THE NEW INTERVENTIONISTS

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A New Foreign Policy Doctrine

NOT SO LONG AGO we could confuse the end of the Cold War with the end of history and entertain the possibility that we had survived the famous Chinese curse of living in interesting times. A new era of international security seemed about to dawn, where even the most protracted conflicts appeared solvable. International mediation in Angola, Cambodia and El Salvador led to negotiated settlements of long civil wars and revived the hope that ballots, not bullets, would finally determine the fate of peoples around the globe.

But as Ralph Ellison cautioned in his masterpiece, Invisible Man, history is not an arrow but a boomerang. Just when the end of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry held out the promise that rationality and reason would triumph over ideology, the world witnessed the bloody dissolution of states in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia and Ethiopia. So, too, came the revival of virulent nationalism throughout the former Soviet empire and genocidal campaigns on the fringes of western Europe. Even those successful cases of mediated civil war now hover on the brink of renewed bloodshed. The fortunes of history, it seems, have as much to do with the persistence of hatred and memory as with the vicissitudes of grand ideologies.

Yet the end of superpower rivalry continues to entrance America with the chimera of a new world order. That illusion, alongside often violent disorder in many states, has produced a kind of “new interventionism.” This outlook combines an awareness that civil war is a legitimate issue of international security with a sentiment for crusading liberal internationalism. The new interventionists wed great emphasis on the moral obligations of the international community to an eager-

ness for a newly available United Nations to intervene in domestic conflicts throughout the world.

Thus future historians may compare 1991 and 1992 to the years just after World War II, when the doctrine of containment evolved. Like that time, the last two years have seen a series of events, precedents, incremental decisions and policy rationales give birth to a new doctrine of American foreign policy. While that new doctrine remains inchoate, a few important facets are visible and suggest that the United States, far from turning inward, may be taking upon itself a more crusading, interventionist role in world affairs.

Many eager advocates of this new doctrine lack a sufficient sense of the dilemmas, risks and costs of intervention. They often fail to take account of the special dynamics of civil war or the realistic limitations of the United Nations as the chosen vehicle for action. The precepts of this new doctrine chafe at traditional notions of sovereignty, remain contradictory and are leading international actors toward largely uncharted domain. Followed unthinkingly, the new interventionism could become increasingly expansive, until the United States and the United Nations ultimately take on tasks for which they are ill-prepared, leaving themselves embroiled in numerous internal conflicts without the will or resources to bring peace to any.

A Doctrine of Dubious Presumptions

THE UNPRECEDENTED U.N. DECISION on December 4, 1992, authorizing the deployment of military force to provide humanitarian relief to starving Somalis was the culmination of year-long pressures. Well before the deployment of 21,000 U.S. troops, congressional leaders from both parties and many in the media had for months urged massive intervention, including establishing a U.N. trusteeship if need be.

But Somalia did not stand alone as a cause worthy of international intervention. Many of the same chorus of congressional leaders, political pundits, television commentators and print journalists also clamored for U.S. military action to stop Serbian aggression in the former Yugoslavia. They endorsed war crime tribunals against Serbs, demanded firmer action to protect and feed afflicted Bosnians and castigated U.N. peacekeepers for their unwillingness to engage armed partisans attempting to thwart humanitarian relief. In turn, U.S. and
U.N. intervention was urged for Liberia, East Timor, Sudan, Zaire and Haiti as well.

The new interventionists seek to end civil wars and stop governments from abusing the rights of their peoples. They assume that civil war today is more prevalent, violent and threatening to international security than in previous eras. They believe that active international intervention is necessary to bring a semblance of order to the post-Cold War world, based on the dubious presumption that the Cold War's end makes internal violence somehow more tractable. But their often contradictory demands for intervention—either mediation, an active combat role on behalf of a warring side, or simply shielding civilians caught in the middle—believe a lack of coherent understanding of peacemaking in internal conflicts.

The new interventionists advocate “a new humanitarian order in which governments are held—by force, if necessary—to higher standards of respect for human life.” They contend that “the protection of ethnic, religious and other minorities endangered by conflict and alienated from a hostile government is now increasingly a recognized obligation of the international community.” To adherents of this approach, sovereignty is no longer a tool for creating international order, but a “political constraint” on international action. In the words of former U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, “We are clearly witnessing what is probably an irresistible shift in public attitudes toward the belief that the defense of the oppressed in the name of morality should prevail over frontiers and legal documents.”

