

THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM AND THE POWELL DOCTRINE: FOUR
CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

The Vietnam War was one of the most traumatic events ever to afflict the US Military. From the ashes of this defeat, the US Military sought to renew itself. As part of this process of renewal, the US Army in particular engaged in serious soul searching as to how, and under what circumstances, the United States ought to commit itself to war. The answers that were derived from this soul searching are known collectively as the Powell Doctrine,¹ named after General Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1989-1993). The elements of the Doctrine are as follows: the need for “overwhelming” force; the need for public and Congressional support; the need for clear objectives; the need for a clear “exit strategy”; and force should only be used in the “vital national interest.”

This thesis will advance four principal arguments: first, that the evolution of the Powell Doctrine cannot be understood without reference to the US experience in Vietnam; second, that the various elements of the Powell Doctrine have a logical relationship to one another which means that the Doctrine as a whole should be considered as a single, integrated body of thought; and, third, that Colin Powell, in his *Foreign Affairs* article, is simply giving public articulation to an intellectual climate that had already become influential before his ascent to the Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.² And that, whilst the Powell Doctrine does deserve to be called a doctrine in the

¹ Also sometimes referred to as the Powell-Weinberger Doctrine.

² Colin Powell, “U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 71 (1992), pp.32-45.

military sense of the word, this is not a full explanation of the conditions Powell has laid down as they encroach upon profoundly political issues. And thus, whilst the Powell Doctrine does deserve the title “doctrine,” it is also an attempt to formulate a coherent set of principles to inform US “National Security” policy in areas that go beyond those traditionally seen as being of military concern.

The case studies that will be used in this thesis are: the first Persian Gulf War (1990-1991); US policy towards Nicaragua (1979-1984); the US intervention in the Lebanese Civil War (1982-1984); and the US reaction to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991-1995). In the conclusion of the thesis, I also deal briefly with the question of how the Powell Doctrine may relate to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Introduction

This introduction aims to do two things: first, to define the scope of the thesis; second, to determine whether the Powell Doctrine actually deserves the title of a “doctrine.” The main aims of this thesis are to give an account of where the ideas that form the Powell Doctrine came from, to understand how these ideas are logically related to one another to form the Powell Doctrine, and what the effect of the Powell Doctrine has been on US foreign policy since the end of the Vietnam War. However, what this thesis will not do is attempt to evaluate whether or not the Powell Doctrine is correct in what it says, or whether the lessons taken from Vietnam that form the Powell Doctrine were the correct lessons to have been taken. The Powell Doctrine is used as shorthand to describe a series of conditions for the use of US Military force laid down by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, shortly before his retirement. These conditions are: that the use of force ought to be overwhelming; that the use of force ought to command public and Congressional support; that force should only be used to achieve clear objectives; that force should only be used in the “vital national interest”; that US Forces should have a clear “exit strategy.”¹ This doctrine is also sometimes referred to as the “Powell-Weinberger Doctrine” (Weinberger being the Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who laid down some of these conditions in a speech to the National Press Club in November 1984).² In this

¹Colin Powell, “US Forces: Challenges Ahead,” *Foreign Affairs* 71 (1992), pp.32-45.

² The full text of Weinberger’s speech can be found at: <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2004/January%202004/0104keeperfull.pdf>.

thesis, we will use the term Powell Doctrine for two reasons: first, because Weinberger and Powell's conditions do not differ from each other in any significant way; second, because Powell served as Weinberger's principal military assistant and was one of the key authors of the National Press Club speech.

The Powell Doctrine does not spontaneously emerge in Powell's Winter 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article. With this article, what Powell did was to lend the significant public stature that he enjoyed in 1992 as probably one of the most well-known US soldiers since Eisenhower to a set of ideas which had been written about as early as the late 1970s. Indeed, in the early 1990s, Powell's standing was such that a Presidential bid along the lines of Eisenhower's successful campaign for the Republican nomination was seen as a very real possibility. Steven Stark, writing in *The Atlantic* magazine, quotes a prominent but anonymous Democratic consultant as saying, "His [Powell's] potential as a presidential candidate is mind-boggling. On paper, if he got the Republican nomination, I don't see how the Democrats could win."³ As we shall see throughout this thesis, Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article drew together in one article a set of ideas that had emerged from an intellectual climate within the US Military.

³ Steven Stark, "President Powell?", *The Atlantic*, October 1993. Full text available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/politics/policamp/powell.htm>

The ideas that come to be known as the Powell Doctrine are mentioned in a body of literature created between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s which attempted to learn the overall strategic lessons of the Vietnam War. It is important to understand that there was no systematic attempt during the 1970s to come up with anything resembling an official document that tried to pull together the strategic lessons the US Army had learned from Vietnam. As Conrad Crane puts it:

The U.S. Army's assessment of its Vietnam failure was quite different than that of the French. While a series of Vietnam studies by high-ranking officers focusing on branch performance and tactical innovations was completed in the early 1970s, the Army's primary emphasis quickly returned to the future European battlefield.⁴

What this leaves us with then, if we are looking to establish an intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine, are the memoirs of those senior officers who commanded in Vietnam and those works of Powell's contemporaries and near contemporaries published towards the late 1970s and early 1980s that attempted to spell out the lessons of Vietnam, but little in the way of an "official" response to the Vietnam War as a whole on behalf of the US Military.

⁴ Conrad Crane, "Avoiding Vietnam: The U.S. Army's Response to Defeat in Southeast Asia," *Strategic Studies Institute*, September 2002, p.2.

Those officers that held senior posts in Vietnam wrote extensively on the War both to justify their own decisions at the time and to lay down as lessons for the future. Both of the senior commanders charged with overseeing the War during its stage of escalation from 1965 to 1968, General William Westmoreland⁵ and Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp,⁶ have written extensive memoirs.⁷ Many of Westmoreland and Grant's subordinates have also written on the war, including Philip Davidson, Westmoreland's G-2 [Head of Military Intelligence], and Bruce Palmer,⁸ who commanded at Corps level and went on to serve as Vice Chief of Staff of the Army between 1968 and 1973. Douglas Kinnard only served as a Colonel during Vietnam; however, in the wake of the war Kinnard interviewed every General Officer who commanded in Vietnam from the rank of Major General upwards, and compiled the definitive survey of their experiences in Vietnam and their criticisms of US strategy in his book *The War Managers*.⁹

There is a second group of work which help form the intellectual climate which gave birth to the Powell Doctrine. These works were written by contemporaries or near contemporaries of Powell. This work was more

⁵ Westmoreland was Commander, US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) between 1963 and 1968.

⁶ Grant Sharp was Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Command (CINCPAC) between 1964 and 1968.

⁷ See William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 1st ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) and US Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998).

⁸ See Lt. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson (Ret.), *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1988), and Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984).

⁹ Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers: American Generals Reflect on Vietnam* (Hanover: Da Capo Press, 1991).

forward-looking, concentrating less on what went wrong in Vietnam and looking more intently at how the US ought to conduct military intervention and limited wars in the future. In particular, the work of Colonel Harry G. Summers, who was a classmate of Powell's at the Command and General Staff College, proved extremely influential. It is necessary to say a brief word about how Summers's book came about to understand its importance. Summers wrote the book whilst a member of the faculty of the Army War College, and was specifically tasked with writing an analysis of the failures of US strategy in Vietnam. Unlike the memoirs mentioned above, Summers was a serving Military Officer at the time of writing. As such, early drafts of Summers's work, which came to be called *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*,¹⁰ were distributed to and commented on by the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, the Army Chief of Operations and Plans, and the Commandant of the Army War College.¹¹ The original document that would become the book *On Strategy* also contained contributions by the CIA and the State Department. On its publication, *On Strategy* was incorporated into the course reading lists at both the Army War College and the Army Command and General Staff College. As such, Summers's work, much more so than the memoirs and analyses mentioned above, carries with it the authority of being at least a semi-official account of the perceived failures of US strategy in Vietnam, and has been read more widely within the US Armed Forces than the other works cited above.

¹⁰ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell, 1984).

¹¹ At the time of writing, these were Generals Edward C. Meyer, John W. Vessey (Vessey succeeds Meyer as Chief of Staff), Glenn K. Otis, and Richard G. Stilwell.

The list of works quoted above is not meant to be an exhaustive list of every published work on the Vietnam War by Military Officers. It is simply cited to make the point that, despite the lack of any official attempt to come up with a single, comprehensive explanation for US failure in Vietnam, the US Military's attempt to learn the lessons of Vietnam, and to make sure that the Vietnam experience was never repeated did not start or end with Colin Powell. We will come back to the works cited above, and others, throughout this thesis to demonstrate where the ideas that would emerge as the Powell Doctrine in 1992 came from.

We will see in the chapters dealing with the individual case studies how each element of the Powell Doctrine has its roots in work produced before Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article. However, it is necessary to briefly outline how Powell's generation of US Military Officers shared a common set of experiences and a common determination not to repeat what they saw as the mistakes of Vietnam, and thus a common determination to learn the lessons of that conflict that, on an instinctive and emotional level, meant that there was a remarkable degree of homogeneity in creating an intellectual climate that was determined never to repeat the experience of Vietnam. What we will also see is, whilst each individual element of the Powell Doctrine had its individual antecedents in work produced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we will also outline the broad issues arising from the US experience in Vietnam, which were seen as issues that needed to be addressed.

For Powell and his contemporaries, Vietnam was the defining experience of their professional lives. When talking about his role as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the First Gulf War, one of the case studies covered in this thesis, Powell had this to say about how Vietnam stayed with his generation of Military Officers: “Vietnam is running through my mind very much,” a situation he saw as applying to his contemporaries as much as to himself.¹² For Lieutenant General Frederick Franks, a contemporary of Powell’s who lost part of his leg in Vietnam, the memories of that war are still extremely fresh:

Memories of Vietnam are very sharp, clear to me, I mean with every other step I take I'm reminded of Vietnam and I remember the great soldiers that I was privileged to serve with there, those that I was in the hospital with at Valley Forge General Hospital, I remember those whose names are on the Vietnam memorial here in Washington ... no, never ... never far from my mind and especially during the Gulf War, we didn't say it to each other but I think we all felt that we're going to do it right this time.¹³

¹² “Interview with Colin Powell,” *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—9 January 1996. Full text available at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/powell/1.html>

¹³ “Interview with Frederick Franks,” *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—9 January 1996. Full text available at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/franks/5.html>

The following quotation is taken from a speech given by Lieutenant General Anthony Zini¹⁴ to a Marine veteran's conference, comparing the occupation in Iraq to Vietnam:

My contemporaries, our feelings and sensitivities were forged on the battlefields of Vietnam, where we heard the garbage and the lies, and we saw the sacrifice... We swore never again would we allow that to happen. I ask you, Is it happening again?¹⁵

Or as former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki said upon retiring from the army in 2004, "The current war [Iraq] brings me full circle to where I began my journey as a soldier" he said. "The lessons I learned in Vietnam are always with me".¹⁶

What these quotations illustrate is that, as well as remembering Vietnam, there was a conscious determination on the part of Officers who had served in Vietnam to make sure that, when their time came to occupy the senior positions within the US Military, they would not make the mistakes of the Vietnam era. So we can see now that there was a desire to learn from the experience of Vietnam. We will look in detail in the individual case study chapters how an intellectual climate came to be formed that led to each of the individual elements that led to the Powell Doctrine. However, what we can see here is

¹⁴ Former CINCCENTCOM. (Commander in Chief, US Central Command).

¹⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (Penguin Books: London, 2006). p.242.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.157.

that, even before we deal with the specific elements of the Powell Doctrine, there is a common experience that underpinned the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine.

But what were the issues that led to the formation of the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine? Whilst we will look at the intellectual climate surrounding the individual elements of the Powell Doctrine in their particular chapters, there are some more general issues that underpinning this intellectual climate that resulted in the Powell Doctrine in its entirety. The foremost question arising from the debacle of Vietnam was, how had the United States, one of the world's two foremost powers, been defeated by a comparatively small, industrially backward nation such as North Vietnam? As Harry Summers put it,

On the battlefield itself, the Army was unbeatable. In engagement after engagement the forces of the Viet Cong and of the North Vietnamese Army were thrown back with terrible losses. Yet, in the end, it was North Vietnam, not the United States, that emerged victorious. How could we have succeeded so well, yet failed so miserably?¹⁷

The second major issue underlying the entire intellectual climate that gave rise to the Powell Doctrine was, how had the war in Vietnam led to a situation

¹⁷ *On Strategy*, pp.21-22.

where the prestige and standing of the Armed Forces held in American society at large been brought to such a low ebb? Norman Schwarzkopf, even in the afterglow of victory from the Gulf War, still vividly remembers the sense of anguish within the US Officer Corps at how far the Army's standing had fallen as a result of the Vietnam War:

It was a nightmare that the American public had withdrawn its support: our troops in World War I and World War II had *never* had to doubt for one minute that the people on the home front were fully behind them. We in the military hadn't chosen the enemy or written the orders – our elected leaders had. Nevertheless, we were taking much of the blame. We soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines were literally the sons and daughters of America, and to lose public support was akin to being rejected by our own parents.¹⁸

We will look at how the individual elements of the Powell Doctrine were developed and relate to one another in the chapters dealing with the individual case studies. However, what we can see is that there are issues in the background which colour the overall intellectual climate that gave birth to the Powell Doctrine. First, there was a remarkably homogenous view that the Vietnam War was an experience that the US should never repeat, and a conscious determination among the generation of Officers that had served in

¹⁸ H. Norman Schwarzkopf, with Peter Petre, *The Autobiography: It doesn't Take a Hero* (Bantam Books: London, 1993), p.208.

Vietnam that when their time came to be in positions of senior leadership they would make sure that they had learned the lessons of Vietnam. Second, that the two fundamental questions behind any investigation into what had gone wrong in Vietnam were, how had the US been defeated by a power that, by every military and economic indicator, the US should have easily defeated, and how had that defeat led to a public confidence and trust in the Armed Forces?

This thesis will seek to advance three principal arguments relating to the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that led to it: first, that the Powell Doctrine, both in the form of Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article and the intellectual climate and debate that led to the article, cannot be understood without reference to the US Military's experience in Vietnam; second, that the various elements of the Powell Doctrine and the ideas that led to the Powell Doctrine bear an intellectual relationship to and have influence on one another and should not be analysed in isolation from one another; third, that, whilst to some extent the Powell Doctrine, as Powell articulated it in 1992, does deserve the title "doctrine" in the military sense of the word, it also goes beyond the realms of what is traditionally thought of as military doctrine and could be said to form a coherent worldview on what an appropriate national security policy for the United States ought to look like.

The thesis will look at how the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate within the US Military that led to it influenced US national security policy in a

series of case studies running from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. First, it will look at US policy towards the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991-1995) (in this case, we will be talking about the Powell Doctrine fully developed and as it was articulated by Powell in the 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article, because most of the period the case study is concerned with is after the publication of Powell's article and all of the time frame of the case study is either after the publication of Powell's article or whilst Powell is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff). Second, it will examine US policy in the first Persian Gulf War (1990-1991). In this particular case study, we will be looking at the intellectual climate that gave rise to the Powell Doctrine as Powell had not yet published his Winter 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article.

Third, it will look at US policy towards Nicaragua (1979-1984); fourth, it will examine US policy towards Lebanon (1982-1984). In both of these cases, we will be looking at the intellectual climate that gave rise to the formation of the Powell Doctrine, rather than looking directly at the Powell Doctrine itself, as both of these case studies take place well before either the publication of Powell's article or before his appointment as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Each chapter will take the following structure: first, we will look at how a particular element of the Powell Doctrine, or, depending on the individual case study, the intellectual climate that helped to bring into being that element of the

doctrine, was shaped or conditioned by the lessons the US Military took from Vietnam, and how the US Military attempted to apply these lessons to its future conduct. We will then look at how that element of the Powell Doctrine, or the intellectual climate that led to it, affected US national security policy in a particular case study. Finally, in each chapter, we will look at how one particular element of the Powell Doctrine or the intellectual climate that inspired it is related to the other elements of the Powell Doctrine.

It may seem strange to argue that the intellectual climate that gave rise to the Powell Doctrine created a body of thought, the various elements of which share a close intellectual relationship to one another and create a situation in which elements of the Doctrine serve to influence other elements of the Doctrine, and then disarticulate the analysis of each element of the Powell Doctrine, and the thinking that led to it, into separate chapters. The reason for this is that most of the existing literature on the Powell Doctrine deals with its insistence on the use of overwhelming force.¹⁹ The academic originality of this thesis lies in the fact that it does not treat the element of the Powell Doctrine calling for the use of overwhelming force as being the defining feature of the Powell Doctrine, but rather merely as one element in a larger body of thought.

¹⁹ For example see: K. J. Campbell, "Once burned, twice cautious: Explaining the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine," *Armed Forces and Society*, 24.3, (1998), Pp.357-374, and J. Record, "Force-Protection Fetishism. Sources, Consequences and Solutions," *Aerospace Power Journal*, (2000), Pp.4-11.

By giving each element of the Powell Doctrine a chapter to itself, this more accurately reflects the importance of each element of the Powell Doctrine, and the intellectual climate that created it, without privileging the element calling for the overwhelming use of force. Also, despite the fact that each chapter deals with a specific element of the Powell Doctrine, each chapter will also deal with the relationships between the various elements of the Powell Doctrine, or the climate that led to the doctrine. In those sections of the thesis where we will be examining the relationship between the different elements of the Powell Doctrine, we will be talking about the relationship between the most comprehensively articulated vision of these ideas rather than the intellectual climate that led to them. This means that we will be discussing those ideas as expressed in Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article.

We will now move on to look at whether the Powell Doctrine in the form in which Powell articulates it in his 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article actually deserves the title of a military "doctrine." The 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article is the only publicly available source in which Powell himself lays down in writing in his own words his thoughts about how the US Military should be used when it comes to military intervention. As the most complete public record of Powell's thoughts on the subject, it should be treated as the benchmark against which we should judge whether the Powell Doctrine actually deserves the title "doctrine" in the military sense of that word. Therefore, in the discussion below, when we refer to the Powell Doctrine we are referring to Powell's public iteration of it directly. The argument we will pursue here is a complex

one in that the Powell Doctrine does contain within it elements of a traditional military doctrine, but, at the same time, it also goes beyond the traditional definition given to doctrine in the military sense of the word. Doctrine has a range of different meanings across many different disciplines but, in a military context, doctrine refers to a set of rules or principles by which Commanders should operate. This does not mean that they are inflexible diktats that a Commander must stick to rigidly, but instead an attempt to ensure that when Commanders are faced with certain situations, and access to certain information, they will ask similar questions and act in roughly the same fashion. The purpose of doctrine is to ensure that the Armed Forces act as a single, coherent body, rather than as a collection of units, in a context where a single Commander cannot possibly take charge of every single unit, or make every decision on a battlefield: “*Military doctrine is what we believe about the best way to conduct military affairs.*”²⁰ Even more briefly, “doctrine is what we believe about the best way to do things.”²¹ The introduction to the US Army’s own study of how it developed doctrine in the 1990s defines doctrine as follows:

Any study of war demonstrates that while there is in warfare no one system – there is indisputably system. Truisms of military experience tell us that although every battle is unique, warfare is governed always by

²⁰ Dennis Drew and Don Snow, “Military Doctrine,” Reprinted from *Making Strategy: An Introduction to National Security Processes and Problems* (Air University Press, 1988), Chapter 11. Full text available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/readings/drew1.htm>. Italics in original.

²¹ Ibid.

select methods and principles. Yet warfare in any age is various and constantly subject to change. System and enduring principles – but also variety and new concepts – characterize the agreed body of thought about military operations that at any given time in an army is called doctrine.²²

Doctrine is usually derived from the study of history. This means essentially that doctrine is an attempt to discover and specify the overarching principles which underpin military success. Carl von Clausewitz made the following observation about history's usefulness in determining the principles of war:

Undoubtedly, the knowledge basic to the art of war is empirical. While, for the most part, it is derived from the nature of things, this very nature is usually revealed to us only by experience. Its application, moreover, is modified by so many conditions that its effects can never be completely established merely from the nature of the means.²³

There is of course an underlying tension here. Doctrine is only useful insofar as it helps the military prepare for the tasks it may be called upon to perform in the future, but doctrine is usually derived from a study of the past. Therefore, it is perfectly possible, indeed perhaps likely, that doctrine which proved useful

²² John L. Romjue, *American Army Doctrine for the Post-Cold War* (Military History Office, United States Army Training and Doctrine Command: Washington, 1996). p.6.

²³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007). p.124. *On War* was originally published in 1832. Translation Copyright 1976 Princeton University Press. This abridged edition, by Beatrice Heuser, uses the translation by Michael Howard and Peter Paret.

in a past context is not going to prove useful in the present because of changes in technology, different political circumstances, the differing nature of adversaries, and generally the fact that each war is fought in its own unique context. Therefore, in order to be of any sustained use, doctrine has to be adaptable, and those whose responsibility it is to formulate doctrine have to be sufficiently self-aware to realise that doctrine will always be in need of modification when it comes into contact with the real world:

I am tempted to declare that whatever doctrine the Armed Forces are working on, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives. It is the task of military science in an age of peace to prevent the doctrine being too badly wrong [italics in original].²⁴

So, having established what doctrine in a military sense is, and its uses and limitations, does the Powell Doctrine deserve its name? It has already become clear that it does constitute a set of principles which ought to inform the way the US acts when considering military intervention. However, the argument against referring to a Powell Doctrine is that by the nature of the questions to which the Powell “Doctrine” seeks answers, it is moving beyond the realms of military doctrine and into the realms of political decision making. Such a

²⁴ Sir Michael Howard, *The Nature of Doctrine*. Full text available at: http://www.raf.mod.uk/rafcms/mediafiles/374EE172_1143_EC82_2EDE0E7B4E01EC78.pdf.

definition would limit military “doctrine” to the realms of purely tactical and operational decision-making such as the correct way to cross rivers, and the coordination of different branches of the Armed Forces. However, this definition of doctrine is too narrow to stand on its own, because even doctrine that is related purely to tactical or operational matters has to derive from some understanding of the basic nature of what war “is,” what is its nature? What are its objectives? What is it that motivates soldiers to fight? And conversely what is it that destroys a soldier’s willingness to fight? These are questions that are too broad for us to attempt an answer in a thesis dealing with the Powell Doctrine. They are noted here simply to make the point that “doctrine” has to touch on issues that are wider than tactical or operational questions. Answers to these basic questions will determine the nature of every other piece of doctrine across the Armed Forces. This is why the answers to these basic questions are known as “fundamental doctrine,”²⁵ because answers to these questions will invariably affect everything else the Armed Forces is and does. The following quotation is taken from a textbook used by the US Army’s Staff College:

Fundamental doctrine forms the foundation for all other types of doctrine. Its scope is broad and its concepts are abstract. Essentially, fundamental doctrine defines the nature of war, the purpose of military

²⁵ Dennis Drew and Don Snow, “Military Doctrine,” Reprinted from *Making Strategy: An Introduction to National Security Processes and Problems* (Air University Press, 1988), Chapter 11. Full text available at: <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/readings/drew1.htm>. Italics in original.

forces, the relationship of military force to other instruments of power, and similar subject matter on which less abstract beliefs are founded.²⁶

As can be seen from the above quotation, military power cannot be separated either from other elements of national power or the nation's national security policy objectives. Therefore, one cannot dismiss the Powell Doctrine as military doctrine simply because it ventures onto terrain that is not seen as "military." A second argument which is related to, but different from, the first, is that the Powell Doctrine should not be referred to as a doctrine in the military sense because in the context of the US Constitution and political system, it is not the task of the military to dictate to civilians the scope and limits of US defence and foreign policy, rather it is the job of the military to follow the orders issued by the Commander-in-Chief, without question. This argument would not deny the importance of fundamental doctrine, but rather the implications of this argument are that in a democratic society it is the place of elected civilian officials to formulate fundamental doctrine, and it is the place of the military to take this fundamental doctrine and apply it. The Constitutionality of this argument on the face of it appears unimpeachable. Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war and the responsibility for the upkeep of the Armed Forces:

²⁶ Ibid.

