



National Security Strategies and Ideological Continuity: The U.S. From Truman to Trump: A Book Review

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Received: 15 Oct 2024; Received in revised form: 18 Nov 2024; Accepted: 23 Nov 2024; Available online: 28 Nov 2024

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Abstract— *How can a nation so committed to be a leading democracy abroad struggle with inequality and unrest at home? The post-World War II era was significant for the U.S. and their powerful position in the world. By establishing significant security strategies primarily aiming to stop communism, evolved to even broader and stronger global ambitions. The transformation of U.S. strategic defense policies since World War II has profoundly shaped American foreign policy and influenced global politics. Following the most devastating war in the history of mankind, the U.S. authorities have faced numerous challenges such as the Cold War, the War on Terror, and other domestic problems while adopting new approaches towards national security and protecting its national interests. However, this pursuit of international dominance often revealed strong contradictions between America's global aspirations and its internal realities. In their monograph *From Containment to Americanism*, Ellias Aghili Dehnavi and Mohammad Alizadeh Jamal successfully show the relevance of the U.S. and their national security strategies, focusing on the transition *From Containment to Americanism*. The authors employ various methodology methods, including analytical descriptive studies, interviews with experts, and extensive library research. This multifaceted approach enables a thorough exploration of how U.S. policies have evolved over decades, shaped by both internal ideologies and external pressures. By delving into the ideological framework of Americanism, tracing its roots to foundational U.S. documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The perspective presents Americanism as a rationale for promoting democracy and freedom abroad. Through careful analysis, the authors reveal the nature of U.S. foreign policy—one characterized by expansive global ambitions supported by ideological principles, often at the expense of addressing internal challenges. By examining the historical complexities of U.S. strategies and their implications for contemporary politics, *From Containment to Americanism* reflects on the balance between America's role as a global leader and the challenges it faces domestically.*



Keywords— *Containment, Americanism, National Interest, National Security, Foreign policy, foreign policy doctrines*

I. INTRODUCTION

LITERATURE SECTION

The examination of U.S. foreign policies has received abundant attention from scholars since the outset of the bipolar world order. Many researchers have contributed to our understanding of the topic, by analyzing the historical

events from differing theoretical methods. This literature section combines other renowned scientific works related to this monograph to explore the historical context, methodological techniques, final results, and opposing views.

One of the most prominent books by McMahon (2003), explores the Cold War from diverse theoretical frameworks. This book provides a complete summary of the chronological development of the period, also, this work analyzes this time, particularly from the perspective of constructivism. The period of the Cold War is seen as a battle of notions between the two superpowers, namely the U.S. as the leader of the capitalist world and the USSR as the leader of the communist world. The battle between these two ideologies went beyond the borders of the capitalist and communist states in Europe. This ideological conflict resulted in proxy wars, massive weapon production, and the most threatening nuclear arms race. Furthermore, utilizing the theoretical frameworks such as realism and the abovementioned constructivism, the author described the actions of the superpowers based on their self-identity and misperception of threat.

In addition, in the book by Cox et al. (2013), the authors' explore the foreign policies employed by the U.S. presidents by diverse methods, such as historical contextualization, comparative analysis, and theoretical frameworks. The authors' emphasize the ideas of American exceptionalism, democracy promotion, and American imperialism. They argue that these notions played a crucial role in the decision-making processes for foreign policies. Additionally, the authors' criticize the modernization theory used by the U.S. administrations during the Cold War. To be more specific, the authors' claim that overreliance on this theory resulted in not beneficial interventions for the U.S. since the theory neglects crucial aspects like social, cultural, and historical factors which play a huge role. However, during the period from Lyndon B. Johnson to Jimmy Carter's presidency the main focus of the U.S. policies was aimed at containment rather than human rights. From Jimmy Carter and then followed by Ronald Reagan the U.S. government emphasized the idea of promoting human rights as a countermeasure to communism. The end of the Cold War opened up new avenues for promoting democracy, marking a shift in both the ideological foundation and strategic direction of U.S. foreign policy.

The collapse of the USSR marked the beginning of a new era and replacement of the previous bipolar system with a unique unipolar world order led by the U.S. After the end of the Cold War, the national security strategies changed, and the main concerns became humanitarian interventions around the world, the war on terror, and the engagement of the U.S. with international institutions.

In the book by Chomsky (2007), the author highly criticized the actions taken by the U.S. authorities after the end of the Cold War. What I mean is that in this work,

Noam Chomsky claims that the military interventions in Iraq and Kosovo were done based on geopolitical objectives rather than concerns regarding human rights violations. Additionally, the author states that the War on Terror in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq was a means to expand the military presence of American forces around the globe by violating human rights and international law. Finally, Chomsky claims that the UN is unable to do its mission, which is the promotion of peace and stability, since it is being easily manipulated by the U.S. due to its military and economic hegemony. "The United States has been engaged in a systematic campaign to impose its will on the world, often under the guise of promoting democracy and human rights." (Chomsky, 2003).