The new interventionists seek to establish guidelines to ensure that the United Nations polices any regime failing to meet the broadly and often ill-defined “humanitarian needs” of its people. Such a rule is possible, they believe, because the

end of the Cold War has vanquished the ideological con-
straints on intervention in the domestic affairs of U.N. mem-
ber states. Guidelines for intervention would mark a significant
shift in the long-standing meaning of the terms of international
relations. Sovereignty would no longer reside with states but
with the people within them; self-determination would no
longer refer to peoples, but to individuals. Precedent, rhetoric,
faulty generalization and expectations: such is the stuff of doc-
trine.

**Doctrine Reunites American Liberalism**

THE NEW INTERVENTIONISM has its roots in
long-standing tendencies of American foreign poli-
cy—missionary zeal, bewilderment when the world refuses to
conform to American expectations and a belief that for every
problem there is a quick and easy solution. It reunites divided
strains of American foreign policy liberalism: traditional
Wilsonian liberalism, defined by support for international
organizations and self-determination of peoples; and its Cold
War cousin, defined by anticommunism.

The challenge of explaining the new interventionism lies in
providing an account of how two camps at odds for most of
the last 25 years can today find common ground. The key to
resolving the mystery is found in the insight of former
Harvard professor of government Louis Hartz: that all
Americans are liberals, united in their commitment to freedom
and the belief that the future of their freedom depends on
freedom flourishing everywhere.³

Over the last forty years, however, Cold War liberals tended
to a Manichaean view of world politics. They believed that
America had to engage actively in mortal combat with an evil
and implacable Soviet foe. The perceived dangers of interna-
tional communism prompted Cold War liberals to advocate
intervention globally in an attempt to prevent regimes even
vaguely sympathetic with communist ideals from coming to
power.

The reaction to Cold War liberalism was an alternative
steeped in the Wilsonian tradition. Issues like the Vietnam
War, nuclear strategy and U.S. support for authoritarian
regimes split America’s liberal consensus. The generation of

the 1960s saw Vietnam as immoral and a betrayal of the American belief in self-determination. The U.S.-Soviet arms race, too, was judged as a threat to international security, prompting Wilsonian liberals toward international organizations and negotiation as a way out of the nuclear dilemma. Wilsonian liberals railed against American support for authoritarian regimes as a policy that compromised American values respecting human rights and self-determination.

The end of the Cold War finally allowed these competing liberalisms to recombine. The two groups slowly found common ground on respect for human rights, their belief that the internal character of regimes has implications for international peace, and on their support for international organizations to reform, and even sometimes to remove, rogue regimes. Right and left have thus come to agree on the broad outlines of America's future foreign policy.

The reunion was also made possible by changes in each liberal strain. The horror and revulsion over Vietnam had led the Wilsonian liberals to an almost categorical opposition to American intervention abroad. In 1978, for example, when Senator George McGovern called for international intervention in Cambodia to stop the Khmer Rouge genocide of its own people—anticipating in some ways the thrust of the new interventionism—his former anti-Vietnam allies dismissed him out of hand. The Vietnam analogy was frequently invoked when the question of American military intervention was raised.

Wilsonian liberals had couched much of their opposition to American intervention abroad in terms of respect for national self-determination and support for individual human rights. Yet a contradiction exists between these two goods—respect for national sovereignty may preclude intervention in the face of a government's horrific violations of the individual and minority rights of its own citizens.

Mounting evidence of the corruption and brutality of many Third World regimes (and rising claims to self-determination in the aftermath of the Cold War) eventually led many
Wilsonian liberals to abandon their commitment to self-deter-
mination. By the late 1980s international opinion, which had
often served as a brake on the crusading tendencies of
American foreign policy, began to concur. A consensus
emerged among international lenders that economic and polit-
ical conditions on aid were necessary for Third World devel-
opment and government reform. Wilsonian liberals had finally
resolved the contradiction between self-determination of peo-
bles and human rights, opting in favor of the latter.

For Cold War liberals, meanwhile, the collapse of the Soviet
Union released them from the need to support authoritarian
regimes as bulwarks against global communism. They also
came to appreciate the potential of international organizations
and international law, a shift best explained by apprehensions
about the costs of providing order in the post-Cold War era.