To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water; To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years; To provide and maintain a Navy.²⁷

And Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution makes the President Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces: “The President shall be Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States.”²⁸

However, there are a number of reasons why such a strict interpretation of the Constitution, and indeed such an interpretation of the nature of democratic government, is not useful. Even leaving aside the fact that the framers of the US Constitution did not and could not be expected to anticipate the idea of formal military doctrine, and the fact that we live in an infinitely more complex world than that of 1789, the idea that in order for democracy to work the military must wait for civilians to hand fundamental doctrine to it, is flawed. First, because there is nothing in the Powell Doctrine that says, should civilians choose to ignore this then the Military should disobey orders. In fact, the professional Military would be horrified by such a stipulation. Second, the President does not hold a purely civilian office. By the terms of the

²⁷ The United States Constitution. Full text available at: <http://www.consource.org/index.asp?bid=529>.

²⁸ Ibid.

Constitution, he is also a military official; indeed, they are the highest ranking military official in the entire Armed Forces. Therefore, Presidents are in need of doctrine as much as any other military officer in terms of the need to provide some consistency in decision-making and setting priorities for the Armed Forces, otherwise the professional Military cannot draw up the kind of plans and budgets necessary to maintain a modern army. In other words, there needs to be some predictability in the decision-making process that the President as Commander-in-Chief is going to undertake so that subordinates can provide them with the information and force structure necessary to carry out military operations.

Last, the idea of civilian supremacy uninformed by military advice on issues of fundamental doctrine proceeds from the rather perverse assumption that it is a bad thing to ask the experts for their opinion on a given subject. After all, by their very nature, senior military officers have spent the greater part of their professional lives studying and preparing to fight wars. This is after all the reason for the existence of the Armed Forces in the first place. Almost by definition a civilian cannot have had this experience. Politicians, if they are to succeed in their chosen career, will need to have a much broader horizon than simply this study of preparation for war. This is not to say that, because of their superior expertise, the military alone should determine fundamental doctrine, but it should be enough to guarantee that their opinion is heard.

So does the Powell Doctrine deserve to be called “doctrine”? In the previous discussion we have established that, in order for something to be called doctrine, a set of principles is required; the Powell Doctrine has this. We have seen that doctrine is formed by the study of past operations and, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the Powell Doctrine is a reflection of the US’s experiences in Vietnam. We have also seen that, if doctrine is to be useful, it must touch on areas that are seen as “political.” Finally, we have seen that the military input into the formation of fundamental doctrine does not necessarily damage the principle of civilian control of the military in a democracy. For these reasons the Powell Doctrine does deserve the title. And to simply call it the Powell Principles or the Powell Rules would be to misrepresent the meaning of military doctrine.

However, the Powell Doctrine was certainly not formulated in a way that has become traditional for US Army doctrine to be formulated. First, doctrine is traditionally disseminated through the Armed Forces by the means of field manuals, each of which deals with specific and discrete topics. Formulation of doctrine is the responsibility of the Training and Doctrine Centre (TRADOC) based at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Here it is the responsibility of a group of specially selected Officers, normally at the rank of Colonel or above, to draft new doctrine or update previous doctrine. The drafts of any new or edited doctrine are then circulated within the Army, in particular to the training schools and operational commands. There is then a long process of debate during which a variety of Officers are invited to give their opinions and a

number of conferences or seminars may be organised to allow the widest possible range of debate to take place. At the end of this process the products of these conferences and seminars are fed back to TRADOC whose task it is to write the final definitive doctrine. Once doctrine has been issued in the form of a field manual, it becomes part of the official policy of the US Army.²⁹

Because the politico-military lessons of Vietnam were never exposed to this kind of rigorous and time-honoured scrutiny, it may seem odd to some to codify them using the term “doctrine.” However, as we can see from the foregoing discussion, “doctrine” is the only suitable term that encompasses both the scale and importance of these lessons.

So we can see that, in a sense, the Powell Doctrine is worthy of the title of “doctrine.” However, to simply label Powell’s conditions as “doctrine” and move on does not fully encapsulate their importance. The Powell Doctrine may deserve the title “doctrine,” but it is also something with implications that go beyond the realms of military doctrine. Although Powell’s conditions are laid down in the context of a discussion about when it is appropriate for the United States to use military force, they have implications that go far beyond a discussion limited to military affairs, particularly the conditions that deal with the need for public and Congressional support and call for a definition of “vital national interest.” These conditions move the Powell Doctrine into a

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of how the process of writing doctrine works, see: *American Army Doctrine for the Post-Cold War Era*, Pp. 79-104.

discussion on what role the public ought to play in national security policy decision-making, and the condition dealing with “vital national interest” implies a discussion of what role the United States, as the world’s only remaining superpower, ought to play in global affairs.

So is the Powell Doctrine a doctrine or not? The answer is that there are certainly elements of the Powell Doctrine that deserve this title, particularly those elements dealing with the need for “overwhelming force,” the need for clear objectives and a clear exit strategy, that is to say, those elements of the Powell Doctrine that have the most direct effect on the conduct of military operations certainly do deserve the title of “doctrine,” and to simply call Powell’s article rules or conditions would be to too narrowly define what we mean by doctrine in the military sense of the word. As we have seen, just because these elements of the Powell Doctrine might have political implications is not reason enough to deny them the title “doctrine,” and they go to the heart of how military force ought to be wielded. However, it is also clear that, whilst inhabiting the realm of military doctrine, the Powell Doctrine also moves beyond it into a discussion of what an appropriate national security policy for a superpower ought to be. Not only does the Powell Doctrine discuss what the most appropriate strategy for military operations ought to be, it also discusses the circumstances under which military operations ought to be considered, principally in the elements calling for overwhelming public and Congressional support, and a clear understanding that a particular intervention is in the “vital national interest” of the United States. These are clearly issues

that, whilst arguably important to formulating National Security policy, have no direct bearing on the conduct of military operations. In that sense, the Powell Doctrine can be seen as a corporate view on behalf of the US Military as to what US national security policy ought to be.

We will now move on to look at how the Powell Doctrine sits with theories of civil-military relations by reviewing the existing theoretical debates on that subject.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

This chapter will aim to place the Powell Doctrine within the existing literature on civil-military relations; the argument here will be that although the Powell Doctrine draws on some aspects of existing theoretical frameworks, the Powell Doctrine fits completely within none of them, and therefore the existing theoretical framework cannot adequately explain the appearance of the Powell Doctrine or the influence it had on US civil-military relations between 1973 and 2009. To be clear, in this context we are talking about the most authoritative public articulation of the Powell Doctrine in Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article. In this particular chapter, we are discussing the Doctrine in its fully formed state, not the intellectual climate that led to it.

Where do the concepts of the Powell Doctrine fit in the wider body of literature dealing with theoretical approaches to civil-military relationships? In order to answer this question, I will look at five texts which sum up different theoretical approaches. The first of these texts is Eliot A. Cohen's *Supreme Command*³⁰; the argument Cohen makes can be described as "civilian activist." In other words, Cohen argues that civilians should be extremely active in setting the basic strategy that military leaders will follow because, for Cohen, there is no clear distinction between war and diplomacy – one is a continuation of the other. The second text we will look at is Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier*

³⁰ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (The Free Press: New York, 2002).

*and the State*³¹; Cohen's work is in large part an explicit argument against Huntington. Huntington argues that there is a very clear distinction between civilian and military authority, and that civilians should be in charge of deciding when to use military force, but, once that basic decision has been made, the military should have authority to design strategy as they see fit in order to achieve "victory." The third and fourth texts we will look at are works by John Keegan. These are: *The Face of Battle*,³² and *The Mask of Command*.³³ Keegan is sceptical of the whole notion that individuals, be they soldiers or statesmen, can actually direct war in any meaningful sense. For Keegan, once wars begin, they acquire their own logic and their own momentum, which means that they control the actions of soldiers and statesmen, rather than the other way around. We will begin the in-depth literature review by looking at Cohen's work, as Cohen is largely writing as a respondent and a critic of the other two authors. The final work we will look at is Richard Betts's *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*.³⁴ As we shall see, Betts's chief concern is how the competition for tight budgetary resources between the various branches of the Armed Forces serves to influence doctrine and colour their advice to statesmen.

The way Cohen sets out to make his argument is by looking at four historical case studies of statesmen at war. For his case studies, he chooses Abraham

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

³² John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Cape: London, 1976).

³³ John Keegan, *The Mask of Command: A Study of Generalship*, 2nd Pimlico ed. (Pimlico: London, 2004). First American edition published in 1987.

³⁴ Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*, 2nd edition (Columbia University Press: New York, 1991). First Edition published 1977.

Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill, and David Ben-Gurion. As should be clear from his collection of case studies, Cohen is a believer in the “great man” theory of history; this holds that history is profoundly affected by the actions of certain individuals, and that their mindset, background, motives etc play the major role in determining historical outcomes. Cohen is very explicit in his belief in the great man theory of history and makes no apologies for it. In fact, part of his motivation for writing his book, as he freely admits, is to defend the reputations of the statesmen he looks at: “I confess to a certain desire to enter the lists on behalf of Churchill and his colleagues in this book.”³⁵ Furthermore, Cohen believes that modern academia in general has become too much of a separate caste, which is set apart from the people and events it is studying, and therefore overly committed to abstraction and theory rather than psychological sympathy with its subjects:

It seems to me that the scholarly disciplines of political science and, to a lesser extent, history have increasingly distanced themselves from psychological sympathy with their subjects. A belief in the greatness of statesmen puts in jeopardy theories built on descriptions of social forces or institutions, or systemic explanations such as “rational choice.”³⁶

Having laid out his basic epistemology, Cohen then moves on to describe what he calls “the normal theory” of civil-military relations, which he ties explicitly to Samuel Huntington. For Cohen, this normal theory involves the strict

³⁵ See preface to *Supreme Command*, p.xii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Pp.xii-xiii.

separation of war from politics. To describe this theory, Cohen uses the metaphor of surgery:

Officers are professionals, much like highly trained surgeons: the statesman is in the position of a patient requiring urgent care. He may freely decide whether or not to have an operation, he may choose one doctor over another, and he may even make a decision among different surgical options, although that is more rare. He may not, or at least ought not supervise a surgical procedure, select the doctor's scalpel, or rearrange the operating room to his liking.³⁷

So, for Cohen, the normal theory presupposes that there is a definitive moment where politics stops and war begins. Cohen sees this as a hopelessly flawed argument; for him, war and politics are, if not the same thing, intimately connected with one another. Cohen takes what he views as a "Clausewitzian" position on war, which is to say that war is a continuation of policy by other means. Clausewitz's view on the relationship between war and politics can be summed up in the following quotation:

Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of

³⁷ Ibid., p.4.

effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.³⁸

In other words, wars are fought for finite objectives; they are not fought for the complete annihilation of the enemy, but rather to achieve specific and discrete political goals. This being the case, the conduct of war cannot be allowed to interfere with achieving these objectives. Because politicians are the ones who set the objectives, it is therefore up to politicians to make sure that strategy does not get in the way of achieving these objectives:

The Clausewitzian view is incompatible with the doctrine of professionalism codified by the “normal” theory of civil-military relations. If every facet of military life may have political consequences...[t]he Clausewitzian formula for civil-military relations has it that the statesman may legitimately interject himself in any aspect of war-making.³⁹

Cohen’s reading of Clausewitz is problematic. Although Clausewitz believes that war is an instrument of policy, and that civilians do have a major role to play in setting objectives and strategy, it is a long way from that to saying that Clausewitz would argue that civilians could legitimately exercise control over any aspect of war-making: “War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and

³⁸ *On War*. p.34.

³⁹ *Supreme Command*. p.8.

winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts. It is a serious means to a serious end.”⁴⁰

Cohen’s argument has other major flaws; first, because he relies so heavily on “the greatness” of individuals, he is at a loss to give much useful advice to a state that is not fortunate enough to possess them. Although Cohen does acknowledge the problem, he does not provide the solution beyond saying that stronger civilian control of the military would have been a positive step in Vietnam. But, assuming that Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara do not meet Cohen’s test for greatness, he leaves the following question unanswered: how are mere mortals supposed to exercise the degree of control that “great” statesmen do? Are they supposed to imitate great men and, if so, how? Or is there some kind of different mechanism at work for “ordinary” politicians? And if there is some different kind of mechanism at work, what is it?

In relation to the Powell Doctrine, Cohen’s work is interesting, but it does not really do much to explain the Powell Doctrine. It is useful insofar as it provides a framework for analysing war and diplomacy, not as two separate phenomena, but as continuations of one another, and Cohen in his conclusion does deal with the rise of the Powell Doctrine.⁴¹ However, the problem with Cohen’s argument is that he does not apply his own logic consistently. If diplomacy and war are continuations of one another, and if, by consequence, it is proper for civilians to entangle themselves in matters of operational control,

⁴⁰ *On War*. p.27.

⁴¹ See *Supreme Command*. Pp.188-189.

then surely the same logic ought to apply in reverse, that is to say that it ought to be proper for the military to at least have its own corporate opinion on political matters. However, Cohen does not seem to see it that way. Rather, he sees the Powell Doctrine as reinforcement to the normal theory of civil-military relations, primarily because he sees the Powell's Doctrine stipulation on overwhelming force as undermining Clausewitzian logic: "‘overwhelming force’ – not appropriate force, or force adequate to meet the objectives, but ‘overwhelming force.’"⁴² Cohen also sees the changes in command structure in the 1980s as reinforcing the normal theory:

The President and the Secretary of Defense would have a single authoritative source of professional military advice, and even if the Chairman did not formally occupy a place in the chain of command (which ran, in theory, from the Secretary of Defense to Theater Commanders-in-Chief) he would, in practice, act as a conduit for military advice to the president, and relay orders from him and the secretary to the military. The "normal" theory had triumphed.⁴³

Cohen has profoundly misunderstood the processes at work here. First, by selecting one specific element of the Powell Doctrine, Cohen has completely ignored the political ramifications of the rest of the doctrine. From Cohen's point of view, he makes the Powell Doctrine seem as though it is advocating a form of total warfare which is insensitive to political needs. However, if

⁴² Ibid., p.188.

⁴³ Ibid., p.188.

Cohen were to look at the rest of the Powell Doctrine, in particular the elements that are concerned with public and Congressional support, it would seem that the stipulation for overwhelming force, far from ignoring political considerations, is actually seen as a political prerequisite because the best way to maintain public and Congressional support is for the US to achieve its objectives quickly with the minimum loss of life.⁴⁴ Furthermore, that public support is crucial if, in the context of a democracy, US policymakers are not to be forced to abandon a conflict before the US has achieved its objectives. Therefore, overwhelming force is not unrelated to specific objectives, as Cohen seems to imply; rather, overwhelming force is the prerequisite of being able to achieve an objective within the context of the US political system.

Cohen's commentary on the reforms of the Goldwater-Nichols Act is deeply flawed. First, in practical terms it did not limit the military advice the President or the Secretary of Defense could receive to simply that of the chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The chairman was now the senior *official* adviser to the President and the Secretary,⁴⁵ but there is no stipulation in the Act that says the President must only look to his official military adviser. In practice, presidents can and do look outside the official chain of command for military advice, whether that be through retired military officers, think tanks, Congress etc. The more pertinent effect of the reforms was to ensure that there was a single military voice that would be involved in taking the

⁴⁴ See Chapter Three, pp.144-145 for further discussion of the linkages between these elements of the Powell Doctrine.

⁴⁵ Cohen also ignores the fact that the Act makes explicit provision for the President to receive dissenting advice from the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, see: Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Public Law 99-433. October 1st 1986. Section 203. Full text available at: <http://www.ndu.edu/library/goldnich/goldnich.html>.

political decision whether or not to use force, and to ensure that the Chiefs of Staff could not be played off against one another as they had been in the case of Vietnam. The provision of the Act relating to the National Security Council reads as follows: “The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.”⁴⁶ What this provision effectively means is that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff is not merely a spokesman for the collective will of the Chiefs-of-Staff, but an independent and statutory member of the National Security Council, and therefore free to give an opinion on both military and political matters that might come before the National Security Council.

We will now move on to look at Samuel Huntington’s *The Soldier and the State*. The first thing to say about this book is that it was originally published in 1957, and so by definition it cannot comment directly on either Vietnam or the Powell Doctrine. However, it is still useful work for three reasons. First, because of the amount of controversy it created, to a certain extent Keegan and Cohen are both writing in response to Huntington. Second, Huntington’s work sketches both a history of the relationship between the military and civilians in the US up until the late fifties and by doing so gives us some background to the situation immediately before large scale US involvement in Vietnam began, and, third, Huntington’s theory of the ideal relationship between soldiers and

⁴⁶ Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, U.S. Code, Title 10, Subtitle A, Part I, Chapter 5, Clause 151(b). Full text available at: http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/title_10.htm.

the state has remained influential despite Vietnam and so is worth considering from its original source.

Unlike Cohen, Huntington does not subscribe to the “great man” theory of history. Rather, Huntington’s method is to trace the historical development of professional militaries through European, Japanese, and American history. Huntington has a very precise definition of what it is to be “professional.” Essentially, in order to be counted as a professional in Huntington’s view, you need to possess not only a distinct set of skills, but also a distinct outlook and an explicit sense of belonging to a profession. He seems to imply that a profession carries with it a unique set of values, which distinguish it from society at large:

The members of a profession share a sense of organic unity and consciousness of themselves as a group apart from laymen. This collective sense has its origins in the lengthy discipline and training necessary for professional competence, the common bond of work, and the sharing of a unique social responsibility.⁴⁷

This definition of professionalism forms one of the key bases of Huntington’s argument. A large part of *The Soldier and the State* is taken up with, first, proving that the military is a “profession” in Huntington’s sense of the word, and second, in tracing how the modern military evolved to these standards of professionalism. In fact, Huntington goes so far as to almost see the modern

⁴⁷ *The Soldier and the State*. p.10.

soldier as a member of some sort of warrior caste, set apart from the rest of society:

He [the professional soldier] normally lives and works apart from the rest of society; physically and socially he probably has fewer nonprofessional contacts than most other professional men. The line between him and the layman or civilian is publically symbolized by uniforms and insignia of rank.⁴⁸

Huntington sees this level of separation as a positive sign because, unlike Cohen, Huntington sees a sharp separation between diplomacy and war. For Huntington, the ideal civil-military relationship is one in which the civilians make the decision when to go to war and what objectives to fight for, while the military is given a free hand in designing strategy to achieve these objectives. This is not to say that Huntington is naïve enough to suppose that civilian policymakers and the military can operate in two distinctly separate spheres without the two ever interacting with one another. Rather, it is to say that Huntington has a clear view on where final responsibility for different categories of decision should rest: “The military profession is expert and limited ... The essence of this relationship concerns the relative scope of competence of the military expert and political expert or statesman.”⁴⁹ The limits that Huntington talks about are in his view limits which are imposed by what he sees as a mindset peculiar to military officers. For Huntington, the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.70.

prerequisite of professionalism, in a military sense, is a tendency to see politics almost exclusively through the prism of military security. For Huntington, the military officer is by nature a conservative, with necessarily limited horizons which have been reinforced at the higher levels of military command by decades of training and preparation for war: “The statesman furnishes the dynamic, purposive element to state policy. The military man represents the passive, instrumental means. It is his function to warn the statesman when his purposes are beyond his means.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, Huntington sees that any attempts to alter this conservatism would inevitably lead to the de-professionalisation of the military: “...the military acquire substantial political power only by sacrificing their professionalism and adhering to the values and attitudes dominant within the community.”⁵¹ This being the case, the ideal way for the military to maintain a higher level of professionalism would be to lead an existence entirely separated from that of wider society. Although Huntington sees a degree of this, in practice he realises that it is not possible for the military to absolutely cut itself off from the rest of society. Huntington therefore sees the division of responsibility laid out earlier, as a means of achieving what he calls an “equilibrium,” between on the one hand a higher level of professionalism, and on the other hand the fact that the military does have to deal on some level with the rest of the society which it is supposed in the final analysis to defend.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Pp.68-69.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.94.

Before moving on to outline some of the flaws in Huntington's argument and its relationship to the Powell Doctrine, it is interesting to note in passing that Huntington saw the US as being particularly slow to adopt a professional military ethic. He puts this down to two main factors. These factors are the physical isolation of the US from great power competition throughout most of its history, and the particularly strong role that liberalism has played in shaping US political thought and practice:

From the birth of the Republic through the Second World War liberalism and the Constitution were the relatively unchanging environmental constants of American civil-military relations ... American awareness of the role of power in foreign politics was dulled by the absence of external threats.⁵²

There are a number of major criticisms of both the theoretical framework which Huntington adopts, and also of the political implications that his theory of civil-military relations would have if it were consistently applied.

The major theoretical implication of Huntington's work is that it is extremely Eurocentric. What we mean by this is that Huntington effectively takes a European and more particularly a German model of civil-military relations and seems to believe that this particular model developed to meet specific political and cultural needs is an ideal that should be applied to all societies at all times. Huntington is so well disposed towards the German general staff system as it

⁵² Ibid., Pp.143-145.

evolved between 1870 and 1914 that he carries his praise almost to the point of hagiography: “Imperial civil-military relations between 1871 and 1914 reflected an extraordinary degree of objective civilian control and military professionalism.”⁵³ Even leaving aside the fact that it has been argued that this system played a major role in causing the First World War, it is highly debatable whether a system of civil-military relations founded in the late nineteenth century to serve the needs of an essentially conservative monarchy would be the most appropriate form for civil-military relations in a twentieth century liberal democracy. This brings us on to the potentially negative implications that Huntington’s theory would have were it to be applied consistently in practice. The idea of treating the armed forces as some kind of separate caste from the rest of society may not be particularly helpful, either for the armed forces, or for society. In the case of the armed forces, the sense of isolation that Huntington seems to call for may lead them to have little sympathy for the political or moral consensus that holds in the societies they are supposed to defend. This lack of sympathy runs a serious risk of undermining the willingness of soldiers to sacrifice their lives in defence of a society or a system of beliefs which they do not share, that they may not be sympathetic with: “Today, having dissolved any connection between claims to citizenship and obligation to serve, Americans entrust their security to a class of military professionals who see themselves in many respects as culturally and politically set apart from the rest of society.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., p.99.

⁵⁴ Andrew J. Bacevich. *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005). Pp.29-30.

If Huntington's theory was carried to its logical extreme, professional soldiers would have completely isolated themselves from this system of belief the minute they reached adulthood and decided on a career. The inverse of this is also likely to be true. If society has no means of regularly interacting with the military, it is highly unlikely that society would develop any kind of understanding or sympathy for, the peculiarities of military life. This may lead to a situation where society views its soldiers as members of some kind of strange cult whose needs and opinions need not concern them. Retired US Army Colonel and military theorist Andrew Bacevich sums up the danger inherent in Huntington's argument with the following observation: "As with their favourite professional football team, Americans cheer the troops on with verve and enthusiasm. Increasingly, however, they have about as much in common with real warriors as they do with the gridiron warriors inhabiting a typical NFL locker room."⁵⁵

So, having looked at some general criticisms of Huntington's theory, where does the Powell Doctrine fit into it? In a sense this is of course an unfair question, as Huntington's work precedes even the earliest hints of the Powell Doctrine by a good ten years. Nevertheless, Huntington was, in at least one sense, able to anticipate the Powell Doctrine insofar as his theory acknowledges the fact that being a soldier is not just another job, but instead a distinct social and professional vocation which tends to impart certain values to its practitioners. As we have seen in the Introduction, one of the major driving elements behind the formation of the Powell Doctrine was that the experience

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.28.

of Vietnam left so many Officers with a remarkably homogenous view of what the US did wrong in that war, and what it should do to correct these errors in the future. This level of homogeneity could only have been reached among a group of people who already shared a set of underlying values and assumptions about how the world does and should work.

Where Huntington's theory of civil-military relations and the Powell Doctrine radically part company is on the issue of military involvement in what Huntington would conceive of as political decisions. That is, when to go to war and for what objectives. As we have already mentioned, Huntington sees this as the prerogative of civilians, the Powell Doctrine sees these questions as ones that the military had to be involved in and indeed, cannot possibly avoid. The Powell Doctrine simply does not recognise and is not prepared to accommodate Huntington's insistence that you can separate diplomacy and military action into two separate but overlapping spheres; rather the Powell Doctrine would see them as not just overlapping but inextricably linked to one another. For instance, when the Powell Doctrine asks, Is there public and Congressional support for military intervention?, this has strayed far from what Huntington would conceive as the military sphere. Yet, for the Powell Doctrine, such questions inevitably have military consequences. For if the public and Congress do not support military action, for how long will they pay the taxes to support it, how long will it be before the public start to protest against military action, thus undermining both the morale of the troops and the public's respect for the Armed Forces as an institution. The Powell Doctrine is acutely aware of the fact that civilian policymakers come and go but the

military has to live with the consequences of the decisions they take. Therefore, from the point of view of the Powell Doctrine, the military has to take a long-term view of its own relationship with wider American society; the Armed Forces will not be funded and will not be respected, if the public are against a particular military operation. As Bacevich puts it,

The message [the Powell Doctrine as Bacevich describes it] itself - establishing specific criteria to govern decisions regarding the use of force – was the uniformed military's. Those who actually devised it did not direct it at any particular official. Nor did they wish to confine its application to a particular moment or circumstance... Any decision to intervene was to require policymakers first to advance a plausible case for meeting all of these tests. The failure to do so was to constitute a de facto veto.⁵⁶

We will now move on to look at the theory developed by John Keegan. Although, in the case of Keegan, anti-theorist might be a better description, Cohen in rather pungent language describes Keegan as a “strategic nihilist.”⁵⁷ What Cohen means by this is that Keegan, and those like him, reject the Clausewitzian idea that force is a rational instrument employed to achieve political ends. For Keegan, the use of force may start out that way, but in the heat and chaos of battle, any notion of force having a political objective, or any meaningful relationship to politics, is simply fanciful. For Keegan, once men

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.48.

