A U.S. Grand Strategy for the 21st Century: Focus on Failed States

by

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The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States transformed the international security environment and U.S. perceptions of it. The subsequent revelations concerning the al-Qaida organization and its operations in Afghanistan transformed official U.S. thinking about state failure and the threats and challenges they pose to the country, its people, and its interests. The Bush Administration, whose campaign rhetoric in 2000 had derided the interventionist and nation-building proclivities of the Clinton team, quickly found itself deeply immersed in precisely those same kinds of operations. The Administration that once appeared headed down a path of neo-isolationism and unilateralism was in fairly short order actively engaged in international coalition building.

One of the enduring principles of strategy is that it requires constant assessment and reassessment, leading to adjustments as events and the actions of others alter the strategic environment. So in that sense, what the Bush Administration has experienced and the choices it has made are hardly surprising or deserving of harsh criticism. At the same time, the hallmark of sound strategic thinking, and indeed the essence of strategy itself, is to find the core strategic imperatives of an emerging period and to chart a long-term direction for the country. Absent such a strategic road map and the policy that guides it, a country is likely to flounder and be overwhelmed by crisis management. In fact, it is fair to say that effective strategy is just the opposite of crisis management: long-term rather than short-term, and proactive rather than reactive.

It is in this realm that the Bush Administration, much as its predecessor, appears to be having far less success. Operational successes in Afghanistan and elsewhere in fighting a “global war on terrorism” (GWOT) notwithstanding, there appears to be little strategic glue holding the various pieces together. Any vision of a future world and the role the U.S. should play in helping to shape the emergence of that world seem buried beneath a short-term fixation on preventing any future terrorist attacks on the U.S. and the broad concept of “homeland security.” Now clearly, a secure homeland is a first-order security concern, and this paper will not argue against that. But a secure homeland, and a strategy for maintaining it, should grow out of a much broader understanding of the threats and challenges we face, and a much broader strategic vision for how we can prevent those threats and challenges from being actualized.
The purpose of this paper is to initiate a dialogue and to suggest a framework for just such a broader understanding of the contemporary strategic environment and a U.S. grand strategy for addressing it. The proposition is that the contemporary strategic imperative—the driving force underlying the evolution of current and future threats—is state failure. Threats that appear in the form of terrorism, organized crime, and even more traditional state-on-state aggression, are likely to grow out of the weakening of state capacity to govern effectively. If the U.S., and of course its allies and other international actors, truly wish to devise an effective strategy for addressing these threats, the starting point is the recognition that preventing the spread of state failure is precisely the grand strategic focus the contemporary international system requires. Although challenges and threats from ideologically-based movements and tyrannical rulers of rogue states will still be with us, a long-term grand strategy for promoting legitimate governance and all that it entails is a better way to address effectively the strategic imperative of the 21st century.

Strategy

In simple terms, strategy is the calculated relationship among ends, ways, and means.\(^1\) **Ends** are the objectives or goals sought. **Means** are the resources available to pursue the objectives. And **ways** are the concepts or methods for how one organizes and applies the resources. Each of these components suggests a related question. What do we want to pursue (ends)? With what (means) will we pursue them? And how (ways) will we pursue them?

In addition to these three core concepts—ends, ways, and means—there are also some essential principles of strategy. First, when it comes to strategy, ends matter. They matter because strategy is only meaningful in terms of the objectives sought. One does not simply “do” strategy; one decides on and pursues objectives strategically. One can evaluate the success or failure of a strategy only in terms of how it fared in the pursuit of those objectives. Second, selecting the proper objective is more important than selecting the proper way in which to use the means (although we should not lose sight of just how important these components of the strategy relationship are, too). Consider the difference between efficiency and effectiveness, with efficiency defined as “doing things right” and effectiveness defined as “doing the right things.” Whereas most of us would like to be both effective and efficient, and whereas both are important to overall success, in the end
effectiveness is more important. Why? Because spending time very efficiently doing the wrong things will not lead to success. Doing the right things only half as efficiently will still lead to progress toward the desired objective. But if you get the ends wrong, it is impossible to get the strategy right. Still, the core challenges in formulating a strategy are to figure out where we need to go, what means we have to get us there, and how best to use those means to get there as effectively and efficiently as possible.

