The Reagan Doctrine and Global Containment: Revival or Recessional

Roger D. Hansen

SAIS Review, Volume 7, Number 1, Winter-Spring 1987, pp. 39-66 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.1987.0044

THE REAGAN DOCTRINE AND GLOBAL CONTAINMENT: REVIVAL OR RECESSIONAL

Roger D. Hansen

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION TOOK OFFICE with a singular purpose in the foreign-policy arena: to restore and revitalize a strategy of global containment of the Soviet Union. It endorsed a form of containment that assumed undifferentiable national interests, the availability of unlimited means to oppose the direct and indirect expansion of Soviet power and influence, and the inadvisability of negotiation with the Soviet Union until a rearmed America could once again bargain from a position of strength.[1] As a student of containment noted in 1983, "One would, in fact, have to go back to the later Truman administration to find a comparable emphasis on the accumulation of military hardware and a corresponding degree of skepticism regarding negotiations."[2]

By the end of the Reagan administration's first term it had substantially failed in its efforts to revitalize global containment. Ironically, however, if the first half of 1985 vividly illustrated those failings, it also witnessed the emergence of what is presently claimed to be a significant opportunity to overcome them. In his 6 February 1985 State of the Union address, the president first publicly set forth what others were soon to call the Reagan Doctrine:

1. These assumptions distinguish global containment from the strategic conceptions of its critics, such as George F. Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Robert W. Tucker. Each stressed the notion of limitations on the strategy of containment. By the 1980s Tucker's preferred strategy of "limited containment" appeared to involve no more—and no less—than the maintenance of a geopolitical equilibrium. Tucker's use of the term containment is somewhat misleading in that containment as "balance" is potentially quite distinct from containment as preventing any and all extension of Soviet power and influence.

2. John Lewis Gaddis, "The Rise, Fall and Future of Détente," *Foreign Affairs*, 62:2 (Winter 1983–84), 367.

Roger D. Hansen is the Jacob Blaustein Professor of International Organization at SAIS. His books include *The Politics of Mexican Development* (1971) and *Beyond the North-South Stalemate* (1979).

Freedom is not the sole prerogative of a chosen few, it is the universal right of all God's children. Look to where peace and prosperity flourish today. It is in the homes that freedom built. Victories against poverty are the greatest and most secure where people live by laws that ensure free press, free speech, and freedom to worship, vote and create wealth. Our mission is to nourish and defend freedom and democracy and to communicate these ideals wherever we can. We must stand by all our democratic allies. And we must not break faith with those who are risking their lives on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua, to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth.

Within six months of this speech Congress reversed itself and voted to resume humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan *Contras,* first approved overt financial support for the rebel resistance in Cambodia, and publicly supported "humanitarian relief" for the Afghan rebels. At the same time Congress repealed the Clark Amendment, which had banned aid to Angolan insurgents for over nine years, leading the way to congressional support for aid to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA insurgency by early 1986. Within one year of the speech, Reagan's declaration of the American duty to support "freedom fighters" against "Soviet-supported aggression" had purportedly become the central element in the administration's effort to revive global containment. For as it is interpreted by its neoconservative architects and supporters, the Reagan Doctrine commits the United States to global containment and then some. It requires the United States not only to resist new Soviet and "Soviet-supported aggression," but also to subvert Soviet power and influence through the support of anti-Soviet insurgencies throughout the Third World. In its fullest flowering the doctrine is interpreted as symbolically representing the acceptance of the U.S.-Soviet conflict as a "clash between two civilizations"—the perspective urged upon the administration by neoconservativism's most prominent shaper and spokesman, Norman Podhoretz, ever since 1981. And the perspective is apparently shouldered enthusiastically, since many of those who share it claim to see "a new vigor and vitality of the idea of democracy," which is argued to be "altering the global balance. . . . From the perspective of the United States, this means that a belief in democracy is not just a Wilsonian dream, or a naive crusade; it is a reflection of hard reality."[3]

And so, once again, a significant element within a U.S. administration has equated American security with a congenial global ideological order. Once again communist states are viewed as a threat to U.S. security regardless of their foreign-policy orientations. Indeed they are "illegitimate," as are all nondemocratic governments in the "pure" version of the

3. The quotes are from Secretary of State Shultz's 10 December 1985 address before the Pilgrims of Great Britain, given in London.

Reagan Doctrine.[4] And once again a U.S. administration apparently strives for global containment (and, in this instance, rollback as well). In the words of one of the doctrine's most ardent supporters:

> Rolling back Soviet acquisitions (albeit only at the periphery, where there is no threat of general war) is the innovation of the Reagan Doctrine. But it is part of a larger, neo-internationalist vision of America's role in the world. The elements are simple: anticommunist revolution as a tactic. Containment as the strategy. And freedom as the rationale.[5]

Is this second-term Reagan administration effort to structure and implement a coherent strategy of global containment as serious as its proponents would have us believe? And if so, are its prospects for success any better than those that faced the failed efforts of the administration's first term? As argued later in this essay, the answer to both questions must be no. With regard to the first question, the neoconservative perspectives on both the U.S.-Soviet conflict and the importance of the Reagan Doctrine are at most competitors for administration attention and approval. If the neoconservative perspectives quite logically give primacy to ideology, they thus far remain unable to rid the administration of competing "geopolitical" or "realist" perspectives. The present lack of clarity and coherence within the administration in articulating the operative implications of the Reagan Doctrine offers the best evidence that while the neoconservative case is being heard, many of the listeners continue to search for effective tactics in their "realist" conflict with the Soviet Union. If and when the ideological card helps, play it. When it doesn't, forget it.

As to the prospects for the success of yet another attempt at global containment, any rays of optimism would appear to be dimmed to insignificance by the same set of constraints on the strategy that caused first-term efforts to fall far short of the administration's goals, and indeed far short of anything meriting the descriptive term "global containment." A brief reconsideration of those efforts is essential for two reasons. First, it was in great part the administration's failure to "revitalize" containment during its opening term that led to the enunciation of the Reagan Doctrine in early 1985. And second, a review of the reasons for the paucity of first-term results underscores the hurdles facing the putative second effort—to the extent that it might in fact evolve into a comprehensive and coherent thrust at global containment.

4. See Robert W. Tucker, *Intervention and the Reagan Doctrine* (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1985), 5.

5. Charles Krauthammer, "The Poverty of Realism," *The New Republic,* 12 February 1986, 16.

FOR THE TWELVE YEARS THAT PRECEDED THE ADVENT of the Reagan administration, U.S. foreign policy had been shaped in good part by the presumption that the United States was increasingly and inevitably less able to influence the course of international relations than it had been at the height of its relative power—roughly the period from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. The presumption of declining relative power and influence suggested the need to define U.S. interests more precisely and to differentiate between vital interests and others. Without the introduction of such discrimination it would be impossible to avoid bankruptcy in the vain attempt to close the ever-widening gap between interests as perceived at the apex of American hegemony and the power required to sustain them. In the Nixon-Kissinger years the presumption was accepted, indeed proclaimed, in official explanations of détente. But U.S. policy defied the presumption's logic: U.S. interests were not reexamined, more rigorously defined, and differentiated. With the advent of the Reagan administration, the presumption itself was abandoned.