⁵⁷ See *Supreme Command*. p.234.

are actually engaged in the business of killing one another, and fearing being killed, then force is an end in itself and the objective, if there can be said to be one, is survival of oneself and one's comrades: "Ordinary soldiers do not think of themselves, in life and death situations, as subordinate members of whatever formal military organization it is to which authority has assigned them, but as equals within a very tiny group – perhaps no more than six or seven men."⁵⁸

For Keegan, the fatal flaw of all writing on military affairs (presumably including his own as John Keegan has never been involved in, or witnessed, a battle firsthand), is that any account written after the fact, almost by definition, cannot recapture the chaos, terror or any of the other million emotions that would have been experienced by the participants. What accounts of battles written after the fact give us, is a neat chronology of events, each proceeding one after the other. But the reality is that, for the participants, there is no such logic. So what we as historians and readers end up with is an essentially sterile account of an event that has never actually taken place because what we read bears no reality to the event as it was lived by the participants. Keegan faults traditional military history for not focusing on the "how" of battles. By this, he means not simply describing what happened, but the processes, both physical and psychological, by which it actually happened. For Keegan, military history as an art is a hopeless oversimplification of the realities of war: "It sounds unbelievably complicated; indeed, it reads like something from a military

⁵⁸ *The Face of Battle*. p.53.

Kama Sutra, exciting, intriguing, but likely to have proved a good deal more difficult in practice than it reads on the printed page.”⁵⁹

In *The Face of Battle*, Keegan essentially sets himself the task of trying to close the gap between the realities of battle as he perceives it, and traditional military history. Strictly speaking, Keegan’s work has no direct impact on doctrine, or the relations between politics and combat. However, his description of combat and the way soldiers react to it has profound implications for any serious study of the relationship between force and politics because the essence of Keegan’s argument is that there is no relationship. For Keegan, combat is simply too confused and too dangerous for either the men directly involved to care about the larger reasons why they might be fighting, but just as critically, even higher elements of command much further removed from immediate danger, cannot hope to control, or even marginally influence events, simply because in the context of the battlefield it is too difficult to know what is happening. Therefore, the implication of Keegan’s argument is that Commanders do not control events to any great degree, but that events control them. Take for example his account of the Battle of the Somme, and in particular why the British continued to attack even after the slaughter of their initial attack: “But most important of all was the simple ignorance of what was happening which prevailed almost everywhere on the British side of no-man’s-land throughout most of the day.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, this ignorance for Keegan is not limited to the Somme, but is a universal characteristic of all complex

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.44.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Pp.256-257.

human action because the more human beings try to anticipate events and plan for them, the greater the level of complexity becomes and, consequentially, more and more things become likely to go wrong: “The effect of these reassurances was to complicate the plan. And the complication of a plan which would depend for its success on the smooth interaction of a very large number of mutually dependent elements invited its frustration.”⁶¹ This has profound implications for the Powell Doctrine or any type of doctrine which asserts that military force has political utility. If the true nature of war is the chaotic maelstrom that Keegan describes, then there is no way that force can be calibrated to achieve any particular discrete objective because commanders from the highest political authority downwards are, once war starts, prisoners to events that Keegan would argue they cannot control. If doctrine as a concept is to have any value, it has to reflect the reality of the situation that soldiers and commanders find themselves in. If it does not, then doctrine is nothing more than an intellectual construct pieced together after the fact as an attempt to give logical coherence to illogical actions.

So what then for Keegan is the role of a Commander amongst this kind of chaos? Furthermore, is there any point to having a Commander when, according to Keegan, what motivates soldiers in combat is their own survival. In *The Mask of Command*, Keegan supplies his own answer. This book is a study of the art of Generalship using case studies from Alexander the Great to Adolf Hitler. For Keegan the role of the Commander has changed as the technology and lethality of battle has changed. Nevertheless, there are some

⁶¹ Ibid., Pp.261-262.

common characteristics to the Commanders Keegan has chosen to look at. For Keegan the first duty of a Commander seems to be to set an example to the men under him, and that in turn means that the Commander must be a reflection and an example of the values of the society he serves. For example, when discussing Alexander the Great, Keegan makes the point that Alexander was essentially leading a warrior society which placed heavy emphasis on notions of personal honour and bravery. This being the case, Alexander was required to set the example for his army to follow: “I should feel ashamed after crossing the sea from Europe to Asia so easily if this little stream should hinder us... I consider it unworthy either of the Macedonians or of my own brisk way with danger.”⁶²

The second key feature for a successful Commander from Keegan’s point of view is the imagination to fill in the enormous gaps in knowledge that the chaos of battle described above inevitably creates. For Keegan, the truly great Commander must have an almost sixth-sense, being able to picture for himself what is going on and what the relative positions of friendly and enemy forces are. When discussing the Duke of Wellington, Keegan makes the following observation,

The Duke was lying down (a favourite posture) and began a very earnest conversation. [We] were preparing to leave the Duke, when he says “Oh, lie still”. After he had conversed for some time with Sir G. Murray (the

⁶² John Keegan. *The Mask of Command: A Study of Generalship* (London: Pimlico, 2004). p.43.

chief of staff), Murray took out of his sabretache his writing materials and began to write the plan of attack for the whole army. When it was finished, so clearly had he understood the Duke, I do not think he erased one word. He says, “My Lord, is this your desire?” It was one of the most interesting scenes I ever witnessed. As Murray read the Duke’s eye was directed with his telescope to the spot in question. He never asked Sir G. Murray one question, but the muscles of his face evinced lines of the deepest thought. When Sir G. Murray had finished the Duke smiled and said, “Ah, Murray, this will put us in possession of the fellow’s lines.”⁶³

The simple point that Keegan is making with this rather convoluted quotation is that Wellington had the unnatural ability to picture exactly where his army would be deployed, where the French army would be deployed and the entire course of how he wished the battle to run, without even the aid of a map. If the quotation is accurate, this is a truly remarkable feat, for not only had Wellington envisioned what his own army would do, but also, in his own head and without any apparent reference to anybody else, he imagined what his opponent would do over the same ground.

The third consistent quality of a great Commander that Keegan highlights is the ability to choose skilled subordinates that a Commander can have total confidence in, and who have total confidence in their Commander. Keegan makes the following observation in the context of his discussion of the command style of Ulysses S. Grant:

⁶³ Ibid., p.137.

What Grant had done, on his swift promotion from command of the 21st Illinois to rank as brigadier-general, was to cobble together a staff of men with whom he felt most comfortable, most of them from Galena, Illinois, where he had worked in his father's shop, all of them with a background in small-town business or politics, none of them with any military experience at all.⁶⁴

This quotation demonstrates two things. First, that Grant was judging the qualities of the people around him on the basis of their character rather than on their formal qualifications. Again, as with Wellington's imagination, Grant's judgement of character therefore is largely based on his own instinct and experience, rather than any predetermined set of rules, but also that Grant chose his staff in order to reflect the composition of the army he commanded. Keegan comments on Grant's procedure for selecting a staff that it, "tells us more about the total unreadiness of Americans in 1861 to wage a great war. Grant might have assembled a better staff had he cast his net wider than Galena main street. But it would have been a staff better in degree than in kind."⁶⁵

Keegan's argument about the virtues of command essentially takes us in a full circle back to Cohen's argument about the nature of command. Because, however much they disagree on the political nature and utility of war, Cohen and Keegan are in complete agreement over one thing, that the most successful

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.195.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Pp.195-196.

commanders are “great men,” that is to say, they are people endowed with particular qualities of intellect or temperament that could not be taught, but rather are unique to that individual. The upshot of this line of reasoning is to come close to rejecting the very idea of doctrine, for a set of doctrines cannot hope to instill the gifts of temperament or intellect that great men require, and for great men doctrine is superfluous, for such people need no such rules, their own innate abilities will see them succeed. From this line of argument, one can infer several important points regarding the usefulness of doctrine that, although Keegan does not explicitly state, do flow from his logic. Keegan would have to not only reject the Powell Doctrine, but any attempt at doctrine on two levels. First, because doctrine, as a set of procedures for war, is attempting to impose order on something that Keegan sees as, by its very nature, chaotic. Second, because doctrine, by prescribing a method to command armies, would inevitably prevent what Keegan sees as the great commanders, from rising to prominence, as doctrine would act as a constraint upon their natural genius.

The final book we will look at is Richard Betts’s *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*. In Betts’s own words, the objective of the book is to establish “the sources and nature of military attitudes on the resort to force, trends in military influence, and the degree of politicization of military advice.”⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this work has little to say directly on the subject of the Powell Doctrine, although it is briefly covered in the epilogue to the second edition. However, there are substantial problems with Betts’s description of the Powell Doctrine

⁶⁶ *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*, p.231.

and the implications that he draws from this description. We will return to those in due course.

Betts ploughs a completely different furrow to either Cohen or Keegan, and although he starts from some of the same basic premises as Huntington, he ends up coming to substantially different conclusions. Betts has no truck with Cohen's romantic notions about the great men of history. For Betts, the opinions of military leaders are shaped by a wide variety of different impulses. In his book, Betts covers a range of different factors conditioning military advice from inter-service rivalry, the possession of certain capabilities, prejudice and personal experience, and also the fact that military decision-makers in Washington are the ultimate recipients of information that has had to travel great distances through various different bureaucratic channels and layers. We will look at each of these factors in turn, how they relate to the other authors we have looked at, and what their implications for the Powell Doctrine might be.

We will begin by looking at Betts's argument about inter-service rivalry. Unlike Huntington or Cohen, Betts does not see the military as a single, cohesive body. In fact, for Betts, "military" is a spectacularly inaccurate term for describing different agencies who are constantly struggling against each other for access to finite resources, most commonly money: "it is necessary to understand the interaction of organizational interests (status, force levels, and missions) and ideologies (strategic and tactical doctrines) in the four

services.”⁶⁷ In other words, the different armed services are likely to offer advice that furthers their own agenda in terms of gaining greater access to funds and greater prestige. For instance, Betts finds no coincidence in the fact that during the early part of the Cold War the air force would almost invariably offer strategic bombing as the solution to any problem: “Organizational interests and doctrinal radicalism fed on each other. To make strategic bombing the dominant form of warfare required autonomous status, and the claim to autonomy was justified by the logic of the strategy.”⁶⁸

In a sense, this argument backs up Cohen’s point about the need for a strong civilian leadership in order to arbitrate between the services and if necessary overrule them on the setting of strategic priorities. However, looked at from another angle, Betts’s argument actually undermines Cohen. If Betts is correct, then one would assume that, in the context of a military-industrial complex, the job of setting strategic priorities would be beyond any one person, even the kind of genius that fascinates Cohen.

We will move on now to look at Betts’s argument about the roles that personal prejudice and the desire for advancement can play in skewing military advice. For Huntington, military life tends to socialise people towards a kind of Burkean Conservatism that stresses patriotism, selflessness, and a generally ascetic lifestyle. For Betts, while there may be some truth in this argument, military officers are still human beings. They still want to advance their

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.116.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.116.

careers, and are likely to try and do this by anticipating the wishes of those above them in the chain of command, and offering advice and perhaps more importantly information, which is likely to please their superiors. To illustrate his point, Betts relates a story of a colonel briefing Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on a trip to Vietnam in 1965:

During a visit by McNamara to the field in 1965, for example, a marine colonel was giving a conventional briefing that left the secretary impatient. McNamara interrupted and interpreted the briefing in his own statistical terms. The colonel immediately perceived what McNamara wanted and spontaneously changed the script of the briefing, expressing everything in terms of numbers and percentages.⁶⁹

Note that Betts has not said the colonel has lied, or that he has presented inaccurate information, merely that he has picked up on what his audience wanted and given it to them. This has profound implications for the relationship between professional soldiers and civilians, particular at the higher levels of command, where promotions are largely decided by civilians. These implications are particularly damaging for the arguments of Cohen and Huntington. From Cohen's point of view, if Betts is right, this tendency to provide an audience with what they are looking for drives a stake through the heart of his argument. Cohen's great leaders are ultimately as reliant as anybody else on the information that others give them and, being humans themselves, are liable to give off all kinds of cues as to the kind of answers and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.186.

information they are looking for. Again, if what Betts is saying is true, Huntington's argument is in severe trouble. Huntington's whole argument is based around the idea that the best way to ensure civilian control of the military whilst at the same time maintaining military effectiveness is to have civilians make the decision about when to use force, but leave all decisions as to the application of that force up to military professionals. As Betts points out, "Careerist motives increase in wartime when the military expands and promotions are rapid."⁷⁰ Therefore, what Huntington sees as Conservatism on the part of the military with regards to the likelihood of war could equally be seen as a careerist impulse.

This argument also has quite profound implications for Keegan's anti-doctrinal arguments. If one combines Keegan's and Betts's arguments, what one is left with is the inescapable conclusion that doctrine is simply a device through which the military renders war comprehensible to those that have not experienced it.

The Powell Doctrine could be seen as a kind of internal correction mechanism for the military to overcome the innate temptation of telling civilian policymakers what they want to hear. By posing a series of questions before military intervention is undertaken, effectively what the Powell Doctrine does is to throw the need for information back at civilian policymakers, putting the emphasis back on civilian policymakers to provide the military with certain information and assurances. Also, by adopting this doctrine the military has

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.186.

subtly altered the careerist impulse that ambitious officers would feel. Most military promotions are not made by civilians but by superior officers. This being the case under the Powell Doctrine, the officers that are most likely to be rewarded are those that do not give civilians the easy answers they are looking for.

We will now move on to look at Betts's argument about how the position of certain capabilities shapes the advice that military officers are likely to give. Betts's argument here is extremely simple: once the military have the capability to do something, they are more likely to recommend that this capability be used; conversely, they are extremely unlikely to give advice that would require a capability that the military does not currently possess. In making his argument, Betts quotes Graham Alison:⁷¹ "Capabilities created to increase the government's options by generating information and alternatives that would otherwise be unavailable, also, and of necessity, create interests in, and lobbies for, the use of these capabilities."⁷²

This argument to some extent parallels Huntington's in that both of them see the military perspective as being an inherently cautious one which is always looking for the maximum variety of possible capabilities and at the same time being cautious in offering advice that does not strain the military beyond its capabilities.

⁷¹ Betts's argument is very much a military application of Graham Alison's theory of "bureaucratic politics." See Graham T. Alison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1971).

⁷² *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises*. p.95.

However, this argument is an interesting one to relate to the Powell Doctrine. As we shall see time and again throughout this thesis, despite the fact that US military capabilities were amongst the best, if not the best in the world, the US military consistently gave advice that would limit the use of that capability to a very narrowly defined set of circumstances. If Betts's argument is correct then the Powell Doctrine is a massive anomaly.

We will now move on to deal with Betts's very brief direct engagement with the Powell Doctrine. Betts's argument surrounding the Powell Doctrine is fundamentally flawed, not because he misunderstands what the doctrine says, but because he misunderstands its implications. For Betts, the Powell Doctrine is the US Military attempting to remove itself more or less completely from the political arena:

...if anything, the American military sought to free itself of any responsibility for deciding what commitments were necessary or justifiable, and – as the Weinberger Doctrine indicated most clearly – they demanded that they not be called upon to fight unless the body politic and those officials who were responsible were united on the issue of necessity⁷³.

Betts has the Powell Doctrine completely backwards here. By insisting on the criteria laid out earlier in this thesis, the US Military is not abdicating political responsibility, it is taking it. Surely by laying out a set of criteria to judge when

⁷³ Ibid., p.231.

US forces should be committed is by definition a comment on the issue of necessity. If situations do not meet those tests then by the terms of the Doctrine it is not justifiable (to use Betts's words) to use military force in that situation. Surely a military looking to free itself of any responsibility for deciding what commitments were necessary or justifiable would not have bothered with anything like the Powell Doctrine but would simply have accepted the idea that a soldier's job is to go where they are ordered by civilian authority. But instead, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the US Military since Vietnam has consistently attempted to define and limit the options available to civilian policymakers to those in line with the Powell Doctrine.

All of the theories we have looked at in this chapter have something to say in devising an explanation for the Powell Doctrine, certainly Cohen's emphasis on the inescapably political objectives of war, and Huntington's idea of the military profession as a separate social identity. Betts's idea of the military officer as a careerist also helps explain why something like the Powell Doctrine is needed as a corrective to limit the temptation of military officers to give the answers they think civilians want to hear. While Betts, Huntington and Cohen all contribute some insights into understanding the Powell Doctrine, none of these theories can entirely explain its emergence and prominence during the 1980s and 1990s. The theories we have looked at in this chapter all contribute something towards our understanding of the Powell Doctrine and its wider place in the history of civil-military relations in the United States. However, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the Powell Doctrine was focused less on any theory of civil-military relations than it was on trying to assimilate what

the US Military considered to be the lessons of its experience in Vietnam, and also the Powell Doctrine was trying to come to terms with the effect the Vietnam War had on wider American society.

In the next chapter we will begin to look at the substantive elements of the Powell Doctrine. We will start by looking at the element which calls for military force to only be used in the “vital national interest”.

Chapter 2 - Force Should Only be Used in the “Vital National Interest”

Shortly after the war in Croatia began, the Yugoslav Army’s high command commissioned a study of likely international responses to the war...In a key contribution to this issue, Milan Radakovic summarised the army experts’ consensus “that there was little reason to expect international armed intervention in Yugoslavia. That conclusion was based on the recognition that the EC countries, through the Western European Union, could not engage in meaningful military operations without U.S. support, which, because the United States was not significantly involved, was lacking.”¹

In this chapter, the case study we will investigate is the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, particularly that in Bosnia-Herzegovina² between 1991 and 1995. This war will also form the case study for the chapter on the part of the Powell Doctrine stressing the need for an exit strategy.³ This first chapter will try to place US policy towards Bosnia in the context of perceived issues of national interest broader than the conflict in Bosnia alone. We will then move on to look at how the different concepts and issues surrounding the idea of national interest that we describe relate to other elements of the Powell Doctrine, specifically the preference for the use of overwhelming force, the need to gain

¹ Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War*, Second Edition (Westview Press: Oxford, 1996), p.244.

² Hereafter referred to as “Bosnia”.

³ See Chapter Six.

and hold Congressional and public support, the need for clear objectives, and the need for an exit strategy.

In this chapter, when referring to the case study, it is appropriate to refer to the Powell Doctrine, as this case study largely takes place after the publication of Powell's 1992 article in *Foreign Affairs*, and, through the brief period of the case study that takes place before the publication of the article, Powell, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was in a position to influence national policy directly in line with the ideas put forward in the article. However, in talking about where the idea that the use of force ought to be in the "vital national interest" came from, we will look at the intellectual climate and those authors that influenced Powell's thinking, particularly Douglas Kinnard and Harry Summers. But first we will look at why the perception grew within the US Military that the Vietnam War was not in the United States's "vital national interest." By doing this we will be able to see more clearly what lessons regarding the US's "vital national interest" the US Army took from its experience in Vietnam.

The argument we will pursue here is that at various times during the Vietnam War, the Johnson Administration seemed to be unsure as to whether the preservation of an independent South Vietnam was, or was not, in the vital interest of the United States. In effect, the Johnson Administration committed the United States to war without having made a clear and unambiguous decision that the preservation of South Vietnam, in and of itself, was worth the sacrifice of American lives. This ambiguity is underlined by the fact that

relatively senior Administration officials were often unsure how to explain the war to the American public. The following quotation is an extract from a memorandum to the Secretary of State written by the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs:

A public statement, either Presidential or on a high State Department level, should spell out some of the guidelines which will motivate our future actions in Viet-Nam. But this look into the future need not form the bulk of such a statement. Instead, the statement should be dominated by a simple, direct restatement of U.S. policy. This restatement should outline the reasons why we are in South Viet-Nam.⁴

This memorandum was written four years after President Kennedy decided to send large numbers of military advisors to South Vietnam, and after the Johnson Administration had already made the decision in principle to bomb North Vietnam. The fact that after this memorandum had been written senior Administration officials, including the President himself, did attempt to lay out various rationales for the war should in no way disguise the fact that, five years after the US began to dramatically step up its involvement in Vietnam, an official as senior as an Assistant Secretary of State should feel the need to point out that the public did not understand the reasons for US involvement in the war. Johnson did try and address this concern through a series of speeches, the most famous of which was his address to a graduating class at Johns Hopkins

⁴ Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Greenfield) to Secretary of State Rusk. Washington February 16th 1965. Department of State, Central Files. POL 27 VIET S. Full text available at: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/121_135.html.

University. In this speech Johnson's motivation for being in Vietnam seems clear:

We are there [South Vietnam] because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Viet-Nam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Viet-Nam defend its independence.⁵

However, in private Johnson was far less sure about the reasons for American involvement in Vietnam: "President Johnson: Well, I know we oughtn't to be there [Vietnam], but I can't get out. I just can't be the architect of surrender."⁶

What Johnson means by "architect of surrender" is that whatever the merits of US intervention in Vietnam, the US cannot be seen as losing the war in Vietnam without risking the credibility of its alliance commitments around the world. As we shall see, this was a line of argument pushed strongly by Johnson's Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs John McNaughton.

⁵ President Lyndon B. Johnson's Address at Johns Hopkins University. "Peace Without Conquest". April 7th 1965. Full text available at:
<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650407.asp>.

⁶ Telephone conversation between President Johnson and Eugene McCarthy on the Assassination of Dgo Dinh Diem, February 1st 1966. Conversation Number: WH6602.01. For full text and audio see:
http://tapes.millercenter.virginia.edu/clips/1966_0201_lbj_mccarthy_vietnam.swf.

The argument that will be made here is that there was never a single agreed rationale for the war, and that whilst publicly the United States's objective was the preservation of an independent South Vietnam, in private, within the upper reaches of the Johnson Administration the preservation of South Vietnam was not universally seen as a non-negotiable objective of the war. As we shall see, the Johnson Administration broke down into competing camps with different views as to the underlying reasons behind US involvement in Vietnam, and also different interpretations as to what the stakes of the war were for the United States. Crucially, these were not arguments that were resolved before the US committed itself to war, but arguments that ran right the way through the Johnson Administration's term in office, at the end of which the US had over half a million troops in Vietnam. Put another way, the United States had committed half a million men to battle without having an agreed upon reason for why they had done this.

Particularly within Robert McNamara's Department of Defense, there was a sizeable and influential group of officials, the most prominent of whom was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton who argued that it would simply be enough for the US to have fought a war in southeast Asia to underline the credibility of its commitment to combating the spread of Communism in Asia. For McNaughton, the ultimate outcome of the war was almost immaterial, so long as the United States had demonstrated that it had done everything possible, within reason, to preserve South Vietnam that would be enough. The following quotation is taken from a paper McNaughton co-authored with Assistant Secretary of State William

Bundy. This paper was written as part of a major policy review carried out between October 1964 and January 1965. This end product of this review was the decision to commence the systematic bombing of targets in North Vietnam:

1. To hold the situation together as long as possible, so that we have time to strengthen other areas of Asia.
2. To take forceful enough measures in the situation so that we can emerge from it, even in the worst case, with our standing as the principal helper against Communist expansion as little impaired as possible.
3. To make clear to the world, and to nations in Asia particularly, that failure in South Vietnam, if it comes, was due to special local factors – such as bad colonial heritage and a lack of will to defend itself – that do not apply to other nations.⁷

Opposing McNaughton, and increasingly, Secretary of Defense McNamara, were the Joint Chiefs of Staff who argued that once any war began, its objectives should be the defeat of the enemy. Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay summed up the Chiefs' view with the following observation: "You can't get a little bit pregnant... Once you get into this, you're into it."⁸

They saw McNaughton's theory as adding up to nothing more than fighting a war for nothing more than the sake of fighting a war, and that struck the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a corporate body as profoundly immoral. LeMay's successor,

⁷ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty. Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (Harper Perennial: New York, 1998). p.185.