**Grand Strategy**

Grand strategy is national strategy at the highest levels, referring to a country's broadest approach to the pursuit of its national objectives in the international system. As such, its focus is typically quite broad, involving the vision its leaders have both of the shape of the future international system and the role of the country in that system. This also includes the role to be played by that country in helping to bring about that desired vision of the future. The other strategies a country employs, including a national security strategy and a national military strategy, are subordinate strategies. If designed and implemented properly, those other strategies act in coordination to achieve the desired end state of the grand strategy—the desired international system with the desired role for the country.

The leadership of a country chooses objectives based on its view of national values and interests, and how they are affected, threatened, or challenged in the current and evolving international system. Hence, the most general statement of an objective is typically to “protect and promote the national interests.” In grand strategy terms, this might entail helping to shape a future international system in which few if any actors (state or non-state) have the desire or the capabilities to do harm to those interests. The means to pursue that objective fall into three or four (depending on how one conceptualizes them) broad categories of national power, also called “elements of national power.” They are political/diplomatic, economic, military, and informational. How a country marshals and applies those elements of national power constitute the “ways” of its grand strategy. Again at the level of grand strategy, these concepts or ways generally have to do with role the country will play within the larger international system. So, for example, choosing among isolationism, engagement, unilateralism, primacy, and
multilateral cooperation is fundamentally a question of grand strategic “ways.”

Although the use of historical analogies is frequently dangerous, serving more to confuse, confound, and oversimplify than to illuminate, a brief description of U.S. grand strategy during the Cold War provides a useful illustration of the preceding discussion and relevant background for our subsequent discussion. The U.S. Cold War grand strategy was containment, a name derived from the core objective which was to contain communism, or prevent the further spread of Soviet communism and its influence. The early stages of the Cold War saw the strategy develop along the lines suggested by George Kennan in his now famous "long telegram" from Moscow. Kennan wrote: “The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies...” The threat grew out of a fundamental ideological clash between very different views of modern life: a liberal political-economic view based on democracy and capitalism, and an “illiberal” alternative rooted in authoritarian political control and state-centralized economic planning. The grand strategic vision subsequently expressed by Secretary of State George Marshall was of a world in which individual freedom, political and economic, would thrive, and totalitarian alternatives would not. The role the U.S. would play would be an active one, emphasizing leadership and engagement.

According to Kennan’s assessment, an effective grand strategy had to have both offensive and defensive components. The defensive objective was to hold back the political, economic and military influence and physical presence of the USSR. The offensive objective, somewhat overlooked in conventional analyses of U.S. Cold War policy, was the promotion of stable democracies and market economies. This offensive component was based on the assessment that healthy market democracies would deprive the Soviets of fertile ground in which to sow the seeds of their revolutionary ideology.

Although a detailed analysis of containment is not necessary for this argument, some additional discussion of it is useful to illustrate how the U.S. implemented its grand strategy, particularly through the use of various elements of power employed in an integrated fashion through its overarching national security strategy. The overall objective, as noted, was to contain communism. The means consisted of the economic, military, and political/diplomatic elements of power. On the
economic side, the Marshall Plan provides the best example of how the U.S. used its considerable economic power in support of the strategy. The Marshall Plan, by infusing large amounts of U.S. capital into the devastated West European economies, would help restore their economic vitality. This would in turn remove one of the potential sources of appeal for communist ideology (the physical dislocations and psychological pressures that accompany high levels of economic uncertainty and want). The Marshall Plan is therefore one example of a “way” in which the U.S. applied the economic “means” in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) provides an excellent illustration of how the U.S. employed the military element of national power as part of its national security strategy in support of the overall grand strategy. This military alliance was primarily a collective defense organization in which the U.S. provided the vast muscle of its military might to insure the West Europeans that the Soviet military could not threaten their physical security.

Unable to marshal much in the way of their own military power, most of which had been either destroyed or exhausted in the war, the West Europeans were encouraged to rely on the capabilities of the U.S. This was especially true of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, which was to take shape particularly in the 1950s as the Cold War unfolded. So NATO serves as an example of a “way” in which the U.S. applied military “means” in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.

