

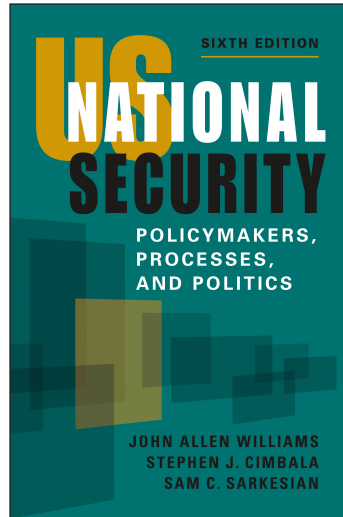
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US National Security:  
Policymakers, Processes,  
and Politics

SIXTH EDITION

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# 1

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## Defining and Defending the National Interest

**National security challenges in the United States have evolved** considerably in the last few years, and policies to meet them have changed in response. Earlier priorities of nation building and fighting a global “war on terror” have been supplanted by dealing with a resurgent Russia and the rise of China as a peer competitor. Strategies, force structure, and training are shifting to reflect the emphasis on state-on-state conflict as a primary concern. At the same time, the challenges of nonstate actors remain and must be considered. Competing state actors and adversary nonstate actors are also learning from one another, posing strategic challenges for US military planners and policymakers.

The international strategic landscape continues to be shaped by complex and contradictory forces. The world is characterized by unrest and changing patterns of interstate relationships, as well as conflicts within states caused by ethnic, religious, and nationalistic differences. International terrorism, drug cartels, population flows, and vulnerabilities to threats made possible by information-age technology add to the turmoil. It is difficult to devise coherent national security policies in this environment, let alone muster the political will and resources to implement them. It is hardly surprising that US national security policies are often complicated, ambiguous, and inconsistent.

US attention has shifted toward nuclear weapons programs in North Korea and Iran, a resurgent Russia seeking hegemony in its “near abroad,” and the increasing power and assertiveness of a rising China that no longer hides its geopolitical ambitions. The United States has undergone numerous cyber attacks attributed to one or more of those

countries, and tensions over Russian intervention in Ukraine, Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, and the status of Taiwan could eventually result in a military confrontation. Relations with all of those countries have diplomatic as well as military dimensions, and these need to be coordinated wisely.

## **National Security**

The challenging international security landscape of the twenty-first century has clouded the concept and meaning of US national security and the protection of national interests by meaningful national security policies has become more difficult.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the problems of conceptualizing national security, we offer a preliminary definition that includes both objective capability and perception: US national security is, first, the ability of national institutions to prevent adversaries from using force to harm Americans or their national interests, and, second, the confidence of Americans in this capability.

There are two dimensions of this definition: physical and psychological. The first is an objective measure based on the military capacity of the nation to challenge adversaries successfully, including going to war if necessary. It also includes a prominent role for intelligence, economics, and other nonmilitary measures and the ability to use them as political-military levers in dealings with other states. The psychological dimension is subjective, reflecting the confidence of Americans in the nation's ability to remain secure relative to the external world. The wisdom and political will of national leaders is critical in the development and implementation of effective national security policies, as well as the willingness of the American people to support such policies.

National security must be analyzed in the context of foreign policy, defined as the policies of a nation that encompass all official relations with other countries. The goal is to enhance conditions favorable to US national interests and to reduce those conditions detrimental to them. The instruments of foreign policy are primarily diplomatic and political, but include a variety of psychological and economic measures.

In the past, national security policy was more distinct from foreign policy. National security purposes were narrower and focused on security and safety, and national security policy was primarily concerned with potential adversaries and their use of force to threaten national interests. There was a clear military emphasis, which is not usually the

case in foreign policy. National security policy increasingly overlaps with foreign policy, however, sometimes blurring any distinction. But much of foreign policy requires compromise and negotiations—the dynamics of give-and-take—associated with traditional diplomacy. This kind of work is primarily a matter for the US Department of State, with long-range implications for national security policy. These relationships are shown in Figure 1.1.

