

# 2008

The logo for h-diplo is written in a dark blue, cursive, handwritten-style font.

## H-Diplo Roundtable Reviews

[www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables)

Volume IX, No. 18 (2008)

5 September 2008

**Ian Shapiro.** *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror.* Princeton University Press, 2007. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-0-691-12928-0 (cloth). \$24.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-13707-0 (paper). \$14.95.

Roundtable Editor: Thomas Maddux

Reviewers: Curt Cardwell, Campbell Craig Lloyd Gardner, Mary Sarotte

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-IX-18.pdf>

## Contents

---

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge.....	2
Review by Curt Cardwell, Drake University .....	6
Review by Campbell Craig, University of Southampton .....	10
Review by Lloyd Gardner, Rutgers University .....	15
Review by Mary Sarotte, University of Southern California.....	18
Author's Response by Ian Shapiro, Yale University .....	21

---

## Copyright © 2008 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

---

As President George Bush affirms the importance of the “War on Terror” and his decision to invade Iraq in 2003, the candidates to replace him, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama have advanced different views on Bush’s strategy and the wisdom of his decisions. As they move toward the middle to win the November election, the differences may be muted. Both McCain and Obama would profit from checking out some of the H-Diplo roundtables that address the historical roots of current U.S. diplomacy and strategy and offer insights on future strategy. Some recent examples that include works by international relations specialists, political scientists, and historians are Tony Smith’s *A Pact With The Devil: Washington’s Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of American Promise*; Michael Hunt’s *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained & Wielded Global Dominance*; and Philip Gordon’s *Winning the Right War: The Path to Security for America and the World*; and Walter Hixson’s *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy*. H-Diplo also has forthcoming roundtables on Joan Hoff’s *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush*; Tom Nichols’ *Eve of Destruction: The Coming Age of Preventive War*; Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier’s *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror*; Henry Brands’ *From Berlin To Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*; Andrew Bacevitch’s *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*; and Melvyn Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, *To Lead the World: American Strategy after the Bush Doctrine*.

Ian Shapiro has joined these specialists with a brief advocacy—133 pages-- that the United States abandon the Bush national security doctrine for dealing with terror and return to a Cold War containment strategy. His recommendation is closest to that of Philip Gordo, as opposed to Tony Smith, who worried that containment could, based on the interventions it produced around the world, “morph back into the Bush Doctrine.” Gordon and Shapiro suggest that the Bush doctrine with its focus on rogue states like the members of the “Axis of Evil”—Iran, North Korea, and Iraq-- and terrorist groups like al-Qaeda, represent a radical and unsustainable departure in U.S. national security policy. Shapiro emphasizes six major characteristics of the Bush Doctrine, including (1) its emphasis on the U.S. right to act unilaterally and militarily anywhere in the world; (2.) its assertion of the right to act without the approval of the United Nations or traditional alliance partner; (3.) its claim of a traditional right to take preemptive actions to prevent an emerging threat as outlined in the *National Security Strategy* statements of 2002 and 2006; (4.) the emphasis on replacing oppressive dictators like Saddam Hussein with democracies; (5.) the insistence that the war on terror did not allow neutrality as a legitimate stance; and (6.) the belief that the war on terror as likely to continue indefinitely. (15-31)

Shapiro concludes that the Bush doctrine is unsustainable with respect its economic costs, the demands on the U.S. military, the required domestic political support, the necessary backing of major allies, and its apparent inability to foster democracy. The Bush doctrine, Shapiro suggests, is “subversive of the legitimacy on which democracies depend ... [and]

more likely to foster insurgencies and anti-American nationalism than fledgling democracies.” (30)

The reviewers welcome Shapiro’s critique of the Bush doctrine but they do raise some questions about the author’s recommendation of containment as an alternative strategy:

- 1.) Campbell Craig, Lloyd Gardner, and Mary Sarotte note that the Cold War containment strategy took on many different forms as discussed in John Gaddis’ *Strategies of Containment* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; 2005). Shapiro recognizes this and prefers the initial strategy of George Kennan as articulated in 1946-1947 as a realist strategy focused on the Soviet Union. Shapiro also notes that containment could get transformed into NSC 68 or a global containment strategy against almost any version of communism regardless of the significance of the country or a realistic assessment of available means, costs, and prospects for success. Curt Cardwell has the most reservations about Shapiro’s assumptions on the necessity and wisdom of containment in the Cold War. Shapiro’s engages these concerns in his response.
- 2.) Shapiro engages critics of the Bush Doctrine, most notably Francis Fukuyama (39-42), and is familiar with the literature on a number of related subjects such as terrorism. One relevant omission is John Gaddis’ *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004) and a follow-up article in *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2005), “Grand Strategy in the Second Term.” Gaddis not only connects Bush’s strategy of preemption, unilateralism and hegemony in American security policy back to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but he also makes a case that the Bush strategy had a good deal of coherence, although this in itself did not guarantee success. In his *Foreign Affairs* article, Gaddis notes many failures in the implementation of the strategy from Afghanistan to Iraq and terrorism in general.
- 3.) The reviewers question how well containment translates into a policy to deal with sub-national terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. They enthusiastically agree with Shapiro that a containment strategy is much preferred to the Bush Doctrine in dealing with states that pursue weapons of mass destruction or shelter and support terrorist groups. As Shapiro emphasizes, containment was successful with Saddam Hussein at far less cost than the Iraq war to date. (48-49) Gardner also notes that Shapiro’s analysis of how containment worked to pressure Muammar al-Qaddafi to abandon its nuclear weapons program offers a persuasive rebuttal of false White House claims that the Iraq war prompted Libya’s decision. Craig questions whether the logic of containment really applies to sub-national terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. Shapiro recognizes this challenge and recommends several alternatives, most notably a return to dealing with terrorists as a problem of international crime and enforcement as well as suggesting that even these groups are susceptible to incentives and pressures in a containment strategy. (86-89) Shapiro also supports his thesis that the “policies flowing from containment are a better bet for America’s security than the Bush Doctrine. In Chapter 5, “Containment’s Realism,” Shapiro responds to seven different issues over whether containment is appropriate for

problems from weapons of mass destruction to transnational terror networks and weak states. (62-101)