Finally, the U.S. used its considerable political and diplomatic power by initially declaring and then implementing the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine stated that the U.S. would support those countries seeking to resist communist movements. Obviously economic and military resources backed up this doctrine. But the fact that the U.S. was willing to make an open political declaration of its intentions to provide such assistance is an example of the use of political/diplomatic “means” in support of the grand strategy of containment. One can also argue that even then, long before the “Information Age” made the use of information technology part of our national security lexicon, the U.S. employed the informational element of power through Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and the like. So the Truman Doctrine serves as an example of a “way” in which the U.S. applied political/diplomatic and informational “means” in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.
Of course, the strategy of containment did not simply emerge from the security environment, nor was it drawn up overnight in a single planning session. It took several years, individual creativity and heroic political efforts, and at least the catalytic experience of the North Korean invasion of South Korea, to make all of that happen. Moreover, the organizational apparatus that eventually generated the strategy was created in 1947, at least three years before the strategy itself was formalized. Of course, one can reasonably argue that the U.S. was already pursuing elements of this strategy prior to its formal articulation, an indication that the organizational structures already in place were well suited for the extant and emerging strategic challenges. We will return to this point later as we touch briefly on the need for organizational reform of our national security policy-making apparatus as an essential part of the overall strategic effort needed today.

The Strategic Imperative Today: State Failure

As noted at the outset of this paper, state failure may be the organizing challenge around which we should consider building our grand strategy. But to be effective, a strategy must be based on a proper understanding of the threats and challenges. And while the threats and challenges posed by state failure are both sufficiently significant and meaningful to justify this kind of strategic attention, the term itself (or perhaps recent usage of it) does not address adequately the nature of the problems we face.

The term is problematic for several important reasons. First, state failure is a process not an outcome. On the one hand, it is a process in which the state loses the capacity to govern (and, more broadly, to perform other essential functions). On the other hand, it can be a process in which the state never developed that capacity in the first place. The logic behind this distinction is simply that it is impossible to lose that which never existed. As one of our colleagues in this failed states working group so aptly observed at an earlier conference, there are “states that begin to fail and states that fail to begin.” Second, if we focus only on the capacity to govern we may lose sight of the fact that the perceived legitimacy of the state and its institutions is critical to its ability to function. History demonstrates that individuals and groups can frequently prop up the capacity of the state to govern (for example, through the use of sheer force or intimidation), but over time the inherent weaknesses of and likely challenges to the legitimacy of that governance will lead
to its eventual erosion and, perhaps, to a process of state failure. Third, a tendency resulting from this focus on state failure has been to concentrate attention on state collapse, the so-called “failed state”. Yet to be effective we must in many cases address the processes of state failure before they begin and certainly while they are underway, not simply when they have already run their course.

All of the preceding points must also be understood in the context of the broader strategic necessity to grasp fully the nature of a problem before one begins to devise responses to it. Medicine surely provides a useful (though imperfect) analogy here. Most patients would want the doctor to explore the full range of explanations for what the affliction is prior to prescribing a course of action (medication, surgery, etc.) for treating it. While complete certainty is not always possible, and while some symptoms are so severe that active intervention to treat them is justified even before their source is fully understood, the essential point is obvious: Practicing sound strategy, like practicing sound medicine, requires a sound understanding of the nature of the affliction. We cannot set a meaningful strategic objective without first understanding the nature of the problem confronting us.

In this regard the concept of state failure is in some respects alluringly simple, but that allure is also misleading. Rather than lumping all state failure together under a single heading, just as we at times lump all of the possible remedies together under the value-laden and equally misleading heading of nation-building, we should instead seek to understand the more specific types, causes, and consequences of state failure. Regional and national factors are crucial not only for explaining state failure but also for designing appropriate responses. Not all states that fail do so for the same reasons. While there may well be a “generic” class of fragile, failing or failed states, and while the characteristics of state failure are often quite similar, individual states encounter different trigger mechanisms and travel different paths on the road toward failure. Therefore, we must devise specific responses tailored to meet specific, individual cases if we are to have any hope of success. That said, however, there are still a number of important considerations at the level of grand strategy that, if acted on, would provide a much better basis for dealing consistently and effectively with a large number of the security threats and challenges we face today and will continue to face well into the 21st century. We turn now to a brief consideration of some other
dimensions of this strategic imperative and how we might approach it.