⁸ Mark Perry, *Four Stars. The Inside Story of the Forty-Year Battle Between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and America's Civilian Leaders* (Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 1989). p.146.

General John McConnell, described his feelings on the decision to declare certain targets in North Vietnam off limits to American bombing in the following terms. "I can't tell you how I feel. I'm so sick of it... I have never been so goddamn frustrated by it all... I'm so sick of it."⁹ Indeed it can be seen as one of the contributing factors of bringing the Chiefs to the point of mass resignation by mid 1967.¹⁰

There were also those such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk who saw the war in Vietnam through the prism of 1930s Europe. Their view of the war was that it was imperative that the United States be seen as standing up to aggression. Men like Rusk genuinely saw the preservation of an independent South Vietnam as being not only of "vital US national interest", but in the vital interests of maintaining world peace: "The central objective of the United States in South Viet-Nam must be to insure that North Viet-Nam not succeed in taking over or determining the future of South Viet-Nam by force."¹¹

Perhaps the man who was most torn over these competing views was the President himself, both in the public and private record. Johnson's mood can be seen swinging wildly between doubting whether the US had any business being in Vietnam. Johnson biographer Randall Woods recounts a monologue Johnson delivered to his National Security Advisor George Bundy:

⁹ Ibid., p.132.

¹⁰ Ibid., Pp.163-166.

¹¹ Paper by Secretary of State Rusk. Washington, July 1st 1965. Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Vol. XXXVII. Full text available at: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_iii/030.html

I don't think it's worth fighting for and I don't think that we can get out. It's just the biggest damned mess that I ever saw... I was looking at this sergeant of mine [his valet] this morning. Got six little old kids over there and he's getting out my things and bringing in my night reading... and I just thought about ordering his kids in there and what in the hell am I ordering him out there for? What the hell is Vietnam worth to me?¹²

On other occasions Johnson seemed to see the war as crucial to American security:

We have chosen to fight a limited war in Vietnam in an attempt to prevent a larger war -- a war almost certain to follow, I believe, if the Communists succeed in overrunning and taking over South Vietnam by aggression and by force. I believe, and I am supported by some authority, that if they are not checked now the world can expect to pay a greater price to check them later.¹³

What we can clearly see from Johnson's tone is a fear that any appeasement of what Johnson in this speech considers to be North Vietnamese aggression could lead to a replay of the appeasement on Nazi Germany in the late 1930s leading to World War II. As we have seen above, this was a line of argument put forward strongly by Secretary of State Rusk. We will discuss the strategic logic of Rusk's position below.

¹² Randall B. Woods, *LBJ. Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p.510.

¹³ President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1967 State of the Union Address delivered on January 10th 1967. Full text available at: <http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/state-of-the-union/180.html>.

Underlying these discourses on the US national interests was always a dark fear within Johnson, that one way or another, Vietnam held the power to destroy his presidency and his hopes for the future:

If we get into this war, I know what's going to happen... Those damn conservatives are going to sit in Congress and they're going to use this war as a way of opposing my Great Society legislation. People like [John] Stennis [senator from Mississippi]. They hate this stuff, they don't want to help the poor and the Negroes but they're afraid to be against it at a time like this when there's been all this prosperity. But the war, oh, they'll like the war. They'll take the war as their weapon. They'll be against my programs because of the war... They'll say they're not against it, not against the poor, but we have this job to do, beating Communists. We beat the Communists first, then we can look around and maybe give something to the poor.¹⁴

Many of the arguments surrounding how the war was to be waged ultimately came back to the fact that the principal foreign policy decision makers of the Johnson Administration had competing views over what the basic stakes of the war were for the United States. If it is taken as a starting point that the survival of an independent South Vietnam was intrinsically important to the United States, then it would be logical to use every resource available to prevail, even potentially at the cost of provoking a war with China. The logic of Rusk's

¹⁴ *LBJ. Architect of American Ambition.* p.597.

analogy with Europe in the 1930s would lead the United States to a position where it would have to be prepared to confront China in order to force it to back down. To men like Rusk, the lesson of appeasement was that there was an urgent need to confront expansionary powers early and clearly demonstrate US resolve. However, if it was taken as a starting point that the objective of the war was to maintain US credibility, it made a great deal of sense to limit the amount of effort expended in South Vietnam. First, preserving forces would allow commitments to be met in other, possibly more vital parts of the world. Second, if South Vietnam had to be destroyed in order to save it, how would this have affected the credibility of the United States? Effectively the message that would be sent out was that the US would maintain its commitment to its allies at the cost of destroying them. Or, as John McNaughton put it, the US needed, “To emerge from (the) crisis (sic) without considerable taint from methods.”¹⁵

As the amount of blood and treasure the US expended in Vietnam increased, such abstract considerations in the national interest became less and less relevant to the problem at hand. Now that American blood had been spilt, the moral issue at hand resolved itself more and more as an issue of would the US allow itself to be beaten now that men had died for the cause. As Johnson put it, “we will not permit those who fire upon us in Vietnam to win a victory over the desires and the intentions of all the American people.”¹⁶ This logic had a cruel circularity to it. More people were effectively being asked to give up their

¹⁵ *Dereliction of Duty*. p.184.

¹⁶ President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1966 State of the Union Address, delivered on January 12th 1966. Full text available at: <http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/state-of-the-union/179.html>.

lives in order to make the sacrifices of those who had already given theirs worthwhile. Increasingly the rationale for US involvement in the war boiled down to the absurd notion that the US was in Vietnam because it was in Vietnam, and would remain in Vietnam because it was in Vietnam. As for McNaughton's argument that remaining in Vietnam was vital to the US's credibility, there is a world of difference in terms of credibility between being seen as helping an ally defend themselves, and the situation the US found itself in in Vietnam, in intervening in somebody else's civil war with allies of very uncertain determination.¹⁷ Looking back on his experience in Vietnam after having retired as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell observed: "I would spend nearly twenty years, one way or another, grappling with our experience in this country [Vietnam]. And over all that time Vietnam rarely made much more sense than... We're here because we're here, because we're..."¹⁸

So what was the intellectual climate that led to the particular element of the Powell Doctrine calling for force to only be used in the "vital national interest"? We can see that such an intellectual climate was a climate that was extremely hostile to the Johnson Administration's inability to define clear, consistent, and militarily achievable objectives in Vietnam. Brigadier General Douglas Kinnard concluded that, "almost 70 percent of the Army generals who managed the war were uncertain of its objectives ... [this] mirrors a deep-seated strategic failure: the inability of policy-makers to frame tangible,

¹⁷ For a discussion of the recurrent problems the US had trying to deal with the South Vietnamese government see Chapter 6.

¹⁸ Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (Ballantine Books: New York, 1995), p.79.

obtainable goals.”¹⁹ Colonel Harry Summers, in *An American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis*, points out that University of Nebraska Professor, Hugh M. Arnold, found that, “Compared to the *one* North Vietnamese objective, he found some *twenty-two* separate American rationales.”²⁰ What we can see from this is that officers of fairly senior rank, a Brigadier General and a Colonel, writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, less than a decade after the end of direct US involvement in the Vietnam conflict, were already pointing towards the Powell Doctrine’s insistence on policymakers being clear on what the stakes are for the United States in any military intervention, and the need to have a clear, coherent and consistent reason why US military intervention is necessary. As General Bruce Palmer put it,

One larger lesson concerns the national interest. From the beginning our leaders realized that South Vietnam was not vital to U.S. interests ... As hostilities dragged on interminably, with no clearly discernible end in sight, more and more questions were raised.²¹

These observations were all made more than a decade before Powell put pen to paper on his *Foreign Affairs* article.

What we see in the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that gave rise to it is a determination not to become caught in this kind of circular reasoning

¹⁹ See Colonel (RET) Harry G. Summers, Jr, *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis* (Mineola: Dover Publication, 2007), p.66.

²⁰ See Colonel (RET) Harry G. Summers, Jr, *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis* (Mineola: Dover Publication, 2007), p.62.

²¹ Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p.189.

outlined above by making sure that policy makers at the outset are clear in their own minds about what it is that is at stake for the United States in any potential military intervention: what its objectives are and what resources the nation is willing to commit in order to achieve them.

Having observed the lessons of Vietnam, it is time for us to move back to our case study of US policy towards the war in Bosnia between 1991 and 1995.

We can identify two distinct types of interest the US had in the conflict in Bosnia. The first type we can call “security interests.” These would be issues that relate to the physical security of the United States and its allies. The second type of issue the US finds itself taking an active interest in is what we could call “humanitarian issues.” These were issues that could not be said to affect directly the physical security of either the US or its allies, but were rather problems of a moral or ethical nature. These issues included such topics as refugees, the delivery of humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians in a warzone. US action on these issues was driven by a sense of moral revulsion and the urge to protect what were seen as innocent people caught in the middle of a particularly bloody conflict. As we shall see throughout this chapter, the Administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton saw these issues in a slightly different light and gave significantly different weight to such issues at different times.

We will look first at the security interests. In order to fully understand these issues, it is important first to set the Bosnian conflict in its historical context.

The peoples of the former Yugoslavia had the uncommon bad luck that the conflict that tore their country apart took place during one of the most profound shifts in the geopolitical landscape of the twentieth century. At the same time as Yugoslavia entered its final collapse, the Soviet Union, for forty years one of the world's two Superpowers, was also entering its terminal decline. As Steven Hurst observes in his history of George Bush's brief four years in office, "Within a year of Bush coming to office, communist governments across Eastern Europe tumbled, the Berlin Wall came down and the Cold War came to an end".²²

This impacted on the conflict in Yugoslavia in two ways: first, it meant that the Yugoslavian conflict was never more than halfway up US policymakers' agenda.²³ When compared to the collapse of a nuclear-armed superpower, the aftermath of the Gulf War,²⁴ the reunification of a potential great power in Germany, and the potential breakthrough in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The problems of Yugoslavia, whilst tragic and certainly potentially dangerous for the peoples of the region, in the eyes of most of the senior members of the Bush Administration were simply not on the same scale. One of the everyday facts of life which are frequently overlooked in academic analyses is that policymakers are human beings, just like the rest of us, and

²² Steven Hurst. *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration. In Search of a New World Order* (Cassell: London, 1999), p. 1.

²³ An illustration of where Yugoslavia fitted in the Bush Administration's overall scheme of priorities is given in Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott's *At the Highest Levels. The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (London: Warner Books, 1993), a book that deals with American foreign policy between 1988 and 1992 in great detail, Yugoslavia is only referenced four times, and doesn't reference Bosnia at all. Bush's own memoirs of the period, George Bush and Brent Scowcroft's *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), only references Yugoslavia four times and always in the context of its relationship with the Soviet Union.

²⁴ See Chapter Three.

even though it sounds trite it is still true to say that there are only so many hours in the day. Former Secretary of State James Baker makes this point in diplomatic yet clear fashion:

The Yugoslav conflict had the potential to be intractable, but it was nonetheless a regional dispute...The greater threat to American interests at the time lay in the increasingly dicey situation in Moscow, and we preferred to maintain our focus on that challenge, which had global ramifications for us, particularly with regard to nuclear weapons. Moreover, in the summer of 1991, we were already consumed by the Middle East peace process and close to getting the parties to the table.²⁵

These unfortunate facts led to the second consequence of the timing of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. US policymakers tended to see events in Yugoslavia through the prism of how they would affect events in the Soviet Union rather than on their own merits. This leads us to the first major security interest that the Bush Administration felt was at stake in the former Yugoslavia: “For America could not appear to back a breakaway province in Yugoslavia without setting a dangerous precedent for a Soviet Union and Russia that might also splinter apart.”²⁶

The nightmare scenario for the Bush Administration was that the Soviet Union would turn into Yugoslavia writ large. Just how aware the Bush Administration

²⁵ James A. Baker, III with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy. Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons: New York, 1995), p.636.

²⁶ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace. Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (Bloomsbury: London, 2002), p.33.

was of this risk can be seen by the tone of the speech given by then Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger at Georgetown University in September of 1990:

“For all its risks and uncertainties, the Cold War was characterized by a remarkably stable and predictable set of relationships among the great powers.” A sudden end to the East-West standoff could bring disorder, leading to government crackdowns, the reestablishment of dictatorships, and war.²⁷

Since its inception, the Soviet Union had always had to deal with the fact that it was a multi-national empire.²⁸ Although in theory the Soviet Union was a federation of fifteen separate republics, in practice Soviet politics had always been managed hierarchically through the auspices of the Communist Party. Once the authority of the Party began to break down, the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was faced with increasing demands for autonomy and then independence from each of the republics. From a US point of view, this was potentially hugely problematic. First, if the Soviet Union fell apart, due to the nature of Soviet nuclear deployment, there would be at least three new nuclear armed states.²⁹ Whether these newborn states could maintain the security of the newly endowed nuclear forces was an open question. Even worse, the fifteen republics were not ethnically homogeneous. There were large Russian

²⁷ *At the Highest Levels*. p.106.

²⁸ For a discussion of how the Tsarist Empire was reconfigured as the Soviet Union see: Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919* (Harvill Press: London, 1997).

²⁹ The vast majority of Soviet ICBMs were located on Russian, Ukrainian and Kazak territory. See *CIA World Fact Book 1990*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext91/world12.txt>.

minorities in several of the republics.³⁰ Other republics also possessed significant non-Russian minorities within them. In short, it was not difficult to imagine a whole range of scenarios which would lead to ethnic tension and potentially war between nuclear armed states. Therefore, the strong preference of the US was that the Soviet Union should continue to exist in some form. Ideally, this union would be democratic with a strong degree of federalism, but it would also hopefully be strong enough to maintain both a monopoly on armed force and the ability to arbitrate between different ethnic groups.

The strong desire to keep the Soviet Union together inevitably had a major impact on US policy towards Yugoslavia. The US could not find itself in the position of supporting the dissolution of Yugoslavia whilst at the same time trying to keep the Soviet Union together. Just how strong this desire was can be seen from the fact that as late as March 1991, a month after a hard line Communist coup attempt had failed, and only eight months before the final collapse of the Soviet Union, President Bush publically refused to even contemplate the possibility that the Soviet Union might collapse. The following quotation is taken from a response to a question during a press conference:

Q. Could you tell me on the eve of the Secretary's trip to Moscow whether you think it's in your intention for your Administration now reach out in the Soviet Union individually to the Republics? And do you think that President Gorbachev's days are now numbered in power?

³⁰ Principally, the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, the Ukraine and Georgia). See *CIA World Fact Book 1990*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext91/world12.txt>.

The President. I will continue to deal with the President of the Soviet Union. That is the Government that's accredited, and that is the Government with which the United States Government will deal.³¹

Consequently, throughout 1990 and 1991, the official US policy was to do everything possible to encourage the various parties within Yugoslavia that the best hope for the future was to reform the federation rather than to secede from it.

In June of 1991, Secretary of State James Baker paid a one-day visit to Yugoslavia as part of a tour of Europe. Baker recounts the message he gave to all of Yugoslavia's leaders as follows:

“Our critical interest in the Yugoslav question is its peaceful settlement. We will continue to oppose the use of force or intimidation to resolve political differences.” Unilateral acts, I reiterated, would lead to disaster, a point I underscored with the Slovenians and Croatians. I also said that while we supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia and existing republic borders and would not accept unilateral changes, the international community, of course, recognized that if the republics

³¹ The President's News Conference with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada in Ottawa, March 13th, 1991. *Public Papers of the President*. George H. W. Bush. 1991 Volume 1, p.263. Available at <http://frwebgate5.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/TEXTgate.cgi?WAISdocID=530871389297+7+1+0&WAISaction=retrieve>.

wanted to change borders by peaceful, consensual means, that was an altogether different matter.³²

It is here that we see the first example of a dichotomy that was to affect US policymaking in the former Yugoslavia from the beginning to the end of the conflict. The lower down the policymaking hierarchy, the more focused US attention would become. The staff of the State Department and the CIA that dealt most directly with Yugoslav matters felt that trying to hold the federation together at this point was a fool's errand and that the better policy was to try and ensure the peaceful dissolution of Yugoslavia. The further up the policymaking ladder one moved, the less officials were concerned with the merits of a particular policy on Yugoslavia itself and the more concerned they became with the merits of Yugoslav policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

Here, we can make our first comment on the general nature of how one defines "national interest." What we can see in the Yugoslav case is that "national interest" is an almost entirely subjective evaluation, and that often different interpretations of "national interest" derive not from which bureaucracy one is a member of, as scholars like Graham Allison³³ would have it, but rather from how far up the hierarchy of a particular organisation people sit. A recurrent feature of US policy towards the former Yugoslavia was the extent to which the State Department, the Department of Defense and the CIA all found themselves engaged in huge internal disputes in Bosnia between those at the

³² *The Politics of Diplomacy*. p.480.

³³ See: Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Little, Brown & Co: Boston, 1971).

top of the organisation, whose responsibility was to try and look at the global impact of particular policies, and those at a more junior level, whose job was to execute policy and who were much closer to the peculiarities of the situation on the ground of the former Yugoslavia and who tended to look at US national interest in terms of the situation on the ground. As we have already seen, senior policy makers tended to look at Yugoslavia through the prism of what was happening in the Soviet Union, whereas a fairly junior State Department official like Stephen Walker who dealt with Yugoslav affairs through the Europe and Canada Bureaus of the State Department, could describe what was happening in Bosnia in the following apocalyptic terms:

Here we are, almost fifty years after the holocaust, approaching the 21st century, and we've apparently learned nothing. We call it "ethnic cleansing" because it sounds nicer, but it is genocide. Genocide is taking place again in Europe and we – yes, you and I – are letting it happen. Actually, we're not just letting it happen, we're encouraging it, we're encouraging the war criminals, the butchers, the rapists, we are responsible.³⁴

Here, I believe we can make a second generalisation about how US policymakers tend to view what is and is not in the United States's "vital national interest." That is, that US policy tends to privilege relationships with its potential peers. That is to say, Russia and China are potential or actual

³⁴ Stjepan G. Mestrovic (Ed.), *The Conceit of Innocence* (A&M University Press: Texas, 1997). p.230.

“superpowers,” depending on how one defines that term: “George Bush was so knowledgeable about China, and so hands on in managing most aspects of our policy, that even some of our leading sinologists began referring to him as the government’s desk officer for China.”³⁵

And its policy towards regional or civil conflict between third parties tends to be strongly influenced by its relationship with the other major powers, in particular, is a conflict occurring either within the borders or close proximity of another major power? And second, are other “superpowers” intervening in a conflict, or is there any likelihood that they might? In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the answers to these questions were that Yugoslavia was neither close enough to any other major power to risk spilling over the borders, and there was little prospect, despite occasional bluster to the contrary, that the Russian Federation would intervene in the former Yugoslavia if the US chose not to.

The second major security interest driving US policy toward the former Yugoslavia was the desire to try and define a limit to US involvement in European affairs now that the Cold War had come to an end. This is not to say that the US no longer felt it had any security interests in Europe; indeed, maintaining and possibly expanding NATO were seen as vital elements of US security policy. However, both the Bush and Clinton Administrations did not

³⁵ *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 100 It is worth noting that in Bush’s own memoirs *A World Transformed* he deals almost exclusively with three topics, relations with the Soviet Union, relations with China and the Gulf War. The US Intervention in Somalia is dealt with in three lines and the US invasion of Panama, the largest military operation since Vietnam at the time, is dealt with in five pages.

want the US to be seen as the world's policeman with the moral responsibility to intervene to prevent every regional conflict that came along. The following quotation is an extract from George H W Bush's personal diary and comes in the middle of a passage written at the very start of the war between Serbia and Croatia: "the concept that we have to work out every problem, everywhere in the world, is crazy. I think the American people understand it... I don't think we can be looked to for solving every problem, every place in the world."³⁶ Married to this was the fact that it was very difficult for US policymakers to judge what exactly the stakes were in regional conflicts. During the Cold War, US policy towards regional conflicts was centred on the idea of preventing or rebutting Soviet interference and stopping any attempt by the Eastern Bloc to widen its sphere of influence:

But the importance of Somalia had for a time [been], for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with the quality of life for the people there, greatly inflated by the Cold War, as if the outcome of what was always nothing more than their indigenous struggles would in some way determine a large, global struggle and show which of the two giant super powers held the key to the future.³⁷

However, with the demise of the Soviet Union leaving the US as the world's only superpower, there was now no danger of Yugoslavia in any way altering a European balance of power that the US utterly dominated. If conflicts such as

³⁶ Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in The Sand: The Bush Dynasty in Iraq*, First Vintage Books Edition (Random House, 2007). p.296.

³⁷ *War in a Time of Peace*, p. 248.

those in the former Yugoslavia were no longer going to have even a tangential effect on the balance of power, did the US have sufficient interest in ending the conflict to be willing to risk the lives of its own troops?

US confusion over the stakes of the Yugoslav conflict was matched by a new determination on the part of the nations of the European Union (EU) to be more proactive in managing European security. With the threat of the Soviet Union gone, European nations were now hoping that the time had come for them to take the lead in settling European conflicts, and that the time had come for the US not to completely disengage in Europe, but to step back from what many in Europe saw as its micromanaging and overbearing role in managing the security policy of Europe. David Halberstam describes this moment of European hubris as,

the belief among different European powers that with the end of The Cold War this was their own special moment in history; whatever happened in Yugoslavia would be on their own terrain and therefore they could handle it. The Europeans, eager to show the force and muscle of a newly unified continent, were anxious to play a decisive role in this issue.³⁸

In short, the Yugoslav conflict occurred at a point in history where the US was keen to reduce its commitments in Europe and the major European powers felt that after 50 years of taking a back seat to the United States they would once

³⁸ Ibid., Pp.84-85.

again be able to dominate their own continent. It is not surprising, therefore, that, until 1995, US policy was generally content to follow the lead set for it by the Europeans, principally Britain and France. A good example of this trend would be the decision to recognise Bosnia and Croatia as independent states. On this issue, US Secretary of State James Baker made it clear that the US would only make a decision on granting recognition once the Europeans had made a decision: “I told the President that we’d need to work with the Europeans to maintain a collective non-recognition policy against any republic that unilaterally declared independence.”³⁹

There is a third generalisation to be made at this point, which is that, for a variety of reasons, the US did not want to be seen as the world’s “policeman.” In some ways, the Cold War had dragged a nation that historically had been extremely wary of foreign entanglements to a position of global pre-eminence. Now that the Cold War had ended, there was a strong undercurrent in US politics, both on the left and the right, that it was time for the US to scale back its overseas commitments. On the left, the end of the Cold War promised to free up both financial and political capital needed to enact political and social reform:

If you think we need to continue to spend \$160 billion to subsidize Europe's defense against the Soviet Union, or whatever it's called now, put your ballot in the Bush box. But if you believe like I do that Europe is strong enough and rich enough and powerful enough to defend itself,

³⁹ *The Politics of Diplomacy*. p. 483.

and that we can take that wealth and invest it in better roads and mass transit and education and better health care for our people, you take your ballot and put it in the Harkin box and come home to the Democratic Party.⁴⁰

It should not be forgotten that whilst trying to deal with Yugoslavia Bill Clinton was also trying to pass one of the most ambitious pieces of domestic legislation ever written with his plan for healthcare reform. The rightwing argument articulated by former Nixon speechwriter Patrick Buchanan in his unsuccessful campaign for the Republican nomination in 1992, was that the kind of activist foreign policy pursued during the Cold War had led to the inexorable growth of the state, rising taxation, and the neglect of American competitiveness in the global economy:

The first challenge we face, then, is economic, presented by the rise of a European super state and a dynamic Asia led by Japan. The 20th Century was the American Century, but they intend to make the 21st, the century of Europe or the Century of Asia. So, as we Americans congratulate one another on the victory for freedom that we, first and foremost, won, and won together for all mankind in the Cold War, we must begin to prepare for the new struggles already underway.⁴¹

⁴⁰ This quote is taken from Senator Tom Harkin (Democrat-Iowa), announcing the start of his campaign for the Democrat nomination in 1992. The full text of this speech can be found at: <http://www.4president.org/speeches/tomharkin1992announcement.htm>.

⁴¹ Quote taken from Patrick Buchanan's speech announcing his intention to seek the Republican Presidential nomination, delivered on December 10th, 1991. Full text available at: <http://www.4president.org/speeches/buchanan1992announcement.htm>.