- 4.) Sarotte enthusiastically supports Shapiro's emphasis on the importance of legitimacy for U.S. containment policies, its relationships with its allies, and support for indigenous democratic movements. Shapiro rejects the Bush administration's advocacy of regime change, "Axis of Evil" rhetoric, and inflated expectations on the spread of democratic institutions from external sources such as U.S. interventions as opposed to internal developments that the U.S. supports. Sarotte, however, would welcome more discussion on the problem of how to evaluate and select groups worthy of U.S. backing: "one suspects that a number of the people whom Shapiro criticizes would defend themselves by saying that they are supporting indigenous democratic movements in Iraq and elsewhere." (2)
- 5.) Shapiro also puts both of his hands on the third rail of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, the U.S. relationship with Israel. The appearances of McCain and Obama before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and their comments affirms the difficulties of separating domestic politics from an effective strategy dealing with the Middle East. To his credit, Shapiro does not duck this issue. Instead, Shapiro suggests that the U.S. has failed to maintain its legitimacy by allowing a commitment to the defense of Israel to slide into an acceptance of Israeli conquest and the expanding settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Legitimacy and the moral appeal of containment that Shapiro seeks to recapture cannot be regained with the approach pursued by President Bush and his predecessors. (51-52) <sup>1</sup>

### Participants:

**Ian Shapiro**, Ian Shapiro is Sterling Professor of Political Science at Yale University, where he also serves as Henry R. Luce Director of the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies. He has written widely and influentially on democracy, justice, and the methods of social inquiry. A native of South Africa, he received his J.D. from the Yale Law School and his Ph.D from the Yale Political Science Department where he has taught since 1984 and served as chair from 1999 to 2004. Shapiro is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a past fellow of the Carnegie Corporation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. His most recent books are *The Flight From Reality in the Human Sciences*, and *Death by a Thousand Cuts: The Fight Over Taxing Inherited Wealth* (with Michael Graetz). His current research concerns the relations between democracy and the distribution of income and wealth.

**Curt Cardwell** received his Ph.D. in 2006 from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and is currently assistant professor of history at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. He is revising his dissertation on NSC 68 and eagerly seeking a publisher.

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Shapiro's discussion on dealing with the Hamas, 80-84, and a visit to the Qalandia checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah, 106-109.

**Campbell Craig** is Professor of International Relations at the University of Southampton in England. He is author of *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (Columbia University Press, 2003). His forthcoming books include, with Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale University Press, forthcoming August 2008), and, with Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2009).

**Lloyd Gardner** is the Charles and Mary Beard Professor of History at Rutgers University, where he has taught since 1963. A specialist in 20th Century foreign policy, Gardner is the author or editor of fifteen books on American foreign policy including *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (1964), *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (1970), *Creation of the American Empire* 2 vols. with Walter LaFeber and Thomas McCormick, (1973), *Wilson and Revolutions, 1913-1921* (1976), *A Covenant with Power: American and World Order from Wilson to Reagan* (1984), *Redefining the Past: Essays in Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams* (1986), *Safe for Democracy: The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913-1923* (1984), *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954* (1988), *Spheres of Influence: The Great Powers Partition Europe from Munich to Yalta* (1993), *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (1995), and *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968* (2004) with Ted Gittinger; Lloyd Gardner and Marilyn Young, eds., *The New Empire: A 21st Century Teach-In* (2005); Lloyd Gardner and Marilyn Young, eds., *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or, How Not to Learn from the Past* (2007). His new book, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of American Foreign Policy Since the 1970s* will be published in October 2008.

**Mary Sarotte** is an associate professor with tenure at the University of Southern California, where she teaches the history of international relations. She is the author of *Dealing with the Devil* (Univ. of North Carolina Press) and *German Military Reform and European Security* (Oxford Univ. Press). Her current project is an international history of the end of the Cold War. Sarotte holds a BA from Harvard, an MA from Cambridge, and a PhD from Yale.

Review by Curt Cardwell, Drake University

---

As a teacher of U.S. foreign relations history I often encounter students who, intrigued to learn that such history can, in fact, be interesting, want to hear what I have to say about what is happening in the world today. Do I think war with China is inevitable? Will there be a nuclear war between Pakistan and India? Was the U.S. government involved in 9/11? Is the war in Iraq about oil? Is Ahmadinejad the next Hitler? Who is that Carlyle Group anyway? (Actually, that last one is mine but you get the point.) After usually falling for the trap I inevitably have to remind them that I am a historian not a soothsayer. I work with the past, not the present or the future. I work with declassified documents that provide evidence of the things I am teaching, not guesswork (although all historians engage with that as well). Yes, I look forward to the day when cabinet-level meetings of the Bush administration concerning the lead up to the current war in Iraq are published in *The Foreign Relations of the United States* series (if, indeed, they ever are). Yes, I do hope someday that records of the meetings Vice President Dick Cheney held with unnamed CEOs and other elites in 2001, prior to the 9/11 attacks, concerning the country's energy policies, are made public. Yes, I would love to know the top-secret opinion on China at present. But for all of this we will have to wait. Meanwhile, what can I really know about what is going on? I might be somewhat knowledgeable about what happened back then but I am only guessing at what is happening now. And that is not a place, as a historian, in which I feel very comfortable, which, I suppose, is one reason I am not a political scientist.

When I first cracked open Ian Shapiro's *Containment* and began to get a feel for what it was about I felt much the same way. This is a book about the present and future, not the past. Commentating on a book of this sort makes me feel rather a bit like a "talking head," or, worse, the resident terrorism "expert," on CNN or Fox News. I offer this caveat because I do not intend in this review to answer whether Shapiro's prescription for the disease that is global terrorism will work, let alone that it is the policy that the U.S. government should pursue. I am, for the most part, sticking to the history.