The Reagan administration rejected the presumption because it saw nothing inevitable in the decline of American capacity to influence and even control the evolution of international relations. From its perspective the relative decline in American power and influence in the 1970s was the result of bad policy and self-imposed "strategic passivity," not one of the two broad and mutually reinforcing trends most generally identified as its causes—the international diffusion of military and economic power and limitations on the utility of force stemming from growing domestic as well as international constraints. Thus the Reagan administration saw no need to place any limitations or priorities on American interests. Quite the opposite:

> The overriding goal of the administration's foreign policy was to make American and Western power commensurate to the support of greatly extended global security interests and commitments. There was no disposition to define interests more selectively and no expectation of anything but an intensified Soviet threat to those interests. Hence, the emphasis on closing the gap between interests and power would be placed on augmenting countervailing military strength.[6]

The administration's rejection of the presumption of an inevitable decline in U.S. capacity to influence and control significant international trends, issues, and events, together with its concern about the perceived threat posed by the Soviet Union, led it to reembrace the United States' dominant postwar strategy of global containment. The events of the first half of the 1980s revealed all the inherent flaws of the strategy.

6. Robert E. Osgood, "The Revitalization of Containment," *Foreign Affairs,* 60:3 (America and the World, 1981), 474.

IN CHOOSING TO REVITALIZE CONTAINMENT the administration made a series of wagers, all of which had to be won if global containment was to succeed, and all of which were lost. First, it wagered that it could devise a military strategy whose goal (containment of the Soviet Union) would be matched by the resources made available by the American public through Congress. There were really two bets involved here: the first concerned global containment per se; the second, the resources available for the military buildup. The first question could be phrased: Is the "containing" of a superpower possible in the present age of strategic (nuclear) parity and Third World pluralism? A less ambitious strategy of maintaining a global equilibrium of power would have allowed losses to be balanced by gains and unimportant losses to be ignored entirely from a traditional balance-of-power perspective. But the strategy of containment has always implied that global equilibrium has been so precarious that not a single loss could be afforded. Even if there had been no resource constraint, was the goal of global containment of Soviet power and influence plausible? And even if this half of the first wager was won, would the administration be able to extract from America's political economy the resources required to fund the strategy while sustaining its domestic political support and leaving the United States solvent?

Despite an enormous increase in U.S. military expenditure during the first Reagan term, the wager failed. In good part this failure reflected military aspirations that dwarfed those of any other U.S. administration since the end of World War II. They were perhaps best illustrated in Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's 1982 statement before Congress.

> Our long term goal is to be able to meet the demands of a worldwide war, including concurrent reinforcement of Europe, deployment to Southwest Asia and the Pacific, and support for other areas. . . .
>
> Given the Soviets' capability to launch simultaneous attacks in [Southwest Asia], NATO, and the Pacific, our long-range goal is to be capable of defending all theaters simultaneously.[7]

This "three and one-half war" strategy called on the United States to be able to confront and contain Soviet or "proxy" military thrusts on all fronts simultaneously; it also demanded that the United States be able to fight a prolonged conventional war on those fronts. Banished in this declaratory policy was the notion, integral to NATO strategic planning, that conventional wars would escalate to the nuclear level in rather short periods of time in theaters where potential Soviet dominance at the

7. Cited in Jeffrey Record, "Jousting With Unreality: Reagan's Military Strategy," *International Security*, 8:3 (Winter, 1983-84), 6.

conventional level suggested an inevitable choice between defeat and escalation for Western forces.

Additionally, the administration's public presentation of its strategy stressed the need for an offensive conventional war-waging and war-winning capability. The United States was to be able to put the Soviet homeland itself at risk and launch offensives against the flanks of the Warsaw Pact countries. Carrier-based aircraft were to be able to mount attacks on "vulnerable points" on the periphery of the Soviet Union. Finally, the strategy emphasized the need for Third World "intervention forces" to be able to fight on numerous fronts simultaneously.

In sum, at the conventional level the administration's policy declarations contained an implicit strategy of fighting and winning long wars, over many fronts simultaneously, with the capacity to take the offensive with counterthrusts at vulnerable points on Soviet soil. What resources would this strategy demand? In addition to the $1.6 trillion requested in the administration's five-year defense plan, the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that an additional $750 billion would be required in order to provide the "hardware" needed to close the gap between ends and means in this conventional war-fighting strategy. As successful as the administration was in its first four years in extracting from Congress authorization and appropriations for defense spending with growth increments in excess of 7 percent per annum in real terms, it is evident that the $1.6 trillion figure itself will not be achieved. By 1985—before the Gramm-Rudman budgetary constraint arose—it was clear that Congress was no longer prepared to permit expenditures for defense to increase at rates much beyond that of inflation. For Fiscal Year 1986, the administration's defense request was cut by $50 billion, with no real increase in expenditure allowed. The conventional war-fighting strategy of the administration simply would not be funded, and the gap between aspirations and resources would rapidly grow unless and until the military goals and means to achieve them were significantly altered.

The administration's nuclear strategy—to the extent that a comprehensive one exists—would appear to be at least equally flawed. Public statements suggest the goal of "prevailing," even under the conditions of a long and protracted nuclear war. And while denying the introduction of any major change in nuclear strategy and rejecting the notion that any nation could "win" a nuclear war, Secretary Weinberger stated: "We are planning to prevail if we are attacked."[8] Could the administration augment U.S. offensive and defensive capabilities in the strategic nuclear arena sufficiently to lend plausibility to Weinberger's pronouncements?

8. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey*, 1982-83 (London: IISS, 1982), 36.

In the first half of the 1980s—and for the foreseeable future—it could not. The administration had inherited a nuclear arsenal that included a robust "assured destruction" capability and a limited capacity for destruction of "hard targets." It had neither a "first-strike capability" nor a "second-strike counterforce" capability. In sum, its capacity to destroy Soviet retaliatory capabilities was anything but robust. From this base the notion of "prevailing" in a protracted nuclear war was by any reasonable measure wholly implausible. Furthermore, the administration's major effort to close the "window of vulnerability" by deploying MX missiles in an invulnerable mode failed, and by 1983 the decision was made to deploy them in existing vulnerable silos. In effect the Scrowcroft Commission appointed by the president to study U.S. force posture simply dismissed the "window of vulnerability" as a problem, leaving the U.S. ICBM force as vulnerable as it always had been to a Soviet first strike. Finally, as of mid-1986 the Congress had approved the deployment of only 50 of the 100 MX missiles requested and appeared increasingly unwilling to authorize further emplacements. The administration's deployment of a number of new nuclear weapons systems undoubtedly strengthened America's "assured destruction" capabilities while simultaneously increasing its "hard-target kill" capacity. For those who feared that the Soviet Union had assumed a dangerous lead in strategic weaponry, comfort was taken in the notion that "parity" was being restored. But strategic parity can not be the foundation upon which to construct credible "prevailing" nuclear war-fighting capacity, and this was clear to allies as well as enemies.

The administration's introduction of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was at least in part a reflection of its inability to regain what it considered a necessary margin of strategic military superiority through building accurate and survivable intercontinental ballistic missile forces. In the three years since its introduction administration experts have argued that the switch to defensive weaponry and strategy will effectively counter existing Soviet nuclear advantages and reinforce the dwindling U.S. capacity to maintain a credible strategy of extended deterrence.

