imperialism. The author analyses Machiavelli's thoughts on these subjects and discusses contending interpretations of Machiavelli's work. He goes on to consider the accuracy with which Machiavelli's theory can explain the historical development of US grand strategy and adds material to the debate over whether the American system of government is, in the opinion of J.G.A. Pocock, anchored in Machiavelli's thought or, according to Leo Strauss, founded in 'opposition to Machiavellian principles'.

This book will be of great interest to all students and researchers of American politics, international relations theory and strategic and security studies.

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To those who stood undaunted:

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THE ROGUE SUPERPOWER

‘It’s not likely we’ll be asking permission.’

(An American general, speaking under conditions of anonymity, regarding the circumstances under which the US would attack suspected terrorist bases in Somalia, *circa* 2002¹)

By the end of the 1990s, America’s overseas critics had begun to describe the sole remaining superpower as, in the words of one *New Statesman* writer, the original rogue state.² The former French prime minister Lionel Jospin levelled a similar charge in more diplomatic language by describing US policy as unilateralist.³ European Union (EU) Commissioner for International Relations Chris Patten repeated these sentiments and added: ‘Gulliver can’t go it alone.’⁴

Scholars and pundits have noticed the same trend. Veteran international relations (IR) scholar Joseph Nye, for instance, titled a recent work *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone*.⁵ Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara not only condemns unilateralism but suggests that the United States should return to the liberal internationalism of Woodrow Wilson.⁶ Samuel Huntington, famous for his argument that the twenty-first century will witness a clash of civilizations, warns that the United States cannot afford to alienate the rest of the world.⁷

One normally presumes that states are entitled to act unilaterally. This is what it means to be sovereign. The United States, however, seems unusually determined to exercise this right. Furthermore, Washington asserts its independence in ways that even its allies find jarring. In the first years of the twenty-first century, to name only a few particularly well-publicized incidents, the United States repudiated its anti-ballistic missile treaty, imposed tariffs and economic sanctions in violation of global free trade agreements, attacked Iraq against the wishes of fellow members of the UN Security Council, excused itself from following the Geneva Convention in its treatment of certain prisoners taken in Afghanistan, withheld its support for an international ban on landmines, withheld its support for controls on small arms, threatened to withdraw its signature from treaties establishing an international criminal court and refused to join international regimes to restrict carbon dioxide emissions.

In short, the United States withholds its support from a variety of apparently worthwhile causes. Meanwhile, the United States government frequently reserves the right to act as it sees fit, regardless of opposition from other nations and international bodies. These facts are in themselves troubling, because America's wealth and military preponderance give it great ability to support international accords – and to undermine them. Without US support, these projects and others like them may fail. Many also suggest that, given America's many advantages, Americans have a duty to support projects of this nature.

American unilateralism is also troubling at a more general level. The period since the decline of the Soviet Union has been one in which there has been an unprecedented degree of co-operation among the developed nations. International harmony would have been worth preserving in any era. In an age of nuclear weapons and global environmental threats, this spirit of co-operation seems absolutely indispensable. Many argue that America's willingness to respect the sensibilities of other nations will play a decisive role in determining whether this global consensus can last.⁸

The journalistic commentator Henry Porter, for instance, laments the fact that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had been unable to prevent the nuclear sabre-rattling between India and Pakistan. Writing in the summer of 2002, Porter suggests that the 'sheer force of American unilateralist military action' had set a bad example for the rest of the world, reducing Kofi Annan to impotence.⁹ International relations scholar Bruce Cronin expressed the concept in more abstract terms:

[H]aving socialized the key states into accepting the assumptions and norms underlying the [global] order, the hegemon is placed in a position where it must follow the rules and institutions it had helped to establish, even when it is not in its interest to do so. To do otherwise would undermine the very order it has created.¹⁰

Given the well-known dangers of America's tendencies, one must ask why the US behaves as it does. Those who oppose the effects of American unilateralism need to know how to combat it, and when it is most likely to rear its head. Those who would defend American policy need to be able to explain why the US acts as it does, and how it justifies overriding the sensibilities of other nations. This book explores the roots of US unilateralism and finds that there is a logic to America's behaviour.

Unilateralism defined

If one is to write about unilateralism, one must define it. The term need not be pejorative. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the word 'unilateral' means only 'performed by or affecting only one person or group'.¹¹ In current discussions of international relations, however, the word has come to imply policies formed without regard for other states that might be affected, especially policies

that defy others' wishes or policies that reject what others see as duties. This book uses the word in the more recent sense.

The deep roots of unilateralism

Why does America insist on standing alone? One may attribute some of Washington's behaviour during the early twenty-first century to the political convictions of its Republican president, George W. Bush. Certainly, Bush's verbal gaffes provide material to political humorists who wish to portray him as ignorant and parochial. Still, even a cursory survey of history shows that it would be simplistic to blame American unilateralism on a single man.

America has not been uniformly unilateralist throughout its history. Indeed, the US has a great tradition of internationalism, which has manifested itself in ways that range from its long-standing aspiration to 'liberate' China and India through peaceful trade to its central role in the founding of the United Nations.¹² Nevertheless, unilateralism has been a recurring theme throughout American history. George Washington famously warned his countrymen to avoid 'entangling alliances'.¹³ Although American president Woodrow Wilson took the lead in founding the League of Nations, his country refused to join it. Many hold America's notoriously isolationist foreign and economic policies of the 1920s and 1930s partially responsible for the Great Depression and the Second World War.¹⁴

The fact that this issue has come up so often indicates that it is more than a question of personalities. Unilateralism seems to be more than a question of ideology as well. Indeed, it can be difficult to determine who is responsible for America's isolationist tendencies. Although one can identify unilateralism as a distinct theme in America's foreign policy, most American political groups mix calls for greater independence with calls for greater involvement, depending on the issues under discussion.¹⁵

Since the 1990s, commentators have tended to associate unilateralism with the American right. Those who lean leftward typically wish to enlist US support for an assortment of well-intentioned international projects, while those who lean rightward typically remain sceptical. On different issues, however, liberals and conservatives reverse roles. During the 1980s, for instance, it was frequently the right that wanted the US to take a more active role in co-operating with anti-Communist forces abroad, while the left questioned both the wisdom and the morality of American interventionism.

Even after the Cold War, American liberals have expressed concern about some of their country's overseas entanglements. 'Time to Bring the Troops Home', writes Asia scholar Chalmers Johnson in a *Nation* article opposing America's military presence in the Far East.¹⁶ Johnson goes on to assert that the United States 'is virtually the only nation on earth that maintains large contingents of its armed forces in other people's countries' and that, '[t]o those unlucky enough to live near them', US forces appear less like 'peacekeepers' than occupiers.¹⁷ Since Johnson is undoubtedly aware that the United States maintains its forces in Japan and elsewhere

on the basis of mutually agreed-on defence treaties with the host countries, one must conclude that he thinks less co-operation and more unilateralism would, in this case, be the principled course of action. Meanwhile, moderate conservatives such as Henry Kissinger continue to caution against isolationism.¹⁸

International relations scholars commonly distinguish between realists, who see foreign policy primarily in terms of their own country's national interests, and idealists, who see foreign policy in terms of morality. Again, however, the debate over America's degree of engagement with the rest of the world is more than a debate between realism and idealism. As noted above, idealists on both the left and the right have alternately castigated unilateralism and advocated it. Realists are equally split over this issue. Samuel Huntington makes a spirited pragmatic argument to the effect that America risks becoming a 'hollow hegemon' unless it becomes more responsive to the rest of the world, but other self-described advocates of 'clear-eyed realism' suggest that America should voluntarily relinquish its position, allow its power to subside, and leave international action to other nations.¹⁹

The pressure for unilateralism

Unilateralism, it seems, is not simply the favoured policy of a particular intellectual or political movement. There appears to be some underlying force that nudges Americans of many academic and ideological persuasions toward unilateral behaviour. Scholars have recognized this and attempted to identify the force. Henry Kissinger, writing in 1968, warned:

Partly as a result of the generation gap, the American mood oscillates dangerously between being ashamed of power and expecting too much of it. The former attitude deprecates the use or possession of force; the latter is overly receptive to the possibilities of absolute action and overly indifferent to the likely consequences.²⁰

Both crusading and idealistic abstention from power politics can inspire unilateralist behaviour. One must ask, however, why the American mood should oscillate more than the mood of any other country. One must also note that, although the 'idealistic element of American youth' that dominated national life in the late 1960s has mellowed with age, America's foreign policy continues to feature both unilateral involvement and unilateral abstention. Just as it would be simplistic to attribute unilateralism entirely to the personalities of particular presidents, it would be simplistic to attribute it entirely to the political fashions of particular generations. The idealism of the 1960s may have reflected aspects of America's tendency towards unilateralism, but those who wish to understand the origins of this tendency must look deeper.

Bruce Cronin attempts to explain US behaviour in terms of America's position within the international system. Cronin identifies the United States as a hegemon: a powerful country that upholds the rules that govern trade and other relations

throughout the international community.²¹ Although a hegemon may achieve its position through sheer power, it enforces international rules by mutual consent. Hegemony is a social role, and the hegemon needs recognition from the rest of the international community in order to retain its position.²² The hegemon, however, faces a dilemma:

[T]here is a tension between a dominant state's role as a hegemon (defined in terms of leadership) and its role as a great power (defined in terms of material capabilities). These roles often call for contradictory performances. While secondary states expect the former to often act on behalf of the common good (as defined by the politically relevant powers), domestic political actors expect the latter to act in pursuit of parochial interest. Thus, there is a contradiction between the propensity for a powerful state to take unilateral action in promoting its self-defined interest and its desire to maintain long-term systemic stability at a minimal cost. This tension explains the contradictory behavior that hegemons often exhibit.²³

Cronin illustrates his point with a case study of America's relations with the United Nations. In the 1940s, the US argued for a strong Security Council. As recently as 1991, Cronin tells us, the US 'determined that its pursuit of a post-Cold War hegemony was tied to its legitimacy as a global leader'.²⁴ Therefore, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the United States legitimized its war to restore Kuwait's independence as a UN action. During the 1990s, however, various Security Council members began to question America's continued attempts to hold Iraq to the terms of the 1991 peace agreement. America and Britain eventually resorted to bombing Iraq without seeking the UN's blessing.²⁵

Cronin's work draws valuable attention to the tension between US domestic policy and US foreign policy. One must, however, ask why this tension is inevitable. The simple fact that America is a hegemon does not fully explain it. To begin with, those who are interested in the actual policies the United States might adopt will wish to know where America's domestic interests diverge from America's interests as a global leader.

The truism that individual interests must always differ from group interests does not fully answer this question. As hegemon, the United States presumably had the opportunity to write the rules of international relations in its own favour. Was it too benevolent to do so? Has it lost the power to do so? Is there some other principle of international politics that made this turn of events inevitable?

Even if one accepts that the US has become the custodian of a system that reflects its principles but not its narrow self-interest, this does not fully explain American unilateralism. There are instances in which America's unilateral behaviour seems like simple hypocrisy. Given America's customary support for free trade, the Bush administration's decision to impose tariffs on steel imports appears to fall into this category. Other issues, however, are not so clear cut.

Even in Cronin's own example, the United States had no self-evident domestic motive for launching air strikes against Iraq. Certainly, the United States has interests in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the security of the global oil supply, but so do most other countries throughout the world. The US action may have been right or it may have been wrong, but it did not benefit Americans any more directly than it benefited Asians or Europeans. Some might say that the US benefited from the opportunity to demonstrate its military might, but this would seem to be in keeping with America's role as hegemon, not in opposition to it. One may argue that America's action was arrogant, aggressive and ill advised, but it is difficult to argue that it was motivated by domestic self-interest.

Public opinion polls do not support the idea that America's foreign policy unilateralism reflects America's domestic self-interest. Steven Kull, director of the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes, has done research that suggests that Americans favour foreign aid and are willing to pay for it with taxes.²⁶ His work also indicates that Americans favour more socially conscious trading practices even at the expense of economic growth, and that they are willing to risk troops in internationally run humanitarian military interventions.²⁷ Indeed, Americans even claim to support the United Nations, and a majority of them say that they are willing to have their troops fight for the UN under foreign commanders.²⁸

Americans, however 'refuse to submit to simplistic choices'.²⁹ Kull's work indicates that Americans have complex opinions about what they are and are not willing to do. This would seem to undermine their support for the UN. Americans, it seems, are eager to co-operate with the rest of the world, but only as long as they get their own way. America's leaders are equally headstrong, and the result is unilateralism. If this is a sin, it is closer to pride than to avarice.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the US behaved in much the same way before it became a world power. Robin Higham, introducing *Intervention or Abstention: The Dilemma of American Foreign Policy*, affirms that, since becoming a superpower, 'the U.S. has conducted itself in its traditional pattern'.³⁰ Higham portrays the Vietnam War as an interventionist aberration.³¹ Cronin contributes to our general understanding of benevolent hegemony in international relations, but he has not identified the causes of American unilateralism.

Raymond Aron, critiquing American foreign policy in *The Imperial Republic*, suggests a more promising approach. Aron, like Cronin, believes that one can explain American diplomacy 'only within the system of inter-state relations to which the protagonist belongs'.³² Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the character of the protagonist. Aron reminds 'the reader of what Europeans too often forget, the major trends in United States diplomacy', which begin, he tells us, with the thirteen colonies.³³

American political commentators have historically maintained that their special tradition shapes their role in the world. Like Aron himself, they have emphasized the fact that the United States aspires to govern itself as a republic.³⁴ Political theory has often portrayed republican government as the antithesis of empire. When

republics become involved in international affairs, they risk succumbing to the temptation of imperialism. Modern America differs significantly from the republics of antiquity, and a series of historical events beginning with the Spanish–American war and continuing through the world wars of the twentieth century has given America a special international role, but republican principles still have the power to explain important elements of US foreign policy.

Certainly, nineteenth-century commentators on US foreign policy were quick to invoke republican theory.³⁵ Not only did these commentators condemn imperialism for its mistreatment of other peoples; they portrayed it as a threat to the liberty of the United States itself.³⁶ Although the details of republican theory may no longer capture the public imagination, it may still shed light on the dynamics that drive America’s dealings with the outside world. Unilateralism and republicanism have often gone hand in hand.

Republics have sought to limit their interaction with the outside world since ancient Greece.³⁷ Plato and Aristotle, among others, commented on this point.³⁸ Republics, democracies and other forms of free societies appear to need an exceptionally great degree of national independence. Unfortunately for those who are interested in American unilateralism, most of the great writers on republican theory have given the topic of foreign policy short shrift.³⁹ There is, however, a thought-provoking exception.

Enter the Florentine

Niccolo Machiavelli, ‘the first great state-and-nation builder of the modern world’, not only observed the unilateralist tendencies of republics but endorsed them.⁴⁰ His *Discourses on Livy* provides readers with the materials to assemble a comprehensive theory of how unilateralism and multilateralism fit into the foreign policy of a republic. This theory anticipates many of the issues that shape American foreign policy in the twenty-first century. Not only does Machiavelli explain these issues in detail, but he advises state leaders on how to address them. In hindsight, much of his advice appears sound.

Some might object that, after five hundred years, later thinkers must have improved upon Machiavelli’s work. Without denigrating more recent scholarship, the author would respond that few thinkers approaching Machiavelli’s stature have related foreign policy to the fundamental problems of maintaining an independent state in such a broad-ranging and practical way.⁴¹ Writers on strategy and foreign policy continue to refer readers to Machiavelli’s writings, and some twenty-first-century writers stress his special relevance to American foreign policy debates.⁴² Specialists in political theory continue to study the Florentine’s thought.⁴³

None of this proves that Machiavelli is superior to later thinkers. The continuing interest in Machiavelli does, however, show that none of the more recent thinkers have established their own superiority either. Therefore, this book proceeds on the assumption that Machiavelli’s ideas remain worth taking seriously. One may choose to reject them – and the author suggests that there are occasions when one should

– but the Florentine presents an important perspective, and those who consider it can justly claim to have deepened their understanding of politics.

For those with an interest in US foreign policy, Machiavelli's work is especially interesting. America's relationship with the Florentine is controversial. Leo Strauss presents one point of view when he writes:

The United States of America may be said to be the only country in the world which was founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles. According to Machiavelli, the founder of the most renowned commonwealth of the world was a fratricide: the foundation of political greatness is necessarily laid in crime. If we can believe Thomas Paine, all governments of the Old World have an origin of this description; their origin was conquest and tyranny. But 'the Independence of America [was] accompanied by a Revolution in the principles and practice of Governments': the foundation of the United States was laid in freedom and justice. 'Government founded on a moral theory, on a system of universal peace, on the indefeasible hereditary Rights of Man, is now revolving from west to east by a stronger impulse than the Government of the sword revolved from east to west.'⁴⁴

J.G.A. Pocock, on the other hand, speaks for a body of researchers who claim to have shown that the ideas of the American revolutionaries were anchored in the Machiavellian tradition.⁴⁵ There is a great deal of evidence for this position. As Strauss himself notes, America's treatment of its indigenous peoples was certainly 'government of the sword'.⁴⁶ The debate, however, remains lively. Recent work reminds us that even the most Machiavellian of the American revolutionaries disagreed with the Florentine on fundamental issues.⁴⁷

If Pocock is right, and the process that began with the American Revolution is essentially Machiavellian, then one must presume that all of Machiavelli's teachings apply to America. Wise Americans will follow the Florentine's advice. Other countries must make their own policy accordingly. One would have to interpret the superficially idealistic sentiments of America's Declaration of Independence in the glare of Machiavelli's arguments about morality.

If, on the other hand, Strauss's argument is more than wishful thinking, those with an interest in the US must look for the point at which American necessities diverge from Machiavellian necessities. Strauss himself is the first to agree that the logic of Americanism and the logic of Machiavellianism often run parallel.⁴⁸ If Americans ignore the truth in Machiavelli's writings, they risk the domestic corruption, national decay and eventual foreign conquest he predicts for poorly managed republics. Nevertheless, if they blindly convert themselves to the Florentine's approach, they will lose the anti-Machiavellian freedoms and virtues that they have enjoyed so much and preached so piously.⁴⁹

Accordingly, the remainder of this book investigates the question of what Machiavelli can tell us about America's twenty-first-century international predica-

ment. In the process, this book will contribute material to the theoretical debate as to whether America is fundamentally Machiavellian. Machiavelli seems to have explained the dynamics of many of America's international relationships. The Florentine's advice, however, pushes the US towards policies that its people should struggle to avoid, and the author clings to the hope that they can.

Using Machiavelli

Machiavelli does not hesitate to give practical advice. Nevertheless, one should not make the mistake of treating his works simply as self-help books for politicians. Although the Florentine may, as he claims, have told us everything he knows about politics, he has grander philosophical purposes.⁵⁰ His larger agenda, and not specific problems of statecraft, guides his work.

Commentaries on Machiavelli's teachings fill volumes. Pocock, however, effectively summarizes the main theme in the Florentine's work in his book *The Machiavellian Moment*. According to one of Pocock's two definitions, the 'moment' referred to in the title is the point at which people perceive that their society has no special claim on Providence. Those who have reached this point acknowledge that neither God nor nature has granted them any special privileges. Their community is but one like every other, its resources are finite, and it is vulnerable to all the dangers that have destroyed previous states and civilizations.

People who have come to these conclusions realize that they must grapple with the problem of remaining 'morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events'.⁵¹ This problem lies at the heart of Machiavelli's work. To solve it, the Florentine suggests, folk must draw upon the quality he calls *virtu*.⁵² *Virtu* encompasses will, audacity, courage, cunning, and a polymorphous variety of other useful traits, but it notoriously does not include the ethical scruples implied by the word 'virtue' in its more ordinary sense.⁵³

Machiavelli prizes *virtu* above all other things. As one of the Florentine's admirers put it, this quality is more magnificent even than the sun.⁵⁴ The fact that Machiavelli values this quality so greatly is much of what makes him a dangerous guide for those who treat his books simply as collections of political maxims. Although *virtu* is the key to long-term success, success is not synonymous with *virtu*. One can, after all, achieve one's ends through outside assistance, or simply through good fortune.⁵⁵

Those who rely on external benevolence as a matter of course, however, remain at the mercy of outside forces. Thus, they can never consider themselves either free or secure. They remain subject to what Pocock called 'irrational events' and Machiavelli personifies as the goddess Fortuna. When Machiavelli discusses specific issues of policy, one may safely assume that he is more interested in the larger question of the state's *virtu* than in the specific issues he has chosen to illustrate his points. Generally, the path to *virtu* will include efficiently solving the

policy problem, but one cannot take it for granted that Machiavelli's solution is the only one possible.

Machiavelli pitches his writing to spur readers to more *virtu*-ous conduct. Despite his detached tone, his books resemble advertisements as much as they resemble objective studies. Machiavelli is more interested in being edifying than in being comprehensive or even truthful. When, for instance, Machiavelli cites historical examples, he not only omits facts which do not interest him but goes so far as to fabricate material that suits his purposes.⁵⁶ Machiavelli takes a similar approach to analytical writing, and does not hesitate to massage his logic in lesser arguments in order to reach his chosen conclusions on larger issues.⁵⁷

One must also be aware that Machiavelli may have advanced some of his ideas through subtle hints rather than explicit statements. Those who wish to understand the Florentine's deepest, most controversial and perhaps most sinister ideas may have to learn to read between the lines. Leo Strauss and Harvey Mansfield have advanced the idea that Machiavelli practised this kind of subtlety.⁵⁸ These thinkers have offered intensive commentaries on the Florentine's work, which attempt to expose the hidden argument.⁵⁹ Machiavelli himself hints that, although his efforts in *Discourses on Livy* may be imperfect, he hopes to point the way for another to achieve his ambition.⁶⁰ 'Though the enterprise is difficult . . . I think I can carry it out in such a way that there shall remain to another but a short road to traverse in order to reach the place assigned.'⁶¹

This book draws on Strauss and Mansfield's research. Nevertheless, the author focuses on the directly political arguments of Machiavelli's work. The author also assumes that Machiavelli's discussions of statecraft are primarily literal. Machiavelli is a deceptive writer, and his work demands to be read at multiple levels, but this author holds that the Florentine was actually writing about politics and believed that real state leaders would do well to put his ideas into practice.

If Strauss dives to the bottom of the ocean trenches, this book explores the coral reefs. Nevertheless, the author believes that his work and Strauss's work are compatible. Neither Strauss nor Mansfield demand that we interpret Machiavelli's work as pure metaphor. Strauss himself affirms that Machiavelli's conclusions are political in nature and also that they are deeply important to the future of the United States.⁶² Indeed, he tells us, the simplest and the most sophisticated understandings of Machiavelli are essentially the same.⁶³ Mansfield, meanwhile, reminds those who would distort Machiavelli's work into something unrecognizable that we are not 'entitled to ignore what is visible in broad daylight'.⁶⁴

The fact that this book relies primarily on Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* further supports its relatively literal approach. Although Machiavelli addressed *The Prince* to a potentially hostile and undoubtedly imposing aristocrat, he directs the *Discourses* to his friends among the commoners. Machiavelli comments that it is easier to speak frankly to commoners, and Strauss affirms 'it goes without saying that speaking to friends means speaking frankly'.⁶⁵

In short, one must remember that Machiavelli wrote his works for his own purposes, and not necessarily those of the state leader in need of advice. One need

not, however, over-interpret them to the point of throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. Those who study Machiavelli in the light of contemporary interpretation will find him all the more useful for exploring subjects such as America's tendency towards unilateralism. Americans have faced Machiavellian moments on more than one occasion, whether or not they have responded in a completely Machiavellian way. Furthermore, whether Machiavellian *virtu* is truly the highest political virtue or not, one cannot deny that a degree of it is indispensable.

Structure

The book unfolds in the following manner. This chapter has proposed that Machiavelli offers useful insights into the reasons why the United States and countries like it have a long-standing tendency toward unilateral behaviour. Chapter 2 goes on to assemble Machiavelli's thoughts on this subject into a theory of unilateralism. Chapter 3 notes how these ideas crop up in American history. Successive generations of American leaders have had to develop a grand strategy to sustain their political ideas against challenges of the sort that Machiavelli described.

Chapters 4 to 7 bring the historical discussion forward to the 1990s. Chapter 7 discusses America's position in the twenty-first century, concluding with the second Bush administration's decision to defy the United Nations and lead a so-called coalition of the willing to overthrow the government of Iraq. The chapter considers the strategic challenges of preserving American political ideas in what many see as a time of globalization and world community. America's so-called 'unilateralism' often proves to be a sensible way of addressing the Machiavellian political dynamics that drove its strategy in earlier centuries.

Chapter 8 then discusses the contradiction between America's need to insulate its internal politics from the rest of the world and its need to participate in larger affairs. America has faced this contradiction frequently over the past decades, and will continue to face it in the years to come. Machiavelli proposed that states should overcome this problem by seeking empire. Although his argument is seductive, it is obviously risky, and perhaps simply self-destructive. Furthermore, no government that truly embraces the principles of the American Declaration of Independence can adopt Machiavelli's proposed solutions. The chapter discusses America's need to find a way to combine liberal ideals with its own independence.

As Chapter 8 notes, America must achieve harmonious relations with the rest of the world, but cannot fully join the sort of international community envisioned by many today. Other countries with other political traditions have different needs. Still, all nations that aspire to freedom will have to address similar problems.

Conclusion

One cannot expect any thinker, including Machiavelli, to encapsulate all of the issues that affect American foreign policy. Machiavelli does, however, focus our

attention on a number of critical factors. The remainder of this book will suggest that these factors influence the US whether American leaders are aware of them or not. For this reason, those leaders are more likely to achieve their purposes if they understand Machiavelli's teaching. Given the facts that practically all countries face pressures to subordinate their own unilateralist impulses to the collective decisions of assorted international bodies, and that practically all countries present themselves as republics in one form or another, what is true for America will be true for most other nations as well.

POLITICAL FREEDOM AND GRAND STRATEGY

Machiavelli discusses the politics of republics in his *Discourses on Livy*. The second book of the *Discourses* focuses specifically on ‘the measures the Roman people took to increase their empire’, but Machiavelli mixes reflections about foreign and domestic policy freely throughout his work.¹ If one combs through the *Discourses*, one finds thoughts on international politics sprinkled throughout the work. Although these thoughts come from an assortment of locations, they combine to form a clear argument in which each point leads, seemingly inevitably, to the next.

Machiavelli tells us that republican regimes are inherently fragile. Free governments have trouble enough maintaining their internal stability. The unpredictable and potentially unlimited demands of external relations can tax their social and political institutions to the breaking point. Nevertheless, states seldom, if ever, have the option of remaining aloof. Therefore, if a republic wishes to survive, it must pursue a rational and long-term strategy that enables it to master foreign affairs, rather than being mastered by them.

In order to pursue such a strategy, state leaders must think ahead and act decisively. The state must maintain institutions capable of performing this way, and it must preserve its freedom of action in its relations with friendly states. Although no state can do without allies, alliances threaten a state’s freedom of action in a variety of ways. Machiavelli advises states to escape this dilemma by emulating the imperial policies of ancient Rome.

Early sections of this chapter explain Machiavelli’s arguments in detail. The chapter then takes a second look at the Florentine’s conclusions. Although Machiavelli’s arguments have profound philosophical implications, they may not be purely objective analyses of international relations. Those who are specifically interested in republican foreign policy should consider Machiavelli carefully, but critically.

Maintaining a free state

Machiavelli begins his *Discourses* by reducing the study of government to its basics. He dispenses with the ‘discussion of cities which from the outset have been subject

to another power' and devotes his work to those which have 'from the outset been far removed from any kind of external servitude, but, instead, have from the start been governed in accordance with their wishes, whether as republics or principalities'.² The Florentine goes on to emphasize that he is prepared to be flexible about the other details of a state's constitution. 'As such cities have had diverse origins, so too they have had diverse laws and institutions.'³

Self-determination takes precedence over all other political questions. States may govern in a wide variety of ways, but without independence they do not govern at all. It makes no difference whether a regime is republican, monarchical, democratic, libertarian, totalitarian, secular, theocratic, Communist or anything else in principle if it lacks the independence to implement its ideals in practice. If a state is 'subject to another power', its inhabitants must look to that other power for government. Likewise, in that case, one must direct political advice to the masters, rather than their subjects.

Machiavelli identifies 'Principality, Aristocracy and Democracy' as the three primary forms of government.⁴ Others, he notes, would add, possibly with better judgement, that each of these types of government can appear in a corrupt form. A corrupt principality becomes a tyranny, a corrupt aristocracy becomes an oligarchy and a corrupt democracy descends into a state of anarchy. '[I]f anyone who is organizing a commonwealth sets up one of the three first forms of government, he sets up what will last but a while, since there are no means whereby to prevent it passing into its contrary, on account of the likeness which in such a case virtue has to vice.'⁵

Corruption, in other words, is not only tempting but subtle. Vice resembles virtue, and can replace it without attracting any great resistance. For this reason, governments tend to become increasingly corrupt, until their flaws are so ingrained that they are irremediable. Eventually, the regime's excesses become so extreme that people replace it with another form of government, whether out of necessity or out of principled indignation.

This, then, is the cycle through which all commonwealths pass, whether they govern themselves or are governed. But rarely do they return to the same form of government, for there can scarce be a commonwealth of such vitality that it can undergo such changes and yet remain in being. What usually happens is that, while in a state of commotion in which it lacks both counsel and strength, a commonwealth becomes subject to a neighbouring and better organized state. Were it not so, a commonwealth might go on forever passing through these governmental transitions.⁶

Conquerors finish off dying states. Nevertheless, internal corruption is normally the weakness that renders states vulnerable to conquest. Machiavelli suggests that 'prudent legislators' can stave off decay by devising constitutions that mix elements from all three types of regime, so that 'each would keep watch over the other'.⁷ Anything that upsets these checks and balances, even slightly, is a threat to the state.⁸

The most internally stable states, Machiavelli suggests, are ones in which the populace is homogeneous, and power resides with a small elite.⁹ For this elite to remain powerful, it must limit population growth. Otherwise, a growing plebeian class will resent its poverty and chafe against the rulers. Since warfare requires large numbers of plebeians to serve as soldiers, elites who wish to retain their power must be wary of foreign conflict.

I am firmly convinced, therefore, that to set up a republic which is to last a long time, the way to set about it is to constitute it as Sparta and Venice were constituted; to place it in a strong position and so to fortify it that no one will dream of taking it by sudden assault; and on the other hand, not to make it so large as to appear formidable to its neighbors. It should in this way be able to enjoy its form of government for a long time. For war is made on a commonwealth for two reasons: (i) to subjugate it, and (ii) for fear of being subjugated by it. Both these reasons are almost entirely removed by the aforesaid precautions; for, if it be difficult to take by assault owing to its being well organised for defence, as I am presupposing, rarely or never will it occur to anyone to seize it. And, if it be content with its own territory, and it becomes clear by experience that it has no ambitions, it will never occur to anyone to attack it for fear it may make war on them, especially if by its constitution or by its laws expansion is prohibited. Nor have I the least doubt that, if this balance could be maintained, there would be genuine political life and real tranquility in such a city.¹⁰

Machiavelli focuses on the social problems of international strife. One might note that foreign conflicts threaten the internal cohesion of states in other ways as well. Military expenditures, for instance, divert funds from more productive and socially desirable activities. Paul Kennedy's well-known *The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers* argues that societies destroy themselves by taking on more military commitments than they can afford.¹¹ Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* makes a similar argument in a more theoretically rigorous fashion.¹²

Despite Machiavelli's affection for isolationism, he believes that isolationist policies will prove impossible in practice. Even Sparta and Venice eventually had to subjugate other states.¹³ Although both succeeded in their initial conquests, both quickly succumbed to the dangers of foreign involvement. States cannot hold themselves completely aloof from external entanglements, or from the domestic strife such entanglements bring.

'[A]ll human affairs are ever in a state of flux and cannot stand still, either there will be improvement or decline, and necessity will lead you to do many things which reason does not recommend.'¹⁴ For this reason, Machiavelli advises republics to view foreign expansion and resulting social turmoil as inevitable. Since one cannot do without a growing plebeian class, one must accept that it will play a

dominant role in politics, and that it will struggle against the aristocracy.¹⁵ Machiavelli hopes that this state of affairs will give the plebeians a stake in the state and reinforce their commitment to its goals.¹⁶ Still, the Florentine accepts that class struggle between the aristocracy and a growing plebeian class is a dangerous compromise, which one accepts only as an ‘alternative [that] involves fewer inconveniences’.¹⁷

The fact that foreign strife is inevitable does not change the fact that it unleashes chaotic forces within a republic. One may manage these forces, and perhaps even profit from them, but one must not allow them to blossom out of control. Although Machiavelli admires martial greatness and assumes that states prosper from expansion, he emphasizes that they must know their limits. ‘Prudent princes and republics should be content with victory, for when they are not content with it, they usually lose.’¹⁸ One notes that later and more benevolent republican theorists, notably Montesquieu, also emphasized the point that unbridled expansion can corrupt and ultimately destroy a republic.¹⁹

Victory inspires arrogance that tempts states into excesses.²⁰ These excesses lead to corruption and collapse. Carthage, Machiavelli notes, might have negotiated a peace with Rome after Hannibal’s victory at Cannae. The Carthaginian Senate, however, failed to pursue this course ‘though it recognized later the wisdom of it when the opportunity had been lost’.²¹

Machiavelli goes on to discuss Alexander the Great’s siege of Tyre. After Tyre held out for four months, Alexander offered to make peace on the terms that Tyre itself had originally proposed. By that point, however, the government of Tyre had become bold, and not only refused the offer but killed Alexander’s envoy. ‘Whereupon Alexander, becoming indignant, put such life into the siege that he took and demolished the city, and either killed or made slaves of its inhabitants.’²²

Hannibal himself, Machiavelli notes, sued for peace when he had reached the limit of his abilities.

If, then, Hannibal, who was so efficient, and had his army still intact, preferred peace to war when he saw that, by losing, his country would be enslaved, what should a man do who has neither the efficiency nor the experience of Hannibal? Yet there are men who make this mistake, in that to their hopes they set no bound, and are ruined because they rely on such hopes and take no account of other things.²³

Planned policy

In order to maintain themselves while avoiding excesses and overcommitment, states must make their policies rationally. Readers of *The Prince* will recall that, although Machiavelli credits the goddess Fortuna with great power to upset human affairs, he believes that she will serve those who beat and kick her into submission.²⁴ Machiavelli makes the same point, albeit less graphically, in his discussion of Roman history.

The Romans, Machiavelli tells us, erected more statues to Fortuna than to any other deity.²⁵ Livy himself refers to fortune copiously, and the historian Plutarch boldly says that Rome owed its expansion to luck rather than virtue.²⁶ Machiavelli challenges this position:

For if there is nowhere to be found a republic so successful as was Rome, this is because there is nowhere to be found a republic so constituted as to be able to make the conquests Rome made. For it was the valour of her armies that caused Rome to acquire an empire, and it was her constitutional procedure and the peculiar customs which she owed to her first legislator that enabled her to maintain what she had acquired . . .²⁷

To substantiate this claim, Machiavelli investigates the proposition that Rome owed part of its success to its good fortune at never having to fight two large wars at once. Indeed, although Rome fought one dangerous opponent after another throughout its early history, these opponents never joined together in a coalition. Machiavelli assures us that this was no accident:

If, before the final victory, we consider well the order in which these wars took place and the Roman method of procedure, it will be seen that in them, mingled with fortune, was virtue and prudence of a very high order. Hence, if one looks for the cause of this fortune, it should be easy to find. For it is quite certain that, when a prince and a people has acquired such repute that each of the neighbouring princes and peoples is afraid to attack it and fears it, no one will ever assault it unless driven thereunto by necessity; so that it will be open, so to speak, to that power to choose the neighbor on which it seems best to make war, and industriously foster tranquility among the rest.²⁸

Once a state establishes itself as powerful, it may use its reputation to cow potential opponents, while proceeding to deal with rivals in the manner of its own choosing. Machiavelli goes on to argue that Roman leaders did precisely that. It is no coincidence that Rome fought a series of major wars but never faced a hostile coalition. According to Machiavelli, the Romans deliberately fought those wars in order to deter their opponents from uniting.

Rome chose its wars and, having chosen them, it did not leave their outcome to chance either. 'The Romans always took care to have in new provinces some friend to act as a ladder up which to climb or a door by which to enter, or as a means whereby to hold it.'²⁹ Rome became greater than other states because it was able to act intelligently. Those who hope to emulate its success must also emulate its methods.

One notes that Machiavelli is not denying that chance exists, nor is he trying to explain it away in terms of predictable mechanical factors. He is no Laplace,

insisting that we live in a clockwork universe.³⁰ Machiavelli is not insisting that states or people normally behave in a rational manner either – indeed, he suggests the opposite. Machiavelli’s argument is that a state that manages to practise a virtue that includes both martial prowess and rational statecraft will have an advantage over other states, and that this advantage is great enough to account for the unprecedented success of ancient Rome.

The importance of decisiveness

Throughout the *Discourses*, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of avoiding half-measures. An anecdote concerning the kings of Rome and Alba inspires him to talk about general problems of defending a realm. Once, Machiavelli tells us, Tullus, king of Rome, and Mettius, king of Alba, made a pact to select three champions from each of their armies and pit the champions against each other in combat.³¹ If the Alban champions won, Rome would become subject to Alba, but, if Alba’s champions won, Alba would become subject to Rome.

The Roman champions won, and Mettius submitted at the time. Later, however, Mettius plotted to betray the victors and escape his obligation. From this, Machiavelli draws the lesson that one ‘should not stake the whole of one’s fortune except on the whole of one’s forces’.³² Mettius should not have put himself in a position in which Rome could defeat his whole army simply by defeating three of his men. The Romans, however, were equally foolish if they trusted their opponent to accept such a defeat gracefully.

Machiavelli’s point seems to be that it is dangerous to attempt, as the colloquialism goes, to have one’s cake and eat it too. Staking an entire campaign on a battle between champions may appear to be a way to avoid bloody and arduous military operations, but it makes you vulnerable to embarrassment, at least, if your forces lose. At the same time, it is unlikely to give you the results you desire if you win. Actual instances in which military commanders agreed to settle disputes in this fashion have always been rare. Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s argument applies by extension to all attempts to find easy answers to difficult problems.

Machiavelli goes on to apply this principle to other military situations. Since it is unwise to over-rely on a fraction of your forces, he argues, it is equally unwise to stake your country’s safety on the defence of natural barriers such as mountain chains.³³ Although mountain passes offer the defender many tactical advantages, one cannot bring all of one’s forces to bear in rough terrain, nor can one maintain one’s entire army in barren country, nor can one predict which pass the enemy will attack. For these reasons, it is better to meet the enemy in open country beyond the mountains, where one can bring one’s entire force to bear.

This is a common, if occasionally controversial, theme in military thought. The strategist Carl von Clausewitz took a similar position regarding mountain warfare.³⁴ Machiavelli may mean readers to take his observations about defending passes in a literal sense, but he may intend them figuratively as well. Machiavelli is reminding us that one must avoid frittering one’s resources away. One must also

avoid putting oneself in a position in which one will have to do so. If one is unable to use one's full strength, one must limit one's commitments accordingly.

In general, Machiavelli suggests, one should commit oneself either entirely or not at all. This principle applies to political affairs as well as military ones:

I shall here quote the words which Livy puts into the mouth of Camillus, for they bear witness to the way in which the Romans extended their dominions, and also to the fact that in judgments pronounced by their government they always avoided a middle course and preferred the extremes. For government consists in nothing else but so controlling subjects that they shall neither be able to, nor have cause to, do you harm, which may be done either by making quite sure of them by depriving them of all means of doing you harm, or by treating them so well that it would be unreasonable for them to desire a change of fortune.³⁵

Machiavelli goes on to discuss how Rome treated the cities of Latium after it conquered them. As promised, he cites a speech Livy ascribed to the Roman consul Camillus:

'The immortal gods have vouchsafed to you the power to decide whether Latium is to be or not to be. Its future lies in your hands. Insofar as the Latins are concerned, it rests with you to make a peace which shall be perpetual, either by punishing them cruelly or by pardoning them. Do you think it advisable to be brutal towards those who have surrendered and been conquered? If so, you can wipe out the whole of Latium. Do you want, after the manner of our forefathers, to augment the Roman state by admitting the conquered to citizenship? The material whereby to increase it to its great glorification lies ready to hand. Of a surety that empire is most secure in which obedience is conjoined to happiness. It behooves you to subjugate them, while their minds are so stunned that they know not what to expect, either by punishing them or by becoming their benefactor.' Having heard this proposal, the senate came to a decision which followed the lines the consul had laid down, which was that, after duly considering one by one each town of importance, they should either treat them generously or wipe them out; by conferring on those they treated generously exemptions and privileges, granting them citizenship and using every endeavour to make them loyal; and by demolishing the towns of the others, sending colonies there, and taking the inhabitants back to Rome or so dispersing them that they could no longer do harm either by an appeal to arms or by their machinations. That they never adopted a middle course is, as I have said, of importance, and other rulers should imitate them in this.³⁶

Poorly governed republics, Machiavelli warns, will not be able to act so decisively. '[I]rrresolute republics never choose the right alternative unless they are

driven to it, for their weakness does not allow them to arrive at a decision where there is any doubt; and, unless this doubt is removed by some compelling act of violence, they remain ever in suspense.³⁷ For this reason, ‘if they should happen to do the right thing, it is force, and not their own good sense, that makes them do it’.³⁸ Machiavelli illustrates this point by narrating an incident in which the shaky republican government in Florence refused to grant the powerful Duke Valentine permission to march his army across their territory. The duke merely forced his way across the Florentine countryside anyway, achieving his own purposes and humiliating Florence.

On other occasions, the Florentine government equivocated over whether to purchase cities from France, thus missing significant opportunities to expand its dominion. The Florentines felt weaker than the French king, and therefore they could not make up their minds to trust him even when he was offering them relatively favourable terms. A Florentine citizen named Imbault partially remedied these mistakes by negotiating privately with the French and buying one city without authorization. In all these incidents, Florence suffered from its military weakness, but it also suffered from its government’s inability to acknowledge its position and take rational risks.

The ancient Roman Senate, Machiavelli repeats, was wiser. Rome normally did not allow its Latin tributaries to have independent armies. Once, however, the Volsci and Aeqi tribes banded together to attack the Latins. At that time, Rome was suffering from a pestilence, and could not defend its tributaries. Therefore, the Senate gave the Latins permission to arm themselves, ‘recognizing that with the enemy at their doors they must fly to arms in any case . . . [and] preferring that what they had to do should be done with Rome’s permission, so that having disobeyed because needs must, they should not get into the habit of disobeying by choice’.³⁹ Rome, in this case, was weak in a material sense, but its robust institutions allowed it to make the best of a bad situation.

Machiavelli discusses the issue of decisiveness a second time, in a chapter titled ‘The decisions of weak states are always fraught with ambiguity, and the slowness with which they arrive at them is harmful’.⁴⁰ Here, he discusses an incident in which the citizens of a Latin republic considered the idea of ending their alliance with Rome. The citizens spent considerable time debating the question of what their envoys should say to the Romans before Annius, their praetor, rose and pointed out that, by discussing rhetoric before deciding whether or not to break with Rome, they were putting the proverbial cart before the horse. ‘It seems to me to be of the utmost importance in this business that you should consider what is to be done rather than what is to be said. It will be easy, when you have arrived at a decision, to accommodate words to acts.’⁴¹

Machiavelli praises Annius’s statement. Indeed, Machiavelli argues, it is better to make any decision – even a poor one – than to remain indecisive. Indecision exposes one to the worst effects of fortune. As an example, Machiavelli describes an instance in which the Latins wasted time deliberating whether or not to assist the Lavinians in a campaign against Rome. Eventually, the Latins made up their

minds to join the campaign and ordered their army outside the city gates – only to discover that, while they had been debating, the Lavinians had lost the war. Another wise Latin praetor observed that, ‘for this short journey [outside the gates], the Romans will make us pay dear’.⁴² The Latins might have profited from remaining neutral, or they might have profited from joining the Lavinians at once, but, by dithering, they suffered the worst of all possible outcomes.