Briefly, however, I will put on my "talking head" hat and comment on what Shapiro is arguing and what I believe about that. What is Shapiro's argument? Simply put, it is that the "containment" policy enlisted against the Soviet Union during the cold war, should be U.S. policy in regards to global terrorism rather than the "bellicose unilateralism" of the present Bush administration (119). Shapiro takes a no holds barred approach in his condemnation of the "Bush Doctrine," as he calls it, which, he contends, has with its emphasis on preemptive war, undermined the basic tenets of U.S. foreign policy since the country's founding (a questionable assumption—a people do not conquer a continent harboring a benign foreign policy). Containment, he argues, is the only viable alternative. What does he mean by containment? Containment, according to Shapiro, involves, among the following: engaging in diplomacy, abiding by international laws and institutions, utilizing economic sticks and carrots while aiding development in the Third World, encouraging competition among the adherents of terrorism, promoting the strength of the capitalist democracies, rejecting preemptive war, protecting civil liberties, investing more in human intelligence, discontinuing support for dictatorships, and using war only as a last

resort to protect vital national interests—all of which are sound policies with which I heartily agree. Further, the policy of containment, as Shapiro describes it, which at least implies a “watch-and-see” policy, is certainly preferable to an “attack-now, assess-later” policy, for the obvious reasons. As Shapiro notes, containment was successfully applied to Iraq between 1991 and 2003 and should be applied to Iran and North Korea. Whether the policy of containment he envisions can retard global terrorism carried out by state-less entities is the great question. That Shapiro has raised the question is his book’s great contribution. For that reason it should be read widely by people of all backgrounds, and here I mean the general public above all others. I hope it will be. And with that I will take off my “talking head” hat and go back to being a historian.

Shapiro’s *Containment* does raise a number of concerns for the historian. There is an assumption that underlies the entire book that containment during the cold war was, as the saying goes, “pure as Caesar’s wife.” But, if I may quote Stalin when responding to FDR’s use of that phrase in speaking of elections in Poland: “I didn’t know [Caesar’s wife] but in fact she had her sins.”<sup>[1]</sup> Shapiro would have us believe that containment was necessary policy, that it was correct policy, and that it was good policy. But I am not altogether convinced of any of those things. Was it necessary? Or, to put that another way, was there something to contain. The assumption that the Soviet Union had to be contained is so ingrained in our collective memory that many will no doubt find the question superfluous. But just because U.S. officials declared that their policy was containment doesn’t mean that the object of their containment policy in fact existed. U.S. officials during the cold war made all sorts of claims about Soviet expansionism even as the U.S. expanded its empire exponentially. It could be plausibly argued, and has been, that the containment policy of the cold war era was largely a fiction designed to establish American hegemony rather than a defensive measure designed to keep a ferocious beast caged. For instance, seen from the perspective of the North Vietnamese and many South Vietnamese, as judged by their long fight against and subsequent defeat of the U.S. invasion, one would be hard pressed to argue that the U.S. intervention was about containment rather than imperialism or, if one prefers, hegemonic reach. The same could be said of Guatemala, Iran, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and British Guyana (as Stephen Rabe has recently informed us), to name just some of the countries in which the United States intervened in the name of containment for reasons that now seem at best misjudgements or exaggerations, at worst self-interested power plays. In this sense, Shapiro’s call for containment is an apologia of sorts for the continued dominance of the United States in world affairs. Whether that serves the interests of the American people, let alone the world’s peoples, is certainly debatable.

In all fairness to Shapiro he does acknowledge this dilemma. He writes: “Those who believe that the United States has been a source of great harm and oppression in the world over the past several decades might be reluctant to engage with what U.S. national security strategy should be *now*, lest it somehow tar them with the brush of legitimating the status

---

<sup>1</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 163.

quo. A strategy for securing America today is all too easily seen as a strategy for securing hegemonic power and ill-gotten gains” (126, emphasis in the original). He insists that this criticism “should not be dismissed lightly,” but goes on to say that however we got to where we are today we do need to decide where to go now (126). Yes, but back to containment?

Was it the correct policy? In recent years evidence emerging from the former Soviet archives has revealed Stalin as a cautious, pragmatic leader who desired a working relationship with the West, particularly in “containing” Germany, albeit not at the expense of Soviet security.<sup>[2]</sup> In light of this the containment policy fostered by Kennan appears in retrospect to have been far off the mark. That it was embraced by the Truman administration and militarized, whatever Kennan’s original intent, we might chalk up to one more instance of the tragedy of American diplomacy. We do not need to argue that Dean Acheson, et al., used containment to hide hegemonic goals, as, for instance, when he and Paul Nitze constructed NSC 68, to acknowledge that containment as outlined by Kennan in the “long telegram” was too tempting to pass up. Whatever the truth of its claims Kennan’s containment thesis provided answers that made it easy to believe. Even critics who have accepted that there was something to contain, foremost among them John Lewis Gaddis, have acknowledged that the policy ultimately went too far and contributed to imperial overreach.<sup>[3<sup>3</sup>]</sup>

Was it good policy? Shapiro is not unaware that the cold war policy of containment was fraught with its own problems. In particular, he points to America’s support for dictators who were anticommunists, and therefore agents of containment, but who were also antidemocratic and brutal to their people. Less clearly he differentiates between what he sees as Kennan’s version of containment and what others did with it that produced some less desirable outcomes (the coup in Iran, the war in Indochina). He proposes that in employing containment this time around the United States needs to be more supportive of democracy, live up, as it were, to its true ideals. But here again I see problems. Actions speak louder than words. Whether a true ideal of the United States is the promotion of democracy is certainly open to question and, given its record, it seems unlikely that it ranks higher than, say, ensuring a global economy for the free movement of corporations and capital. Plus, there is no guarantee that U.S. officials will act in the manner Shapiro prescribes. George Kennan watched in apparent dismay as his policy was transformed before his eyes into military containment. In the end he practically disowned containment, or tried to.<sup>[4]</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (New Haven, New Jersey: Yale University Press, 2007), is the most cogent analysis to date utilizing the available Soviet archives.

<sup>3</sup>John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> No better exposition of this thought has been published than William Appleman Williams, “A Second Look at Mr. X,” *Monthly Review* 1952, reprinted in William Appleman Williams, *History as a Way of Learning* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1973), pp. 103-114.

Maybe this is about what policies are called. Should we be seeking containment? Is that where we want to go? As noted, I agree with much of what Shapiro argues, and certainly see his reading of containment as far better than the Bush Doctrine. But I hope he will forgive me if I find it difficult to march headlong in support of the son without taking a good, hard look at the father.

Review by Campbell Craig, University of Southampton

---

It is far too early to offer any definitive judgments about the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. That will be the enviable task of future knife-sharpening historians; I, for one, will predict now that there will never be a school of Bush revisionism. However, by focusing on the War in Iraq—surely as synonymous with Bush's foreign policy as Vietnam was with Lyndon Johnson's—it is possible to make an initial evaluation. Because wars have tangible, declared objectives, it is possible to determine, at least to some extent, whether these objectives were met, and to assess the costs undertaken in pursuing them.<sup>1</sup> Using this simple formula, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the War in Iraq and hence the foreign policy of the second Bush has been an utter disaster.