Since the final decision to produce and deploy defensive systems will not be made during the tenure of the Reagan administration, the SDI issue need not be analyzed here. However, no detailed analysis is needed to conclude that a turn toward defensive systems, if undertaken, offers little hope of reasserting the U.S. capacity to implement successfully a strategy of global containment. First, there is little evidence to suggest that defensive improvements over the next two or three decades cannot be negated by offensive countermoves. Second, and perhaps more important, there is little reason to believe that any Strategic Defense Initiative will not be very seriously impaired by the same domestic political and budgetary constraints that have limited the Reagan administration's

efforts to augment offensive systems. The cost of the population-protection version of the SDI presented by President Reagan has already been conservatively estimated at between $550 and $670 billion—and this for what would admittedly be a very imperfect system.[9] When the American public comprehends the cost of a system that will not provide the safety captured in the president's dream of a perfect defense, the move toward defense will prove no more immune to budgetary constraints than any other form of arms expenditures. Indeed, in 1986 congressional funding of SDI research alone fell some 40 percent short of administration requests.

In sum, despite major advances in strategic modernization programs during its first term the administration was not able to devise a military strategy for global containment whose goals were matched by the resources made available through the political system. Many critics were quick to point out that a major flaw in the strategy was its greatly expanded range of objectives in the face of limited resources. They appealed for a more limited definition of objectives: no global war-fighting capacity, no protracted conventional counteroffensive capacity, no goal of reaching the Soviet homeland, and so on. The "lesson" learned was that the Reagan administration's military strategy was simply too expansive in its declaratory objectives.

The more fundamental question was almost always left unaddressed: if the central strategic paradigm for the United States is global containment of the Soviet Union and its numerous "proxies," *can* a supporting military strategy aim to accomplish less? Pleas to limit military objectives, tasks, or interests are inevitably prescriptions to abandon the goal of global containment. Analyzed from this perspective, the central flaw in the Reagan administration's military strategy did not reflect so much a misconceived effort to overreach through military means as it did an insoluble dilemma of global containment. This paradigm has always produced a significant dilemma for the military strategy of the United States—one that increased as the Soviets achieved strategic parity—and at the least it is highly probable that it always will.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S SECOND LOST WAGER was at least as crucial as the first, if not more so. Revitalized containment required that the American public support the use of U.S. or "proxy" armed forces abroad to resist the emergence of "radical" regimes or the spread of their influence. Such policies, in one form or another, were soon operative on all

9. Barry M. Blechman and Victor A. Utgoff, *Fiscal and Economic Implications of Strategic Defenses* (Boulder, Colo. and Washington D.C.: Copublished by Westview Press and The Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, 1986), 89. This is the estimate given by Blechman and Utgoff for a space-based defensive system using lasers, the second most expensive of the four strategic defense alternatives discussed in their book.

on all continents and were particularly visible in Central America and the Caribbean, Africa, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. Would domestic forces support or undermine these vital elements in a strategy of revitalized containment?

From the outset the administration acted with considerable caution, suggesting an awareness of domestic constraints that its rhetoric appeared to ignore. Despite administration circumspection, however, by the end of its first term the severe limitations that American politics placed upon all forms of intervention abroad—direct or indirect—were reducing remilitarized containment to a caricature. The early months of 1985 exposed the dilemma in a dramatic and unmistakable manner.

During the first month of that year President Reagan suffered one of his very few major foreign-policy defeats on Capitol Hill when Congress refused to appropriate $14 million to support the *Contras* in Nicaragua. The fight had built for close to a year; the president had made one compromise after another, ending with an agreement that the funds would be spent only for humanitarian aid, not for any lethal military supplies. Despite these compromises, and despite a desperate lobbying effort, Congress rejected the appropriations request. After the defeat the president, taking one of the few steps left to him, embargoed trade with Nicaragua, declaring that country to represent "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."[10] If that characterization was accurate—and it was and still is so perceived by supporters of global containment—the significant degree to which the administration's domestic constituency rejected that strategic concept and its policy imperatives was dramatically illuminated.

This symbolic defeat for containment policy was merely the culmination of over three years of growing domestic conflict over the administration's Central American policy. Whether supporting the El Salvadoran regime against rebels in a civil war or supporting the *Contra* rebels against Nicaragua's Sandinista regime, the administration fought stiff congressional pressure to limit the quantity and quality of U.S. intervention and to seek negotiated rather than military solutions. Overt actions were so suspect and constrained that covert operations were increasingly emphasized, but soon they drew an equal amount of critical attention. The frustrated administration's imposition of a trade embargo on Nicaragua in the spring of 1985 was indicative of the bind in which the administration found itself. A symbolic act taken in defiance of Congress as much as anything else, it could accomplish little but was one of the few measures left to an administration constrained by growing domestic opposition to its approach.

10. *The New York Times*, 2 May 1985.

The "Vietnam syndrome" was evident as the arguments for and against U.S. involvement in Third World domestic and regional conflicts were replayed with passion. From the Right, U.S. global credibility and the capacity to halt the advance of communism in our own back yard were seen to be at stake; from the Left, U.S. policy was once again perceived as vainly attempting to sustain archaic social structures facing the inevitable forces of social and political change. From the Right, national interest and morality necessitated greater U.S. intervention; from the Left, the overwhelming necessity was nonintervention in a situation in which no vital national interests were involved and in which morality more often than not was seen to be aligned with the forces of change. For the Right, better to support "authoritarianism" in a contest with "totalitarianism"; for the Left, better to support neither and hope for an outcome superior to either.

Concern with the Vietnam syndrome was focused deep within the administration. It was most apparent in the Defense Department, and was perhaps best reflected in Secretary Weinberger's 28 November 1984 speech to the Washington National Press Club, in which he listed six tests to be applied when considering the use of U.S. troops abroad. In addition to the existence of vital national interests and "the clear intention of winning," Weinberger added the following condition:

> Before the U.S. commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress. We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win overseas or, as in the case of Vietnam, in effect asking our troops not to win but just to be there.

At least part of Weinberger's concern could be explained by the worries of the military establishment that he often represented. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were urging caution with regard to Central America and Lebanon as well, particularly when neither adequate public support nor well-defined objectives were evident in either conflict. A further military concern, expressed by the army chief of staff General John Wickham in mid-1983, was that U.S. armed forces were being stretched thin by growing Third World commitments, with the risk that force levels in Europe and elsewhere would not be sufficient to deal with major contingencies.

In sum, the loss of the administration's wager that it could develop and sustain the requisite amount of domestic support for its strategy of global containment was perhaps its most serious loss. Four years after the advent of the administration it had become commonplace to note that what the U.S. public would support abroad were quick, inexpensive, and successful uses of force, and almost nothing else.

It was both fitting and incongruous that the grandest jewel in the crown of the Reagan administration's strategy of global containment should have been a successful invasion to overthrow a radical regime in Grenada. Surely this demonstration of "will" and the "utility of force" in international relations was hardly of the magnitude that critics of the Carter administration had in mind when they called for an end to détente and a return to remilitarized containment. Though the unchained eagle could "liberate" Grenada, the American public seriously constrained its capacity to influence events—let alone control them—elsewhere. Even support for such "proxies" as the *Contras* proved difficult to obtain. And the option of using U.S. troops to overthrow the Sandinistas was blocked by the overwhelming opposition such an action would produce. Reagan could declare Lebanon to be "central to our credibility on a global scale" in October 1983 and withdraw U.S. troops entirely in February 1984, leaving the perceived archproxy of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, Syria's President Hafiz al-Assad, as what passes for an ultimate arbiter in the chaotic politics of Lebanon.

When President Reagan removed U.S. troops from Lebanon in 1984 he was praised by political pundits for his capacity to "read" the moods of the American public and to avoid, as Lyndon Johnson had not, a political disaster. As a commentary on Reagan the politician, the analysis was flattering. As an indirect commentary on the capacity of the United States to implement a strategy of global containment that the American public would support, it was an appropriate symbol of the growing futility of that strategy.