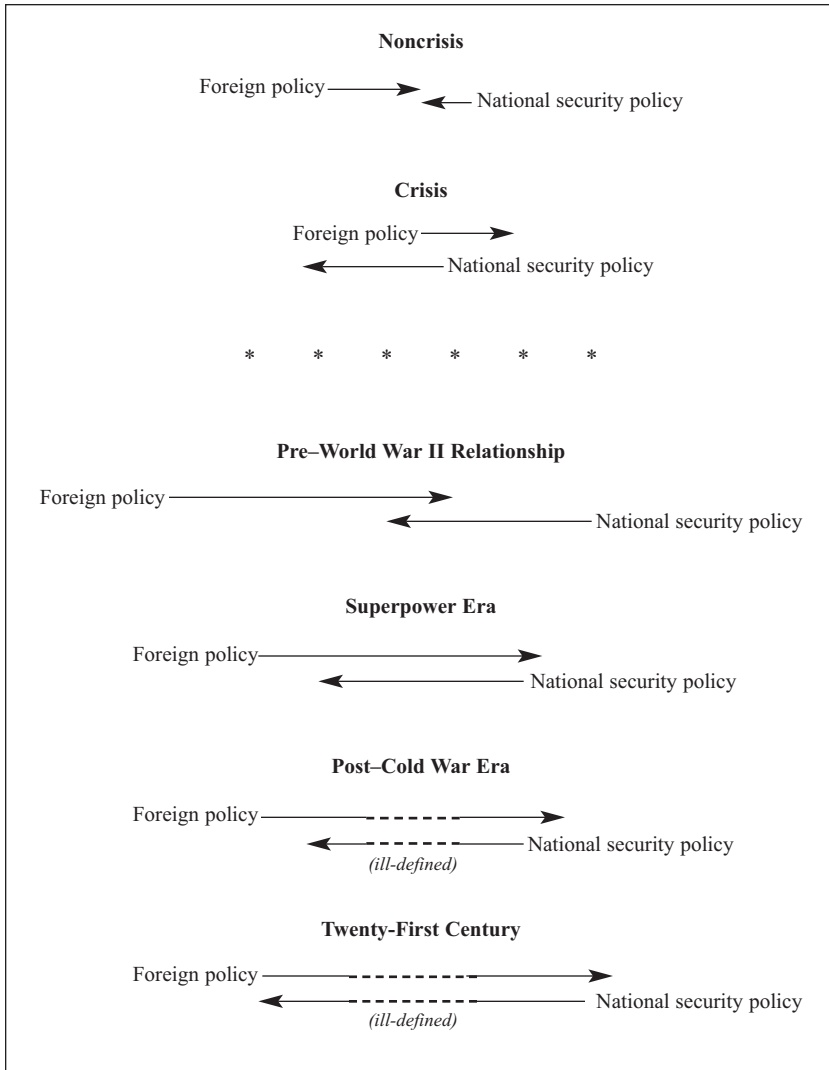
Historically, most Americans felt that imposing US values on other states was a low priority unless survival was at stake. For reasons discussed here, national security goals were increasingly seen to include the projection of US values abroad. Given the cost of such efforts in Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, this perspective is increasingly called into question and highlights the interrelationship among foreign, domestic, and national security policies. An observation made more than two decades ago remains relevant: “America’s concept of national security today is infinitely more complex than at any time in its history. The same is true for the relationship between the foreign and domestic components of national security.”<sup>2</sup>

The difficulties of determining US national interests and establishing national security priorities are compounded by the increasing number of linkages between national security and domestic policies. The domestic economic impact of certain national security policies links US domestic interests and policies to the international security arena. This is seen in economic sanctions, embargos on agriculture exports to adversaries or potential adversaries, diminished foreign oil sources, border security, and the export of technologically advanced industrial products.

Owing to the special characteristics of our democratic system and political culture, it is increasingly difficult to isolate national security issues from domestic policy. Besides the relationship between foreign and national security policies, domestic interests are important in establishing national security priorities and interests. The primary distinction between foreign and domestic policy and national security policy rests in the likelihood of the use of the military as the primary instrument for implementing national security policy. Although many other matters are relevant to US national interests, they are best incorporated into foreign policy and the overlap between such policy and national security policy.<sup>3</sup>

These observations are the basis for defining national security policy, expanding on the concept of national security: National security policy is primarily concerned with formulating and implementing national strategy involving the threat or use of force to create a favorable environment for US national interests. An integral part of this is to

**Figure 1.1 National Security and Foreign Policy**



*Source:* Adapted from Col. William J. Taylor Jr., "Interdependence, Specialization, and National Security: Problems for Diplomats, Soldiers, and Scholars," *Air University Review* 30, no. 5 (July–August 1979), pp. 17–26.

*Note:* The gap between foreign policy and national policy indicates the relative degree of "closeness" between foreign and national security policy. The arrows indicate the relative degree of overlap. As shown, during times of crisis, the gap between foreign and national security policy is minimal and virtually nonexistent. In the twenty-first century it is often difficult to clearly separate foreign policy and national security because the use of force has become closely connected with a variety of peacekeeping missions, humanitarian crises, operations of war, and operations other than war; many such missions are extensions of foreign policy or a combination of national security and foreign policy, particularly in combating international terrorism.

prevent the effective use of military force and/or covert operations by adversaries or potential adversaries to obstruct the ability of the United States to pursue its national interests.

National security means more than the capacity to conduct international wars. Given the characteristics of the international arena and contemporary conflicts, challenges to US national security might take any number of nontraditional forms. Therefore, cyber warfare, international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—including chemical and biological warfare—and information warfare are important dimensions of national security policy. Still, the capacity to deter nuclear war and wage conventional conflicts remains essential for the conduct of US national security policy. Indeed, given the rise of China and difficulties with a resurgent Russia and nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea, these latter capabilities have moved to the forefront of US national security thinking.

National security policy must be carefully developed and implemented according to priorities distinguishing survival (that is, vital) interests from others. Too often, national security is used synonymously with any interest, suggesting that all interests are survival priorities. Taking a page from Sun-tzu, if almost everything is a matter of national security, then the concept of national security becomes virtually meaningless.<sup>4</sup> If national security policy and strategy followed such a pattern, the United States would have to defend everything everywhere; as a result, it would be unable to defend anything. Resources and personnel would be scattered across the globe and rarely be in a position to bring sufficient force to bear, even if survival were at stake. Additionally, a perception that blood and treasure are being expended for nonvital interests would greatly reduce the public's political will to support national security policies generally.

Short of clear threats to US territory, Americans often disagree over priorities. Even when there is agreement on priorities, there may be disagreement on resource commitment and strategy. Yet a system of priorities provides a way to identify levels of threats and helps in the design of strategies. The relationship between national interests and national security is particularly important. As former US national security advisor and secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger wrote, "What is it in our interest to prevent? What should we seek to accomplish?"<sup>5</sup> The same questions continue to challenge policymakers, scholars, and elected officials. The answers were elusive at the start of the post-Cold War period and became even more complicated after September 2001. The US war against terrorism became the dominant theme then, but this was complicated by the US involvement in Iraq



and Afghanistan, troubling issues with Iran, North Korea, and Syria, and a variety of issues linked to homeland security. As noted earlier, conflicts with peer competitors have now become the most important metric for force planning.