One can summarize Machiavelli’s teachings on decisiveness as follows. The indecisive allow outside events to drive their policies. This means that they will never be able to anticipate those events, or to shape the outside world to their own advantage. In war (and, by extension, all practical affairs), they will fritter their resources away. Like the Florentines and the Carthaginians, they will miss opportunities. Unlike the Romans, they will neither secure friendships nor rid themselves of enemies.

In other words, indecisive states cannot pursue intelligent long-term strategies. Unlike Rome, they will not be able to manage world politics to improve their own position. A succession of crises will draw them ever deeper into unprofitable foreign entanglements. As they struggle to raise troops and funds to maintain their commitments, they will worsen the internal friction within their own societies. Ultimately, Machiavelli’s scheme suggests, this will lead to their destruction, whether from without or from within.

Institutional efficiency

To escape the dangers of indecision, states must preserve their ability to act surely and with foresight. This requires them to maintain effective political institutions domestically. Machiavelli also notes that states must preserve their freedom of action in international affairs. Otherwise, they will find themselves caught between conflicting obligations and unable to limit their commitments. When faced with a difficult decision, the partisans of one policy will be able to block the partisans of another, and the state will find itself forced to compromise and accept the fatal middle course.

Machiavelli advises his readers to consider these principles when they design the internal structures of their own organizations. ‘No one department and no one official in a state’, he notes, ‘should be able to hold up proceedings.’⁴³ For similar reasons, he warns readers to protect themselves against bureaucratic delay:

[I]f you empower a council to distribute preferments and emoluments, or a magistracy to administer some department, it is expedient either to make it necessary for them to take action or to arrange for someone else to have the power and duty of acting, should they be unwilling to act. Otherwise, the institution will be defective and dangerous ...⁴⁴

In military affairs, Machiavelli holds, ‘there should be one, not several commanders’.⁴⁵ Machiavelli goes so far as to say that it is wiser to entrust an expedition

to one average leader than to two brilliant ones. Again, Machiavelli is trying to encourage decisiveness and unity of purpose. In war, presumably, there is less danger that the one commander himself will prove unwilling to act.

Alliance politics

When multiple states work together, the same principles apply. Therefore, Machiavelli tells us, leagues of several republics in which no one has ‘preference, authority or rank’ are fundamentally flawed.⁴⁶ Machiavelli concedes that membership in a league has two advantages over other forms of alliances. ‘First, it does not readily involve you in war; secondly, you can hold as much as you take.’⁴⁷ Nevertheless, such leagues will be reluctant to accept any single commander, and each member is likely to retain some right to veto plans, or at least to abstain from them.

Machiavelli notes that ‘a league is governed by a council, which must needs be slower in arriving at any decision than those who dwell within one and the same circle’.⁴⁸ League members will also have different interests. Those who must fight coalitions can take advantage of these facts. Machiavelli opines that, if a single power can survive an enemy alliance’s first attack, it can usually divide the hostile coalition.⁴⁹ Coalitions, in other words, are fundamentally weak.

Indeed, allies can be a liability. Those who wish to undermine a powerful state are likely to do so by striking at its dependants:

For if I want to make war on some prince ... rather than attack him I shall look for some justification and ground for attacking one of his allies, knowing full well that, if his ally be attacked, either he will resent it and I shall get what I want in that war shall arise, or, if he takes no notice, he will disclose either his weakness or his unreliability in that he does not defend a dependent state. In either case he will lose his reputation and it will be easier for me to accomplish my designs.⁵⁰

In ancient Greece, Machiavelli tells us, strong states such as Athens and Sparta sought to resolve these problems by reducing their allies to mere subjects. The stronger cities dictated alliance policy and compelled obedience with the threat of force. Machiavelli goes on to say that this method of organizing an alliance is ‘quite useless’.⁵¹ Subjects, he tells us, are inevitably resentful. Governing them is ‘a difficult and tiresome business’, which requires strong forces.⁵² This is particularly true when the people of one’s client states have been accustomed to governing themselves.

Alliance politics can subject a state to the same handicaps as weak internal government. Moreover, alliances can draw a state into unwanted wars. The Greek system of imperialism only makes alliances costlier and more volatile. Thus, even co-operative relations with the external world can push an independent government toward indecision, irrationality, overstretch and eventual corruption.

Machiavelli is not opposed to alliances. Rome, he tells us, achieved greatness only because it had allies to support it.⁵³ No state can bear the costs and misfortunes of international politics solely on its own. Nevertheless, alliances present states with a dilemma, because, although they are necessary, they can also be one's undoing. As many have said of their spouses, one cannot live with them and cannot live without them.

An imperial solution?

Machiavelli advises republics to avoid the dangers of alliances by emulating ancient Rome. Although the Romans formed compacts with other states, Machiavelli tells us, they reserved decision-making powers for themselves. Thus, the Romans avoided the inconveniences of alliance politics. Rome gave orders, and its allies had to obey.⁵⁴

One is entitled to ask how Rome's supposedly ingenious imperialism differed from the 'useless' imperialism of Athens and Sparta. Machiavelli purports to answer this question by claiming that Rome overcame the problems of earlier empires in two ways.⁵⁵ First, when the Romans chose to subjugate an ally, they made sure they had other allies to help. Second, Rome continually increased its population, and thus, in Machiavelli's terms, its military potential. In a different section, Machiavelli observes that most of the people Rome subjugated had been used to living under kings, and thus did not find living under the authoritarian rule of Roman governors unnatural or oppressive.⁵⁶

Although Machiavelli criticized the Greek states for subjugating their allies, his objection now seems to be that they did not take sufficient measures to keep their allies subjugated. Although he previously suggested that republics must limit their expansion, he now suggests that they should view even friendly states as targets for intimidation and conquest. Sceptics might accuse the Florentine of inconsistency. Machiavelli's attempts to distinguish between Greek and Roman forms of imperialism are not entirely persuasive. The Florentine's arguments demand, if nothing else, further investigation.

Roman institutions, after all, were fluid and complex. One cannot take it for granted that they were categorically superior to those of ancient Greece. One certainly cannot take it for granted that Rome remained consistently superior to Greece throughout its history. Athens and Sparta, after all, have also won the admiration of later generations, and both of them also founded great empires in their time.

Why Rome?

The fact that particular phenomena appear together does not prove that one caused the other. Hence, the fact that Rome's empire outlasted the empires of Athens and Sparta need not mean that Rome's method of dealing with allies was superior. Certainly, this fact does not prove that Rome's method is generally preferable for all states at all times. One is entitled to ask whether Machiavelli might have some ulterior motive for making such claims.

Machiavelli believes that Roman methods are superior, and he may be using his discussion of alliance politics as a pretext to inculcate readers with the same belief. In other words, Machiavelli's comments on alliances may be propaganda. This does not mean that they are untrue. Indeed, it probably means the opposite – the most effective propaganda is based on truth wherever possible. Machiavelli may be exploiting valid theoretical arguments as a way to advance his brand of neo-Romanism. Strauss and Mansfield support such a conclusion.⁵⁷

At the beginning of the *Discourses*, Strauss notes, Machiavelli presents himself as 'another Columbus, as the discoverer of a hitherto unexpected moral continent, as a man who has found new modes and orders'.⁵⁸ These new methods, however, turn out to be the old methods of the ancients, particularly Rome. 'The ancient modes and orders are new because they have been forgotten, or buried like ancient statues.'⁵⁹

People are aware of the ancient modes and orders, but they do not believe they can imitate them in the modern world. This is partially due to the influence of Christianity. 'Modern men regard the imitation of antiquity as not so much physically as morally impossible.'⁶⁰ Machiavelli hopes to prove otherwise. The Florentine is encouraging readers to unearth the mores of ancient Rome and use them to re-create the grandeur of the ancient Romans. Mansfield explicitly connects Machiavelli's discussion of Rome's alliances to Machiavelli's broader attempt to discredit Christian morality.⁶¹

Each of Machiavelli's arguments about foreign policy is individually compelling. Certainly, external entanglements can undermine a state. Certainly, alliance politics can hamper a state's attempts to master those entanglements. Certainly, strong states will come under pressure to forestall these developments by setting themselves up as hegemon. The fact that Rome adopted an imperial policy and succeeded suggests that Roman society provided strong foundations for hegemony.

Machiavelli provides historical examples of each development, as is his wont. A modern reader can supplement his illustrations with more recent ones. Does this mean that one must accept Machiavelli's overall conclusion about the superiority of Roman attitudes, Roman policies and Roman systems of government? If so, imperialistic unilateralism would appear to be a wise policy for anyone capable of practising it. Those who remain convinced that other courses of action are possible may wish to explore other lines of argument.

Conclusion

Given the complexities of real-world foreign policy, one must be cautious about applying works of previous centuries to the present day. Nevertheless, despite this caveat, the basic issues Machiavelli explores are timeless. Free governments depend on specific social norms and political institutions, and when these governments engage in international relations they must expose their norms and institutions to uncaring forces beyond their control. Given the extent to which the external environment can affect republics, republics must take a hand in shaping the external environment.

NEW WAYS AND METHODS

‘[O]wing to the envy inherent in man’s nature, it has always been no less dangerous to discover new ways and methods than to set off in search of new seas and unknown lands.’¹ Machiavelli opens his preface to *Discourses on Livy* with this line. Like Machiavelli himself, the American revolutionaries dared to seek new ‘ways and methods’ in government and, like the Florentine, they were conscious of the danger. America’s political system differs considerably from ancient and Renaissance concepts of republicanism, but America began its relationship to the outer world in much the same position as a newly founded Machiavellian republic.

As Chapter 2 discussed, Machiavelli described ways in which the outside world puts pressure on republican governments. These pressures have affected the United States since its earliest days. Machiavelli’s model does not predict American history perfectly, nor have Americans consistently understood their situation in Machiavellian terms, but nevertheless one can see the political dynamics described in the *Discourses* operating from the revolt of the thirteen colonies onward. This chapter analyses the first century and a half of American history in the light of Machiavelli’s writings.

Chapter objectives

Compared to theory, history is messy. Even when Americans encountered the themes Machiavelli described, these issues were always mixed with others. In the same vein, although Americans have always been concerned with preserving their prerogative of determining when and how to participate in international affairs, they have rarely used the term ‘unilateralism’. Indeed, many statesmen may have simply assumed that this prerogative was desirable, and failed to debate it at all.

The following five chapters recount the history of America’s attempts to control its degree of involvement with the outside world. Although the author sticks to this theme, the text consists largely of narrative. This, the author hopes, presents the most accurate picture of US policies. Such accuracy allows one to apply theoretical ideas more flexibly and intelligently.

Independence: why America needed it and how America secured it

The fact that America began its national history with a Declaration of Independence draws Americans into Machiavelli's political universe. At the most basic level, the revolutionaries' decision to 'dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them' raises them into the ranks of those countries governed in accordance with their wishes, and thus brings them into the scope of the *Discourses on Livy*.² Moreover, by putting the responsibility for their political destiny in the hands of a republican government, the revolutionaries took up one of the Florentine's other crucial themes. Pocock defines the 'Machiavellian moment' as being, among other things, the point at which the republic and the citizen's participation in it appear as a problem in historical self-understanding.³ The Declaration of Independence brought precisely these issues to the fore, not only in terms of political theory, but in terms of foreign policy.

The Declaration of Independence expressed un-Machiavellian ideas about God, personal freedom and the purpose of government.⁴ From the point of view of international relations, however, Machiavelli and the American founders thought along similar lines. The Florentine's work revolves around the problem of how to take control of one's destiny.⁵ Although the pre-revolutionary Americans did not discover Machiavelli's principles in the same order that *Discourses on Livy* presents them, they discovered them nevertheless. They experienced the vicissitudes of dependence, and, like Machiavelli, they eventually adopted the 'republic and the citizen's participation in it' as the antidote.

Machiavelli ostensibly writes for sovereigns, not subjects. Nevertheless, his advice on how to manage dependent states suggests what he thinks colonies can expect from their masters. If one is to admire the Romans for using tributary states in their wars, pitting those states against each other in order to keep them subservient and playing upon autocratic tendencies in those states in order to make them amenable to the dictatorship of colonial governors, one must assume that those who allow themselves to be tributaries are exposing themselves to such treatment. Moreover, to put one's fate in another's hands is to gamble that one's master will remain benevolent. Fortuna, Machiavelli suggests, delights in punishing those who tempt her in this fashion.⁶

Americans had been a battleground for European powers since the mid-1700s. Throughout the 1730s, the British lobbied Spain for permission to trade more extensively with its New World holdings. The Spanish, however, refused to accept more than one British trading ship per year.⁷ In 1739, Britain sent a fleet to open trade routes to the Spanish colonies by force.⁸ Spain countered Britain's attack by forming an alliance with France. Although the 1739 war concerned the Caribbean, the Franco-Spanish alliance raised the stakes for Anglo-French competition in North America as well.

Britain and France were, at this point, developing into rival world powers. Both sought to secure their position by allying themselves to the various countries of Central Europe. When the War of the Austrian Succession began between Prussia and Austria in 1740, France and Britain manoeuvred to turn the situation to their advantage. Bolder French statesmen such as Count Maurepas believed 'that the future prosperity and strength of France would rest upon the kingdom's continuing ability to work its will in the Indies and America'.⁹

In 1744, Britain entered the war on the side of Austria, and France entered the war on the side of Prussia. A detachment of French and Indian troops from Crown Point destroyed the British colony in Saratoga.¹⁰ This put France in a position to threaten most of New York and New England. The British colonists, however, saw the opportunity to strike back, and to capture the fortified French port of Louisbourg.

Louisbourg, located on Cape Breton Island off Nova Scotia, was invaluable as a fishing port, a bastion at the entrance to the St Lawrence River, and a haven for sailors on the long transatlantic voyage. Moreover, French privateers used it as a base to harry ships from the British colonies.¹¹ The famous military engineer Vauban had personally designed Louisbourg's defences.¹² Louisbourg boasted stone walls thirty feet high and over 100 cannon.¹³ This fortress was known as the 'Key to Canada' and the 'Gibraltar of the West'.¹⁴ Many considered it impregnable, but Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts had heard reports that its garrison was poorly trained and that its cannon were in disrepair.¹⁵

In 1745, Shirley convinced the Massachusetts legislature to authorize an expedition against Louisbourg. The colonies of Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey contributed to his effort, raising a total of thirty-four cannon, 100 transport vessels and 4,200 troops.¹⁶ Aided by four British warships, this force seized Louisbourg, thrilling the British public, which, until that point, had been 'desperate for good tidings'.¹⁷ The French, greatly chagrined, struggled unsuccessfully to regain the fortress for the rest of the war.

The British, however, were reluctant to commit further resources to the North American campaign.¹⁸ In 1748, Britain returned Louisbourg to France in order to conclude a peace treaty. If the British colonists felt cheated of their prize, they were also concerned about France's colonial expansion in the west. As the French encroached upon British colonies in Virginia and developed alliances with Indian tribes along the Ohio River, they seemed to be acquiring the means to link their colonies in the North with their colonies in Louisiana, thus restricting the British settlers to a narrow and vulnerable band of territory along the coast.¹⁹

The 'contest in America', observed John Mitchell, writing in 1757, was not a matter of 'a port or two in Nova Scotia, or an Indian fort on the river Ohio'; it was a struggle 'to gain power and dominion, that must sooner or later command all that continent, with the whole trade of it, if not many other branches of trade; which must all fall into the hands of France, sooner or later if we suffer her to secure her present encroachments on the British dominions in North America'.²⁰

By the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, the American colonists realized that they could not rely on Britain to support their interests. This prompted them to look for ways in which they might take charge of their own affairs. This, in turn, led them to discover that their political institutions were inadequate for such a task. In the words of Benjamin Franklin:

The difficulties that have always attended the most necessary general measures for the common defence, or for the annoyance of the enemy, when they were to be carried through the several particular assemblies of all the colonies; some assemblies being at variance with their governors or councils, and the several branches of government not on terms of doing business with each other; others taking the opportunity, when their concurrence is wanted, to push for favorite laws, powers or points that they think could not at other times be obtained, and so creating disputes and quarrels; one assembly waiting to see what another will do, being afraid of doing more than its share, or desirous of doing less; or refusing to do anything, because its country is not at present so much exposed as the others, or because another will reap more immediate advantage . . .²¹

Franklin popularized these notions in his newspaper, the *Boston Gazette*, publishing a woodcut of a snake with its body severed into sections representing the various colonies.²² ‘Join or die’, read the caption. Shortly afterwards, the *New York Mercury* reproduced this image. Other papers adopted the motif without actually publishing the woodcut.

The colonists had not yet demanded sovereignty. They had, however, discovered the necessity of central leadership and efficient political institutions. These, readers might recall, are also elements of Machiavelli’s theory. As early as the 1750s, the colonists had begun to discover that they could not truly achieve strategic efficiency without claiming at least a greater degree of independence.

In June of 1754, representatives of the colonial governments met in Albany, New York to discuss ways of opposing France’s attempt to forge an alliance with the Iroquois Indians. Historians Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson describe how the colonists and their British masters played parts in a Machiavellian drama:

The deliberations quickly moved beyond this limited aim, however, and ultimately produced a plan for a unified government with the responsibility of managing the defense of the colonies. Under the Albany Plan of Union, a president general was to be nominated by the King, but the real locus of control lay in the contemplated Grand Council. The council was to be composed of delegates nominated by the lower houses of the provincial assemblies, with the largest colonies, Virginia and Massachusetts, having no more than seven delegates, the smaller colonies

no less than two. The responsibilities of this government were vast, and its powers included that without which there could be little hope of effectiveness: the power of taxation.

The Albany Plan of Union was acceptable neither to the provincial assemblies, which unanimously rejected it, nor to the home government. Their reasons were substantially the same. Both saw in the plan the creation of a body that might prove injurious to their respective interests. The home government objected to the substantial powers that were conferred on the Grand Council and saw in them an ultimate danger to British rule in the colonies . . . The maxim that was repeated so often in the following decade – mostly by the British in assuring themselves that conditions in the colonies were not as bad as the evidence made it appear – that colonial disunion would prevent independence, was invoked on this occasion as a justification for disapproval of the plan.²³

Rome, Machiavelli observed, kept its tributaries under control by pitting them against each other. The British used a similar tactic, and the provincial assemblies, selfishly jealous of their own power, were happy to collaborate. If such methods of administration left the colonists vulnerable to predatory outsiders, the British considered this a price worth paying. The flip side of this logic, however, suggests not only that the Americans needed to adopt something like the Albany Act of Union, but that they needed to declare complete independence in order to do so.

Although the colonies failed to unite, the Virginia militia, under the command of George Washington, engaged French forces at the headwaters of the Ohio in 1754.²⁴ Washington won an initial victory, but the French counter-attacked and forced him to withdraw. The following year, the British general Edward Braddock marched against the French and their Indian allies.²⁵ Washington urged Braddock to move swiftly, but the British general lost considerable time organizing his supply train.

Braddock continued to ignore Washington's advice. His obstinacy proved unfortunate, since he was innocent of the dangers of ambush in the American wilderness. Predictably enough, he led his forces into a trap. A mixed force of French and Indian troops caught his troops in a crossfire on the Monongahela River.

Braddock compounded the disaster by ordering his men to remain in the open and take up platoon formations. Whereas this might have been a sound tactic on a treeless plain, it was wholly inappropriate for the terrain. The French and Indians, firing from cover, devastated the tightly massed British units while suffering practically no casualties in return. The British troops were routed. Braddock lost 714 of his 2,400 private soldiers and sixty-three of his eighty-six officers. The general himself died of wounds suffered in that battle.

The American colonists were disgusted by Braddock's performance, and by the perceived cowardice of his troops. Few missed the point that it was a British general who had failed them so ignominiously.²⁶ Colonial newspapers continued to discuss this story for months.²⁷ The newspapers also played upon the atrocities the French

and their Indian allies committed against British settlers, raising fears of what might happen if Britain proved unable to defend its colonies.

Meanwhile, the so-called Diplomatic Revolution stripped Britain of its European allies. Austria joined forces with France to reclaim territory from Prussia, while the Dutch abandoned their former entente with London in favour of profitable neutrality. Faced with the threat of French hegemony, the British chose to support the Prussian king. By 1756, the hostilities in America and Europe had merged into the conflict known as the Seven Years War.

The first years of the war went badly for Britain.²⁸ In North America, France captured Oswego on Lake Ontario, thus threatening New York. In Europe, France defeated the British Army of Observation in Hanover. The British, for their part, failed to intercept a French fleet that sailed from Brest to Canada. Britain also lost the island of Minorca, freeing the French fleet at Toulon for action on the open seas and further endangering the empire's overseas colonies.

In 1757, King George II of Britain appointed William Pitt as his prime minister. Pitt gave Frederick II of Prussia adequate financial support to hold his own in the European war, while concentrating Britain's national forces on the colonial theatre. Fortunately for Britain and its colonies, Pitt found admirals and generals with energy and ability to match his own. Over the following three years, British regulars aided by colonial militias and supported by the Royal Navy captured a series of strategic fortresses and went on to win a decisive victory on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec, bringing Canada under British rule.

Despite Britain's eventual victory, the events of 1755–56 highlighted the point that Americans could not entrust their defence entirely to Great Britain. Britain, however, was quick to tax the colonists in order to help pay off its war debt.²⁹ Furthermore, in the years following the war, the British crown decided to station 10,000 troops on American soil at an annual cost of £250,000–£400,000, approximately half of which was to be raised locally.³⁰ The new levies, the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act, sparked the great debate over taxation and property rights that played such a prominent role in touching off the American Revolution. To the suggestion that the taxes paid for their own defence, many Americans responded that they would be better off looking after themselves.³¹

In 1763, Britain proclaimed a moratorium on further settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains.³² The British made this decision primarily in order to improve relations with the Indians. Many Americans, however, perceived this as a further outrage. Even those who accepted the need to moderate further settlement resented the provisions of the proclamation that restricted peaceful dealings with the Indians. Although these provisions permitted licensed dealers to trade with the native peoples, they regulated all contact with the Indians closely, and, in the words of one historian, virtually eliminated the influence of the colonies.³³ The colonists felt that they had fought the French to ensure access to the west, and they resented having the prize that they had sacrificed for snatched away from them.

The American founding

The events of the 1740s and 1750s forced Americans to face the fact that their interests and Britain's interests were not the same. Certainly, the colonies received lavish assistance from Great Britain. Certainly, the colonies benefited from Britain's victories. Nevertheless, the British crown made war and peace for its own reasons, not those of its dependencies. Britain's willingness to bargain away fortresses and western territory highlighted this point.

Even had Britain's policies been more favourable to the colonists, dependency placed Americans in an invidious situation. As long as the colonists remained passive British subjects on a continent divided among the European powers, they remained at the mercy of external political developments. These developments had regularly led to wars in the past, and would inevitably do so again. Despite Britain's victories, America had paid dearly for these conflicts.

The cost of war was bitter in its own right. Furthermore, as Machiavelli would have warned, the process of meeting that cost disrupted the internal political balance of colonial government. This disruption did not manifest itself in quite the way Machiavelli would have predicted. The American political controversies of the 1760s had less to do with any expansion of the plebeian class than with questions of taxation, property rights and the prerogatives of kingship. Many American colonists saw these questions as matters of honour and principle. The process that led to the American Revolution came to encompass a wide variety of issues, most of which were domestic rather than international, but it began with the tensions inherent in America's status as a dependant in foreign affairs.

In 1775, Britain and its American colonies went to war. Over the following year, Americans debated the question of whether to seek independence or reconciliation. Initially, few of the delegates to the American Continental Congress favoured autonomy.³⁴ Britain, however, rejected American peace proposals, and, as the war went on, both sides grew increasingly resistant to compromise. Advocates of American independence frequently referred to foreign policy issues.

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published his influential pro-independence tract *Common Sense*. Paine portrayed the British monarchy as a tyranny. Such tyrannies, Paine suggested, were constantly attempting to aggrandize themselves by conquest. Thus, all other countries had to see them as potential foes and treat them accordingly. Such tyrannies were constantly at war or in danger of war.

Paine suggested that an independent America could escape from this violent cycle. 'France and Spain never were, nor perhaps ever will be, our enemies as Americans, but as our being subjects of Great Britain.'³⁵ Furthermore, Paine argued, Americans could avoid making enemies of its own. America would trade freely with all nations, and avoid taking sides in external disputes. 'It is the true interest of America to steer clear of European connections.'³⁶

Paine publicized these ideas, but many influential colonists were considering them.³⁷ Benjamin Franklin, for instance, reputedly advised Paine on his pamphlet.³⁸ Franklin had previously reflected that the colonies had shouldered an 'enormous

Load of Debt which sinks us almost to Perdition', not for their own defence, but 'for the sake of Continental Connections in which they were separately unconcerned'.³⁹ On another occasion, Franklin wrote a dialogue in which America complained to Britain that:

[W]hen you have quarrel'd with all Europe, and drawn me with you into all your Broils, then you value yourself upon protecting me from the enemies you have made for me. I have no natural Cause of Difference with Spain, France or Holland, and yet by turns I have joined with you in wars against them all. You would not suffer me to make a separate Peace with any of them, tho' I might easily have done it to great Advantage.⁴⁰

Many other influential Americans expressed similar sentiments, both before and after the Revolution. John Jay advised his countrymen to 'be independent in the most extensive sense, and to observe a proper distance towards all nations, minding our business, and not interfering with, or being influenced by, the views of any . . .'.⁴¹ Madison wrote:

It is not only unwise and unsafe for one nation to calculate on the support of another; but support and protection are so nearly allied, and protection and dependence join each other by such imperceptible connection, that it is hard to say where one begins or the other ends – therefore to be truly *free*, we must depend only on ourselves.⁴²

Or, in the words of John Quincy Adams:

[America] well knows . . . that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banner of foreign independence, she would involve herself, beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition . . . She might become the dictatress of the world: she would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit.⁴³

As the American revolutionaries began to engage in diplomacy, they put these ideas into practice. In November 1775, the Continental Congress founded a Committee of Secret Correspondence to communicate with sympathizers in Europe.⁴⁴ John Adams, 'in whose writings we find the most articulate expression of American ideas on foreign policy in the decisive years 1775 and 1776', set down the following guidelines for diplomacy with France:

1. No political connection. Submit to none of her authority; receive no governors or officers from her.
2. No military connection. Receive no troops from her.
3. Only a commercial connection; that is, make a

treaty to receive her ships into our ports; let her engage to receive our ships into her ports; furnish us with arms, cannon, saltpetre, powder, duck, steel.⁴⁵

The Americans swiftly compromised these principles.⁴⁶ In order to secure badly needed French aid, they agreed to defend France's colonies in the West Indies against the British, and to refrain from signing any peace treaty with Britain without France's approval.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, these compromises notwithstanding, Adams, Paine, Burgh and Franklin had set the tone for the emerging nation's foreign policy. Their arguments were not universally accepted, nor were they universally appropriate, but they captured critical truths about America's political situation.

The revolutionaries consistently portrayed independence in international relations as an integral part of political liberty. By the summer of 1776, it was clear that the rebellious colonies needed to declare their intentions. The colonies needed to clarify their position both in order to justify domestic measures on behalf of the war effort and in order to achieve credibility in international affairs. In the words of American diplomat Richard Henry Lee: 'No state in Europe will either Treat or Trade with us as long as we consider ourselves Subjects of G.B. . . . It is not choice then but necessity which calls for Independence, as the only means by which foreign Alliances can be obtained.'⁴⁸

Given this state of affairs, it is no surprise that the Continental Congress declared independence. The manner in which they announced their decision highlights the relevance of Machiavelli's theories to the American political experiment, and the particular importance of Machiavelli's ideas about foreign policy. Pocock defines the 'Machiavellian moment' as being, among other things, the point at which the republic and the citizen's participation in it appear as a problem in historical self-understanding.⁴⁹ The revolutionaries condemned the old order on the basis of the indignities it forced upon its citizens, founded a republican system of government to vindicate what they presented as those citizens' God-given rights and sought to mobilize the citizens in support of their new republic. John Adams likened the people to a 'vast, unwieldy machine', but concluded that only this machine had the power to overthrow the British.⁵⁰

The Declaration of Independence (DOI) frequently refers to the connection between liberty and international affairs.⁵¹ In the DOI's list of grievances against the British king, one notes:

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers incapable of annihilation have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within ...

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states, for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither & raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands ...

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation ...

for cutting off our trade with all parts of the world ...

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages and totally unworthy of the head of a civilized nation.⁵²

Machiavelli described the way Rome exploited its colonies. The Americans are complaining that Britain is dealing with them in much the same fashion. Not only has King George treated them harshly, but he has sought to weaken them. He has limited their growth and he has undermined their political institutions, rendering them incapable of acting for themselves. In Machiavellian terms, the colonial government is enduring a state of enforced corruption, and, as Machiavelli might have predicted, this left America vulnerable to insurrection, Indian attack and foreign invasion.

Not only has the king sapped the colonists' 'manly firmness', but he has actively conspired with outsiders against the Americans. His readiness to side with foreigners against the colonists speaks volumes about his loyalty to his subjects. Since these outsiders have different systems of government, their involvement in American politics can only be extra-legal. This erodes the colonial system of government even further. Moreover, although these foreigners may have ties to the king himself, they have no motivation to act in the interests of Americans.

The colonists presented the king's actions as an outrageous violation of their God-given rights. Machiavelli was not a libertarian, a religionist or a man encumbered by moral sensitivity. The Florentine praised Rome's imperial policies and, had he appeared out of his time to advise the British crown, he might have urged King George, not to stop oppressing the Americans, but to find a more effective way of crushing them. Nevertheless, he described the political dynamics that the Americans experienced. Had he appeared among them, he would almost certainly have agreed that the only relief to their plight was independence and revolution.

Grand strategy and the American republic

By declaring independence, the colonists became eligible for Machiavelli's advice. The revolutionaries' decision to 'dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them' raises them into the ranks of those countries governed in accordance with their wishes,

and thus brings them into the scope of the *Discourses on Livy*.⁵³ The American revolutionaries knew that they would have to defend their new country. Like Machiavelli, they saw a need for a long-term strategy and for the institutions that such a strategy would require.

Benjamin Franklin had written extensively on this subject. Long before the colonies had revolted, he had addressed the question of how to preserve their integrity as outposts of the British Empire. In 1751, he had observed the strengths of the French system of colonial administration:

The whole Countrey [Canada] is further under one general Command which the People obey with such Alacrity that in case of any Attack they all fly on the first Notice to the Place of Danger as readily as in a Garrison on beating and sounding a Call. They Fortify also wherever they come. But above all they are now Masters of almost all the Indians on the Eastern part of the main . . . Thus the Indians are endeared and are very true to them, tho' were proper means used, it would not be very difficult to gain them by the Force of Interest, to which, tho' these People have no Estates, they are very much Attach'd. This is the present Condition of the French, while that of the British Colonies is too much the reverse. Each of them is a distinct Government wholly independent of each other, pursuing its own interest and subject to no General Command.⁵⁴

Franklin urged the colonies to develop joint institutions to co-ordinate their Indian policies.⁵⁵ As noted earlier, he also supported the more extensive programme of centralization proposed in the Albany Plan. Franklin also believed that the British colonies should expand in order to increase both their prosperity and their security against future attack. He described '[t]he establishing of new colonies westward on the Ohio and the lakes' as 'a matter of considerable importance to the increase of British trade and power, to the breaking of that of the French, and to the protection and security of our present colonies'.⁵⁶ This underlined the need for efficient central organization.

A particular colony has scarce strength enough to extend itself by new settlements, at so great a distance from the old; but the joint force of the Union might suddenly establish a new colony or two in those parts, or extend an old colony to particular passes, greatly to the security of our present frontiers, increase of our trade and people, breaking off the French communication between Canada and Louisiana, and speedy settlement of the intermediate lands.⁵⁷

Later, Samuel Adams expressed grander ambitions. Adams looked forward to the day when the newly founded United States would acquire Canada, Nova Scotia and Florida.⁵⁸ 'We shall never be on solid footing', he wrote, 'till Britain cedes to us what Nature designs we should have, or till we wrest it from her.'⁵⁹

Thomas Jefferson agreed with many of these goals in principle, but believed that they were best accomplished through patience. ‘Our confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all America, North and South is to be peopled. We should take care not to think it for the interest of that great continent to press too soon on the Spaniards. [Spain possessed Florida and had a claim on Louisiana.] Those countries cannot be in better hands.’⁶⁰ Jefferson’s main concern was that Spain would prove ‘too feeble’ to hold its American colonies until the United States grew ‘sufficiently advanced to gain it from them piece by piece’.⁶¹ Many other policy makers in the early United States shared Jefferson’s point of view.⁶²

Given the importance the early American republic placed on avoiding excessive commitment to foreign countries, it is not surprising that its statesmen placed great importance on self-reliance. They preferred to win victories through their own arms, and did not like to rely on outside forces to protect them. Although Franklin manipulated European political rivalries to secure support for the revolution, he was always unwilling to depend on the ‘whims’ of the balance-of-power system.⁶³ Franklin hoped for enduring alliances based on reason, good will and the general good of humanity.⁶⁴

John Adams had a less idealistic view of international politics. He agreed, however, that America should develop the means to take direct charge of its destiny. ‘God helps those who help themselves,’ he quoted.⁶⁵ ‘And the world too, in this sense, is very Godly.’

A colonial pamphleteer writing in the 1750s offered the following vision of statecraft, emphasizing the importance of psychological insight, historical knowledge and rational planning:

[Those who conduct the helm of state must] study the philosophy and policy of government, which teaches them to look back as far as authentic histories can conduct them with certainty, to mark the causes of the rise and decline of ancient states, to study the passions and designs of the great men of those times, which were productive of such events; to compare the passions and operations of the human mind in the present times, with those that are past; to carry on those observations to future times, to mark where the state might be ship-wrecked, and avoid those dangers; to observe what may aggrandize her in future times, and take measures to secure that, before her contemporaries or enemies can discover the danger, or prevent the effect.⁶⁶

Alexander Hamilton linked unity, foreign policy independence, military power and long-term strategy to prosperity:

Under a vigorous national government, the natural strength and resources of the country, directed to a common interest, would baffle all combinations of European jealousy to restrain our growth. This situation would even take away the motive to such combinations, by inducing an

impracticability of success. An active commerce, an extensive navigation, and a flourishing marine would then be the inevitable offspring of moral and physical necessity. We might defy the little arts of little politicians to control, or vary, the irresistible and unchangeable course of nature.

But in a state of disunion these combinations might exist, and might operate with success. It would be in the power of the maritime nations, availing themselves of our universal impotence, to prescribe the conditions of our political existence; and as they have a common interest in being our carriers, and still more in preventing our being theirs, they would in all probability combine to embarrass our navigation in such a manner, as would in effect destroy it, and confine us to a *PASSIVE COMMERCE*. We should thus be compelled to content ourselves with the first price of our commodities, and to see the profits of our trade snatched from us to enrich our enemies and persecutors. That unequalled spirit of enterprise, which signalises the genius of American Merchants and Navigators, and which is in itself an inexhaustible mine of national wealth, would be stifled and lost; and poverty and disgrace would overspread a country, which with wisdom might make herself the admiration and envy of the world.⁶⁷

If America was to establish itself, it could not renounce force. Franklin took issue with the pacifist Quakers: ‘Tho’ they themselves may be resigned and easy under this naked, defenceless State of the Country, it is far otherwise with a very great Part of the People – with us, who can have no confidence that God will protect those who neglect the use of rational Means for their Security . . .’.⁶⁸ ‘A coward is much more exposed to quarrels than a man of spirit,’ Jefferson claimed. ‘Weakness provokes insult and injury, while a condition to punish it often prevents it.’⁶⁹

Alexander Hamilton warned that neither treaties nor mild behaviour could provide a substitute for strength:

Let us recollect, that peace or war, will not always be left to our option; that however moderate or unambitious we may be, we cannot count upon the moderation, or hope to extinguish the ambition of others . . . To judge from the history of mankind, we shall be compelled to conclude, that the fiery and destructive passions of war, reign in the human breast, with much more powerful sway, than the mild and beneficent sentiments of peace; and, that to model our systems upon speculations of lasting tranquillity, is to calculate on the weaker springs of human nature.⁷⁰

Others among the founders emphasized that the United States should become a sea power. Jefferson desired a fleet as a ‘bridle’ for any power that might threaten the new republic from bases in the West Indies.⁷¹ Madison added that a fleet would help maintain the Union by allowing the central government to police the

states.⁷² Furthermore, Madison opined, a fleet presented relatively few threats to the liberties of individual citizens.⁷³ Large land forces, he feared, would be much more likely to become instruments of tyranny.

Hamilton added that the US Navy needed to be capable of taking the offensive on the high seas. Although some urged America to develop a purely defensive fleet of coastal gunboats, he described this as a 'novel and absurd experiment'.⁷⁴ Without a navy:

[O]ur commerce would be a prey to the wanton intermeddlings of all nations at war with each other; who, having nothing to fear from us, would [not hesitate to] supply their wants by depredations on our property, as often as it fell in their way. The rights of neutrality will only be respected, when they are defended by an adequate power. A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being neutral.⁷⁵

One notes that Hamilton links America's need for sea power with America's need to remain independent in international relations.

Nevertheless, the early American strategists did not see military power as an end in itself. Franklin in particular emphasized that an army was a 'devouring monster'.⁷⁶ Not only did he believe that military operations were dangerously expensive, but he believed that war was inherently evil, and peace good.⁷⁷ Machiavelli urged republics to know their limits for reasons of prudence. Franklin reached the same conclusion by a more idealistic route.

The cost of independence

The American Revolution itself reminded Americans both of war's evil and of war's cost. From 150,000 to 200,000 men served in the colonial armies, and perhaps 25,000 of them had died.⁷⁸ As a percentage of the American population, 25,000 casualties in the late 1700s is the equivalent of over two million casualties today.⁷⁹ Perhaps twice this number were permanently maimed.⁸⁰

The war had devastating economic consequences as well. Inflation reduced the value of the Continental dollar to less than 1 per cent of its pre-war value.⁸¹ The revolutionary army frequently requisitioned supplies directly from the countryside, causing further disruption.⁸² This upset society and weakened the government. To quote one historian:

[T]wo effects of this deteriorating situation, caused solely by the need to support a Continental army, were particularly marked and exceptionally important. One was the loss of authority and prestige by the Continental Congress as it failed to cope with the impossible problem of wartime finance and supply, and the consequent slide of power, from 1778 onwards, down to the state governments. The other was the widespread loss of faith – perhaps a naive faith but nonetheless held by almost everyone committed

to the Revolution – in the special ability of Americans, with their absence of poverty and their security and equality arising from widespread ownership of land, to meet the challenge of war without behaving badly. American Revolutionaries had pinned their hopes on what they called the ‘virtue’ of the people, and that ‘virtue’ most decidedly and spectacularly broke on the anvil of war. In the words of David Ramsay, who lived through the war as an unswerving Whig and wrote his history of it soon after the peace treaty: ‘The iniquity of the laws [which vainly tried to regulate the wartime economy] estranged the mind of many citizens from the habits and the love of justice.’⁸³

America’s economic woes highlighted the need for efficient political institutions. The colonies had more than enough material wealth to sustain their war effort. Their weakness lay in their lack of any organization capable of mobilizing those resources.⁸⁴ After the war, the Continental Congress found it equally difficult to convince the states to raise revenue for paying off the war debt.⁸⁵ European countries, meanwhile, took advantage of America’s weakness to deny it needed trading privileges.⁸⁶ This placed the new government in jeopardy of both bankruptcy and social unrest.

The Constitution

American political thought and historical experience revealed the need for a regime that could conduct effective foreign policy and yet would limit the country’s involvement in war. Since the Articles of Confederation that united the victorious rebel colonies provided no such system, America’s founders concluded that they needed to reorganize their government. The movement that led to the Constitutional Convention reaches back to the colonists’ strategic debates before the Seven Years War. Without even the chance of aid from Great Britain, Benjamin Franklin’s slogan ‘Join or die’ was more apt than ever.

Alexander Hamilton warned that, without a stronger central government, the United States would be the ‘football of European politics’.⁸⁷ British goods emphasized this point. When an American delegation attempted to negotiate a trade treaty in 1785, their British hosts asked them ‘whether you are merely commission’d by Congress, or whether you have receiv’d separate Powers from the respective States . . . repeated experience having taught . . . how little the authority of Congress could avail in any respect, where the Interests of even one individual State was even concern’d’.⁸⁸

The need for an effective foreign policy was among the main spurs to the constitutional movement, and to the development of the United States’ political identity. ‘Nothing contributed more to the calling of the 1787 Constitutional Convention’, historian Walter LaFeber writes, ‘than did the spreading belief that under the Articles of Confederation, Congress could not effectively and safely conduct foreign policy.’⁸⁹ In another historian’s words, before the adoption of the

Constitution the only men who had constantly to think of the United States as one nation were the American ambassadors abroad.⁹⁰ Jefferson described opponents of the Constitution as those who wished for America to act as one country internationally while remaining many countries at home.⁹¹ These wishes proved incompatible.

Americans were by no means unanimous on this issue. Many feared that a strong central government would drag the country into wars and other foreign imbroglios. The authors of the Constitution attempted to subject foreign policy makers to the same system of checks and balances as other organs of government. Although they gave the president the power to repel attacks, they stipulated that only Congress could declare war, and, although they gave the president the power to negotiate treaties, they gave the Senate the powers of advice and consent.