**Why State Failure Matters**

Perhaps the very first strategic question about state failure is this: Why should we care? There are several important reasons for the United States and its allies to be concerned. In no particular order of importance, these reasons include the following considerations. First, failing states and their associated problems simply don’t go away. They linger, and they generally get worse. The longer they persist, the more they and their problems challenge neighboring states, regional stability, and international peace and security generally. Those problems include systematic internal human rights violations and humanitarian crises (among them mass genocide, torture, and starvation). In part a result of those problems, mass refugee migrations may subsequently threaten to overwhelm and destabilize neighboring countries, many of which are themselves ill-equipped to support their own populations let alone to respond adequately to the pressures generated by such refugee flows. This is magnified by what appears to be a tendency today for state failure to occur in regions consisting of weak states, so keeping the problems isolated is difficult if not impossible.

A second reason state failure matters is also related to what can go on within them in the form of illicit activities. These include a rather wide array of “nasty things,” including arms and drug trafficking, international organized crime, and, of course, terrorist operations. In 1996 this author wrote: “So, for example, the inability of a state to control criminal activities such as drug or weapons smuggling, money laundering, and terrorism may eventually transform the country into a kind of ‘safe haven’ from which the criminal can effectively consolidate and expand operations. To the extent that such actors gain strength in these safe havens, the failed state becomes a security concern for other countries, including the United States.”\(^{10}\) What we understand today about al-Qaeda and Afghanistan, and what we are learning in retrospect about Somalia, is not so surprising to those who cautioned several years ago about the dangers of terrorist and criminal groups operating with impunity out of states that are either unwilling or unable (or both) to control them. Clearly, states that have little or no capacity to govern legitimately are targets for internal or external disruption, insurgencies, and various forms of exploitation.
A third reason state failure should concern us is the human misery that accompanies it. Whether it spills over or not, the kind of suffering generated as a state weakens and fails is not something that we can easily ignore. While some may argue that this is a result of the “CNN factor,” it is more likely that the media serve only as a magnifier of what is at root a “value issue” for the United States. Although there are certainly cases—some very painful and obvious ones—where the United States has been able to ignore such human suffering, more often than not it is simply not consistent with our core values to stand on the sidelines and ignore it. Over time, especially, pressure builds and eventually may give way to the “do something” strategy, a concept that is neither a strategy nor “something” that is likely to improve the situation. In fact, it is precisely an absence of a strategic approach to such challenges that frequently causes us to undertake some actions that are ill-conceived, poorly designed, and half-heartedly implemented. Just “doing something” may be a formula for making matters worse, both for those currently suffering and for ourselves.

Why States Fail

In earlier works I presented some of the reasons why states fail. They include the incomplete or ineffective process of state formation noted earlier, some of which (though not necessarily all) may lead back to flawed policies of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Those policies may never have been designed to promote or even support the evolution of effective state governance and functioning economies. Combined with various international forces at work following the collapse of the old colonial order, and in some cases exacerbated by the later end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, those policies certainly contributed to the reality that some countries never really had a chance to become fully functioning states (at least as many of us think of this concept of “state”).

Our own desires to promote both political and economic liberalization in the post-Cold War transition period may also contribute to state failure, especially in cases where we perhaps overestimated the role of formal institutions and underestimated the role of informal institutions, civil society, and the “attitudinal” underpinnings of democracy. Pressures to liberalize political and economic systems, sometimes far too quickly and radically than countries and their people could sustain and endure, may have resulted in the collapse of
governmental authority and the rule of law, and their replacement by crime, corruption, and other maladies associated with state weakening and failure.\textsuperscript{12}

And of course, reasons for state failure include the conscious actions of individuals and groups (internal and external) to undermine and weaken the state, or simply to exploit the state for personal gain. Colombia today may provide a telling example of the former. And a number of the more recent, egregious cases of state failure in Africa illustrate the latter, where individuals who gain hold of political power simply use government as a vehicle for extracting resources and wealth from the society and its people.