If we put aside the discredited and largely abandoned justification of a war to prevent Iraq from obtaining weapons of mass destruction, and focus on other rationales defenders of the war have put forward more recently, we can identify two general objectives. Some have defended the war in idealist terms, as a bid to overthrow a vicious regime and unleash democracy in Iraq and, eventually, throughout the Middle East. Others have suggested a more brutal justification: in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States needed to march into the tough Arab neighbourhood and make someone pay, so as to demonstrate that America was not to be messed with again.<sup>2</sup>

What can we say about both objectives? Over the past five years, no Arab state in the Middle East has moved closer to liberal democracy, and indeed the United States has boycotted one Arab government (Hamas) that actually won an election. Iraq itself is a tribal and religious civil war waiting to happen, and the notion that the people of Iraq will soon enjoy a multiethnic parliamentary democracy can now only be regarded as delusional. Anti-American groups throughout the region are thriving, emboldened (as any historian of Vietnam could have predicted) by their resistance to American power rather than terrified by it. Iran, one of the three “axis of evil” nations identified by President Bush in 2002, is making a living out of defying the United States, and may soon acquire a nuclear weapon. One can rationalise and temporise these failures endlessly; of course, no one knows what will happen over the next decades. But had you asked the architects of the war in 2003 if, five years on, they would regard such results as successful, can anyone seriously believe

---

<sup>1</sup> Here I assume that the official explanations, or at least those offered most recently by supporters of the war, indeed reflect the genuine intentions of the administration in launching the war, and that other ulterior motives were not actually dominant. This is itself a highly debatable assumption, but for the purposes of my argument I wish to give the administration the benefit of the doubt.

<sup>2</sup> As the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman creepily said to Charlie Rose, the real point of the war was to walk into the Middle East with a big American stick, and tell those who would defy the United States to “Suck. On. This.” The video of Friedman’s interview is available on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slLzZmA3WvU>.

that they would have answered yes? No better proof of this can be found than in the numerous attempts by prominent supporters of the war to distance themselves from it.<sup>3</sup>

The failure of the war's stated objectives is one thing. Even more horrible are the tremendous costs, facts that cannot be substantially disputed or hindsightedly spun. More than 4000 U.S. and other coalition soldiers have been killed, and many more than that seriously wounded. Less often talked about, the irregular nature of the fighting, and in particular the effectiveness of roadside bombing attacks against U.S. soldiers, has led to a high number of serious brain and other vital organ injuries--thousands of GIs have returned home totally incapacitated, facing a life of bleak dependency. At least 100,000, and probably many more Iraqis have been killed, much more than that wounded, a great percentage of them innocent civilians. Tens of thousands of Iraqi children are dead, dying, orphaned, or disfigured because of this war. Some two million Iraqis, including many of the nation's best-educated and more moderate civilians, have fled. They are unlikely to return to build a shining Iraqi democracy, and who can blame them?

As for the war's economic cost, Iraq is incomparable. A combination of incompetence, graft, and the Bush administration's desire to wed military victory with nation building has led to a staggering bill, one that of course has not been paid for by taxpayers today but will be bequeathed to future generations of Americans, courtesy of foreign lenders. Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes have famously predicted a final price tag of \$3 Trillion dollars, which if true means that Iraq will cost the United States more than half, in real dollars, of what it spent to wage World War Two.<sup>4</sup> This to overthrow and unsuccessfully rebuild one weak state that had just endured a decade of crippling sanctions, not defeat the mighty war machines of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. When one adds the fact that the war is surely a main cause of the quintupling of the price of oil over the past five years, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Iraq war will turn out to have caused irreversible, structural damage to the U.S economy.

Finally, the war in Iraq has seriously damaged American power, at least over the short term. It has alienated friends, invoked contempt, if not glee, among enemies, and undermined the claims of so many after the Cold War, not just triumphalist Americans, that the twenty-first century world would look to the United States for leadership. As was the case after Vietnam, future administrations will now find it politically difficult to wage similar wars, even if they actually have a good reason to do so, a fact of which regimes like Iran are quite well aware. According to many reports the U.S. Army has been gutted by the war, with recruitment standards at a historic low and widespread demoralisation throughout the officer ranks. Many senior military officials have threatened to resign if the

---

<sup>3</sup> See David Rose, "Neo Culpa," <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/12/neocons200612>. Also see Francis Fukuyama, "After Neoconservatism," *New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Blimes, *The Three Trillion Dollar War* (New York: Norton, 2008).

Bush administration tries to pick a fight with Iran.<sup>5</sup> That does not happen in a powerful empire.

Ian Shapiro's aim is to offer an alternative to the strategy that brought us this catastrophe. Rather than providing simply an "ad hoc" critique of Bush administration foreign policy, which today is akin to shooting fish in a barrel, Shapiro wishes to advocate a different approach to American diplomacy, one that finds its intellectual and strategic origins in the Cold War policy of containment. His book is an excellent and quite bold critique of current U.S. foreign policy and its neoconservative intellectual foundations. But I am not persuaded by his claim that a policy of containment akin to that used in the Cold War can apply today.

Most historians of America's Cold War would argue that there were two versions of containment: the first, as famously articulated by George F. Kennan and others during the first couple years after the Second World War, envisioned a limited struggle to deny the Soviet Union access to key centers of industrial power in western Europe and Japan; the second, as famously articulated in the 1950 document NSC-68, stipulated international communism, more than Soviet power per se, as the threat to American security, and demanded that the United States contend with it around the globe. Both were, strictly speaking, defensive strategies, as they did not advocate the defeat of the USSR by military means, but NSC-68 paved the way for an open-ended foreign policy of militarized anti-communism that led to, among other things, the Vietnam war—an event that Shapiro contends defied the logic of containment.<sup>6</sup>

Shapiro does not acknowledge this discrepancy, so let us assume that he is referring to the early version. Kennan and other architects of containment emphasized three key points in selling their strategy to President Truman. First, the United States must assume that the Soviet Union could be contained, that it was not bent upon heedless expansion; moreover, if it were so contained, its dysfunctional political system would eventually implode. Kennan was right about this—it was the single most important insight in the making of America's Cold War. Second, Kennan, Truman, and other members of the administration believed strongly, at least at the time, that the United States must keep its foreign policy limited and inexpensive, so as to avoid ruinous spending, the loss of political liberties at home, and the descent of the United States into a garrison state. America, that is to say, must not become like the USSR in its efforts to contend with it.