THE THIRD WAGER OF THE ADMINISTRATION—that a reassertion of power and will to use it in the Third World would attract vital support and successfully overcome "destabilizing" opposition there—on balance proved to be a losing one from its inception. Administration efforts to develop a "strategic consensus" in the Middle East, to support the evolution of a strong and stable Maronite Christian regime in Lebanon, to defeat leftist rebellion in El Salvador, and to undermine the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua illuminated various facets of a growing Third World capacity to thwart superpower attempts to exercise power and influence. The efforts also revealed a strange pattern of unclear and often changing American goals and a similar uncertainty relating to the means to be used to achieve those goals. This lack of strategic coherence might well have been sui generis to the Third World policies of the Reagan administration and not an inescapable dilemma of global containment. But the tendency to upgrade Third World conflicts, once engaged in, to the rhetorical level of "vital national interests" is reminiscent of earlier periods of U.S. postwar diplomacy guided by the same strategic paradigm.

The Reagan administration apparently accepted the early 1980s notion that the Middle East was a "power vacuum" waiting to be filled by one of the two superpowers. It certainly feared that the Soviet Union threatened vital U.S. interests there, and that the protection of those interests could be achieved by the creation of what secretary of state Alexander Haig was to call a "strategic consensus" in the region. This perspective led to Haig's April 1981 trip to the Middle East, in which he visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel. "In every capital," he wrote, "I was given the same urgent message: dangerous forces had been let loose in the region, and only a credible new assertion of American influence, coupled with the influence of moderate Arab regimes, could oppose them. There was, in a real rather than a theoretical sense, a strategic consensus in the region."[11]

If such a consensus existed among moderate Arab states and Israel, then Haig grossly misread its complexities and nuances. Moreover, the consensus, such as it was, formed around a dilemma, not a strategy. Moderate Arabs and Israel may well have shared concern about potential Soviet influence in the region, but they could not act together to mollify that concern until the Arab-Israeli conflict was settled. And since there was—and still is—no settlement of that conflict in sight, there could be no strategic consensus linking moderate Arab states, Israel, and the United States in a reassertion of American power and purpose in the Gulf or in the Middle East as a whole. Indeed, the attempt to create a strategic consensus simply illuminated the inability of the United States to influence the region's indigenous political and social forces.

The moderate Arab states the United States counted on to build its anti-Soviet strategic consensus and to provide military access to the Middle East's "power vacuum" would not countenance a strategic partnership that included Israel; nor would they close ranks with the United States as long as Israel continued to act—on the West Bank and elsewhere—in ways that further alienated Arab opinion. Yet Israel continued to do so with impunity, and the United States was perceived to be acquiescing in—if not supporting—most Israeli actions. In 1981 alone Israel's military raids in Lebanon, its bombing of Iraq's nuclear reactor, its formal annexation of the Golan Heights, and the escalating violence on the West Bank suggested one of two conclusions to the Arabs: either the United States supported such aggressive Israeli actions, or it could not prevent them. In either case, the administration's policy of "strategic consensus" to insert U.S. power into the Middle East was dead. Given the domestic and regional implications for the Arab world of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the idea that

11. Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 169.

the United States could have entered the region on the wings of an anti-Soviet "strategic consensus" was ridiculous from its very inception.

The same inability to comprehend the nature and strength of domestic and regional forces and conflicts led the administration to a repeat performance in Lebanon. By midsummer of 1982 Israeli forces had driven to the outskirts of Beirut, crushing PLO and Syrian forces on the way. U.S. and allied troops were landed to implement the negotiated evacuation of remaining PLO units, were removed, and were returned once again after the massacres of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Phalangist troops nominally under Israeli army control. From this point until the withdrawal of U.S. troops in February of 1984, U.S. policy demonstrated a profound lack of understanding of the domestic and regional situation and an incoherence relative to its own objectives in many ways typical of global containment ventures in the Third World.

First, there was the marked escalation of objectives. The U.S. Lebanon venture began as part of a peacekeeping effort, which was the way the allied troop presence in Beirut was interpreted by the French, British, and Italians. Soon U.S. objectives were broadened to include assisting the Lebanese government to achieve the withdrawal of all foreign military forces—meaning the Syrians, the Israelis, and any remaining PLO forces. By 1983 the objectives were broadened once again—this time to include assisting the Maronite Christian forces then in precarious control of the central government to create a stable Lebanese political regime. Finally, after the October 1983 attacks on U.S. forces at the Beirut Airport, which killed 239 Americans, President Reagan declared that the United States had "vital interests in Lebanon" and that the country was now "central to our credibility on a global scale." Thus in one year's time U.S. objectives (backed by 1,600 troops) had escalated from a peacekeeping mission to the defense of vital national interests, including America's global credibility. Four months after the final escalation of objectives, at the beginning of a U.S. presidential election year, U.S. troops were withdrawn from Lebanon.

Second, the administration appeared oblivious to the domestic Lebanese hurdles to the achievement of any of its changing objectives. With 1,600 troops it could not even keep the peace in Beirut, much less nationwide. For close to a decade Lebanon had been in a state of civil war among a plethora of warring sectarian militias. Consequently, there was no "legitimate" government to support. The civil war was and is precisely about the "legitimate" distribution of political power in Lebanon; when the United States chose to stabilize the country under the government of the Maronite Christian leadership of President Amin Gemayel, it was perceived to be taking sides in a vicious civil war of ageless origin.

This made U.S. troops appear to be legitimate targets to those factions opposed to Maronite Christian preeminence.

Third, the administration revealed as little understanding of the regional hurdles to its objectives as to the purely domestic. Tripartite negotiations to agree on the terms of Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon took more than six months and then produced an agreement that Syria would not accept. And since Israeli agreement to withdraw from Lebanon was contingent upon similar Syrian action, the 17 May 1983 Lebanese-Israeli agreement was never implemented and eventually abrogated by Lebanon at Syrian insistence.

In the end U.S. policy attained none of its objectives. No peace was achieved. America's chosen vehicle for a stable Lebanon, President Amin Gemayel, remained in place—though not in power—only at the sufferance of America's "radical" regional opponent, Syria's President Assad. A disillusioned Israel withdrew steadily toward the internationally recognized Lebanese-Israeli border, further weakening "moderate" Christian forces in Lebanon and strengthening "radical" Arab forces. Finally, the American notion that its capacity to impose a stable government in Lebanon constituted by "moderate" political forces would provide major impetus to an Arab-Israeli settlement of the West Bank was exposed as the fantasy it had been from the outset, leaving the Reagan Plan of September 1982 without support and the Middle East no closer to a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict than it had been when the president was elected.

That an administration that came to office intent on inserting U.S. power into the Middle East attempted so much and achieved so little should not have come as a great surprise. Major failings of global containment initiatives have often occurred in the Third World in the past and will undoubtedly continue to do so. Perspectives and policy objectives emerging from that strategic paradigm concentrate so singularly on the superpower struggle, and in doing so oversimplify and obfuscate the concepts of power, influence, proxies, "moderate" regimes, "radical" regimes, and "credibility" to such a degree, that there is little if any room left for serious analysis of domestic and regional factors likely to affect efforts to influence Third World behavior.