The Constitution's attempt to divide foreign policy powers among multiple branches of government has proved problematic over the years. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger declared that, 'in foreign affairs, [the Constitution] was often cryptic, ambiguous and incomplete'.⁹² This reflects the American founders' fear that an overly powerful government would develop the same international ambitions as the British king. Americans of the late 1700s grossly underestimated the importance of external affairs to their country's future. When Congress first appointed a secretary for foreign relations, it assigned him extraneous duties on the grounds that his primary job would not provide him with enough work to keep him busy.⁹³

Nevertheless, the Constitution transformed the United States into a nation that could act as a body in international affairs. By ratifying it, the Americans acknowledged that too little power could be as great a threat to their independence as too much. Alexander Hamilton urged his fellow citizens to support the Constitution on these grounds: 'Let Americans disdain to be the instruments of European questions. Let the thirteen States, bound together in a strict and indissoluble Union, concur in erecting one great American system superior to the control of all transatlantic force and able to dictate the terms of their connection between the old and the new world!'⁹⁴

The test of practice

Having founded their republic and given it the institutional tools to 'dictate the terms' of its foreign connections, Americans swiftly encountered temptations to compromise their independence. Many Americans saw the French Revolution as a continuation of their own. The more idealistic hoped to join with the French to spread republican government throughout the world.⁹⁵ Furthermore, America remained bound by its Revolutionary War-era military alliance with France. When France and Britain went to war in 1793, America was legally obligated to help defend French colonies in the West Indies.⁹⁶

America's leaders understood that their country could not afford to become involved in the developing conflict. Even if one overlooked the military dangers of becoming involved in a new world war, the young United States needed to maintain

cordial relations with Great Britain for economic reasons. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton was acutely aware of this fact. Hamilton was attempting to repay America's outstanding debts, and one of his principal sources of revenue was a tax on overseas trade.⁹⁷ Trade with Great Britain accounted for over nine-tenths of America's commerce.⁹⁸

In April 1793, President Washington proclaimed American neutrality.⁹⁹ Although members of his cabinet disagreed sharply about an assortment of related issues, all supported the general concept of non-involvement.¹⁰⁰ Even Thomas Jefferson, who sympathized with the French revolutionaries, concluded that 'a fair neutrality will prove a disagreeable pill to our friends, tho' necessary to keep us out of the calamities of war'.¹⁰¹ The French attempted to frustrate Washington's policy by appealing to American public opinion. In summer 1793, a French envoy named Edmond Genet landed at Charleston and embarked on a four-week tour of the United States, speaking at public meetings wherever he went.¹⁰²

'My zeal', Genet wrote, 'never will be satisfied until I have drawn the American people into the war on our side. The whole New World must be free and the Americans must support us in this sublime design.'¹⁰³ Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, warned him that his excessive ardour would only hurt his cause, but he ignored the warning. Genet incited riots against neutrality and commissioned American privateers to attack his country's enemies on the seas.¹⁰⁴ American sailors went on to take over 80 prizes on behalf of Revolutionary France.¹⁰⁵

Historian Bradford Perkins narrates the climax of this affair as follows:

Believing that the administration could not stand against him, Genet demanded a special session of Congress to decide between his wishes and those of the administration. This was too much. The president exploded: 'Is the Minister of the French Republic to set the Acts of this Government at defiance, with impunity and then to threaten the Executive with an appeal to the People? What must the World think of such conduct, and of the Government of the United States submitting to it?'¹⁰⁶

Hamilton took advantage of Genet's attempts to subvert the American government to counter popular support for the French. The Secretary of the Treasury published a series of articles in the *Daily Advertiser* drawing attention to Genet's offences against US sovereignty.¹⁰⁷ Hamilton's efforts inflamed American resentment against the French, strengthening the hand of those who wished to keep the US neutral.¹⁰⁸ Washington went on to strengthen his earlier proclamation of neutrality by signing the Neutrality Act of 1794, which banned Americans from enlisting in foreign armies, arming foreign warships or planning private military ventures.¹⁰⁹ The Act permitted Americans to trade with belligerent countries, but warned them not to expect government protection.¹¹⁰ Although the laws initially applied only to the Wars of the French Revolution, the US made it permanent in 1800 and extended it to internal revolutions in 1817.¹¹¹

The British did not make it easy for Hamilton and his political allies to argue the case for neutrality. In December 1793, Britain arranged a truce between Portugal and the Algerian pirates.¹¹² This freed the Portuguese to fight France – and freed the Algerians to sail into the Atlantic and raid at will. Since most other countries had their own treaties with the pirates, American ships suffered disproportionately from their raids. Meanwhile, Britain conspired with American Indians, impounded American grain shipments bound for France and refused to evacuate disputed posts along the Canadian border.¹¹³

Lord Dorchester, governor-general of Canada, encouraged his people to resist the advance of American frontiersmen, assuring them that Britain and America would soon be at war.¹¹⁴ In order to prevent such a development, Washington sent John Jay to settle outstanding disputes with Great Britain. Jay's efforts remain controversial to this day. His concessions to Britain both incensed the Republican element in American politics and exposed the consequences of America's military weakness.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Jay succeeded at heading off an Anglo-American war.¹¹⁶

Jay's treaty infuriated the French. The French revolutionaries felt that their fellow republicans in America had a duty to support them by opposing Britain in every way.¹¹⁷ To the French, Jay's treaty exposed the American government as illegitimate.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, France suspended its diplomatic relations with America and warned the American people that, if they re-elected George Washington, they would face hostility and perhaps war.¹¹⁹

Washington famously declined a third term in office. His Farewell Address of September 1796 included the following lines, often cited in discussions of America's tendency to hold itself aloof:

[N]othing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations and passionate attachments for others should be excluded; and that in place of them just and amicable feelings toward all should be cultivated. The Nation, which indulges toward another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest.¹²⁰

Washington's main concern was simply that such emotional attachments would lead Americans to make irrational decisions. America's geographical and political circumstances made such ties unusually likely to be dangerous, and unusually unlikely to be profitable. 'Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence, she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns.'¹²¹

The first president also raised the more Machiavellian point that such ties would undermine the country's domestic political arrangements:

[Such attachments give] to ambitious, corrupted or deluded citizens (who devote themselves to the favourite [foreign] Nation) facility to betray

or sacrifice the interests of their own country, without odium, sometimes even with popularity: – gilding with the appearances of a virtuous sense of obligation, a commendable deference for public opinion, or a laudable zeal for public good, the base or foolish compliances of ambition, corruption or infatuation.

As avenues of foreign influence in innumerable ways, such attachments are particularly alarming to the truly enlightened and independent Patriot. How many opportunities do they afford to tamper with domestic factions, to practise the arts of seduction, to mislead public opinion, to influence or awe the public councils!¹²²

This led Washington to formulate his ‘great rule of conduct’, which was to fulfil existing treaties, but to ‘steer clear of permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it’.¹²³ Washington opposed only political alliances, and generally favoured extending commercial relations, although he warned that America’s trading alliances should be flexible and impartial.¹²⁴

Washington’s successor, John Adams, sought reconciliation with France but refused even to discuss breaking Jay’s treaty with Great Britain.¹²⁵ The French, for their part, demanded that the Americans pay them simply for the privilege of negotiating.¹²⁶ Charles Pinckney, America’s ambassador in Paris, responded with his famous remark ‘millions for defence, but not one cent for tribute’.¹²⁷ Meanwhile, in America, the generally pro-French Republicans suspected John Adams of concealing good news about the negotiations in order to justify their policies. The Republicans in Congress joined with their Federalist opponents to pass a law calling on the president to publish all reports from Paris.

Adams complied, changing the names of the French representatives to X, Y and Z. The revelation that France was attempting to extort money from the United States infuriated the American public. France went on to wage war against US shipping for the following two years. In 1800, American ambassadors negotiated an end to this so-called Quasi-War. France refused to pay reparations for damage to American shipping but agreed to cease hostilities and formally release the US from its treaty commitments.

The Louisiana Purchase

Meanwhile, a new threat took shape in America’s west. At the end of the Revolutionary War, Spain had taken control of Louisiana. Most American leaders were content to let Spain have it for the time being. Few saw the Spanish as a threat. American statesman Rufus King quoted Montesquieu: ‘it is happy for trading powers that God has permitted the Turks and Spaniards to be in the world since of all nations they are the most proper to possess a great empire with insignificance’.¹²⁸ In 1800, however, Spain secretly returned Louisiana to France in return for territory in Tuscany.¹²⁹

Over the following months, Americans heard rumours of Spain's bargain. Spanish officials in Louisiana enacted stringent new laws about trade. Although the Spanish were, in fact, merely trying to control smuggling, many Americans saw France's influence behind the new and unpopular regulations.¹³⁰ Treasury Secretary Oliver Woolcott expressed the general American reaction when he said that the French would be 'the worst and most dangerous neighbors we could have'.¹³¹ They would be 'like ants and weasels in our barns and granaries'.¹³²

Members of the Federalist party were particularly concerned about the turn of events. Federalists believed, in one historian's words, 'almost as a matter of faith "that France plans to regain Louisiana, and to renew the ancient plan of her monarchs of *circumscribing* and encircling what now constitute the Atlantic states"'.¹³³ The Federalists' fears were well founded. Napoleon Bonaparte, who had established himself as First Consul of France in 1799, was eager to revive France's empire in the New World.

Napoleon had appointed Talleyrand as his foreign minister. Talleyrand was also well known for his American ambitions.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, a slave revolt on the French island colony of Santo Domingo gave Napoleon the pretext for a show of force in the New World.¹³⁵ Twenty thousand French troops landed on Santo Domingo in 1802, with more following.¹³⁶ Although the French won a quick victory, the rebel slaves fled into the hills and carried on a guerrilla campaign.

Although Napoleon ultimately hoped to deploy troops in Louisiana to block further American expansion, he hoped to conciliate the US in the short term.¹³⁷ Andre Pichon, the French envoy in America, argued that America had no legitimate reason to object to France's decision to recover a former colony.¹³⁸ James Madison, who was then serving as Secretary of State, responded bluntly that, if France reoccupied Louisiana, it would 'collide' with the United States.¹³⁹

Thomas Jefferson, then president, elaborated in a private letter:

There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three eighths of our territory must pass to market and from its fertility it will ere long yield more than half of our inhabitants. France, placing herself in that door, assumes to us the attitude of defiance . . . the day that France takes possession of New Orleans fixes the sentence which is to restrain [America] forever within her low water mark.¹⁴⁰

Jefferson's conclusion was particularly significant: 'From that moment, we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation.'¹⁴¹ These words, which Jefferson of all people must have found difficult to write, suggest an end to America's freedom from entangling alliances. If this situation had come to pass, America would be in much the same position it had occupied in the 1750s. This had threatened American liberty then, and it undoubtedly would again.

In the winter of 1802–03, Napoleon prepared a fleet to transport fresh troops to Louisiana.¹⁴² Americans contemplated pre-empting their arrival by attacking the

colony. Britain hinted that it would support the United States in a war. Meanwhile, the campaign on Santo Domingo had become a debacle which cost the lives of over 50,000 French troops. As Napoleon contemplated the difficulty of campaigning in America and the likelihood of a new war in Europe, he abandoned his American ambitions.

In April 1803, Napoleon summoned a minister, probably Talleyrand, to receive the following message:

I will not keep . . . a possession which will not be safe in our hands, that may perhaps embroil me with the Americans, or may place me in a state of coolness with them. I shall make it serve me, on the contrary, to attach them to me, to get them into differences with the English . . . My resolution is fixed; I will give Louisiana to the United States. But as they have no territory to cede to me in exchange, I shall demand of them a sum of money to pay the expenses of the extraordinary armament I am projecting against Great Britain.¹⁴³

Thus it was that Jefferson was able to buy the entire colony of Louisiana. This provoked a minor debate over whether it was prudent, in the words of one of Jefferson's political opponents, to 'rush like a comet into infinite space'.¹⁴⁴ Some felt that Jefferson's expansion privileged Western farmers over Eastern merchants.¹⁴⁵ Others suggested that the price was too high, and others, more altruistically, that it was wrong to dispossess other countries of their land.¹⁴⁶

Most Americans, however, appear to have accepted Madison's arguments that a large and wealthy country could maintain its freedom more effectively than a small one.¹⁴⁷ Leaders of all political persuasions could agree that America's liberties were safer without a vast French colony looming to its west and dominating the Mississippi.¹⁴⁸ Commentators in both Europe and America foresaw that the Louisiana Purchase cleared the way for the United States to dominate the continent.¹⁴⁹ Jefferson's purchase reflected the strategic ideas of America's founders, increasing both the country's independence in international affairs and its integrity as a republic.

Citizens and statecraft

America's foreign policy issues of the early 1800s were not all grand questions of geopolitics. Commercial issues loomed large as well. Frequently, these issues involved the fate of individual vessels and citizens. The US went to war with the Barbary Pirates in order to protect its shipping, and quarrelled with both France and Britain over the same issue. By 1807, Americans had begun to contemplate war over Britain's practice of impressing sailors from US ships into the Royal Navy.¹⁵⁰

Americans had other grievances with Britain as well. One should be careful not to overrate the role of impressment. The United States was also trying to establish its right, as a neutral power, to trade unmolested with Europe's warring states. In

1812, when Britain and America finally came to blows, President James Madison justified the war primarily on the grounds of Britain's decrees against US trade.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, impressment played an important role in touching off the war.

Americans drew explicit connections between the country's ability to protect its citizens and its integrity as a republic. In an editorial on the impressments, one journalist exclaimed 'how inconsistent with our pretensions of sovereignty and independence' they were.¹⁵² Americans saw their national independence and the inviolability of their fellow citizens as related issues, and felt that it would be 'base and degrading' to compromise either.¹⁵³ The importance Americans attached to the fate of their countrymen is a manifestation of their determination to maintain their system of government.

Machiavelli would have agreed, although perhaps for slightly different reasons. The Americans seemed primarily concerned with their country's honour and with the possibility that, if the US established a policy of abandoning citizens to foreign abuses, any one of them might be next. Machiavelli was concerned with the danger that, if a republic ignored insults to its citizens, the victims and their associates would become alienated from the republic. At the very least, they might seek private revenge in ways that would undermine public policy.

For if an individual is grievously offended either by the public or by a private person, and does not receive due satisfaction, he will, if he lives in a republic . . . [governments] should never esteem a man so lightly as to think that, if injury be added to injury, the injured person will not consider how to vindicate himself, even though it involve him in all manner of dangers and entail his own downfall.¹⁵⁴

Consolidation

Despite America's numerous embarrassments in the war of 1812, the British were eager to avoid further war. Over the following years, Americans continued the grand strategy of their founders by consolidating their gains. In 1819, the United States acquired Florida from Spain. Meanwhile, a series of uprisings in Latin America whittled down Spanish influence in the hemisphere. In 1823, President Monroe declined to take part in the Greek uprising, and in the same year he proclaimed the doctrine that bears his name.

Although the Monroe Doctrine aimed at enforcing a separation between America and Europe, it was not 'isolationist' in the twentieth-century sense of the word. Monroe did not call on his countrymen to remain passive or insular in international affairs.¹⁵⁵ His doctrine relied on a keen understanding of European power politics and a tacit understanding with Great Britain. Although the US Navy of the 1820s lacked the strength to keep foreign powers out of the hemisphere, Monroe correctly calculated that Britain would be willing to co-operate in a general way, in order to keep its European rivals from establishing themselves to its west.

American statesmen improved their country's position through amicable diplomacy as well. In 1817, the US concluded the Rush–Bagot treaty with Britain, demilitarizing the Great Lakes. Because of this and other arms control treaties, the US–Canadian border became one of the most lightly fortified borders in the world by the middle of the century.¹⁵⁶ Americans did, however, prefer to maintain the material ability to protect themselves. 'From 1816 through the end of the century, boards of engineers and naval authorities would develop plans for coastal fortifications, but faced widespread skepticism that fortifications of any type could prevent modern navies from taking and burning American cities.'¹⁵⁷

Throughout this period, the US continued to expand. Americans had numerous economic and ideological reasons for doing so, but the need to maintain their liberties by maintaining control of their national destiny was high among them. In 1845, magazine editor John O'Sullivan first described America's will to expand as its 'Manifest Destiny'. O'Sullivan justified his country's ambitions on the grounds that expansion would 'distance the United States from European influence . . . promote greater economic freedom and . . . preserve democracy'.¹⁵⁸

The threat of European intervention remained real. In the early 1840s, as Americans debated the question of whether to annex the Republic of Texas, Britain discreetly offered to ally itself with the Texans if only they would remain independent.¹⁵⁹ Several Texan leaders boasted about how they flirted with Britain in order to put pressure on the US.¹⁶⁰ At one point, when the Texan cause was faring poorly in Washington, Texan president Anson Jones remarked 'I will have to give them another scare. One or two doses of English calomel . . . have to be administered.'¹⁶¹ France intrigued with the Texans as well.¹⁶²

Americans were far from unanimous on these issues. Daniel Webster famously warned that 'it is of very dangerous tendency and doubtful consequences to enlarge the boundaries of this country'.¹⁶³ Webster warned that the citizens of a continent-sized nation would have too few natural connections and too little 'sympathy' to 'concur in any general constitutional principles'.¹⁶⁴ He also noted that adding new states to the Union would upset the distribution of power within the Senate.¹⁶⁵

Senator Stephen A. Douglas debated Webster on this subject. Douglas responded that the railroad made a continental United States quite possible: 'The application of steam power to transportation and travel has brought the remotest limits of the confederacy, now comprising twenty-six states, (if we are permitted to count by time instead of distance) much nearer to the center than when there were but thirteen.'¹⁶⁶

Throughout his career, Douglas articulated a robust version of the Manifest Destiny doctrine.¹⁶⁷ Douglas was deeply concerned with autocratic rule in Europe. Although British society was superficially more liberal than other European nations, he considered Britain a 'cruel and unnatural mother', determined to undermine the United States one way or another.¹⁶⁸ As a spokesman for the Irish living at the time of the potato famine, he had understandable reasons for taking this position. America, he felt, had a duty to give the oppressed peoples of the world an example of how a democratic republic could prosper and grow strong.

Furthermore, Douglas did not trust Europe's balance-of-power system to last. Eventually, he felt, a powerful European country – probably Britain – would rise above its rivals and go on to challenge the United States, covertly if not overtly. America, he felt, needed to expand to the maximum degree possible in order to meet that threat. In his opinion, the fact that America routinely raised its newly acquired territories to the rank of states and granted them a republican form of government negated any moral scruples one might feel about US imperialism.

Douglas's position proved more influential than Webster's. In 1845, American president James K. Polk reiterated the Monroe Doctrine in more aggressive terms:

The rapid extension of our settlements over our territories heretofore unoccupied, the addition of new States to our Confederacy, the expansion of free principles, and our rising greatness as a nation are attracting the attention of the power of Europe, and lately the doctrine has been broached in some of them of a 'balance of power' on this continent to check our advancement. The United States, sincerely desirous of preserving relations of good understanding with all nations, can not in silence permit any European interference on the North American continent, and should any such interference be attempted will be ready to resist it at any and all hazards . . .

We must ever maintain the principle that the people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny. Should any portion of them, constituting an independent state, propose to unite themselves with our Confederacy, this will be a question for them and us to determine without any foreign interposition. We can never consent that European powers shall interfere to prevent such a union because it might disturb the 'balance of power' which they may desire to maintain . . .¹⁶⁹

Note that Polk emphasizes both his country's 'free principles' and his determination to avoid subjecting those principles to the vagaries of a so-called balance-of-power system. 'The peoples of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny.' Polk improved his own country's ability to decide its own destiny dramatically in his subsequent war with Mexico.

When Texas achieved independence, Mexico had recognized its sovereignty up to the Nueces River. The Texans claimed that their borders should extend beyond to the Rio Grande, and the US government chose to support this claim. America offered, however, to pay for this territory by assuming responsibility for \$2,000,000 worth of damage claims by US citizens against the Mexican government.¹⁷⁰ The Mexicans contemptuously refused either to give up the territory or to pay the damages.

After this, many citizens called on the US government to force Mexico to pay the damage claims. Once again, the USA treated an offence against individual citizens as a matter of national concern. In the words of the Secretary of State, 'the honour of this government is pledged to our own people for the diligent and proper

prosecution of these claims'.¹⁷¹ To leave the claims unpaid would wrong the rightful recipients, and to pay them from American funds would wrong taxpayers.¹⁷²

In the midst of this crisis, Polk had the US Army march to the Rio Grande, flagrantly defying Mexico's territorial claims. Predictably enough, Mexico attacked the American forces. Polk promptly announced that Mexicans had shed American blood on American soil.¹⁷³ At Polk's request, Congress declared war.

Polk declared that 'we go to war with Mexico solely for the purpose of conquering an honorable and permanent peace'.¹⁷⁴ Despite these words, Polk immediately began planning his war strategy in order to ensure that the United States would gain control of California, New Mexico and other valuable pieces of territory.¹⁷⁵ Polk's opponents accused him of having callously plotted a war of conquest.¹⁷⁶ Certainly, many of his countrymen were frank about their ambition to seize valuable territory.

Not only did the US advance to the Pacific Ocean, but it immediately sought access to the lands beyond. After it had acquired California, Secretary of State James Buchanan secured a commercial treaty with Hawaii. Scarcely had America concluded the treaty when France seized Honolulu. The US protested vehemently, and the French withdrew.¹⁷⁷ In the 1850s, the US went on to establish trading rights with China and Japan.

Polk's bid for California was in keeping with the grand strategy that Americans had followed since the mid-1700s. From a twenty-first-century standpoint, one can say that his conquests enriched and strengthened the United States. Nevertheless, many Americans felt that he had gone too far. The Mexican War raised questions of constitutional powers, regional politics and basic morality.

As Machiavelli might have warned, Polk's overweening expansion disturbed the checks and balances of American domestic politics. Although Polk sought Congressional approval for his war with Mexico, his opponents felt that he had deliberately provoked the Mexicans into taking hostile actions, thus forcing Congress's hand. This, they argued, exceeded a president's constitutional authority. As one Whig politician put it, 'we had seen an American president, without provocation, and without right, planting the standard of the United States on a foreign soil'.¹⁷⁸ Abraham Lincoln also took Polk to task in this regard.¹⁷⁹ Polk set a precedent for other presidents who would interpret their foreign policy prerogatives broadly in order to increase their influence in national affairs.

Even more significantly, the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War strengthened the slave-holding states. Polk's war was enormously popular in the south, for exactly this reason.¹⁸⁰ The prospect of creating new slave-holding states presented Southerners with an opportunity to send more pro-slavery senators and representatives to Washington. Furthermore, territorial expansion increased their economic power. In the words of one historian:

Certain it is that virtually every Southern spokesman believed that slavery must expand or die. The same arguments for expansion appeared so frequently in the political rhetoric of the period that they became standard

fare. Jefferson Davis perhaps best expressed two of the major doctrines. 'We of the South,' he explained, 'are an agricultural people, and we require an extended territory. Slave labor is a wasteful labor, and it therefore requires a still more extended territory than would the same pursuits if they could be pursued by the more economical labor of white men'. Restriction of slave territory, Davis noted in a secondary argument, would 'crowd upon our soil an overgrown black population, until there will not be room in the country for the whites and blacks to subsist in, and in this way [it would] destroy the institution [of slavery] and reduce the whites to the degraded position of the African race.'¹⁸¹

Given the fact that increasing numbers of Southerners were coming to see 'the masses of the north' as 'vile, rotten, infidelic, puritanic and negro-worshipping', increasing the capabilities of the South could only increase the likelihood of conflict.¹⁸² As Southerners became more economically self-sufficient, it became easier for them to contemplate secession. Meanwhile, abolitionists tried to keep slavery out of newly acquired territories. Struggles over this issue increased the divisions within the country.

The Mexican War also confronted Americans with a crisis of conscience. Polk's opponents felt that robbing Mexico of its land was wrong. In the words of one Whig politician, the United States had violated 'every principle of international law . . .'.¹⁸³ Henry David Thoreau went to prison for acts of civil disobedience against the war.¹⁸⁴ To Thoreau, the war was an indictment of America's system of government.

An idealistic Jeffersonian might have opposed the war on the grounds that it violated the principles of America's own revolution. Even a more pragmatic Machiavellian might have concurred that rapid expansion risked upsetting the domestic checks and balances that allowed the increasingly divided Union to hold itself together. Indeed, many American pragmatists warned that America should decline any opportunities to annex the more populous regions of Mexico, not out of moral considerations, but on the grounds that the US political system could not survive the absorbing of large numbers of Mexicans.¹⁸⁵ Thoreau, however, went further than either the Jeffersonians or the pragmatists.

Thoreau did not merely criticize Polk administration policy; he criticized the US system of government. He hoped, not to return to America's founding principles, but to transcend them. The American government, Thoreau wrote, is no more than a 'tradition, though a recent one'.¹⁸⁶ Such traditions, he claimed, have no principles beyond the blind drive to perpetuate themselves. In the process, such traditions provide a useful mechanism by which unscrupulous men can pursue their private ambitions.

Thoreau echoes the Declaration of Independence in stating that government is no more than the 'mode which people have chosen to execute their will'.¹⁸⁷ Unlike the DOI, however, he holds out little hope that any existing government can achieve justice. Although he speculates about an imaginary just state which will prepare the

way for a 'still more perfect and glorious state', he presents these as distant hopes.¹⁸⁸ In the meantime, he urges his fellow citizens to introduce friction into the 'machine' of all forms of actual government through spontaneous personal acts.¹⁸⁹

Those who believe in the high-minded principles of America's founding must take Thoreau's criticism seriously. The American revolutionaries justified their rebellion against Great Britain on the grounds that the British king was crushing both the will and the 'inalienable rights' of the people. Thoreau accused the US government – with some justice – of the same crime. This in itself is cause for moral concern.

The fact that such immoral policies alienate America both from foreign countries and from its own citizens should make even pragmatists take pause. Thus, truly patriotic Americans should thank Thoreau for alerting them to a threat to their country. True patriots will also recall that the First Amendment to the US Constitution recognizes the unqualified right to free speech. Nevertheless, having acknowledged that Thoreau was right to criticize his country, one must also acknowledge the gravity of his criticism.

In the Machiavellian moment of 1776, Americans had sought to take control of their destiny by embracing a certain set of principles and, ultimately, by founding a certain set of institutions. Thoreau was calling on thoughtful, principled people to dissolve those institutions and rethink the principles that inspired them. When the Mexican War broke out, a number of American congressmen applauded the courage of Mexico's troops.¹⁹⁰ If Thoreau was right, we might all follow their example.

If, on the other hand, Thoreau was wrong, those who retain their faith in the Republic of 1776 must rebut his arguments. One may do so while continuing to admire Thoreau. Indeed, the most effective way to disprove his propositions might have been to demonstrate that the United States was capable of truly moral behaviour. Nevertheless, those who care about a particular constitutional arrangement must remain sensitive to the difference between opposing a policy and opposing the system of government that produced it. The fact that the Mexican War pushed influential thinkers across this line is a sign of how severely Polk's policies challenged the cohesion of the American republic.

Although the Mexican War outraged Thoreau, other Americans found that it stirred their blood. US citizens had been launching private 'filibustering' expeditions to seize Latin American territory since the early days of the republic. After 1848, these raids grew increasingly ambitious, culminating in William Walker's successful takeover of Nicaragua. More idealistic men calling themselves the Young Americans wanted to join forces with European revolutionaries to bring democratic republicanism to the Old World.¹⁹¹ Although neither the filibusters nor the Young Americans managed to draw their nation into major foreign commitments, one must note that their ambitions were risky in the extreme.

Machiavelli warned that it is perilous for republics to expand beyond a certain point. The moral qualms of Thoreau, the moral hubris of the Young Americans and the amoral greed of the filibusters were but different manifestations of this peril.

How close the US came to a Machiavellian crisis remains a matter for speculation. Over the following two decades, even greater perils occupied the American body politic. During the 1850s and 1860s, the US confronted the twin issues of slavery and secession.

The American Civil War

The crisis that culminated in the American Civil War brought the nature and purpose of the US political system into question. Among the issues at stake was America's ability to hold itself aloof from European politics. The South's decision to secede flew in the face of the American founders' arguments about the importance of unity and threatened the gains made by generations of American statesmen. Lincoln summed up the foreign policy dangers of secession in his annual address to Congress of 1861: 'A nation which endures factious domestic division is exposed to disrespect abroad; and one party, if not both, is sure, sooner or later, to invoke foreign intervention.'¹⁹²

A year later, once again before the US Congress, Lincoln elaborated on the geopolitical consequences of secession:

A nation may be said to consist of its territory, its people and its laws. The territory is the only part which is of certain durability. 'One generation passeth away, but the earth abideth forever'. It is of the first importance to duly consider and estimate this ever-enduring part. That portion of the earth's surface which is owned and inhabited by the people of the United States is well-adapted to be the home of one national family, and it is not well adapted for two or more. Its vast extent and its variety of climate and productions are of advantage in this age for one people, whatever they might have been in former ages. Steam, telegraphs and intelligence have brought these to be an advantageous combination for one united people . . .¹⁹³

Lincoln went on to enumerate the geographical problems of dividing the Union: 'There is no line, straight or crooked, suitable for a national boundary on which to divide.'¹⁹⁴ The growing population of '[t]he great interior region' of the continent needed access to the Atlantic ports of the North-east, the Gulf ports of Louisiana and the Pacific ports of California.¹⁹⁵ No matter how one divided the American continent, one would leave major sections of the population cut off from one port or another 'except on terms dictated by a government foreign to them'.¹⁹⁶ 'Which of the three [ports] may be best is no proper question. All are better than either; and all of right belong to the people and their successors forever. True to themselves, they will not ask where a line of separation shall be, but will vow rather that there shall be no such line.'¹⁹⁷ To divide the Union would be to stifle the economic potential of all its parts. This would create friction among those parts that could lead to future wars. Furthermore, one may infer, division would impoverish citizens and weaken their armed forces. The states of a divided America would be vulnerable

to foreign invaders and to each other. In order to find allies and resist enemies, such states would have to join in disputes that had no direct importance to them, with all the risk and internal political conflict that entails.

Washington's international rivals might have welcomed such a turn of events, and it is not surprising that several countries toyed with the idea of taking advantage of America's moment of weakness. The shogun of Japan attempted to renege on his pledge to open certain ports to US trade.¹⁹⁸ Numerous European powers co-operated with blockade runners who defied the US Navy to carry supplies to the South.¹⁹⁹ The blockade runners provided the Confederacy with invaluable material, including 600,000 small arms, 2,000,000 pounds of saltpetre, 1,500,000 pounds of lead and 600,000 pairs of boots.²⁰⁰

Britain tacitly allowed Confederates to build several warships in its ports. An assortment of nations helped create the legal fictions that allowed these vessels to operate from putatively neutral ports.²⁰¹ Southern raiders descended into the United States from Canada.²⁰² On some occasions, the Canadian officials actively attempted to prevent these raids, but, on others, their attempts at opposition were less convincing. Spain attempted to sponsor a revolution in Peru.²⁰³

The French emperor Napoleon III scorned the Union and hinted that he would have gladly recognized the Confederacy if he could have been sure of British support.²⁰⁴ Napoleon III mounted the Civil War's most dramatic foreign challenge to the US in 1864, when he appointed his dependant the Archduke Maximilian to rule Mexico. The Union attempted to counter this threat by advancing troops into Texas. The Confederates, however, turned back this expedition.²⁰⁵

The Confederacy actively sought foreign support. Southerners based their bid for international help on the hope that European countries would have to assist them in order to secure access to 'King Cotton'.²⁰⁶ Southerners correctly noted that four-fifths of the world's cotton came from their plantations.²⁰⁷ The cotton industry was economically vital to both Britain and France. Nevertheless, the Confederate government never managed to develop a coherent policy for using their cotton to achieve diplomatic leverage. Some thought that the best policy would be to withhold their cotton to pressure European countries into recognizing their independence, while others wanted to sell cotton to finance the war effort.

At the beginning of the war, the former policy was more popular. Although the Confederate government never formally agreed to enact an embargo, the Southern states carried out a quasi-official policy of refusing to trade.²⁰⁸ Over the following years, as European powers failed to respond, the South switched to a policy of trading their cotton. By then, however, the Union naval blockade had become effective enough to prevent them from selling their wares abroad whether they wanted to or not. The European textile industry suffered, but France and Britain managed to stave off disaster by importing cotton from India, Egypt and Union-controlled territory.²⁰⁹

Although European leaders seriously contemplated supporting the South, the cotton trade barely figured in their calculations.²¹⁰ The Confederacy's policy, in short, failed. Southern leaders did try other methods to win European support,

such as petitioning the pope, but they overlooked many of their most promising opportunities to win foreign help.²¹¹ For instance, despite Union fears, the Confederates overlooked the opportunity to exploit early crises between the US and Canada.²¹²

The South tried one last gambit to draw the North into a war with Europe. In December 1864, a man named Frank Blair approached the Southern leaders and urged them to arrange a truce between the Union and the Confederacy, so that both sides could combine forces to drive Maximilian out of Mexico.²¹³ Jefferson Davis expressed guarded interest in this proposal and offered to negotiate with the North. Lincoln met the Confederate envoys in person.

Lincoln refused to consider any alliance with the Confederacy until the Southerners laid down their arms and surrendered. When one of the Southern envoys cajoled him with an anecdote about how Charles I of England negotiated with rebels before the cessation of hostilities, Lincoln responded: 'All I distinctly recall about the case of Charles I is that he lost his head in the end.'²¹⁴ The talks produced no result. Afterwards, Union spies confirmed that the South had planned the whole affair as a ruse to provoke war between France and the US.

Northerners flirted with broadening the war too, especially in the early years. In 1860, Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio openly suggested that the Union might allow the South to secede and annex Canada in order to replace its lost territory.²¹⁵ The New York *Herald* reported that the US had actually adopted this policy.²¹⁶ Lincoln, however, dismissed the idea of invading Canada with the remark 'One war at a time.'²¹⁷ The president emphatically assured a delegation representing Canadian volunteers in the Union army that he had no intention of invading their country, and he kept his promise.²¹⁸

William H. Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State, initially suggested provoking a war with France, Britain and Spain in the hope that Northerners and Southerners would unite to repel foreign invaders.²¹⁹ Some have suggested that Seward's proposal was actually a ruse. Seward, these historians imply, wanted to acquire a reputation as a volatile character, so that foreign leaders would feel that they had to handle him cautiously.²²⁰ Certainly, Seward adopted more prudent policies after the war with the South had actually broken out.

Throughout the war, Northern statesmen managed to contain incidents that might have brought foreigners into the conflict. The first and perhaps most serious of these incidents took place in 1861, when Captain Charles Wilkes of the US Navy learned that two Southern envoys were travelling to Europe on a British ship called the *Trent*. Wilkes intercepted the *Trent* and arrested the Southerners. Union supporters were jubilant at this minor triumph.

The British public, on the other hand, was outraged. *Punch* published a cartoon of Britannia leaning on a cannon.²²¹ Union soldiers boasted 'We've whipped England twict. We kin do it again.'²²² Canadians, expecting an invasion, rallied to arms. Lincoln, however, insisted that there would be no war.²²³

Seward released the Southern prisoners into British custody. The Secretary of State also drafted a letter explaining the American case in which he observed both

that the United States would have had the right to keep the Southerners if it had chosen and that, by demanding their return, the British were implicitly endorsing the principles America had fought to establish in the war of 1812. For this, the American author George Train hailed Seward as ‘the cleverest Secretary of State that America has ever possessed ... He can talk diplomacy with Lyons, war with Palmerston, Latin with Russell, Greek with Gladstone, or Hebrew with Rothschild.’²²⁴

In 1863, Captain Wilkes precipitated his second international incident by seizing mail from the British ship *Peterhof*.²²⁵ When Britain protested, Lincoln ordered Wilkes to return the captured letters. The US Secretary of the Navy, however, maintained that Wilkes had acted appropriately and refused to co-operate. Lincoln leaked word to the press that he intended to return the mail, temporarily appeasing Britain.

The president then challenged his Secretary of the Navy to come up with a legal precedent for holding the mail. When the secretary could not, Lincoln compelled him to return the letters. At this point, however, the British realized that they themselves might wish to seize mail in future wars. Therefore, they dropped their objections to such seizures.²²⁶

Seward proved himself adept at conciliating potential enemies on numerous other issues as well. At one point in the war, he went so far as to allow the British to reinforce their Canadian garrisons by marching troops across Maine.²²⁷ This spared the soldiers assorted hardships and demonstrated his good will, while also hinting that the USA was strong enough not to fear Britain’s forces. Seward also renewed the Rush–Bagot arms control agreement on the Great Lakes, despite earlier violations by both Britain and the US.²²⁸

The Union also took opportunities to curry favour with Spain. In 1864, Seward learned that a Spanish fugitive named Jose Arguelles was hiding in New York.²²⁹ The Spanish wanted to arrest him for illegally trading in slaves. Lincoln had him secretly arrested and hustled on to a Spanish ship. Although the action was not strictly legal under US law, few Northerners were inclined to sympathize with Arguelles.

Not only did Lincoln’s administration placate foreign powers on critical occasions, but it stood up to them when necessary as well. The US took care to maintain its defences along the Canadian border.²³⁰ When the United Kingdom winked at the Confederacy’s programme of building warships in British shipyards, Lincoln hinted that he might respond by licensing American privateers to prey on Britain’s merchant vessels.²³¹ This threat played an important role in convincing the British to crack down on Southern shipbuilding. Union naval commanders also attempted to deter Spain from repairing Confederate vessels by sending US warships to cruise ostentatiously along the Spanish coast.²³²

In 1862, the Union faced one of its most serious foreign threats. The Confederates had defeated US troops in a series of battles, and the European powers had begun to believe that its defeat was inevitable. Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell of the British Foreign Office suggested that their country might offer to mediate in

the American Civil War. If the Union refused to accept their mediation, they added, Britain would recognize the Confederacy.²³³ Napoleon III suggested that France would follow Britain's lead.

In the midst of this crisis, Seward wrote an unofficial letter to his friend John Bigelow.²³⁴ Bigelow spread word of its contents, as Seward had intended him to do. The letter implied that the United States had a defensive alliance with Russia. If the European powers turned against America, the letter suggested, the tsar would attack them on their own continent.

Seward's letter was a bluff. America had no alliance with Russia, and the tsar's government had warned the US not to hope for one.²³⁵ Nevertheless, French and British statesmen had reasons to be concerned. Russian envoys had repeatedly conferred with their US counterparts during earlier phases of the American Civil War.²³⁶ European statesmen had every reason to tread carefully if they wished to avoid a world war.

Meanwhile, the Union turned back the Confederate army at the battle of Antietam. This proved that the US armed forces were more formidable than some had suspected. Seward subsequently announced that he would regard any attempt at enforced mediation as a declaration of war.²³⁷ Britain and France backed off.

Lincoln understood that some of his most important allies in keeping European nations out of the war were the ordinary European people who supported his cause. Europe's middle and working classes were politically active, and the majority of their members detested slavery. On some occasions, they expressed their sentiments violently. In 1862, for instance, a British cotton broker addressed his workers, trying to incite them against the North. The workers attacked him and left him with a lifelong scar.²³⁸

Lincoln tried several gambits to win public support in Europe. In 1861, he offered Giuseppe Garibaldi, the hero of Italy's wars of unification, a command in the Union army.²³⁹ Garibaldi was wounded and in prison at the time, and unable to accept the offer. Private citizens acting as friends of the Lincoln administration encouraged French and British authors to write books opposing the South.²⁴⁰

On one occasion, Lincoln sought to win support from pious Europeans by petitioning the Egyptian authorities to release an imprisoned Syrian bookseller who had offended Muslim authorities by selling Christian literature.²⁴¹ The Egyptians let the bookseller go. Not only did this improve Lincoln's standing with conscientious Europeans, but it impressed the pasha of Turkey. The pasha, struck by Lincoln's ability to enforce his will overseas, banned Confederate ships from Ottoman ports.

Lincoln also made more significant decisions with world public opinion in mind. The need to bring conscientious Europeans firmly on to the Union side played an important role in his administration's decision to make the Emancipation Proclamation.²⁴² Some felt that the American Civil War heralded a world civil war and a far more radical emancipation of the working class. When Karl Marx heard news of an 1860 slave revolt, he remarked 'The signal has been given', and added 'If things get serious by and by, what will become of Manchester?'²⁴³ Two years

later, commenting on the Union's early defeats, he expressed his faith that the North would eventually win, but speculated that it would need to use 'revolutionary methods' and might, itself, undergo revolution in the process.²⁴⁴

In 1865, Marx drafted a letter to Lincoln that ended with these words:

The workingmen of Europe feel sure that as the American war of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American anti-slavery war will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come, that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.²⁴⁵

Lincoln embraced similar ideas. In 1861, he presented the American Civil War as a social struggle with global implications:

This is essentially a people's contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men – to lift artificial weights from all shoulders – to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all – to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.²⁴⁶

Union supporters were willing to make common cause with their class allies around the world. The self-appointed Union spokesman George Francis Train addressed the Irish Brotherhood of St Patrick in London, condemning class inequality in Scotland, England and Ireland.²⁴⁷ Train concluded that 'Ireland must find some Garibaldi to . . . cry Union in America and Liberty in Ireland'. The British police arrested him for this performance, but subsequently released him. The United States minister in London, Charles Francis Adams, remarked that he never quite appreciated the moral influence of American democracy, nor the cause that the privileged classes have to fear the United States, until he saw the role his country was playing in European politics.²⁴⁸

Lincoln praised labour unions and defended the right to strike.²⁴⁹ He was frank, however, about his belief that 'it is best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can'.²⁵⁰ Lincoln was equally plain-spoken about the type of relationship he was willing to establish with the international labour movement. In 1863, he wrote a letter to the workingmen of Manchester (England):

To the Working-men of Manchester: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the address and resolutions which you have sent me on the even of the new year. When I came, on the 4th of March, 1861, through a free and constitutional election to preside in the Government of the United States, the country was found at the verge of a civil war. Whatever

might have been the cause, or whosoever the fault, one duty, paramount to all others, was before me, namely, to maintain and preserve at once the Constitution and the integrity of the Federal Republic. A conscientious purpose to perform this duty is the key to all the measures of administration which have been and will hereafter be pursued. Under our frame of government and my official oath, I could not depart from this purpose if I would. It is not always in the power of governments to enlarge or restrict the scope of moral results which follow from the policies that they may deem it necessary for the public safety from time to time to adopt.²⁵¹

The workingmen had not asked Lincoln to initiate a Marxist revolution of the international proletariat. Lincoln, however, pre-empted such a request by ruling out any such possibility in advance. The president's loyalty lay with the 'Constitution and the integrity of the Federal Republic'. America and the international workingmen's movement might share mutual interests and even mutual affection, but the United States would retain its independence, its institutions and its capacity for self-government. 'I have understood well that the duty of self-preservation rests solely with the American people; but I have at the same time been aware that favor or disfavor of foreign nations might have a material influence in enlarging or prolonging the struggle with disloyal men in which this country is engaged.'²⁵² Again, Lincoln emphasizes that the people of the United States take responsibility for their own future. The politics of foreign nations influence this process, but they are not a part of it.

The so-called Realist school of thought in international relations theory suggests that this is the normal state of affairs in world politics. International affairs, as the title of Hans Morgenthau's seminal Realist work would have it, consist of 'politics among nations'. Politics within nations and politics among transnational social groups are mere appendages, and one is entitled to ignore their effect on global events. Likewise, Realists dismiss the idea that emotion or moral principle can play a significant role in international politics. They feel that one is more likely to understand world affairs if one ignores these factors.

Although Lincoln prized his republic's constitutional integrity, he rejected the rest of the Realist creed. His very decision to correspond with the workingmen indicates his belief that they, like states, had a role to play in international politics. Nor did Lincoln reject morality. 'Circumstances ...', he acknowledged, 'induce me especially to expect that if justice and good faith should be practiced by the United States, they would encounter no hostile influence on the part of Great Britain.'²⁵³ Moreover, Lincoln anticipated 'admiration, esteem and the most reciprocal feelings of friendship' between Britain's workingmen and the United States. Lincoln hoped to see his country live in affectionate harmony with other free nations, but, unlike many who propound such ideals, he did not hold America's own freedom to be negotiable.

The limits of Manifest Destiny

The United States survived its civil war with its sovereignty intact. Reflecting on the conflict, Cassius Clay, America's plenipotentiary to Russia, noted:

Since steam can throw, in twelve days or less, the entire navies of Europe on our country, it is useless to deceive ourselves with the idea that we can isolate ourselves from European interventions.

We must make and keep a navy equal to any other nation. This we can well do, without jeopardizing our liberties, and will ever be, loyal to the *Union*: and incapable of domestic tyranny. Here has been the secret of English liberty – a *small army* and a *large navy*. Let us go, and do likewise.²⁵⁴

Other prominent Americans, most notably Alfred Thayer Mahan, took up and expanded this argument. Not only did these thinkers believe that the US needed a navy to defend its coasts, but they emphasized America's need for a fleet to protect its commercial shipping. Fleets require ports, and the coal-fired steamships of the late 1800s were particularly dependent on refuelling stations. For the United States to build a world-class navy, it needed to secure overseas bases to support its fleet. In the same vein, it needed to be wary of other powers that sought to establish military ports along its trading routes.

America's founders envisioned their country expanding in order to insulate itself from foreign intervention on the land. To a naval advocate such as Mahan, it was only natural for America to continue that process on the sea. The economic value of territory and the emotional desire to aggrandize the US gave Americans further reasons to move outward. In practice, however, the politics of America's further expansion were not so simple.

In 1803, Jefferson had been able to articulate clear reasons why America needed Louisiana. The president had then moved expeditiously to buy the territory. Polk's conquest of California was more controversial, and one is free to debate the question of whether or not Polk's justification for the war was anything more than a convenient pretext. Nevertheless, the link between US interests and US actions seems straightforward. Jefferson could argue that he was acting to ensure the future of America's system of government, and, although Polk's action carried a stronger taint of greed, he could do the same.

The thinking behind America's expansion in the late nineteenth century was murkier. Some, certainly, portrayed expansion across the oceans as a logical continuation of expansion across the continent. Nevertheless, the more America expanded, the more dangers it incurred and the stronger the arguments of the anti-imperialists became. Furthermore, although America may have had strategic reasons to expand, these do not always seem to have been the actual reasons why its leaders chose expansion.