This message, the last point in particular, had a great deal of resonance at a time when the US was gradually losing pre-eminence in the global economy to Japan and Germany: “The budget deficit was growing larger every year, as was the trade imbalance with Japan. Ordinary people who did not usually monitor such economic trends felt squeezed and believed they were working harder and harder just to stand still.”⁴²

There was a great deal of superficial appeal in the argument that whilst the US had protected its “Allies” for the past 50 years, the nations of Europe and Asia had effectively taken advantage of the US by getting a free ride when it came to paying for their own defence and that, in return for US protection, they had pursued trade policies that directly damaged the US economy, and in particular that these policies had done enormous damage to the manufacturing base in the United States. Although in this passage I have used the figures of Harkin and Buchanan because they were politicians seeking office during the Yugoslav crisis, both Harkin and Buchanan represent and are spokesmen for points of view that recur time and time again in debates over the direction of US foreign policy.

Those such as George Bush Senior and Bill Clinton once he was in office who still wished to maintain the pre-eminence of US foreign policy had to be aware of the dangers posed to this policy from both left and right. Therefore, both the Clinton and Bush Administrations took exceptional care to demonstrate to the

⁴² *War in a Time of Peace*. p.15.

public at every available opportunity that the US would not and could not be expected to deal with every conflict in the world on its own, and also both Administrations took care to try and make sure that when the US did decide to intervene in regional conflicts such as Bosnia and Somalia, that it did so in the context of multinational missions that had UN approval. In answer to a question about why the US had not taken stronger action in the former Yugoslavia, President Bush responded as follows:

I think the sanctions -- I'm not prepared to give up on the sanctions at all. They've only been in effect for a few days. As you know, first on this question of Yugoslavia, out in front was the United Nations. You had Cyrus Vance as a representative of the United Nations, did a superb job trying to negotiate, ably supplemented, I might say, by Peter Carrington. They tried to work that problem, had our full support.⁴³

The same point was perhaps made more bluntly by a senior official of the incoming Clinton Administration speaking on background before a visit by President Mitterrand of France. The question being answered is “why the US had stopped trying to set up a no-fly zone in Bosnia?”

Well, we haven't given up at all. We have not yet convinced our partners that a no-fly zone enforcement resolution should be adopted by the Security Council, and I think perhaps the President and President

⁴³ Taken from the President's news conference, June 4th, 1992. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=21050&st=international+leadership&st1=>

Mitterrand will be discussing that tomorrow. It's not a unilateral action that the United States can take.⁴⁴

On technical grounds this argument is clearly nonsense. The US, with relatively minor assistance from the British, was able to enforce two no-fly zones in Iraq for twelve years. Therefore the “senior Administration official” can only be referring to the fact that the US would, on political grounds, rather not be seen as acting unilaterally.

This kind of multilateral approach was seen as a way of being able to pursue US policy in a way that spread the cost and responsibility for intervention. It also dealt with the second problem. The US feared that if it did become seen as a global policeman this would inevitably lead to resentment by other nations, who could see the US as throwing its weight around and potentially, over time, come to see the US as an overgrown global bully. US political commentator Joe Klein, writing on Bill Clinton’s foreign policy, makes the following observation: “...he also understood the long-term value of diplomatic humility, of not making unnecessary enemies, of pursuing American interests within the context of multilateral organizations.”⁴⁵

The perception of not wanting to be seen as a bully was particularly acute in its relationship with Russia and China, as these nations saw themselves as equals

⁴⁴ Background briefing by Senior Administration Official, March 8th 1993. Full text can be found at:
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=59988&st=bosnia&st1=european+union>.

⁴⁵ Joe Klein. *The Natural. The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton* (Hodder and Staunton: London, 2002), p.77.

on the world stage to the US. The Russians in particular had a hard time dealing with the fact that the Russian Federation was no longer in the same league as the old Soviet Union. Therefore, from the perspective of the Bush and Clinton Administrations, it made good long-term strategic sense for the US to be seen as acting in concert with other nations and sensitive to their opinions, particularly to those nations who could in the future become potential rivals. The problem with this attitude is that, when no consensus for a particular action existed, what started out as a policy of seeking collective action became paralysis. Also, despite the fact that the many nations would bemoan unilateral US action, they had become used to the idea that the US would take a lead on issues and that they would position themselves in response to what the US did:

The Europeans were unaccustomed to signature American diplomats consulting in this manner. They were accustomed to someone like George Shultz or James Baker telling them in a nice way that brooked little disagreement what the United States of America intended to do.⁴⁶

When the US did not act unilaterally but sought to engage them in collective action, this reflex of responding to US policy was no longer available, and that in turn led to a great deal of resentment. After all, the US is the “superpower”; they are supposed to take a lead.

⁴⁶ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.226.

We will now move on to look at the “humanitarian” interests that the US had in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

Because Yugoslavia had been such an ethnically heterogeneous state, there were substantial minorities of Serbs living in both Bosnia and Croatia, and a substantial Croat minority living in Bosnia. The leaders of these groups did not see why Bosnia should be allowed to exercise its right to be independent of Yugoslavia, while the Bosnian government blocked their right to be independent of a Bosnian state in which they were going to be minorities. As Milan Martić, a prominent Serb separatist in Croatia put it, “What cannot be bought is our Serb dignity. We would rather go hungry, as long as we are together with our Serb people. We will eat potatoes and husks, but we will be on the side of our people. We will remain human.”⁴⁷

The aim therefore for both Bosnian-Serbs and Bosnian-Croats was to carve ethnically homogenous states out of Bosnia which could then become parts of Serbia and Croatia. The inevitable consequence of these war aims was that a great deal of the violence in the former Yugoslavia was directed against civilians. As Laura Silber and Alan Little put it, Bosnian refugees were not, “the tragic by-product of a civil war; their expulsion was the whole point of the war.”⁴⁸ The conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia gave the world the term “ethnic cleansing”; what this euphemistic term meant in practice was the forced deportation of non-Serb (and to a lesser extent non-Croat) populations from

⁴⁷ *The Death of Yugoslavia*. p.99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.244.

their homes, and a systematic attempt to destroy any trace that Muslims or Croats had ever lived in a particular area. To this end, churches, mosques, and other sites of cultural significance were destroyed, along with property deeds, or any document that could prove ownership of land.⁴⁹ Aside from these forced deportations, rape was used as a weapon of war, both to terrify people into leaving an area faster, and to try to destroy the Bosnian Muslims and the Krajia Croats as distinct ethnic groups.

These atrocities were unusually well reported. Those perpetrating the atrocities took remarkably little concern to conceal what they were doing, the massive movement of refugees allowed easy access to witnesses, and several reporters, most notably *Newsday*'s Roy Gutman and John Burns of the *New York Times*, wrote extensively on war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, indeed Gutman won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his reporting. The following quotation is taken from one of Gutman's articles headlined "Ethnic Cleansing: Yugoslavs Try to Deport 1,800 Muslims to Hungary": "In a practice not seen in Europe since the end of World War II, the Serbian-led government of Yugoslavia chartered an 18-car train last week in an attempt to deport the entire population of a Muslim village to Hungary."⁵⁰

Burns even managed to interview a handful of the soldiers responsible for acts of ethnic cleansing. The following quotation is taken from one of Burn's interviews with a Bosnian-Serb soldier called Borislav Herak:

⁴⁹ For a graphic description of these practices see: Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War*. (Simon & Schuster: London, 1994).

⁵⁰ Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide* (Lisa Drew Books: New York, 1993). p.20.

In the killing techniques he claimed to have used, including throat-cutting and machine-gunning, and in the apparently casual and random fashion in which most of his victims were selected, the young Serb's story closely matched accounts by thousands of Muslims who managed to escape Serbian offensives in the last 12 months.⁵¹

As well as this media coverage, the US Government was extremely well informed about what was going on. The CIA in particular was able to give policy makers an almost minute by minute chronology of certain instances of ethnic cleansing. To say nothing of the fact that US Embassy officials and NGO workers had exactly the same access to refugees that the press did. David Halberstam quotes John Fox, who in the summer of 1992 was a junior member of the State Department's policy planning staff: "There was a network of us, working for different agencies both in and out of government, sharing information and keeping each other tuned. And we had a lot of information very much like that which Gutman came up with about the camps and the atrocities."⁵²

The reaction of the US Government to these events can tell us a great deal about where "humanitarian" interests fall in the scale of national interests.

Although both the Bush and Clinton Administrations were by no means

⁵¹ John Burns, 'Bosnia War Crime Trial Hears Serb's Confession', *New York Times*. Published Sunday 14th March 1993. Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/14/world/bosnia-war-crime-trial-hears-serb-s-confession.html?scp=3&sq=war+criminals&st=nyt>.

⁵² *War in a Time of Peace*. p.133.

indifferent to ethnic cleansing, both Administrations consistently condemned it and both supported the creation of a War Crimes Tribunal. Neither Bush nor Clinton ultimately sanctioned military intervention in order to prevent ethnic cleansing, although there is an important distinction to be drawn between these two Administrations. The Bush Administration was quite clear that although what was happening in the former Yugoslavia was deplorable and ought to be stopped, it was not sufficiently important to the US that it would justify the use of force. The way the Bush Administration seems to have viewed the former Yugoslavia is that although it was an important issue, it never quite passed the threshold of importance for military action to be seriously considered: “There was never any thought at that time of using U.S. ground troops in Yugoslavia - the American people would never have supported it.”⁵³

The Clinton Administration, although it did not commit to military action for purely humanitarian reasons, did weight the importance of humanitarian interests slightly differently to the Bush Administration. In stark contrast to Baker’s standoffish attitude, Clinton’s Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright seemed in the early stages of the Administration to be almost evangelical about peacekeeping:

The decision we must make is whether to pull up stakes and allow
Somalia to fall back into the abyss or to stay the course and help lift the

⁵³ *The Politics of Diplomacy*. Pp.635-636.

country and its people from the category of a failed state into that of an emerging democracy. For Somalia's sake, and ours, we must persevere.⁵⁴

Although Clinton himself came to office without having particularly strong convictions on foreign policy in general, after listening to Congressman Lee Hamilton (Democrat-Indiana), Chair of the House Foreign Relations Committee, outlined some of the problems the new Administration faced, Clinton's reply was, "Lee, I just went through the whole campaign and no one talked about foreign policy at all, except for a few members of the press."⁵⁵

Several senior members of the Administration, in particular Vice President Al Gore, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, and UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, had taken a keen interest in the former Yugoslavia and were prepared to see the US take some sort of military action in order to alleviate the situation:

"There are people on his staff who just want to go ahead and bomb, and damn the consequences," said one deputy. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was opposed, at least initially, to military action. Defense Secretary Les Aspin favoured action, but only with a clear-cut objective he could sell the chiefs, especially Powell.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Madeleine K. Albright, 'Yes, there is a reason to be in Somalia', *New York Times*, published Tuesday August 10th 1993. Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/10/opinion/yes-there-is-a-reason-to-be-in-somalia.html>.

⁵⁵ *War in a Time of Peace*, p.168.

⁵⁶ Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton. Mastering the Presidency* (Century: London, 2007). p.131.

However, even the most hawkish elements of the Clinton Administration were only prepared to contemplate a very limited range of military action; in particular no-one at senior level advocated the large scale deployment of ground forces. Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, Lieutenant General Gordon Sullivan, accurately described the attitude of the Clinton Administration and its effect on the European allies: “The Europeans were looking for leadership from the United States. With troops on the ground. And it was not forthcoming. Only air.”⁵⁷ This immediately touched off fierce resistance on the part of the Military and particularly on the part of Colin Powell.⁵⁸ In the end the Clinton Administration came to the conclusion that the case for military intervention in Bosnia was not strong enough to overcome the resistance of the Military domestically or, just as importantly, of its European allies who had troops on the ground as part of a humanitarian and peace-keeping mission, and it feared retribution should the US undertake military action.

What one can see from the Bosnian case study is not that the US is indifferent to violations of human rights, or that it is prepared to look the other way when war crimes are being committed, but that there is a distinct limit on what US policy makers are prepared to contemplate in order to stop such acts. The US under both a Republican and Democratic Administration, putting different emphases on the importance of human rights, came to the conclusion that they could not justify a military intervention in the former Yugoslavia on humanitarian grounds alone, despite the fact that the US could not claim to be

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.131.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 6 for a detailed account of the Clinton Administration’s policy towards military response in Bosnia and Powell’s resistance.

ignorant of the enormous scale of the suffering being inflicted mostly on a civilian population.

The second “humanitarian interest” we can detect in US policy towards the former Yugoslavia is in a sense a negative one. During the Cold War both the US and the USSR had to weigh up the likely response of the other superpower should they choose to intervene in regional or civil conflicts. Superpower intervention always carried with it the risk that the other superpower would engage in counter-intervention. This was no longer a realistic prospect, as President Clinton put it in his address at the American University,

The Soviet Union itself has disintegrated. The nuclear shadow is receding in the face of the START I and START II agreements and others that we have made and others yet to come. Democracy is on the march everywhere in the world. It is a new day and a great moment for America.⁵⁹

The US was now free to shape policy without the realistic threat that it would trigger a superpower standoff. By the end of the Cold War, the US stood as indisputably the strongest military power in the world and remained the lynchpin of a Western economic system that now dominated the globe. The point to be noted here is that there was nothing standing in the way of US intervention in the former Yugoslavia except the attitude of US policy makers

⁵⁹ William J. Clinton, Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration, February 26th 1993. Public Papers of the Presidents, 1993 Book 1. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46220&st=bosnia&st1=global+leadership#>

themselves. Because of all of these factors, wars in the former Yugoslavia presented a situation not only of exceptional human suffering, but also a situation where the US had every opportunity and every capability to prevent suffering. In other words, many people when faced with the question “Why should we intervene in the former Yugoslavia?”, came to the conclusion, “Because we can”.

Not only did the demise of the Soviet Union remove one of the principal reasons why US intervention in civil conflicts has been potentially geopolitically risky, it also, at a stroke, removed the rationale that had underpinned US foreign and defence policy for fifty years. Ever since the end of the Second World War, US policy had been built around how the US was going to deal with the Soviet Union. Although the Cold War had been a time of great international tension it had also served as a very effective organisational principle for US and to an extent Western, foreign policy:

The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the international order forever... The rise of a global economy has changed the linkages between our domestic and our foreign policies and, I would argue to you, has made them indivisible. In a time of dramatic global change we must define America's broader purposes anew.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis, April 1st, 1993. Public Papers of the Presidents 1993. Book 1. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46392&st=soviet+union&st1=foreign+policy>.

Policy was built around the need to contain Soviet expansionism, and prevent nuclear war, and grudgingly to try and reduce and then reverse, the nuclear arms race. David Halberstam succinctly sums up the task facing the Cold War foreign policy establishment. “They had come of age when you inherited a difficult, divided world, and if all went well during your tour of office, you handed to your successor a difficult, divided world.”⁶¹ Now that the Soviet Union was gone, there seemed to be no organising principle behind foreign policy, there seemed to be no criteria against which to judge how the US should respond.

The wars in the former Yugoslavia seem to offer one potential rationale for future foreign policy and that was to use the extraordinary power that the US had at that point in history, to try to create a more stable and a more just world order:

Today, our policies must also focus on relations within nations, on a nation's form of governance, on its economic structure, on its ethnic tolerance. These are of concern to us, for they shape how these nations treat their neighbors as well as their own people and whether they are reliable when they give their word. In particular, democracies are far less likely to wage war on other nations than dictatorships are.⁶²

⁶¹ *War in a Time of Peace*, p.59.

⁶² William J. Clinton, Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Annapolis, April 1st, 1993. Public Papers of the Presidents 1993. Book 1. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=46392&st=soviet+union&st1=foreign+policy>.

In particular there was an argument that the UN could now be used as its authors had initially intended it should be used, as a genuine instrument of collective security. There was a strong argument that what was happening in Bosnia contravened the 1948 genocide convention⁶³ which, simply put, placed an obligation on all signatories to do all in their power to prevent genocide taking place. The argument was made that if the US allowed what was happening in Bosnia to take place unchallenged, it would set the worst possible example for what the new post Cold War world might look like. What was going on in Bosnia may not have been a direct threat to the security of the United States, but it was certainly a direct threat to any aspiration to build a more just world now that the Cold War was over.

These arguments are nothing new in debates over how the US should frame its interests. Rhetorically, the United States has always liked to see itself as a nation apart, as the world's preeminent democracy and a source of hope and inspiration for the rest of the world. At least since Thomas Paine and the French Revolution this self-image has gone hand in hand with the idea that the US should use its power to help the spread of its ideals. As Ronald Reagan put it, "We--today's living Americans--have in our lifetime fought harder, paid a higher price for freedom and done more to advance the dignity of man than any people who have ever lived on this Earth."⁶⁴ More recently, during the Cold

⁶³ For the text of the convention, see: <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>. Also see Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (Flamingo: London, 2003), chapters 1 and 2, for a discussion of how the convention came about and the arguments over its drafting.

⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan. Remarks announcing candidacy for the Republican Presidential Nomination, November 13th, 1979. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76116&st=city+on+a+hill&st1=>.

War, a significant section of US elite opinion favoured a policy not of containment towards the Soviet Union but a policy ending in nothing less than the destruction of Communism and the liberation of Eastern Europe: “By contrast many of the Reagan people had cared not just about national security but rather which side was right and which side was wrong.”⁶⁵

This idealism does not sit well with the rest of the Powell Doctrine. By definition, if your aim is the continuous spread of democracy and the American ideal of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, there is no exit strategy, there will always be new challenges for the US to overcome by force. Second, although rhetorically the objective of this kind of foreign policy is clear, on a more practical level there are a number of important questions that this kind of idealistic foreign policy leaves unanswered. First, is the spreading of democracy the same thing as spreading American style, institutions and the notion of a capitalist, property owning, democratic system? And if so, how do you deal with the inevitable clash once these institutions are introduced into areas of the world that are outside of their cultural frame of reference? Also, the Powell Doctrine’s demand for continued public and Congressional support could be difficult to satisfy in the context of commitments which are difficult to justify in the absence of a direct threat to the security of the nation. As Colin Powell put it, even though the Military occasionally has to operate in unclear circumstances:

⁶⁵ *War in a Time of Peace*. Pp.58-59.

Decisive means and results are always to be preferred, even if they are not always possible. So you bet I get nervous when so-called experts suggest that all we need is a little surgical bombing or a limited attack. When the desired result isn't obtained, a new set of experts then comes forward with talk of a little escalation. History has not been kind to this approach.⁶⁶

Also, here we see two different concepts of the national interest in direct competition with one another. On the one hand, we have the desire mentioned earlier that the US should not find itself in a position of having to play the world's policeman. On the other hand, we see a desire to be seen as a force for good in the world. In the context of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, this contradiction tended to play itself out as a situation in which US rhetoric, both under Bush and Clinton, tended to outrun US actions. Time and again, both the Clinton and Bush Administrations would in the strongest possible terms condemn what was happening in the former Yugoslavia. The following quotation from a news conference President Bush gave in August 1992 is fairly typical of Bush and Clinton's rhetoric towards what was happening in Bosnia:

Like all Americans, I am outraged and horrified at the terrible violence shattering the lives of innocent men, women, and children in Bosnia. The aggressors and extremists pursue a policy, a vile policy, of ethnic

⁶⁶ Colin Powell. 'Why Generals get Nervous'. *New York Times*, published Thursday October 8th 1992. Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/08/opinion/why-generals-get-nervous.html>.

cleansing, deliberately murdering innocent civilians, driving others from their homes.⁶⁷

However, neither the Bush nor the Clinton Administration demonstrated any willingness to actually do anything to reverse it. In this context, the discussion of whether what was happening in Bosnia was sufficiently serious to be called genocide is extremely interesting. Both the Bush and Clinton Administrations went to great lengths to avoid using the term genocide, or, if they did use the word, they went to great lengths to ensure that it was modified, i.e. acts of genocide, acts tantamount to genocide, but never just the word genocide on its own. This is because, if the US admitted there was genocide and then did nothing about it, not only would it be violating its treaty commitments, but, on a more fundamental level, it would be violating its sense of itself as a just nation. As the former Yugoslavia Desk Officer Richard Johnson points out, admitting an unqualified genocide was taking place in Bosnia would have produced, "...more political pressure to take effective action, including the use of force, to end and punish the genocide."⁶⁸

In the title of this chapter we used the phrase "vital national interest", rather than "national interest." This is a distinction that Powell himself uses when

⁶⁷ George H. W. Bush, Remarks on the situation in Bosnia and an exchange with reporters in Colorado Springs. August 6th 1992. Public Papers of the President. 1992-3, Book II. Full text available at:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=21303&st=bosnia&st1=genocide>.

⁶⁸ *The Conceit of Innocence*, p.67.

talking about the doctrine in his 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article,⁶⁹ and so it is to the issue of what constitutes “vital interest” that we now turn our attention.

The first thing to be said is that vital-ness is not a fixed concept. What looks vital in one moment may not under shifting circumstances remain vital for long. Powell’s successor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Shalikashvili summed up the issue rather well:

This is no longer a world where you limit yourself to vital interests.

Today, we protect our interests when they are threatened in order to shape the environment to ensure that what develops is in accord with our goals, using American military forces in situations when lesser interests are threatened so they don’t grow.⁷⁰

As we can see by looking at the Yugoslav case study, the opposite is also true. What looks like a peripheral interest at one point can, under changing circumstances, come to look vital relatively quickly. For example, in 1992 the Bush Administration saw its policy towards the former Yugoslavia largely in the context of what it considered to be its much more important relationship with the Soviet Union and the newly born Russian Federation. By 1995, only three years later, the Clinton Administration saw the situation in Bosnia as a key test case in forming the shape of a post-Cold War world. These differences can partly be ascribed to the different world views of the Bush and Clinton

⁶⁹ Colin L. Powell, U.S. Forces: Challenges ahead, *Foreign Affairs*, 71(5), (1992), Pp.32-45.

⁷⁰ William Shawcross, *Deliver us from Evil. Warlords and Peacekeepers in a World of Endless Conflict* (Bloomsbury.: London, 2001), p.213.

Administrations discussed above. But they are also in large part due to changing international circumstances which altered the relative priorities of the United States.

To offer just a brief list of these changes in international circumstances should suffice to make the point. With the deployment of a largely European peace-keeping force into Bosnia and parts of Croatia, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia had taken on the dimensions of an Inter-allied problem as most of the US's allies had committed peace-keeping forces. This would be a demonstration of when the dimensions of other states can be perceived to alter what counts as "vital" or "not vital". Changing public awareness can also help decide vital-ness. In 1992 Yugoslavia was a side story in a time of profound change to the political landscape of the world with the end of the Cold War. By 1995, because of the horrific humanitarian situation discussed above, the wars in the former Yugoslavia had become one of the leading foreign news stories in the United States and both public and elite opinion were now much more aware of the situation and much more vocal in demanding that the United States take action to improve it. Likewise, as the Clinton Administration was gearing up for re-election in 1995,⁷¹ it was acutely aware that foreign policy was not a highlight of the record of its first term in office. Being able to come up with a durable peace in the former Yugoslavia was seen as essential if the Clinton Administration wanted to portray itself as successful when it came to issues of foreign policy. Importantly, here we can see that vital-ness of an interest may

⁷¹ For a discussion of how Bosnia and foreign policy in general became election issues in 1996, see: Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996).

easily bleed over into general political perceptions of the strength and competence of an Administration, even if the issue itself does not directly threaten the security of the United States.⁷²

The issue of vital-ness, as well as being in a state of constant flux, is also a matter of deeply subjective judgement at any given time. Certainly in the case of the former Yugoslavia, this subjective judgement as was briefly discussed above was, to a great extent, shaped by the person making it in the bureaucracies of the State Department, National Security Council and the Department of Defence. Those at the highest level of policy making have to consider the global and interlinked nature of the decisions that they make, for example what was the likely effect of US policy towards the former Yugoslavia on US policy towards the former Soviet Union, and was policy in one area likely to help or hinder the execution of policy in another area. On the other hand, those at a more junior level tend to see the daily impact of a policy on the ground in a particular country or region. In other words, as one moves down the bureaucratic ladder, officials are more likely to see vital US “national interest” in terms of its effect on a particular country or region rather than in global terms.