But one other, more general reason for state failure deserves attention precisely because it bears on our discussion of grand strategy and the international security environment. Cases of state weakening and failure may be more in evidence today because in many ways the challenges to effective legitimate governance today are greater than at any previous time in history. This may be a more systemic challenge of “ungovernability.”\textsuperscript{13} Forces of technology in areas such as communications and weapons have empowered those who wish to challenge governmental authority and equipped them with more effective means to organize and more powerful capabilities to weaken and destroy it. Contradictory forces of fragmentation and integration, and the globalization of human activities, have made it increasingly difficult for even mature democracies to cope with some of the challenges and continue to find popular consensus on policy responses to pressing problems. These same forces have made it all the more difficult for fledgling democracies and “quasi-states” to fend off attacks from those who seek to undermine their legitimacy and destroy the capacity of the state to function effectively. Already weak governments bump up against these forces and a world that is increasingly less amenable to domestic policy control. Small wonder that they find it so difficult to stay on the path toward legitimate and effective governance, especially when the more general forces of fragmentation and disintegration are coupled with the conscious actions of some individuals and organizations to undermine and weaken those governments.

Yet such is the world we face today. Some states weaken and collapse because they were never effectively states in the first place. Some states collapse under the weight of failed and corrupt leadership. Still other states collapse as a result of the conscious efforts of certain actors to bring them down
(or at least to weaken them), while some states simply find themselves overwhelmed by powerful external forces over which they can exert little control or influence. The search for a strategy to guide us in this international security environment therefore begins with this initial recognition that there are indeed different reasons why states begin to weaken and perhaps eventually fail. The next step in the formulation of a strategic approach necessarily focuses on the consideration of possible responses.\textsuperscript{14}

**Responding to State Failure**

Previously I have focused on the question of response by looking at issues of “where” (in what cases do we respond) and “what” (with what kind of objectives). The objectives may be more or less ambitious, ranging from pure humanitarian relief on the least ambitious end of the spectrum, to stopping the fighting at a more intermediate position, to full-scale restoration of the state at the most ambitious end. Where we respond may be a function of how strategically important a particular country is seen to be, how likely the response is to lead to success (itself a function of how ambitious the objective is and how “serious” the state weakening is), and the relative availability of the necessary resources for responding.

In the present context I wish to take a different tack, however, and argue instead that the overall response needs to be framed in terms of a grand strategy that recognizes the weakening of state legitimacy, and hence state capacity to govern effectively, as the overarching strategic imperative of the contemporary security environment. The vision underlying this grand strategy is of an international system in which legitimate governance predominates. Legitimate governance may be any kind of political system in which those who are “ruled” perceive those who “rule” as having a legitimate right to do so.\textsuperscript{15} The international system might be comprised of both state and non-state actors, so it need not be limited to a strictly “Westphalian” framework; in fact there may be some areas in which the only effective way to implement “legitimate governance” would be through political arrangements quite different from what some of us understand a “state” to be. There is almost certainly a role to be played by international organizations in such a system and in supporting the overall grand strategy.

Returning to the strategy framework, the objective or end of this grand strategy is an increase in the level of legitimate
governance in the international system. The United States would play a major role in leading that effort through active engagement with other actors. Attention would be focused on the near-term existence and potential spread of weak and weakened states, and the lack of legitimacy that almost always underlies them. The means would be all of the elements of power, coordinated nationally and internationally, to work toward the promotion of legitimate governance. The specific ways for organizing and applying those means are largely “to be determined,” but much like the example of containment discussed earlier, a grand strategy of promoting legitimate governance would involve employing those means in multi-faceted and multi-dimensional ways. That must involve all elements of power, coalitions and allies, regional and international organizations, and even NGOs and the private sector. The U.S. would take a lead role in defining the grand strategy and marshalling others to support it, but it would also base its near-term behavior on that which it sees as its current priorities.

Implications of a New Grand Strategy

So how would such an orientation alter or affect the way the U.S. might look at the contemporary security environment? Some relatively brief illustrations will serve to elaborate on this.