Secretary of State Seward was eager to acquire territory that would help America to expand into Canada, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Scarcely a year after the guns

of the Civil War fell silent, he began negotiating to buy a number of islands in the West Indies from Denmark.²⁵⁵ Seward also dreamed of buying Iceland, Greenland, Culebra, Culebrita, St Bartholomew Island, St Pierre, Martinique, Tigre Island and, according to rumour, Borneo and Fiji.²⁵⁶ Congress, however, balked at the cost. In the end, Seward's only success at expanding US territory was his purchase of Alaska from Russia.

President Ulysses S. Grant, historian Charles S. Campbell tells us, had no clear plan for American expansion.²⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Grant was an 'instinctive expansionist, a man with an elemental conviction that the acquisition of some places would increase United States power and that this was self-evidently desirable'.²⁵⁸ In 1869, Grant negotiated a treaty to annex the Caribbean island of Santo Domingo. Santo Domingo occupied a strategic position near the Central American isthmus and the future site of any trans-America canal.²⁵⁹ Santo Domingo's leader, Buenaventura Baez, wanted the US to take over his country before his domestic political opponents overthrew him, and Grant was happy to oblige.

Many Americans, however, were reluctant to accept Santo Domingo's population into the US body politic. Many Americans resisted annexing the island out of a racist distaste for its dark-skinned people. Others merely felt that it was wrong for one race to take land from another. 'Already', in the words of Senator Charles Sumner, 'by a higher statute is that island set apart to darker-skinned people. It is theirs by right of possession, by their sweat and blood mingling with the soil; by tropical position; by its burning sun, and by unalterable laws of climate'.²⁶⁰ Accordingly, the Senate refused to ratify Grant's treaty of annexation.

In the 1870s, however, the United States became more deeply involved in island politics. In 1875, an American adventurer named Albert B. Steinberger resolved a political squabble in Samoa and set himself up as prime minister.²⁶¹ Steinberger irritated the German, British and American consuls there, who eventually had him abducted and deported. The Samoans subsequently appealed to both Britain and America for protection against Germany.

The Samoans hoped that America would annex their islands, or at least make them a protectorate. Assistant Secretary of State Frederick Seward, William Seward's son, negotiated with the Samoan envoy. Seward warned the islanders of his country's 'strong opposition to the acquisition of any islands, near or remote, inhabited by any race but our own'.²⁶² America agreed only to employ its 'good offices' on Samoa's behalf. In return, the islanders granted the US Navy a base at Pago Pago.²⁶³

Legally, the United States had committed itself to practically nothing. Nevertheless, its involvement with Samoa deepened. Foreigners in the Samoan islands used the town of Apia as a headquarters. In 1879, Britain and Germany resolved to take this town out of native hands and govern it jointly. The American consul accepted their invitation to participate in the council governing Apia.²⁶⁴

In the early 1880s, native Samoans attacked German property. The Germans responded by seizing Apia and the nearby peninsula of Mulinuu.²⁶⁵ President Cleveland and his Secretary of State, Thomas Bayard, found Germany's heavy-

handed behaviour disturbing. They directed their consul in Samoa to protest at Germany's actions. The Germans confided that they planned to take over Samoa, but promised to respect America's rights.

Shortly afterwards, a band of Samoans rose up against their king. Many believed, probably rightly, that Germany had instigated the revolt.²⁶⁶ The US consul in Samoa responded by declaring Samoa a 'temporary protectorate'. Cleveland's government disavowed his action, and Germany dispatched four warships to the area.²⁶⁷

The Germans invaded the islands. America sent a warship of its own to the region, followed soon after by two more. US-backed Samoan forces defeated German troops in a battle at a place called Fangalili. The Germans responded by shelling the islands viciously, taking no precautions to spare American property.²⁶⁸ War seemed likely.

At that point, a hurricane struck the islands, sinking both the German and the American fleets. Sobered by this event, America, Germany and Britain negotiated a solution to the conflict. The three powers agreed to leave Samoa nominally independent, but to appoint a 'justice' with the power to adjudicate all future disputes among themselves and the Samoans. For the first time in history, the US formally agreed to help govern a foreign nation.²⁶⁹

The United States also took an increasingly proprietary interest in Hawaii. As Secretary of State James G. Blaine wrote in 1881:

The situation of the Hawaiian islands, giving them the strategic control of the North Pacific, brings their possession within the range of questions of purely American policy, as much so as that of the Isthmus itself. . . . [Hawaii] holds in the western sea much the same position as Cuba in the Atlantic. It is the key to maritime domination of the Pacific States, as Cuba is the key to the Gulf trade . . . under no circumstances can the United States permit any change in the territorial control of either which would cut it adrift from the American system, whereto they both indispensably belong.²⁷⁰

America had restrained itself from attempting to annex these islands. Nevertheless, as Chinese immigrants arrived in greater numbers, John L. Stevens, the US minister to Hawaii, commented that a further influx could force the US to change its policy. Non-interference depended on 'the perpetuity of the rule of the native race as an independent government'.²⁷¹

Hawaii's white residents revolted against the native monarchy in 1887, forcing the king to grant them greater powers.²⁷² Two years later, royalists staged a feeble counter-revolution. The royalist uprising failed, and the US landed marines to keep order. In the aftermath, Stevens called for America to annex the islands, and went so far as to support pro-American factions in Hawaii. Queen Liliuokalani surrendered to the minister's forces, but the US government returned her to her throne, reining in Stevens.²⁷³

Royalists continued to fight the white-skinned pro-annexation party in Hawaii. Meanwhile, America's new president, Grover Cleveland, rejected his predecessor's

aggressive stance towards the islands and invited Congress to develop a Hawaii policy.²⁷⁴ Many senators echoed Blaine, noting the islands' economic value and strategic importance. The debate, however, revolved largely around the moral question of whether the US should, in Senator George G. Vest's words, abandon its traditional outlook and 'venture upon the great colonial system of the European powers'.²⁷⁵ The House of Representatives concluded that the US should remain aloof.

The Senate added the following, noting only that the US could not allow other nations to intervene where it had abstained:

Resolved: That of right it belongs wholly to the people of the Hawaiian Islands to establish and maintain their own form of government and domestic polity; that the United States ought in no wise to interfere therein, and that any intervention in the political affairs of these islands will be regarded as an act unfriendly to the United States.²⁷⁶

In 1897, Americans confronted the possibility that foreigners might intervene in Hawaii. The Japanese had begun to emigrate to the islands. Hawaii's Japanese population had gone from 116 in 1883 to 24,407, over 20 per cent of the total population.²⁷⁷ When Hawaii's government attempted to turn away a shipload of 1,174 Japanese immigrants, Japan's government sent a warship to Honolulu.²⁷⁸

The Japanese minister to Hawaii publicly hinted that his country was considering war.²⁷⁹ In response, the US Navy drafted plans to fight Japan for control of the islands. McKinley negotiated with the Hawaiian government and concluded a treaty by which to annex the islands.²⁸⁰ Once again, the US Congress debated the question of whether to take over Hawaii.

Again, the moral question of whether a republic should seize colonies played a critical role in the debate. Some invoked the example of ancient Rome, arguing that imperial expansion had corrupted Rome's free institutions.²⁸¹ Many held that it would be wrong for the United States to take over Hawaii against the will of its people.²⁸² Racially prejudiced Americans feared the consequences of giving what one writer called the 'detested and dangerous Asiatic' a voice in American politics.²⁸³ Sugar-beet growers opposed annexation out of fear that Hawaii would flood the US with cheap cane sugar.²⁸⁴

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a resolution in support of annexation. Some Americans had accused their country of aggression for its role in overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy and installing a more pliable government in its place. The Senate said that, even if this charge was true, it was no more significant than the fact that the French had helped overthrow the British monarchy in America.²⁸⁵ The Senate's argument seems to be based on similar assumptions to Senator Douglas's claim that American imperialism was of a sort that liberated foreign peoples, rather than enslaving them.

On a more pragmatic note, the senators observed that 'it is no longer a question of whether Hawaii should be controlled by native Hawaiians or by some foreign

people; but the question is, what foreign people shall control Hawaii?'.²⁸⁶ Given this fact, the Senate took no shame in noting Hawaii's importance to the defence of the United States: 'By simply keeping other nations out of Hawaii the United States will thereby secure almost absolute immunity from naval attack on its Pacific coast for the simple reason that their [other countries'] bases are too far away to be made available.'²⁸⁷

Throughout the Hawaiian debate, tensions had risen between America and Spain. Cuban rebels were fighting to liberate their island from Spanish rule. Many Americans wanted the US to intervene on behalf of the revolutionaries. When the battleship U.S.S. *Maine* blew up in Havana harbour, many Americans – probably wrongly – blamed the Spanish. By the spring of 1898, the US Congress was devoting so much time to the brewing war with Spain that it temporarily set the issue of Hawaii aside.

Historians continue to debate the origins of the Spanish–American war.²⁸⁸ Certainly, there were American statesmen, notably Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, who appreciated the strategic value of acquiring Spain's colonies.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, there is little evidence that President McKinley intentionally provoked the Spanish in the way that Polk appears to have intentionally provoked the Mexicans. Even historian Charles A. Beard, who interprets the Spanish–American war as an American power grab, concedes that 'the letters and papers of the time now open to students reveal no little confusion in official minds'.²⁹⁰ The Cuban revolt had preoccupied Americans for years. McKinley had strong personal feelings about Spain's harsh treatment of the Cubans, but he took no action until Spanish rule gave way to anarchy.²⁹¹

The US dispatched the *Maine* to monitor riots in Havana, but did not intervene in the fighting. When the *Maine* blew up, McKinley initially attributed the disaster to an accident.²⁹² The administration withheld judgement until after the report of the navy's board of inquiry.²⁹³ Even after the board concluded that someone had deliberately destroyed the *Maine* with a submarine mine, the United States government refrained from accusing the Spanish government of sanctioning the act.²⁹⁴ The US did, however, request reparations from Spain, and its increasingly stringent demands led to war.

In short, the McKinley administration does not appear to have acted purely on the basis of strategic calculations. Some argue that the United States acted, not for reasons of geopolitics, but for reasons of economics. John A. Hobson suggests that America's 'dominant directive motive' in the Spanish–American war was actually 'the demand for markets and for profitable investment by the exporting and financial classes'.²⁹⁵ One must, however, note that American businessmen tended to oppose the war.

The one noteworthy exception to this principle is that of the American sugar magnates. Sugar tycoons owned property in Cuba. Their holdings would undoubtedly have been safer if the US had taken control of the island. The sugar lobby contributed heavily to political campaigns and had a strong voice in US politics. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that sugar interests actively sought a war with

Spain.²⁹⁶ Senators Nelson W. Aldrich and William B. Allison, both noted for their ties to the sugar industry, actually spoke against war.²⁹⁷

The rest of America's business community strongly opposed military action. After the depression of 1893, businessmen were reluctant to face a new round of turmoil.²⁹⁸ Furthermore, many feared that war would strengthen the supporters of free silver.²⁹⁹ Indeed, supporters of the Cuban revolutionaries often saw corporate interests as an obstacle. 'I have had . . . hundreds of letters from businessmen all over the country . . . protesting against this whole crusade,' wrote Senator Eugene Hale in 1896. 'The business interests and the stock market [in opposing the war] do not represent the sentiment of 70,000,000 people of our great Republic.'³⁰⁰

As Germany and Russia forcibly seized enclaves in China, American business interests reconsidered their pacifism. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Goluchowski, had urged all Europeans to 'fight shoulder to shoulder' against 'destructive competition with transoceanic countries'.³⁰¹ Germany and Russia appeared to be following his advice by freezing US business interests out of their newly conquered zones of influence. Faced with these developments, the New York *Journal of Commerce* 'came out not only for a stern insistence on complete equality of rights in China, but unreservedly also for an isthmian canal, the acquisition of Hawaii, and a material increase in the navy – three measures which it had hitherto strenuously opposed'.³⁰² The *Journal* did not, however, call for foreign conquest, and business interests do not appear to have been of more than secondary importance in touching off the Spanish–American war.

Public sentiment played a more significant role in causing hostilities.³⁰³ This sentiment, in one historian's words, 'scarcely ran beyond assistance to "the heroic Cubans" struggling for independence'.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, even this cause is insufficient to explain the war, since, despite the excesses of so-called 'yellow journalists', both the public and the press behaved relatively responsibly.³⁰⁵ Americans, in short, had many reasons to fight Spain, but neither officials nor the public had thought them through in a coherent way. As Spain 'lost control of Cuba', US leaders felt compelled, in the words of the Republican party presidential platform, to 'actively use its influence' to restore order.³⁰⁶

One can quibble about the origins of any war. Nevertheless, the Spanish–American War seems to be one with many indirect causes and no direct ones. This suggests that US leaders did not plan the war in the way that Lincoln planned to keep foreign powers from intervening in the Civil War or Jefferson planned to buy Louisiana. Rather, the statesmen of the 1880s and 1890s allowed pressures for war to mount. Eventually, those pressures grew so great that McKinley responded to them. In the words of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, 'All men in this country are agreed to-day . . . that this situation must end. We can not go on indefinitely with this strain, this suspense and this uncertainty, this tottering on the verge of war.'³⁰⁷

To adopt a recently fashionable bit of management jargon, America's entry into the Spanish–American War was reactive rather than proactive. This does not necessarily mean that McKinley or his predecessors followed the wrong policy, nor does it absolve the United States of imperialism. Statesmanship frequently has

more to do with managing one's affairs prudently than with advancing one's interests boldly. Likewise, a crime of opportunism is still a crime.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli warns us to be wary of allowing Fortuna to dictate our course. As the US government became more deeply involved in overseas affairs, it found itself exposed to external forces at more points. These forces pushed it into war. American strategists may have been pleased with the outcome, but they should not have been sanguine about this process.

The debate resumed

After the Spanish–American war, Americans resumed their debate over the issue of whether it was wise and right for the US to acquire new territory overseas. The Congressional resolution that authorized McKinley to use force against Spain also disavowed any intention of annexing Cuba.³⁰⁸ Admiral George Dewey's swift and total victory over the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay, however, stimulated Americans' desire to take Spain's other colonies for themselves. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce petitioned the president to keep the Philippines 'with a view to strengthening our trade relations with the Orient'.³⁰⁹ The East Coast periodical *United States Investor* echoed these sentiments, as did numerous senators.³¹⁰

After the initial excitement, anti-imperialists returned to prominence. Numerous senators revived the example of ancient Rome.³¹¹ Labour unions opposed imperial expansion, as did farmers. Samuel Gompers, representing the American Federation of Labor, warned of an 'inundation of Mongolians to overwhelm the free laborers of our country'.³¹²

Carl Schurz, a prominent spokesman for the American Anti-Imperialist League, warned that annexing Spain's colonies would 'aggravate our race troubles, to bring upon us the constant danger of war, and to subject our people the galling burden of increasing armaments'.³¹³ Schurz listed five reasons why such annexations would be more dangerous than America's earlier acts of expansion:

1. All the former acquisitions were on this continent, and, excepting Alaska, contiguous to our borders.
2. They were situated, not in the tropical, but in the temperate zone, where democratic institutions thrive and where our people could migrate in mass.
3. They were but very thinly peopled – in fact, without any population that would have been in the way of a new settlement.
4. They could be organized as territories in the usual manner, with the expectation that they would presently come into the Union as self-governing states with populations substantially homogenous to our own.
5. They did not require a material increase of our army or navy, either for their subjection to our rule or for their defense against any probably foreign attack provoked by their being in our possession.³¹⁴

Schurz went on to emphasize the dangers of admitting Spain's former colonies as states. This, he noted, would give 'Malays', 'Tagals', 'Spanish creoles' and the 'negroes of the West Indies' a place in the US government.³¹⁵ Nevertheless, to maintain the territories as permanent colonies would, 'for the first time since the abolition of slavery', establish 'two kinds of Americans: Americans of the first class, who enjoy the privilege of taking part in our government in accordance with our old constitutional principles, and Americans of the second class, who are to be ruled in a substantially arbitrary fashion by Americans of the first class'.³¹⁶ The US would, once again, be a house divided.

And I warn the American people that a democracy cannot so deny its faith as to the vital conditions of its being – it cannot long play the king over subject populations without creating within itself ways of thinking and habits of action most dangerous to its own vitality – most dangerous especially to those classes of society which are the least powerful in the assertion and the most helpless in the defense of their rights.³¹⁷

Anti-imperialists, however, tended to be older politicians, and their public appeal had dwindled.³¹⁸ Supporters of expansion, meanwhile, attempted to seize the moral high ground by arguing not only that America had the right to rule Spain's Pacific colonies, but that it had a duty to do so. 'We will not renounce our part', Senator Albert J. Beveridge declared, 'in the mission of our race, trustees under God, of the civilization of the world.'³¹⁹ Even at the time, anti-imperialists pointed out the hypocrisy of such arguments.³²⁰ Many Americans, however, found them persuasive.

Henry Cabot Lodge defended the annexation of the Philippines in more reasoned terms. Lodge acknowledged that he had 'ever considered it the cardinal principle of American statesmanship to advocate policies which would operate for the benefit of the people of the United States'.³²¹ To those who saw considerations of the economic value of the Philippines as sordid, he retorted that, to him, that value meant 'wages and employment to a large number of American farmers and working-men'.³²² Lodge also emphasized the importance of having a base near China to counter advances by other powers, notably Russia.

Nevertheless, Lodge maintained that America's colonial expansion would have a benevolent effect throughout the region. The Chinese, he noted, needed protection from Russian incursions as much as American merchants. For the Philippines, he proposed that the US 're-establish civil government', provide fair courts, protect 'persons and property', ensure freedom of religion and 'inaugurate and carry forward, in the most earnest and liberal way, a comprehensive system of popular education'.³²³ Then, he proposed that, 'as rapidly as conditions permit', the United States should 'bestow upon them the conditions for home rule'. Although Lodge admitted that the US would have to begin by imposing its system on an unwilling people, he maintained that the Philippines were not yet in a state in which they

could maintain free institutions without such interference. Lodge went on to point out that the US had established itself in Louisiana, Florida, Alaska and California in much the same fashion, and that its actions had been genuinely beneficial for the inhabitants of those regions.³²⁴

To those who warned that annexing the Philippines would force the US to increase military spending, Lodge made two answers. Lodge rejected alarmist estimates of the number of troops the US would need to maintain order in the Philippines. Spain had governed with 15,000 men. Lodge saw no reason why the United States could not hope to suppress the ongoing insurrection and reduce its forces to a similar level.³²⁵ The economic advantages of controlling the Philippines, Lodge argued, would compensate for the cost of 15,000 troops. Regarding the navy, Lodge stated that, ‘so far as the Navy goes, our present fleet is now entirely inadequate for our own needs. The Philippines will entail upon us no naval expenses that we should not have in any event with a proper naval establishment.’³²⁶

Meanwhile, Americans had to consider the possibility that, if they did not acquire Spain’s former colonies, others might. Scarcely two months after Dewey’s victory, French, German, British and Japanese warships arrived in the Philippines.³²⁷ In terms of armaments and ship tonnage, Germany’s fleet was as strong as Dewey’s own.³²⁸ Great Britain publicly stated that it would be willing to annex the islands if the US did not. Japan offered to participate in a multinational protectorate.³²⁹

Admiral von Diederich of the German fleet repeatedly violated Dewey’s blockade of Manila Bay.³³⁰ Germany also approached Spain to propose that a neutral country – such as itself – occupy the Philippines for the duration of the war. Von Bulow, the German Foreign Minister, openly stated that ‘His Majesty the Emperor deems it a principal object of German policy to leave unused no opportunity which may arise from the Spanish–American War to obtain naval fulcra in East Asia’.³³¹ The British expressed their sentiments by symbolically moving their ships between the German and American fleets, warning von Diederich that, if he chose to attack Dewey, the US admiral would not stand alone.³³²

America’s imperialists ultimately won the argument. The US acquired both the formerly Spanish colonies and Hawaii as well. Cuba remained independent, although the US exerted a great deal of informal control over its affairs. Clearly, America had increased its commercial and military reach.

At first glance, it appears that naval expansionists such as Clay, Seward and Mahan were largely right. No one can argue that the American way of life would have been safer over the past century if the dominant nations in the Pacific had been Germany and Japan. The anti-imperialists may have made valid moral points, but their more lurid predictions failed to come true. Neither Hawaii’s statehood nor colonial rule in the Philippines greatly disrupted the functioning of the US Constitution.

Nevertheless, the Spanish–American war contributed to trends that would ultimately kill American citizens and complicate American politics. Psychologically, the US had taken a crucial step towards becoming a regular participant in international affairs. America’s acquisitions also multiplied both its material interests

and its legal obligations abroad. Anti-imperialists were right to note that the US was taking on open-ended military commitments, and they might also have noted that the US was setting itself against the other rising global powers of the day.

From clarity to confusion: the period in review

The American founders faced much the sort of issues Machiavelli described. For Americans to be free, they had to control their foreign obligations. To achieve such control, they needed political institutions capable of doing so. Americans also needed to control the ports and waterways that sustained their economy, and to minimize the influence of foreign powers on their continent.

America's founders recognized these needs, and laid the foundations for achieving them. In other words, they developed a long-term strategy of the sort Machiavelli might have suggested. The US Declaration of Independence was a Machiavellian moment in Pocock's sense. Americans faced many of the problems Machiavelli described, and they responded with a largely Machiavellian logic.

In other ways, America's principles and Machiavelli's logic were in conflict. To the Florentine, America's commercialism and anti-militarism would have seemed highly questionable, not to mention America's endorsement of God-given individual rights. Machiavelli also warned that an expanding republic would experience social tensions. Americans managed to avoid confronting these difficulties for over sixty years.

One reason why the Americans were able to defer their moment of reckoning for so long may be that, as Chapter 2 suggested, Machiavelli's logic is incomplete. Factors such as trade, technology, a relatively unpopulated frontier and an inclusive political system facilitated America's expansion. The Florentine downplayed these factors, perhaps deliberately. Early American history also seems to have borne out the theory that large republics can manage their affairs more effectively than small ones. Again, Machiavelli contended the opposite.

Eventually, Machiavelli's logic began to reappear. This was also the point at which tensions between Machiavellian imperatives and American ideals began to emerge. The Mexican War suggested that there were social, political and perhaps moral limits to America's growth. Polk's conduct raised troubling questions about America's national identity. America's Civil War interrupted the debate over these issues, but it did not resolve any of the fundamental questions.

For the Union, the foreign policy imperatives of the American Civil War were those of the country's founders. If Americans were to maintain their liberty, they had to maintain the institutions that preserved it. In the same vein, they had to defend these institutions' right to make decisions for themselves. The British, French and Spanish governments might have preferred to see the Union compromise with the Confederacy, but Lincoln upheld the principle that the decision belonged to the United States alone. On these points, Machiavelli and the various founders could have agreed. Lincoln's genius was to perceive the full importance of these points, and to overcome all obstacles in acting upon them.

After the Civil War, Americans turned their attention back to the problems of imperialism. The US overcame the problems of absorbing former Mexican territories at least as effectively as Rome overcame the problems of expanding its domain. Machiavelli, who admired Rome, would have approved. Americans came to share this sentiment. Even among the most principled anti-imperialists, few suggested giving California back to Mexico. Nevertheless, Americans encountered further opportunities to expand, and the grand strategy of their founders was no longer sufficient to guide their actions.

In 1776, Americans took collective responsibility for their own destiny. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Americans found that their old ideas of their place in the world were no longer enough to deal with the realities they were facing. If it had become difficult to justify further expansion in terms of freedom and republican self-government, it had become equally difficult to justify isolation. Without generally recognized principles to guide their actions, America's leaders could only react to events as they thought best at the time.

This increased the influence of their prejudices, character flaws and personal idiosyncrasies. Jefferson adhered to the principle of keeping the US out of European entanglements despite his personal sympathy for Revolutionary France. There was no similar principle to spur a relatively cautious Democrat such as Grover Cleveland to annex Hawaii, nor was there any generally recognized injunction that might have restrained the expansionist Republicans of the McKinley administration from seizing the Philippines. Cleveland and McKinley might have compromised in order to accommodate their political opponents, but they did not share the kind of common principles that would have given them a common view of such problems.

Ambiguity about America's international role also increased the influence of journalism, intellectual fashion, economic trends and unfounded public opinion. Without general principles to refer to, leaders would find it harder than ever to overcome the temptation to put the pressures of the moment ahead of longer-term interests of free government. 'World politics', American scholar Paul S. Reinsch warned *circa* 1900, 'appear to be entering a stage where grim, silent, passionate forces will hurry humanity along, like leaves in a torrent.'³³³ Americans had tamed those forces in the Machiavellian moment of the eighteenth century, and American leaders of the twentieth century had to continue in that tradition.

WORLD POLITICS, WORLD WARS

President Theodore Roosevelt attempted to give his country a fresh sense of direction. Like America's founders, Roosevelt differed with Machiavelli on significant points, but, again like the founders, he frequently partook of the Florentine's logic. Over the course of his career, Roosevelt presented a collection of principles that could, in theory, form the basis for a new American grand strategy. His points about globalization, the common interests of putatively civilized nations, America's obligations to the world and the dangers of selfish complacency among the citizenry foreshadow many arguments that remain influential in the twenty-first century.

Roosevelt believed that the world was becoming more interdependent. If America hoped to retain control over its own destiny, it would have to meet the challenges of the changing world. To meet these challenges, the nation would have to rid itself of effeminacy and return to the 'strenuous virtues' of its early days.¹ In this, Roosevelt parallels Machiavelli, who held that republics succumb to the vagaries of fortune when they become corrupt. Machiavelli, like Roosevelt, advised republics to recreate the struggles of their founding in order to purge themselves of corruption.²

In 1897, Roosevelt stated:

As our modern life goes on, ever accelerating in rapidity, and the nations are drawn together for good and for evil and this nation grows in comparison with friends and rivals, it is impossible to adhere to the policy of isolation. We cannot avoid responsibilities, and we must meet them in a noble or ignoble manner, hoping to escape them or shirk them, or by meeting them manfully, as our fathers did. We cannot avoid, as a nation, the fact that on the east and west we look across the waters at Europe and Asia.³

To meet their responsibilities, Roosevelt held, people must 'pay the price of greatness'.⁴ Roosevelt called on Americans to embrace 'hardiness, manliness and courage' while rejecting 'the anaemic man of culture', 'the good quiet soul', 'excessive urban growth' and 'the love of luxury'.⁵ Although Roosevelt recognized trade and industry as sources of strength, he felt that they should serve the higher

purposes of national greatness, not the base purposes of making businessmen richer and life more convenient.⁶ ‘Most ominous of all’ was the fall in the birth rate throughout the civilized world.⁷ Roosevelt pointed to China as an example of what could become of a country that valued wealth and comfort above virility and military power.⁸

How does one persuade businessmen, intellectuals and complacent householders to return to the manly virtues of the warrior? Machiavelli was explicit: one must reduce them to a state of terror.⁹ One must overturn the social order that allows people to pursue private interests in peace, strip away the luxuries they have managed to accrete, and return them to a position in which they must draw on boldness, toughness and community solidarity to survive. Roosevelt did not describe the process of renewal in detail, but he repeatedly argued that the American national character would benefit from war.¹⁰

In other words, Roosevelt proposed two of the main differences between Americanism and Machiavellianism in the Florentine’s favour. Roosevelt’s anti-business beliefs put him in Machiavelli’s camp against Hamilton. Furthermore, Roosevelt’s antipathy towards comfortable lifestyles is difficult to reconcile with the principle that all people have an equal right to the ‘pursuit of happiness’. Roosevelt suggests that the warrior’s happiness should take precedence over that of the ‘good quiet soul’, and that the pacifist Quakers are not even entitled to ‘the privilege of living in a free community’.¹¹

Roosevelt enthusiastically criticized America’s founders, but it seems unlikely that he intended to repudiate the Declaration of Independence.¹² Therefore, before concluding that his calls for national regeneration are incompatible with Jefferson’s ‘self-evident’ truths, one must consider other ways of interpreting Roosevelt’s position. A disciple of Rousseau might argue that, far from denying un-heroic people the freedom to pursue their limited visions of happiness, Roosevelt’s militarism liberates them to pursue the greater happiness of sacrificing their personal satisfactions to the general will of a democratic community. This, however, is not compatible with the American charter. The Declaration of Independence makes it clear that people receive their rights, not through their membership in any human association, but directly from God. No government, democratic or otherwise, can justly interpose itself between individuals and their Creator.

Roosevelt might also have responded that he was a passionate believer in individual liberty. His true fear, he might have maintained, was that his countrymen might grow too pusillanimous to defend their rights. America’s founders would have agreed that free people must maintain their strength and vigilance in order to remain free. Nevertheless, when one examines Roosevelt’s programme in more detail, one sees that it was incompatible with the DOI. His ideas would not have reformed the United States; they would have transformed it.

Roosevelt saw war as salutary for the national character. America’s founders saw war as necessary, but feared its effects on the national character. Benjamin Franklin remonstrated with Quakers. Roosevelt merely scoffed that they were as undesirable as citizens as they were as duellists.¹³

Roosevelt and the founders did not differ on the effects of war. All agreed that warfare encouraged aggressive, commanding personalities. All agreed that war compelled the nation to mobilize its youth for combat and its wealth for military expenditure. All agreed that war forced men to endanger their lives and, in Roosevelt's words, 'all they hold dear'.¹⁴ To Roosevelt, however, these were desirable goals, whereas, to the founders, they were lamentable side effects. Roosevelt and the founders differed on means because they differed on ends.

America's founders hoped to see Americans grow richer and more secure through peaceful trade. Hamilton wanted to see American firms prosper rapidly through manufacturing, whereas Jefferson would have preferred to see individual Americans prospering more modestly but more independently through agriculture, but both shared a desire for abundance and tranquillity. Roosevelt undoubtedly appreciated peace and prosperity as well, but he subordinated these objectives to a fundamentally different national ideal. 'The bolder and the stronger peoples', he felt, were competing for 'the domination of the world. Let us therefore boldly face the life of strife.'¹⁵

On these issues, Roosevelt's ideas continue to parallel Machiavelli's writings on national regeneration. Although Machiavelli advised republics to reproduce the struggles of their founding, he did not insist that they script precisely the same outcome.¹⁶ Sparta, he noted, lived successfully under the same laws for over eight hundred years. Less perfect republics, however, benefit from occasional innovation.

On other issues, Roosevelt and Machiavelli are at odds. Machiavelli advised republics to limit their liabilities in foreign affairs. Roosevelt never fully defined America's responsibilities, but he seemed to conceive of them in grand terms.¹⁷ In 1912, he declared that Armageddon had arrived, and that his supporters were 'battling for the Lord'.¹⁸

In this battle, America's national interests came first. 'I am simply an American first and last, and therefore hostile to any power that wrongs us.'¹⁹ Roosevelt presumably had his own country in mind when he declared that peace would come, 'not to the coward or the timid, but to him who will do no wrong and is too strong to allow others to wrong him'.²⁰ Nevertheless, Roosevelt did not suggest that America should rule the world. Roosevelt's ultimate loyalty was to what he called 'civilization'.

Roosevelt believed that other peoples could attain this quality. Britain, in his eyes, was certainly civilized, and he was eager for the British to remain militarily strong.²¹ Roosevelt maintained that all nations had a responsibility to uphold the rights of weaker civilized countries.²² Whereas Machiavelli preferred to dictate even to allies, Roosevelt was glad to salute all civilized countries as partners.

Roosevelt remained ready to crush those whom he defined as barbarians. When, for instance, he seized formerly Colombian territory in order to build the Panama Canal, he compared the Colombians to 'Sicilian or Calabrian bandits' and claimed that they had no right to oppose a project that 'was for the benefit of the entire world'.²³ Indeed, Roosevelt spoke of a 'duty to put down savagery and barbarism', so that peoples living in savage conditions might be 'freed from their chains'.²⁴

In this spirit, he applauded Russia and France when they turned their arms against the ‘hopeless and hideous bloodshed of Algiers and Turkestan’.²⁵

Ultimately, Roosevelt suggested, the destruction of barbarism might pave the way for partial global disarmament:

If China became civilized like Japan . . . if the Turkish Empire was abolished, and all of uncivilized Asia and Africa held by England or France or Russia or Germany, then I believe that we should be within sight of a time when a genuine international agreement could be made by which armies and navies could be reduced to meet merely the needs of internal and international police work.²⁶

In 1915, writing as a private citizen, Roosevelt explicitly advocated world federalism:

What I propose is a working and realizable Utopia. My proposal is that the efficient civilized nations – those that are efficient in war as well as in peace – should join in a world league for the peace of righteousness. This means that they shall by solemn covenant agree as to their respective rights, which shall not be questioned; that they shall agree that all other questions arising between them shall be submitted to a court of arbitration. And that they shall also agree – and here comes the vital and essential part of the whole system – to act with the combined military strength of all of them against any recalcitrant nation.²⁷

The idea of a ‘world league’ bound by solemn covenants and binding judicial procedures need not be anti-Machiavellian. Indeed, if this league aspires to represent the world’s peoples, one could define it as a sort of global republic. One could conceive of its founding as a Machiavellian moment, and one could – quite reasonably – conclude that such a league would be subject to Machiavellian imperatives. A global republic would not, however, be the American republic. The moment that began in 1776 would be over, and another would have begun.

Roosevelt’s foreign policy

Despite his flamboyant ideas, Roosevelt was reserved in his foreign policy. As president, he was most daring in the western hemisphere, where he secured land for the Panama Canal, warned European powers to tread cautiously in Venezuela and asserted the USA’s right to exercise ‘an international police power’ throughout Latin America.²⁸ In Europe, Roosevelt tried to promote the brotherhood of civilized nations by supporting an international court, promoting arms control conferences in The Hague, urging both France and Germany to compromise in their dispute over Morocco and deploring the reciprocal fears that kept Britain and Germany locked in an arms race.²⁹ Roosevelt was apparently more interested in achieving international harmony than in taking credit. When he felt that other countries had

a better chance of concluding an agreement than the United States, he did not hesitate to step aside and offer those countries his quiet support.³⁰

McKinley's Secretary of State, John Hay, had established the so-called Open Door policy in which America sought to keep China stable, neutral and open to trade. In 1900, Chinese rebels known as the Boxers attempted to drive foreigners out of their country. When China's Manchu rulers proved unable (and perhaps unwilling) to put down the Boxers, the US sent troops to participate in a multinational expedition to crush the rebellion. America's bases in the Philippines allowed it to join this campaign swiftly.³¹ Roosevelt, who was vice-president at the time, felt that this proved the value of America's colonial policy.

During his own presidency, Roosevelt had to contend with the danger that foreign powers might conquer China and establish colonies there, excluding the US. After reading Mahan's *The Problem of Asia*, Roosevelt concluded that Russia presented the greatest threat to China's neutrality.³² Although Roosevelt had previously praised the tsars for bringing civilization to Turkestan, he reclassified Russia as a barbarian power. Roosevelt aligned the US with Britain, Germany and Japan in order to keep the Russians in their place.³³

Russia seemed poised to annex Manchuria. In 1903, John Hay suggested encouraging Japan to fight the Russians. 'If we gave them a wink . . . they would fly at the throat of Russia in a moment.'³⁴ Two years later, Japan actually did attack Russia. One can only speculate on the degree to which Roosevelt's diplomacy affected Japan's decision.³⁵

Japan defeated Russia in a series of battles. Roosevelt soon became concerned that Japan itself would rise to dominate East Asia. As the Japanese government exhausted its funds and the Japanese army reached the limits of its capabilities, Tokyo asked the United States to mediate a settlement.³⁶ Roosevelt arranged for peace talks in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. There, he negotiated to trim both Russian and Japanese demands, brokering a compromise peace and preserving a balance of power between the two nations.³⁷

By pitting Russia and Japan against each other, Roosevelt preserved the Open Door policy in China at minimal risk to the US. Such balance-of-power gambits have a venerable history in international relations. America's founders, however, mistrusted the balance-of-power concept. Machiavelli, likewise, wrote that it is dangerous to take the middle path. Better to secure your interests directly, Machiavelli would say, than to trust in complex relationships among outside powers to hold your rivals in check.

Balance-of-power policies have supporters as well as detractors. Nevertheless, the short history of Otto von Bismarck's alliance system and the longer history of Britain's continental diplomacy suggest that such policies require constant maintenance. A country that seeks to maintain such a balance must be ready to intervene whenever one of the other nations seems to be gaining an advantage, even if this means betraying its former allies. For these reasons, a country that tries to enforce a balance of power is likely to make enemies. If it allows its policy to lapse, one of those enemies is likely to rise to power.

Roosevelt's policy of balancing Russia against Japan suffered from precisely these weaknesses. Both the Russians and the Japanese resented the concessions that Roosevelt forced upon them.³⁸ In Japanese cities, mobs rioted against America. Nevertheless, although the Japanese felt stung, they had gained in power. General Leonard Wood and the businessman John Hays Hammond noted that, despite Roosevelt's efforts to moderate Japan's advances, the Japanese remained in a position to launch a new bid for mastery in Asia.³⁹

The Japanese promptly took advantage of their conquest to limit America's trade with Korea, and to establish permanent influence in Manchuria.⁴⁰ In 1908, Roosevelt restored America's deteriorating relations with Japan first by sending his Great White Fleet of battleships around the world (with British logistical help) to demonstrate US naval power and then by concluding a number of treaties to resolve outstanding issues with the Japanese.⁴¹ When the Great White Fleet arrived in Japan, crowds greeted the Americans with applause. The upturn in US-Japanese relations, however, did not outlive Roosevelt's presidency.

American businessmen saw the Japanese as rivals, and competed fiercely with them in China. Furthermore, influential members of the US State Department were reluctant to conciliate Japan. After Roosevelt left office, these diplomats adopted harsh policies that spurred anti-Americanism in Tokyo without doing anything to curb Japan's ability to avenge itself. One cannot hold Roosevelt responsible for the failures of his successors. Nevertheless, many historians have concluded that the path from Portsmouth led straight to Pearl Harbor.⁴²

Roosevelt's legacy

Despite Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy successes, few have consciously emulated him. Contemporary scholars recognize a Wilsonian approach to foreign policy, but few speak of Rooseveltism. This is, perhaps, an oversight, since Roosevelt anticipated many of the issues that have preoccupied American leaders throughout the twentieth century, including the questions of collective security and international organization that concerned Wilson and continue to concern his admirers. Contemporary readers may smile at Roosevelt's bombastic rhetoric, but one cannot dismiss his analysis so easily.

Roosevelt rediscovered the Machiavellian pressures that induce republics to expand, and interpreted them in the context of the twentieth century. He was an early advocate of the now-commonplace principle that America must take an active role in an increasingly interdependent world. Others may debate the questions of whether his imperialism was compatible with his hopes for a world league and whether he conceived of this league in a Machiavellian way. As America became more deeply involved in world politics, all of its leaders encountered both the attractions of empire and the appeal of federation. Roosevelt's presidency offered glimpses of what was to come.

Roosevelt's critique of American culture was prescient as well. Both imperialists and internationalists have found the American people difficult to work with. Both

have sought to reform the American national character. The tension between the expediency of enforcing a Spartan code of ethics and the American regime's claim to govern on the principle of individual rights remains unresolved.

The First World War

'It would be an irony of fate', Woodrow Wilson remarked before his first presidential inauguration, 'if my administration had to deal with foreign affairs.'⁴³ In October 1913, he continued in this un-Rooseveltian vein by declaring that the United States would 'never again seek an additional foot of territory by conquest'.⁴⁴ Although he found it necessary to enforce stability in the western hemisphere by sending troops to Nicaragua, Haiti, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, he resisted calls to escalate these conflicts.⁴⁵ Wilson went so far as to offer Colombia \$25 million as an indemnity for America's role in detaching Panama, although Senate Republicans prevented him from delivering this payment.⁴⁶ In contrast to Roosevelt but in agreement with America's founders, Wilson believed that warfare would degrade the nation's character: 'Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fibre of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.'⁴⁷

When war broke out in Europe, Wilson called on Americans to be 'impartial in thought as well as in deed'.⁴⁸ Wilson hoped both to spare America the loss and moral corrosion of war, and to preserve his country as a 'disinterested influence' that could eventually help the belligerents negotiate a just peace.⁴⁹ His plea for impartiality, however, proved futile. Recent immigrants from Europe fiercely defended their nations of origin, and mainstream newspapers branded the Central Powers as agents of autocracy.⁵⁰ The US diplomatic corps sympathized with the Allies.⁵¹ Private citizens took up collections on behalf of the French, and occasionally volunteered for combat on the Allied side.⁵² When a group of Americans visited the US ambassador to France and asked if they might join the French army, he replied that such a step would be illegal but, 'if I was young and stood in your shoes, by God I know what I would do'.⁵³

Those particular Americans went on to fight in the trenches. Few of their countrymen wanted to emulate them, especially in the early years of the war. There was an active American pacifist movement. During the presidential election of 1916, voters applauded Wilson on the grounds that he had kept their country out of war. The *New York Times* backed the Allied cause on paper, but its editors chided the British for expecting the US to back up its words with action.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, American firms continued to trade with Europe, and they did not hesitate to deal in munitions. Since Britain controlled the seas, America had few opportunities to trade with Britain's enemies. Therefore, the US became a de facto supplier to the Allies. As the Allied nations ran short of capital, US financiers lent them money, tying the French, British and American economies together. Even

critics of America's pro-Allied bias agreed that these trading practices were permitted under international law, but the US commerce with the Allies reinforced America's sentimental attachment to the Allied cause with material interests.⁵⁵

The US had faced a comparable situation during the wars of the French Revolution. In both cases, a substantial fraction of the public sympathized with a particular side. In both cases, America's commercial activities threatened to tie it to various belligerents. George Washington had maintained his country's neutrality. Initially at least, Wilson seems to have been trying to follow Washington's example.

The Allies of the First World War, however, proved more adept at public relations than Genet, not to mention X, Y and Z. Moreover, Washington was able to argue for neutrality on the basis of widely understood strategic principles. Even French sympathizers such as Jefferson accepted the chain of logic that concluded that America could best defend its way of life by staying clear of foreign wars. By the twentieth century, this was no longer so clear.

America's reasons for avoiding entanglements had diminished, and its reasons for accepting them had, if anything, multiplied. The US had developed to the point where it could, if it made the effort, compete with European powers on an equal footing. Although the US had established itself as the only power on the American continent, it had expanded to the point at which it was competing and co-operating with foreign countries again. US actions in the Pacific had established the principle that, when outside powers encroached on American interests, the US would not remain supine. Americans had not, however, made much progress in establishing what interests they viewed as critical.

Theodore Roosevelt, who had proposed a prototype for a new American strategy, was quick to criticize Wilson's passivity. The former president called for America to raise a conscript army of 1,500,000 and join the war on the Allied side.⁵⁶ Roosevelt-era Secretary of State Elihu Root presented a moral and strategic argument for war. 'There is no question about going to war,' Root told the Union League Club of New York. 'Germany is already at war with us.'⁵⁷ On another occasion, he continued this theme:

I hate war, but I welcome the coming of the inevitable at the beginning . . . I say that upon the issue of the war in Europe hangs the question whether America shall, at the close of that war, be turned into one armed camp, or whether America shall be a subject nation. There is no nation on earth – not England, nor France, nor Belgium, not Italy, nor Russia, with a greater stake in the success of the Allies in this war against German militarism than the United States. We are able to hold this peaceful meeting . . . and why? Because we are protected by the navies and armies of the Allies!⁵⁸

From a twenty-first-century perspective, one may accuse Root of oversimplifying his argument. As Henry Ford, Representative Oscar Callaway and many

other prominent Americans had noted, the prospect of Germany crushing the Allies and going on to invade the United States remained absurdly remote.⁵⁹ Some twenty-first-century historians would question Root's assumption that Imperial Germany was bent on world domination, although others would warn that there is an element of truth to it.⁶⁰ America's entry into the First World War was not 'inevitable', nor was defeat the only alternative. The United States could have attempted any number of policies, with any number of possible outcomes.