Administration policies in Central America revealed a similar pattern. Again there was the rapid escalation of objectives: what started as a policy to halt the shipment of supplies from Nicaragua to El Salvador soon became a "secret war" to provoke domestic turmoil in Nicaragua, and ultimately escalated to a policy of overthrowing the Sandinista regime. And the accompanying rhetorical escalation was also present; by 1984 Nicaragua constituted "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

Again the administration underestimated the degree to which domestic and regional forces would provide substantial hurdles to U.S. objectives. It was successful in its efforts to have a centrist candidate elected to the presidency of El Salvador and to defeat the revolutionary Left's efforts to achieve a power-sharing compromise in the civil war. It was also successful in restoring a degree of influence in Guatemala as that country's civil violence abated and the military permitted the election of a civilian administration by 1985. The problem for Reagan foreign policy was the highly contingent nature of these successes. In El Salvador (and subsequently in Guatemala and Honduras) would existing social structures provide the opportunity for the emergence of stable democratic regimes? After four years of administration military and economic assistance in El Salvador the issue remained as clouded as ever. And while the holding of presidential elections in Honduras and Guatemala at mid-decade led some administration officials to herald the appearance of Central American "democracy," observers familiar with the region's political realities noted with appropriate skepticism that the usual Central American alliance of the military and the oligarchy retained control over the parameters of electoral choice. To speak about Central American democracy, Costa Rica aside, remains at best a predictive exercise.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S FOURTH WAGER IN ITS ATTEMPT to revive global containment in its first term—that the United States could coax and/or coerce its Western European allies into conformity with that strategy—need not detain us here, since it is not particularly suggestive of the hurdles facing the Reagan Doctrine. What must be noted, however, is that—not surprisingly—this wager was also lost. The 1983 Siberian natural gas pipeline conflict and its eventual denouement—the failure of the administration to halt Western European participation in financing and building the pipeline—best illustrates the failure of the wager. The pipeline battle symbolized the clash of two competing notions of East-West relations, and the European notion emerged victorious. "Divisible détente" prevailed over global containment, economic interchange prevailed over economic warfare, and cooperation retained an equal standing with conflict in East-West diplomacy. And in the process, the misguided administration notion that the reassertion of strong U.S. leadership in the Western alliance would be met with relief and cooperation by U.S. allies was laid to rest.[12]

12. The Theater Nuclear Force (TNF) controversy and eventual outcome in no way controverts this point. The European conception of détente has never eschewed the necessity of a very credible nuclear deterrent threat; the demand for the new missile forces arose in Europe and was met with initial skepticism in the United States.

In retrospect, the Reagan administration's first-term efforts to restore a revitalized and remilitarized strategy of global containment of the Soviet Union, its "proxies," and its potential allies failed. The gap between declaratory and operative strategy—a gap that has existed throughout the years of containment—grew by an order of magnitude that became a matter of serious concern. The resources required by the strategy were unavailable, basically due to the four factors analyzed above. America was "standing tall" in Grenada and off the shores of Tripoli; elsewhere it assumed a more covert pose (Central America) or a brief, defensive and retreating one (Lebanon). Not strangely at all, this appeared to be just the foreign-policy mix most Americans wanted, as reflected in the president's popularity: a few very inexpensive "victories" to satisfy America's "new nationalism"; otherwise, indifference to anything other than a threat to vital interests. In Peoria, none were perceived. Not so in the editorial offices of *Commentary* and *The National Interest.* And the president? His well-documented views on the Soviet Union leave no doubt that his heart was with *Commentary;* his equally familiar pragmatic political instincts suggest that his head was in Peoria. How would any pragmatic ideologue lessen the dissonance? Attempt to meld Peoria with *Commentary.* The result was the Reagan Doctrine.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CONTENTION IS THAT since the president's 1985 State of the Union address, U.S. support for anticommunist revolution has become "the centerpiece of a revived and revised policy of containment. In effect, ten years after Vietnam, a coherent policy reasserting the return of active U.S. intervention in the world has been formulated."[13] Is the contention reasonable on its face? And if so, what does it portend for the future of a strategy of global containment of Soviet power and influence?

The contention must be rejected for several reasons. The first is that the Reagan Doctrine was initially—and essentially remains—a desperately needed rationale to reconstitute dwindling public and congressional support for the *Contra* conflict with Nicaragua's Sandinista regime. Revelations of covert CIA-organized mining of Nicaraguan harbors in 1984 had led the Congress to challenge the president's Nicaraguan policy and to terminate all further assistance to the *Contras.* The first six months of 1985 witnessed a lengthy and bitter struggle over reviving that aid. U.S. involvement in the Nicaraguan conflict needed a new rationale, and the Reagan Doctrine provided it. Primary emphasis was switched from a geopolitical—or security—argument for *Contra* support to an ideological one: support for "freedom fighters" committed to the spread of democracy.

13. "The Poverty of Realism," 15.

It was a natural and logical switch for an administration committed since the president's June 1982 speech before the British Parliament to an assertive public campaign on behalf of "democratic values" and a global "infrastructure of democracy."

The tactic worked: by July 1985 the House of Representatives reversed itself and approved $27 million in humanitarian assistance to the *Contras*. For the first time the aid was overt, and for the first time the administration declared that its purpose was to overthrow the Sandinista regime, bringing "democracy" to Nicaragua. For later argumentation it is also worth recording the administration's arguments that support for the *Contras* would (1) prevent the necessity of any direct U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and (2) break the military stalemate. In other words, for $27 million in nonlethal aid to the *Contra* forces the United States could topple a Soviet proxy regime and spread democracy while avoiding any risks of direct U.S. intervention. Widespread doubts were voiced during congressional debates that so much could be obtained with so little, but the new rationale and the promises accompanying it carried the day.

THE SECOND REASON FOR REJECTING the contention concerns the very cautious manner in which the Reagan Doctrine has been implemented. The cost of support to freedom fighters in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Cambodia and, by early 1986, Angola, has been extremely small. The administration has consistently shown a preference for covert assistance, recognizing the dangers to countries, for example, Pakistan, from which "freedom fighters" are operating. It has consistently shown caution in choosing what types of aid to give. True, it has occasionally been pressured by congressional conservatives to do much more than it originally intended, as in the decision to provide Stinger missiles to UNITA. But more often than not, it has resisted these pressures to apply the Reagan Doctrine in the bold and universal manner of the doctrine's language itself. Thus it continues to work with and request financial support for the "Marxist-Leninist" regime in Mozambique rather than aid the MNR, that country's *Contras*.

Even in the case of Nicaragua the Reagan Doctrine's supporters fear that the administration's "geopoliticians" or "realists" are prepared to settle for less than the doctrine's ideological promise. Would the administration accept a Contadora-negotiated solution that left the Sandinista regime in power? In the May 1986 flap over a letter written by special envoy Philip Habib suggesting that it would, what became clear was the lack of coherence within the administration relating to the Reagan Doctrine specifically and a strategy of containment more generally.

These two reasons for rejecting the notion that the Reagan Doctrine forms the "centerpiece" of a revived and revised policy of containment

may themselves be rejected on one condition—discarding the notion that the doctrine has anything to do with supporting freedom and spreading democracy. If the ideology in the doctrine is discounted as public relations packaging for a realpolitik effort to weaken the Soviet position in the Third World—or more ambitiously to "bleed the Soviets to death" in their peripheral empire—then the Reagan Doctrine can be argued to represent a coherent policy in support of a strategic effort at containment. And that policy is simply one of supporting, with the appropriate degree of "realist" prudence, anticommunist insurrections in the Third World.