As consensus emerged in the 1980s that economic power
was the dominant currency of international relations and an
important component of national security, Cold War liberals
opened to the possibility of a larger U.N. role in security
affairs. Collective security, they hoped, could help alleviate
America’s crushing defense burden and massive public debt.
This new-found courtship, however, has its limits. Former
Cold War liberals do not wish to relinquish America’s interna-
tional leadership. Rather, they see the end of the Cold War as
making international organizations more ideologically predis-
posed to follow the American lead.

The Gulf War’s Errant Example

For the new interventionists the Gulf War is a
watershed of international cooperation and consensus.
It should, they believe, serve as a model for a new system of
global collective security. International order is seen as flowing
from the credibility and capability of a unified community of
nations, unshackled from ideological polarization, to deter any
act of interstate and internal aggression.

Actions taken by the United Nations in response to Iraqi
attacks on its Kurdish population are now renowned as setting
important precedents. In particular U.N. Security Council res-
olution 688, which allowed that an act of internal aggression
may be deemed a threat to international order, is interpreted
as establishing humanitarian intervention in a state’s affairs as
a legitimate response of the international community.
Overlooked, however, are the many special circumstances that make the Gulf War an unlikely model for future collective responses. While the war was sanctioned by the United Nations, the military action remained firmly under American command and control. While international forces drove the Iraqi army from Kuwait, the costs of the operation ran upwards of $70 billion. And while U.N. resolution 688 established legal precedent, its practical relevance may be moot: U.N. protective forces entered Iraq only after Operation Desert Storm demolished what was the world’s fourth largest army, thus destroying Iraq’s capacity to resist. In short, humanitarian intervention could work in Iraq because it followed, not preceded, the most successful U.N. peace-enforcement mission ever.

The Gulf War and the subsequent protection of Iraqi Kurds nonetheless provided the basis for Operation Restore Hope in Somalia as well as the legal rationale for the 22,000 U.N. troops providing humanitarian relief in Bosnia. Many new interventionists claim that precedent has been set for peace-enforcement—that is, war—against Serbia and for humanitarian intervention in Liberia and Sudan as well.

But the model of the Gulf War—a limited mandate to fight a conventional war in the vast openness of a desert—may be relevant only to wars involving secession of relatively homogeneous populations in readily defined territories. Rarely does such a situation occur.

Toward Selective Intervention

BILL CLINTON comes to the presidency sympathetic to the new interventionism. His election marks the accession to power of a generation intent on making America live up to its professed ideals. But to avoid an increasingly expansive doctrine that risks extending American intervention to all areas of the globe, Clinton must scrutinize the underlying assumptions of the new interventionism.

Foremost, a more realistic perspective of internal state violence would avoid much of the new interventionist hysteria surrounding civil war in the post-Cold War era. Such wars are no more frequent than before. At present there are 18 civil wars; in 1985 there were 19. Civil wars today are no more bloody than those past. The U.S. civil war cost upwards of 600,000 lives; the Spanish civil war of the 1930s and the
Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s killed on similar scales.

Today's civil wars should not be expected to be more amenable to negotiation; they will remain among the most difficult conflicts to settle politically. In the twentieth century about 18 percent of civil wars ended with the elimination or unconditional surrender of one party. Moreover, the same percentage of civil wars was settled in the period before the Cold War as during it, suggesting that it is the dynamics of internal conflicts that account for their intractability.

The end of the Cold War peels away but one layer of conflict from civil wars, only to reveal a host of others beneath. While there was a short window where the ending of the Cold War provided the superpowers leverage to settle various disputes such as Angola and El Salvador, the actual end of the Cold War significantly reduces their ability to influence former internal allies.

Nor will outside intervention aimed at defeating recalcitrant warring groups—even if undertaken by the United Nations—prove any more likely to succeed in the post-Cold War era. For example, some new interventionists have insisted that the United Nations use military force to compel the Khmer Rouge to abide by the 1991 Paris Peace Accords. But why should the United Nations be expected to succeed where the Vietnamese army, one of world’s most disciplined, could not? Likewise, what would enable the United Nations to defeat Angola’s UNITA when the Cuban army had failed to do so?

U.N. troops may carry international legitimacy, but internal parties will still command the asymmetries of civil war: parties win by not losing; the will of those who intervene will wane over the long term if resource and human costs run high; and intervention will be one of many commitments for outsiders, whereas internal actors will be singleminded in their dedication. The primary advantage this new era affords for enforcing peace in places like Cambodia or Angola is that the superpowers will no longer equip rival factions. But such factions have already proven adept at maintaining access to weaponry, as
bordering states often have incentive for continuing to arm warring sides.