Just what is the US national interest? At first glance the answer seems relatively simple: it is to promote US values and objectives. Promoting these includes implementing effective national security policies. Upon closer examination, these answers raise additional questions. What are US values? How are they reflected in national interests? What is the relationship between national security and national interests? How should US national security policy be implemented? Not surprisingly, there is no agreement on the answers to these questions.

Each generation of Americans interprets national values, national interests, and national security in terms of its own perspectives and mindset. Although there is agreement about core elements, such as protection of the US homeland, opinions differ about the meaning of national security, the nature of external threats, and the best course of conduct for security policy. The answers to Kissinger's questions are even more elusive today. National interests encompass a wide range of elements in a complex society such as the United States.

It is to be expected that in a country with a diverse population and multiple power centers there will be different opinions about security issues. Recognizing that these matters are ambiguous and rarely resolved by onetime solutions, we explore the concepts of national security in the context of national interests and national values. In the process, we design a framework for analyzing national security policy.

Regardless of the policies of any administration, the United States has political, economic, cultural, and even psychological links to most parts of the world. What the United States does or does not do has a significant impact on international politics. Americans can neither withdraw from external responsibilities nor retreat into isolation without damage to the national interest. As Henry Kissinger wrote:

No country has played such a decisive role in shaping contemporary world order as the United States, nor professed such ambivalence about participation in it. Imbued with the conviction that its course would shape the destiny of mankind, America has, over its history, played a paradoxical role in world order: it expanded across a continent in the name of Manifest Destiny while abjuring any imperial designs; exerted a decisive influence on momentous events while disclaiming any motivation of national interest; and became a superpower while disavowing any intention to conduct power politics.<sup>6</sup>

## **National Interests**

US national interests are expressions of US values projected into the domestic and international arenas. The notion of interests includes the creation and perpetuation of an international environment that is most favorable to the peaceful pursuit of US values. Americans generally believe that their own democracy is safer in an international system that expands democracy and open systems. (An important controversial issue is under what conditions open systems can be successful and what costs are justifiable to support them.) Similarly, the United States wishes to prevent the expansion of closed systems by their use of force or indirect aggression. The domestic arena has become an important consideration in pursuing national interests affected by asymmetrical threats, information-age challenges, international terrorism, and rising national competitors.<sup>7</sup>

Three statements serve as reference points. First, US values as they apply to the external world are at the core of national interests. The US public expects American policies to be consistent with their view of morality. Policy critics at home and abroad often regard this as simply a justification for policies decided on other bases. Sometimes this is true, but policies as diverse as the Vietnam War and the treatment of asylum-seekers at the US southern border are criticized on moral rather than simply prudential grounds. Second, pursuing national interests does not mean that US national security strategy is limited to the homeland. It may require power projection into various parts of the world. Third, the president is the focal point in defining and articulating US national interests. He or she will justify policies as much as possible on whether they are consistent with US values.

National interests can be categorized in order of priorities as follows. The first order is vital interests. Vital interests include protection of the homeland and areas and issues directly affecting this interest. This may require total military mobilization and resource commitment. In homeland defense, this also may require a coordinated effort of all agencies of government, especially in defense against terrorist attacks and cyber and information warfare. The homeland focus was highlighted by the creation of a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by President George W. Bush following September 11 to coordinate the efforts of a number of agencies in countering terrorism in the United States. Interagency and interservice information sharing and coordination greatly improved, but this was not all done under the auspices of DHS.

The second order is critical interests. Critical interests do not directly affect the survival of the United States or pose a threat to the homeland, but in the long run can become first-order priorities. Critical interests are measured by the degree to which they affect the systems of the US and its allies. Some examples include US economic competitiveness, energy availability, and the emergence of regional hegemons.

The third order is serious interests. These are issues that do not critically affect first- and second-order interests yet cast some shadow over them. US efforts are focused on creating favorable conditions to preclude third-order interests from developing into higher-order ones.

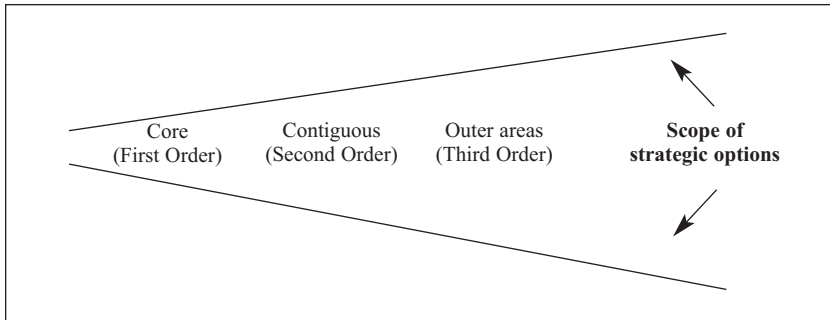
All other interests are peripheral in that they have no immediate impact on any order of interests but must be watched in case events transform these interests. In the meantime, peripheral interests require few US resources.

Categories of priorities such as these can be used as a framework for a systematic assessment of national interests and national security and also as a way to distinguish immediate from long-range security issues. They can provide a basis for rational and systematic debate regarding the US national security posture and are useful in studying national security policy. There is rarely a clear line between categories of interests or complete agreement on what interests should be included in each category, however. Many changes have expanded the concept of national interests to include several moral and humanitarian dimensions, among others. From this perspective US support for authoritarian regimes that benefit the US in some way (economically, militarily, or politically) should be minimized.