Yet this is the interpretation of the Reagan Doctrine that neoconservatives—within and without the administration—logically must, and in reality generally do, reject. For it is in fact the competing realist interpretation of the doctrine being urged upon the administration by conservative, realpolitik-oriented policy analysts from such think tanks as the RAND Corporation and the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis.[14] From this perspective, the notion of spreading democracy simply vanishes as an operative concept, and the geopolitical calculus suggested for determining when, where, and how the support of freedom fighters can maximize Soviet dilemmas would have been warmly endorsed by Metternich and Castlereagh. This version of the Reagan Doctrine is nothing more than the realpolitik that Norman Podhoretz rails at in "The Future Danger" in his attack on Robert W. Tucker's prescription for "limited containment."[15] It embodies an outright rejection of Irving Kristol's "self-consciously ideological" foreign policy appropriate to the "American 'public philosophy.' "[16] And it stands Charles Krauthammer's "neo-internationalist" dismissal of "Morganthauian" realpolitik on its head.[17] If and when neoconservatives support this realist interpretation of the Reagan Doctrine they necessarily reject the sine qua non of their entire foreign-policy perspective: global containment built upon realist foundations will lead to American isolationism; only ideological foundations can successfully sustain the strategy.

14. See for example, Uri Ra'anan et al., *Third World Marxist-Leninist Regimes: Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and U.S. Policy* (Elmsford, N.Y.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1986) and Francis Fukuyama, "Gorbachev and the Third World" *Foreign Affairs,* 64:4 (Spring, 1986), 715-31.

15. "What I am suggesting. . . is that a strategy of containment centered on considerations of Realpolitik would be unable to count indefinitely on popular support. Sooner or later (probably sooner rather than later) it would succumb to a resurgence of isolationism, leaving a free field for the expansion of Soviet power." (Norman Podhoretz, "The Future Danger," *Commentary,* April 1981, 39.)

16. Irving Kristol, "Foreign Policy in an Age of Ideology," *The National Interest,* 1 (Fall 1985), 13 and passim, 6-15.

17. "The neo-internationalist denies that power is an end in itself because the American people do not believe it. If Americans are going to intervene in the world, it has to be for something more than just interest defined as power. It is interest defined as values." ("The Poverty of Realism," 18.)

THE FINAL REASON FOR REJECTING the neoconservative claim that the Reagan Doctrine has become the centerpiece of a second-term strategy of global containment concerns the fundamental issue of plausibility. Is it plausible, given the potential strengths and weaknesses of a policy of active support of anticommunist insurgencies in the Third World, that the administration could *possibly* view it as the centerpiece—or even a significant ingredient—in a strategy of global containment of Soviet power and influence? Consideration of the plausibility issue turns our analysis to the second question examined in this section: What are the prospects for the achievement of the Reagan Doctrine's purported goals? Since those goals appear to encompass both those of neoconservatives (the overthrow of Marxist-Leninist Third World regimes and the spread of democracy) and "realists" (containing the spread of Soviet power and influence and/or bleeding the Soviets in the Third World, thus weakening them at home and abroad), the probabilities of achieving both sets of goals should be considered.

The probabilities of spreading democracy through overt and covert actions taken under the Reagan Doctrine to assist anticommunist insurgencies in the Third World are so low that it is difficult to understand how any of the doctrine's sophisticated supporters can take the ideological goal seriously. Even if the communist regimes being pressured were to fall, neither the political cultures of the countries involved nor the "freedom fighters" being supported suggest gains for democracy. In Angola Jonas Savimbi is at best representative of one tribal faction. Prior to his embrace of "democracy" (with its accompanying South African and U.S. military and economic assistance) he was an avowed Maoist. A victory for the Angolan insurgents would represent a victory neither for freedom nor democracy. It would at best represent the replacement of one weak *authoritarian* regime by another. In Afghanistan the mujaheddin fighting the communist regime are also characterized by strong tribal loyalties. Freedom and democracy in the Western sense are simply not a part of their political vocabulary or political goals unless those goals are given a single narrow meaning—*freedom from* the Soviet-imposed regime. The same is true in Cambodia, where one of the three groups seeking to displace the Vietnamese-installed government is the Khmer Rouge, whose recent genocidal history serves as an ironic counterpoint to the democratic pretensions of the Reagan Doctrine.

Only in Nicaragua might a rebel victory arguably assist in the spread of freedom and democracy. Yet there as well the political implications of an insurgent victory would be uncertain at best. As of 1986, over half of the *Contras* still had a strong *somocista* background. And while U.S. pressure on the *Contras* to "return" democracy to Nicaragua might be great, the country's political culture together with the *Contras'* own political and social loyalties hardly guarantee more than authoritarian rule of the standard Central American style.

THE IDEOLOGICAL GOALS OF THE REAGAN DOCTRINE, then, were not achievable from the outset. This cannot have surprised any of its more nuanced supporters. The primary goal was the bleeding and/or defeat of communist-backed regimes in the Third World: democracy would be an added bonus. Unless we are to believe that the doctrine's supporters were the most naive foreign-policy observers to appear on the American scene in decades, we must assume that this traditional "realist" goal has been their priority from the outset. But how plausible was it? As the hurdles to the achievement of global containment during the first Reagan administration suggest, this goal, too, was never within reach.

The doctrine was sold domestically on the basis of three notions. First, that the enterprise would be inexpensive; second, that it would keep U.S. armed forces out of combat; and third, that the rise of a global commitment to democracy abroad had finally put *American* values on "the side of history." The doctrine had to incorporate the first notion, since at a time of fiscal austerity significant congressional appropriations for subversion abroad were unlikely. As noted above, by the end of 1984 Congress had cut off *all* funding of the *Contras* in Nicaragua, the only country in which the presence of a Marxist-Leninist regime could be portrayed as threatening vital U.S. national interests. The simple fact is, as of mid-1986, a majority of the House of Representatives had not accepted that notion. For aid to the *Contras* was once again rejected by the House of Representatives in the spring of that year despite cries from the administration that the results of a termination of *Contra* aid would be "a national security disaster."[18] It was clear that a congressional compromise would provide some assistance to the *Contras* before Congress adjourned, and in fact it did so by August, providing $100 million. What the events of the first half of 1986 illustrated once again was how unconvincing the notion of a threat to vital U.S. national interests stemming from Third World Marxist-Leninist regimes appeared to the Congress and the American public, and how reluctant the body politic was to appropriate more than token funding to finance the Reagan Doctrine.[19]

Symbolic levels of funding for anticommunist insurgencies everywhere were available because even the most skeptical opponents of the Reagan Doctrine often had to protect themselves against the charge of being "soft on communism." To a considerable degree this necessity explains the

18. *The Washington Post*, 7 June 1986. The quote is from a presidential speech delivered the previous day. It was one of a series of presidential statements attempting to influence a second House vote on *Contra* aid later that month.

19. On 24 June 1986, one day before the House of Representatives, under intense administration pressure, reversed its stand on *Contra* aid and approved a $100 million package by a vote of 221 to 209, ABC News released the results of a poll indicating that 62 percent of all Americans were opposed to *Contra* aid, 29 percent favored it, and the rest were undecided. *ABC World News Tonight*, 24 June 1986.

string of votes in favor of insurgency support that took place in July 1985. But it also explains the shallowness of that support, the minuscule amounts and the generally nonlethal forms of aid actually authorized and appropriated, and the administration's inability, even in the one case that has any serious national-security potential—Nicaragua—to extract funding from Congress without endless efforts of lobbying and compromise each time the issue came up.

But the limited funding and the promise that such funding will obviate any necessity to use U.S. troops abroad, on the one hand, and the administration's continuing claims that vital national-security interests are involved, on the other hand, creates an extraordinarily implausible atmosphere. If vital interests are endangered, are token amounts of money to poorly organized insurgents likely to secure those interests? No progress can be demonstrated by any extant insurgency. The administration's arguments for assistance admit as much; without the yearly funding, it warns, the insurgencies will be decimated. Why not, then, commit U.S. troops? Because, Congress is told, support for the insurgents will make this further commitment unnecessary.