Also, US policy towards the former Yugoslavia was marked by the interesting phenomenon that State Department officials, as a rule, tended to be more hawkish than those in the Department of Defense. It is not easy to pin down

⁷² For an in-depth discussion of the evolution of the Clinton Administration’s policy towards Bosnia, see: Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War*. Rev. ed. (Modern Library: New York, 1999).

any particular reason why this was so although certainly it was true that there were many more people at a senior level in the military and in the Department of Defense that had had some firsthand experience of the war in Vietnam, than there were in the State Department. What we can say for sure is that the subjective judgements of policy makers as to whether or not what was happening in the former Yugoslavia constituted a “vital national interest”, were by and large conditioned by the level of seniority they held in the policy making process and also it is possible that their perceptions were influenced by the point in time at which they entered the policy making process. What is certain is that Colin Powell was less than impressed with the coherence of the policy making process under his new boss Bill Clinton, “...the discussions continued to meander like graduate-student bull sessions or the think-tank seminars in which many of my new colleagues had spent the last twelve years while their party was out of power.”⁷³

Equally, when writing his biography between 1994 and 1995, Powell was sceptical that any US president would ever decide that what was happening in Bosnia would constitute “vital national interest”:

The west has wrung its hands over Bosnia, but has not been able to find its vital interests or matching commitment. No American President could defend to the American people the heavy sacrifice of lives it would cost to resolve this baffling conflict. Nor could a President likely sustain the

⁷³ *My American Journey*, p.560.

long-term involvement necessary to keep the protagonists from going at each other's throats all over again at the first opportunity.⁷⁴

Interestingly, Powell's very gloomy prognosis was proved wrong, the Dayton Accords have, to date, managed to keep the peace in Bosnia, and indeed at the time of writing there is even the suggestion that Bosnia may join the European Union at some date in the not too distant future.

We will now move on to look at how the different conceptions of national interest we have laid out in this chapter sit with the rest of the Powell Doctrine. We will again begin by looking at the "security" interests laid out at the beginning of this chapter.

If we look first at our generalisation that the US tends to privilege its relationships with the other potential great powers and its possible competitors, this certainly has implications for the need to gain and hold public and Congressional support because it should be relatively straightforward to explain why maintaining good relations with other potential superpowers is important to the US. These potential superpowers constitute the only really plausible threat to the United States in the traditional geopolitical battlefield over relations between sovereign states. Therefore, it should be a relatively simple matter for politicians to be able to explain to the general public why these relationships are important, why it is in the US's "interests" to maintain them. Also, the benefits of maintaining stable relations between the US and

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.562.

potential competitors are relatively tangible and easy to demonstrate in terms of maintaining peace between nuclear armed powers, and in terms of the opportunities for expanded trade and economic relations. These are all issues around which it ought to be possible to shape and maintain a relatively stable political consensus.

The distinction in opinions between different levels of policy makers could also potentially be explained in terms of maintaining public and Congressional support. The higher up the policy making process one goes, the more one's position is dependent upon public support. The lower to mid levels of the State and Defense Department are by and large staffed by career officials who remain in their jobs regardless of which party is in power. As such they are relatively impervious to public opinion and also relatively anonymous. At the higher levels of the State and Defense Department officials rotate in and out of office depending on the results of elections. It is therefore essential for them to maintain public and Congressional support in order to win elections and maintain themselves in office. Also, the higher one moves up the policy making chain the more known one becomes to the public at large and the more public opinion turns against a particular policy the more likely you are to come up against extremely public criticism.

This is most acutely true of presidents themselves. Not only is holding onto public support vital to maintaining themselves in office in the short and medium term, being able to say that their policies emerged as a result of public consensus is also important in terms of maintaining their historical reputation.

Presidents that are seen to have divided the nation, particularly if it turns out that their policies were not successful, are generally not fondly remembered by historians. In the case of Yugoslavia, George Bush was himself a keen amateur historian and had a very definite sense of how he wanted to be remembered by history. He most certainly did not want to be remembered as a President who divided a nation to go to war three times in one term in office.⁷⁵

In terms of the need for overwhelming force, again the “security interests” that we looked at earlier in this chapter would seem to have a better fit to the Powell Doctrine than “the humanitarian interests”. Because the whole rationale behind intervention on humanitarian grounds is to eliminate or at least drastically reduce human suffering, the logical coda to that is that you cannot use more force in an intervention than was already present in the situation as it stood, lest you make the situation worse and undermine the whole purpose of intervention in the first place. Not only does humanitarian intervention place a premium on the amount of force it is logically consistent to use, it also requires force being delivered with a high degree of accuracy, so that those causing humanitarian suffering are the ones that feel the consequences of any use of force. Time and again in the debates on whether to use force in The Former Yugoslavia it was argued that the use of force would exacerbate an already intolerable situation for the civilian population. One could argue that this argument, based on the limited utility of force in humanitarian interventions, could break down in a case of humanitarian suffering on such an overwhelming scale that no amount of damage inflicted by military intervention could make

⁷⁵ The other two occasions being the US invasion of Panama and the Gulf War.

the situation any worse than it already is. This argument has two major flaws to it. First, whilst it might be easy to identify such cases of overwhelming human suffering in hindsight, governments have to deal with such situations in real time, and with necessarily limited information. Therefore it is not a straightforward process to clearly identify situations in which military intervention will clearly and unambiguously not make the humanitarian situation worse. Second, if military intervention is being undertaken exclusively to prevent humanitarian suffering, even if one accepts that a large scale use of force would not make the humanitarian situation worse, one could still argue that the inevitable destruction caused by any large military intervention makes those intervening at least partially responsible for causing the human suffering that their intervention was meant to prevent.

Overwhelming force also fits in with the idea of the security interests discussed earlier in this chapter in that, in viewing national interests through the prism of security interests, one is more likely to see force as an instrument used by one state against another. This gives you an obvious set of targets against which overwhelming force can be used. It also assumes that the damage inflicted by overwhelming force would be enough to compel an enemy state into altering its behaviour. On the other hand, the humanitarian interests this chapter has looked at posit that it is legitimate for the US to intervene forcefully in civil wars. Here we see the enemy not as another state but as a civilian population that contains enemy elements. As can be seen by the US experience in Vietnam, the use of overwhelming force can have unintended and indeed counterproductive consequences. In particular it can create a situation in which

the civilian population is in fact more rather than less sympathetic towards the enemy. When considering the possible use of air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, the US Air Force was relatively confident that taking out conventional Serb forces would be a relatively straightforward proposition. Their fear was that the temptation would then be for the Serbs to break their main force units into smaller guerrilla elements and continue the war intermingled with a sympathetic Bosnian Serb population that felt itself to be under attack by the West. Those opposed to air strikes never tired of reminding the world that Bosnia had been the site of a long, bitter and extremely bloody guerrilla war during the Second World War, and that the Serbs in particular had a reputation for being excellent guerrilla fighters.

The Powell Doctrine will also be more sympathetic to a conception of national interests based on the “security” paradigm outlined earlier in this chapter on the grounds that the security paradigm clearly delineates clear objectives.

“Humanitarian objectives” are by their very definition difficult to limit both temporally and specially. The time limit to a humanitarian operation is however long it takes to alleviate the suffering of a population. First, this is dependent on a number of factors beyond military control, such as weather, infrastructure and the cooperation of the local population. Second, the extent to which a situation can said to have been improved enough to allow the withdrawal of forces is a deeply subjective one and there is the constant temptation to expand the mission to achieve ever more ambitious goals. In the case of the Former Yugoslavia, military policy makers strongly did not want to repeat the experience of Somalia, where US forces had originally been

deployed to facilitate the delivery of food aid and the mission had gradually expanded until it included restoring a legitimate Somali government. It is difficult to spatially limit humanitarian operations because once you concede the point that humanitarian motives are justification enough for a military intervention, then as a matter of moral principle that justification holds true wherever and whenever there is judged to be a humanitarian crisis. This links back to the point made earlier in this chapter about the Bush and Clinton Administrations not wanting the US to be seen as the world's policeman. Equally they did not want the US to be seen as the world's nanny, a superpower on call to solve the world's humanitarian ills. Yet once you accept humanitarianism as a motive anywhere, it is hard to rationally reject it as a motive to intervene everywhere.

The above discussion should also make it clear that intervention on humanitarian grounds also makes the task of defining a clear well-defined exit strategy difficult. First, because it is difficult to draw a line as to exactly how much humanitarian suffering it is the responsibility of the US to prevent. For example, in the case of Somalia, the initial US intervention did prevent widespread famine, by ensuring that food reached those in greatest need. However this did nothing to solve the underlying problems of Somalia, principally, the lack of any kind of governing authority. Once the initial task of preventing famine had been achieved, there was a great temptation to try and expand the US mission to try and overcome the long-term problems facing Somalia, rather than just alleviating short-term suffering. Second, even if US forces were successful in re-establishing order and ensuring a humane standard

of living for the inhabitants of somewhere such as Bosnia, Somalia or Haiti, there is no way of knowing what will happen once US troops leave. After all, left to their own devices, these states had for all intents and purposes imploded, resulting in respectively, civil war, famine and dictatorship. There is a strong temptation in such an environment to say that once US forces have established order, it would be a good idea to keep them there. Part of the US Military's reluctance to get involved in the Balkans was based on the fear that any commitment would turn into a completely open-ended venture that would last for decades. The US Military did not want to find itself in the same position the UN has found itself in Cyprus, a situation where outside military forces have effectively become a permanent part of the political landscape, unwilling to stay, yet unable to leave for the fear that any exit would lead to renewed violence.

What we have seen in this chapter is that there is no single set of ideas and concepts that add up to some kind of permanent and magisterial concept known as "the national interest". What there is, are different competing assumptions and world views that at any one time may legitimately call themselves "national interests". We have seen that these concepts can be shaped by proximity to particular issues, by political affiliation, and by media and public perception. We have also seen that the Powell Doctrine sits most comfortably with notions of national interest that define the concept quite narrowly in terms of interstate relations and, particularly from an American point of view, relations from actual or potential peer-competitors. Finally, we have seen that with the end of the Cold War and the proliferation of civil conflict and

humanitarian catastrophe, it has become increasingly difficult, in the face of a globalised media, to maintain this narrowly statist concept of national interest.

Chapter 3 – The Use of Force Must be Overwhelming¹

*“...The facts of war are often in total opposition to the facts of peace...
The efficient commander does not seek to use just enough means, but an
excess of means. A military force that is just strong enough to take a
position will suffer heavier casualties in doing so; a force vastly superior
to the enemy’s will do the job without serious loss of men.”²*

The first Persian Gulf War of 1990 was the first time since the end of Vietnam that the US undertook a combined arms operation involving numbers of troops in the hundreds of thousands. The Gulf War also marked the point at which many of the Vietnam era junior Officers moved into senior posts of command in a combat setting³. This conflict makes an ideal case study of one of the elements of the Powell Doctrine, namely, that if the US engages in hostilities it should first assemble a force of overwhelming strength. The purposes of this chapter will be to outline the lessons learned from Vietnam which contributes towards the shaping of this particular aspect of the Powell Doctrine; how Powell’s generation of Officers came to learn this lesson; how the idea of the need for “overwhelming force” has a long history in both US and European military thought and practice; how Powell’s insistence on the need for

¹ Although not a direct quote, this recognizable phrase can be attributed to Powell, and is used in various forms by other writers in the field.

² Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Pre-war Plans and Preparations*, op cit., Colonel Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982). p. 51.

³ Colin Powell as Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, Norman Schwarzkopf CINC CENTCOM (Commander in Chief, US Central Command), Frederick Franks Commander US VII corps all holding the rank of Lieutenant General.

“overwhelming force” affected US policy towards the Persian Gulf prior to the Iraq invasion, during Operation Desert Storm, and in the war’s aftermath; and also how the idea of overwhelming force influences the elements of the Powell Doctrine dealing with the need for public and Congressional support and the need to define “vital national interest.” In this chapter, when we look at the lessons of Vietnam and how they influenced US policy in the First Persian Gulf War, we will be referring to the intellectual that brought about the Powell Doctrine as this case study takes place before Powell’s formal public enunciation of the Doctrine in his 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article. However, it should be borne in mind that, whilst the Powell Doctrine had not been publicly enunciated, Colin Powell, throughout the period of this case study, was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and therefore in an extremely influential position that allowed him to put forward and forcefully argue for those ideas that would go on to be enunciated in the Powell Doctrine a little over a year after this case study.

Before we can begin to understand how the US Armed Forces recovered from Vietnam, we must first understand the depths to which they had sunk during Vietnam and the serious challenges that the Army in particular faced.

The most serious problem was a breakdown of basic unit cohesion and discipline: “Forty percent of the Army in Europe confessed to drug use, mostly hashish; a significant minority, 7 percent, was hooked on heroin. Crime and

desertion were evident in Germany, with 12 percent of soldiers charged with serious offences.”⁴

On top of these problems the Army also suffered from a severe shortfall of modern equipment, having not purchased new tanks or infantry fighting vehicles since the early to middle 1960s. This was because from the middle 1960s to the early 1970s the largest portion of the Pentagon budget had been spent on simply maintaining the Army in Vietnam and replacing equipment rather than modernising it: “The Soviets had exploited the Army’s Vietnam diversion to close the gap in weapons technology. Popular opinion at the time did not appear to favour significant funding increases for new weaponry.”⁵

The cumulative effect of these deficiencies was to leave the US Army woefully underprepared to meet its NATO commitments in Europe, leaving it at a serious qualitative and quantitative disadvantage compared to its Warsaw Pact adversary:

The years of fighting in Vietnam had drawn Europe based forces down to unacceptable strengths. Worse, the insatiable appetite for personnel had stripped our forces of officer leadership and almost destroyed the Army’s professional non-commissioned officer corps.⁶

⁴ Robert Scales et al., *Certain victory* (Brassey’s Inc: Washington, 1994). p.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁶ Lieutenant General Frederick Franks with Tom Clancy, *Into the Storm* (GP Putnam and Sons: New York, 1997). p.85.

In a sense, this thesis is not merely about how the US Army went about learning the lessons of Vietnam, it is to a great extent the story of how the US Army managed to save itself as an institution and regain public and political confidence.

The Vietnam experience produced several “lessons” relating to the need for the use of “overwhelming force” which were absorbed by the US Military. First, the idea of a graduated use of force of the kind suggested by academics in the 1960s⁷ was discredited. Second, the idea that the best way to maintain the initiative in combat is to simply overwhelm any enemy that would be foolish enough to engage with you was reasserted. Finally, by insisting on a massive build-up of forces before military action was undertaken, the Military hoped that this would force civilian policy makers to make a clear decision on whether to go to war or not, and avoid the kind of incremental slide into conflict which was seen as marking US involvement in Vietnam. We will now look at where the theory of graduated response came from intellectually and why it was initially embraced by the US Military.

By the early 1960s such a strategy of graduated response had become immensely appealing to both civilian and military leadership. Throughout the 1950s, US Security policy had been underpinned by the idea that the US would

⁷ Two of the most interesting works in the field of limited war and the graduated use of force produced in the sixties are Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1960), and Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (Harper for the Council on Foreign Relations: New York, 1957). For an overview of the effect these intellectuals had on US strategic policy see Fred. M. Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon* (Stanford University Press: California, 1991).

respond to any situation where its vital interests were threatened by launching nuclear retaliation against its adversaries. This was known as the strategy of massive retaliation. The idea underpinning it was that no potential adversary would dare run the risk of threatening the United States because it knew that the response would be devastating. Another consideration was cost. Nuclear weapons are extremely cost effective in terms of the ratio between destruction and the cost of the weapon. It was hoped by the Eisenhower Administration that this strategy would allow the US to wage the Cold War whilst at the same time maintaining the health of its economic system.

By the early 1960s, this was no longer seen as credible⁸. First, because with an expanding Soviet nuclear arsenal any nuclear exchange was likely to lead to the devastation of the United States and, because of this, the threat of immediate use of nuclear weapons was not seen as something that the US could contemplate. The threat of a massive nuclear response to communist aggression was simply no longer a threat that the United States could credibly make, so by the early sixties US policy makers perceived a pressing need to come up with alternative strategies to combat Soviet expansion in the Third World.

The theory of graduated response was, in simple terms, the idea that US military action should be proportional to the incident that provoked it. The theory held that an opponent faced with steadily mounting pressure would

⁸ One of the fiercest critics of this strategy was former Army Chief of Staff, Maxwell D. Taylor. So much so that after his retirement, Taylor published a book criticising his Commander in Chief Dwight Eisenhower: Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (Atlantic Books: London, 1959).

realise that the United States was serious in its intent and that the opponent ought to change policy before greater punishment was metered out. This theory is largely based on the idea that strategy is an outgrowth of economics and that all actors are equally rational. As a leading theorist of limited war, Thomas Schelling, states: “If we confine our study to the theory of strategy, we seriously restrict ourselves by the assumption of rational behaviour – not just of intelligent behaviour, but of behaviour motivated by a conscious calculation of advantages.”⁹ In the context of a world populated by an increasing number of nuclear-armed states, as a practical matter this theory had the additional advantage of suggesting a way in which the use of military force could still retain its utility without running an unacceptably high risk of any resort to military action leading inevitably to the use of nuclear weapons. It suggested a way of containing the violence of modern warfare at a certain level of acceptability. John Lewis Gaddis describes the rationale behind graduated response as the desire to have more options than nuclear war or surrender. Gaddis quotes President Kennedy as saying, “We intend to have a wider choice ... than humiliation or all-out nuclear war.”¹⁰

The assumption that adversaries calculate gains and losses “rationally” meant that the task of policy makers was to determine the point at which an opponent’s calculation of advantages would change in such a way that they would behave as the US wanted them to behave. George Herring points out that:

⁹ Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, (Boston, Mass: Harvard University Press., 1999), p.4.

¹⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.203.

Such a strategy would harness the nation's military power more closely to the attainment of its political objectives. A variety of military instruments, including conventional forces, would be readied to respond to different threats at different levels. The amount of force employed in any situation would be limited to that necessary to achieve political aims.¹¹

Or as Deputy Secretary of Defence Cyrus Vance put it:

I think that a lot of us felt that by the gradual application of force the North Vietnamese and the NLF would be forced to seek a political settlement of the problem. We had seen the gradual application of force applied in the Cuban missile crisis, and had seen a very successful result. We believed that if this same gradual and restrained application of force were applied in South Viet Nam, that one could expect the same kind of result; that rational people on the other side would respond to increasing military pressure and would therefore try and seek a political solution.¹²

The Military, particularly the Army, saw an additional advantage to the idea of limited war. A strategy of massive nuclear retaliation effectively reduced the Army to the role of a police force whose job it would be to secure and decontaminate areas devastated by a nuclear explosion. This meant that,

¹¹ George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1994). p. 4.

¹² Transcript, Cyrus R. Vance Oral History Interview I, 11/3/69, by Paige E. Mulhollan, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

throughout the 1950s, the Army had a particularly difficult time securing what it considered to be an adequate budget¹³. The same can be said to be true to a lesser extent for the Navy and the Air Force as they had problems securing funding for programs and weapons systems not related to the delivery of nuclear weapons¹⁴.

The army's experience in Vietnam fatally undermined its faith in the notion that the graduated use of force was either practically possible or theoretically desirable.

The main critique levelled against this theory was its assumption of rationality on the part of any and all opponents; this was seen as being simplistic and of ignoring complex historical and psychological factors which combined to provide the basis for an army's motivation and the State's view of what its objectives should be. As Clausewitz¹⁵ pointed out as early as the nineteenth century, "It is paltry philosophy if in the old-fashioned way one lays down the rules and principles in total disregard of moral values".¹⁶ In the case of the North Vietnamese, these "moral values" could be found in their absolute conviction that the American presence in South Vietnam was a continuation of

¹³ The following are figures taken from Congressional hearings held in 1956 to determine the size of the US military budget. The following figures are what each of the service branches received. Air Force \$23 billion, Navy \$13 billion, Army \$12 billion. Figures taken from Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (Harper and Brothers: New York, 1957). p.413.

¹⁴ For an explanation of President Eisenhower's reluctance to spend large amounts on the military and an account of some of the funding and political battles caused by this see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Volume Two, The President, 1952-1969* (George, Allen and Unwin: London, 1984).

¹⁵ The theories of Clausewitz and his writing are key texts to the syllabus of US staff colleges.

¹⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz. *On War*. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Princeton University Press. 1976). p.184.

French colonial oppression and that it was their duty to reunify the country under a single Vietnamese government which they would control¹⁷. Writing his memoirs many years later, Colin Powell was to see these moral values clearly:

Our political leaders had led us into a war for the one-size-fits-all rationale of anticommunism, which was only a partial fit in Vietnam, where the war had its own historical roots in nationalism, anti-colonialism, and civil strife beyond the east-west conflict.¹⁸

Or as Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts put it:

The rationale imputed to the North Vietnamese an economic motivation, a mechanistic calculation of costs and benefits, a logical willingness to lower demand as price rose. It was as if General Giap [North Vietnamese Defence Minister] would manage a revolution the way McNamara managed the Pentagon. It implicitly assumed that Vietnamese reunification was a relative value to Hanoi that could be relinquished as the pain threshold rose, rather than the absolute value it was.¹⁹

As we can see both from the Gelb and Betts quotation above and by the discussion of Clausewitz's theories of war developed in the early nineteenth

¹⁷ In the late nineties a series of seminar was held which brought together senior American and Vietnamese historians and policy makers from the Vietnam period for a discussion of their different interpretations, objectives and motivations for the war. See Robert. S. McNamara et al. *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*. (Public Affairs: New York, 1999).

¹⁸ Colin Powell with Joseph Persico, *My American Journey*, (Ballantine Books: New York, 1996). p.144.

¹⁹ Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (The Brookings Institution: Washington DC., 1979). p.139.

century, the idea that war is a moral and ethical contest rather than simply a rational transaction based on the calculation of gains and losses was not an idea unique to Powell. Indeed, the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine saw a reassertion of the idea that war was a moral contest that, by its very nature, was ugly, brutal and stark. Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, who had been CINCPAC²⁰ during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, noted in the conclusion of his memoir, *Strategy for Defeat*, that, when searching for the lessons of the US experience in Vietnam, “The application of military, war-making power is an ugly thing – stark, harsh and demanding – and it cannot be made nicer by pussy-footing around with it.”²¹ We can see here that the self-criticisms made by the most senior officers in command of US forces in Vietnam foreshadow Colin Powell’s insistence on the need to assemble an “overwhelming force” when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the Gulf War.

If one accepts that war is not a rational calculation of gains and losses, but rather a moral and ethical contest, then it is futile to try and persuade the enemy to act in accordance with interests that they were perceived to have had. Rather, the best way to achieve objectives was felt to be not to persuade the enemy, but simply to overwhelm them, to remove their capability to continue to make war. This sentiment can be summed up by the introduction to the air-war plan in the first Gulf War:

²⁰ Commander-in-Chief Pacific. The Pacific was the theatre of operations within which Vietnam fell, making Sharp General Westmoreland’s direct superior.

²¹ U.S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato Presido Press, 1998), 269.

What it is: a focused, intense, air campaign designed to incapacitate Iraqi leadership and destroy key Iraqi military capability in a short period of time... What it is not: a graduated, long-term campaign plan designed to provide escalation options to counter Iraqi moves.²²

This brings us to the next lesson learnt from Vietnam that the best way to maintain the strategic initiative was to outnumber your opponent decisively. However this is not a new idea. Clausewitz has this to say when talking about the effect of numbers on the outcome of battle:

Superiority of numbers admittedly is the most important factor in the outcome of an engagement, so long as it is great enough to counterbalance all other contributing circumstances. It thus follows that as many troops as possible should be brought into the engagement at the decisive point.²³

This insight was by no means alien to the American concept of warfare. To a certain extent, one can see elements of the intellectual climate that existed after the Vietnam War, which would lead in the 1990s to the Powell Doctrine's insistence on the need for "overwhelming force" as a prerequisite for victory as forming a part of American thinking on warfare as far back as Grant and Lee's

²² Michael Gordon and General Bernard Trainor, *The General's War* (Little, Brown and Company: Boston, Mass., 1995), p 75.

²³ *On War*, pp.194-5.

campaigns in the Civil War. One can see a reliance on “overwhelming force” in General Winfield Scott’s “Anaconda” plan:

Let the navy ... blockade the southern coasts. The army, then, must drive down the Mississippi, opening the river all the way to the Gulf, splitting the western states from the Confederacy and holding the valley in such strength that the blockade of the Southland would be complete. With rebellion isolated, it could then be crushed at leisure.²⁴

What this quotation shows is that Scott clearly identified the decisive point of battle: the Mississippi River Valley. He proposed offensive action to remove the enemy from this key piece of ground and then holding it with a force large enough to prevent the enemy’s return. The above discussion also demonstrates the fact that the intellectual climate that gave rise to the Powell Doctrine’s insistence on the need for “overwhelming force” was not particularly novel, but that it was built on an understanding both of classic nineteenth-century European theories of war and also on long held American beliefs about how war should be practiced.