A realistic assignment of priorities can be better understood by looking at geopolitical boundaries of core, contiguous, and outer areas (see Figure 1.2). In specific terms, at the core of US national interests is the survival of the homeland and political order. But survival cannot be limited to the “final” defense of the homeland. In light of international terrorism and today’s weapons technology, weapons proliferation, and chemical/biological and cyber warfare, homeland survival precludes simply retreating to the borders and threatening anyone who might attack with total destruction. By then it is too late for national security policy to do much good, and in some cases the attacker can be difficult to identify.

If national interest is invoked only when the homeland is directly threatened and survival is at stake, then the concept may be of little use and a US response too late to overcome the peril. If the concept is to have any meaning for policy and strategy, then it must be something more. Developing this broader view can spark a great deal of disagree-

**Figure 1.2 US National Security Priorities**



ment between the executive and legislative branches of government and in the US political arena. The media also frequently become involved. Policymakers rarely have the luxury of endless debate, nor do they have unlimited time or all necessary facts in a given situation. Yet policy must be made and strategy options examined, chosen, and implemented, even in the face of uncertainty and while disagreements remain intense.

Policy must be determined and implemented at some point. Before that, national interests for the particular situation must be identified and articulated. At the same time, national interests over the long range must be considered. Custom, usage, and constitutional powers give the president a basis for articulating their meaning. Initiatives in foreign and national security policy usually rest with the president as the commander in chief of US armed forces, chief diplomat, and chief of state. Importantly, the president can take action while the other branches of government deliberate. This illustrates the key role of the president in national security decisionmaking and the importance of the checks-and-balances system as a limitation on presidential power.

To be sure, Congress has an important role, but the president must take the lead and is the country's only legal representative with respect to foreign relations. For better or for worse, the president articulates the national interests, and Congress responds. The same holds true with respect to the president and the variety of interest groups in the government bureaucracy and public arena. Members of Congress find it very difficult to force a president committed to a course of action to change direction in national security policies, even in the case of a long war that has become unpopular. In particular, Congress finds it difficult to stop a war that the president feels should be continued.<sup>8</sup> The "nuclear

option” of shutting off funding, as was done to stop the war in Vietnam, is difficult to do politically and has many unpredictable effects.

Every recent presidential administration has produced one or more official statements of US national security policy. These documents lay out the rationale for current policies and serve as a capstone document to guide other national security documents. There will often be some boilerplate, but most of them have been serious attempts to capture the national security interests of the United States and justify the policies chosen to implement them. They also reflect the preferences of the president whose staff prepared them. President Clinton’s national security documents emphasized the importance of international institutions and the need to work through them. George W. Bush’s emphasized the willingness of the United States to launch preventive war to deal with national security threats and to go it alone if necessary. President Trump’s 2017 statement was notable for a sharper political tone and its emphasis on “defending America’s sovereignty without apology” and putting America first in national security strategy.<sup>9</sup> President Biden put out an interim strategic guidance soon after his inauguration that reflected his priority of reengaging with allies to pursue common goals.<sup>10</sup>

## **US Values and National Interests**

US values underlie the philosophical, legal, and moral bases of the US system. These attributes are deeply engrained in the US political system and domestic environment; they also apply to the way in which the public perceives justice in the international system and “just cause” for the use of force. In other words, values are principles that give the US political system and social order their innate character and are the basis of further principles upon which to base national interests.

### *The Value System*

The growing heterogeneity of US society has affected all aspects of US culture and enriched the country considerably. All cultures have contributed to the US value system, but it has been most affected by the dominant social groups as it evolved. Accordingly, modern US values derive primarily from the Judeo-Christian heritage, the Anglo-Saxon legacy (including the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the philosophies of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others), and the principles rooted in the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independ-

ence, and the US Constitution. We identify at least six fundamental values that define the United States and its role in the international world.<sup>11</sup>

First is the right of self-determination, a dual concept in this context: it applies not only to the nation-state but also to people within that state. Each nation-state is presumed to have the right to determine its own policy and to govern as it chooses as long as it does not threaten neighbors or oppress its own people. At the same time, people within that nation-state also have the right of self-determination. From the US perspective, this means that through free and fair elections, people in a nation-state have the right to determine how and by whom they will be ruled, with the option to replace rulers as they see fit.

There is another dimension as well: an emerging right claimed by minority groups to demand autonomy as a matter of self-determination. This duality of self-determination and state sovereignty creates serious problems in determining appropriate and legitimate action on the part of the United Nations, regional organizations, and the United States. This duality also has important implications for US military strategy. Moreover, this duality can lead to a dangerous confrontation between minority groups within a state demanding self-determination and the state itself, as occurred in the former Yugoslavia (between Albanians and Serbians in Kosovo, then a province in Serbia) and in Iraq, among other states.<sup>12</sup> Ideally, self-determination is accomplished within a system of laws and peaceful change. The peaceful partition of the former Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia is an example of this. There is also the possibility of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland spinning off from the United Kingdom. Not all aspirations for national determination by nonstate nations will be resolved without great struggle, however. The attempt of Catalonia to achieve independence from Spain continues, generally peaceably so far. Attempts by the Kurds to carve a homeland out of territory in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria will be resisted militarily by the countries involved. The possibility of a peaceful “two state” solution for Palestinians and Israelis grows ever dimmer, and a peaceful resolution of that conflict seems unlikely.

Second, it follows that there is an inherent worth of each individual in his or her relationship to others, to the political system, and to the social order. What does this mean? Put simply, every person is intrinsically a moral, legal, and political entity to which the system must respond and whose rights must be respected. Each individual has the right to achieve all that he or she can, without encumbrances other than protection of fellow citizens, homeland protection, and survival. Individual worth must therefore be reflected in economic, political, and

legal systems. This notion has been challenged in connection with the treatment of persons entering the country without authorization, in particular with respect to the separation of families at the border.