The guiding principle of the new interventionism—the international community’s obligation to intervene wherever a state or group within a state fails to meet the humanitarian needs of its people—cannot be enforced consistently. To do so would dictate intervention in every civil war as well as in states with regimes so repressive as to destroy even its incipient threat. Potential cases for intervention far outstrip available resources. Intervention will have to be selective, and a moral principle applied unevenly will leave even well-intended international actors variously open to charges of hypocrisy, cowardice, neglect or self-interest.

Some internal wars are also more threatening to international security than others. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Balkan war place heavy burdens on newly independent east European states undergoing transitions to democracy. Left unchecked, Serbian aggression could advance to Kosovo and Macedonia, raising the specter of broader interstate conflagration. The war in the Balkans is a greater danger to international security than civil wars in Somalia, Liberia or Sudan because it may overwhelm Europe’s political stability and economic productivity, prerequisites for Third World development. Even in Africa, Mozambique’s civil war bears the greater stakes, threatening to flood southern Africa with refugees or to overwhelm South Africa’s tenuous transition to majority rule and economic renewal, which would wreck a boon for the entire continent.

While there may be cause for the United States and United Nations to step into civil war for reasons of international security, the goal of intervention must be clearly defined. Only a combination of coherent strategy, sufficient leverage and a keen sense of timing will allow a third party to bring peace. Most civil wars become amenable to settlement only after they have played themselves out with ferocity. A short-term emphasis on ceasefires may only prolong conflicts and mitigate against parties perceiving that their survival depends on political settlement. While attempting mediation or urging negotiation, third parties may inadvertently prolong conflicts. A decision to try combatants for war crimes, say, may assuage our sense of justice but work against a negotiated end.

Many civil wars may have to be allowed to run an ugly course. Herein lies an irony that clouds the clear morality of
many new interventionists: the possibility that humanitarian assistance may extend war and anarchy rather than end it. Aid to besieged populations, if it assists prolonged resistance, may only end up costing more lives. Likewise, arming a weaker party in the belief that justice calls for a “fair fight” may simply produce a permanent state of war. Fewer lives may be lost if one side wins outright. Moreover, a decisive victory is sometimes the best result, followed by a forward-looking conciliatory peace.

There are no panaceas for internal conflicts. The hope that international intervention in one war will prove a deterrent elsewhere is simply that—a hope, with little evidence to justify it as a proposition and plenty to suggest that domestic tyrants do not learn from other cases. Civil wars and ethnic rivalries have histories and dynamics all their own that diminish the effects of precedents set elsewhere.

Finally preventive diplomacy, while a reasonable expectation for avoiding interstate war, is more difficult for internal conflicts. In the 1980s some analysts predicted that Yugoslavia would collapse into civil war; today one would be hard pressed to find an expert who does not believe Zaire will soon collapse into war as well. Yet such predictions are different from knowing exactly when internal violence will begin. Predicting civil war is akin to predicting earthquakes: analysts know the fault lines running beneath the surface and can provide probabilities and estimate time periods, but they cannot say with any confidence when the big one will strike.

Recognizing U.N. Costs and Limits

PRESIDENT CLINTON will need a realistic sense of what the United Nations can and cannot do. The United Nations is simply incapable of playing the role that the new interventionists demand of it. Only if used with a prudent sense of its costs and capabilities can the organization play a limited role in bringing peace in the world.

The organization is currently overextended and underfunded. During the last three years it has been involved in 14 peace missions, the same number of missions as undertaken in all its preceding 43 years. The estimated cost of peacekeeping has grown from $750 million in 1991 to $2.9 billion in 1992, of which member nations have contributed only $2 billion, leaving a shortfall of almost $900 million for this year alone.
These figures do not include U.N. commitments to Somalia and Mozambique, which could double U.N. expenses.

The scope of U.N. involvement in civil wars has expanded dramatically. In addition to peacekeeping the United Nations is now expected to extend protection to noncombatants and food convoys, to supervise, monitor and sometimes run elections, to oversee land reform, to document war crimes and, if need be, to provide order when societies and governments break down. The United Nations has somehow taken on a mythic status as the cure for all ills. Yet it has not received the resources necessary to carry out even the tasks it has embarked on already, let alone to meet the open-ended commitments of humanitarian protection called for in Yugoslavia and Somalia.