“War on Terrorism”

For one thing, it probably would not fundamentally alter our concern with terrorism in the short term. That is still a threat of the first order. But it would alter the context within which we view the threat of terrorism and our responses to it. So, for example, it might help in the development of better policies for eliminating sources of terrorism, and sources of support for terrorism, rather than simply fighting a war on it. Terrorism might be seen as part of a larger strategic threat from illegitimate and ineffective governance, which would have important implications for how we address it in the near- and the long-term. It might help reorient our thinking around the consequences of some of the actions we take against terrorism that have long-term risks associated with actually promoting more illegitimate governance.

From its inception a “war on terrorism” has been a problematic, if also successful, rhetorical construct. For one thing, it begs the question of defining the enemy and can lead to some messy political complications. This is evident when
another country wants to “join the fight” but has a very
different conception than we do of just what a terrorist is.
For another thing, it confuses a tactic with an enemy. The fact
is that an individual or group chooses to use terrorism as a way
of attacking us. Clearly we should be interested in defending
ourselves and preventing such attacks. But we should be focused
first and foremost on the enemy who chooses to attack us, and
not on some sweeping and necessarily vague notion of “terrorism”
generally. By focusing too broadly on terrorism, we may in fact
focus too narrowly on how to “combat” it. The military
operations in Afghanistan offer an interesting lesson in this
regard. Necessary and justified as an immediate response to an
immediate threat, the military campaigns have succeeded in their
operational objectives. But if the necessary follow-on
activities do not succeed, including the establishment of some
semblance of effective governance in Afghanistan and the region
more broadly, the U.S. will likely face the same threat again in
the not-so-distant future. A deadly cycle of terrorist attacks
and U.S. counter-attacks could ensue. Operational success in
and of itself does not guarantee strategic success.

This is one way in which the proposed grand strategy would
change our orientation, not because of an argument that failed
states cause terrorism, but precisely because weak, failed, and
illegitimate states allow or even encourage actors who employ
terrorism to operate within them. A long-term strategy that
works to reduce such “safe havens” makes more sense than
repeatedly being compelled to employ military force to attack an
enemy that is allowed to reestablish and reconstitute itself.
And this is not simply a prescription for open-ended “nation-
building”; it is rather a cautionary prescription that forces us
to see the necessary linkage between operational choices and the
attainment of strategic-level ends. The strategic reorientation
would also provide some framework for choosing whom we enlist in
our “war on terrorism” and what price we pay for having them
join. If we are in fact propping up other illegitimate regimes,
and in other ways contributing to the promotion not of
legitimate but illegitimate governance, we should at least be
doing so with full recognition of the real price we may be
paying—the creation of even more, and less tractable, safe haven
problems in the future.16

Geopolitics

Such a reorientation of our grand strategic focus would
probably lead us to rethink some general precepts of
geopolitics. For example, perhaps we should be less preoccupied
with “Great Powers” per se and more preoccupied with what those “Great Powers” might look like 10 to 20 years hence. So for example, the current debate about China and whether we “contain” or “engage” shifts to recognition that the issue is not whether China becomes a major power but what kind of major power it becomes. And we might be more concerned with ensuring that China does not slip down a path of state weakening and eventual state failure, a process that would almost assuredly be far more dangerous and threatening to U.S. interests than a strong but liberalized China.

We might also see the most significant threat on the Korean Peninsula in a somewhat different light. Perhaps that threat is not so much a military attack by the North on the South growing out of either territorial or ideological interests, but rather as the more likely desperate consequence of the implosion of the North as it collapses into a political and economic black hole. Considering the interests of major actors in that region, such an implosion could be very dangerous indeed. Preventing the collapse of North Korea, and working toward its eventual inclusion in a reunified Korean Peninsula characterized by legitimate governance, may be a much more meaningful long-term strategic objective than simply a continued policy of military deterrence. Peaceful reunification is, after all, our stated policy objective—though frequently contradicted even by our own actions.

The proposed reorientation should also lead us to see current developments in Colombia differently than prevailing policy in Washington suggests we do. Perhaps we would recognize more clearly that the real danger of Colombia is not simply “drugs and thugs,” although they are serious symptoms and require serious attention. But the real problem is the fundamental lack of effective legitimate governance, and the threat not only to Colombia but also to the region and to the U.S. is the further erosion of what little capacity and legitimacy the Colombian state has. Seen that way, it is clear that no amount of counter-drug tactics and operations by themselves will achieve a strategic victory.