Third, rulers owe their power and accountability to the people, which is the essence of democratic political legitimacy. The people are the final authority. There is a continuing responsibility by elected and appointed officials to act according to moral and legal principles, and the people have the right to change their leaders by regular constitutional processes. Furthermore, individual worth necessitates limited government with no absolute and permanent focal point of power. To ensure this, governance must be open. That means, with only a few justifiable exceptions, decisions and policies must be undertaken in full public view, with input from a variety of formal and informal groups. The system of rule must be accessible to the people and their representatives. This is the essence of what are called “open systems.”

Fourth, policies and changes in the international environment must be based on the first three values just outlined. Therefore, peaceful change brought about by rational discourse among nation-states is a fundamental value. The resort to war is acceptable only if it is clearly based on homeland protection and survival or other core values, and only if all other means have failed. In this respect, diplomacy and state-to-state relationships must be based on mutually acceptable rules of the game.

Fifth, systems professing such values and trying to function according to them should be protected and nurtured. Nation-states whose values are compatible with US values are thought to be best served by an international order based on those same values. The United States continues to discover the limits of the possible in trying to spread democracy to areas of the world unprepared to nurture it, however. Hopeful notions of “nation building” have been severely challenged by their very disappointing results in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

Sixth, while US values are grounded in the Judeo-Christian heritage that predated the founding of the republic in the late eighteenth century, these characteristics are consistent with the precepts of other religious traditions, including Islam. For many Americans, they instill a sense of humanity, a sensitivity to the plight and status of individuals, and a search for divine guidance.

We do not suggest that these values are perfectly embodied in the US system, although they remain aspirational. There are many historical examples of value distortions and their misuse to disguise other purposes. But these values are esteemed in their own right by most Ameri-

cans and are embodied in the political-social system. Furthermore, the system of rule and the character of the political system have institutionalized these values, albeit imperfectly. The expectations of most Americans and their assessments of other states are, in no small measure, based on these values.

### *American Values Today*

The early years of the republic saw little need to translate values into the external world, as the interest of the United States rarely extended beyond its own shores. This changed as the United States became a great power, partly as the result of acquiring territory in the Spanish-American War in 1898. Within two decades, US involvement in World War I was seen as a way to make the world safe for democracy and subdue a tyrannical Old World power.

The collapse of the old order in Europe following World War I set the stage for the continental evolution of both democratic regimes and authoritarian Marxist-Leninist and Fascist systems. Until that time, Pax Britannica had provided a sense of stability and order to European affairs as well as a security umbrella for the United States in its relationships with Europe. But for many Americans, involvement in a conflict to save Europe seemed in retrospect to be a mistake. The United States withdrew into isolationism with the “Back to Normalcy” policy of President Warren G. Harding in 1921 and sank into an economic depression in 1929, which was itself exacerbated by economic nationalism and high tariffs. Although the United States participated in disarmament negotiations during the interwar period, many view the failure to join the League of Nations and participate actively in it as a contributing factor to World War II—a serious step back from President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points as the basis for a new world order.<sup>14</sup>

Even in the aftermath of World War I, Americans were accustomed to a world dominated by a European order compatible with US values and interests. Although an imperfect order, it did not offend the US value system until the rise of Fascist Italy and Germany.<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, US values were expressed by progressivism in Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency and later by Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” from his 1941 State of the Union address—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—remain excellent reflections of US values.

Between the two world wars, Americans presumed that US interests were also world interests. US values were viewed as morally unassailable



and therefore to be sought after by the rest of the world. In this context, US national security was primarily a narrow focus on the protection of the homeland. Given US geographic isolation from Europe, this required few armed forces and a simple military strategy. Furthermore, there was little need to struggle with issues over US values and how to protect them in the external world, except occasionally for the sake of international economics. The US passed responsibility to others, primarily Britain and France, for keeping the democratic peace. Opinions began to change with the gathering clouds of World War II and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's policies on rearmament and support for the British and French. Many Americans wanted no part of the "European War" that started in 1939, but the Japanese bombing of the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, caused a rapid shift in US opinion about the war.

Regardless of the US desire to return to isolation following the successful conclusion of World War II, US interests were increasingly threatened. Parts of Europe and Asia were smoldering from the war, and it soon became clear that US interests and responsibilities extended beyond the nation's borders. In addition, it was perceived that democracy and US values could not be nurtured and expanded by disengagement; if democracy needed to be defended, then it seemed to require a US presence in all parts of the world. Beyond protection of the US homeland, then, what did the United States stand for? And how did it intend to achieve its goals, whatever they were?

The United States was against Marxist-Leninist and other authoritarian political systems determined to subvert or overthrow the international order. The policy of containment reflected a US policy consensus to prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union and its Communist system. The United States played a vital role in rebuilding Europe, especially with the economic recovery program known as the Marshall Plan. All of this placed the United States in the leadership role of the West and was consistent with the earlier Puritan view of Americans as a chosen people.<sup>16</sup> For many, the second half of the twentieth century was the "American Century," and the containment policy provided the rationale for involvement in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Challenges to that policy involved where and how it was implemented, but there was strong support for the policy in principle. Even today there are echoes of the containment policy in US concerns about the possibility that the government of China would attempt to force the island of Taiwan—which it considers a renegade province—to unite with mainland China.

But with the end of the Cold War, in roughly 1989, the emergence of a new security landscape and domestic economic and social chal-

lenges caused many Americans to refocus on domestic issues. There was a turning inward, reinforced by the conviction that the United States had won the Cold War and the danger of a major war had diminished considerably. But this new landscape was ambiguous and difficult to comprehend. US political scientist John Mersheimer argued presciently that the United States would miss the Cold War, with its moral certainties and predictable (if difficult) responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> The reemergence of peer competitors to the United States and a refocusing on large-scale war makes the strategic landscape even more complicated and difficult to deal with, since lower-level challenges still remained.