Nevertheless, Root raised points that advocates of passive neutrality could not answer. Germany was, in fact, carrying out covert operations against America. Root's doctrine of welcoming 'the coming of the inevitable' has some validity, and would have served France, Britain and America better than their policies of appeasement and isolation in the 1920s and 1930s. Root was right to note that, if America allowed an aggressive power to grow unchecked, it would eventually find itself forced to turn into a permanent 'armed camp', with all that implies for its economy and its citizens' liberties. Root was also right to note that the military strength of the Allies made the world safer for the United States, and that America could not be indifferent to their fate.

An ostrich-like policy of unreflective isolationism neither accounted for Root's more useful points nor refuted his more dubious assertions. Thus, the United States remained in much the situation it had occupied in the 1890s. Feelings ran high, but those emotions had not united the people behind any coherent policy. Few agreed on any guiding principles or objectives, but an assortment of movements advocated an assortment of contending programmes. In this sort of environment, a spectacular event can precipitate fateful changes in policy. Whether these changes are for better or for worse is likely to remain in the hands of Machiavelli's Fortuna.

On 7 May 1915, a German submarine sank the ocean liner *Lusitania*. One hundred and twenty-eight Americans died in the incident. The *Lusitania* was a British ship, and its cargo included munitions, but the American public was outraged. Wilson declared that he was 'too proud to fight', but even he began to veer away from impartiality. The middle course beckoned, with all that implies.

Wilson and his advisers were convinced that the majority still favoured peace.⁶¹ America also lacked the military strength to join the war in any meaningful way. Nevertheless, Wilson vigorously protested against Germany's submarine campaign, and did not hesitate to use threatening language. The president could not afford to look weak, either at home or abroad.⁶²

Moreover Wilson clung to the principle that the American republic must vindicate every citizen's rights in every instance. When the Senate considered a bill to prevent further crises by forbidding American citizens to travel on armed belligerent vessels, the president responded that, 'for my own part, I cannot consent to any abridgment of the rights of American citizens in any respect. The honor and self-respect of the nation is involved.'⁶³ In this, Wilson asserted the rights of US citizens abroad even more fiercely than Washington, who signed a Neutrality Act warning US citizens that, if they chose to traffic with belligerents, they did so entirely at their own risk.

In March 1916, after two more submarine incidents, Wilson demanded that Germany abandon 'its present methods of submarine warfare' and threatened to sever relations if it did not.⁶⁴ Germany yielded to this ultimatum. The Germans agreed to return to earlier codes of conduct for submarine warfare, in which a submarine could not sink a merchant vessel without ascertaining that it carried contraband and allowing all crew and passengers to disembark.⁶⁵ Wilson had triumphed, but, as he himself admitted, he had also committed his country to a gamble.⁶⁶ If Germany reneged on its pledge, America would have to choose between becoming a laughing stock and going to war.

Meanwhile, Wilson shifted from a policy of minimizing defence spending to one of building an army of 400,000 men and, in his words, 'a navy second to none'.⁶⁷ This was, obviously, a prudent step for a country that was flirting with war. Pacifists could, however, point out the inconsistency between America's preparations for war and America's continued protests of neutrality. Preparedness advocates could not even claim to be arming in order to deter violence, since Wilson himself admitted that '[t]he country is not threatened from any quarter'.⁶⁸

Wilson acknowledged that 'we have never yet sufficiently formulated our program for America with regard to the part she is going to play in the world'.⁶⁹ The president had, however, begun to explore possibilities. Ever since 1914, Wilson's confidant Colonel Edward House had been talking with the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, about the possibility that the US might take an active role in negotiating an end to the European war.⁷⁰ By 1915, the two of them had agreed that the best way to facilitate this would be to convene another convention dealing with the laws of war. By autumn, Grey had proposed a 'League of Nations' binding members to 'side against any Power which broke a treaty' or 'which refused, in case of dispute, to adopt some other method of settlement than that of war'.⁷¹

In May of 1916, Wilson publicly called for such a League. Like Theodore Roosevelt, he had concluded that America could regain its sense of purpose in world affairs by embracing the cause of international organization. On 5 October 1916, Wilson described the moral principles that, in his view, should guide America's new and more cosmopolitan foreign policy:

[W]e ought to have a touchstone. We ought to have a test. We ought to know, whenever we act, what the purpose is, what the ultimate goal is . . . Now the touchstone is this: On our part absolute singleness of heart and purpose in our allegiance to America . . . by upholding the doctrine that is truly American that the States of America were set up to vindicate the rights of man and not the rights of property or the rights of self-aggrandizement and aggression . . . When you are asked, 'Aren't you willing to fight?' reply, yes, you are waiting for something worth fighting for; you are not looking around for petty quarrels, but you are looking about for that sort of quarrel within whose intricacies are written all the texts of the rights of man, you are looking for some cause which will

elevate your spirit, not depress it, some cause in which it seems a glory to shed human blood, if it be necessary, so that all the common compacts of liberty may be sealed with the blood of free men.⁷²

Wilson's aspirations were lofty. His attempt to transform America's process of stumbling towards war into a process of marching towards a better world was surely admirable. Nevertheless, one must note that he had adopted a more pious version of Roosevelt's grand strategy of imperialism. One must also note that this new strategy differs sharply from America's founding principles. Where America's founders claimed to be securing the liberties, and indeed property, of American citizens, Wilson and Roosevelt were proud to offer up their citizens in a higher cause.

In theory, Wilson may have believed that the League was worth fighting for. Nevertheless, the president remained appalled by warfare, and all too aware that his country had allowed events to slip beyond its control. On 31 January 1917, Germany informed the United States that it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare and that it would attack American-flagged ships. Wilson severed diplomatic relations with Berlin, but refused to declare war until Germany committed 'actual overt acts' against the US. For several weeks, Wilson struggled to get Germany to back down short of war.

The Germans, however, promptly torpedoed the British liner *Laconia*, killing twelve people, including Americans. Meanwhile, US officials intercepted the so-called Zimmerman Telegram, which proved that Germany was trying to incite Mexico to join it in any war against the United States. The Zimmerman Telegram also suggested that Germany might form a similar anti-American alliance with Japan.⁷³ In private, Wilson agonized over what he was about to do, but, on 2 April, he asked Congress to declare war.⁷⁴

Wilson blamed the war on America's loss of direction: 'Matters lying outside our own life as a nation and over which we had no control . . . despite our wish to keep free of them, have drawn us more and more irresistibly into their own current and influence.'⁷⁵ Wilson hoped, however, to bring good out of evil. In 1915 and 1916, he had proposed new guiding principles for America's foreign policy. In 1917, he told Congress that America was fighting to put these principles into practice:

[T]he right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for those things which we have always carried nearest our hearts – for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.⁷⁶

As Roosevelt hoped and Wilson feared, war left its mark on America's national character. Whether or not the First World War promoted martial virtues among

America's youth remains open to speculation. Certainly, many American generals who were to distinguish themselves in the Second World War learned their art in the First. As Wilson warned, however, war proved poisonous to tolerance:

People with German names were bullied into Americanizing them; school boards banned the teaching of the German language; Beethoven's music could not be played in Boston; sauerkraut even appeared on menus as liberty cabbage. Not that Germans were the only sufferers. Pacifists, radicals, indeed anyone whose commitment to the war seemed inadequate, were abused, ridiculed and forced into symbolic acts of conformity . . .⁷⁷

The People's Freedom Union, an umbrella group for pacifist, feminist, socialist and anti-discrimination movements of the First World War and post-First World War period, suggested that the 'heresy-hunting' of the war largely inspired the lynchings, Ku Klux Klan revivals and persecutions of immigrants that blighted the 1920s as well.⁷⁸

Far from opposing these trends, Wilson's administration reinforced them with its draconian Espionage and Sedition Acts. This legislation inaugurated such ironies as a law prohibiting 'scurrilous' remarks concerning the Constitution.⁷⁹ On one occasion, the government prosecuted a film producer for the allegedly anti-British themes in his film on the American Revolution. The producer received a ten-year prison term (later commuted to three years) and a \$10,000 fine in a case titled, appropriately enough, *U.S. v. The Spirit of '76*.⁸⁰

Such anecdotes highlight larger developments in the relationship between American citizens and the American government. In 1916, as the US Army began to gear up for war, it had discovered that 'large numbers of men of family and business responsibilities' had volunteered, whereas 'others who had not attained a high economic value were left at home'.⁸¹ For this reason, among others, the US adopted a comprehensive programme of selective service conscription. One may reflect on the progress from the principle that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights to the principle that men have unequal economic value, and are to be allocated to whatever risks, duties and sufferings maximize their utility to the state.

None of Wilson's measures were new. No one should find them surprising. As Imperial Russia was in the process of discovering, internal and external subversion can destroy a state from within. As Britain had already discovered, modern warfare forces states to mobilize all their citizens, whether they are willing or not. If America was to go to war, it had no choice but to discipline its people accordingly.

America had adopted similar measures in the past. Lincoln, for instance, famously overrode the US Constitution to suppress subversion and imprison dangerous individuals. The Union also resorted to conscription. Lincoln, however, was defending the American system of government against a specific threat. Once he had dealt with that threat, he restored America's customary liberties and

constitutional processes. Wilson's war for 'a universal dominion of right' was potentially eternal, for, even if the League of Nations had lived up to the more optimistic expectations, it would have needed to enforce its decisions.

The First World War inspired a diverse and broadly based anti-war movement as well. Pacifists joined forces with feminists, civil libertarians and supporters of related causes. Seldom has the US needed its dissenters more urgently. Contemporary Americans owe this movement their gratitude for sustaining the spirit of the First Amendment.

One cannot, however, ignore the chasm between much of the anti-war movement and the Republic of 1776. Thoreau had pointed out that the American system of government could be improved. The dissidents of 1917–18 often proposed radical ways of improving it. Many favoured various forms of anarchism or socialism.

Although the No Conscription League opposed 'all wars waged by capitalist governments', its members affirmed that they were 'internationalists' who would 'fight for what we choose to fight for'.⁸² At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, this was a potentially ominous statement. Machiavelli's observation that mobilizing a republic for external war exacerbates internal class conflicts was proving true. When Wilson accepted war and domestic repression on behalf of his 'concert of free peoples', he both alienated segments of American society and strengthened the hand of those who might have accepted similar measures on behalf of other international ideals.

The League debate

The Allies won the war, and Wilson convinced the victorious powers to include a charter for a League of Nations as an integral part of the subsequent peace treaty.⁸³ He was less successful with his own country's Senate. The Republican senators who blocked America from joining the League may have acted largely for partisan political reasons.⁸⁴ Henry Cabot Lodge, a leader of the movement against the treaty, had once enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a League, specifically refuting the arguments he went on to use against Wilson.⁸⁵ This suggests that his opposition to the League had more to do with mischief than principle.

Nevertheless, the League's opponents raised important points about the ways in which membership in transnational organizations might endanger the US system of government. Senator William Borah of Idaho noted that, given the fact that there would always be nations and popular movements that found themselves opposing the decisions of an international league, internationalists would have to back up their ideals with 'Prussianism'.⁸⁶ Borah also echoed Machiavelli's warning about the problems of coalitions when he warned that the League would be the 'most heterogeneous and irresponsible body or court that ever confused or confounded the natural instincts and noble passions of a people'.⁸⁷ Senator Miles Poindexter noted that the League would actually require the US to maintain mandated levels of armament:

Specifically, he made five charges against the League: (1) that under it we surrendered the power of disarmament, (2) that it called for compulsory arbitration of all questions, without exception, (3) that it would compel the United States to ‘participate in the wars and controversies of every other nation’ and to assume the burdens of a mandate over any part of Europe, Asia, or Africa that was assigned to it, (4) that the International Labor Bureau would interfere in our domestic affairs and (5) that the United States would surrender to other nations the power ‘to regulate commerce with foreign nations in arms and ammunition’.⁸⁸

Opponents of the League insisted that they were not merely making a quixotic stand for the principle of sovereignty. They were arguing about the kind of nation that America was to be and the kind of lives its citizens could hope to lead. Senator James Reed, a Democrat, wanted ‘to burn into the brain and heart of the American people, that every nation entering the League yields to its arbitrament and decision all controversies with other countries, even though they involve the national honor and the national life’.⁸⁹ The United States might well, for instance, find itself forced to impose peacetime conscription and high taxes in order to meet its League commitments.⁹⁰ The provisions of the US Constitution that granted Congress exclusive powers to raise armed forces and pass legislation would become void.⁹¹

Supporters of the League often agreed. Senator Porter McCumber, for instance, advocated the League precisely because it would have the power to compel the United States to do its duty to the international community by fighting in future wars.⁹² Senator Thomas J. Walsh noted approvingly that the League would also tie America’s hands, restraining it from future imperial conquests comparable to Polk’s conquest of California.⁹³ These senators had a case. The United States government has not always acted wisely, even by America’s own standards.

This, however, raised the question of whether one could trust the body organized under the League of Nations charter to make consistently better decisions than the bodies organized under the US Constitution. League opponents rejected rule by ‘57 varieties of European nations’.⁹⁴ The problems of allocating voting rights to colonies, former colonies, exceptionally small countries, exceptionally populous countries, underdeveloped countries and countries which rejected the democratic tradition complicated the matter yet further.⁹⁵ Certainly, such a system was unlikely to respect the personal liberties American citizens had asserted in their Declaration of Independence. A robust international government would have been a new system of government, based on new principles.

Wilson and the European members of the League agreed to modify many of the League’s more sweeping powers. Nevertheless, the League retained Article X of its charter, which committed member states to ‘preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and political independence of all Members of the League’.⁹⁶ League opponents warned that this would place the United States under an unlimited obligation to fight in foreign wars. League supporters countered that

the obligation would be moral, not legal, and that the United States would always be able to remain neutral if it was willing to pay the small price of committing hypocrisy.⁹⁷ Ultimately, the Senate was not willing to accept a treaty that included Article X, and Wilson was not willing to accept a treaty that did not.

Pragmatic internationalism

As the 1920s progressed, US public opinion became increasingly pacifistic and isolationist. The American government reflected the popular mood, signing the toothless Kellogg–Briand pact renouncing war as an ‘instrument of national policy’, but refusing to participate in the World Court.⁹⁸ Over the following decades, the US went on not only to take a leading role in a second world war, but to help found alliances and international organizations of every description. America had not, however, resolved the problems of entangling a republican government in foreign affairs, nor had it adopted any new vision of its national destiny. Rather, the United States embarked on its great transformation in a spirit of pragmatism.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), who presided over the crucial years of America’s transformation, was a quintessential pragmatist. Theodore Roosevelt had challenged his countrymen’s complacency about international matters, but Franklin was initially willing to accommodate the public mood. Personally, FDR admired Mahan, supported the League of Nations and believed that the world was becoming more interdependent. Nevertheless, his speeches on these subjects emphasize America’s interests and America’s safety, not America’s duties and America’s greatness.⁹⁹

In FDR’s 1932 presidential bid, he opposed joining the League and won a substantial portion of the crucial isolationist vote.¹⁰⁰ During the 1930s, the US Congress passed a series of Neutrality Acts intended to prevent future repetitions of the *Lusitania* incident from drawing America into war. Roosevelt generally supported these efforts. Although he objected that some of the Acts hampered the president’s scope to make effective foreign policy, he did not speak out against the principles of isolation and neutrality.¹⁰¹

Nazi Germany’s *Kristallnacht* attacks on Jews outraged the American public.¹⁰² Meanwhile, Roosevelt determined that the Nazi regime was a direct threat to the United States. William Bullit, America’s ambassador to France, confirmed FDR’s suspicions in March of 1938, when he received a secret report on Hitler’s ambitions. Hitler, according to the report, had confided to the Austrian pretender Otto von Habsburg that he planned to seize control of Central Europe over the course of 1939, crush France the following year and then go on to launch the ‘greatest operation in all history’ against the United States.¹⁰³ ‘We will settle accounts with the Jews of the dollar . . . we will exterminate the Jewish democracy and Jewish blood will mix itself with the dollars.’

There are no German records of this conference.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Bullit’s report probably reflected Hitler’s views accurately enough. The German dictator had publicly denounced America as a mongrel nation.¹⁰⁵ In an unpublished sequel to

Mein Kampf, Hitler wrote that one of the main functions of a Nazi government was to prepare for war with America.¹⁰⁶ If Germany had managed to complete its naval rearmament programme, it would have been in a position to threaten the United States.¹⁰⁷ Franklin Roosevelt also feared that his country was vulnerable from the skies.¹⁰⁸ Although Germany had no way to get bombers across the Atlantic in the 1930s, airpower had made it increasingly difficult for any nation to think of itself as invulnerable.

Franklin Roosevelt was also concerned with Japan's imperial policy in China. Nevertheless, even after FDR acknowledged the Axis powers as threats, he attempted to minimize America's role in fighting them. 'What is the first line of defense in the United States?' he asked in January 1939.

For the Pacific, he described that first line of defense as 'a series of islands, with the hope that through the Navy and the Army and the airplanes we can keep the Japanese – let us be quite frank – from dominating the entire Pacific Ocean and prevent us from having access to the west coast of South America'. Turning to the Atlantic and Europe, Roosevelt described America's first line of defense as 'the continued existence of a very large group of nations'. He named them: 'Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Persia, France and England'.¹⁰⁹

The United States would encourage those countries to resist Hitler and help them to build up their defences. America would, for instance, provide its European allies with aircraft.¹¹⁰ If absolutely necessary, America might help the Western allies blockade German ports.¹¹¹ Roosevelt hoped that such measures would intimidate Hitler into moderating his policies. Later generations would describe similar policies as 'containment' and 'deterrence'.

Although Roosevelt himself was lukewarm about international commitments, he included passionate internationalists in his administration. The spread of war in Europe encouraged these men to speak up for their principles. In April 1941, Vice-President Henry A. Wallace gave a speech in the altruistic tradition of Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, declaring that the United States should offset its Bill of Rights with a Bill of Duties. 'With such a Bill we can help build a Pax Democratica which will bless us and the whole world for a century to come.'¹¹² Secretary of State Cordell Hull authorized an Advisory Committee to plan a future organization to succeed the League.¹¹³ Hull kept this Committee secret and later divided its work among a number of subcommittees in order to keep 'sinister influences' from opposing the new organization as they had opposed Wilson's plan.¹¹⁴

These sinister influences seemed most evident in the form of the America First Committee, along with similar organizations. America First aimed to keep America out of the Second World War. This movement's goals were uncomfortably close

to the goals of the anti-Semites and other Nazi sympathizers. Although the original Committee had included a prominent Jewish member, he resigned in protest when Henry Ford, who was known for sponsoring an anti-Semitic newspaper campaign, joined the Committee as well.¹¹⁵

Franklin Roosevelt frequently suggested that the America First Committee had racist and unpatriotic motives.¹¹⁶ In theory, however, America First stood for a well-established set of American principles. The Committee's manifesto favoured neutrality on the grounds that involvement in European wars threatened America's own democratic system.¹¹⁷ This idea would have been familiar to the anti-imperialists of the 1890s and the American statesmen who declined to take part in the Hungarian revolt in the 1840s, not to mention Monroe, Washington and Hamilton. By the 1940s, however, it had become the province of cranks.

As Machiavelli noted, even models of isolationism such as Venice and Sparta had to respond to their external interests. The American isolationists of the 1940s may have been acutely conscious of certain threats to republican liberty, but they were obtuse, at best, about others. America First rejected pacifism and called for a strong navy, but it failed to appreciate the difficulties which America would have faced in a world where Europe and Asia were united under actively hostile regimes. Even if the US had managed to sustain its economy and ward off invasion, it would, as Root warned twenty years earlier, have had to turn itself into an 'armed camp'. America First, as its critics joked, might have been aptly named 'America Next'.¹¹⁸

The traditional defenders of American neutrality would not have made this mistake. Hamilton, for instance, was adamant that America should not risk its fortunes supporting the French Revolution. Nevertheless, he understood that America shared many commercial interests with Great Britain and might, under the right circumstances, share strategic interests with its former master as well.¹¹⁹ If Franklin Roosevelt failed to address the America First movement's legitimate concerns about republican politics, he was still closer to the statesmanship of the American founders – and of Machiavelli – than were the isolationists.

The isolationists were, however, right to fear the effects of war on American liberties. Just as the First World War incited American communities to bigotry, the Second World War conditioned them to obedience and control. In the words of social analyst Michael C.C. Adams:

[C]ertainly the war encouraged what William H. Whyte called organization culture: a trend toward bureaucracy, conformity, and standardization in everything from clothing to values to political candidates. Uniformity began to increase when millions of Americans underwent military discipline in the country's largest organization, the armed forces. Later, big government interfered in the lives of citizens through such agencies as the Internal Revenue Service to a degree that would have been inconceivable a generation earlier. Big business, too, imposed standardization through its products and its personnel procedures. After a successful war,

the military became a success model, and corporations adopted military-style hierarchical management. James Jones, a veteran, writer and social critic maintained that the war produced a demand for 'team players' with a related loss of respect for individualism.¹²⁰

America First did not, however, have the American people on its side. By 1942, the hope that international organization might prevent future wars had captured the American public's imagination. The prominent Republican Wendell Willkie had embraced the cause of internationalism, making it respectable for both major political parties. Seasoned political analysts doubted that the American people had given much thought to what international organization would actually mean. When a Gallup poll indicated that 74 per cent of the American public supported an international police force, pollster Jerome Bruner commented that most people's actual attitude seemed to be that 'we are for it in the same way as we are for vaccination . . . force stops aggression. Vaccination stops smallpox. Never mind the niceties.'¹²¹

Those who did consider the 'niceties' were often more reserved than Wilson had been in 1918. The geographer Nicholas Spykman opposed all international leagues, but advised Americans to nip future threats in the bud by playing one European power against another.¹²² In June of 1942, Hugh Gibson and former president Herbert Hoover published a highly influential book called *The Problems of a Lasting Peace*.¹²³ Hoover and Gibson supported the idea of a global assembly to 'build up the fabric of international law and steadily guide the movement of nations toward abolition of war', but they did not trust it to stop future Hitlers, nor were they willing to subordinate their own country to its decisions.¹²⁴ Rather, they advised the Allies of the ongoing war to form a separate alliance to pursue their military interests.

Franklin Roosevelt, meanwhile, slowly developed plans for what would become the United Nations. In 1941, FDR deleted Winston Churchill's call for an 'effective international organisation' from the Anglo-American manifesto known as the Atlantic Charter.¹²⁵ In its place, Roosevelt put a less specific promise to establish 'a wider and permanent system of general security'.¹²⁶ FDR's comment that this would help satisfy the 'extreme internationalists' suggests that his mind was at least partially on domestic, rather than foreign, affairs.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, in negotiations with a Russian delegation, FDR proposed his idea that, after defeating the Axis, Britain, China, America and the USSR might go on to enforce world order in a new role as the 'Four Policemen'.¹²⁸ FDR later suggested a worldwide organization to enact resolutions about global matters. Within this organization, the Four Policemen would retain a special 'power to deal immediately with any threat to the peace'.¹²⁹ There are obvious parallels between Franklin Roosevelt's idea and the ideas Gibson and Hoover proposed in their 1942 book. By 1945, Roosevelt had convinced both his foreign allies and the US Congress to create a United Nations organized along roughly these lines.

THE COLD WAR

Franklin Roosevelt's United Nations had one thing in common with Theodore Roosevelt's hopes for a 'realizable Utopia'. Both failed to account for the fact that the differences among putatively civilized countries can be every bit as bitter as the differences between civilized people and barbarians. The United Nations proved to be anything but united. The great powers could hardly have acted as four (later five) policemen, since they championed rival versions of the law.

Thus, America found itself fighting for its life. This is not to say that its actions were purely benevolent, nor is it to say that the Soviet Union's actions were purely malign. Historians can demonstrate that Western countries provoked the USSR, perhaps as often as the USSR provoked the West. Nevertheless, those who portray the great East–West contest as a routine incident of rivalry, misunderstanding and mutual suspicion among powerful states are ignoring some of the most important principles that guided both leaders and the led in all the countries that participated in this conflict.

'The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.'¹ With these words, Karl Marx predicted a revolution that would establish a global dictatorship of the proletariat. His twentieth-century admirers offered themselves as the promised revolutionaries and dictators. Lenin had explicitly established the principle that a politically enlightened 'vanguard' might use all the tools of deception, covert action and full-scale warfare to advance the proletarian cause, even in regions where the workers themselves happened to demur. Moreover, Lenin and his successors held that the capitalist states were inherently aggressive. Communist theorists differed over the question of whether war between the Communist and non-Communist world was inevitable, but practically all of them agreed that it was probable.²

In other words, a Marxist believes that the only way to eradicate war is to abolish capitalism and all other 'class' societies, and to set up communism in their stead ... Furthermore, if war is really to be abolished, this communism must be set up, not just in one country, but over the whole globe ...³

Lenin recognized that war involved evils, but he repeated Marx's own opinion that it could help the development of mankind, and he advised Communists to use it whenever they could be confident that they would win.⁴

Although Communist intellectuals energetically debated the fine points of their doctrine, practically all of them accepted Lenin's teachings on these issues. Certainly, political and academic leaders throughout the USSR and its allies took such ideas for granted. Marxist-Leninists in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East tended to subscribe to these principles as well. Mao Zedong and his followers proved, if anything, more outspoken than the Russian Bolsheviks.

As the Bolsheviks consolidated their victory in the Russian Civil War, they talked freely of advancing through Germany and the rest of Europe.⁵ Defeat at the hands of the Poles forced Lenin and his followers to reconsider these plans. During the 1930s, the Soviet Union curtailed its programme of foreign expansion in order to develop its industrial base. Nevertheless, even the relatively moderate Joseph Stalin took the opportunity to overrun Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and eastern Poland.

After the Second World War, the Soviet Union executed a deliberate and successful campaign to install client regimes in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany. Moscow harboured clear ambitions to acquire Greece and Turkey as well.⁶ If Westerners wondered whether the Soviet Union would scruple to deal with them in a similar fashion, Stalin and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov ended their doubts in February 1946, when both publicly identified the Western democracies as enemies.⁷

The struggle between the Marxist-Leninists and the rest of the world was not merely a contest for military supremacy, nor was it merely a scramble for wealth. The Marxist-Leninists were, in Machiavelli's terms, attempting to establish new ways and methods of the most intrusive kind imaginable. Communist regimes put every social organization under party control and attempted to mobilize every citizen for political ends.⁸ When Communists came to power, they typically followed Machiavelli's advice to those who have taken control of a previously independent society. The only certain way to govern such a society, Machiavelli holds, is to destroy it.⁹

In principle, Communist governance need not have been as brutal as it typically was in practice. Nevertheless, if Marx had not specifically endorsed labour camps and political executions, he had not given his followers any definite reason to refrain from such measures either. To those who accused Communists of seeking to abolish 'individuality and freedom', Marx had responded 'and rightly so! The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.'¹⁰ Marx had, moreover, rejected the religious teachings and liberal political doctrines that might have supported kinder policies. Marxist thinkers placed little value on individual people in their teachings. The Marxists of the twentieth century placed correspondingly little value on human life in their deeds.

The Marxist-Leninists justified their measures on the grounds that they were working to build a perfect society. One can only speculate about what life in that

society might be like. Perhaps such a utopia would revert to the principle that all people are endowed with the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – Marx did not specifically rule out such a possibility. The Soviet Constitution ostensibly granted citizens many of the same freedoms as the US Bill of Rights.¹¹

Nevertheless, none of the Marxist-Leninist regimes treated such rights as inherent, inalienable or self-evident. No individual could rely on them in practice. The Soviet Constitution did not recognize these rights as absolute even in theory. Rather, it granted them ‘in conformity with the interests of working people and in order to strengthen the socialist system’.¹²

In other words, individual freedom was merely a means to achieve collective ends. If another means proved more effective, individual freedom would no longer be necessary. Marxist-Leninist ideals emphasized social goods, not personal prerogatives. These statements hold true, not only in the regions under direct Soviet control, but for putatively independent Communist regimes in Albania, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and virtually everywhere else that people have founded governments based on Marxist-Leninist teachings. Communism may have a liberal side, but its illiberal side appears to be stronger.

Some analysts argue that later generations of Soviet leaders made policy on the basis of *realpolitik*, rather than ideological belief.¹³ Undoubtedly, some Marxist-Leninists were more idealistic than others. Nevertheless, the Soviet leaders of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s not only claimed to be Communists, but behaved the way Communists traditionally had. The question of whether Soviet leaders crushed the Czech government’s heretical version of Communism, subjected Russian dissidents to sadistic and clinically unknown forms of psychiatric treatment, destroyed medieval churches, fomented so-called wars of national liberation, conducted so-called active measures throughout the West, prepared their special forces to carry out a campaign of sabotage and assassination behind NATO lines and invaded Afghanistan out of ideological zeal or imperial ambition seems largely beside the point.

One is free to argue that Marxism-Leninism did a superior job of addressing human needs than liberal democracy, but, even if one accepts that utopian ends justify drastic means, one must concede that the Soviet system was incompatible with the founding principles of the American republic. Those who adhered to American tenets had every reason to assume that the Communists were their foes. No sincere Communist could have been anything else. Generations of Communist leaders had demonstrated their sincerity.

Americans, on the other hand, were frequently guilty of hypocrisy. The US, which protested Soviet expansion so loudly, had historically indulged in spectacular conquests of its own. The US, which expressed outrage at Stalin’s moves to establish Communist regimes in nations such as Hungary, had itself schemed to help non-Communist political parties win elections in Italy and France. Nevertheless, whatever the invidious parallels between American and Soviet conduct, one cannot

deny that people to the east of the Iron Curtain lived under substantially different modalities from people to the west. Those who preferred one way of life to the other had no choice but to wage the Cold War in earnest.

All nations faced these circumstances. Winston Churchill warned listeners about the coming east–west conflict at a time when US leaders still treated the USSR as an ally.¹⁴ The Cold War was an international struggle, not a purely American one. The US, however, was directly involved from the 1940s on. America's role in occupying Germany ensured that US troops would be caught up in any third European war, and America's unscathed industrial plant made the US the only power immediately capable of challenging the USSR.

America made an abortive attempt to limit its liabilities in foreign affairs. Following the Second World War, the United States precipitously scaled back its military. By 1947, the US armed forces had only 13 per cent as many personnel as they had at their wartime peak.¹⁵ Not only had the US military shrunk, but it had lost troops with specialist training in critical fields. Therefore, only a fraction of the remaining military units were able to fight.¹⁶

Although the US possessed nuclear weapons in theory, only a handful were ready for use. In 1947, Truman was shocked to discover how few atomic bombs his country actually possessed.¹⁷ Historians estimate that the US had thirteen such weapons at that time.¹⁸ By 1948, the size of the US stockpile was closer to fifty, but air force officials did not believe that this would be enough to prevent the Red Army from overrunning Europe.¹⁹ One must keep in mind that the fission bombs of the late 1940s had only a fraction of the explosive power of the fusion bombs of later decades.

Not only did American soldiers want to return to their lives and American taxpayers want to stop supporting wartime forces, but American leaders believed that demobilization was an important part of maintaining the US system of government. Politicians of all persuasions had largely suspended debate over domestic issues in order to maintain national unity during the Second World War. US leaders felt that it would be undemocratic and potentially dangerous to stifle such discussion indefinitely.²⁰ If America remained permanently mobilized for war, it risked becoming a garrison state.

Nevertheless, both the US public and the Truman administration rejected 1920s-style isolationism.²¹ In 1947, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Secretary of War Robert Patterson and acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson sent President Harry Truman a joint memorandum warning that, if the Soviet Union continued to pursue its current policies unchecked, it would soon acquire Greece, Turkey and much of the Middle East.²² That would make the USSR a power in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which, in turn, would pave the way for it to influence, if not to conquer, India and China. Truman accordingly declared his doctrine of supporting 'free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures'.²³

The Truman administration also re-instituted conscription.²⁴ Both Congress and the administration were, however, concerned about limiting military spending

to, in Truman's words, 'what the country could afford for the long pull'.²⁵ Many, particularly in Congress, hoped that air forces armed with nuclear weapons could intimidate potential enemies more cost-effectively than large land armies.²⁶ Although the various branches of the US government agreed on the need to improve the armed forces, the number of American troops available for action continued to decline.²⁷

The Truman administration also acknowledged – in deeds as well as in rhetoric – that America needed to co-operate with like-minded states. America could not afford to wage the Cold War alone, nor could it base its policy on supporting 'free peoples' against 'subjugation' unless those free peoples accepted its support. In 1947, Truman's administration concluded the Rio Treaty with a collection of Latin American states.²⁸ Two years later, the Truman administration followed the lead of its European partners and joined the organization which was to become the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).²⁹ Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty committed the US to defend its new allies in much the same language as Article X of the League of Nations charter would have committed America to defend other members of the League, but in the political climate of the late 1940s this excited little debate.

If the American founding was America's Machiavellian moment, the Cold War was America's Machiavellian crisis. *Discourses on Livy* described the difficulty of meeting external threats, the difficulty of alliance politics and the strains the previous two difficulties place on domestic political understandings as archetypal problems of republican foreign policy, and, in the late 1940s, the United States faced all of them at once. Dilemmas that had challenged Americans before re-appeared in particularly urgent forms. Difficulties that America had formerly treated as transitory became chronic. Although these problems would have been dangerous for a purely Machiavellian republic, they were doubly so for a republic that aspired to remain even partially faithful to the principles of America's Declaration of Independence.

America had reached a point at which it could not isolate itself from external challenges, nor could it meet those challenges alone. For these reasons, it had tied its fortunes, not merely to one league, but to a variety of transnational organizations. Although its polity and its economy remained robust for the moment, the strains on both could only increase. Most dangerously of all, America had lost much of its ability to manage those strains.

America's enemies had the power to decide when, where and how aggressively to challenge the US. America's allies had the power to influence America's response. Not only did Washington have to win allied support for its positions, but it had to compensate for its allies' weaknesses, even in cases where those weaknesses were self-imposed. Washington also had to accommodate other states in instances where those states' local policies had broader implications. Although some of America's alliances, such as NATO, had relatively well-defined decision-making procedures, others relied more heavily on informal understandings and diplomatic haggling.

America's financial, military and political commitments were largely in the hands of Machiavelli's Fortuna. Machiavelli would have been the first to observe that Fortuna, in this case, often wore the face of America's avowed enemies. Over time, the severe, unpredictable and uncontrollable demands of the Cold War seemed likely to distend the American political system. As the American government drifted further and further from its founding principles, the American people would lose faith, not only in the government, but in the principles themselves.³⁰

At this point, Machiavelli suggests, people shift their loyalties from the republic itself to narrower group interests, and strife between these groups may break out. The haves and the have-nots, for instance, are likely to come to blows. Whatever form civil disintegration takes, it undermines the republic's collective will – and indeed its ability – to meet external threats. After that, even the strongest republics may face military humiliation.

Machiavelli advises republics to avoid this fate by implementing a grand strategy to defeat its opponents. In this strategy, he emphasizes, republics must resist the forces that pressure them to fritter away their energies on the ineffective middle course. To ensure their allies' timely co-operation, they must transform their alliances into hierarchical relationships modelled on those of Rome. In the process, a Machiavellian republic will induce its citizens to relinquish their private ends and devote themselves to the imperial cause. If the United States of America was to maintain its tradition of personal liberty – the tradition which justified its existence – it had already accepted a dangerous handicap.

US president Dwight Eisenhower once pondered whether there might be a point at which 'our duty to future generations did not require us to *initiate* war at the most propitious moment that we could designate [emphasis in the original]'.³¹ Fortunately, he did not pursue this idea. Rather, he concluded, as he declared in a 1954 press conference, that '[a] preventative war, to my mind, is an impossibility today ... [F]rankly, I wouldn't even listen to anyone seriously that came in and talked about such a thing.'³²

American leaders recognized that their country needed a long-term strategy. George Kennan, America's ambassador to the USSR, presented the rudiments of such a plan in his famous X article.³³ The Truman Doctrine acquired the status of a strategic principle, as did other statements by American leaders. Nevertheless, if the US was unscrupulous by some liberal standards, it was not constituted to act with true Machiavellian ruthlessness. Neither its founding principles nor its national institutions nor its people's sentiments nor, indeed, its leaders' understandings of their roles conditioned it to make itself a new Rome – at least not in the conscious and single-minded way that Machiavelli advocated.

Accordingly, Kennan, the National Security Council and the other figures who shaped America's grand strategy adopted a modest approach. Rather than relentlessly consolidating its own power while undermining that of its enemies, the United States would merely help the states who had escaped the USSR's previous conquests to resist further aggression. In this fashion, America would 'contain' the

Soviet Union. Kennan himself was reluctant to present containment as an overly prescriptive dogma, and some American leaders, notably Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, claimed to reject it. Nevertheless, the concept sums up America's Cold War policies and rationales with consistent accuracy.³⁴ Kennan intended containment to be more than a policy of passively absorbing blows. The Soviet Union, he claimed, would be incapable of satisfying its needs or maintaining its people's faith in Marxist ideology unless it could continue to expand.³⁵ If the United States could frustrate Moscow's imperial ambitions for long enough, Kennan argued, the Soviet Union would eventually disintegrate. Until that time, however, his strategy forced America to stick to Machiavelli's middle course, maintaining an enmity but doing nothing to overcome the enemy.

Events appear to have vindicated Kennan's plan. In hindsight, one may well conclude that containment was the least of many possible evils. Nevertheless, by adhering to a policy of containment, however loosely, American leaders took the risk that their political system would succumb to the pressures described by Machiavelli before the USSR succumbed to the pressures described by Kennan. America's decision to follow a middle course with its main enemy forced it to pursue the middle course in any lesser conflict where its main enemy became involved.

When a republic faces a dispute, Machiavelli suggests that it should either commit itself to victory or commit itself to cutting its losses. Containment made it difficult for the United States to do either one. On the one hand, America presumed itself to be in a situation in which it could not afford to strike directly against its principal opponent. On the other, containment made it difficult for the United States to concede any struggle with Communist powers anywhere in the world.

The fact that containment was largely a psychological doctrine made it particularly difficult for the United States to practise Machiavelli's wisdom. Not only did American leaders have to be wary of allowing the Soviet Union to gain material advantages, but they had to be wary of allowing the Communist cause to gain perceived successes. Although Kennan himself argued for a selective approach to resisting Communist advances, those who followed the strategy he described in his X document could logically infer that every perceived gain for Communism would prolong the period that the Soviet Union would be able to maintain its people's faith while sapping American will to cope with the political and economic demands of the struggle.³⁶ Therefore, American leaders found it perennially difficult to refuse Soviet challenges. The consequences, as Machiavelli might have predicted, were bloody, costly and politically unhealthy.

American leaders knew the importance of avoiding unnecessary confrontations. In January 1950, for instance, Dean Acheson publicly announced that America would defend certain countries and no others.³⁷ Although he promised that the US would protect Japan, the Ryukyu Islands and the Philippines, he explicitly ruled out defending Taiwan, South Korea or any part of mainland Asia. 'So far as the military security of other areas of the Pacific is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack.'³⁸ Acheson did suggest that

countries within those ‘other areas’ might seek help from the ‘entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations’, but his speech strongly suggested that the United States would remain largely aloof.³⁹

Privately, American policy makers acknowledged that they could not remain so detached. Tom Connally, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations committee, spoke for many in the White House as well when he said that America had to intervene in Korea in order to keep the Soviet Union from concluding that all countries outside the US defensive perimeter were fair game.⁴⁰ Even countries that nominally fell within the protected sphere might wonder how much they could rely on their American defenders.⁴¹ Moreover, although states may have distinct identities under international law, their borders are less certain in war. Even if Americans cared nothing about the Republic of Korea, they could not ignore the fact that the Korean peninsula constituted an invasion route between the mainland and the Japanese islands, known to Chinese tradition as the ‘dagger and the bridge’.⁴² Four years earlier, Truman had acknowledged that Korea was a battleground in which ‘our entire success in Asia may depend’.⁴³

In June 1950, with the connivance of Stalin and Mao, the Communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) attacked the South.⁴⁴ The next day, the United States itself secured a United Nations resolution calling on the DPRK to desist. Within a week, Truman had approved General Douglas MacArthur’s plan to defend South Korea. DPRK troops overwhelmed the first American task force on the scene. In the months that followed, America paid a bitter price for allowing its ground forces to decay.

MacArthur reversed the tide of United Nations defeats with his amphibious landing at Inchon and went on to drive DPRK troops back across their borders. Success, however, led to new peril when MacArthur’s push across the Yalu River prompted the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to counter-attack with the full weight of its armed forces. At that, MacArthur wished to abandon the middle way by launching general attacks against the PRC. ‘The interests of this country’, MacArthur declared, ‘are involved in saving the lives of its sons, rather than embarking on an indefinite, indecisive campaign which will sacrifice thousands and thousands of additional American lives.’⁴⁵

MacArthur, in a Machiavellian fashion, felt that America faced a choice. Either America had to let the war ‘go on indefinitely, destroying the fabric of society’, or to end it.⁴⁶ His preferred means for ending it were those of all-out attack. Truman remained determined to keep the Korean War limited. When MacArthur publicly challenged him, he famously relieved the general of his command.

In three years of inconclusive combat, American forces suffered 138,000 casualties, including 25,000 dead and 10,000 missing.⁴⁷ Americans were shocked, not only by the scale of the losses, but by the images of prisoners of war broken and reduced to repeating Communist propaganda after the process of torture and indoctrination known as ‘brainwashing’, and by the repeated spectacle of the US Army in retreat. The moral heirs of Theodore Roosevelt worried that increasing prosperity was allowing indulgent mothers to turn their sons into weaklings.

Policy makers, particularly within the military, became wary of any operation that resembled the Korean War, even superficially.

In the words of Roger Hilsman, an adviser to President John F. Kennedy's administration, 'it was a shibboleth among the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States ought never again to fight a limited war on the ground in Asia'.⁴⁸ One may observe that it is, indeed, sound statecraft to keep one's country out of difficult military situations whenever possible. Washington insiders, Hilsman suggests, were not so patriotic. Their interests lay less with keeping their country out of trouble than with avoiding responsibility for whatever trouble their country got itself into. They were, in Hilsman's view, 'determined to build a record that would protect their position and put the blame entirely on the President no matter what happened'.⁴⁹

Government officials perennially harbour such suspicions of each other. There were heroes as well as villains among the American decision makers of the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, Hilsman noted a dangerous trend. Just as later generations spoke of a Vietnam Syndrome inhibiting American military action, a Korea Syndrome promoted timidity, conformity and petty intrigue within America's increasingly influential national security bureaucracy. One would be overstating one's case if one blamed this trend for America's frequent and serious foreign policy blunders of the 1960s, but it was an important contributing factor.

The Eisenhower presidency

The Korean War was still going on when Truman left office. The new president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had spoken against the way in which such conflicts affected American national life. Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, had been even more passionate about the subject. Dulles and Eisenhower perceived the dilemma in the same terms as MacArthur and Machiavelli. America could not afford to bleed away its human, economic and psychological resources in a never-ending series of wars that it was not prepared to win. Dulles had condemned the existing US strategy as a 'treadmill' policy 'which, at best, might perhaps keep us in the same place until we drop exhausted'.⁵⁰

Although America might have enough oil, steel, and young men to march forever upon the treadmill, Dulles warned that the US could not mobilize its people for perpetual war without abandoning its tradition of individual freedom. Although Dulles and Eisenhower presented this argument most prominently, Truman administration officials shared much the same concerns. Acheson, for instance, wrote this on the subject: 'One of the dangers – clear and present dangers in the judicial phrase – which confronts us Americans is what this struggle may do to us.'⁵¹ Acheson warned that, as the vicissitudes of the Cold War tempted Americans to violate their own moral codes and to abandon their tradition of free thought, 'we are in real danger of taking on the face of our adversary'.⁵²

Unlike MacArthur, Eisenhower acknowledged that attempts to settle Cold War disputes by main force could be as dangerous as allowing them to drag on

inconclusively. In June of 1953, Eisenhower rejected the idea of a massive new offensive in Korea. '[V]ictory would require such an expansion of the current conflict as to demand, practically, a general mobilization. This means regimentation – and the question arises as to the length of time that we could endure regimentation without losing important parts of our free system.'⁵³

Instead, Eisenhower resolved the Korean War through peace talks backed up with an implicit nuclear threat. Dulles intimated that the United States would avoid the burden of matching its enemies 'man for man, gun for gun' with its ability to 'strike back where it hurts, by means of our own choosing'.⁵⁴ Although he did not specify what those means might be, few doubted that he was referring to nuclear weapons. Dulles also advocated 'rolling back' Communist regimes from the countries they already controlled, and the Central Intelligence Agency duly carried out some of its most audacious operations to overthrow unfriendly governments during the Eisenhower years.

