



The Grand Strategy of Washington and Eisenhower: Recovering the American Consensus

By Paul Carrese

Paul Carrese is Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Air Force Academy. The views expressed are the author's, not those of any government entity. Work on this article was made possible through support from the Earhart Foundation.

Abstract: Scholars have sought to shoehorn American foreign policy into the distinctly European theories of liberalism, realism, or nationalism that are taught in International Relations courses. But America's first grand strategy, as articulated in Washington's Farewell Address in 1796, blended such views in a distinctly American way. The widespread belief that this address counsels isolationism is wrong. Washington instead argues on behalf of an America that stands for moderation and independence in our international engagements. His legacy is evident nearly two centuries later in Eisenhower's Farewell Address in 1961. These statesmen embody the distinctive quality of American strategy that balances and blends seemingly rival principles to avoid extremes of injustice and imprudence. Tocqueville's praise of Washington's grand strategy affirms its deeper philosophical roots, as distinct from mere pragmatism. In his address, Eisenhower adapted the Washingtonian approach, blending interests and justice, prudence and principles, and power and pacific benevolence—to advocate our global leadership as America's enlightened self-interest.

The year 2014 revealed increasing signs of decay in the liberal-democratic global order that America first sought in 1941, upheld through the Cold War, and expanded in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 eras. President Barack Obama has admitted such fraying. The emerging pattern features rising threats from illiberal powers; questions about our alliances; and a shift from an American military-political presence that vindicates liberal-democratic ideals to diplomacy that merely exhorts them. The Obama strategy did not seek this result; it promised “smart power” as a blend of realism and liberal internationalism. The rising disorder suggests that the administration has produced a doctrine of American self-containment. The cautious actions against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is roiling the strategically crucial Middle East, seem to validate this observation.

President Obama says his guiding maxim is “don’t do stupid stuff” (politely put). He takes, from a kind of realism that has (as Machiavelli might say) a bit of

lion and much fox, the view that America has overextended itself without gains for interests and security, especially under the alleged neoconservative militarism of George W. Bush. Accordingly, he argues, we must retrench to protect only interests touching the homeland and our region. The United States can work with concerts of powers to keep other regional balances, but should only strike out in economical ways against threats over the horizon.¹ Alternately, from a kind of liberal internationalism that blends some regard for power and interests into a basic idealism, Obama emphasizes norms and institutions of international law along with a diplomacy that exhorts the world to accept liberal principles. The United States may have played a major role in establishing such norms and institutions, but since the system is now self-sustaining, the relative decline of America is acceptable.²

Some defenders of the administration deem its doctrine “strategic restraint,” and compare Obama to President Dwight Eisenhower. The Obama blend of norm-driven liberalism in speech, with insular realism in deed, claims to have avoided new mistakes while achieving some successes. Two leading analysts, Fareed Zakaria and Joseph Nye, have defended this doctrine by suggesting that just as Eisenhower maintained American primacy by ending wars and avoiding military interventions (Korea and Vietnam), and by avoiding risky policies (resisting use of nuclear weapons), so Obama could succeed with similar strategic restraint.³

However, rising criticism even from the President’s supporters, and growing anxiety from allies, suggests that restraint is not a winning strategy—and that the comparison with Eisenhower is strained. Scholars have demonstrated that Ike was a serious strategist rather than a figurehead for Secretary of State John Foster Dulles; he moved with a “hidden hand” to guide debates and decisions in foreign and security policy.⁴ Despite the many challenges he faced, there was little sense of international chaos or American passivity. Moreover, most scholars credit him with settling a national consensus on the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman strategies of internationalism, containment, and a Cold War with the Soviets. Obama, in contrast, has not achieved a consensus grand strategy. Indeed, there may be as much discontent with the Obama doctrine of restraint and diplomatic exhortation as with the George W. Bush strategy of vindicationist internationalism.

If academic debate were not so beholden to realism and liberal internationalism—a dominance reinforced by rival alignments of think tanks and policy journals hewing to one doctrine or the other—then they might see our current dissensus as an opportunity to question such creeds. Those who view

¹ For defensive realism and “offshore balancing,” see Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

² See G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³ Fareed Zakaria, “On Foreign Policy, Why Barack is Like Ike,” *Time*, Dec. 19, 2012; Joseph Nye, *Presidential Leadership and the Creation of the American Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), at p. xii, pp. 46–50, pp. 120–24.

⁴ The path-breaking work is Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). I also rely throughout upon Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1127542>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1127542>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)