Despite its expanded role, the United Nations remains wedded to previous doctrines sharply delineating peacekeeping and peace-enforcement on the basis of enemies. In peacekeeping there is no enemy, and success depends on keeping it that way. In peace-enforcement the United Nations determines an aggressor and sets out to defeat or deter it militarily. There is a clear enemy and mission, and the rules of engagement are broader than merely returning fire in self-defense.

Yet recent demands for U.N. intervention in civil wars present dilemmas for U.N. troops, revealing a yawning gap between tried doctrines and newly appointed tasks. In the case of Bosnia, U.N. troops "providing protection" face enemies but lack a mandate to defeat them. In cases of peace-building—acting as referee in certifying elections and monitoring demobilization—U.N. troops may make enemies and eventually need to engage in peace-enforcement. Such is the case in Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge refuses to meet treaty commitments and attempts to undermine the peace process. Finally, in Somalia the task of "providing order" could lead to the worst case: enemies on all sides and an open-ended commitment to administering the country.

The United Nations has built-in flaws that cannot be remedied simply by increasing its resources, capabilities and organis-
zation. By its very nature the United Nations is prone to deliberation; that is the essence of a large bureaucracy that purports to represent all peoples of the world. Its strength—the ability to grant international legitimacy to an endeavor—at the same time forms its weaknesses: slowness, inefficiency and the possibility that the national interests of its members will block constructive collective action. A confusion of demands, the need for consensus in decision-making and the tendency toward incremental action rob the United Nations of coherent strategy when approaching intervention.

A review of past operations, however, shows that when a situation calls for classic peacekeeping—agreement between warring parties who have reasonable command and control over those with weapons—the United Nations can do the job. Although U.N. peace-building operations in Cambodia and Angola are at various stages of unraveling, U.N. experience in Namibia and El Salvador shows that the organization can indeed play a key role in ending civil war. Where parties to civil war have reached public agreement on ending hostilities, prompt and decisive action alongside commitment of adequate resources can make the difference. Strengthening U.N. capability to place peacekeeping troops on the ground quickly after settlements are reached would be a major contribution to peace.

The Lessons of Yugoslavia

From a strategic standpoint U.N. intervention in Yugoslavia has been a disaster. No overriding goal or cohesive plan exists. Steps resembling peace-enforcement—no-fly zones and sanctions—are implemented with no mandate to enforce them. Investigation and the threat of war crimes prosecution, which only make sense if the international community deems the war in Bosnia a total war, could work against a mediated settlement. Actions that resemble peacekeeping, such as repeated attempts to create and monitor ceasefires, assist the provision of humanitarian aid but work at cross purposes to the search for a permanent solution, as combatants merely use the pauses to regroup and gain tactical advantage. Measures to protect food and people—including a request to use Belgrade as a shipping depot for deliveries to Bosnia—weakens potential peace-enforcement operations. And provisions for the self-defense of troops protecting convoys and
refugees may lead to de facto peace-enforcement, without the necessary commitment, planning and resources to ensure success.

The new interventionists argue that the lesson of Yugoslavia is that the time for international action is before crises become wars; the United Nations, they say, must improve its tools of preventive diplomacy. They contend that improving U.N. intelligence gathering and establishing a rapid deployment force of 10,000 to 60,000 troops will enable the United Nations to intervene rapidly in crises and to avoid future Bosnias and Somalias.

Yet such proposals skirt the crucial issue. Preventive diplomacy depends on quick, decisive action. Information and tools to respond to crises are necessary but insufficient without a firm decision and the demonstrated will to use them. The ability of the United Nations to respond decisively will always be inferior to the ability of individual states or small groups of states to do so.

The Balkan crisis is telling in this regard. Deterring acts of aggression within states is much more difficult than deterring acts of aggression between states. It should be remembered that at the beginning of the Balkan war there was no Slovenia and no Serbia, but a state called Yugoslavia. Knowing what the world knows now, injecting 30,000 troops between Croatia and Slovenia may have been a good idea. But at that time many in the United Nations desired that Yugoslavia stay Yugoslavia. A decision to inject troops into the conflict would have been seen by many as prejudicing the internal conflict toward a secessionist outcome.

The crises over Slovenia and Croatia made apparent the different strategies among Western powers for avoiding war. Germany argued that quick recognition of those states might prevent war; U.N. special representative Cyrus Vance believed that recognition would increase the possibility. Germany’s strategy might have worked if Europe had closed ranks behind it. But coming on the heels of German unification, a united European response was stymied by fears that Germany would dominate European decision-making and that Croatia’s authoritarian past would revive the unseemly prospect of a new German-Croat alliance. There also existed genuine confusion over whether Yugoslavia should be one or many. If Europe could not reach consensus on quick action, how could the United Nations?
Peace-enforcement in the Balkans?