Rhetorically, Eisenhower and Dulles had abandoned the compromises of containment. One can hardly describe a policy of nuclear 'massive retaliation' as a middle course. Nevertheless, one must recall that the Truman administration had attempted to economize on military expenditures in precisely the same fashion. Truman's nuclear-armed air force had not deterred Communist forces in Korea.

Dulles himself admitted that his policy would not deter the Soviet Union from overthrowing pro-Western regimes through subversion.⁵⁵ Military officers from Matthew Ridgway to Maxwell Taylor warned that the idea of deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation was little more than an illusion. Soviet leaders understood that the US was unlikely to risk nuclear war if anything less than its immediate survival was at stake. Therefore, unless the United States could win little wars as well as big ones, the Soviet Union could continue to expand by force. The threat of massive retaliation was largely hollow, and the idea of economizing on military expenditures by relying on nuclear weapons was something of a middle course after all.

Eisenhower's foreign policy was not, in fact, fundamentally different from Truman's. Certainly, he made no attempt to 'roll back' Communism during the Hungarian revolt of 1956. The historian John Lewis Gaddis suggests that Eisenhower never had any 'burning sense of dissatisfaction' with Truman-era containment.⁵⁶ As if to prove that point, Eisenhower appointed no lesser a representative of containment than George Kennan himself to head a prestigious study group researching America's foreign policy options.⁵⁷

Eisenhower also suppressed the isolationist wing of his own party. In both word and deed, he strengthened and extended the system of alliances that made containment possible. Eisenhower did not hesitate to emphasize the ways in which these associations served America's national interest.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, he and Dulles both disavowed Machiavelli's approach to alliance politics.

'We do not assume that we have any mandate to run the world,' as Dulles put it. 'Nothing would be less in keeping with our traditions and our ideals.'⁵⁹ Eisenhower expressed the same point in a note to himself in 1954. In that note, he

worried ‘that, unconsciously, we are guilty of one of the greatest errors that ignorance can make – we assume that our standard of values is shared by all other humans in the world’.⁶⁰

The net effect of Eisenhower’s presidency was to shore up the containment strategy, not to overturn it. Eisenhower extracted the US from its first great military quagmire of the Cold War, but, although he appreciated the danger such situations posed to America’s continued existence as a free country, he failed to develop any effective strategy for avoiding repeat performances. His effort to negotiate a warmer relationship with the USSR failed, ostensibly because of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s indignation about the revelation that America was conducting espionage against his country, but ultimately, perhaps, because of the irreconcilable opposition between the two political systems. Given Eisenhower’s concerns about both Communist expansion abroad and the growth of what he called the military-industrial complex at home, one cannot be surprised that some of his most memorable speeches took the form of jeremiads.

Eisenhower’s successor, John F. Kennedy, expressed greater optimism about the United States and its situation in world politics. In his inaugural address, which dealt almost entirely with foreign affairs, Kennedy declared that America would, and by implication could, ‘pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty’.⁶¹ For those who, in the spirit of Acheson, Eisenhower and Dulles, grumbled that the process of marshalling one’s citizens to pay unlimited prices and bear unlimited burdens is itself detrimental to liberty, Kennedy offered his famous admonition: ‘ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country’.⁶² Kennedy spoke the language of national rejuvenation through personal sacrifice. Like Henry Wallace, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and Niccolò Machiavelli, Kennedy hoped to find the resources for a newly ambitious foreign policy by subsuming individual citizens’ energies into the collective effort.

Kennedy resembled Theodore Roosevelt, not only in his bold rhetoric, but in the comparative restraint of his statesmanship. This restraint, combined with the larger political dynamics of containment and the Cold War, repeatedly induced him to choose the middle course. Machiavelli would not have been surprised by the outcome. The most prominent example of Kennedy’s middling policies occurred in April 1961, with the invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs.

America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had begun planning operations to overthrow Cuba’s Communist government during Eisenhower’s presidency. The CIA’s chief plan involved using a brigade of Cuban exiles to invade Cuba and lead an anti-Communist revolt. If Kennedy had objected to these ideas in principle, he could easily have cancelled the project.⁶³ Instead, he supported the operation and ridiculed opponents as cowards.⁶⁴

Kennedy ordered planners to modify their operations in order to make America’s involvement less apparent.⁶⁵ Whatever advantages so-called ‘plausible deniability’ might have had in principle, it was rendered pointless in practice by the fact that America’s involvement was not only easy to deduce, but widely known and closely

followed in the press.⁶⁶ The most significant effects of his modifications were to reduce the exiles' ability to inspire an anti-Communist uprising, force them to land in marshy terrain, reduce their air support and cut off their escape routes to the mountains.⁶⁷ When the 'least covert military operation in history' turned into a debacle, Kennedy initially withheld air support from the invasion force.⁶⁸ Kennedy later changed his mind and authorized a single air raid, but this merely complicated the fiasco further.

Had Kennedy supported the invasion aggressively enough to make it succeed, he would have significantly bolstered America's strategic position. Had he cancelled the invasion, he would have preserved his country's good name. By invading in a half-hearted manner, he paid the price of both policies and gained the advantages of neither. Many suggest that Kennedy's indecision over the Bay of Pigs encouraged Soviet leaders to see him as weak. This may have encouraged them to pursue bolder gambits of their own.

One of the Soviet Union's most spectacular gambits took place the following year, when the USSR attempted to base nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. Again, Kennedy sought the middle way. Senior American statesmen urged him to invade Cuba, or at least to destroy the missile sites with air strikes. Kennedy opted merely to quarantine the island by sea, and to demand that the Soviet Union withdraw its missiles peaceably.

After an extended confrontation, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the missiles. In return, the United States withdrew some of its own missiles from Europe and pledged not to invade Cuba in the future. Most assume that, if either side had remained intransigent, the confrontation would have escalated to nuclear war. On this occasion, Kennedy's willingness to compromise probably prevented catastrophe. Nevertheless, Machiavelli would undoubtedly have noted that, if Kennedy had been less willing to compromise the previous year, the Cuban Missile Crisis could never have happened in the first place.

Meanwhile, even as Kennedy dealt with the two confrontations in Cuba, he had to face a crisis in Laos as well. Communist guerrillas known as the Pathet Lao threatened the US-backed government there. Both the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam and the USSR openly supplied the guerrillas.⁶⁹ Eisenhower had told Kennedy that he would have been willing, 'as a last, desperate hope', to intervene with US troops.⁷⁰

In March of 1961, as the Laotian government tottered, Kennedy deployed ships and a task force of 500 helicopter-borne marines in the China Sea.⁷¹ The Bay of Pigs, however, dampened the president's enthusiasm for war. On 20 April, Kennedy reflected that, if the United States committed itself to a war in Laos, 'we might find ourselves fighting millions of Chinese troops in the jungles'.⁷² As if this was not daunting enough, Laos was also logistically inaccessible to US forces. 'Thank God the Bay of Pigs happened when it did,' Kennedy later commented. 'Otherwise, we'd be in Laos by now – and that would be a hundred times worse.'⁷³

Accordingly, Kennedy backed a British proposal for a ceasefire.⁷⁴ In May, the North Vietnamese agreed to this plan. Representatives of fourteen nations convened

in Geneva to negotiate a more permanent arrangement. When North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces violated the ceasefire the following year, Kennedy sent more troops to the region.⁷⁵

The Laotian factions promptly agreed to accords under which all outside powers were to respect Laotian neutrality and refrain from intervening in Laos's civil war.⁷⁶ Kennedy undoubtedly hoped that the Laos Accords would lead to peace in South-East Asia. The president also felt that he had taken the moral high ground. If the Communist powers violated the accords, Kennedy suggested, the rest of the world would recognize America's right and duty to intervene.

North Vietnam, however, did not acknowledge the accords. Over 7,000 North Vietnamese troops continued to fight in Laos.⁷⁷ North Vietnam also continued to use Laos as a supply route and staging ground for its war against South Vietnam. Had Kennedy publicly accused the North Vietnamese of violating the Laos Accords and sent troops to stop them, he would have once again had to risk fighting 'millions of Chinese troops in the jungles'. Accordingly, he chose the compromise strategy of remaining quiet in public while discreetly dispatching the Central Intelligence Agency to carry out covert operations against the North Vietnamese.

As Kennedy's presidency went on, Vietnam assumed ever-greater prominence in American foreign affairs. Under Eisenhower, the United States had begun to support the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam (ARVN) with lavish aid and limited numbers of advisers. Not only did Kennedy continue this policy, but he expanded the US Army Special Forces to more than five times their previous size in order to increase his options when dealing with such situations.⁷⁸ 'In South Vietnam', Kennedy confidant Theodore Sorensen noted, the Special Forces 'delivered babies, chopped trails, dug wells, prevented ambushes, raised morale and formed effective bands against the communists'.⁷⁹ The Kennedy administration also equipped the South Vietnamese with combat helicopters, which proved devastating against the Communist guerrillas.

Kennedy's supporters suggest that he might have severed America's commitment to South Vietnam. There is no way to tell whether this is the case. We know only that, in Sorensen's words:

His essential contribution ... was both to raise our commitment and to keep it limited. He neither permitted the war's escalation into a general war nor bargained away Vietnam's security at the conference table, despite being pressed along both lines by those impatient to win or withdraw. His strategy essentially was to avoid escalation, retreat or a choice limited to those two, while seeking to buy time to build an antiguerrilla capability sufficient to convince the Communists that they could not seize the country militarily – and time to put the Vietnamese themselves in a position to achieve the settlement only they could achieve by bringing terrorism under control.⁸⁰

In other words, Kennedy applied Kennan's strategy of containment. Although he was unwilling to overthrow his opponents, he hoped to hold them at bay. In May of 1961, Kennedy sent Vice-President Lyndon Johnson to deliver a letter assuring South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem of America's willingness to 'join with you in an intensified endeavor to win the struggle against communism'.⁸¹ Nevertheless, when Undersecretary of State George Ball warned that hawkish policies could lead the US into deploying hundreds of thousands of troops in Vietnam, Kennedy responded: 'George, you're crazier than hell. That just isn't going to happen.'⁸² Eventually, Kennedy hoped, South-East Asia's Communists would lose the will or the means to continue their campaign against the US and its allies.

Kennedy's caution forestalled the brutality of the Vietnam War, and arguably prevented a more apocalyptic war with the Communist superpowers. Moreover, Kennedy shunned the middle course – and saved his country from probable catastrophe – in two other Asian crises, first by rejecting Taiwan's plan to invade mainland China and second by staying out of the Sino-Indian war. Kennedy clearly could have done worse. Nevertheless, he left the conflict in South-East Asia unresolved.

Vietnam

By the mid-1960s, Kennedy's South-East Asia policy appeared to be succeeding. The Communist guerrillas had alienated the South Vietnamese people through their attempts to make life unliveable under the Diem regime.⁸³ ARVN, with US military aid, was growing more efficient. In late 1963, Colonel Bui Tin of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) secretly visited South Vietnam to gauge the state of the Communist forces there.⁸⁴ Bui Tin concluded that the guerrillas were losing the war, and saw no reason to hope that they might improve. If North Vietnam was to reunite the country under a Communist regime, he warned, it would have to intervene directly, using its regular army.⁸⁵

In summer 1964, NVA units invaded the South. The United States sent increasing numbers of its own troops to counter them. America's reasons for fighting in Vietnam were at least as strong as its reasons for fighting in Korea. The US had strong strategic reasons to defend Indochina. Just as Korea is the traditional 'dagger and bridge' between mainland Asia and Japan, Vietnam's coastline curves around the western edge of the South China Sea.

Moreover, the North Vietnamese were working with active Communist guerrilla movements in Laos and Cambodia. The Communists had the potential to launch similar campaigns in Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia and perhaps the Philippines. Many have mocked Eisenhower's warning that a Communist victory in Vietnam would create a 'domino effect', toppling one country after another in succession.⁸⁶ The Communists themselves, however, believed in the domino effect and hoped to produce it.⁸⁷ Leaders in both the Soviet Union and the People's

Republic of China had announced a policy of using ‘wars of national liberation’ like the one their allies were waging in Vietnam to advance the cause of world Communism. South-East Asia’s people, resources and shipping lanes were at stake.

Washington’s honour and reputation were on the line as well. In 1950, American statesmen had argued that they needed to defend Korea in order to assure NATO members that they would be willing to defend Europe. The legal, moral and public relations arguments in favour of defending South Vietnam were stronger. Whereas Dean Acheson had disavowed any commitment to Seoul, the United States had formally pledged its support to Saigon. In 1954, America had signed the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) treaty. In the event of an ‘armed attack’ against another SEATO member, the US was to ‘act to meet the common danger in accordance with [its] constitutional processes’.⁸⁸

A protocol to the SEATO pact brought Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam under the treaty’s protection. Although the agreement did not specifically pledge the United States to go to war in its allies’ defence, the same could be said of the NATO treaty. In both South-East Asia and Western Europe, America had implied that it would protect its allies by all means necessary. Lyndon Johnson recognized this. As vice-president, in a private memorandum to Kennedy, he had written:

We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a Fortress America concept. More importantly, we could say to the world that we don’t live up to our treaties and don’t stand by our friends. That’s not my concept.⁸⁹

Despite holding such unequivocal convictions in principle, Johnson’s administration followed a middle course in practice. As with the Bay of Pigs, America’s experience in the Vietnam War stands as an example of the folly of doing things by halves. Numerous writers have produced detailed histories of America’s military strategy and foreign policy during this conflict. Many hold – with fine Machiavellian logic – that the United States should have acknowledged that the war was unwinnable, whatever the humiliation.

Others, in an equally Machiavellian vein, hold that the United States should have used more effective tactics. Some members of this camp would have advised the US to overwhelm North Vietnam with massive forces, while others feel that the United States should have focused on refining its counter-insurgency doctrine in order to fight the guerrilla war in the South.⁹⁰ Yet others suggest that America’s foreign policy establishment was foreordained to make the decisions – and mistakes – it historically made. The irony of Vietnam, as the title of one book would have it, is that the system worked.⁹¹ All parties to these arguments, however, would recognize that the United States defined its goals ambiguously, committed its forces piecemeal, employed them indecisively, justified its actions half-heartedly and paid a terrible price for its vacillation.

Although the Johnson administration had ample opportunity to conclude that its campaign in South Vietnam was going to involve substantial military effort over a protracted period of time, it never asked Congress to declare war. The United States had a clear national interest in defending its SEATO ally from invasion, but the Johnson administration did not clearly invoke this interest. Rather, the Johnson administration used a naval skirmish in the Gulf of Tonkin as a pretext to ask Congress for authorization to 'respond instantly with the use of appropriate force to repel any unprovoked attack upon the armed forces of the United States'.⁹² Ironists will note that, in the actual Gulf of Tonkin incident, it may well have been American forces that launched an unprovoked attack on the North Vietnamese.⁹³ The principle of self-defence was, at the least, an odd way to justify a war which would call on American forces to cross the Pacific Ocean to take the offensive against enemies who, whatever long-term threats they presented to America's national interests, had no immediate interest in fighting Americans at all.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution went on to authorize 'all measures including the use of armed force' to assist South-East Asian nations in the defence of their 'political independence and territorial integrity'.⁹⁴ Congress's decision to cede such sweeping powers to the president offends the spirit of the US Constitution and provides a clear example of how war in general and protracted, indecisive struggles such as the Cold War in particular degrade the institutions of the American republic. Moreover, although Johnson undoubtedly welcomed the opportunity to go on doing as he saw fit without asking the nation to commit itself to war, the ambiguity of the resolution hardly strengthened the war effort. Critics of the war were fond of asking what America was fighting for, and the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution did not provide a satisfying answer. Nor did the resolution provide any firm legal support for presidents who hoped to pursue bold but potentially unpopular strategies to win the war.

Certainly, Johnson and his successors were careful not to test the limits of their authority. They had many reasons for restraint, of which the weakness of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was but one. Many of these reasons were thoroughly well intentioned. Johnson, for instance, wished to conserve his political influence and national resources for his Great Society campaign against poverty and racial discrimination.

The fact that the Vietnam War was merely a part of the Cold War made Johnson's (and later Nixon's) hesitancy all the more understandable. Even if the US could have won the Vietnam War, its citizens had to assume that the Communist powers would soon challenge them again somewhere else. America could not put its citizens' personal aspirations on hold for ever and still remain the country it claimed to be. Moreover, the US could not afford to behave as if the North Vietnamese were its only enemies. If it committed itself too heavily in South-East Asia, it would have been offering the Soviet Union opportunities to take advantage of its weakness elsewhere, and, if it pursued its campaign against North Vietnam too provocatively, it might have brought China and the Soviet Union into the war.

Nevertheless, presidential caution hurt America's war effort. Thus, this caution ultimately prolonged the fighting, increased the human and material cost, and extended the period of danger. For instance, despite the US armed forces' chronic need for experienced personnel, no president mobilized the reserves or the National Guard. This policy proved socially divisive as well, since well-connected people could often avoid combat duties by securing places in the National Guard, whereas the less fortunate could not.

Likewise, despite the expense of the war, Johnson financed the war mainly by borrowing.⁹⁵ Nixon resorted to taking the US dollar off the gold standard, thereby ending the system that had regulated global currency exchange rates since the Second World War. Both America's failure to mobilize its reserve forces and its dependence on debt constrained the USA's ability to use its national resources to support the war. The former policy allowed well-connected young men to avoid combat by taking refuge in National Guard units, increasing resentment among conscripts. The latter policy contributed to the global economic slump of the 1970s.

America followed a middle course in its more narrowly military strategy as well. Although the Johnson administration deployed the US Air Force to bomb North Vietnam, it followed an incremental strategy.⁹⁶ Rather than attempting to destroy North Vietnam's war-making ability with all-out attacks, the US bombed limited targets on a piecemeal basis, killing innocents to be sure, but deliberately refraining from inflicting more than a measured amount of damage to the enemy armed forces. American planners hoped that this would convince the Communists to make peace while their losses remained relatively light. The North Vietnamese, however, merely took advantage of the lulls between air raids to step up their efforts against the South.

Not only did the United States refrain from invading North Vietnam, but it held back from ground operations to block the Communist supply route known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The so-called Trail was actually a network of paths, roads, fuel pipelines and, by the 1970s, paved, multi-lane highways.⁹⁷ These routes circumvented the narrow and relatively well-defended border between the two Vietnams by passing through supposedly neutral Laos. Branches of the Trail continued through Cambodia, allowing the NVA to approach South Vietnam at practically any point along its land frontiers.

As a result, the Hanoi government was free to mobilize the people of North Vietnam, arm them with weapons from the Soviet and PRC arsenals, and deploy them against its enemies. Since NVA units could enter South Vietnam against minimal opposition, they could then travel through the rural areas of the country and attack at whatever points they chose. This gave Communist forces great latitude in their choice of tactics, while complicating the tactics of ARVN and its SEATO allies (occasionally to be known simply as 'the allies'). Moreover, the Communist forces enjoyed an abundance of modern equipment.⁹⁸ American bombing hindered this process but did not stop it, even when Richard Nixon abandoned the incremental strategy in favour of a more vicious air campaign.

ARVN and its allies could not hope to guard every vulnerable point along South Vietnam's 900-mile border. William Westmoreland, the American commander in the theatre, described the situation as follows:

In World War I close to 6 million Allied troops were needed to man the 455 miles of the Western Front. In World War II, 4.5 million Allied troops were needed to man a 570-mile Western Front. In Korea, close to a million United Nations troops were needed to man a 123-mile front across the waist of the Korean Peninsula. To have defended the land frontiers of South Vietnam in similar density would have required many millions of troops, plus others to carry on the fight against the insurgency, numbers that it would have been absurd to contemplate.⁹⁹

For the allies to cut off the Communist infiltration, they had to take the offensive. If they had invaded North Vietnam, they would have cut off the infiltration at the source. The Korean War, however, illustrated the danger that this might bring the PRC or even the USSR into the war as combatants. Allied forces might have obtained many of the same advantages by using ground forces to block the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, where all its routes passed through a geographical bottleneck.

For the first eight years of the war, allied forces restricted themselves to air and special forces campaigns against Laos. In 1971, thirty-four battalions of the South Vietnamese Army with limited support from US aircraft crossed the Laotian border in an operation known as LAM SON 719.¹⁰⁰ ARVN's goal, however, was merely to enter the region, destroy any enemy forces that happened to be present at the time, and withdraw.¹⁰¹ The operation caused heavy losses on both sides, but the Ho Chi Minh Trail was back in service in less than a week.¹⁰² Whether out of respect for Laotian neutrality or reluctance to escalate the war, the allies never blocked the Trail for an extended period.

One cannot know whether cutting the Trail would have allowed the allies to win the war. Some analysts claim that it would not have.¹⁰³ These analysts portray the Vietnam War as a political insurgency matching indigenous South Vietnamese Communists against the RVN government. If the allies had not learned how to counter the insurgency's guerrilla tactics and political appeal, these analysts argue, America and the RVN would have lost the war even if they had blocked all the routes to the north.

There is some truth to such arguments. Nevertheless, one cannot doubt that cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail would have dramatically changed the character of the war. The Communist troops – NVA regulars and National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgents alike – imported 95 per cent of their ammunition and practically all of their weapons from the North.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the North reinforced the insurgency movement with personnel – an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 troops per month in quiet periods, and triple those numbers during the build-up periods before major offensives.¹⁰⁵ This allowed the Communist forces to assemble forces for

large-scale attacks, and to replace their subsequent losses. By the 1970s, the indigenous South Vietnamese Communists were virtually extinct, and units which nominally belonged to the NLF were partially composed of North Vietnamese military personnel.¹⁰⁶

During the early 1960s, when the Communist insurgents were fighting with minimal aid from the North, ARVN had been whittling away at their ranks and their popular support. Although South Vietnam had needed American aid, it had not needed significant numbers of American troops. Only when North Vietnam began to deploy large forces via the Ho Chi Minh Trail did the Communists gain the ability to threaten the Saigon regime, inflict losses on American combat units and continue to do so for protracted periods of time. North Vietnam's war effort depended upon ports, road networks, motor transport and a regularly trained and equipped army sustained by an efficient system of conscription – in short, upon all the material and administrative infrastructure of a modern state.

Whether or not American brute force could have totally eliminated the NLF insurgency movement, it could have deprived the Communists of the benefits of North Vietnamese material, personnel and infrastructure. Whether or not South Vietnamese citizens were amenable to Communist rule, it was the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, not indigenous Vietnamese, who provided Hanoi with 98 per cent of its arms.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, one needs to accept that America's reluctance to employ its full force played a decisive role in the war, and one needs to see that reluctance in the context of America's other middle course strategies in its global struggle with the Communist superpowers. If it had not been for the Cold War, America would have been considerably less likely to commit its troops to South-East Asia in the first place, but, if it had chosen to do so, it would have been free to invade Laos and North Vietnam with relatively little ado.

As it was, the North Vietnamese were unable to force US troops out of Vietnam, but the US felt unable to force them out of the war. This led to the stalemate which one American author called 'America's longest war' and another referred to as a 'war without end'.¹⁰⁸ A Gallup poll indicated that over 70 per cent of the American public favoured the Johnson administration's action in 1965, and US citizens continued to support the administration's Vietnam policy for years.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Truman, Acheson, Eisenhower and Dulles might have agreed that Americans were justified in not wanting to support such a war for ever.

In 1967, *Time*, *Life* and the *New York Times* published editorials that criticized America's role in Vietnam.¹¹⁰ Later that year, for the first time, public opinion polls indicated that a small majority of Americans opposed the war.¹¹¹ Over the following six years, American opposition grew to the point at which the Nixon administration withdrew all US forces from Vietnam. When North Vietnam launched its final offensive against the South in 1975, Congress refused to allow the US armed forces to intervene.

Not only did the Vietnam War lead Americans to question their country's military commitment in South-East Asia, but it led them to doubt their country itself. 'US involvement in the "bloody mess" is not a result of error upon error,

mistake upon mistake, committed by *stupid* men', read one anti-war manifesto.¹¹² 'Every decision to escalate the war has been carefully programmed.'¹¹³ American policies, this manifesto alleged, were not merely misguided, but actively malicious. The political system that produced those policies was not merely flawed, but perverse.

The Mexican War inspired Thoreau to criticize the very foundations of the US government. The Vietnam War inspired a generation of American thinkers, moralists, celebrities and concerned citizens to follow his example. Like Thoreau himself, they were right to do so. Some of their criticisms demand the most profound consideration. The fact that the Vietnam War alienated so many of the most thoughtful, principled and influential figures in American public life testifies to the strain it put on the American republic.

The most poignant dissent may have been that of Martin Luther King Jr. King, after all, had reminded his fellow citizens of that most American of principles – that all men are created equal. Moreover, King had distinguished himself by calling on Americans to heal their divisions and work together as a nation to realize that principle more fully. The significance of founding a republic, Machiavelli tells us through Pocock, is practical – a republic allows people to take charge of their own lives. King symbolized the faith that the founding ideas of the American republic remained effective.

King himself feared that challenging the American government's foreign policy would sabotage that government's progress towards recognizing racial equality.¹¹⁴ Although he may have been more concerned with the danger of upsetting his relationship with the Johnson administration than with the more abstract danger of upsetting the nation's confidence in its philosophy of government, he recognized the peril of widening the divisions within his country. In late 1966, however, King decided that his reticence on Vietnam undercut his moral authority on other issues.¹¹⁵ The next year, he publicly described America's Vietnam policy as a 'symptom of a far deeper malady'.¹¹⁶ This malady, in King's view, was opposition to revolution.

King called on peace and civil rights activists to unite and protest 'until the very foundations of our country are shaken'.¹¹⁷ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) rejected King's appeal, denying that the Vietnam War had hindered the advancement of African-Americans.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the controversy over Vietnam and the controversy over racial issues exacerbated each other. Machiavelli observed that foreign wars tend to intensify domestic social struggles, and Vietnam provides an example of that point. The war pushed both sides in these struggles towards extremes, and further alienated minorities from the nation. 'No Vietcong', the famous African-American boxer Muhammad Ali famously observed, 'ever called me nigger.'¹¹⁹

Large numbers of less famous American people felt compelled to question their country as well. The University of Michigan charts the state of American public opinion with regular polls known as the National Election Survey (NES). In 1958, when the NES began, an index of polls measuring Americans' trust in their

government yielded a score of 49, and by 1966 it had risen to 61.¹²⁰ This score fell to 45 in 1968, and slid to 38 in 1972.

Other NES data confirms that the American public was, as a whole, growing jaded about its government. In 1964, for instance, 64 per cent of the poll respondents agreed with the proposition that the American government works for the benefit of all.¹²¹ In 1970, only 41 per cent agreed with this statement, and in 1972 only 38 per cent concurred. The number of people who felt that 'quite a few of the people running the government are crooks' rose from 24 per cent in 1958 to 32 per cent in 1970, and the number who felt that 'public officials don't care what people think' rose from 36 per cent in 1964 to 47 per cent in 1970.¹²² Political scientist Robert Putnam suggests that Vietnam contributed to a more general breakdown in American interpersonal relationships, although he researches other factors in more detail.¹²³

The overwhelming majority of anti-Vietnam protesters were at pains to emphasize their commitment to American ideals.¹²⁴ Taken as a whole, the anti-war movement was patriotic, its concerns were legitimate and its exercise of the right to free speech and the right to free assembly were in keeping with the US Constitution. Nevertheless, elements of the anti-Vietnam protest movement were closer in spirit to the radical No Conscription League of the First World War, and they influenced public perceptions and public debates in a way the socialists and anarchists of earlier eras could only have dreamed of. Never before had self-described enemies of the American way of life been so active, so influential or so generally accepted within the United States.

Widely admired opponents of the war portrayed themselves as 'guerrillas' fighting for both the defeat of American armed forces in the field and the overthrow of the American system of government at home.¹²⁵ These opponents explicitly condemned America's liberal tradition.¹²⁶ The Russian archives reveal that the GRU (Soviet military intelligence) used the international anti-Vietnam War movement as a front for covert operations, notably in Japan.¹²⁷ Senior members of the Johnson administration believed that foreign agents directed critical organizations within the American movement as well.¹²⁸

Although the self-proclaimed anti-Americans were few in number, they had a disproportionate influence over the ideas and activities of the larger anti-war movement. Mainstream anti-war groups freely joined coalitions with the radicals, and grassroots activists typically adopted the position that the political predilections of the coalition leaders were unimportant.¹²⁹ One exception to these rules was the anti-nuclear/anti-war group SANE, which attempted to distance itself from Trotskyist and mainstream Communist organizations.¹³⁰ SANE also discouraged protesters from carrying pro-NLF signs at its demonstrations. The National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam censured SANE for these actions, calling on activists throughout the country to boycott SANE events.

One can dismiss the American students who marched under the NLF flag as harmless. One cannot be so sanguine about their comrades who planted bombs, committed arson and issued death threats. Organizations such as the Weather

Underground and the Symbionese Liberation Army made little progress towards overthrowing the US government. Still, the simple fact that the Vietnam War inspired a network of anti-American terrorist groups to spring up on US soil indicates the degree to which Vietnam shook the American body politic.

Government responses to the anti-war movement often violated the spirit of American liberty as well. The FBI's attempts to discredit dissidents such as Martin Luther King Jr highlighted the government's abuse of its investigative powers, while the Chicago police department's efforts to suppress protests during the 1968 Democratic Convention symbolized the establishment's willingness to resort to brutality. When the US Supreme Court upheld the *New York Times*' decision to publish the classified documents known as the Pentagon Papers, the Nixon administration dispatched a team to ruin journalist Daniel Ellsberg's reputation.¹³¹ Official contempt for the sanctity of American law and the rights of American citizens gave credibility and even a degree of substance to the more radical criticisms of the US political system.

Historian Robert D. Schulzinger sums up the Vietnam War's influence on American society as follows:

The war profoundly affected every institution in American life: universities, Congress, the presidency, the Democratic Party, the armed forces, labor unions, religious organizations, and the mass media. At the beginning of U.S. involvement in the war, most Americans trusted their leaders to make appropriate choices, and the public held most large organizations in high regard ... Nearly all public officials and most citizens believed that the United States was properly waging the Cold War ... By 1968 this landscape had changed beyond recognition.¹³²

Vietnam-era Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara put it more succinctly: '[T]he war caused terrible damage to America. No doubt exists in my mind about that. None.'¹³³

As a matter of historical accuracy, it is possible to overrate Vietnam's role in the trend towards cynicism, anti-militarism and political alienation in American culture. As noted earlier, the First World War, the Second World War and Korea aroused well-justified disillusionment as well. The youthful exuberance of the baby boom generation and the general development of modern society would probably have weakened American national unity in any event. Nevertheless, the Vietnam experience dramatically accelerated this trend. The American public's growing disaffection with its government increased social friction at home, undermined citizens' confidence in their national principles, encouraged the powerful to violate those principles yet further, complicated the task of national leadership and deprived the republic of the talents of innumerable bright, principled and enthusiastic people who felt that their idealism was incompatible with their Americanism. All this took place at an unfortunate moment in the country's history. The 1970s were a dangerous time for US citizens to lose faith in their republic.

The ebb tide of the republic

From the late 1960s onwards, America suffered from political and economic problems of increasing severity. The Cold War was not the sole cause of these difficulties, but it hastened their onset, exacerbated their consequences and complicated their solution. These problems, in turn, weakened America's ability to defend itself. America's experience in the 1970s conformed to Machiavelli's theories at multiple levels.

Machiavelli warned that foreign misadventures accelerate the process of domestic corruption. This corruption, in turn, renders a republic prostrate to its external enemies. If one believes that Machiavelli's theory has anything to teach us about the political dynamics of the United States, the fact that America's final humiliation in Vietnam coincided with President Richard Nixon's abuse of office and the resulting Watergate scandal seems particularly ominous. Although the fact that this sequence of events matches Machiavelli's theory so perfectly undoubtedly owes something to chance, there is no doubt that Watergate accelerated the Vietnam-era trend towards cynicism.

One should not blame Watergate on the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon and his staff members must bear personal responsibility for their deeds. Nevertheless, the social strife of the Vietnam period contributed to the siege mentality within the White House. This, in turn, encouraged both the president and many of his followers to treat American citizens as enemies and the law as a mere impediment to be overcome. The Vietnam experience also magnified the Watergate scandal's effect upon American public life.

Watergate paved the way for a relatively uninspiring series of American leaders. Nixon personally appointed Gerald Ford, who, whatever his amiable virtues, was noted more for his gaffes than his statesmanship. James Earl Carter defeated Ford in 1976. In his campaign, Carter presented himself as a political outsider, free from the corruption that had settled upon Washington. Carter may have restored some integrity to the US government, but, in the realm of foreign policy, his innocence often bordered on naivety. The abruptness with which he reversed his policies on such issues as human rights and America's military commitment to Korea indicates that he himself thought the better of his initial positions.¹³⁴

NES data confirms that Americans were steadily losing confidence in their political system. The NES trust in government index fell by almost one-quarter in the two years around the Watergate scandal and continued to decline throughout the decade, from a score of 45 in 1968 to one of 27 in 1980.¹³⁵ The percentage of respondents who felt that 'quite a few' of their leaders were crooks, unsurprisingly, jumped from 32 per cent in 1970 to 45 per cent in 1974.¹³⁶ Again, this percentage rose, rather than fell, as the 1970s went on. The number of people who felt that 'public officials don't care what people think' rose more modestly, from 47 per cent in 1970 to 51 per cent in 1976, and then to 52 per cent in 1980.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, America and its allies sank into economic decline. For the first time in its modern history, the United States suffered from protracted peacetime inflation.¹³⁸ Over the course of the decade, prices rose as much as they had risen

during the Second World War.¹³⁹ An assortment of Middle Eastern crises contributed to the problem by triggering sharp jumps in the price of oil, but practically all prices rose steadily throughout the 1970s, even when oil prices were relatively stable.¹⁴⁰ The inflation of the 1970s represented a fundamental imbalance in the US (and international) economy, not merely a rise in the cost of a specific commodity.¹⁴¹

This was not the inflation of growth-fuelled exuberance. Each time inflation rose, unemployment shot up as well.¹⁴² Between the early 1970s and the early 1980s, America's rate of joblessness nearly doubled.¹⁴³ The overall productivity of the US economy slipped. From 1973 to 1975, the US gross domestic product (GDP) actually declined by almost 10 per cent – America's longest and most severe drop since the 11.8 per cent slump that followed the Second World War. US GDP dropped again in 1979–80 and then, after a rebound, dropped by 2.19 per cent in 1981–82.¹⁴⁴ Although the United States had suffered two one-year declines in the 1950s, both of less than 1 per cent, it had not faltered so many times in a single decade since the Great Depression.

America's stock market experienced a sixteen-year slump, beginning in 1966. During this period, the Dow Jones Industrial Average endured five major declines of up to 75 per cent in real dollars.¹⁴⁵ Although there were also periods when the market rallied, the rises did not make up for the drops.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in 1971, President Richard Nixon took the US dollar off the gold standard, thereby ending the Bretton Woods regime that had stabilized the world's currency exchange rates since the Second World War. The dollar, unsurprisingly, plummeted relative to other currencies, losing 39 per cent of its value against the Japanese yen, 50 per cent against the German mark and 61 per cent against the Swiss franc between 1970 and 1979.¹⁴⁷

Many factors affect the world economy, and many aspects of US policy contributed to the economic slide of the 1970s. One would be oversimplifying the case if one blamed America's economic decline purely upon the Cold War. Nevertheless, one notes that the US had gone from spending 5 per cent of its gross national product on defence in 1949 to spending over 13 per cent during the Korean War, and had gone on spending 8 to 10 per cent from that time onward.¹⁴⁸ One cannot prove that this prolonged period of spending contributed to America's prolonged economic crisis, but wartime military expenditures typically lead to inflation, and it would be surprising if peacetime military expenditures did not.¹⁴⁹

The Johnson administration's decision to fight the Vietnam War on credit magnified the Cold War's effect on America's finances. Vietnam directly precipitated the crisis that forced Nixon to abandon the gold standard.¹⁵⁰ J. Bradford DeLong of the US National Bureau of Economic Research argues that 1970s-era economists misunderstood the principles of fiscal policy, and that their misconceptions would have eventually led to inflation in any event.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, he agrees that Vietnam triggered the disaster of the 1970s.¹⁵²

America's economic angst hurt American people and reduced their confidence in their republic.¹⁵³ Hard times reduced the nation's will and, to a lesser extent, its ability to support military forces. The Vietnam War made it unusually difficult for

US military planners to invest their funds efficiently, first by compelling them to reconfigure the US armed forces for jungle warfare and then by compelling them to switch the forces back again.¹⁵⁴ As American budgets and priorities fluctuated, the Soviet Union steadily invested its resources in improving its overall military power.¹⁵⁵ By 1980, the USSR matched or exceeded the United States in such industrial indexes as steel and oil production, as well as direct military spending.¹⁵⁶

These developments allowed the USSR to gain military superiority over the US and its allies. Many Western countries had been reducing the size of their armed forces.¹⁵⁷ America's own military establishment, for instance, had shrunk from 3,161,000 men and women in 1970 to 2,088,000 in 1980.¹⁵⁸ Over the same decade, the Soviet Union had expanded its forces from 3,305,000 (with another 205,000 border guards) to 3,675,000 (plus 450,000 border guards).¹⁵⁹

Western countries were also giving ground in numbers of tanks, artillery pieces and aircraft.¹⁶⁰ The West was growing weaker and the USSR was growing stronger, not merely in terms of numbers of troops, but in the quality and technological sophistication of forces deployed in such critical regions as the border zone between East and West Germany.¹⁶¹ American aircraft were superior plane for plane, but the combination of Soviet numbers and Soviet air defences seemed likely to negate that advantage. For the first time since the early days of the Second World War, the US Army warned its soldiers to expect their enemies to rule the skies.¹⁶²

A similar process was taking place in the Pacific, where the USSR had added aircraft carriers, new bombers and nuclear-tipped missiles to its Far Eastern arsenal.¹⁶³ The USSR built up its air and naval forces in the Baltic, Black Sea and Arctic Ocean as well.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the US Navy (USN) cut its aircraft carrier forces from a strength of fifty-eight carriers to a strength of thirteen.¹⁶⁵ The fact that the USN's remaining carriers were exceptionally large and powerful did not change the fact that they were simply too few to maintain America's numerous naval commitments. This compromised the USN in such roles as the defence of NATO's critical Norwegian flank. A study commissioned by NATO Secretary-General Manlio Brosio warned that the USN would be unable to secure vital regions, and major naval exercises of the late 1970s simulated operations to 'regain' a fictitious country based on southern Norway, implicitly accepting that the USSR would capture Norway in the first phases of any war.¹⁶⁶

NATO had traditionally hoped to counter Soviet numerical superiority with superior troops and gear. During the 1970s, the Soviet Union surpassed the United States in the general quality of its military equipment.¹⁶⁷ The fact that specific Western weapons systems were more advanced seemed unlikely to compensate for the fact that the Soviet armed forces as a whole were likely to be better supplied and more efficient. Research performed at the British Royal Military Academy confirmed that Western countries had few grounds for complacency concerning training, morale or even technology.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, Western countries would have faced enormous difficulties deploying their forces in any militarily useful way. Over five of the divisions that America

nominally committed to the defence of Germany were actually in the US, and would have had to cross the Atlantic to participate in combat.¹⁶⁹ Severe deficiencies in bases, ammunition, spare parts, vehicles and support personnel would have further impeded US operations.¹⁷⁰ In 1977, US senators Samuel Nunn and Dewey F. Barnett described the state of NATO logistics as 'nothing less than a disgrace'.¹⁷¹

Not only had the Soviet Union improved its forces, but it had improved their positions. Cuba, for instance, served as a base for Soviet air and naval forces.¹⁷² Although the USSR had undertaken not to place missiles on Cuban soil, the missile-carrying submarines that docked there served much the same purpose. The victorious Vietnamese Communists granted the Soviet Union the use of the formerly American naval base at Cam Ranh Bay. Moscow's rapidly developing relationship with Muammar Gaddafi's Libya granted the USSR access to the western Mediterranean.

Moscow was building up its long-range nuclear arsenal as well. Defence expert Edward Luttwak, writing in 1983, noted:

Outnumbered in every category of 'strategic' weapon except bombers, and outmatched in every conceivable index of capability except in the number of warheads (a rapidly waning advantage), American strategic-nuclear forces have much less delivery capacity as of this writing than the Soviet . . . [T]he long-standing American advantage in missile accuracies ha[s] to a large extent also disappeared.¹⁷³

After the fall of the Soviet regime, Western intelligence analysts discovered that they had underestimated the size of the USSR's nuclear stockpile by 12,000 warheads, an error factor of over 25 per cent.¹⁷⁴ America's actual circumstances had been worse than Luttwak had known.

Had America fought the Soviet Union, it would have done so as part of an alliance. Americans should be grateful to their allies. Without them, the US would have had to draw its defensive lines back towards its own borders, and, without them, it would have found the economic costs of defending itself far greater. The West German army was defending the frontiers of the United States almost as directly as the US army was defending the frontiers of West Germany. Machiavelli emphasized the point that, if a republic is to succeed in foreign affairs, it needs external support.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli also pointed out the inconveniences of leagues, and America suffered from these as well. Over the years of its existence, NATO had adopted a number of practices which, while expedient in terms of alliance politics, were dangerous in terms of military strategy, particularly from an American point of view. NATO had, for instance, granted five different member countries sole responsibility for defending a section of the inter-German border. Whereas this symbolized the political equality of the five alliance members, it failed to account for the fact that some of those five countries were far more militarily capable than others. Indeed, certain countries failed to deploy more than token forces in their

zones.¹⁷⁵ Had the Soviet Union chosen to attack, it would have been able to smash through the weaker sectors with relative ease.

NATO also insisted on a policy known as ‘forward defence’, in which alliance forces planned to stop any Soviet invasion dead in its tracks at the inter-German border. Although this would have been the ideal way to defend Western Europe in theory, it would have been exceedingly difficult to accomplish in practice. To defeat the Red Army, NATO ground forces would almost certainly have had to fall back and conduct a defence in depth. By clinging to the idea of ‘forward defence’, many argued, the alliance merely denied itself the opportunity to prepare for what would happen when the Soviets inevitably broke through.

If the Soviets had broken through, and NATO had failed to improvise a successful new strategy, the alliance would have had to consider resorting to nuclear weapons. One might expect NATO to have wanted to keep any nuclear exchange as controlled as possible. The alliance, however, adopted a convoluted nuclear command and control structure.¹⁷⁶ This structure made it unnecessarily difficult for central commanders to control their subordinates.¹⁷⁷ That seemed to increase the chances that, in the chaos of battle, a relatively low-level military commander might fire the shots that would precipitate a global nuclear exchange.¹⁷⁸

Most analysts accept that NATO’s European members deliberately shaped alliance strategy to increase the chances that a clash in Germany would escalate into a total nuclear war.¹⁷⁹ Rather than see their own countries become battlefields in a ground campaign against the Red Army, many European leaders preferred to gamble that they could prevent war altogether by threatening the USSR with the MAD-ness of mutually assured destruction.¹⁸⁰ As long as this gamble succeeded, the US and its partners shared the blessings of peace. Maxwell Taylor, however, had already pointed out the limitations of relying too heavily on nuclear threats. Moreover, if the Soviet Union had actually attacked, America might have paid an awesome price for the alliance’s choice of strategies.