Third, Kennan regarded the Cold War in classic terms as a geopolitical struggle between two powerful nation states. He is not called a Realist by accident: he believed that the key to American success lay in taking power politics seriously. This meant preventing Soviet expansion into the nations of western Europe and Japan, not because they were now democracies, but because by seizing these industrial regions the USSR could acquire the

---

<sup>5</sup> See Fred Kaplan, "Should generals resign if Bush orders an attack on Iran?" <http://www.slate.com/id/2176122/>.

<sup>6</sup> See Fredrik Logevall, "A Critique of Containment," *Diplomatic History* 28, Number 4 (September 2004), pp. 473-499.

geopolitical momentum that Nazi Germany enjoyed during the late 1930s and into the first years of the war, when it came close to conquering all of Europe.

Containment succeeded. The USSR did implode, the United States did avoid becoming a garrison state, at least compared to its Soviet rival, and it is certainly reasonable to argue that the fundamental reason for this was the early American decision to make it clear to the Russians that they would not be allowed to expand into the vital regions of western Europe and Japan. This summary provides too clean of a picture, particularly when it comes to the topic of nuclear weapons, but for the purposes of evaluating Shapiro's argument let us accept that the fulfilment of these three objectives demonstrates the wisdom of containment.

How, then, could these lessons apply today? Shapiro's answer to this question makes up the heart of his argument. On two grounds the lessons are relevant, if not exact. The general idea that the United States, or the West, should regard anti-American states as deterrable is a strong one, and indeed this is where Shapiro makes his sharpest points. Relying heavily upon Realist scholars such as Robert Pape and John Mearsheimer, Shapiro contends that states like Iraq or Iran are not irrational and suicidal, and can be deterred from attacking the United States and its allies with the threat of major retaliation, just as the Soviet Union was during the Cold War. By the same token, many terrorist groups must rely upon the sponsorship of states, thereby activating the logic above, if not perfectly. Deterring authentically sub-national terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda is a different question, however, as retaliation against them in the Cold War sense is impossible. Shapiro believes that the West must attack terrorism by regarding it as a problem of international crime and enforcement, rather than one of foreign policy and war, and I think he is absolutely right about this. But it is not at all clear how this derives from the logic of containment.

Shapiro is equally persuasive on the second issue, which is the danger of America becoming a garrison state. He ruthlessly attacks the erosion of civil liberties and drunken-sailor spending tolerated by the Bush administration. He is very strong on perhaps the most serious threat to American democracy, which is the determination of bureaucracies, institutions and lobby groups that benefit from American belligerence to hype minor threats as existential dangers to American survival.<sup>7</sup> The military-industrial complex that President Dwight D. Eisenhower foresaw in 1960, Shapiro writes, was “child's play” compared to what we see now. But again, why should a policy of containment be the answer to this problem? Why wouldn't a policy of isolationism, which containment was devised explicitly to preclude, work equally as well? Several contemporary specialists have advocated a strategy of “offshore balancing,” which would retract American power to the western hemisphere and radically demilitarize American foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> That would

---

<sup>7</sup> For a recent example that borders on the self-parodying, see Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> The most forceful presentation of this argument is Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

presumably fly in the face of containment, but it is not clear from Shapiro's argument why he would disagree with such a strategy.

Shapiro's case is on the weakest ground, however, when it comes to the third foundation of the strategy of containment—its Realist geopolitical logic. Kennan understood international relations much as earlier practitioners of *Realpolitik* did: as a game of anarchical nation-state power politics. The key was to prevent the USSR from moving its pieces onto a few crucial states and gaining control over their armed forces and industries. Kennan thought and wrote about many other things, but when it came to the essential logic of containment it was first about hard material power. I read through Shapiro's book twice, and could find no argument that showed how this kind of thinking might apply to contemporary American foreign policy. Indeed, I would suggest that America's only serious adversaries today—hard-core subnational terrorist groups like al-Qaeda—have emerged and thrived precisely *because* they have figured out how to weave in and around the nation-state system that Kennan saw as the realm of international conflict. It seems self-evident that a strategy of geopolitical containment has by definition little to say about the question of sub-national terrorism, as Shapiro's support for international policing indeed suggests.

If containment is taken generically as a self-confident, “Kennanesque” attitude toward foreign policy, one which sees that there are no perfect solutions, which therefore balances means with ends, which resists hysteria, demonisation, and fear-mongering, which carefully defines a basic security strategy for the nation and insists that it be insulated from the pressures of domestic politics, and which understands, as Reinhold Niebuhr liked to stress, that we are all sinners in this world, then Shapiro has good reason to call for its return. I think this is pretty much what he is really trying to say. But in a unipolar world, in which the American capitalist system has won the day, when the globalisation of this system has rendered many national boundaries increasingly irrelevant, when states that might have been expected to challenge American primacy—China, Japan, the European Union—are content to remain radically militarily inferior to the U.S., and when the most determined enemies of the prevailing order have become nonstate actors with very different pieces to play in the game, containment's operational lessons have limited value. Shapiro's criticisms of the Bush administration's foreign policy are acute and timely; he takes excellent aim at those trapped fish. Those hoping for a modern-day Kennan, however, will have to keep searching.

Review by Lloyd Gardner, Rutgers University

---

Ian Shapiro offers here a wide-ranging critique of the Bush Doctrine of preventive war. He argues at several points along the way that the neo-conservative forces that moved after 9/11 to implement a strategy long in the making were actually filling an intellectual void. The shock those attacks produced “turned the Democrats into donkeys in the headlights,” and then, changing the image, “a herd of cows being chased across a field by a yapping dog.” (125) The Democrats really had only themselves to blame for they had simply dismissed the conservative surge in think-tanks and other manifestations of discontent as collections of nerds and looney war lovers. Still, the Democrats had unwisely adopted the recommendations of the Democratic Leadership Council and sought to maintain themselves in power by what became the well-known methods of “triangulation,” believing that their base had no place else to go. On both fronts they were outmaneuvered, and when 9/11 came, they had no intellectual starting point from which to begin countering the neo-conservatives.