Similarly, the reorientation might help us ask better questions and come to better policy answers about the entire African continent. The often-heard question, “Does Africa matter?” is easy to answer the wrong way by focusing on a narrow geopolitical framework of vital interests carried over from an era now passed. Of course the U.S. has “no vital interests” in Africa. But the answer today should be that Africa certainly
matters as a current and future source of weak and failing states, and as such it will continue to provide fertile soil for terrorists, criminals, and other "bad guys" to operate against us. We might not be fighting the "war on terrorism" very visibly in Africa today, but in the absence of a coherent grand strategy for moving that continent in the right direction—toward increasing legitimate governance—it is quite likely to be one of many future "theaters of war" in the not-so-distant future.

Even in the Middle East, a region as complex and challenging for the U.S. as it is important and dangerous, the proposed reorientation offers some insight. For example, the prospect of a war with Iraq must be viewed from a set of strategic lenses broader than "regime change" and "decisive military action." There is no doubt that the U.S., alone or with allies and the international community behind it, can wage war on Iraq and can bring about the ouster of Saddam Hussein. But one must ask at what price and toward what strategic end? Getting rid of Saddam Hussein is the easy part; figuring out what comes after is not only the more difficult, it is by far and away the more important. What happens if his ouster is not followed by an immediate and enduring reduction in the threat of Iraqi use of weapons of mass destruction? The latter does not necessarily flow directly from the former, although that seems to be the strong implication of current rhetoric. Among the many thorny problems and complexities is the additional fact that a long-term U.S. occupation of Iraq might do more to aid the cause of Osama bin Laden than almost anything any other terrorist or rogue state could do. If seen through the lens of promoting legitimate governance, or at least not increasing illegitimate governance, the prescription for dealing with Saddam Hussein might be improved. Nor would the reorientation allow us to continue to ignore what will likely be one of the thorniest problems of that region long after regime change in Iraq has been accomplished—the lingering paucity of legitimate governance in many of the most significant places in the Middle East. The U.S. will have to address this, and the strategic reorientation proposed here would begin that process sooner rather than later. It would not cause us to withdraw support from regimes with whom we have close ties and share vital interests; it would, however, cause us to begin working on a process for long-term stability and eventual transformation (not necessarily transition) of those regimes.

Globalization
As we work to promote greater openness, liberalization, and globalization generally, the proposed reorientation might also help us to see that there is a “darker side” to globalization. Just as others warned years ago, the same rules that help business be more competitive and efficient, and that help consumers benefit in turn, also help criminals and terrorists in their work. Moreover, some of the pressures to liberalize global markets place insurmountable strains on already fragile states. Viewed in this way, such reforms and policies should be taken more cautiously with an eye to their effects on overall prospects for promoting legitimate governance. Globalization is on balance a good thing, but it does have negative consequences that we should also factor into a broader strategic equation. If a particular policy is likely to destabilize and seriously weaken a legitimate state, we might at a minimum want to consider some offsetting and supporting policies to avoid that undesirable second or third order effect.

Conclusions

Two final observations serve as conclusions to this paper. The first concerns a formidable challenge for bringing about this strategic reorientation and for implementing it. That is the organizational challenge. Just as the Cold War strategy of containment required a wholly new set of organizations first to help devise the strategy and later, and perhaps most importantly, to implement it, a new strategy for promoting legitimate governance probably requires a fundamental reorganization of our national security apparatus. What worked quite well for organizing and coordinating the ends, ways and means of our Cold War strategy are impediments to the kinds of thinking, acting, and resourcing we need to do today. This was made painfully apparent on September 11, 2001. But today, in our understandable but nonetheless dangerous fixation on the “war on terrorism” and “homeland security,” we are hastily moving toward creating new organizations without adequately addressing the strengths and weaknesses of the old. Of course, this kind of fundamental reorganization usually involves politics in its rawest form, and no one is foolish enough to believe it will be easy. But the strategic imperatives of a new international security environment demand that we do it, and we must take on that challenge. The U.S. needs more than a new “Office of Homeland Security”; it needs a National Security Act of 2003.