Throughout the 1970s, the USA and USSR negotiated to achieve a state of mutual understanding commonly referred to as ‘détente’. Détente was undoubtedly safer than direct confrontation, and many Westerners saw this movement as cause for optimism. The word, however, means only relaxation of tensions, not friendship or affection. Détente architect Henry Kissinger sought this relaxation, not because he believed it to be the best policy in principle, but because he believed it was the only way to deal with the stark realities of the era.¹⁸¹ For the US, détente was a way of accepting its weakness as gracefully as possible.

The USSR, meanwhile, pressed its growing advantages. In 1973, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev set out his views of the world situation as follows:

[T]he positive changes in international life are to a decisive extent connected with the coordinated purposeful actions of the Socialist states. In today’s conditions, new opportunities are opening up for the cohesion of the socialist countries, the world Communist movement and all progressive forces in the struggle for the people’s interests . . . the

influence of socialism has grown and the positions of the revolutionary forces have gained strength.¹⁸²

Four years later, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR reiterated that, 'on the basis of fundamental changes in the balance of forces in the world, a profound restructuring of the entire system of international relations is taking place'.¹⁸³ In remarks directed towards the armed forces, the Central Committee added:

Détente among governments intensifies rather than weakens ideological combat. Peaceful coexistence does not signify an acknowledgement that the capitalist system, with all its vices, is eternal, nor does it constitute peaceful cohabitation of socialism and capitalism; rather it creates fresh possibilities for stepping up the struggle against imperialism . . .¹⁸⁴

The Central Committee went on to say that the 'great shift in the balances of world power' had already 'obliged' capitalists to accept an assortment of setbacks.¹⁸⁵ Accordingly, the USSR grew increasingly bold in its military ventures. In 1977, 1,000 Soviet advisers commanding 15,000 Cuban troops intervened in the Ethiopian civil war to crush Eritrean rebels and shore up the Communist government in Addis Ababa.¹⁸⁶ Two years later, the USSR launched a brilliantly co-ordinated air, ground and special forces assault to seize control of Afghanistan in a matter of days, and, if the subsequent campaign turned against the Soviet occupiers, the initial attack was none the less audacious.

Saved by the bell

In 1980, Ronald Reagan replaced Carter as president. In Machiavellian fashion, he spoke of restoring the country's greatness by returning to its traditional virtues.¹⁸⁷ When he ran for re-election in 1984, he claimed success with the slogan 'It's morning again in America'. The public rewarded him with 59 per cent of the popular vote and the largest electoral landslide in history.

Statistics suggest that Reagan helped restore public confidence in the American government. According to the NES, Americans' overall trust in their government rose from a score of 27 in 1980 to one of 34 at the end of Reagan's presidency.¹⁸⁸ Whereas this was 27 per cent short of the figures seen in 1966, it was an improvement. Between 1980 and 1988, the percentage of Americans who believed that 'quite a few' of their leaders were crooks declined from 47 per cent to 40 per cent, while the percentage who believed that the government works for the benefit of all rose from 21 per cent to 31 per cent.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, more liberal Americans might argue that Reagan reduced the intellectual level of American political discourse and alienated the less fortunate members of the population. According to the NES, the percentage of respondents who felt that 'people don't have a say in what the government does' rose slightly

during Reagan's presidency.¹⁹⁰ The percentage who felt that 'public officials don't care what people think' fell only by a single point.¹⁹¹ By the standards of the 1950s and 1960s, the percentage who believed that politicians were crooks and the percentage who doubted that the government worked for the benefit of all also remained disturbingly high.

One may use voter turnout as a crude way to assess the degree to which the population feels engaged with the political system. Over 69 per cent of the eligible American populace voted in the 1964 presidential election, and 67.8 per cent voted in 1968.¹⁹² In 1976, however, voter turnout had fallen to 59.2 per cent. Turnout remained stalled at 59.2 per cent in 1980, and rose a mere 0.7 per cent to 59.9 per cent in the 'morning again in America' election of 1984. In 1988, at the close of Reagan's term, turnout dropped to 57.4 per cent.

Although it may be difficult to evaluate Reagan's success at reviving America's self-confidence, he indubitably revived America's military capabilities. In terms of real (inflation-adjusted) dollars, Reagan increased the US arms budget by over 41 per cent.¹⁹³ During the 1980s, the US and its allies improved both the quality and the quantity of their forces.¹⁹⁴ Although both sides in the Cold War were deploying increasingly sophisticated weapons, the technological advances of the 1980s tended to favour the West. The spread of guided anti-tank missiles, for instance, multiplied the strength of NATO defensive positions and reduced the importance of the Soviet Union's numerically superior armoured forces.

Western forces adopted more effective methods of fighting as well. Both America and the NATO alliance developed new military doctrines that emphasized seizing the initiative by striking enemy forces deep in the enemy rear area, before they deployed for combat. New technology made these new methods feasible. Meanwhile, the United States adopted the Reagan Doctrine of actively supporting anti-Communist movements throughout the world.

As earlier sections have noted, America had repeatedly responded to Cold War crises by adopting what Machiavelli called the middle course, and it had repeatedly suffered the consequences Machiavelli would have predicted. Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense, attempted to steer the US away from these policies of costly, dangerous moderation. In 1984, in a speech before the National Press Club, Weinberger enunciated principles that became known as the Weinberger Doctrine. Colin Powell later adopted a similar policy, leading many to rechristen it as the Powell Doctrine. Weinberger suggested six principles for the United States to follow when deciding whether or not to commit its forces to war.¹⁹⁵

First, this doctrine holds that America should only fight when it has a clear national interest in doing so. Second, when it chooses to fight, it should do so wholeheartedly, with a clear intention of winning. Third, it should have clear objectives. Fourth, it should continually reassess the relationship between those objectives and its level of commitment, adjusting the level of commitment when appropriate. Fifth, its leaders should only go to war when they are reasonably sure that they have the support of the people and their elected representatives in Congress. Sixth, the US should view war as a last resort.

The Reagan Doctrine discomfited Soviet forces throughout the world, notably in Afghanistan. NATO's combination of new technology and new doctrine challenged Soviet forces.¹⁹⁶ Weinberger, meanwhile, successfully avoided protracted military debacles. One must give Reagan and his advisers credit for these accomplishments, but one must also note that they did not restore America to the kind of unity a true Machiavellian might have hoped for.

Among the most vivid examples of this were the Boland amendments and the subsequent Iran–Contra affair. One of the anti-Communist guerrilla movements which the Republican administration sought to aid under the Reagan Doctrine was the contra insurgency against the left-leaning government of Nicaragua. The contras' brutality alienated many Americans, including members of the US Congress. Representative Edward P. Boland sponsored bills in 1982 and 1984 which prohibited the US government from aiding the contras.¹⁹⁷

Reagan 'dubbed Congress a meddling "committee of 535"'.¹⁹⁸ Members of his administration proceeded to raise money for the contras through extra-governmental means that ranged from soliciting funds from wealthy foreigners to indirectly selling missiles to Iran.¹⁹⁹ This operation became public after a series of events beginning in 1986, when Nicaraguan forces captured a private contractor working on behalf of the contras for the US government and forced him to confess his activities to journalists.²⁰⁰ The US Congress went on to investigate, and the incident developed into a scandal. For purposes of this study, one notes that the Reagan administration's policies failed to win the confidence of the American people's elected representatives, and that the administration's attempts to bypass those representatives were at odds, to say the least, with the system of checks and balances upon which America's more fundamental political principles presumably depend. Had the Reagan administration succeeded, it would have set a dangerous precedent, and, in failure, it lost standing with Congress and the people that it might ideally have used to pursue other policies in the national interest.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's own inefficiencies and internal political difficulties developed to a critical point. Beginning in 1989, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the Communist governments of Central Europe to fall. In 1991, the Soviet Union itself disintegrated.

American leaders had hoped and even planned for such an outcome. Kennan had pinned his containment strategy on the idea that, if the USA remained steadfast, the USSR would eventually collapse. Some suggest that the Reagan administration's tough military stance hastened the USSR's fall by forcing Moscow to spend more on its armed forces than it could afford. Nevertheless, America owed the happy resolution of the Cold War to a substantial degree of luck. Had the Soviet leaders of the late 1980s been of a different temperament, they might have done as many observers feared they might do, and launched a third world war while they remained in a position to win it. Likewise, had the Cold War dragged on for any longer than it did, America might well have sunk back into a social and economic quagmire of its own.

The US economy improved in most ways from 1982 onward. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration, like the Johnson administration, financed its military programme through borrowing. America's federal budget deficit, which had first developed under Nixon, mushroomed to over 6 per cent of the GDP in 1984.²⁰¹ Although the deficit dipped between 1985 and 1988, it had jumped back to 4 and 5 per cent in the early 1990s.

One should not allow the economic recovery of the mid-1990s to blind one to the hazards and disadvantages of Reagan's policy. Needless to say, the deficits of the 1980s reduced the government's ability to find funds and credit for other forms of spending. Economists also estimate that the Reagan-era deficits held back the growth of the American GDP by \$1,000 to \$3,400 per worker.²⁰² This represents lost income for American people and missed opportunities for American businesses. It represents slower development of medical, industrial and other technologies, which might have saved lives, strengthened businesses and addressed any number of other problems.

America's budget deficit also led to excessive trade in US government bonds. This led to correspondingly high demand for US dollars to buy the bonds with. The value of the dollar rose, and, although this benefited importers, it hurt America's export industries and worsened America's growing balance-of-payments deficit. This contributed to the decline of traditional American industries and the dwindling economic security of America's wage-earners.²⁰³ Thus, the deficit hurt Americans and it has hurt American society. Moreover, the deficit put America at risk of future inflation and a return to the conditions of the 1970s.

The end of the Cold War allowed America to stanch its economic wounds.

In the mid-1980s, America spent 6.2 per cent of its GDP on the military. By 2001, this figure had dropped by more than half, to 2.9 per cent. Meanwhile, the US managed to end the deficits and realize a modest surplus. According to the US government's own figures, reductions in the defence budget account for 42 per cent of the reduction in the deficit.²⁰⁴

Another 14 per cent of deficit reduction came from reduction of interest payments on the national debt. This partially reflects reduced defence spending (and, thus, reduced borrowing) as well. The remainder of the reduction in the deficit comes from increased tax revenues. Had the Cold War continued, America's deficits would almost certainly have continued to mount, and the US would have eventually had to face one set of painful consequences or another. The fall of the Soviet Union, however, gave the US fresh cause for hope.

A NEW ROME?

Not only did the Soviet Union's withdrawal from world affairs relieve the pressure that had been distorting American political life, but it left the USA with an opportunity to redirect the course of international politics. Seldom has Fortuna favoured any republic with a more docile countenance than the one she presented to the United States in the 1990s. Nevertheless, American leaders continued to come under pressure to adopt middle courses in foreign affairs, and continued to suffer the consequences Machiavelli would have predicted. America's experiences with allies and international organizations also conformed to Machiavelli's predictions. For these reasons, as the decade proceeded, American policy makers found unilateralism increasingly attractive.

The moment of opportunity

When the 1990s began, the USA had a remarkable opportunity to shape its own future. Americans were conscious of this point. Scholars, pundits and leaders interpreted this situation in a variety of ways and proposed an assortment of different courses of action. Some suggested that the United States should comprehensively disengage from the rest of the world.¹

This policy was, however, unpopular among foreign policy professionals, one reason being that it gave other actors free rein to overturn the favourable international order.² To disengage would have been to invite Fortuna to change her mind. If, however, the US chose to remain active in world politics, it would have to go on exposing its political system to the shocks of international affairs. The US would also have to determine how to structure its relations with its many partners.

Machiavelli's advice to republics in such situations is clear. The Florentine advised republics to secure support from allies, but to put themselves at the head of every alliance. Few openly urged America to emulate ancient Rome, but even relatively liberal Americans explored parallel lines of thought. As early as 1990, for instance, political scientist Joseph Nye presented parallel thoughts in a book titled *Born to Lead*. Nye, like Machiavelli, believed that even the richest and most powerful republics needed outside support.

Drawing back from current international commitments would not stop technological change, hinder the development and global extension of an information-based economy, or change the high degree of dependence on transnational actors. Terrorism, drug traffic, AIDS, global warming and other problems will intrude. Further, there are no purely domestic solutions to such transnational problems; rather collective international action will be a critical part of their solution.³

For these reasons, Nye urged the United States to ‘develop and mobilize resources for international leadership’.⁴ Nye’s version of leadership was more self-effacing than Machiavelli’s. Where the Florentine saw leadership as a matter of dictating policy to vassals, Nye saw it as a matter of establishing supranational organizations within which states could collectively manage a ‘transition to interdependence’.⁵ Nye’s vision, however, rests on the assumption that states can agree on how this interdependence is to work. When agreement fails, interdependence becomes a mere euphemism for the continuation of anarchy – or for empire.

The feel-good war

Global politics in the 1990s were a grand assessment of how far agreements among states could go. The decade opened with a dramatic test of the world’s nations’ commitment to collective action. On 2 August 1990, Iraq overran Kuwait. Iraq proceeded to annex the conquered country as its nineteenth province.

If the concept of an international community meant anything at all, Iraq had defied its most fundamental tenets. One of the most basic principles of international law, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, is that states are never justified in attacking other states except in self-defence.⁶ The Baghdad government did not even attempt to claim that Kuwait had been a military threat to Iraq. Moreover, contemporary international law and the United Nations system are based on the principle that states share an equal and inviolable right to sovereign government.⁷ By conquering a neighbouring state and annexing its territory *in toto*, Iraq had made a mockery of both principles.

Iraq’s offence to the international community was material as well as symbolic. If the world had allowed the Baghdad regime to annex Kuwait, the nations of the Arabian Peninsula would have had to consider the possibility that they might be next. Since most of those countries were lightly populated and militarily weak, they would have had little choice but to appease the conqueror. This would have given Baghdad considerable power over the region, whether it actually invaded other countries or not. Iraq, and whatever outside powers had the most influence in Iraq, would have been in a position to control access to the oil-producing parts of the Middle East.

Although the United States consumed more oil than it produced, it was not particularly reliant on oil imports by the standards of the industrialized world.⁸ America was, however, part of a global trading network in which other critical participants – most notably Japan – were almost completely dependent on Middle

Eastern oil. This trading network overlapped with the liberal world's network of military alliances. A shock to one was a shock to the other. All members had a shared interest in preventing new and aggressive powers from gaining the ability to blackmail them.

Just as Nye might have hoped, America took the lead in opposing Iraq's move and the rest of the world community co-operated. Less than a day after Iraqi troops entered Kuwait, the United Nations had adopted a resolution condemning the attack. On 4 August, the European Community had imposed an embargo against Iraq, and on 6 August the United Nations Security Council followed suit. That winter, a coalition of 33 nations acting under the auspices of the UN drove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Coalition members also contributed 28 billion US dollars to the effort, meaning that this war, unlike America's Cold War campaigns, did little direct harm to the US government's budget.

The victorious nations left the government headed by Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath party in power, partly as a buffer against Iran, but mainly in order to meet the requirements of coalition politics. Although the United Nations had authorized war to liberate Kuwait, it had not empowered the liberators to become conquerors. John Major, the British prime minister at the time, cites this as the primary reason why the victors in the 1991 Gulf War left the Ba'ath regime intact.⁹

In the realm of abstract principle, the same passages of the United Nations Charter that banned Iraq from annexing Kuwait would seem to ban other governments from installing a new regime in Baghdad. Moreover, members of the coalition actively opposed moves to replace the Ba'ath government. The USSR was particularly vocal in this regard. An internal document of the USSR's military intelligence services stated that Russia had joined the coalition primarily in order to prevent Western nations from gaining permanent influence in Iraq after the war, and the Soviet Union succeeded in this effort.¹⁰

The Gulf War victors expressed the hope that Saddam Hussein's domestic opponents would overthrow him. When the Ba'ath regime's internal enemies actually rose up, however, the victorious nations stood aside and allowed the Baghdad government to annihilate the rebels. In the meantime, the United Nations relied on a system of inspections backed up by the threat of economic sanctions to keep Iraq tame. Machiavelli might have sensed danger in that course, and certain American generals would have preferred to inflict further damage on the Iraqi army, but the alternatives appeared both perilous and politically difficult.¹¹

Foreign policy experts were optimistic about the sanctions policy. Many suggested that the United Nations could use such methods on a wider basis, to uphold its members' collective sensibilities on such issues as human rights. This approach appeared to give the putative world community a cheap and non-violent way to put pressure on rogue members. The 1990s, many hoped, would go down in history as the 'decade of sanctions'.¹²

The perceived success of international co-operation in the Gulf War masked the differences between Machiavelli's version of alliance leadership and the more benevolent concepts of scholars such as Nye. American president George Bush Sr

voiced no concerns about possible conflict between America's international commitments and America's domestic ideals when he proclaimed a New World Order.¹³ Rhetorically, at least, he embraced his country's role as 'the only nation on this earth that [can] assemble the forces of peace'.¹⁴ Bush's New World Order speech contributed to a broader movement towards strengthening international organizations.¹⁵

Not quite Machiavelli

Bush Sr and his advisers aspired to be more Machiavellian than the New World Order speech suggested. In 1992, the Bush administration prepared a report known as the Defense Planning Guidance document, or DPG. 'Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival', this paper stated.¹⁶ To this end, the United States would 'endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power'.¹⁷

The DPG called on the United States to intervene in political disputes throughout the world, whether or not it had any direct stake in them. 'We will retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing selectively those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies or friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations.'¹⁸ By these means, the US would show other nations that they had no interest in developing their own power. '[T]he U.S. must show the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests.'

The Bush administration's commitment to these ambitions remains ambiguous. Richard Cheney, then serving as Secretary of Defense, publicly endorsed the DPG.¹⁹ When a leaked version of the DPG appeared in the *New York Times*, however, the administration issued a less strident paper.²⁰ Bush Sr's reluctance to endorse full-blown imperialism went beyond the desire to avoid provocative rhetoric. In practice, the Bush administration proved unwilling to pay the price of global power.

America's Cold War defence spending had endangered the national economy. The safer international environment of the 1990s permitted the US to pay off some of its debts, making itself economically safer as well. If America had chosen to climb higher peaks of global dominance, it would have had to return to higher levels of spending. One advocate of primacy, writing in 1996, urged America to spend 5 per cent of its GDP on foreign policy.²¹ Whereas this is a smaller percentage of national wealth than America sacrificed at the height of the Cold War, it is over 100 billion dollars more than the Bush administration actually spent.²²

Advocates of primacy had little patience for economic qualms. 'We are the richest country the world has ever known', wrote one.²³ 'And we are richer today than we have ever been before.' If only American leaders had the courage to demand greater sacrifices from the public, they could use this wealth to foster national greatness. Nye concurred:

Although the 1990s will require Americans to cope with the debts of the previous decade, the world's wealthiest nation should still be able to pay for both its international commitments and its domestic investments. America is rich but acts poor. In real terms, GNP is more than twice what it was in 1960, but Americans spend much less of their GNP on international leadership. The prevailing view is 'we can't afford it' despite the fact that US taxes are a smaller percentage of GNP than in other OECD nations. This suggests a problem of domestic political leadership in power conversion . . .²⁴

Indeed, Nye warned, if the US government failed to harvest the national wealth through increased taxation, the citizens would only waste it. '[G]iven recent experience, what the United States might save in international expenditure would probably increase domestic consumption rather than investment.'²⁵ Theodore Roosevelt might well have agreed. Machiavelli would have agreed as well. The Florentine held that, while the state should be rich, the people should be poor.²⁶

Bush Sr, however, may have understood the US public better than the primacy enthusiasts. Even his own modest tax increases cost him severely in the 1992 election. To an uncritical follower of Machiavelli, this may simply indicate that Bush failed to manage the people properly. To someone who subscribes to the American faith that it is just and beneficial for people to determine their own destiny, this may be an example of democracy in action.

Those who embrace the idea that the US government is a government of the people, by the people and, most critically of all, for the people may not dismiss the voters' choice so blithely. This phrase suggests that foreign policy should be a means to domestic happiness, not an end in itself. The advantages of pursuing yet greater heights of power were merely speculative. The costs were definite.

A policy of increasing America's dominance over the rest of the world might also have divided the country on moral grounds. The history of public protest in the Mexican War, the Spanish–American War and the Vietnam War demonstrate that many Americans oppose imperialism on principle. Machiavelli suggested that republics could strengthen themselves at home by strengthening themselves abroad. For the US in the 1990s, this may not have been the case.

Bush Sr seemed to hope that the United States had already achieved the DPG's goals and could now rest on its proverbial laurels. One day after the Gulf War of 1991 ended, he stated:

I think because of what has happened, we won't have to use U.S. forces around the world . . . I think when we say something that is objectively correct, like don't take over a neighbour, or you're going to bear some responsibility, people are going to listen because I think all of this will be a newfound – put it this way, a re-established credibility for the United States of America.²⁷

Although Bush and his advisers had been willing to use force against Panama, and in the Gulf War itself, they were slower to do so for the more open-ended goals of preserving the New World Order. When Serbia attacked Croatia in 1991, for instance, the Bush administration offered only mild words in protest.²⁸ Where the DPG urged the US to assume other countries' military burdens so that those countries would not build powerful armed forces of their own, the Bush administration adopted the position that unrest in the former Yugoslavia was a matter for the European Community.²⁹ Meanwhile, civil conflict in Somalia hampered UN attempts to feed starving people there. The Bush administration sent troops to protect aid convoys, but resisted the UN Secretary-General's calls for military operations to suppress the rival militias that were preying upon relief efforts.³⁰

Not quite Wilson

When William Clinton entered the White House in 1993, America's foreign policy was an amalgam of internationalist rhetoric, realist sensibilities and cautious practices. The new president embraced this conglomerate of approaches.³¹ Whereas politicians are always wise to give themselves as many options as possible, those who chronically refuse to make choices risk drifting on to the middle course. During the 1990s, America's attempts to exercise all its options simultaneously exacerbated the problems Machiavelli associated with coalition politics. The United States failed to provide international organizations with leadership or support, but it permitted the vacillation characteristic of such organizations to influence its own foreign policy.

Scarcely had the new president taken office when the policy of co-operation came into conflict with the policy of selectivity. Despite the Bush administration's position that Somalia was irrelevant to America's national interests, Clinton complied with Boutros-Ghali's request to attack Somali militias. On 14 January 1993, militiamen shot and killed the first American soldier to die in the conflict. The fighting grew fiercer as the year went on and, that October, the US Army suffered a debacle in which it lost almost 100 men (eighteen killed, seventy-eight wounded and one taken prisoner).³²

Public opinion polls reported mixed reactions from the American public. An estimated 41 per cent of survey respondents wanted the US to withdraw its forces from Somalia immediately.³³ This suggests that 59 per cent were willing to keep them there for longer. The Clinton administration, however, halted offensive operations in under a week and withdrew its forces shortly thereafter, handing the operation over to other international forces.³⁴

The Somalia campaign's humanitarian benefits are questionable. The incident also established the perception that the American public would lose its stomach for war as soon as US forces suffered casualties. This perception appears to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy.³⁵ Whether this perception was accurate or not, it became widespread. This belief reduced American leaders' will to act in later

situations, undercut US credibility with America's potential allies and encouraged America's potential enemies.

The questions America and the UN faced in Somalia rose repeatedly throughout the 1990s. Governments in the developed world spent the decade grappling with the question of how to respond to military crises that took innocent lives but posed no direct threat to their national interests. Somalia demonstrated the dangers of proceeding too boldly. The memory of Somalia made both America and Britain reluctant to intervene the following year in Rwanda when the Hutu ethnic group attempted to exterminate the rival Tutsi tribe.³⁶

Romeo Dallaire, a Canadian general commanding UN observer forces in Rwanda, argued that swift military intervention might prevent genocide.³⁷ Rwanda's Hutu-dominated government was overseeing the massacres in an organized way. Dallaire felt that even a modest demonstration of force would have caused it to desist. Hindsight indicates that he was probably right.

The United Nations, however, procrastinated for weeks before discussing Dallaire's plan.³⁸ Hutu militias went on to murder over one million Tutsis, and they carried out the majority of the killings during the first six weeks. The United States and Britain bear primary responsibility for delaying UN action. Clinton publicly apologized for his country's role. This, one might note, compromised America's dignity while offering little comfort to the murdered Tutsis.

Meanwhile, international attempts to prevent atrocities in the former Yugoslavia proved similarly ineffective. The question of whether outside nations should have intervened more actively or whether they should have minded their own business remains open to debate, but, whichever position one takes, one must concede that Bush's New World Order failed. The United Nations would undoubtedly have achieved more if France, Britain and the United States had provided it with more resources and direction. Nevertheless, one must observe that Western powers dithered more and accomplished less when acting through the UN than they tended to do on their own.

Bush Sr, as noted above, wished to keep American forces out of the former Yugoslavia. Neither the US nor the UN acted in the summer of 1991 when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) (commonly referred to as Serbia) sent troops to attack the breakaway province of Croatia and 'cleanse' the ethnically mixed Krajina region of non-Serbs. A French general, Jean Cot, later claimed that 'the Serbs could have been stopped in October 1991 with three ships, three dozen planes and about three thousand men'.³⁹ Both the Serbs and the Croats appear to have taken Western inaction as a sign that they could persecute rival ethnic groups with impunity.⁴⁰

When Bosnia split from the FRY, both the European Community and the UN recognized its independence. Neither, however, answered Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic's call for outside countries to provide his nation with a transitional government – and with defensive forces.⁴¹ Instead, in early 1992, the UN endorsed a plan to appease extremists of all ethnic groups by partitioning Bosnia into three ethnically based cantons. The extremists proceeded with attempts to purge their

cantons of rival ethnic groups, and, although Serbs carried out the most publicized acts of genocide, the Croats behaved in much the same fashion.⁴²

In autumn 1991, the UN imposed an arms embargo on all of the former Yugoslavia. While impartial in principle – and, thus, relatively easy for the international body to agree on – this had the practical effect of strengthening ethnically Serbian forces, which were already well equipped with weapons, against Croats and Bosnia, who did not. A few months later, the United Nations sent peacekeeping forces into Krajina. By this time, however, Serbian forces had driven the non-Serbs out of those areas. UN forces arrived in time to protect the ethnic Serb population that remained, freeing Belgrade's troops for offensive operations elsewhere.⁴³

UN members pursued contradictory and half-hearted measures as they argued and vacillated. In the summer of 1992, as Serbian forces besieged the Bosnian city of Sarajevo, the UN sent an envoy to determine whether or not it would be appropriate to mount a peacekeeping operation. This envoy concluded that there was no peace to keep.⁴⁴ The Security Council ignored his conclusion and, in a measure reminiscent of their early policies in Somalia, sent troops to protect aid workers delivering food and medicine to the besieged city. The peacekeeping force, however, proved too weak to carry out this mission except when it was able to bribe local commanders into allowing aid to pass. This aid, in any event, did little to protect people from the real humanitarian crisis, which was the war.

Later in 1992, America proposed lifting the arms embargo on Croatia and Bosnia and supporting their forces with air strikes. Germany cautiously supported the idea, but France and Britain feared that it would prolong the fighting and place their peacekeeping troops at risk.⁴⁵ As debates over the policy wore on, Clinton changed his mind about the scheme and abandoned it. Instead, he announced his support for Russian plans to designate certain areas as safe havens for victims of ethnic repression. Although the UN estimated that it would need 35,000 troops to protect these refugees, no member state offered military support.⁴⁶

For the following two years, internal political disputes kept the United Nations in deadlock. America had come to support forceful action against Serbia. Yasushi Akashi, the UN Secretary-General's special representative in charge of the Balkan crisis, used his influence to block military intervention.⁴⁷ Russia, France and Britain lobbied on Serbia's behalf, whereas the US and Germany leaned towards Croatia.

The European Union (EU), meanwhile, attempted to administer the ethnically mixed city of Mostar.⁴⁸ Croatian criminals, however, made this job difficult, and EU member states demonstrated little commitment to the task. The Italians frequently submitted their plans for Mostar to Croatian leader Franjo Tudjman, thereby discarding even the pretence of even-handedness. Although the EU managed to rebuild most of the city, its attempt to end the ethnic violence failed.

Frustrated with the various international organizations, the Clinton administration began ignoring their mandates. America turned a blind eye as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia violated the UN weapons embargo by arming the Bosnian

Muslims.⁴⁹ The US also employed a private firm known as Military Professional Resource Incorporated (MPRI) to arm and train Croatian forces. This policy proved embarrassing in 1995, when MPRI-trained Croats tried to drive ethnic Serbs out of Krajina.⁵⁰

In July of 1995, Serb forces attacked the UN safe haven of Srebrenica and massacred over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims there. Although there were Dutch troops on the scene, the UN had given them neither the strength nor the authority to intervene. This convinced Clinton of the need to stop the Serbs militarily.⁵¹ The UN concurred and authorized the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to suppress the Balkan conflict.

NATO used air strikes to force the Serbs to accept a peace settlement which Western governments considered fair. The alliance deployed 60,000 troops to enforce the peace. This peace, however, was far from complete. Among other things, the settlement allowed many of the perpetrators of ethnic violence to become police officers in the various Balkan states. Unsurprisingly, those police committed over 70 per cent of the human rights violations reported in Bosnia in 1996.⁵²

Western countries continued to wrangle over when and how to arm the various Balkan states and how to pursue suspected war criminals. The international community also failed to distribute economic aid to the former Yugoslavia effectively.⁵³ Criminals and ethnic warlords appropriated much of the money. NATO, the EU and the UN had finally stopped the Balkan factions from engaging in open warfare, but their performance was hardly encouraging.

As the 1990s progressed, even the United Nations' triumph in the Persian Gulf began to lose its lustre. UN Resolution 687 had noted that Iraq's recent conduct forced other nations to regard it as a potential threat.⁵⁴ Accordingly, this resolution prohibited Iraq from possessing nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) weapons. Iraq was to destroy its NBC holdings. As a first step, Iraq was to report what NBC weapons it possessed.

Iraq agreed to Resolution 687 as a precondition to the 1991 ceasefire. Baghdad did, indeed, report on its NBC arsenal. Within three months, UN inspectors in Iraq had found 46,000 artillery shells loaded with chemical warfare agents – over four times the amount listed in Iraq's report.⁵⁵ By October, inspectors had found 100,000 shells.⁵⁶

Iraq refused to allow inspectors into over 1,000 sites designated as presidential palaces.⁵⁷ The Baghdad government also refused to allow the UN to place electronic monitoring devices on its territory.⁵⁸ In 1995, Lieutenant General Hussein Kamel, Saddam Hussein's son-in-law and director of Iraq's Military Industrialization Corporation, defected to Jordan.⁵⁹ Kamel provided evidence that Iraq's NBC programmes were more advanced than outsiders had guessed. His revelations indicated that neither UN inspectors nor US reconnaissance satellites had detected the full extent of Iraq's NBC build-up.

Accordingly, the United Nations continued economic sanctions against Iraq. The Coalition also maintained 'no-fly zones' over Iraqi territory. To enforce such measures, Coalition members stationed troops and aircraft throughout the

region. Although force levels varied, this operation, known as Southern Watch, typically involved approximately 6,000 US Air Force personnel, the services of a US aircraft carrier and/or amphibious assault ship and assorted other assets.⁶⁰ In 1998, the US Congress passed an emergency appropriation of over one billion dollars to help maintain this operation.⁶¹

As long as Western troops remained in the area, Iraq had little power to cause harm beyond its borders. The Coalition, however, could not relax its vigilance without taking the risk that Iraq would build up its arsenal to the point at which it would be a genuine threat. Moreover, the UN could not ignore Iraq's violations of Resolution 687 without suffering public humiliation. Such an action would also have signalled the UN's weakness to any nation that might object to any of its other resolutions.

As time passed, the human, military and political costs of monitoring Iraq mounted. UN sanctions hurt the Iraqi economy, as they were intended to do, but the worst hardships fell on the nation's poor. Infant mortality rose over 160 per cent in Iraq.⁶² The UN attempted to alleviate the plight of Iraqi civilians by allowing Iraq to trade oil for food, but the Baghdad regime found ways to exploit this scheme for its own purposes, and the poor continued to suffer. Although the Iraqi government sold 44.4 billion US dollars' worth of oil, the Iraqi people only received an estimated 13.5 billion dollars' worth of humanitarian aid.⁶³

The Iraqi people's misery provided a focus for global anti-Western sentiment. Moreover, at a time when Britain and even America were having trouble finding enough troops, ships and aircraft to keep their various commitments around the world, both had to maintain forces in the Gulf. The fact that many of these troops were stationed near the Islamic shrines of Mecca and Medina offended many of the world's Muslims. Osama Bin Laden includes this indignity prominently among his reasons for promoting anti-Western terrorism.⁶⁴ Iraqi policy also provoked continual disputes between America and its continental European allies, notably France.⁶⁵

As the 1990s progressed, the Iraqi government grew increasingly bold. In 1993, Iraq allegedly sponsored an attempt on former US president George Bush Sr's life. Iraq began to fire on Coalition aircraft. In 1998, Iraq refused to guarantee UN observers' safety, and then expelled them outright.⁶⁶ The Baghdad government allowed inspectors to return only after Clinton threatened war.⁶⁷

The middle way of containment had proved taxing, dangerous and politically divisive in both the Cold War and Vietnam. In both cases, the US had allowed its opponents to set the terms and tempo of a conflict and, in both cases, it had paid a heavy price. Although the stakes were lower, the international attempt to impose Resolution 687 appeared to be following a parallel course. Meanwhile, in one international incident after another, the UN had proved itself organizationally incapable of coping with violent crises.

One may argue that the UN would have functioned more efficiently if its more powerful members had worked harder to support it. In the same vein, one may argue that nations have a moral obligation to bear the risk, cost and opprobrium of

supporting the United Nations world order, even if they find it more convenient to act on their own. Nevertheless, Western leaders of the late 1990s had few reasons to trust the UN with issues they considered important.

Both America and its Western European allies demonstrated their frustration with the UN in 1999, when NATO intervened in the Kosovo crisis without the world organization's approval. This incident had its roots in the mid-1990s, when Albanian separatists in the Serbian province of Kosovo stepped up their campaign of bombings and shootings against government forces. Serbia responded with increasingly broad attacks against Kosovo's Albanian population. Initial UN efforts to mediate proved ineffectual.

NATO, acting without United Nations authorization, demanded that Serbia admit an alliance peacekeeping force into Kosovo. Serbia not only refused, but stepped up its persecution of Kosovar Albanians. NATO proceeded to bomb Serbia until the Serbs accepted its demands. Although the United Nations Secretary-General later declared his retrospective support for the NATO operation, Russia and China's vehement opposition to the alliance's measures suggests that it would have been difficult or impossible for Western governments to implement a similar programme through the UN Security Council. An article in the journal of the US Army War College notes that '[f]rom a formal legal standpoint, NATO's actions were illegitimate'.⁶⁸

The leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States judged NATO's ability to act decisively to be more precious than the UN's ability to confer legitimacy. Customary critics of Western military policy such as Germany's Joschka Fischer and Italy's socialist prime minister Massimo d'Alema actively supported the alliance's actions.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, even NATO experienced internal disagreements over strategy. These disagreements led the alliance to adopt a compromise approach.

Europeans (along with many US military commanders) were frustrated by the American political leadership's unwillingness to put its armed forces in even moderate levels of danger.⁷⁰ This caution forced NATO to limit its operations to aerial bombing and to forbid its pilots to fly at altitudes below 15,000 feet. Americans, for their part, were frustrated by the European hesitation to target Serbia's economic infrastructure.

As a result of NATO members' various qualms, the alliance adopted an incremental strategy reminiscent of the Johnson administration's policies in Vietnam. Initially, NATO limited its attacks to specific elements of Serbia's armed forces, hoping that this would convince the Serbs to yield. Only when Serbia remained defiant did NATO escalate to more damaging attacks. The process dragged on for ten weeks, during which time Serbian troops purged Kosovo's Albanian community.⁷¹ This leads many to judge the NATO operation a failure.

Beyond security

Even as the military campaigns of the 1990s proceeded to their various conclusions, nations negotiated numerous agreements on legal, economic, humanitarian and environmental matters. Different agreements involved different issues and the US adopted different positions in different cases. Nevertheless, America's general response to such negotiations has given its critics some of their strongest arguments for accusing the United States of arrogant unilateralism. As one examines these issues, one sees that they have consistently subjected the US to Machiavellian pressures, and that the US has frequently adopted Machiavellian solutions.

Despite the widespread perception that the US is an insular power, America is deeply involved in international economic agreements and organizations. Not only does the US participate actively in such bodies as the World Trade Organization (WTO), but it has accepted rules of order that put it on an equal footing with other members of these institutions.⁷² In principle, America must negotiate with other members of these organizations as peers and accept majority decisions as binding. The US has also signed and promoted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which, under certain circumstances, gives external bodies the authority to override American law. The US Congress has normally allowed presidents to negotiate such regional free trade pacts under fast-track rules, in which the legislature promises to accept or reject any agreement within a 90-day period and without amendment.⁷³

Why has the US been so willing to compromise its sovereignty on economic issues? A liberal might observe that the United States gains more than it loses from international trade. A Machiavellian might add that the United States has so much wealth and so much influence over financial affairs that it can control international economic organizations no matter what parliamentary procedures those organizations adopt. Richard H. Steinberg has published research suggesting that this is, indeed, the reason why America has been so willing to join nominally egalitarian institutions.⁷⁴ NAFTA and the WTO, according to this argument, serve America in much the way Machiavelli claimed that Rome's alliances served Rome.

Even economic internationalism, however, is a mixed blessing for the United States. Although the country as a whole undoubtedly benefits from its involvement in global economic institutions, financiers who profit from overseas investments benefit more surely than producers who risk competition from foreign rivals. This is not to deny that many – if not most – producers will profit as well. Those that maintain an advantage over their foreign counterparts will reap huge returns from increased access to foreign markets. Nevertheless, economic internationalism tends to reward those with capital and specialized skills more than those who support themselves through labour.

Independent candidate Ross Perot sought to draw voters away from George Bush Sr by warning that NAFTA would threaten American jobs. This issue faded in prominence during the Clinton years. Nevertheless, respected commentators warn that America's pursuit of global profits is quietly increasing the gap between rich

and poor in US society.⁷⁵ Whether or not these commentators are right at the present time, it is fair to say that US involvement in international economic institutions has the potential to broaden this gap.

Some find such gaps inherently repugnant. Others may accept them as natural, and yet others may argue (rightly or wrongly) that such gaps are tolerable because general economic growth allows even poorer citizens to improve their absolute standard of living. All, however, must concede that inequality has the potential to become politically divisive. Not only do economic gaps inspire resentment among the have-nots, but they promote a sense of separateness among the haves, and they motivate both sides to manipulate political institutions on behalf of their class interests. Those who share Machiavelli's concern with maintaining the domestic unity of the republic may conclude that America has chosen the right policies in its relations with international economic institutions, but they will also conclude that America must proceed with caution.

America's critics are less moved by Washington's calculated willingness to join international economic organizations than by its refusal to endorse international legal, humanitarian and environmental agreements. America has historically been reluctant to commit itself on regulatory issues. US policy regarding the Law of the Sea treaty presents a case in point. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, America refuses to accept an exceptional number of international measures on issues of exceptionally great potential significance and public concern. Prominent examples include the Kyoto Protocol regulating carbon dioxide emissions, the Ottawa treaty banning landmines and the provisions establishing an International Criminal Court (ICC).

Some would argue that America is simply acting out of national self-interest. Others would say that American politicians are acting on behalf of their financial supporters, many of whom have a vested interest in opposing these treaties. Both explanations are compelling. Nevertheless, although these explanations may be all too accurate in specific cases, they do not explain why the American government opposes agreements of this general type so consistently.

The argument that America is simply acting out of national interest is inadequate. Many other sovereign states freely chose to sign the various treaties under consideration, and the US has broadly the same national interest in avoiding global warming, addressing humanitarian concerns regarding landmines, limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction and prosecuting war criminals as them. The argument that interest groups within the US are successfully influencing the American government is powerful in some cases, but less so in others. Although it is easy to make the case that America's carbon-producing industries have the financial influence to stop the US government from endorsing Kyoto, it seems unlikely that the landmine industry has similar clout. Moreover, as noted above, many governments did sign the treaties in question, and one doubts that all of them are immune to corporate pressure.

One must also note that there is no uniform American position on these issues. Environmental regulations, international tribunals and arms limitation agreements

arouse passionate controversy within the United States. Some may still argue that certain political interest groups within America have come to dominate the US government's decisions. This argument is correct – indeed, it is self-evident.

Whenever a government makes a decision on a controversial issue, certain groups have prevailed over others. Some means of influencing policy are legitimate and others are not, but every government needs the ability to make such decisions. This does not justify bribery, nepotism, abuse of office or any other form of improper influence. This should not discourage anyone from criticizing improper influence whenever and wherever it appears. Nevertheless, the fact that international regimes such as Kyoto, Ottawa and the ICC intrude on the American government's ability to resolve controversial issues according to its own procedures goes a long way towards explaining why the US remains particularly reluctant to join such agreements.

When government cannot decide, external factors – Machiavelli's *Fortuna* – are apt to make its decisions for it. These external factors are likely to be indifferent, if not actively hostile, to the government, the people it represents and the principles it embodies. Not only do international regimes limit the options governments have at their disposal, but they frequently complicate the process by which governments select among the choices that remain to them. Even narrow agreements such as arms control pacts may arouse popular sentiments that make it difficult for governments to exercise options that the treaties themselves leave open. Institutions such as the ICC, which would have broader authority to intervene in a broader range of issues, would complicate national decision making to a far greater degree.

Machiavelli, one recalls, elaborated extensively on the evils of indecision. Governments of all types must heed his warnings, but republics must take them particularly seriously. A Machiavellian republic begins, Pocock tells us, when a people takes collective responsibility for its own destiny. If a republic cedes this responsibility to outsiders or to chance, it renounces its justification for existence.

America's founders not only formed such a republic, but they prescribed the ideals it was to aspire to. This impels the US government to be particularly jealous of its sovereignty, but it also adds an important caveat. Americans have not taken responsibility merely for survival, self-government or even democracy; they have taken responsibility for upholding their God-given individual rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Accordingly, they must maintain their separation from outside bodies founded on different principles, even if those principles also seem admirable. Nevertheless, when the US government fails to recognize its own principles, the American DOI itself gives Americans the right to resist it.

The tensions between external commitments and internal decision-making procedures affect all states at all times. As the twentieth century gave way to the twenty-first, however, Americans became increasingly conscious of them. International political movements organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had become increasingly popular in the 1990s. These movements played an important role in developing and promoting international regulatory agreements.