But there was an honorable tradition available to them had they had the wit to seize upon George Frost Kennan’s prescriptions for avoiding appeasement without succumbing to the imperial temptation: Containment. Shapiro takes on the argument used by George W. Bush that containment was of no use in fighting the war on terror by going directly to the concept of such a notion. What future president, he writes, could ever declare the war on terror won? And that is the heart of our self-made predicament. It need not have been. Enthralled by the idea of taking down Saddam Hussein and spreading democracy throughout the Middle East, his Administration turned its back on pursuing diplomatic alternatives with both Syria and Iran, thereby breaking a cardinal rule of successful Cold War policies that allowed differences to develop inside the Communist bloc. Instead, American policies had the effect of forging alliances between groups that really had serious differences. It was not all Bush’s fault, for Shapiro points out that many of these policies had their beginnings in the Clinton years.

As for Iraq itself, Shapiro believes that “smart” sanctions could have been developed to correct any mistakes made in the oil-for-food program that were revealed to have been tainted by corruption at all points. He points to Madeline Albright’s callous statement when challenged on the sanctions that even if thousands of children had died because of the policy, it was somehow worth it. Many liberals, of course, came to favor a policy of removing Saddam Hussein precisely because they believed that extending the sanctions as they operated in the Clinton years was an immoral policy. Of course it was Colin Powell at the outset of the second Bush Administration who fought to change the sanctions regime so as to insure Iraq did not receive any support for a weapons program. His defeat by Cheney and Rumsfeld signaled the death of containment, a point that Shapiro could have developed to bolster his arguments.

But the author is also somewhat uncertain about when Containment really did become something more than Kennan had in mind in his original formulations. Shapiro argues that the transformation into a wide-ranging global policy really began as early as Truman’s

second term and then exploded in the Eisenhower years. He has in mind, one supposes, the decision to go above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea and the new commitment after the Korean truce to intervene in Indo-china. It was certainly the case, as Kennan wrote in his memoirs, that he believed the policy decisions made about Japan and atomic bomber bases on Okinawa were important in Stalin's decision to approve Kim Il-song's attack on South Korea. Once the Korean War began the political landscape flattened out, and dissent about the Cold War became almost unpatriotic. Kennan left the government for Princeton University and produced a series of books implicitly critical of current policy.

As Kennan ruefully noted in later years, he found himself in agreement with many of the critiques Walter Lippmann had made of his famous "X" article in a series of newspaper columns that became a little book entitled, "The Cold War." Lippmann warned that however one tried to limit the application of the policy, it inevitably meant that the United States would find itself constantly expanding the number of strong points it had to maintain on the periphery of the Soviet Union, and, in the process, seeing decisions being made by so-called allies, whose agenda had little to do with American national interests. One remembers in this regard, the beginning of Jimmy Carter's presidency and his efforts to move beyond the Vietnam War to a new foreign policy agenda, one that would stress human rights, and curtail American arms sales. He received little credit for these efforts from either the left or the right, and from adversaries like the Soviet Union or allies of the ilk of the Shah of Iran.

Even so, the effort to find a "usable past" on which to build a foreign policy platform is a pressing matter. Shapiro is adamant that it cannot be done by criticizing tactics, and he is hardest on the Democrats, especially John Kerry, whose effort to stake out a position on Iraq during the 2004 campaign foundered on the rocks as he attempted to surf board around the central issues of the war. During the campaign, the Massachusetts senator said that the war had been mismanaged, not misconceived. He would have prosecuted it with more vigor, sending 40,000 additional troops. If 225,000 troops could not maintain order, what good would another 40,000 have done? "If anything, this conjured up the disquieting possibility that a Kerry administration foreign policy might be a replay of the Johnson administration. More than anything, it underscored the reality that Kerry offered no fundamental alternative to the Bush Doctrine." (125-6)

This is a very short book. Sometimes one has the feeling reading it of riding in an express subway train, as station signs go whizzing by. Sometimes, as well, one is surprised when the narrative diverts to a consideration of the Democratic failures in blocking the Bush administration's efforts to repeal estate taxes, but Shapiro ties it all in nicely. His discussion, for example, of boasts that the Iraq War speeded Libya's decision to abandon its atomic aspirations, and helped to drive Syria out of Lebanon are masterful rebuttals of false claims.

One concludes that Shapiro is aware of the pitfalls of pushing historical analogies too far, and of making too many claims for Containment as the answer to America's problems in the Middle East. But his insistence that the alternatives developed in recent years, based upon notions of omnipotence, have yielded a series of disasters can scarcely be denied.

There is very little in this book about such crucial issues as the growing rivalry for oil resources in this Third Imperial Age where the struggle for energy advantages between nations has become paramount. But that is a discussion better left to a different forum.

Is there room for public intellectuals in popular debates about US foreign policy? Hopefully the answer is yes, so that Ian Shapiro, a political theorist at Yale, can find a larger audience than just his fellow academics. Shapiro's book, although brief – only 133 pages of text, growing out of a talk he gave to a Yale Club in 2004 – holds much deserving of broad attention.

As he explains in the introduction, the 2004 election motivated him to take a temporary break from his usual form of writing, namely scholarly political philosophy. Shapiro was dismayed about what he perceived to be the failings of the Kerry campaign. He says he knew that Kerry would lose, because "in politics it is hard to beat something with nothing" (ix). In Shapiro's view, Kerry should have articulated a clearer alternative to the Bush Doctrine in his quest for the presidency. Shapiro's book is, in essence, an attempt to provide the formulation missing from the last election in time for the next.

The cornerstone of his formulation, as the title of the book makes clear, is George Kennan's concept of containment. Since Shapiro's *Containment* is intended as a political argument about where US foreign policy should go, rather than as a historical assessment of where it has already been, this review will focus on its success in achieving its own goals. In other words, Shapiro makes no claim to contribute to the scholarly history of containment or its successor policies. He draws on very few primary sources, other than staples such as the Long Telegram. He does not provide a review of the key secondary literature on containment. This is not his goal or purpose.

As a result of the (intentionally) lacking historical rigor, it is possible to challenge his understanding of the history of containment at a number of points. The most obvious critique is that there was not one but rather a multiplicity of strategies of containment, as shown by John Lewis Gaddis.<sup>1</sup> However, rather than focus on the fit between Shapiro's ideas with the past, this review will, in the interests of space, focus instead on whether Shapiro has succeeded at the goal that he has set for himself: formulating an updated concept of containment and proving its applicability to US foreign policy.