Finally, what is recommended here is not as radical as it may appear at first glance (although the organizational piece of
it probably is). In many cases the policies we are pursuing today will change very little, although it is hoped they will be cast and understood in a broader light with a longer term vision of where it is we are going as a nation. The reorientation does not require the U.S. to fix every case of state failure nor to be everywhere in its efforts to promote legitimate governance. But it does require the U.S. to take the lead in articulating that strategy, persuading others to join in, devising the appropriate ways to pursue the objectives, and coming up with a fairly large share of the resources to do it. In the end, the leadership role of the U.S. will be just as essential, if not more, in determining the success of this grand strategy as it was in the case of containment.

Looking at the strategic environment through a grand strategy focused on state failure will provide a framework for guiding policy decisions and formulating subordinate strategies. But just as containment did not spell out precisely where and how we should contain the communist threat, a grand strategy of preventing state failure will not specify exactly what cases we need to respond to and how we should respond. It is not a “cookie cutter” approach with a “one size fits all” answer to everything. Each case must be evaluated on the basis of how much it matters, the nature of the specific failure or weakening, and the combination of elements most likely to lead to success. The U.S. will undoubtedly have many serious and potentially divisive discussions, both internally as a part of its domestic politics and externally as part of its foreign relations, over the specific actions to be taken (or not taken) as part of such a grand strategy. This is precisely what occurred throughout the Cold War. But the U.S. will have a strategic compass to guide those debates and to inform those discussions. It will have an answer to the most basic part of the strategy equation: Where do we wish to go?

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1 This is the definition used in the course of instruction at the U.S. Army War College. There are, of course, other definitions. Despite some differences in these definitions, the fundamental underlying concepts are essentially the same.

2 The distinction between “elements” and “instruments” of national power is another matter of definition not necessarily critical for our discussion now, but more important later. Therefore, we distinguish here between a general element of power, say economic, and a specific instrument such as an economic sanction. The instrument is a specific application of the general element. Translating an element into one or more specific instruments and employing them in pursuit of the stated objectives comprise yet another important dimension of strategy.

3 Ways are sometimes used synonymously with “courses of action.” They represent the alternative approaches one can take in pursuit of the objectives.
This distinction between the offensive and defensive components of containment is similar in content though not in terminology to what Ikenberry has recently referred to as the coexistence of both realist and idealist philosophical underpinnings of U.S. grand strategy. See John G. Ikenberry, “American Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 2002.

We simplify the entire strategy, including objectives, for the purpose of illustrating the concepts. In addition to containing communism, the post-war strategy of the United States also had the objective of promoting a world order favorable to its interests and values. This is related to the “offensive objective” we discussed in the last paragraph: the promotion of stable democracies and market economies. For a relatively recent and abbreviated discussion of this point, see Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “The Present Danger,” *The National Interest* No. 59 (Spring 2000), esp. pp. 59-61.

We say “primarily” a collective defense organization because there was always something of a collective security dimension to NATO’s purpose, too. This is perhaps most aptly summed up in a statement attributed to the first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, that the purpose of NATO was to keep the Russians out, the United States in, and the Germans down.


That detail is left to another analysis, although some of it is sketched out in Robert H. Dorff, "Responding to the Failed State: The Need for Strategy," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol. 10, No. 3 (Winter 1999): 62-81.


The so-called “crony capitalism” in Russia may be an example of a possibly more benign form of this, with perhaps the complete collapse of Albania a much less benign form.

Dorff, “Democratization and Failed States.”

The following discussion is based on earlier arguments presented in Dorff, "Responding to the Failed State."

It is fundamentally a question of rule of law, but not solely or narrowly in the context of “law and order”, for it also includes things like “contract law.” Without the latter, for example, there will be no basis for the evolution and growth of a formal economy.

There are of course many other dimensions to this discussion of the reorientation of our strategy and the implications for the GWOT that we cannot cover here. But one with perhaps the broadest import might be the dimension related to the often heard and only partly rhetorical question: “Why do they hate us?” It is not al-Qaida that is the important “they” in this question, but the large numbers of Muslims in the world who, while probably not at all likely to take up arms against us, might very well look the other way when the al-Qaida’s of the world are living next door and plotting their next attack. “They” may hate us because we are seen as the enemy of legitimate governance and their own individual values.