Turning inward, Americans faced issues of diversity: gender and gender identity, race, sexual orientation, and the integration of various groups with non-Western heritages. Some argued that the United States might never have been a true melting pot of culture, yet it had benefited greatly from the waves of immigrants who brought along their rich heritage. Others argued there was the risk of cultural erosion from the increasing prominence of non-Western cultures.<sup>18</sup> Arguments about “multiculturalism” and the degree to which that is consistent with “Americanism” continue to flourish. Unfortunately, these issues are often dealt with based on dogmas, political soundbites, and platitudes rather than rational analysis. The US motto *E pluribus unum* (“one out of many”) is accepted in principle, but Americans continue to disagree on the extent to which they should focus on the *pluribus* or the *unum*.

### The New Era

In the new era it is difficult to agree on the principles of US values as they apply to the international order. Issues of multiculturalism and diversity have become more salient and controversial in the wake of publicized examples of excessive police force used against persons of color. While there is a wide consensus on the need to address racial issues, there are great differences in opinions as to how they should be addressed. For example, in viewing the US domestic system, former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and later secretary of state the late Colin Powell wrote:

And Lord help anyone who strays from accepted ideas of political correctness. The slightest suggestion of offense toward any group . . . will be met with cries that the offender be fired or forced to undergo sensitivity training, or threats of legal action. Ironically for all the present

sensitivity over correctness, we seem to have lost our shame as a society. Nothing seems to embarrass us; nothing shocks us anymore.<sup>19</sup>

As some critics point out, spokespersons for various groups in the United States often use terms such as “our people” or “my people” in referring to their particular racial, ethnic, or religious group to the exclusion of others. This tends to distinguish and separate one group from Americans in general. But as President Franklin D. Roosevelt remarked in 1943 when activating the predominantly Japanese-American 442nd Combat Team, “Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart. Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.”<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, demographics and cultural issues have an impact on US national security policy and strategy. When the national interest is clear and the political objectives are closely aligned with that interest, however, there is likely to be strong support by Americans for US action. But US involvement in cultures and religions abroad can have domestic repercussions, such as involvement in the conflict in the Middle East between Israel and the Palestinians and US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. This makes it more difficult to project US values into the international arena. In sum, the commitment of the US military in foreign areas will not draw support from the public unless it is convinced that such actions will support the vital interests of the United States.

### **The Study of National Security**

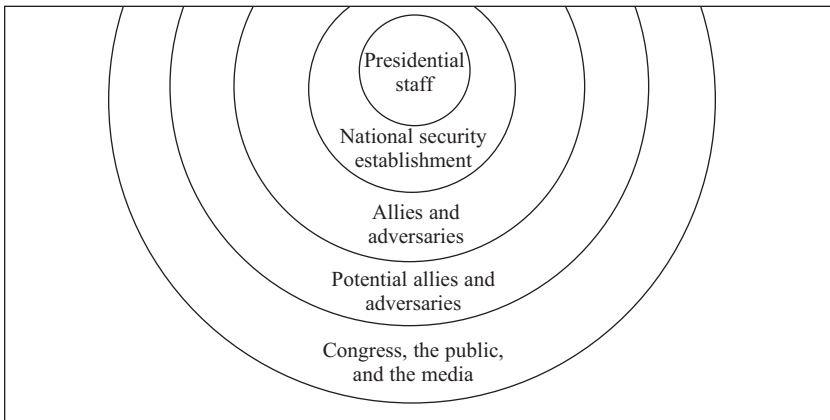
We consider three approaches to the study of national security: the concentric-circle approach, the elite-versus-participatory policymaking approach, and the systems-analysis approach. All concentrate on the way in which policy is made. They should be distinguished from studies that examine national security issues, such as US nuclear strategy or US policy in the Middle East. The three approaches should be further distinguished from studies of government institutions.

The concentric-circle approach places the president at the center of the national security policy process (see Figure 1.3). The president’s staff and the national security establishment provide advice and implement national security policy. This approach shows the degree of importance of various groups as the primary objects of national security policy. For example, a major objective is to influence the behavior and policies of allies as well as adversaries. At the same time, Congress, the public, and the media have important roles in the national

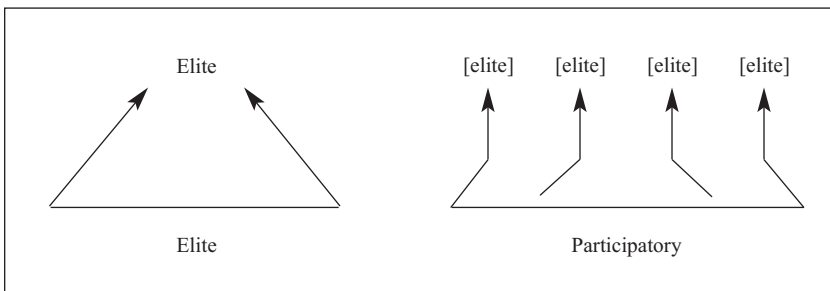
security policy process. The more distant circles represent government structures and agencies, constituencies, and the media. The farther the institutions are from the center, the less their direct influence on national security policy. The problems with this approach are its oversimplification of the national security policy process and its presumption of rationality in decisionmaking.