Lloyd Axworthy, Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs, noted that the Ottawa landmine treaty set a particularly clear precedent for activist groups. NGOs, Axworthy tells us, ‘can no longer be relegated to simple advisory or advocacy roles. They are now part of the way decisions have to be made.’⁷⁶ The victorious International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a coalition including over 1,000 groups in fifty-five countries, echoed this statement, declaring that its efforts would become a model for a new kind of diplomacy.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, domestic critics of US national life sought assistance from international bodies. One prominent instance occurred in October 2000, when a coalition of fifty American activist groups including Amnesty International USA, the National Council of Churches and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called on the United Nations to ‘hold the United States accountable’ for racism.⁷⁸ It is natural for those who are dissatisfied with conditions in their own country to look abroad for support. There is nothing new about such tactics, nor is there anything fundamentally un-American about them.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, have seen a trend towards regarding international movements and international authorities as inherently more legitimate than national ones.⁷⁹ To some critics of US foreign policy, the simple fact that America’s positions on certain issues are ‘lonely’ is sufficient to condemn them.⁸⁰ Early twenty-first-century cosmopolitanism is a tendency rather than a coherent political movement, and it has no distinctive political agenda to compare with, for instance, the doctrines of National Socialism or Marxism-Leninism. Nevertheless, advocates of this new cosmopolitanism not only criticize the US government, but they frequently reject the individualistic, classically liberal political ideals that inspired the American republic.⁸¹

Not only does the US find it inherently difficult to commit itself to international regulatory regimes in any case, but its relationship with the principal advocates of such regimes has become adversarial. A 1998 majority opinion from the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee summed up the debate over the landmine treaty as follows:

The [Ottawa] Convention served unique political purposes, rather than humanitarian needs. It was negotiated in a forum with large numbers of NGOs protesting aspects of the US negotiating position and otherwise criticizing the US as being part of the land mine problem. Additionally, a number of small countries such as the Seychelles, funded and emboldened by the various activist organizations, repeatedly sought to embarrass the United States. It was, in short, an environment where serious consideration of national security issues could not occur.⁸²

John R. Bolton, speaking in 2000, was equally frank about his reasons for opposing international human rights accords:

The globalists’ approach ... is specifically targeted against the United States, in an effort to bend our system into something more compatible

with human rights and other standards more generally accepted elsewhere. This conscious effort at limiting ‘American exceptionalism’ is consistent with larger efforts to constrain national autonomy.⁸³

The following year, President George Bush Jr appointed Bolton Undersecretary of State. In 2005, Bush nominated Bolton to be America’s ambassador to the United Nations.

T. Jeremy Gunn, reviewing work by fellow writers in the *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, regretfully conceded that Bolton had a point. Gunn noted a trend among experts on international law in which ‘one ceases to evaluate the merits of particular actions, but criticizes them *because of who the actor is* [emphasis in original]’.⁸⁴ Gunn suggests, in other words, that professionals in the field of international law share NGO activists’ tendency toward anti-American prejudice. If he is correct, Bolton’s assertion that America’s opponents see international regulation as a way of constraining US decisions becomes difficult to dismiss.

Even pro-American cosmopolitans value international agreements as a means of putting reins on the US political process. Joseph Nye, as previously mentioned, argues that interdependence is in America’s own national interest, and few anti-Americans could endorse his glowing assertion that the US was ‘born to lead’. Nevertheless, even to Nye, one of the attractive features of international commitments is that they will force America’s wayward politicians to modify their behaviour. ‘Finally,’ Nye writes, after listing other advantages of international organizations, ‘international regimes and institutions introduce greater discipline into US foreign policy. International rules help reinforce continuity and a long-term focus, in contrast to what typically prevails in democratic politics. They also set limits on constituency pressure in Congress . . .’.⁸⁵ Nye, like Bolton’s malevolent globalists, wishes to bend the US political system, in order, among other things, to restrain elected representatives from serving their constituents. Machiavelli’s writings suggest that wise republicans will strive to prevent their system of making political decisions from being bent.

Conclusion

When Americans reviewed the history of the 1990s, many came to Machiavelli’s conclusions. Statecraft based on the middle way had failed in Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq and the Balkans. Nevertheless, the United Nations had proven unable to make policy on any other basis, and, although NATO had attempted to act more decisively in Kosovo, it had suffered from many of the same handicaps as the larger institution. These facts suggested that the US could achieve more satisfying results at a more manageable price when it maintained direct control over its own security policy.

Even as international regimes struggled with matters of war and peace, states and NGOs renewed their efforts to found new regimes to regulate other types of issues. If the American republic finds it difficult to work with coalitions in military affairs,

it finds working with them on regulatory issues considerably more so. Military commitments place indirect pressures on America's domestic political life, by consuming resources, placing armed forces personnel in danger and raising questions about America's role in the world. Commitments to international regulatory regimes directly interfere with America's domestic political life, complicating decision-making procedures, frustrating those whose viewpoints have prevailed in national institutions and encouraging dissidents to form alliances with people from outside the American political system. The fact that many advocates of international regulation are deeply sceptical about American culture and American political ideals makes global regulatory regimes even less compatible with America's political imperatives as a republic.

Any American government would have experienced these pressures. The politically centrist US president William J. Clinton refused to sign the landmine treaty and threatened to attack Iraq.⁸⁶ American conservatives, however, were even more impatient with the inconveniences of international collaboration.⁸⁷ When conservative candidate George W. Bush became president in 2000, the results for America's foreign policy were predictable.

KICKING FORTUNA

The drama of American foreign policy in the 1990s reached a climax in the first three years of the twenty-first century. This has – since the millennium is here only in a chronological sense – merely set the stage for further developments. Nevertheless, the events of George W. Bush’s first term demonstrate that the political dynamics described in *Discourses on Livy* continue to shape American statecraft, and that an understanding of them will help one to understand the decisions American leaders will face in coming years. Although, as of 2005, America’s campaign in Iraq has yet to be concluded, it offers an appropriate place to conclude this study.

The line of thinking explored in the 1992 DPG influenced the second Bush administration even more than the first. Richard Cheney, who advocated the DPG as Secretary of Defense, had become vice-president. Other senior members of Bush Jr’s administration had expressed similar ideas about foreign policy by signing the Project for the New American Century’s (PNAC’s) 1997 *Statement of Principles*. Noteworthy signatories included Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Special Assistant to the President Elliott Abrams, Chair of the Defense Policy Board Richard Perle and President Bush’s brother Jeb.¹

The *Statement of Principles* was largely compatible with the passages of *Discourses on Livy* where Machiavelli advised republics to emulate Rome.²

Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?³

Another significant declaration notes that ‘the history of the twentieth century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire’.⁴ Regarding the economic costs of such a programme, the *Statement* calls for ‘significantly’ higher defence spending and implicitly derides those who allow ‘short-term commercial benefits’ to override ‘strategic considerations’.⁵ These statements are broadly compatible

with the *Discourses on Livy*. Although that supports this book's argument that Machiavelli's work provides insights into recurring problems of American foreign policy, it need not mean that the authors of the *Statement* were knowingly following the Florentine's advice. There are, however, reasons to suspect that they may have been.

The PNAC's founder, William Kristol, and many of its prominent members have contributed to the intellectual movement known as neoconservatism.⁶ This movement frequently appears more unified to its critics than to its alleged members.⁷ Nevertheless, many of those most commonly associated with this movement agree that they share what Norman Podhoretz calls a 'tendency' to take common positions on certain issues.⁸ This tendency began in the 1970s among intellectuals who sought to combine concern for traditional cultural standards and belief in free-market economics with openness to certain forms of state-led social engineering.⁹ This movement gained direct political influence when a number of its presumed members achieved positions within the Reagan administration.¹⁰

From the Reagan era onward, the neoconservatives have attracted particular attention for their stance on foreign policy. Again, their positions are more of a tendency than a dogma, but these positions typically include a distrust of international institutions, a willingness to advocate forceful action in the national interest, a confidence in America's overwhelming military power and a corresponding confidence in the moral superiority of the American system.¹¹ Although the neoconservative presence in government declined during the 1990s, analysts generally counted as neoconservatives continued to write prominent works articulating these positions.¹²

A significant number of the neoconservatives who have served in government either studied with or openly admire the political philosopher Leo Strauss.¹³ Although journalists have repeatedly exaggerated the relationship between Strauss and particular neoconservative thinkers, few would deny that Strauss has influenced the neoconservative movement.¹⁴ Strauss, as noted in Chapter 1, was deeply interested in Machiavelli and wrote an important interpretation of Machiavelli's work.¹⁵ Therefore, it is plausible that Strauss's work on Machiavelli influenced the neoconservatives' thought and thus US foreign policy.

Any who would go on to say that Strauss's influence on the neoconservatives pushed the United States to adopt the most brutal of Machiavelli's teachings must contend with the fact that Strauss portrayed the Florentine as a 'teacher of evil'.¹⁶ Those who consider Strauss responsible for introducing Machiavellianism into American politics may respond that Strauss did so with a wink. Strauss was interested in the idea that classical philosophers presented their more radical teachings in the form of subtle hints concealed within the text of what appears to be a more politically palatable argument.¹⁷ Therefore, some neoconservatives may have concluded that Strauss himself had concealed a subversive message beneath his ostensible condemnation of Machiavelli. Whether or not this is the case, it is plausible that thinkers with an interest in Strauss would have read Machiavelli's works with a view towards applying them to contemporary issues.

Whatever Machiavelli's influence on the neoconservatives and despite the *Statement of Principles*' areas of apparent Machiavellianism, the *Statement* also diverges from the Florentine's teachings on numerous points. The *Statement*, for instance, ignores Machiavelli's concern that prolonged foreign engagements may widen fractures within the body politic. Moreover, it opens by calling on 'conservatives' to overcome minor differences of opinion and concludes by presenting its arguments as a manifesto for 'moral clarity'.¹⁸ Machiavelli feared that the costs of an active foreign policy would prove divisive. The PNAC members, on the other hand, seemed to hope that their policies would bring unity.

The *Statement of Principles* also departs from Machiavelli's work on the subject of alliances. Machiavelli held that republics need allies to share the costs of foreign operations. The *Statement* does not spell out the role of allies in America's affairs. Machiavelli explicitly advised republics to put themselves in a position from which they can dictate alliance policy. The *Statement* says only that America needs to strengthen its ties to 'democratic allies', and that it needs to 'promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad'.¹⁹

Some may suspect that the people who signed the *Statement* view alliances exactly as Machiavelli did, but did not find it politic to say so. One should, however, note that there is an influential body of thought which holds that democratic countries enjoying 'political and economic freedom' share common attitudes, which makes them natural partners and, perhaps, natural supporters of an American project to preserve and extend 'an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles'.²⁰ The academic Francis Fukuyama – a signatory to the *Statement* – has developed such propositions in detail. Accordingly, one must also consider the possibility that the signatories sincerely expect America's 'democratic allies' to acknowledge American policy as benevolent.

The fact that highly placed individuals endorsed the PNAC's ideas does not make the *Statement of Principles* Bush administration policy, nor should it obscure the probability that other influential figures hold different ideas. Secretary of State Colin Powell, for instance, prominently presents himself as a spokesman for restraint. Nevertheless, it seems safe to assume that the president would not have appointed the signatories to senior positions unless he was comfortable with their stance, and equally safe to assume that most of their colleagues – including moderates such as Powell – are generally willing to co-operate with them. Certainly, Bush Jr conducted assertive foreign and defence policies from the beginning of his administration. In 2000 and 2001, for instance, he actively pursued controversial plans to develop a system of national defences against ballistic missiles.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 inspired the Bush administration to implement even bolder policies. Intelligence agencies linked the attacks to the militant Islamic organization al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's most prominent bases were in Afghanistan, and, when that country's government refused to help apprehend the terrorists, America overthrew it at the head of an international coalition. Numerous thinkers and NGOs criticized Washington's use of force, with a few applauding the anti-American attacks and many more arguing that the US itself should accept

responsibility for offending al-Qaeda and thus indirectly helping to cause the 11 September incident.²¹ Other commentators suggested that the United Nations should have played a more prominent role in authorizing the international response to the attacks, but most national governments and organizations of national governments accepted America's claim that it was exercising its right to defend itself.²²

Even before occupation forces had established themselves in Afghanistan, White House officials – and the rest of the world – began to discuss the question of whether or not the US should, in Richard Perle's words, move 'from one liberation to another' and invade Iraq.²³ Perle and like-minded thinkers had advocated such a move for years. In January 1998, Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz had joined other PNAC members in urging the then president, William Clinton, to pursue such a policy.²⁴ At that time, they had presented the following argument:

The policy of 'containment' of Saddam Hussein has been steadily eroding over the past several months. As recent events have demonstrated, we can no longer depend on our partners in the Gulf War coalition to continue to uphold the sanctions or to punish Saddam when he blocks or evades UN inspections. Our ability to ensure that Saddam Hussein is not producing weapons of mass destruction, therefore, has been substantially diminished. Even if full inspections were eventually to resume, which now seems highly unlikely, experience has shown that it is difficult if not impossible to monitor Iraq's chemical and biological weapons production. The lengthy period during which the inspectors will have been unable to enter many Iraqi facilities has made it even less likely that they will be able to uncover all of Saddam's secrets. As a result, in the not-too-distant future we will be unable to determine with any reasonable level of confidence whether Iraq does or does not possess such weapons.

Such uncertainty will, by itself, have a seriously destabilizing effect on the entire Middle East. It hardly needs to be added that if Saddam does acquire the capability to deliver weapons of mass destruction, as he is almost certain to do if we continue along the present course, the safety of American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate states, and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil will all be put at hazard.²⁵

In fine Machiavellian tradition, the authors of this letter were unwilling to leave such an important issue in the hands of Fortuna. 'Given the magnitude of the threat, the current policy, which depends for its success upon the steadfastness of our coalition partners and the cooperation of Saddam Hussein, is dangerously inadequate.'²⁶ A later passage added: 'American policy cannot continue to be crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the UN Security Council.'²⁷ The letter did, however, argue that Washington had 'the authority under existing

UN resolutions to take the necessary steps, including military steps, to protect our vital interests in the Gulf'.²⁸

In 2001–02, the Bush administration formally embraced these arguments. The debate over this issue polarized people and states in a way that the controversy over attacking Afghanistan had not. Not only left-leaning NGOs but American and European conservatives argued against attacking Iraq.²⁹ The governments of France, Germany and Russia, all of which had backed US action in Afghanistan, opposed the second war.

The Bush administration, meanwhile, affirmed its commitment to its variant of Machiavellism. In September 2002 the White House published a Congressionally mandated report titled *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. This document closely resembled the PNAC's *Statement of Principles*. *The National Security Strategy* attracted particular notoriety for endorsing pre-emptive action against 'rogue states and their terrorist clients' – a concept already familiar from the *Statement*.³⁰

The *Statement of Principles* implied that the United States could rely on free-trading democracies to share its interests and its sensibilities. Bush personally opened *The National Security Strategy* by articulating this concept at length.³¹ The president's letter also resonates with the moral clarity praised by the PNAC.

These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society – and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.³²

With these words, Bush declares his (and, presumably, his country's) determination to fulfil this duty. Bush also implicitly chides other nations for their reluctance. In a different passage, Bush notes that 'alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations'.³³ The United States, he says, is committed to 'lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States and NATO as well as other long-standing alliances'.³⁴ International obligations, he goes on to say, 'are to be taken seriously. They are not to be undertaken symbolically to rally support for an ideal without furthering its attainment'.³⁵

One could read Bush's comments merely as an attempt to deflect the criticism that America in general and his administration in particular had demonstrated a lack of commitment to these institutions. Given the conviction of the president's other statements, it seems more likely that he is directing these remarks outward. Bush claims that America's way of life is morally and technically superior to all alternatives. Bush also claims that his methods are vital to preserving that manner of living. If one accepts even a qualified version of these premises, it is reasonable to conclude that those who let what he would see as excessively refined scruples prevent them from taking what he has presented as necessary action are indeed failing to take their obligations seriously.

Those who disagree with Bush will see his moral claims as presumptuous. Appeals to absolute standards of right and wrong also fall outside Machiavelli's model of foreign policy. The fact that Americans resort to them so readily reflects the side of American political culture that seeks – successfully or not – to exempt itself from Machiavelli's logic. Nevertheless, the Bush administration's dispute with the UN concerns the issues Machiavelli raised when he discussed the problems of leagues.

At a surface level, the problem with leagues is that they cannot act swiftly. Different members inevitably perceive issues differently, and, when a league lacks 'preference, authority or rank', it will find it difficult to resolve those differences. A republic that ties its fortunes to a league without following Rome's policy of turning the league into an empire will suffer the consequences of the collective body's vacillation. The founders of the United Nations were acutely aware of the problems of collective decision making, and of situations in which critical members were unwilling to trust their own concerns with the group. Accordingly, they explicitly included 'preference, authority' and 'rank' in the UN's system of decision making, while still trying to avoid Machiavelli's preferred system in which one state dictates policy to all others.

This scheme offered stronger countries the following bargain. Those countries would follow the rules of the United Nations world order and even act as its policemen. In return, the UN would recognize their role and their special concerns. America had followed UN procedures when Iraq invaded Kuwait and materially supported the collective body's policy of containing the Ba'athist state. US strategists were, however, concerned that the Iraqi government would eventually develop weapons that would allow it to turn the tables.

The United Nations had addressed America's concerns with a series of resolutions culminating in Resolution 1441, which prohibited Iraq from producing such armaments and compelled Iraq to prove its compliance by submitting to inspections. Most accepted that Iraq was defying those resolutions. The resolutions had not, however, empowered other countries to invade Iraq for such defiance, much less granted them the right to replace the Iraqi government. UN resolutions customarily authorize war by using the euphemism 'all necessary means', but Resolution 1441 spoke only of 'serious consequences'.

Given that the US appeared practically as willing to defy United Nations procedures as Iraq, opponents of the war were entitled to find Bush's concern for the international body disingenuous. At another level, however, he was speaking frankly. One may dispute the question of whether or not the UN's reluctance to back up Resolution 1441 with force undermined its credibility in the abstract, but its hesitation definitely undermined its credibility with the Washington leadership. Since America's leaders had lost faith in the UN's ability to resolve the problems Machiavelli had described, they embarked on a course of action somewhat closer to the solution Machiavelli recommended. Bush's statements about the common calling of freedom-loving people add an emotional and, for those who agree with him, moral dimension to America's decision.

In March 2003, America attacked Iraq. British prime minister Tony Blair contributed combat forces to the campaign and appears to have sincerely favoured the action.³⁶ Over thirty other countries contributed varying amounts of support out of varying motives.³⁷ America, like the Romans, created a league of those willing or induced to follow its lead. America's 'coalition of the willing', however, is hardly a new Roman Empire and there is little evidence that the Bush administration organized it as deliberately as Machiavelli would have advised.

The Bush administration's neo-Machiavellian foreign policy has achieved numerous successes. After the 11 September 2001 attack, Bush, in his own words, declared war on terrorism. The US State Department estimates that the number of violent attacks attributable to international terrorists fell by almost 50 per cent between 2001 and 2003.³⁸ International terrorists carried out 199 successful attacks in 2002 – the lowest number in any year since 1969.³⁹ The State Department's method of counting terrorist incidents has attracted severe criticism, but data collected by the RAND Corporation and interpreted by the Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) confirms that the number of terrorist incidents diminished between 2001 and 2003.⁴⁰

MIPT/RAND data suggests that the number of worldwide terrorist attacks rose in the immediate aftermath of America's invasion of Iraq.⁴¹ The US occupation of Iraq has, however, allowed Washington to withdraw 5,000 troops from Saudi Arabia.⁴² This reduces the level of interaction – and, hence, the amount of friction – between Americans and Arabs in the land of Islam's holy places. By acquiring new bases on the Persian Gulf, America has also made itself less dependent on its alliance with the unstable and internationally embarrassing Saudi regime.⁴³

The forces that invaded Iraq in 2003 found no stockpiles of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. Supporters of the war, however, are entitled to observe that, as long as the Ba'athist regime had remained in power, it would have had the potential to acquire such arms. Rolf Ekeus, Executive Chairman of the UN Special Commission on Iraq from 1991 to 1997, points out that Iraq phased out its programme of stockpiling chemical warfare agents, not as an act of disarmament, but because it discovered that it could produce more effective nerve gases if it manufactured them immediately before it planned to use them. Ekeus acknowledges that Iraq had made little material progress towards building nuclear weapons, but maintains, after the 2003 invasion, that the theoretical side of the Iraqi nuclear programme was advanced.⁴⁴ The United States and its partners may not have neutralized any immediate threat when they invaded Iraq, but they eliminated what would otherwise have been a permanent source of uncertainty and danger.

America's occupation of Iraq has proved bloody and frustrating. Foreign policy analyst Larry Diamond, who served as a senior adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, admits 'occupation has left Iraq in far worse shape than it need have and has diminished the long-term prospects of democracy there'.⁴⁵ The story of these failures lies outside the scope of this book, and the ultimate lessons of America's actions in Iraq remain for future analysts to assess. Nevertheless, at

the time the Bush administration decided to overthrow Saddam Hussein, there were reasons to hope that America could put a friendlier and more humane government in his place.

Iraq's population was potentially receptive to such a government. America and its partners received the warmest reception in regions dominated by Kurds and Shi'ites, both of whom suffered exceptionally under Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime. Even in Baghdad, however, a July 2003 survey by the British polling agency You.Gov found that half the respondents felt that the US had been right to invade.⁴⁶ Only 13 per cent of the respondents wanted US troops to withdraw immediately, and over 30 per cent were prepared to see the occupiers remain for 'a few years'.⁴⁷

A Gallup poll taken in August 2003 provided the US with even more encouraging statistics. Although almost half of the Iraqis polled felt that living conditions had deteriorated since the war, two-thirds believed that ousting Saddam Hussein had made the sacrifice worthwhile, and 67 per cent expected Iraq to be better off in five years' time.⁴⁸ Sixty per cent supported the American-backed Iraqi Governing Council.⁴⁹ Half said that the occupying authorities were doing a better job of administering the country than they had initially, while only 14 per cent said that their performance had got worse.⁵⁰

America's successes, however, came at a price, not least a financial one. In September 2003, the Bush administration estimated that it would need 87 billion dollars simply to maintain the foreign policy commitments it had already undertaken. This estimate assumed that other countries would contribute 40 billion dollars to the costs of occupying Iraq, that it would be able to reduce its troop levels in Iraq by 30,000 and that it would be able to realize 15 billion dollars in revenue from Iraq's oil.⁵¹ Even at the time, these were optimistic assumptions. The idea that America would be able to withdraw 30,000 of its troops seems particularly hard to justify – in February 2003, Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki had warned the US Congress that the post-war occupation of Iraq would require 'hundreds of thousands' of troops – several times more, in other words, than America initially deployed.⁵²

Meanwhile, America's budget deficit had risen to 500 billion dollars, or 4.2 per cent of the US GDP.⁵³ Much of this represented prudent steps to stimulate the economy after a period of recession and stock market decline. As of 2003, the Bush deficit had caused little apparent harm. Nevertheless, like all deficits it had the potential to produce inflation, like all deficits it increased US dependency on overseas creditors, and like all deficits it had all too much potential to grow.

The campaign against terrorism also spurred the US government to expand the powers of law enforcement agencies. The fact that the Bush administration introduced many new policies by executive order and successfully urged Congress to introduce others on an expedited basis highlights the way in which the crisis at least temporarily enhanced the influence of the president.⁵⁴ Most of the new law enforcement policies were clearly appropriate, and the danger of further terrorist attacks compelled the US government to act swiftly. Nevertheless, aspects of the

new policies threaten American citizens' traditional protection against arbitrary surveillance, harassment and arrest.

After 11 September 2001, Bush administration Attorney General John Ashcroft declared that, if terrorists struck again before the legislature granted law enforcement agencies new powers, Congress would be responsible for the new attack.⁵⁵ Within weeks, the House and Senate passed legislation known as the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorists (USA-PATRIOT) Act. Legal experts have criticized this act on an assortment of grounds, and, although some of their opinions remain controversial, the following points demand attention:

- Under certain circumstances, the PATRIOT Act allows law enforcement authorities to eavesdrop on communications between criminal suspects and their attorneys.⁵⁶
- Intelligence agencies have traditionally gathered information under more permissive guidelines than law enforcement. Among other things, intelligence agencies enjoy the privilege of keeping their files confidential. Under certain circumstances, the PATRIOT Act allows the government to use information gathered under intelligence agency guidelines to prosecute people in criminal cases. Not only does this reduce citizens' protection against surveillance, but it could force people to defend themselves against charges without having the opportunity to see the evidence against them.⁵⁷ This could make it practically impossible for the wrongfully arrested to prove their innocence.
- Section 203 of the PATRIOT Act allows the Central Intelligence Agency to assume some of the functions of a grand jury. The CIA gains, among other things, the legal authority to subpoena citizens and compel them to answer questions. Citizens called before the CIA do not, however, enjoy the various safeguards enjoyed by witnesses before a grand jury.⁵⁸
- The PATRIOT Act expands law enforcement agencies' surveillance powers for all purposes, not merely those of opposing terrorism.⁵⁹
- The PATRIOT Act allows the government to deport non-citizens simply for association with groups deemed to be terrorist organizations, even if those groups perform non-violent functions and operate legally within the United States.⁶⁰
- The PATRIOT Act also allows immigration authorities to ban non-citizens from entering the country on the grounds that they have verbally endorsed terrorism or a terrorist organization.⁶¹
- The Patriot Act allows the US Attorney General to detain non-citizens indefinitely without charges.⁶²

The US Department of Justice maintains that it uses these new prerogatives responsibly, applying more sweeping measures only in extraordinary cases.⁶³ Nevertheless, as long as the measures remain in force, less scrupulous authorities have the opportunity to abuse them. Unofficial reports indicate that some Justice

Department officials are interested in expanding their powers far beyond the provisions of the 2001 Act. On 7 February 2003, the non-partisan watchdog group Center for Public Integrity (CPI) published what it claimed was a leaked draft of Justice Department proposals for a second piece of legislation, known as PATRIOT II.⁶⁴

According to the CPI, PATRIOT II provided for secret arrests of terrorist suspects and authorized the Attorney General to deport non-citizens at will on security grounds. Moreover, PATRIOT II allowed the Justice Department to strip Americans of their citizenship for membership in terrorist organizations, even if those Americans had not violated US law. Barbara Comstock, the US Justice Department's Director of Public Affairs, responded to the CPI report by stating that her agency was considering a wide variety of ideas, some more seriously than others.⁶⁵ Comstock refused to comment further.

The debates over the PATRIOT Act demonstrate the principle that foreign policy emergencies alter domestic politics. Machiavelli warned about the danger that this could allow certain interest groups and branches of government to gain excessive influence within a republic. The Florentine was, however, prepared to welcome developments that strengthened the state at the expense of individual citizens. Those who support a republic based on the American Declaration of Independence cannot.

Nor was the PATRIOT Act the only development that strengthened elements of America's national security apparatus at the expense of America's larger democratic institutions. Although US law requires the president to issue a written report and inform selected members of Congress in order to use 'any department, agency, or entity of the United States Government' to carry out covert action 'to influence political, economic or military conditions abroad', it exempts 'traditional military activities' from these strictures.⁶⁶ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld interprets 'traditional military activities' to include operations of military special forces.⁶⁷ Senate Joint Resolution 23, passed in the aftermath of the 11 September attack, seems to confirm Rumsfeld's interpretation.⁶⁸ Not only does this create a legal grey zone in which military authorities up to and including the commander-in-chief may use special forces to circumvent normal checks on covert operations, but it risks diverting those forces from their intended missions.⁶⁹

In 2004, the American television network CBS News broadcast photographs of US troops humiliating captives at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.⁷⁰ This, and subsequent allegations of torture at other American detention facilities, lies outside the scope of this book. They are hardly the first occasions on which US military personnel have treated prisoners harshly. Nevertheless, the author notes in passing that they also suggest a weakening of principles which might once have appeared implicit in America's Declaration of Independence.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1990s, American presidents of both parties pursued what Machiavelli might have described as a middle course in foreign policy. This produced results of the type Machiavelli would have predicted. Machiavelli's writings on the problems of leagues foresaw many of the difficulties America experienced in its relations with international institutions. This happened to be a period in which those institutions expanded both their activities and their claims of moral authority. That made these difficulties even more vexing.

George W. Bush and his advisers – perhaps knowingly – adopted policies closer to the ones Machiavelli might have advocated. Their 2003 decision to invade Iraq was a decisive step in that direction. In some cases, their policies achieved their intended effects. In others, they conceivably might have.

Even where these policies encountered difficulty, Machiavelli appears to have anticipated the sort of problems which America faced. *Discourses on Livy* warned republics about the economic consequences of launching wars without contriving to make allies share the burden. The Florentine also wrote at length about the difficulties and brutalities entailed in imposing a new regime on an occupied country, although he addressed these issues more explicitly in *The Prince*.⁷¹ Machiavelli would hardly have been surprised that the 11 September terrorist attack became the occasion for the executive branch of the American government to consolidate its power over citizens, and, although he would have been troubled about certain details, he might have applauded the overall process.

Nevertheless, Bush administration policies have always differed from Machiavelli's teachings in significant ways. Moreover, the authentically Machiavellian elements of the second Bush administration's foreign policy have had troubling effects on American economic and political life. These facts illustrate both the points at which Machiavelli anticipated America's foreign policy needs and the points at which his teachings may lead Americans astray. The full consequences of America's foreign policy in the early twenty-first century may not be apparent for decades, but this tension between Machiavelli's accurate observations and unacceptable interpretations will almost certainly continue to play a role in shaping them.

CONCLUSION

Machiavelli's Value

One of the fundamental problems of republican government, Machiavelli tells us, is that a people's attempt to achieve self-government inevitably conflicts with the demands of their relations with the outside world. This problem has surfaced in every era of American history. Both American leaders and unofficial commentators on American affairs have repeatedly discovered the appeal of policies approximating to Machiavelli's neo-Roman solution. The fact that these issues come up so regularly suggests that their recurrence is more than a coincidence.

Machiavelli appears to have presented enduring truths about the way people interact within a republic, and about the way republics interact with other polities. Thus, Machiavelli offers us several useful tools for analysing American politics. First, his theories help us to identify the foreign policy issues that are likely to have the greatest effect on American political life at any given point. Second, his theories help us to see the full implications of those issues. Third, his theories help us to anticipate likely consequences of the various policies American leaders might adopt in response to those issues.

Americans have, however, shrunk from the full implications of Machiavelli's neo-Romanism. Those who have sought to implement the Machiavellian solution have had to work by stealth and by half-measures. If this has frequently exposed America to the perils of what Machiavelli described as the middle way, it may also have preserved the special qualities of America's political system – Machiavelli's vision of the virtuous republic is incompatible with the principles of God-given personal freedom espoused in the founding documents of the United States. Christ asked what it profited a man to gain the whole world if he lost his immortal soul.¹ One might ask the same question of countries.

If, however, one accepts that Machiavelli was largely right, and one also accepts that the US cannot follow his advice, this puts Americans in the position of patients who accept the diagnosis but reject the treatment. The doctor cannot cure them. They may, however, take advantage of the doctor's report in order to learn more about their condition and perhaps even to develop alternative therapies. Machiavelli, as Chapter 1 has noted, is a devious physician, and it is perilous to extract simplified lessons from even more straightforward works of political thought. Nevertheless, Machiavelli's work is directly relevant to twenty-first-

century political controversies, and it would be obtuse not to consider what his writings might imply.

America's Declaration of Independence appears to be a clear-cut example of what Pocock called a 'Machiavellian moment'. The grand ideals of the Declaration are normally remote from real people's experiences, but those who wish to make them more than platitudes will find that America needs a government with both the will and the capacity to act upon them. Although the former may be more elusive, the latter is no less necessary. As Machiavelli would have suggested, Americans need control over both their political processes and their national resources.

Although the rulers of a new Roman Empire might, in theory, have the maximum control over both, the demands of forming and maintaining such an empire would determine America's exercise of both to the point at which such control would be hollow. Moreover, conscientious Americans would oppose such a project as antithetical to their country's moral ideals, and American political principles entitle them to a voice, even if equally conscientious Americans view such scruples as naive. Americans must accept that total control is a mirage and that, for as long as anyone can foresee, their independence will be contested. Eternal vigilance will remain the price of liberty.

Nevertheless, even if national leaders must relinquish the quest for absolutes, some policies will leave Americans with considerably more scope to determine their destiny than others. One may reject Machiavelli's imperialism and still accept the idea that the guiding principle of any republic's foreign policy must be to maximize freedom of action at the minimum cost. In a republic committed to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', one must measure this cost in terms of individual lives, civil liberties, tax burdens, the dignity of national citizens travelling abroad and similar considerations, as well as overall national resources. One may accept that people will often disagree about how to implement such principles in practice and still hold that it is better to follow a consistent principle than to meander. America's experience with Machiavelli's political dynamics suggests that these would be useful principles for the United States.

As Machiavelli observed, no republic can afford to maintain an effective foreign policy without allies. Moreover, citizens of a republic are unlikely to be indifferent to the fate of others abroad – concepts such as common humanity and international community may occasionally be overrated, but they are not without meaning. Accordingly, America will not be able to escape alliances, nor can it afford to disregard international institutions. Economic interdependence and the spread of liberal political beliefs may make such relationships more fruitful than Machiavelli suggested. One suspects, however, that republics will always experience friction in their interactions with outside institutions. National leaders will have to face this fact with prudence and tact, retaining the legal and material independence to choose their own policies while moderating rhetoric to preserve valuable relationships.

This emphasis on independence may seem selfish, and this willingness to place one's own nation's policies ahead of collective global sensibilities may seem arrogant. Indeed, the act of founding a republic – along with the innumerable acts

CONCLUSION: MACHIAVELLI'S VALUE

involved in maintaining one – is an act of supreme self-confidence. If the citizens of a republic genuinely lose faith in their purpose or their system of attaining it, what Pocock called the 'Machiavellian moment' has ended. Otherwise, however, those citizens will find such confidence indispensable to their endeavour, and – provided their confidence is reasonably well founded – they may also find that it can be a noble thing.

NOTES

1 THE ROGUE SUPERPOWER

1. Mark Bowden, 'Back to Hell', *Guardian*, G2 (24 January 2002), p. 7.
2. Will Grant and Jon Farmer, 'America, The Original Rogue State: A Guide to its Postwar Adventures', *New Statesman* (5 November 2001), pp. 18–19.
3. Adam Sage, 'Jospin Plays on Anti-US Feeling', *Times* (5 April 2001), accessed on-line at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk> (28 August 2001).
4. Jonathan Freedland, 'Patten Lays into Bush's America', *Guardian* (9 February 2002), p. 1. Patten's statement is unintentionally ironic, since the Gulliver of Jonathan Swift's tale could and did. The Lilliputians, by contrast, were a pompous and ineffectual bunch, given to frivolous entertainment. Although Gulliver rescued them from an invasion and a great fire, they plotted against him in their imperial court, and he eventually decided to leave. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, accessed on-line at <http://www.online-literature.com/swift/gulliver> (11 June 2002), *passim*.
5. Joseph S. Nye Jr, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), *passim*.
6. Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), *passim*.
7. Samuel Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (March/April 1999), pp. 35–49, *passim*.
8. This is, to name but one prominent example, the message of the activist group Contract with the Planet. Anon., <http://www.Contractwiththeplanet.org> (5 February 2002).
9. Henry Porter, 'Wake-Up Call', *Guardian*, G2 (29 April 2002), p. 2.
10. Bruce Cronin, 'The Paradox of Hegemony: America's Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2001), p. 105.
11. Judy Pearsall (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 1567.
12. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 542.
13. Saul K. Padover (ed.), *The Washington Papers: Basic Selections from the Public and Private Writings of George Washington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), pp. 309–25.
14. Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic: The United States and the World 1945–1973*, trans. Frank Jellinek (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. xxxviii.
15. There are exceptions. The libertarian think-tank known as the Cato Institute, for instance, is sceptical of all foreign entanglements. See, for instance, Barbara Conry,

- 'Let Europeans Defend Themselves', 23 October 1996, accessed on-line at <http://www.cato.org/dailys/10-23-96.html> (24 October 1996).
16. Chalmers Johnson, 'Time to Bring the Troops Home', *Nation* (14 May 2001), pp. 19–22.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
 18. See, for instance, Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), *passim*.
 19. Huntington, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne, 'A New Grand Strategy', *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 289, No. 1 (January 2002), pp. 36–42, *passim*.
 20. Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), pp. 95–6.
 21. Cronin, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–11.
 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
 26. Steven Kull, 'Vox Americani', *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2001), p. 35.
 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 30. Robin Higham (ed.), *Intervention or Abstinence: The Dilemma of American Foreign Policy* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), p. 19.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. xix.
 34. Aron, *ibid.*, alludes to this in his title. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), p. 67.
 35. Lasch, *op. cit.*
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. The Spartans, for instance, argued that all Greeks would be collectively safer if individual cities refrained from building walls. Athens, however, built walls for itself. The Athenian statesman Themistocles justified this decision by recalling how, in earlier instances, Athenians had ventured on perilous courses when they 'thought fit', without consulting anyone. Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), p. 48.
 38. Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdoerf, *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), pp. 39–44.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
 40. Karl-Friedrich Walling, *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), p. 111.
 41. This is due, not only to Machiavelli's genius, but to Machiavelli's methods. Machiavelli seems to assume that our understandings of politics generally tally with politics in the real world. Furthermore, he assumes that he can understand human psychology. These assumptions allow him to range throughout a broad range of political topics, drawing freely upon intuition and practical wisdom.

Later generations of theorists, beginning with Hobbes, have tended to be much more cautious about making assumptions. They have questioned the idea that we can understand politics and human conduct directly. Therefore, they have focused their work on narrowly defined problems and attempted to reason about those problems from abstract first principles. Although some scholars have used the new methods more consistently than others, they have been particularly prevalent in twentieth-century international relations theory. The post-Hobbesian approach may help scholars to avoid fallacious assumptions, but it makes it difficult for them to address multifaceted

issues such as the relationship between republican constitutional principles, domestic politics and foreign policy unilateralism.

For more on this subject, see Leo Strauss, 'On the Spirit of Hobbes's Political Philosophy', in K.C. Brown (ed.), *Hobbes Studies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 1–27.

42. See, for instance, Robert D. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2001), *passim*.
43. See, for instance, Timothy J. Lukes, 'Lionizing Machiavelli', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (September 2001), pp. 561–76.
44. Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958), p. 13.
45. Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. 506.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
47. Walling, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–16.
48. Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
49. Chapter 8 will deal with this in more detail.
50. Machiavelli opens both *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* by remarking that he has revealed everything he knows about the subject. Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
51. Pocock, *op. cit.*, p. viii.
52. Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 35.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
55. Machiavelli warns, however, that those who rely merely on such outside help will not keep their gains for long. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.
57. Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
58. Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 1–13.
59. Mansfield, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
60. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. Leslie J. Walker (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 205.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
62. Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–14.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
64. Mansfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
65. Strauss, *Thoughts*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

2 POLITICAL FREEDOM AND GRAND STRATEGY

1. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15.
8. Skinner, *Machiavelli*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 223–4.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
11. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Confrontation 1500–2000* (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1988), *passim*.
12. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), *passim*.
13. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–6.

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17. Ibid., p. 225.
18. Ibid., p. 439.
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23. Ibid., p. 441.
24. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 87.
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26. Ibid.
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28. Ibid., p. 359.
29. Ibid., p. 360.
30. Lay people seeking a quick guide to Laplace might consult Barry D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1996), pp. 108–11.
31. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, op. cit., p. 267.
32. Ibid., p. 268.
33. Ibid.
34. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 417–32.
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36. Ibid., p. 426.
37. Ibid., p. 301.
38. Ibid., p. 300.
39. Ibid., p. 299.
40. Ibid., p. 395.
41. Ibid., p. 396.
42. Ibid., p. 397.
43. Ibid., p. 324.
44. Ibid., p. 325.
45. Ibid., p. 513.
46. Ibid., p. 368.
47. Ibid., p. 370.
48. Ibid., p. 371.
49. Ibid., p. 503.
50. Ibid., p. 382.
51. Ibid., p. 369.
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53. Ibid., pp. 369–70.
54. Ibid., p. 370.
55. Ibid., p. 369.
56. Ibid., p. 370.
57. Ibid., pp. 199–202.
58. Strauss, *Thoughts*, op. cit., p. 85.
59. Ibid., p. 86.
60. Ibid., p. 86.
61. Mansfield, op. cit., p. 201.

3 NEW WAYS AND METHODS

1. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, op. cit., p. 205.
2. 'Text of the Declaration of Independence', in *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: Grolier, 1986), p. 591; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, op. cit., p. 211.
3. Pocock, op. cit., pp. vii–viii.
4. Chapter 8 will discuss this issue in more detail.
5. Skinner, op. cit., p. 35.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
7. Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
10. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *The Fall of the First British Empire: Origins of the War of American Independence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 79.
11. Browning, op. cit., p. 222.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*; Tucker and Hendrickson, op. cit., p. 11.
15. Browning, op. cit., p. 222.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
18. Tucker and Hendrickson, op. cit., p. 33.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
20. *Ibid.*
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22. Anon., Early America, <http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/spring97/newspapers.htm> (21 June 2002).
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24. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
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27. earlyamerica.com, op. cit.
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30. Anon., <http://www.odur.let.rag.nl/~usa/E/fiwar/French02.htm> (21 June 2002); Tucker and Hendrickson, op. cit., p. 94.
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32. Odur.let, op. cit.
33. Tucker and Hendrickson, op. cit., p. 93.
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36. *Ibid.*
37. Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 119.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

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41. Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), p. 21.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 185.
44. Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
45. Stourzh, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–18.
46. Middlekauff, *op. cit.*, p. 402.
47. Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 19. Note that eighteenth-century writers used the term ‘alliance’ flexibly. Lee’s desire to treat, trade and obtain alliances with foreign countries need not conflict with other Americans’ desire to avoid ‘entangling’ themselves in more oppressive international obligations. Stourzh, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
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59. *Ibid.*
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88. *Ibid.*
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5 THE COLD WAR

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66. Ibid., pp. 264, 266.
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150. Npq.org, op. cit.
151. DeLong, op. cit., p. 34.
152. DeLong compares Vietnam's role in causing America's economic disaster to the role of the dispute between Corcyra and Corinth in causing the Peloponnesian War. The war had deeper causes, but Corcyra and Corinth triggered it.
153. One notes, for instance, that this was a period in which prominent scholars became interested in the idea that the US might be in a state of decline. Works such as Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), *passim*, and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Confrontation 1500–2000* (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1988), *passim*, explored this theme.
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155. *Ibid.*
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170. For an extended and fully referenced study of these issues, see Thomas M. Kane, *Military Logistics and Strategic Performance* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 128–30.
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176. For details on how NATO undermined its own strategy and organizations in order to threaten the USSR with MAD, see Paul Bracken, *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 163–4.
177. Ibid.
178. Ibid.
179. Ibid.
180. Ibid.
181. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1982), p. 235.
182. Rood, op. cit., p. 250.
183. Ibid., p. 275.
184. Ibid.
185. Ibid.
186. Luttwak, op. cit., pp. 55–6.
187. Reagan did not, however, demand the national sacrifices which Machiavelli associated with reform. Indeed, his administration embraced the philosophy that government can improve its revenues by cutting taxes. A full evaluation of Reagan-era budgets lies beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, Reagan's policies were hardly Spartan.
188. Anon., http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_5.htm, op. cit.
189. Anon., http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_5.htm, op. cit.; Anon., http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_4.htm, op. cit.; Anon., http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_2.htm, op. cit.
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192. Anon., <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/08/17/ap/turnout.chart/index.html> (17 December 2002).
193. Anon., http://www.americanpresident.org/kotrain/courses/RR/RR_Domestic_Affairs.htm (23 December 2002).
194. Those interested in monitoring their progress might consult various editions of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' publication *The Military Balance*.
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197. Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and its President in the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 151–2.
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199. Ibid., pp. 151–62.
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201. DeLong, op. cit.
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203. For a general, if polemical, work on this topic, see Phillips, op. cit., *passim*.
204. Anon., <http://www.ctj.org/html/def0301.htm> (18 December 2002).

6 A NEW ROME

1. Libertarian activists such as those of the Cato Institute argued most comprehensively for disengagement. See Conry, op. cit. A number of foreign policy scholars took similar

- positions. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross identify works by Earl Ravenal, Douglas Bandow and Eric A. Nordlinger as examples of neo-isolationist thought. Other prominent authors were willing to entertain isolationist ideas, notably Christopher Layne and Alan Tonelson. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, 'Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy', *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996–97), pp. 9–12.
2. Posen and Ross, op. cit., p. 9.
 3. Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Born to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), p. 239.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid., p. 253.
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8 CONCLUSION: MACHIAVELLI'S VALUE

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