What is Shapiro's understanding of containment? Its key components include the following: First, an awareness that "appeasement" of the ambitions of the enemies of the US – whether Soviet or terrorist – "would be disastrous for America's vital interests" (5). Secondly, agreement that the goal of containment is to prevent the advance of America's enemies, "without saddling the United States with unsustainable global military obligations" (5). Third, that such a policy "does not rule out military alliances, but it implies that they should be geared in the first instance to preserving America as a democracy and then to the protection of other democracies" (49). Finally, and most importantly, that there be an agreed conceptual basis. "The argument for containment defended here is rooted in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

commitment to democracy.” He continues: “Resisting domination by others without seeking to dominate them is the national security analogue of Machiavelli’s dictum that power is best given to the common people, whose desire is *not to be dominated, rather than to dominate*” (102, emphasis added).

How do these ideas translate into policy? Shapiro says that the US should, in its attempt to fight global terror, rely largely on economic, financial and judicial instruments. The US should employ sanctions and divestment activities against relevant countries. It should pursue issues through international tribunals such as the International Criminal Court. Shapiro particularly regrets the shift away from the use of the domestic criminal justice system as the forum for prosecuting terrorists and calls for its de facto reinstatement as the primary venue (11, 120). Finally, the US should provide aid to democratic resistance movements. As he puts it, “...containment bids us to support indigenous democratic movements without fighting their battles for them” (114).

How persuasive is Shapiro’s argument that these ideas should form the basis for US foreign policy starting in January 2009? It is a compelling vision. Particularly welcome is Shapiro’s focus on the issue of legitimacy, which, in the opinion of this reviewer (published elsewhere) is the key concept<sup>2</sup>. As Shapiro rightly puts it, the Bush Administration “has failed to grasp how much democratic nation building depends for its legitimacy on grassroots support” and on “local legitimacy for the fledgling institutions” (xv).

Put another way, an eternal question in the formulation of US security strategy is whether the territorial defense of the United States starts on the near or far side of its oceans.<sup>3</sup> The failures of isolationism in the interwar period and then the rise of intercontinental weaponry tipped the balance in favor of the latter by the second half of the 20th century. The problem is that a security strategy based on the “far side,” so to speak, requires legitimization in the eyes of the non-US citizens who live there. Perpetuating the Cold War mission of starting the defense of the US on the far side of the oceans, as the Bush Administration chose to do aggressively after 9/11, without also promoting the concomitant institutions and initiatives designed to legitimize such actions, proved to be deeply unwise. Shapiro is therefore right to call for reprioritization of legitimacy-producing initiatives.

Insufficiently developed, however, are the means by which Shapiro would produce such legitimacy. Saying that the United States should “support indigenous democratic movements” opens up a host of questions, which he could have profitably discussed at greater length. Defined how, and by whom? If they support the use of violence? If they oppose other groups on ethnic as well as political grounds? One suspects that a number of the people whom Shapiro criticizes would defend themselves by saying that they are

---

<sup>2</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, “The Worst Allies, Except for All the Others: US-European Relations in the Age of George W. Bush,” *International Politics* 45/3 (May 2008): 310-324; “Transatlantic Tension and Threat Perception,” *Naval War College Review* 58 (Autumn 2005): 25-38.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Roskin, “From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: Shifting Generational Paradigms and Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 89 (1974): 563.

supporting indigenous democratic movements in Iraq and elsewhere. Since Shapiro has such a powerful theoretical understanding, more discussion of the concept of democracy and democratization in the context of political theory would have been welcome.<sup>4</sup> Also, at one point Shapiro says that he wrote this book to “ensure that we do not become entangled in the next Iraq – be this in Iran, Syria, North Korea, or elsewhere.” (xv). Discussion of the extent to which intellectuals and academics can in fact “ensure” the avoidance of undesirable policy might have yielded further interesting insights about the complex relationship between producers of ideas and producers of policy.

Shapiro’s book nonetheless remains worthwhile reading. Its writing is impressively clear and accessible, and the pace moves along briskly. As an attempt by a serious theoretical scholar to engage in applied politics, it deserves praise, readers and attention. Whether any of those readers will be sitting in the West Wing and Old Executive Office Building remains an open question.

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, his sophisticated and nuanced essays in *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Author's Response by Ian Shapiro, Yale University

---

I am grateful to these reviewers for their careful and, for the most part, sympathetic reading of my book. That said, it seems appropriate to correct some misunderstandings concerning my views about containment's connection to U.S. policies during the Cold War and about the ways in which Kennan's views stand in need of modification for the post-Cold War era.

Both Cardwell and Craig conflate my defense of containment with a defense of U.S. policies during the Cold War. Cardwell puts it as follows:

“For instance, seen from the perspective of the majority Vietnamese, as judged by their long fight against and subsequent defeat of the U.S. invasion, it would be hard pressed to argue that the U.S. intervention was about containment rather than imperialism or, if one prefers, hegemonic reach. The same could be said of Guatemala, Iran, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and British Guyana (as Stephen Rabe has recently informed us), to name just some of the countries in which the United States intervened in the name of containment....”

It is true that some commentators, such as John Gaddis, have pulled all these policies into one or another of his conceptions of “symmetric” and “asymmetric” containment, but to my mind this empties the idea of containment of virtually all meaningful content, and renders it difficult to distinguish containment from its main alternative during the cold war: rollback. Dwight Eisenhower and his future Secretary of State John Foster Dulles poured scorn on containment as a form of appeasement during their 1952 electoral campaign and ran instead on rollback. Once in office, however, they quickly reverted to containment in Eastern Europe and against the Soviets. But their decision to topple Iran's democratically elected government in 1953 and install the hugely unpopular Shah was not by any plausible description containment. Nor were the surrogate wars sponsored by the U.S. in Latin America, or the Vietnam war (which was staunchly opposed by Kennan).

In view of several of the reviewers' comments, I should emphasize that in my book I make the case that in two major respects Kennan's views stand in need of substantial modification for the post-Cold War era.

One concerns international institutions. Kennan put little stock in international institutions; he thought they would inevitably be sidelined by the main action between the US and the USSR. But that was then and this is now. Today we face less predictable, more fluid, and open-ended challenges than we did during the Cold War. Just because these threats might have to be confronted anywhere in the world, we need to act through international institutions.