The elite-versus-participatory policymaking approach is based on the view that the policy process is dominated by elites (see Figure 1.4). National security policy is undertaken by elites within the national security establishment, but that elite group must in turn develop support in the broader public. On the one hand, the elites have the skill and access to information to formulate national security policy, in contrast to an

**Figure 1.3 Concentric Circle Approach**



**Figure 1.4 Elite and Participatory Models**

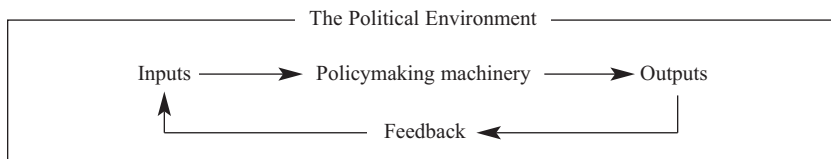


uninformed and unorganized public. On the other hand, for national security policy to be successful in the long run, there must be some degree of participation by the public and political will within the body politic. The elite model sees national security policy as being made by a small circle that includes the president, his or her staff, key members of Congress, high-ranking military officers, and influential members of the business community. These elites—who may or may not be cohesive—are assumed to operate on the basis of their own self-interest, often overriding other considerations. The participatory model assumes the existence of a variety of elites who represent various segments of the public, interest groups, and officials. In this model, the same elites rarely control all aspects of national security policy. Coalitions are formed for particular issues, then reformed for other issues. This approach attempts to reconcile the skill and power of the elite with the demands of participatory democracy.

The systems-analysis approach emphasizes the dynamic interrelationships among variables at all stages of the security decisionmaking process (see Figure 1.5). Many inputs go into the policy process, and the policymaking machinery must reconcile competing interests and design a policy that is widely acceptable. In turn, the impact of policy is measured by feedback on policy effectiveness and how it is perceived by those affected.

All three approaches are useful in the study of national security policy, and this book incorporates something from each. We examine the formal national security establishment on the assumption that the president and government entities established by law form that establishment and are at the center of the policy process—the concentric-circle approach. We examine the National Security Council (NSC) and the Department of Defense from the concentric-circle approach and partly from the elite-versus-participatory approach. Finally, in analyzing the formal policy process, we give the most attention to the national secu-

**Figure 1.5** Systems-Analysis Approach



urity network—a systems-analysis approach that considers many power clusters within the governmental structure, the political system, and the international environment that have an impact on the national security establishment and the policymaking process.

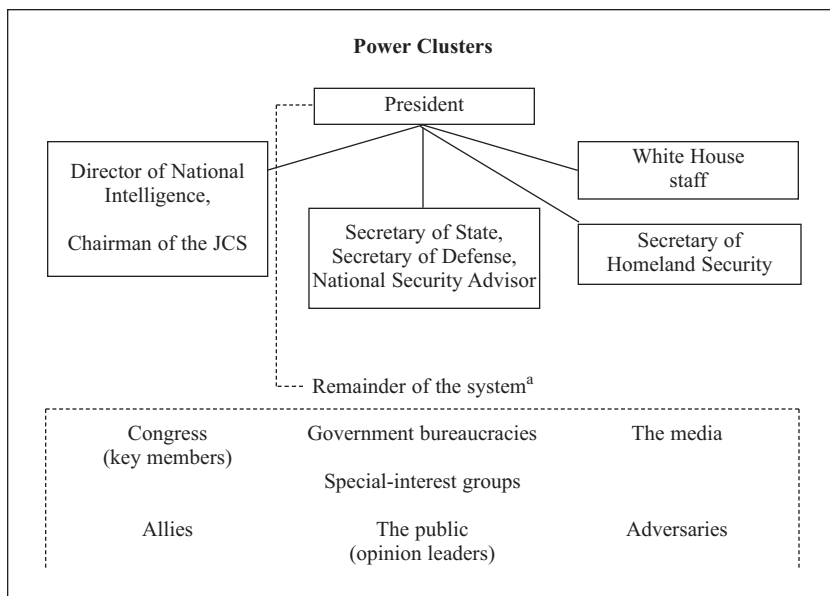
The term *national security establishment* refers to those responsible for national security decisionmaking as well as a descriptive term that identifies a set of actors and processes that actually produce security policy outcomes. The character and personality of the president can also lead to the creation of informal and parallel structures and processes for developing national security policy. This sets up a series of policy power clusters that form a national security network that drives the national security establishment and the formal policymaking process. The relationships among and within these power clusters and their actual powers are dependent upon the way the president exercises his or her leadership and his or her views on how the national security establishment should function.

We consider four major power clusters within the US command structure, whose powers vary according to presidential leadership and preferences: (1) the policy triad, consisting of the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, and the national security advisor; (2) the director of national intelligence and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; (3) the president's closest White House advisors, such as the White House chief of staff and the counselor to the president; and (4) the secretary of Homeland Security.

These four power clusters are important in shaping national security policy (see Figure 1.6). They represent critical parts of the national security establishment but operate in ways that reflect presidential leadership style and the mind-sets of those within the three power clusters. As such, they may or may not be compatible with the formal national security establishment.

Put another way, the national security establishment is fluid and dynamic, and the policymaking process is not as rational and systematic as one is led to believe or as one might hope. For example, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had numerous advisors reporting directly to him, some of whom may have had the same assignment (unbeknownst to the others); President Dwight D. Eisenhower preferred a highly structured staff organization similar to those he was accustomed to from his Army experience; President John F. Kennedy was comfortable with a much looser organization; and President Donald Trump resisted attempts to structure his decisionmaking process, relying instead on his own instincts and informal advisors outside of government. President Biden

**Figure 1.6 Policy Power Clusters and the National Security System**



*Note:* a. Objects of national security policy and inputs into national security policy.

relies on his own experience, but does so in the context of a more structured and analytical process than his predecessor.