ALL THIS IS, OF COURSE, A RHETORICAL SHELL GAME. The administration faces the same constraint on its implementation of global containment that it did during its first term. The U.S. public will not support the use of U.S. troops abroad (except in "victorious" quick-in, quick-out cases, like Grenada) unless "vital national interests" are far more evident than they are even in Nicaragua. Within the administration, Weinberger's views on when to commit troops abroad also check an expansion of the means by which the Reagan Doctrine might be implemented. And many members of Congress, fearing that even small sums of money may begin an ill-advised entanglement, are willing to appropriate only enough to protect their "patriotic" pro-"freedom fighter" credentials.

If a "democratic revolution" was sweeping the Third World, then a degree of plausibility might be added to this "getting much for virtually nothing" policy. But no respected analyst of the politics of the developing world would claim that such a trend is extant or imminent. Indeed, one of the few competent efforts to scrutinize this issue, written by a scholar quite sympathetic to the goals of global containment and highly respected by most neoconservatives, recently concluded:

> With a few exceptions, the prospects for the extension of democracy to other societies are not great. These prospects would improve significantly only if there were major discontinuities in current trends—such as if, for instance, the economic development of the Third World were to proceed at a much faster rate and to have a far more positive impact on democratic development than it has had so far, or if the United States

reestablished a hegemonic position in the world comparable to that which it had in the 1940s and 1950s. In the absence of developments such as these, a significant increase in the number of democratic regimes in the world is unlikely. . .the limit of democratic development in the world may well have been reached.[20]

The case for the plausibility of the Reagan Doctrine is thus narrowed to a single argument, which, even if the administration did accept, it would not dare press publicly for fear of losing support for an interventionist strategy of global containment: the Soviet Union is so overextended abroad and so weak at home that with this almost costless U.S. effort on the periphery the process of Soviet rollback will begin. The notion of an "overextended empire" now on the defensive is shared by many within the Reagan administration and is well represented in much conservative and neoconservative analysis of the current international scene. Something approaching a consensus has developed around the proposition that domestic difficulties, mainly economic, and indigenous resistance to Soviet-supported "Marxist-Leninist" regimes in the Third World have tilted Soviet foreign policy away from a period of "expansion" and toward one of "consolidation." And proponents of U.S. support for insurrectionist movements against these regimes argue that the implementation of the realpolitik version of the Reagan Doctrine will represent at the least a nagging reminder to the Soviets of the difficulties and costs inherent in their interventionist Third World activity and a warning that the United States is well placed to increase those costs through its support of insurrectionist efforts without running any serious risks to itself.

Nevertheless, most of these same analysts are very careful to emphasize that "consolidation" should not be confused with rollback and that increased U.S. aid for present insurgencies is far more likely to produce more than proportional increases in Soviet support for its "clients" in all instances save Nicaragua.[21] For those realpolitik supporters of the Reagan Doctrine, its objective is not rollback, the spread of democracy, or even global containment. Its goal is simply to cause difficulties of a sufficient magnitude to lead to serious Soviet reconsideration of its geopolitical interaction with the Third World during this period of Soviet consolidation and perhaps to an eventual attempt to reach a modus vivendi with the United States in these regions.

Thus the notion of Soviet overextension and domestic weakness also fails to add plausibility to the Reagan Doctrine. No knowledgeable student

20. Samuel Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly,* 99:2 (Summer 1984), 218. Typically, Huntington's entire essay is provocative, well reasoned, comprehensive, and worth a complete reading.

21. See, for example, *Third World Marxist-Leninist Regimes* and "Gorbachev and the Third World."

of the Soviet Union believes that it is weak enough to have to accept the defeat of Marxist-Leninist regimes in Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia—indeed anywhere save Nicaragua, where such an acceptance would reflect a "realist" Soviet geopolitical calculation of comparative vital national interests, not domestic weakness. Substantially increased and sustained U.S. assistance to anticommunist insurgencies might alter the costs to the Soviet Union, but Congress will not provide this *precisely* because congressional support for the Reagan Doctrine is a direct function of the doctrine's minimal cost and low risk.

IN RETROSPECT, THEN, THE NOTION THAT THE REAGAN DOCTRINE is intended to serve as the centerpiece of a coherent second-term strategy of global containment is simply not credible. The origins of the doctrine in the early 1985 conflict over aid to the Nicaraguan *Contras,* the caution with which the doctrine is being implemented, the strong resistance within the administration to the doctrine's ideological interpretation, and its utter implausibility as a significant contributor to an effective strategy of containment all lead to this conclusion. They also suggest a much less dramatic interpretation. The emergence of the Reagan Doctrine can best be understood simply as a continuation of the administration's ad hoc efforts to circumvent the constraints facing a strategy of containment that thwarted it throughout its first term.

The Reagan Doctrine fit very comfortably into this evolution for several reasons. First, it provided a partial answer to a very immediate problem—how to develop enough congressional support to resume aid to the *Contras.* Second, it provided an additional ingredient in the president's rhetorical commitment to "democratic values."[22] Finally, the doctrine represented a natural evolution of policy in an administration that had begun to recognize that its strong anticommunist position could benefit from some link to the human rights/values issue. The notion of supporting "freedom fighters" to roll back Marxist-Leninist regimes in the Third World and spread democracy in the process provided one such link.

In practice, however, the link has allowed the administration's "realists" to harness ideological support for "geopolitical" purposes—thus the caution with which human rights and democratic process issues are handled. As the case of the Philippines during the last weeks of the Marcos regime illustrates, the administration's commitment to the spread of democracy is generally so constrained by its geopolitical concerns that it all but disappears when a price tag is attached to it.

22. On the administration's commitment to human rights, see Tamar Jacoby, "Reagan's Turnaround on Human Rights," *Foreign Affairs,* 64:5 (Summer 1986), 1066-86.

An ad hoc and—in an operative sense—marginal change of emphasis in the administration's failing containment strategy has been blown out of all proportion less by it than by publicists who are attempting to introduce a much more fundamental change in Reagan foreign policy than is the administration itself. The Reagan Doctrine has indeed presented neoconservatives with an opportunity to replace a "realist" perspective with an "idealist" one, to reinterpret a *structural* conflict (a bipolar clash between the two superpowers) as an *ideological* conflict (Podhoretz's "clash between two civilizations"). But despite neoconservative efforts, the administration has resisted their urgings. It has done so not because it is uncomfortable with the neoconservative perspective on the U.S.-Soviet conflict; on the contrary, it is a perspective that finds much support within the administration. The resistance can reflect only a considerable and enduring concern within the administration that a neoconservative approach to the U.S.-Soviet conflict would enhance—not reduce—the major constraints that have hampered its efforts at containment since 1981.

Neoconservatives continue to argue that Americans will make the sacrifices required by a strategy of global containment *only if* the U.S.-Soviet conflict is explained and hence understood by them as a conflict over competing value systems and political-economic norms and institutions. Realists, including those whose views remain preponderant within the administration, reject this fundamental neoconservative premise. As Weinberger's statements suggest, many elements within the administration believe that the neoconservative premise met and failed its acid test in Vietnam. That war was fought for a U.S. national interest defined as the spread of American ideals and democratic values, all incorporated within the notion of an American-sponsored world order. The American political system was unable to sustain the level of support required to win that war, or even to achieve a highly compromised "peace with honor."