As we shall see, this insight on the need for “overwhelming force” was not entirely lacking amongst US Generals of the Vietnam era, but for what were perceived as wider political and strategic reasons, this insight was largely ignored.

²⁴ Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the American Civil War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957), p.53.

The fact that US forces were not overwhelmingly strong compared to their opponent and that this might cause difficulty to the US effort in Vietnam was recognised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff *during* the Vietnam War.

The Joint Chiefs correctly saw that involvement in Vietnam would require a full-scale war... They felt, as Gen. Harold Johnson put it, that if the United States was not willing to go all the way it should not go in at all and that if military forces were committed, they should be committed at the “most rapid rate possible and not... at the rate of... an eye dropper.”²⁵

The historical record also shows that Johnson’s concerns were fully shared by the senior US commander in the field, Lieutenant General William Westmoreland. By mid-1965, Westmoreland had requested that 44 battalions of what were known as “Free World Forces”²⁶ should be sent to Vietnam. However, Westmoreland realised that this number was insufficient to win the war:

In other words, a force of 34 US maneuver battalions and 10 3d country maneuver battalions together with appropriate tactical air and balanced ground combat and logistic support will not provide reasonable assurance

²⁵ *LBJ and Vietnam*. p. 34. For similar criticisms made by other senior military officers see Bruce Palmer, *The 25 Year War: America’s Military Role in Vietnam*. (University of Kentucky: Lexington, 1984), and U.S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (Novato Presido Press, 1998).

²⁶ “Free World,” in the context of Vietnam, refers to the US, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

of attaining the objective you postulate (convincing the DRV/VC they cannot win). The DRV/VC are too deeply committed to be influenced by anything but application of overpowering force. Consequently, while infusion of US/3d country combat strength on the scale contemplated should reestablish the military balance by the end of December, it will not per se cause the enemy to back off.²⁷

However, as we shall see, for political reasons the insight of Generals Johnson and Westmoreland was largely ignored. The rationale given by the Johnson Administration for avoiding the kind of rapid build-up that Generals Westmoreland and Johnson advocated was fear that a rapid and massive build-up of US forces in South-East Asia ran the serious risk of Chinese or possibly even Soviet counter-intervention. Whilst US policymakers undoubtedly did have to keep in mind the precedent of the Korean War,²⁸ it is doubtful that avoidance of a war with China could be the major reason why the Johnson Administration did not undertake a rapid build-up of US forces in South-East Asia. Logically, if the Johnson Administration thought that the US's overriding strategic interest was to avoid a confrontation with China, then surely the Johnson Administration would not have committed itself to any large-scale presence of US forces in South Vietnam. Because the US was not

²⁷ Telegram from the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler), Saigon, June 30th 1965. Source: Center of Military History, Westmoreland Papers, COMUSMACV Message Files. Top Secret. Full text available at: < http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_iii/030.html>.

²⁸ For accounts of the origins of the Korean War and US policy towards that war in general, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Vol. 2, The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) and Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (London: Pan, 2010).

in a position to accurately predict at what point a build-up of US forces would trigger a Chinese intervention, therefore, any large-scale deployment of US forces, regardless of how rapidly those deployments were made, ran the risk of provoking China. Aside from the logical shortcomings in a position that avoided a rapid build-up of troops in order to avoid provoking Communist China, there is also some evidence that the Johnson Administration knew that the likelihood of Chinese intervention was less than they sometimes portrayed it: “China was reeling from the failure of what it called the ‘Great Leap Forward,’ an experiment in social engineering that had caused thirty million deaths and cut the nation’s birth rate in half.”²⁹ The United States may not have been fully aware of the extent of the catastrophe that had befallen China; nevertheless, US policymakers ought to have been aware that China was, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, in the midst of a catastrophe. In May 1962, at the height of the “Great Leap Forward,” over 5,000 refugees a day were crossing the border from mainland China to Hong Kong.³⁰ Moyar describes the level to which the Chinese sought to avoid conflict with the United States even after the United States had directly attacked Chinese supposed North Vietnamese allies:

Yet when the Americans bombed the North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases, no Chinese planes or ships attempted to defend North Vietnam or attack the American aircraft carriers. Nor did the Chinese even produce a

²⁹ Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.126. For a discussion of the political, social and economic effects of the “Great Leap Forward,” see Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

³⁰ Information taken from *Mao Great Famine*, p.240.

strong Verbal response, stating only that the Vietnamese would fight and defeat the Americans if they expanded the war but making no mention of a Chinese intention to participate in the fracas.³¹

Having looked at the constraints on the size of force the US chose to commit to Vietnam, and how that led to a situation where the US found it difficult to employ “overwhelming force,” we will now look at how the strategy the US chose to pursue in Vietnam made it virtually impossible for the US to achieve or use “overwhelming force” decisively.

The US from the beginning to the end of its involvement in Vietnam was on the strategic defensive and having to react to the moves of the North Vietnamese. This was partly because of political considerations. US forces were not allowed to attack Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, nor were they allowed to invade North Vietnam itself. However, it was also due to the fact that the US was never able to assemble overwhelming numbers at the decisive point that Clausewitz refers to³². Former President Dwight Eisenhower, who was also a five star general, made the following observation to President Johnson in a letter in 1968: “We cannot hit the enemy where he concentrates, for example, around Khe Sanh... Has Westmoreland really been

³¹ *Triumph Forsaken*, p.320.

³² For an interesting discussion of how the Vietnam might have turned out differently had these restrictions not been in place, see C. Dale Walton, *The Myth of Inevitable US Defeat in Vietnam*, (F.Cass: London, 2002).

given the forces he is asking for; if he has asked for 525000 men, why don't we send them sooner?"³³

Westmoreland realised at the time that he did not have decisive numerical advantage over the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong:

The purpose of this message is to provide an analysis of current MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] force requirements projected through FY 68. Last year, when we first developed out force requirements for CY 67, we stated a requirement for 124 maneuver battalions with the necessary combat and combat service support for a total strength of 555,741... Subsequent reassessment of the situation has indicated clearly that the Program Four force, although enabling us to gain the initiative, will not permit sustained operations of the scope and intensity required to avoid an unreasonably protracted war.³⁴

In his memoirs, General William Westmoreland describes the decision to limit US troop numbers at 525,000 in 1968 with the following observation:

While I could live with the situation and continue to prosecute the war in terms of the old parameters, including gradually turning the war over to the ARVN, failure to provide large numbers of additional US troops and

³³ Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War* (WW Norton and Company: New York, 1989). p. 167.

³⁴ Telegram from the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp). Saigon, March 18th 1967. Johnson Library. National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Vol. LXIX. Full text available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/v/13143.htm>.

exploit the enemies losses with bold new moves seriously prolonged the war.³⁵

In fairness to the policy makers that placed these limits on Westmoreland it should be noted that Westmoreland has been criticised for the strategy he adopted. It has been argued that he did not make the best use of the forces he had available to him. This was because US forces were widely dispersed around Vietnam. Therefore, US forces were never able to concentrate overwhelming force at any particular point and therefore it did not achieve decisive results. Westmoreland's strategy was one of strategic defence based on reacting to North Vietnamese moves and seeking to deflect them, whilst at the same time causing so much damage to North Vietnamese units as to render them ineffective. "As a military strategy, attrition meant wearing down or grinding down the enemy until the enemy lost it's will to fight or the capacity to maintain its military effort."³⁶ As Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, a South Vietnamese officer writing in exile, pointed out: "The Americans had designed a purely defensive strategy for Vietnam. It was a strategy that was based on the attrition of the enemy through a prolonged defense and made no allowance for decisive offensive action".³⁷ It has also been argued that, because of the nature of the war in Vietnam, it would have been impossible to concentrate "overwhelming force" at any one particular time or place because of the lack of a visible enemy.

³⁵ General Williams Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Double Day and Company: New York, 1976), p. 359.

³⁶ Lyndon Johnson's *War*, p. 20.

³⁷ Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, Op-Cit., *On Strategy*. Pp. 115-116.

So, would it have been possible for Westmoreland to concentrate “overwhelming force” at a particular time and place if different strategic choices had been made? As we shall see, those military officers who were part of the intellectual climate that inspired the Powell Doctrine would argue that it was possible and that it should have been done.

For authors such as David Halberstam and John Prados,³⁸ the US’s lack of “overwhelming force” in Vietnam was a side issue. The line of argument these authors pursue is that the US, by supporting a regime in South Vietnam that was a legacy of French colonial rule,³⁹ placed itself on the wrong side of history. Halberstam, comparing the wars in Korea and Vietnam, makes the following observation:

The former [Korea] was a conventional war with a traditional border crossing by a uniformed enemy massing his troops; the latter was a political war conducted by guerrillas and feeding on subversion. There was no uniformed, massed enemy to use power against; the enemy was first and foremost political, which meant that the support of the population made the guerrillas’ way possible.⁴⁰

This being the case, Halberstam goes on to argue that any American military presence in Vietnam was inherently counter-productive to the goals the US

³⁸ See John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

³⁹ For an in-depth discussion of the nature of the South Vietnamese government, see Chapter 6.

⁴⁰ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1969), p. 212.

sought: “The very presence of Caucasian troops was more than canceling out any military benefits.”⁴¹

The alternative view of the war, as put forward by authors such as Harry Summers,⁴² is that the Vietnam War was, in the final analysis, an act of aggression on the part of the North Vietnamese towards the South, and that the guerrilla warfare emphasised by Halberstam was only one aspect of a campaign waged and directed by Hanoi:

By seeing the Viet Cong as a separate entity rather than as an instrument of North Vietnam, we chose a center of gravity which in fact did not exist. The proof that the Viet Cong guerrillas were not a center of gravity was demonstrated during Tet-68, when, even though they were virtually destroyed, the war continued unabated.⁴³

If one subscribes to Summers’s view of the war’s nature, then the utility of “overwhelming force” becomes clear. If the war is being directed by Hanoi and is ultimately reliant on North Vietnamese support to continue, then overwhelming US force could have been used to seal the South Vietnamese battlefield from the North by carrying the fight into Cambodia and Laos. Authors such as Mark Moyar would go even further than Summers and would advocate that the US ought to have used “overwhelming force” to not only

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁴² See Colonel (RET) Harry G. Summers, Jr, *American Strategy in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis* (Mineola: Dover Publication, 2007).

⁴³ *American Strategy in Vietnam*, p. 80.

isolate the battlefield in South Vietnam, but to have actually carried the war directly to North Vietnam:

an American invasion followed by a North Vietnamese retreat into the mountains and a Chinese abstention from fighting was, for the United States, a far better strategic scenario than the one the Americans ultimately accepted by not invading ... The Communists would have lost the supply system that began in the North and reached into the South via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and they would have been denied the importation of foreign war supplies by sea into Haiphong, the North's primary port, compelling them to rely on the vulnerable roads and railways from China for full logistical support.⁴⁴

It is worth noting that General Westmoreland was in no doubt that an earlier expansion of the war into Cambodia, Laos and possibly North Vietnam would have made a decisive difference:

the United States made other serious strategic mistakes in Vietnam and Southeast Asia: waiting so long to make incursions into Laos and Cambodia and even when eventually doing so, reducing their effectiveness by restrictions; failing to demonstrate to the North Vietnamese that they were vulnerable just north of the DMZ.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Triumph Forsaken*, p.322.

⁴⁵ General Williams Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Double Day and Company: New York, 1976). p.410.

The debate about the character and nature of the Vietnam War is one of the academic debates about the war that still rages. Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to resolve this argument, it is important to know that the conflict in Vietnam was never as clear-cut as a dichotomy between a guerrilla war and a conventional war; it contained elements of both, and that other strategic options other than those chosen by the Johnson Administration were available to US policymakers, and the strategy that the US eventually adopted should not be seen as one that it inevitably had to adopt. Ultimately, whether the US Military was right to draw the lesson that bringing overwhelming force to bear would have made a difference to the outcome of Vietnam comes down to whether you believe that the war in South Vietnam was largely an indigenous guerrilla war, or whether you believe the war was largely directed by North Vietnam with element of a guerrilla war.

Whether or not the need for “overwhelming force” to maintain the strategic initiative was an appropriate lesson to be taken from the US experience in Vietnam, what is for certain is that the US Military, writ large, and those that formed the intellectual climate that informed the Powell Doctrine, certainly did take that lesson from Vietnam, whether correct or not. We can see this very clearly in the planning of US operations in the first Gulf War. The US Military’s attitude can be summed up by a quotation from Gordon Trainor:

In drawing up their plan, the Jedi’s [US army planning cell] operated with several key assumptions. One central presupposition was that the coalition ground forces should not waste men and material fighting non-

decisive battles; military power was to be conserved for a possible fight with the Republican Guard, which Iraq was holding in reserve, and not weakened in unnecessary engagements with Iraq's regular army forces.⁴⁶

The third and perhaps most politically significant lesson regarding the need for overwhelming force that the US armed forces drew from its experience in Vietnam was that by laying out the full cost and magnitude of military options to civilian policy makers at the outset, the military could prevent the kind of incremental drift into conflict which marked US involvement in Vietnam.

Although US involvement in Vietnam ended with the commitment of over half a million US servicemen and the death of nearly 50,000, the commitment originally began merely by the US sending a limited number of advisors to train and give tactical support to the South Vietnamese. As each phase of US involvement failed to lead to a successful outcome, policy makers were continually tempted to see whether just a slightly bigger US presence could make the difference. So there was the expansion of the US advisory effort from a few hundred in the late 1950s to 16,000 by 1963 to 22,000 by 1965. Then economic and military targets in North Vietnam were bombed. This was followed by the despatch of combat troops to protect the aircraft and facilities involved in this bombing until finally these troops were used in an offensive combat role against North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.⁴⁷ This is to say

⁴⁶ *The Generals' War*. p. 126.

⁴⁷ There are many accounts of how US escalation in Vietnam took place, some are memoirs and some are secondary sources. For good examples see Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (Norton: New York, 1982), Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Oxford

nothing of the fact that, between the summer and autumn of 1963, the US covertly encouraged the *coup d'état* that brought down the government of Ngo Dinh Diem, which, in a political sense, massively increased the level of commitment of the United States as the Americans were at least partly responsible for bringing the regime that Johnson had to deal with between 1964 and 1968 to power. The Johnson Administration could not be seen as running out on an allied government that the US had played a major part in creating.

This is not to suggest that US policymakers did not understand the seriousness of what they were doing. Rather, the point to be noted is that, because the US commitment to Vietnam was increased in such an incremental way, policymakers were slow to realise just how deeply committed the US over time became to the survival of South Vietnam. As Powell put it on returning from his first tour as an Adviser in Vietnam,

Still, few people in America knew or cared what was happening in that faraway country. Vietnam was strictly a back-burner issue. At the time, the United States had 252,000 Army troops in Europe and 49,000 in Korea, compared to the 16,300 in Vietnam.⁴⁸

Because US involvement in Vietnam increased so incrementally, it meant that US policy makers and, to a greater extent the US public, never engaged in a full scale debate about whether or not preserving an independent South

University Press: New York, 1991), and Robert S. McNamara with Brian Van De Mark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lesson of Vietnam* (Vintage Books: New York, 1996).

⁴⁸ *My American Journey*, p.101.

Vietnam was actually worth a war. The attitude of the Johnson Administration can be summed up in the way in which the announcement that additional forces were being sent to Vietnam was made by Lyndon Johnson in 1965. Rather than deliver a message to Congress or ask for a declaration of war, Johnson made the announcement in a regular White House press conference. As Herring puts it, “July 28th, 1965, might therefore be called the day the United States went to war without knowing it.”⁴⁹

In fact, the Johnson White House went further than this in trying to close down public debate over Vietnam before it had begun. Internal documents show that steps were taken to deliberately obscure the role of American forces in Vietnam. The following is an extract from National Security Memorandum.⁵⁰ It is worth quoting it at some length because it demonstrates the duplicity of the Johnson Administration and the lengths that it went to in order to minimise the public’s perception of how deeply committed the US was to the war in Vietnam:

The President desires that with respect to the actions in paragraphs 5 through 7 [increases in ground forces], premature publicity be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimise any appearance of sudden changes in policy, and official statements on these troop movements will be made only with the direct approval of the Secretary of

⁴⁹ *LBJ and Vietnam*. p.2.

⁵⁰ National Security Memorandums in the Kennedy and Johnson White House were authoritative statements of policy and laid out what the US would do in a certain situation and the rationale behind its actions.

Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of State. The President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy.⁵¹

This determination to minimise publicly the role the US was playing in Vietnam was to have a number of serious consequences on both a political and a practical level.

On a political level the fact that there was no sense of emergency about the way the US entered Vietnam made it much easier for Lyndon Johnson to go to war without having to mobilise reserves or declare any kind of national emergency. From Johnson's point of view this was a relief as it meant that he could concentrate on passing an ambitious programme of domestic reform⁵² without the war taking resources away from it. As Dale Herspring points out,

Declaring a national emergency would have focused public attention on the war instead of on his domestic programs, probably guaranteeing that little more would be accomplished at home. Yet potential Congressional opposition to issuing a joint resolution also would be problematic.

⁵¹ Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1996). p.346.

⁵² Much has been written on Johnson's domestic ambitions, see Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (St Martin's Griffin: New York, 1991). Goodwin was granted a number of interviews with Lyndon Johnson and the book contains a good deal of commentary from Johnson's point of view. For more recent work see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1998).

Johnson wanted both guns and butter: he was not prepared to sacrifice one for the other.⁵³

However, the Joint Chiefs did continue to press Johnson for at least a limited degree of national mobilisation. In a crucial meeting on July 22, 1965, where the decision was made to grant Westmoreland's initial request for 34 US battalions, President Johnson asked the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral David McDonald, what he thought the President should do. McDonald's reply was succinct and to the point:

1. Supply forces Westmoreland has asked for.
2. Prepare to furnish more (100,000) in 1966.
3. Commensurate building in air and naval forces, step up of air attacks on NVN (North Vietnam).
4. Bring in needed reserves and draft calls.⁵⁴

However, immediately after McDonald's intervention, President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara make it clear that McDonald's request is not likely to be granted.

“President: Any ideas on cost of what this would be?

McNamara: Yes--\$12 billion--1966.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil-Military Relations from FDR to George W. Bush* (University Press Kansas: Lawrence, 2005), p. 169.

⁵⁴ Notes of Meeting, Washington, July 22nd 1965. Source: Johnson Library, Meeting Notes File, Box 1. No classification marking. Available at:
<http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_iii/070.html>

In bland bureaucratic language, what this exchange tells us is that, were mobilisation to take place, the money that Johnson had earmarked for his “Great Society” would go up in Vietnamese smoke. House majority whip Hale Boggs (Democrat Louisiana) points out that even this incremental increase in US effort played increasing havoc with President Johnson’s ability to enact domestic policy.

Well, it's strange that reaction in the House was considerably different from the Senate. There was much more support in the House than there was in the Senate. But obviously the growth of the war and the spread of the war and the cost of the war made our job much more difficult in providing the domestic programs.⁵⁶

However, from the military’s point of view, this method of fighting a war whilst maintaining a peacetime stance proved an enormous strain. First, because it meant that there was a huge drain on the manpower of the regular US army without an influx of reserves to fill potential gaps in force structure. Second, it meant that the normal peacetime tour of duty of one year was maintained. This led to a high turnover of men and officers in Vietnam and affected the overall cohesion of US forces in the field:

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Transcript, Hale Boggs Oral History Interview I, 3/13/69, by T. H. Baker, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

In order to fight the war without calling up the reserves, the Army was creating instant noncoms. Shake-and-bake sergeants we called them. Take a private, give him a little training, shake him once or twice, and pronounce him an NCO... the involvement of so any unprepared officers and non-coms led to breakdowns in morale, discipline, and professional judgement.⁵⁷

Apart from refusing to activate the reserve, the other major detrimental effect of the military maintaining a peacetime posture was that the normal peacetime one year tour of duty was not extended. This led to a high turnover of both junior officer and combat infantry. The effect of this was to replace experienced officers and infantry and replace them with green untested troops. The following quotation shows the effect this situation had on one unit, the First Battalion 7th Cavalry Regiment, but this was to be a situation repeated throughout the US military throughout the entire length of the Vietnam War:

For much of this time my battalion was at, or near, its full authorized strength of thirty-seven commissioned officers, one warrant officer, and 729 enlisted men. That changed in the spring of 1965, when we lost eight of our fifteen platoon leader lieutenants...Between April and July we also lost by discharge or reassignment our intelligence officer, surgeon, personnel officer, air operations officer, supply officer, assistant medical officer, chaplain, and two company commanders.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *My American Journey*. Pp. 139-140.

⁵⁸ LT. GEN. Harold G. Moore (RET) and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*. (Corgi Books: London, 2002). Pp.26-27.

Not only did this leave frontline units critically short of experienced personnel, it also meant that the training timetable for new recruits was severely compressed given the urgent need to deploy them to Vietnam. The following quotation is taken from a White House meeting between Lyndon Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the immediate aftermath of the Tet offensive. The Army Chief of Staff, General Johnson, explained the problem of sending more troops to Vietnam with the following observation: “We have already curtailed training to the minimum. We must give these units proper training time. They are already squeezed.”⁵⁹

There was never a serious public debate over whether Vietnam was worth a full scale war, because the impression was always maintained that this next level of escalation would be the last level of escalation needed. Congress and the American public increasingly came to feel that they had been duped into a war that they neither wanted nor had agreed to⁶⁰. Furthermore, because there was not the kind of national mobilisation that had accompanied for example World War II, there was not the same kind of visceral emotion that the North Vietnamese were an enemy which needed to be overcome and defeated. Robert Murphy, an influential businessman and lawyer whom President Johnson used

⁵⁹ Notes of Meeting, Washington, February 9th 1968. Source: Johnson Library, Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings. President's Daily Diary. Notes of the President's meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

⁶⁰ For detailed analysis of the role of Congress in the Vietnam War, see Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion: America's Descent into Vietnam*. (Basic Books: New York, 2001) and Melvin Small, *At the Water's Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War* (Ivan R. Dee: Chicago, 2005). For a study of how Vietnam impacted on Lyndon Johnson's relationship with Robert Kennedy and an argument on how this disagreement affected US policy and US domestic politics see Jeff Shesol, *Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy and the Feud that Defined a Decade* (W.W.Norton: New York, 1997).

as an outside consultant on matters of foreign policy, put the point with the following observation: “There is no hate complex like there was against Hitler...Ho Chi Minh is not regarded as evil in many places in the United States and in Europe he is regarded as a kindly hero”.⁶¹

By insisting on the accumulation of overwhelming force at the outset, the intellectual climate that created the Powell Doctrine attempted to ensure that, on the practical level of war fighting by ensuring the maximum commitment of US forces at the outset, it tried to avoid the kind of manpower and equipment gaps which characterised US involvement in Vietnam. These gaps would be avoided because the army would know ahead of time exactly the size of commitment that it was being asked to make and could therefore plan its force structure accordingly.

Furthermore, in the wake of Vietnam, the army’s attempts at doctrinal renewal were aided by changes made to the army’s force structure by chief of staff General Creighton Abrams, to ensure that in the future it would be impossible for the President to commit US forces to long-term combat without both extending tours of duty or without calling up significant elements of the reserves. The way this was done was by creating what were known as “roundout” divisions, these divisions would have a spine of regular troops which would maintain the division’s logistics and other services during

⁶¹ Lloyd. C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Elephant Paperbacks: Chicago, 1995). p.400.

peacetime but would require the addition of at least a brigade's worth of reservists in order to bring them up to full combat strength.

General Abrams...had insisted that the Army could not go to war again without the involvement and tacit approval of the American people. A call up of the Reserves would bring home to Americans from the beginning that they had a personal stake in the conflict. Therefore, Abrams had sought to weave Reserve forces so inextricably into established deployment schemes that no force would be able to fight a major war in the future without them.⁶²

These reforms ensure that it is impossible to go to war in the kind of furtive, almost secretive way in which the Johnson Administration entered Vietnam. Instead, future Administrations would be required to engage in public debate about the objectives of any conflict and the American people would be fully aware of what was being asked of them and what price they could potentially be asked to pay. What we can see here in the very early days of the post-Vietnam era Army is General Creighton Abrams, as Chief of Staff of the Army, setting the organisational conditions within which the ideas that would go on to become the Powell Doctrine, particularly its insistence on "overwhelming force" and the need for public support, could flourish.