The observation of Frederick Hartmann and Robert Wendzel on the defense planning process remains relevant today: “The defense planning process . . . is beset with multiple dilemmas. Assessing the threat and acquiring the force structure to meet that threat require an efficient crystal ball—not only in the sense of defining the future in the here and now in terms of events and dangers; the process also requires accurately estimating the national mood years before the critical event.”<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

There is a set of limitations that cannot be separated from the operations of the US national security establishment. The policy process cannot be understood apart from these considerations. As a result, there is likely to be internal disagreement within the national security estab-

lishment, between the establishment and other branches and agencies of government, and between all of these and the public. When we add the differing views of allies and adversaries, it is clear that simply examining the actors or the policy process is not sufficient to explain the complexities inherent in making and implementing US national security policy.

All of this is exacerbated by the diffusion of power within the US political system, within and among the branches of government, and within the general population. Participatory politics and single-issue politics, changing domestic demographics, the policy role of the media, the rise of social media and the twenty-four-hour news cycle, and internal power problems within government have made it very difficult for the president to undertake foreign policy or national security initiatives that are perceived as outside the mainstream or as requiring a new kind of military posture or preparedness. To place a stamp on national security policy, the president must build a political base within the government and activate the general public as well as convince the media of the appropriateness of new policies and strategies. This usually means that they must be seen as major national security issues, with the US position clearly proper and morally correct, and must involve acceptable risk and a high expectation of success. Very few policies meet all of these tests—a frequent source of presidential frustration.

The US fear of concentrated power is ingrained in the constitutional principles of separation of powers and checks and balances, which have provided clear limits to the exercise of power of any one branch of government. Yet these restraints can also prevent effective responses to challenges that require a concentration of power to succeed. Thus, the problem is self-contradictory. The legal niceties of US constitutional practice can be problematic in the international security setting, where power and politics are often inextricable. It is in this context that the US national security establishment and the process by which security policy is formulated and implemented meet their greatest test. Such a test is evident in the continuing struggles between the president and Congress over the war power and how to meet our national security objectives.

In this book our primary concern is the US national security establishment and the security policy process. In addition, we examine the international security setting, the factors that affect the substance of US national security policy, and the presidential mandate. All of these matters have become complicated by the disagreements within the United States on military operations abroad, how to deal with a rising and



ambitious China, proper responses to international terrorism, and other troublesome issues. The chapters on the national security establishment and the national security process are focused on these issues.

## Notes

1. See John Allen Williams, “The Military and Society Beyond the Postmodern Era,” *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 52, no. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 199–216.

2. David Jablonsky, “The State of the National Security State,” in David Jablonsky, Ronald Steel, Lawrence Korb, Morton H. Halperin, and Robert Ellsworth, *US National Security: Beyond the Cold War* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, July 26, 1997), pp. 39–40.

3. See Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Shannon L. Blanton, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*, 14th ed. (Stamford, Conn.: Cengage Learning, 2013).

4. *Sun Tzu: The Art of War*, translated and with an introduction by Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

5. Henry A. Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 92. This was written before Kissinger became assistant to President Richard Nixon for national security affairs (a position that is known widely as national security advisor) and then secretary of state.

6. Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. 234. See also John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2018), chap. 9, pp. 255–293.

7. See David E. Sanger, *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age* (New York: Crown, 2018); Fred Kaplan, *Dark Territory: The Secret History of Cyber War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016); Thomas E. Copeland, ed., *The Information Revolution and National Security* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, August 2000); John Allen Williams, “Understanding Asymmetric Warfare: Threats and Responses,” *National Strategy Forum Review* (Summer 2007), pp. 23–26; and John Allen Williams, “Terrorism: The New Threats,” *National Strategy Forum Review* (Winter 2004), pp. 7–9.

8. See Richard E. Grimmitt, *Congressional Use of Funding Cutoffs Since 1970 Involving U.S. Military Forces and Overseas Deployments* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 16, 2007).

9. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: December 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

10. Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Renewing America's Advantages: Interim National Security Guidance* (Washington, DC, March 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

11. See Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, eds., *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, 5th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

12. David Scheffer concluded, “I propose that we are witnessing the end of sovereignty as it has been traditionally understood in international law and in state practice. In its place we are seeing a new form of national integrity emerging.” David Scheffer, “Humanitarian Intervention Versus State Sovereignty,” in United States Institute of Peace, *Peacemaking and Peacekeeping Implications for the United States Military* (Washington, DC, May 1993), p. 9.

13. For a succinct explanation of the US failure in Afghanistan, see Joseph J. Collins, "What Went Wrong in Afghanistan," September 2, 2021. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/09/what-went-wrong-afghanistan/185061>.

14. See James M. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process*, 4th ed. (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock, 2004), pp. 28–30.

15. Certainly many actions of the Soviet Union during this period were inconsistent with US values, but they were not yet an influential part of the European order.

16. See, for example, Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2006). Also see Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

17. See John Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War," *The Atlantic*, August 1990, pp. 35–50.

18. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). See also Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993), pp. 22–49. For a critique of the Huntington thesis, see Shireen T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Coexistence?* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998).

19. Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random, 1995), p. 610.

20. See <https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/propaganda/id/221>. Roosevelt's comment was consistent with American values, but it is sadly ironic that at the time these words were spoken some 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, citizen and noncitizen alike, were incarcerated in internment camps by a 1942 presidential order for the duration of the war. This policy was approved in *Korematsu v. United States* (December 18, 1944). See [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0323\\_0214\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0323_0214_ZO.html), especially the blistering dissents.

21. Frederick H. Hartmann and Robert L. Wendzel, *Defending America's Security* (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), p. 146.