The realist perspective suggests that the American public will support and sustain direct and indirect intervention abroad only when vital and tangible national interests are perceived to be at risk—interests that were not perceived in Vietnam. The exceptions to this realist premise such as Grenada and very limited aid to "freedom fighters" in the Third World are easily explained—they are virtually costless and risk free and do not require the sacrifices of a truly interventionist foreign policy.

Neoconservatives will, of course, continue their efforts to convince the administration that "if Americans are going to intervene in the world" they will do so only for "interest defined as values."[23] The administration will continue to listen with sympathy, and more often than not with

23. "The Poverty of Realism," 18.

the desire to believe what it is hearing. But during its final two years in office the administration's head in Peoria will in all probability continue to prevail over its heart in the editorial offices of *Commentary*—if only because of the continuing constraint on change represented by Congress.

MANY PROMINENT SCHOLARS OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY have noted that global containment's lengthy reign as America's grand strategy—a reign putatively interrupted briefly in the 1970s by "détente"—can be explained only by its successful blending of (realist) concerns for vital national interest and of (idealist) concerns for a more transcendent notion of world order. The realist concern for vital interests needs no explanation in a interstate system whose ordering principle is anarchy. And yet, scholars note, the American concern with the *purpose* of U.S. foreign policy has, since the founding of the republic, been so strong that no grand strategy can succeed that is not equally reflective of America's idealism. In the twentieth century, Wilsonianism, the Truman Doctrine, and now the Reagan Doctrine have all reflected this commitment to a purpose that goes far beyond that normally associated with reason-of-state behavior. All three have been interpreted as commitments to the defense or expansion of democratic systems and values. And all three have been defended by their supporters as embodying a deeper truth about U.S. foreign policy than realists have ever perceived; namely, that America's national interest *is* its national purpose: supporting the spread of democracy. Thus a world order congenial to democratic evolution has been the vital national interest that global containment has struggled to achieve and maintain ever since 1950. The nation will remain committed to global containment, many of its supporters argue, because that strategy blends and bends realpolitik and ideology to a purpose that our national experience both necessitates and morally sanctions. Cyclical patterns of augmentation and retrenchment are evident but, it is argued, such patterns do not undermine the secular commitment of the United States to containment as grand strategy.

There used to be only one significant problem for this interpretation of postwar U.S. foreign policy: Vietnam. In that particular instance America's containment consensus crumbled. The conventional explanation of this singular failure of containment is that the United States' commitment to a congenial world order caught it up in a lengthy conflict in which the American public could perceive no vital national interests at stake. Therefore it eventually refused to accept the human and financial sacrifices required to sustain America's ideological purpose in Southeast Asia.

Now this general interpretation of U.S. foreign policy faces a new and more significant problem: the failure of the Reagan administration

to augment containment successfully under most favorable circumstances and its eventual turn to what in many ways amounts to a toy soldier caricature of containment in the form of the Reagan Doctrine. This costless, riskless, and wholly implausible form of "global containment" has been forced upon the administration by an American public that once again, as the Vietnam, refuses to sacrifice for a robust strategy of containment because it sees no vital national interests at stake. And, more troublesome for the traditional interpretation of U.S. foreign policy, the American public's response to intonations of U.S. purpose in Central America, Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and elsewhere is one of skeptical indifference. If a few dollars will bloody some radical Third World noses and embarrass the Soviet Union in the bargain, fine. But a sustained effort requiring any measurable sacrifice of blood and treasure to spread democracy? When has a politician with his ear to the ground sounded that clarion call lately?

In short, we appear to have reached a point in postwar U.S. foreign policy at which a heretical question is in order: is it possible that the American public is quite willing to distinguish—indeed, may insist upon distinguishing—between vital national interests for which it will sacrifice, on the one hand, and morally sanctioned purposes such as a congenial world order and the spread of democracy for which it will not sacrifice, on the other?

Neoconservatives and their less outspoken supporters have often asserted that Vietnam was somehow an exception and that the containment consensus required only strong leadership in order to be reconstituted. If it accomplishes nothing else of lasting significance in foreign affairs, the Reagan era should rid American historiography of this notion. Strong leadership may evoke sacrifices in defense of threatened vital national interests. It can no longer successfully evoke them in defense of American purpose (a world order congenial to the spread of democratic institutions). In this most fundamental sense global containment is dead; the Reagan Doctrine is its symbolic—and, needless to say, its wholly unintended—recessional.

THIS SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINT in postwar U.S. foreign policy has been reached without notice for two reasons. First, an articulate neoconservative elite continues to argue the contrary case in what has become a hopeless effort to reverse the U.S. public's verdict on global containment. Therefore attention is focused on elite views of American purpose rather than the public's view—a view that can be revealed only by assessing the meager results of six years of Reagan administration efforts to "revitalize" containment.

Second, the administration's interventionist actions in Central America, Grenada, Libya, Lebanon, and elsewhere continue to evoke

the superficial impression that this is the stuff of containment, and that America once again walks tall along its trail. Thoughtful observers, certainly including neoconservatism's gurus, must know better. Indeed, these minimalist acts of intervention illuminate containment's death rattle, not its revival. America can act pugnaciously, and that is popular so long as the acts are inexpensive and riskless. More fundamentally, however, the character of these interventionist efforts reveal that the American public of the 1980s (1) is unconvinced by arguments about "credibility" so crucial to containment's foundations, (2) is insistent upon discriminating between vital security interests and other general interests, (3) is unwilling to sacrifice in defense of the latter, and (4) does not view the U.S.-Soviet conflict as a "battle between two civilizations" (a view that, if accepted, turns all facets of the superpower conflict into "vital security interests"). An American public with these inclinations disembowels a strategy of global containment, and that is precisely what it has quietly been doing throughout the Reagan administration.

In coming years neoconservatives will continue to argue the need for a grand strategy of global containment with the added element of rollback embraced in the Reagan Doctrine. But if a president as popular and as sympathetic to the neoconservative foreign-policy perspective as Reagan cannot sustain the support required for its implementation, it is highly doubtful that any succeeding president will achieve what his administration has failed to achieve. The fundamental constraints on such a strategy, examined throughout this essay, support this judgment.

In the face of these growing international and domestic constraints it is highly probable that U.S. strategic thinking will turn away from the notion of containment and toward the maintenance of global equilibrium in both its geopolitical and strategic forms. In earlier postwar periods, when the global balance of power was perceived (correctly or not) to be insecure and Soviet power was perceived to be expanding on dynamic economic foundations, it could be—and was—argued that only a strategy of containment could sustain the precarious global balance.

Today the global balance appears robust, not precarious. The Soviet Union "loses" China and Egypt; the United States "loses" South Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Iran, and—worst of all—"credibility." Yet the geopolitical equilibrium holds; neither superpower is capable of sustaining any of the "geopolitical momentum" of which we heard so much during the 1970s in reference to the Soviet Union's African probes. In the strategic arena the highly dramatized "window of vulnerability" opened wide for the Soviet Union by the late 1970s with no discernable consequences; apparently the Soviets were less impressed by U.S. strategic vulnerability than were Americans.

Neoconservative rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, today's world is not one of precarious strategic or geopolitical balance. Nor is the economic/technological base of Soviet power dynamic; indeed, it is a fundamental weakness of considerable dimension. It follows that a U.S. strategy in support of global equilibrium no longer need resemble one of global containment. While this tells us very little about the specific contents of a new grand strategy, it is highly suggestive of its general thrust and it does assure us that a propitious opportunity to design such a strategy now exists.