The reasons for this are both practical and normative. On the practical front, it will often be the U.N. officials from development and other agencies on the ground who have access to pertinent information. This is especially likely to be true as far as weak and failed states are

concerned, where it will often be these people who will know the details of different war lords' capacities and agendas, where the weak points in borders are, and other relevant street-level information. Moreover, international authorization of containment coalitions enhances their stability. It is harder for a country to withdraw from participation when it has become committed through an international legal process than when it is merely a coalition "of the willing"—of which a different administration might take a different view. But the most important reasons for insisting on international authorization are normative. If major powers act either unilaterally or via coalitions of the willing when they are not themselves under threat of imminent attack, they lack principled authority for their actions. As a result, they are likely to be seen as imperialistic, opportunistic, or both. The 1991 Gulf War and the 2001 action against Afghanistan garnered worldwide support partly because they were authorized by the U.N. Security Council. This stands in stark contrast the 2003 Iraq war, which continues widely to be seen as a rogue American action against a country that posed no regional or global threat. Rather than undermine the U.N. at every turn, as the Bush Administration has done, the major democratic powers should be working to strengthen the U.N., and then working through it to face domination down. There is no alternative if we are to have an effective *global* strategy against international terror.

The second respect in which Kennan's views stand in need of substantial modification for the post Cold War has to do with regional alliances. Kennan was skeptical of their utility. He thought they might constrain the U.S. in undesirable ways and, in the case of NATO, that it would militarize the conflict with the Soviets unnecessarily. But again, that was then and this is now. When terrorist groups can move around and find sanctuary in weak states, it defies credulity that they can be contained without cooperation from regional powers. Nowhere is this more evident than in Iraq, which has become both a weak state and a magnet for terrorists as a result of U.S. policies in the region since 2003.

As the Iraq Study Group recognized in December of 2006, it is vital that the U.S. prevent Iraq's sectarian conflicts from spilling over into neighboring countries, and that it limit the ability of terrorists to transit through those countries into the broader region and beyond. At a minimum this will require working with Syria and Iran.

Despite our many conflicts with the governments of both countries, they share interests in common with us in achieving this goal. The Bush Administration reversed decades of American policy in the Middle East by openly embracing forcible regime-change in Iraq. Before that, Syria had cooperated for two and-a-half decades in Lebanon (they came in with Henry Kissinger's permission to help stabilize the country in 1976). Kissinger's decision had embodied a widespread belief in Washington, that would persist through successive Republican and Democratic administrations until 2001, that only the Syrians could hold Lebanon together. That belief was reaffirmed in the run-up to the 1991 Gulf War, in which Syria supported the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq.

The Syrians stopped cooperating with the U.S.-led military policies in the region during the run-up to the 2003 war in Iraq. Having failed in their support of Saddam Hussein against the U.S.-lead invasion, the Syrians then turned their support to the insurgency. Their about-

face seems to have been born of the belief that, unless the U.S. failed or became bogged down in Iraq, Syria would be next. This was a reasonable fear. The Assad government in Damascus was the only other Ba'athist regime besides Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and there was open speculation in U.S. government and neo-conservative circles at the time that Syria might indeed be next. If we stop threatening them, there will be significant opportunities to explore common interests in stabilizing their border with Iraq.

Despite all the saber-rattling between Washington and Teheran, the United States and Iran share substantial interests in the region. They have a common interest in ensuring that the Taliban does not regain power in Afghanistan. They have a common interest in Iraq's territorial integrity. If Iraq were to break apart, this would precipitate huge problems for Iran with its Kurdish populations—not to mention a massive refugee crisis. Despite the railings of President Ahmadinejad, it should be remembered that Iran is a status quo power in the region. They have not invaded any country since the eighteenth century, and Iran has no territorial claims against any neighbor.

Ahadinejad's hand has been strengthened by the Bush Administration's unpopular actions, but it is clear that the Mullahs understand the importance of reining him in. In June of 2006 Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei created a new Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, to which he appointed political figures who had been associated with the pre-2004 reformist Khatami era. This suggested an agenda to diminish Ahmadinejad's rogue pronouncements on international affairs. Public admonition of him for his statements denying the Holocaust was another signal that the Mullahs want to ratchet down confrontational rhetoric.

This is not to say we should be sanguine about Iran's nuclear ambitions. A nuclear-armed Iran might well be in the cards. Certainly we should try to prevent that from happening, or at least slow it down as much as we can. But just as a strategic opening to China was helpful in containing the U.S.S.R., so a strategic opening to Iran will be helpful in containing the terrorism that can be expected to emanate from Iraq. This is not to say that Iran does not also need to be contained (just as China had to be during the Cold War even after Nixon went to Beijing). It is to say that adversaries often share common interests that make it feasible and sometimes necessary to work with them.

Gardner's review mentions the Carter administration, noting that its foreign policy efforts to curtail American arms sales and promote human rights have been underappreciated. But he fails to mention Carter's most important (though also underappreciated) achievement from the standpoint of containment: the peace agreement he brokered between Israel and Egypt in 1979. For all practical purposes this took the possibility of another pan-Arab regional war against Israel off the table, and it relied on a classic Kennan move: taking advantage of conflicts of interests among adversaries to limit their capacity to threaten you.

Kennan had inverted the logic of a divide-and-rule into the service of containment. We might call it the principle of divide-and-refuse-to-be-ruled. He saw that there were conflicts and potential conflicts of interest within the communist camp that could operate to American advantage. (He thus welcomed the rise of Titoism in Yugoslavia; this was the

kind of internal threat to Soviet hegemony that would promote competition within the Soviet camp, weaken the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe, and complicate its battle for hearts and minds in the developing world).

By facilitating a separate peace between Israel and Egypt, the Carter and Begin administrations deployed analogous logic. The threats posed to Israel by terrorist groups are serious, to be sure, but they are not as serious as the possibility of another united attack of the kind Israel faced in 1967 and 1973. By heading off this possibility by making a separate peace with Anwar Sadat at Camp David, Carter and Begin did more to assure Israel's security than any action that has been taken since. Indeed, this containment strategy stands in stark contrast to the unnecessary "rollback" Israel pursued by invading Lebanon in 1982. That enormously costly failure led, inter alia, to the creation of Hezbollah whose initial raison d'être was to expel Israel from Lebanon. That Hezbollah is still with us is a stark reminder that the costs of abandoning containment can be enduring.

---

**Copyright © 2008 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at [h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu).

---