The United Nations has set the stage for peace-enforcement against Serbia, warning that Serbian actions in Kosovo could constitute a threat to international peace. Former Secretary of State George Shultz has urged the use of military force on humanitarian grounds to stop Serbian aggression in Bosnia. Ronald Reagan has called for forming “an army of conscience.” And Western diplomats have discussed a host of specific measures—enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia, establishing war crimes tribunals for Serbian leaders, recognizing Macedonia and placing U.N. troops there to act as a trip wire in case of Serbian attack.

Yet peace-enforcement in civil wars requires a clear, compelling case for reasons of international security; humanitarian concerns are not enough. Indeed if humanitarian concerns—measured by deaths and genocidal campaigns—were the justification for military intervention, Bosnia would rank below Sudan, Liberia and East Timor. Serbian thugs are certainly rank amateurs compared to Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge and Mozambique’s RENAMO, both of whom have been accorded international legitimacy in the search for peace.

Peace-enforcement in civil wars is more difficult than peace-enforcement in interstate wars and often requires a long-term presence as an army of occupation. There are no clean civil wars: enemies are rarely concentrated, visible and vulnerable; it is often difficult to distinguish between civilians and soldiers or enemies and allies, and if one inadvertently confuses the two, soon there are no allies at all.

The war in Bosnia combines a war of secession with an internal war fought among a diverse population. Bosnians are nearly divided in thirds among Croats, Muslims and Serbs. Bosnian Serbs have fought because they do not want to be a minority in a state outside Serbia; Croats and Muslims have fought because they do not want to be minorities within a greater Serbia. It is unclear whether there is unified command and control among Bosnian Serbian militias. According to one count, no less than 19 separate armed groups are engaged.

Peace-enforcement in the Balkans should address the relationship between the conflict and its effects on international security. Action against Serbia should only be to deter aggression against Kosovo and Macedonia, to prevent escalation to interstate war and to weaken Serbia’s capability to carry out
further attacks. U.N. military intervention should not aim to end the war in Bosnia. U.N. troops would find themselves fighting a protracted guerrilla war. The war in Bosnia should be ended politically or militarily by the territory’s various warring groups.

The Pitfalls for President Clinton

THE CLINTON foreign policy will likely be marked by competing instincts. A presumption of moral certitude and search for global social redemption may vie with a realistic sense of the limits of American power to bring peace and justice to a world marked by violence, brutality and political disintegration.

The new president inherits from his predecessor few clear guidelines about when and where to intervene militarily. George Bush’s last major speech before leaving office reveals that the former president never resolved whether he was a realist or a liberal. Addressing the cadets at West Point, Bush spoke of America’s moral and spiritual leadership and the threat of tyrants who “ignore the welfare of their own men, women and children.” But he also warned against “universalism” and a perceived need for the United States to react to every “outrage of violence.” The speech could provide grist for those who seek to curtail America’s policing of the world or those who seek to broaden humanitarian intervention by the United States. It did little to quell demands for more forceful action in the Balkans.

If the United States joins in peace-enforcement against Serbia, President Clinton should seek to avoid an “elastic doctrine syndrome.” Foremost, the new president must explain that military intervention is in America’s own interests, that it is necessary to prevent a possibly larger interstate war that may involve NATO allies. Clinton should avoid the temptation of rhetoric that speaks of upholding the rights of peoples everywhere, of supporting the dictates of international morality or of doing, in President Bush’s phrase, “God’s work.”

It will take courage. The American people prefer more lofty reasons to use military force than the unadorned truth that national interests are at stake. If Clinton chooses the rhetoric of the new interventionism, he should be prepared for the next case for intervention that the most vivid television images—depicting a world sharpened, simplified and devoid of
context—thrust to the top of his foreign policy agenda, whether it be Tibet or Tajikistan, Myanmar or Malawi.

It may be, as the new interventionists insist, that the international community has begun to accept the proposition that interests of people come before the interests of states. Such a principle could be a valuable tool for creating a more just and secure world. But carried out absent a sense of limits and of political and economic realism, and if applied according to the dictates of television, rather than the national interests of the United States, not only will this new American foreign policy be unsustainable but the post-Cold War era will likely be more confrontational, conflict-ridden and violent than the one that preceded it.