Multiple methodologies have become prominent in study initiatives of national security strategies in the United States. For instance, McMahon (2003) employed case studies, qualitative analysis, and policy analysis to gather in-depth insights into the evolution of U.S. foreign policies. Similarly, in Cox et al. (2013), the authors' utilize theoretical frameworks, historical analysis, and interdisciplinary approaches. The methodologies employed in both works, despite their differing approaches, improve our understanding of the important events and developments from the Cold War period.

To sum up, the analysis of U.S. foreign policies shows a complicated interplay of ideological frameworks, historical contexts, and methodological techniques that have shaped the nation's international engagements from the Cold War to the present. The shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world order has not only changed national security strategies but has also stimulated critical evaluations of the causes behind U.S. interventions, underscoring the ongoing tension between the promotion of democracy and the pursuit of geopolitical interests.

II. DISCUSSION SECTION

Ellias Aghili Dehnavi and Mohammad Alizadeh Jamal analyze the evolution of the U.S. National Security Strategies from the end of World War II to the Trump administration by detailing a progression of geopolitical, ideological, and economic policies. Through this comprehensive evaluation, the text undermines the self-perception of the United States as a global leader, promoting democracy and freedom worldwide. From Truman's "containment strategy" aimed at stopping the spread of communism to Reagan's more aggressive approach, a pattern emerges of America framing itself as both the *guardian* and *moral compass* of the global order. However, this approach has not been without its

contradictions and costs, as internal disparities and structural vulnerabilities still remain unaddressed.

This perception, as presented, is not without significant internal and external repercussions. For instance, Truman's containment policies were the beginning strategy for decades of Cold War conflict, symbolizing America's outward focus to counter ideological enemies like the Soviet Union. At the same time, internal effects, such as increased domestic tensions, show how foreign policy aimed at external ideological enemies can impact the nation internally, shaping American society political and cultural matters.

The text makes a crucial argument about the two-sided nature of U.S. policies: *while they assert America's role as a global superpower, they often tend to ignore domestic concerns*. For example, during Kennedy's presidency, his Alliance for Progress aimed to foster social and economic reforms in Latin America to deter communism. However, the authors suggest that this outward focus may hide social problems, showing a *repeated pattern in U.S. foreign policy*.

Additionally, during the post-Cold War period under Clinton, the absence of a clear ideological enemy led to more excessive globalization and liberal interventionism, as seen in NATO expansion and humanitarian missions. However, these policies arguably masked growing domestic issues and economic instability that would later culminate in a crisis. Yet, this period also revealed an American 'overconfidence', where international ambitions overshadowed potential structural vulnerabilities at home. The authors argue that America's self-image as a global "savior" often is two-sided, having confident leadership abroad while ignoring unresolved vulnerabilities domestically. This focus on external validation risks neglecting the pressing need for internal reform.

The Trump administration was a significant change, embracing an "America First" doctrine that prioritizes national economic and security interests over global leadership. The authors critique this as a shift away from traditional multilateralism, arguing that it weakened the U.S.'s soft power and global standing. While Trump's approach reflects the acknowledgment of the need to prioritize internal stability, it also shows the tension between nationalism and America's traditional role as an international unifier.

Could America's sense of identity be tied to always having an enemy? It's an interesting question the authors raise. By framing adversaries like the Soviet Union as existential threats, the U.S. has fostered internal social cohesion. However, as the authors suggest, this reliance on external threats risks creating a short-sighted focus that prevents

broader national self-reflection, especially in times of domestic upbringings.

The monograph also evaluates how the containment policy, particularly in the context of U.S. foreign strategy after World War II, was not only focused on military engagement, but also on economic and diplomatic efforts. This comprehensive approach shaped key alliances such as NATO. The authors critically examine how containment evolved over the decades, demonstrating that each administration adapted the policy to align with its specific goals, thus showing a continuity in American foreign policy strategy despite changes in the modern world. But is prioritizing international engagement over domestic governance a sustainable strategy for maintaining America's role as a global hegemon?

Furthermore, the authors discuss how deterrence theory and realist approaches shaped the U.S. Cold War policies. Deterrence theory, central to Eisenhower's "massive retaliation" policy, was supposed to prevent aggression through the threat of mutual destruction, maintaining nuclear balance. Realist approaches prioritize national interest and containment of Soviet influence, justifying interventions to secure U.S. hegemony. These strategies - containment, deterrence, and realism - were interconnected, with containment aiming to prevent communism, deterrence ensuring a forceful response, and realism driving global dominance.

Together, they demonstrated the U.S. as a superpower.

III. CONCLUSION

Through the evaluation, the authors emphasize that American foreign policy was not static but rather adaptable, with each administration interpreting these doctrines differently in response to contemporary challenges, thereby ensuring policy continuity across different eras. The monograph offers valuable insights to U.S. history, understanding the ongoing process of why understanding *americanism* became so important.

Americanism, as we understand it, explains a broad ideology that presents many underlying factors, which are crucial to analyze. By knowing American values, we understand the U.S. history better and clearer. The careful examination of the U.S. and how the security strategies evolved over time are an essential part of world history, as the United States influences the whole world with their principles.

However, in today's world, the emergence of non-traditional threats such as cybersecurity, global pandemics, and climate change is also important to discuss. These issues are reshaping U.S. dynamics and global

interactions, making it crucial to understand how they influence and challenge the traditional security paradigms discussed in the monograph.

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