Having looked at the "lessons" the US military drew from Vietnam, we must now look at how the concept of the need for overwhelming force relates to

⁶² *Certain Victory*. p.18.

other elements of the Powell Doctrine. In particular we will see how this need for overwhelming force can help to achieve consistent Congressional and public support and how the expense of possessing overwhelming force serves to compel policy makers into deciding what the vital interests of the United States are.

First, as has already been discussed earlier in this chapter, the use of overwhelming force is the best way to ensure that a conflict is short and that the outcome is in the United States' favour. And, as the quotation that we began this chapter with demonstrates, it is also seen as the best way of minimising your own casualties at the same time as successfully obtaining objectives. All of these things are important in maintaining public and, through that, Congressional support for the commitment of US troops to a particular theatre of operations. Schwarzkopf's deputy Lieutenant General Calvin Waller stresses the importance Schwarzkopf gave to maintaining public support for the war:

I think politicians who say Norman Schwarzkopf was reluctant to fight this war are sadly mistaken. Norman Schwarzkopf didn't want to enter into another military war where the resolve of the people was not to stick it out, so he was concerned, you know, the ghost of Vietnam, entering into a conflict not having the support of the people concerned him, but

once we saw the overwhelming support from the people of America who were behind all of the coalition forces.⁶³

In announcing that the war had begun, President Bush went to great lengths to reassure the American people that everything possible was being done to minimise US casualties, indeed he explicitly evoked the memory of Vietnam and contrasted it against the war in the Gulf.

Prior to ordering our forces into battle, I instructed our military commanders to take every necessary step to prevail as quickly as possible, and with the greatest degree of protection possible for American and allied service men and women. I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back. I'm hopeful that this fighting will not go on for long and that casualties will be held to an absolute minimum.⁶⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were extremely diligent in stamping out the notion that defending Saudi Arabia and/or liberating Kuwait could be done lightly. Shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, an unnamed “senior Administration official” said that 50,000 troops would be required to defend Saudi Arabia. The

⁶³ “Interview with Lieutenant General Calvin Waller,” *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—January 9th 1996. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/waller/1.html>.

⁶⁴ President George H. W. Bush. Address to the Nation Announcing Allied Military Action in the Persian Gulf, January 16th 1991. Public Papers of the President. 1991: Book I. Full text available at; <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=19222&st=iraq&st1=>.

reaction of the Army Chief of Staff, General Carl Vuono, at what he considered to be a distressingly low figure was described by Bob Woodward as being that:

The operation, now dubbed Desert Shield, could sour on the question of expectations and credibility. With the White House and political leadership concealing facts and risks, creating false hopes for a small, short-lived operation, he heard echoes of Vietnam.⁶⁵

This quotation demonstrates both that the senior military is keenly aware of the danger of starting out with a relatively small commitment of troops and resources which has gained public support because of its smallness, and then the military is sucked into an ever-increasing commitment because the initial small deployment did not do the job. This then creates a situation where the public feels that it has been misled as to the overall cost of a particular commitment. And perhaps more damagingly, it leads to an erosion of trust between the general public and senior military figures. So, from the military's point of view it is better to overestimate the numbers of troops and resources necessary to successfully complete any given mission and then try and build public and Congressional consensus around that figure so that the public will on the one hand feel fully informed and consulted about the potential costs and risks of military operations:

⁶⁵ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1991), p.279.

The Army chief recognised that Operations Plan 90-1002⁶⁶ put the military in for the long haul – months and months, if not longer. No one knew how long the deployment might last. If the media and therefore the public didn't feel they were getting the facts, there was no chance of maintaining public support. Such a massive deployment could not be concealed; orders were going to units in dozens of states. “The big question is the political will question,” Vuono told his staff.⁶⁷

The requirement for overwhelming force also reinforces the element of the Powell Doctrine which states that military force should only be used to defend the vital interests of the United States.

Acquiring overwhelming force, even against a relatively small adversary, is expensive, and it is expensive in a number of different ways. In terms of manpower, gaining overwhelming advantage means calling up reservists, thus disrupting the economy and pulling people away from their families. In terms of both purchasing the equipment all of those troops will need and then transporting it to where it is needed, and finally in terms of political capital in order to have the finances to pay the troops, move the troops, buy the equipment and supplies and then transport them. This costs a great deal of

⁶⁶ The plan to defend Saudi Arabia from an invasion from Iraq, drawn up first in the early 1980s and updated on a regular basis all the way up to the invasion of Kuwait. This plan provided a number of different options for troop levels depending upon the political objectives US policy makers wanted to achieve. These numbers went from 50,000 to 250,000.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

money which had to be found from somewhere.⁶⁸ The first Gulf War provides a good example of the huge costs involved in assembling a force thought to be overwhelming. On October 30th 1990 Colin Powell outlined the offensive plan to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait,

The defensive force Bush had approved in August, totalling 250,000 troops, would be fully deployed on schedule by December 1, he said. The war plan would require at least another 200,000, plus six carrier task forces and additional aircraft. If the president gave the order now, the offensive option would be in place by January 15.⁶⁹

The funds to equip and maintain such large forces could be raised through tax or through cutting other spending programmes. Either way, such a huge commitment was going to place the President's hopes for the future and his own political standing at present in question.

Therefore, a President and the advisors around him have to think very carefully about whether a particular foreign policy problem means that much to them that they are prepared to pay these costs in order to achieve their objective. This was precisely the reaction of National Security advisor Brent Scowcroft⁷⁰:

⁶⁸ In constant dollars, the first Gulf War cost \$102 billion. See Stephen Daggett, "Cost of Major U.S. Wars," Congressional Research Service, June 29, 2010. Full text available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Karen DeYoung, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2006). p. 200.

⁷⁰ For Scowcroft's own views on the Gulf War see George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (Vintage; New York, 1999), Chapters 13-19.

Scowcroft was taken aback by the size of the attack force Powell was proposing. The military, he felt, had moved from reluctance to undertake an offensive operation at all to a deliberately inflated plan designed to make the president think twice about the effort.⁷¹

Certainly in President Bush's mind, there was no doubt about the seriousness with which he viewed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The following quotation is taken from his address to the nation on August 8th, announcing the initial deployment of US troops to defend Saudi Arabia.

In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe. Sometimes these choices are not easy. But today as President, I ask for your support in a decision I've made to stand up for what's right and condemn what's wrong, all in the cause of peace.⁷²

What is interesting is Powell's response to Scowcroft's concerns. This is effectively to say that if the objective of US forces is as important to the security of the country as Scowcroft says it is, no one will care how much it costs so long as US forces succeed:

Don't worry about the numbers, he said. Deploying too few troops would risk a prolonged battle, higher casualties and even failure. After a victory,

⁷¹ *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell*, p.200.

⁷² George Bush. Address to the Nation Announcing the Deployment of United States Armed Forces to Saudi Arabia, August 8th 1990. Public Papers of the President. George Bush. 1990: Book II. Full text available at:
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=18750&st=iraq&st1=>.

no one would argue that the force had been too big; people would say they had been prudent.⁷³

Although in one sense Powell's answer to Scowcroft's concerns is reassuring, on another level it does force Scowcroft and others holding his opinion that force is the best way to end the Gulf conflict to explain the reason why they think that force is the most appropriate way of ending the crisis in the Gulf.⁷⁴ Because if such a huge commitment was made and then it was later found out that this was unnecessary, what looked to be a prudent commitment of force then instead looks excessive, expensive and unnecessary, and certainly not in the vital interests of the United States.

So the need that Powell sets out for American forces in the Gulf to be overwhelming places any advocate of the use of force in a position where they have to be certain that force is not only legally and morally justified. It also asks the advocate of military force to justify why a military solution is the best way of ending a conflict. Also, and perhaps more importantly, it forces policy makers to make an explicit decision about when a particular outcome is so important to the United States that it justifies this huge expenditure of men and material.

⁷³ *Solider: The Life of Colin Powell*, p. 200.

⁷⁴ Many people argued that a prolonged blockade of Iraq would be the best way of bringing the crisis to an end. Among those arguing for such a course were former Defence Secretaries Robert McNamara and Clark Clifford and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe.

This attitude on the use of force effectively means that US policy makers are asked to place foreign policy objectives into two distinct categories: those circumstances where they are prepared to use an overwhelming amount of force, and those circumstances in which they are not prepared to use that amount of force, with little room under the Powell Doctrine for any intermediate categories⁷⁵. Wisconsin Congressman Les Aspin, who was Chairman of the House Armed Forces Committee at the time of the Gulf War and who went on to serve as President Clinton's first Secretary of Defense, was critical of the way the Powell Doctrine attempted to divide foreign policy into these two categories.

He evidently believed that such a constraint would limit the military's usefulness in achieving policy objectives to only extreme cases. Such conditions could lead to the military becoming like nuclear weapons in the Cold War--important, expensive, but not useful.⁷⁶

Whether one subscribes to the Powell Doctrine's insistence on dividing foreign policy issues into those where overwhelming force could be contemplated, or Aspin's criticism of the Powell Doctrine, depends largely on what we take to be the military's purpose. If one takes the view that the military's role in foreign policy is strictly limited to the destruction of the conventional armed forces of other states, then for reasons outlined earlier in this chapter, one

⁷⁵ For criticisms of this distinction see George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1993), p.84 and p.103 and Madeleine Korbelt Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (Pan: London, 2004), Pp.181-182.

⁷⁶ Edwin, J. Arnold, "The Use of Military Power in Pursuit of National Interests", *Parameters*, Spring 1994. Pp. 4-12.

would always seek overwhelming force. However, if we subscribe to the view that the range of tasks the military ought to be asked to perform go beyond conventional war fighting, then from this point of view, Aspin's criticism makes much more sense. In the context, for example, of military assistance to a civil power, such as the US intervention in Haiti in 1994, overwhelming force is not necessary and indeed could be viewed as counterproductive. In this instance the military's objective is not to overwhelm the enemy, but to support a civilian led effort to restore basic institutions of government and the economy. Therefore, an overwhelming large military presence would tend to defeat the purpose of rebuilding civil capacity.

The issue of whether the mission of modern militaries is to engage in a wide range of security related operations, or whether the proper use of military force is strictly related to war fighting is outside the scope of this thesis, but it is worth noting for the record, that since the first Persian Gulf War, the US military has found itself having to act in support of a civil power, much more than it has found itself fighting wars.

So far in this chapter we have looked at the lessons of Vietnam as regards the idea of overwhelming force and how the idea of overwhelming force fits into the wider context of the Powell Doctrine. Before concluding this chapter, we need to look at criticisms of the Powell Doctrine's insistence on a need to build up overwhelming force.

The working assumption of US planners was that the Iraqi armed forces would prove a formidable opponent for the US led coalition. Schwarzkopf himself was in no doubt that the Iraqis would prove formidable opponents: “They had the capability to be quite a formidable enemy and, of course, you do judge your enemy based upon capabilities, not intent, you have to look at the enemy and really almost make a worst case call every time.”⁷⁷

While we now know that this did not turn out to be the case, there was in fact evidence available at the time that Iraqi forces were not as capable as they were portrayed as being. Iraq had already been involved in a vicious and prolonged war with its neighbour Iran for most of the 1980s. This war had been closely observed by the United States as well as many other western nations because of their substantial strategic and economic interests in the region. As Dilip Hiro noted, Iraq’s military performance in this war had been less than impressive:

Baghdad’s reverses had resulted from a combination of logistical, military and political factors. Its forces performed well only as long as they were near their own border. Once deep into Iran their communications and supply lines became overstretched, and the high command had difficulty in redeploying forces quickly...The deployment of Popular Army⁷⁸ units complicated the situation. Many regular army

⁷⁷ “Interview with General Norman Schwarzkopf,” *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—January 9th 1996. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/schwarzkopf/1.html>.

⁷⁸ A militia made up of Baath party members.

officers considered these inexperienced reservists more of a cumbersome liability than an asset, more inclined to surrender than fight.⁷⁹

There were also more contemporary signs that the Iraqi army was simply not in the same league as the coalition it faced. In late January 1991, the Iraqis launched a limited offensive from Kuwait into Saudi Arabia, briefly capturing the town of Ra's al Khafji. After a few days of fierce fighting, Saudi and Qatari units drove the Iraqis back across the border. Commenting on Iraqi performance, Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor had this to say:

Throughout the battle, the Iraqis had great difficulty in coordinating their actions. Allied signal intelligence revealed virtual command chaos. Iraqi unit commanders lost control of their subordinates and most of the time were unaware of events beyond their line of sight. Artillery failed to coordinate with ground attacks and was incapable of shifting fire in a fast-moving situation. Logistics were unresponsive to the needs of the combat units.⁸⁰

However, this poor Iraqi performance did not cause US planners to make any alterations to their estimates of the size of the force that the coalition needed to use in order to eject the Iraqis from Kuwait, nor did it alter their plan as to how allied forces were to operate. This failure to assimilate readily available information raises a number of questions about the Powell Doctrine's reliance

⁷⁹ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (Grafton Books: London, 1989), p. 60.

⁸⁰ *The General's War*, p. 287.

on overwhelming force and the effect that this had on the mentality of US planners. We have already spoken about the perceived need for overwhelming force in order to maintain the initiative in combat and the perceived damage that the absence of overwhelming force did to US forces in Vietnam. One is justified in asking the question; were US planners more interested in re-fighting the Vietnam War than in fighting the Iraqis?

By painting the Iraqi army in the most threatening hue possible, Powell and Schwarzkopf could gain justification for the demands for large numbers of troops, aircraft and other equipment. This is not to say that Powell or anyone else deliberately lied to or misled anyone. However, this belief in the fighting prowess of the Iraqis served to justify the need for overwhelming force and this may have prevented US planners from looking past their preconceived notions of what kind of opponents the Iraqis would be.

The second point to make is that the idea that military force should only be used in an overwhelming fashion may in itself have contributed to there being a Gulf crisis in the first place.⁸¹ Throughout the August of 1990, the American intelligence community received continuous signals indicating a build up of Iraqi forces along the Kuwait border. In response to these reports, there were discussions at a senior level of a number of options involving the movement of

⁸¹ For a detailed account of the build up to the Gulf crisis, see Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Faber and Faber: London, 1994), Alan Monro, *Arab Storm: Politics and Diplomacy Behind the Gulf War* (I.B.Taurus: London, 2006), and James Addison Baker with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992* (G.P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1995).

various military units to attempt to signal to Saddam Hussein that from an American point of view, an invasion of Kuwait would be unacceptable:

What the United States could have done unilaterally it had not done. No bombers had been despatched to Diego Garcia. The Maritime Prepositioning Ships had not been sent toward the Gulf. There were no amphibious forces in the region.⁸²

It is not surprising that the US military did not wish to undertake this kind of reinforcement. It bore too many surface similarities to the slow, steady, graduated use of military power seen in Vietnam, and it risked the kind of stealth escalation which had done so much to damage the armed forces' morale and to undermine their public credibility. Although we can of course never prove what Saddam's reaction to these American moves would have been, it is not unreasonable to think that Saddam would have noticed increased American military muscle and that this would have entered into his calculations. We can be reasonably sure of this because the Iraqi dictator made substantial efforts to reassure the Bush Administration of his benign intent prior to the invasion. The extent of this can be seen in a cable sent by US ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie to the State Department recounting a meeting she had had with Saddam on the 25th July 1990:

Comment: Saddam, who in the memory of the current diplomatic corps, has never summoned an ambassador, is worried. He does not want to

⁸² *The General's War*. p.28.

further antagonize us. With the UAE manoeuvres⁸³, we have fully caught his attention, and that is good.⁸⁴

Glaspie's cable indicates that Saddam had no interest in antagonising the United States and that he was fully conscious of US actions in the region. So it is reasonable to assume that further, larger scale, and perhaps more public US military moves would have affected Saddam Hussein's thinking and may have provided an incentive for him to negotiate his problems with Kuwait, rather than risk invading.

Another criticism frequently levelled at the US performance during Desert Storm was that senior commanders were so obsessed with not repeating the mistakes of Vietnam that they failed to take advantage of major tactical opportunities as they presented themselves. The biggest of these mistakes was said to be the fact that General Franks VII corps moved too slowly, which allowed major elements of the Iraqi Republican Guard to escape destruction and thus Iraq continued to pose a threat to its neighbours. This criticism was particularly strong because it was not made simply after the fact – General Schwarzkopf was stinging in this criticism of General Franks' rate of advance during Desert Storm. The following quotation is Schwarzkopf's recollection of a conversation that he had with General Franks concerning Franks' attack against the Republican Guard:

⁸³ This is referring to a series of joint air exercises conducted between the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

⁸⁴ *The Generals War*. p. 22.

The first thing he brought up was his concern that some Iraqi units he'd bypassed might come up to hit him on the flank. He wanted them destroyed before his forces turned to the Republican Guard, and therefore was about to order an attack towards the *south*. 'Fred,' I interrupted, 'for chrissake, don't turn south! Turn *east*. Go after 'em!'⁸⁵

General Franks has argued that the speed of his advance had little to do with the amount of resistance the Iraqis were putting up. The greater problem that Franks had was trying to manoeuvre an armoured corps in a relatively confined space.

Finally and perhaps most tellingly for the future the decision to halt the allied ground offensive after one hundred hours allowed many Iraqi units to escape relatively unscathed from the fighting. These units were to prove invaluable to Saddam Hussein in defeating the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings which took place immediately after the war's end. This meant that Saddam would continue to be a thorn in America's side for the next decade. Richard Haass, the Middle East Director of the National Security Staff, summed up the first Bush Administration's view of Saddam's likely future:

The one fly in the ointment was obviously that Saddam was still in power. It was our view that that likely scenario is that Saddam would be overthrown by his own people, probably from the military, who would have essentially have been fed up with the fact that this character had

⁸⁵ *Doesn't take a Hero*. p.570.

twice marched them off into disaster within a decade. And our view was that whilst we couldn't guarantee it that was the most likely course of action. Events were simply left to themselves.⁸⁶

In a sense the 2003 invasion of Iraq⁸⁷ was the conclusion to a story that began in 1990. Perhaps the biggest criticism that can be levelled at the Powell Doctrine's insistence on overwhelming force is that in the first Gulf War the US and its allies had this overwhelming force in place and did not use it to best effect. The US's obsession with not allowing itself to slide into war in the way that policymakers in Vietnam had allowed themselves to drift incrementally towards disaster meant that after the liberation of Kuwait there was no political or military appetite to expand the coalition's objectives to include the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Secretary of State James Baker sums up the Administration's attitude towards a potential occupation of Iraq as follows:

How many more American lives would have been lost? How far beyond our authority from the UN would we have been acting if we had prolonged the war further, if we had occupied Southern Iraq, if we had gone to Baghdad? How long would we have to fight a guerrilla war in Iraq if we'd occupied any of the territory? A whole host of factors. People

⁸⁶ "Interview with Richard Haass," *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—January 9th1996. Available at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/haass/1.html>.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

also forget that it was never a war aim or a political aim of the United States to eliminate the Saddam Hussein regime.⁸⁸

This left the US and its allies in a situation of having to live with and attempt to “contain” a regime that had twice invaded its neighbours and was in the unique position of having used chemical weapons against not only its neighbours but also its own people.⁸⁹ Although answering a counter-factual question is by its very nature impossible, one is at least justified in asking the question, could the United States have saved itself and the Iraqi people a great deal of pain and expense by removing Saddam Hussein when it had the opportunity in 1991?

In this chapter we have demonstrated the following: first, that although the idea of outnumbering and overwhelming an enemy dates at least from the nineteenth century, both in European military thought and American military practice, it took the US experience in Vietnam to make the American military reassess the value of having overwhelming numbers and having them at the earliest possible point on the modern battlefield. Also, we have shown that Vietnam helped to re-orientate American strategic thinking away from strategies aiming to persuade an adversary to undertake certain actions back towards strategies aimed at compelling an enemy to undertake certain actions. We have seen how this strategic change was brought about both by the

⁸⁸ “Interview with James Baker,” *PBS Frontline: The Gulf War* [online], Original Air Date—January 9th 1996. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/baker/1.html>.

⁸⁹ For good journalistic accounts of how the policy of “containing” Iraq worked in practice, see Andrew and Patrick Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession*, new ed. (Verso; London, 2002), and Con Coughlin, *Saddam: The Secret Life* (Pan: London, 2007).

empirical lessons that the US Military chose to draw from Vietnam. We have also seen that whether these were the correct lessons depends on whether you think of the Vietnam War as a revolutionary struggle internal to South Vietnam, or externally directed aggression. What we have also seen is that, within the US Military, the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine came down very firmly on the side of the argument that the war in Vietnam was by and large driven by North Vietnamese aggression.

We have seen the emergence of what will be a recurring theme throughout this thesis, namely that the Powell Doctrine's requirement for overwhelming force has a relationship to the other elements of the Powell Doctrine, in particular, that it helped in maintaining public support for military action and it forces civilians to give some kind of definition of what constitutes US vital interests.

Finally, we have seen that the supposed need for overwhelming force can potentially have adverse results for US interests. In particular, we have seen how it can lead to an overestimation of enemy capabilities and how it can prevent the use of military power as a deterrent. Perhaps most telling for the future, the insistence on overwhelming force may have been a contributing factor in inhibiting the US from removing the Iraqi regime in 1991 and thus storing up a great deal of trouble for itself in the future.

Chapter 4 – US Forces Must Have Overwhelming Public and Congressional Support

The military subculture was deeply affected by the Vietnam War and the anti war movement... One of the main redoubts of the Vietnam syndrome today lies within the officer corps of the US military. US military officers today who came of age during the Vietnam War are overwhelmingly opposed to doing battle on ambiguous operational and military turf. They are deeply suspicious and sometimes plainly hostile to civilian judgement with respect to the use of force, and they are sensitive to the reality that if civilian strategists and politicians lack support for a military campaign , it is they, soldiers in combat, who will end up paying the price for vacillation and error¹.

The need for public and Congressional support is a unique element to the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that engendered it. While the rest of the Powell Doctrine, and its intellectual climate, represents the military proactively learning and asserting the lessons of Vietnam to civilian policy makers, the stress on the need for public support is a reactive response on behalf of the military towards changes in American society, changes in the role that Congress saw for itself in the making of foreign policy, and changes in the law. This is not to say that public support was unimportant in all wars prior to Vietnam, rather it is to say that public support became harder to achieve in the

¹ Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts. The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Macmillan Press: London, 1997), p. 278.

post-Vietnam era and also that public support became that much harder to maintain over the long run. The other important distinction to draw between the pre and post-Vietnam eras is that the military tended to see public support for military action as something which must exist *a priori*, rather than something which could be mobilised after the President had already made the decision to commit US troops abroad. The following quotation is taken from a speech Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had delivered to the National Press Club in November 1984: “*before* the United States commits combat forces abroad, the US Government should have some reasonable assurance of the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress.”²

In this chapter, we are talking solely about the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine as the events in this chapter take place well before the publication of either the 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article or Powell’s term as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In this chapter we will look at the lessons Congress and the American public took from Vietnam and how that led to a change in attitudes towards military intervention in particular in the developing world. We will also see how during the Nixon Administration and beyond, Congress became more assertive about its role in the making of foreign policy and passed a number of measures which

² Caspar W. Weinberger, “The Uses of Military Power,” National Press Club, Washington, D.C., Nov. 28, 1984. Emphasis added.

fundamentally changed its role in the decision making process leading up to the deployment of US forces for combat overseas.

The case study this chapter will use will be an examination of US policy towards Nicaragua between 1979 and 1984. The selection of this case study allows us to look at the different approaches of two Administrations of different parties and ideological points of view. Also, it allows us to look at the differences between dealing with an insurgency and trying to overthrow the Marxist government that resulted from this insurgency.

Before moving on to look at the lessons of Vietnam, we need, for purposes of comparison, to look at how the public and, in particular, Congress saw its role in formulating foreign policy before Vietnam.

The early Cold War saw a shift in the balance of power between the Presidency and Congress in the making of foreign policy. With the US now a global military power for the first time, and with the advent of nuclear weapons making speed of decision making vital, the important foreign policy decision making tended to drift away from Congress where debate and parliamentary procedure could hold up the decision making process, towards the executive where a small group of Presidential advisors could make decisions quickly. It was also felt that the executive had better access to information than Congress. This was not a process which in any way was forced down Congress' throat, but a process which Congress largely accepted as necessary and sensible.

Senator Tom Connally (D-Tex) explaining his support of President Truman's decision to send troops into Korea without consulting Congress said:

If a burglar breaks into your house, you can shoot him without going down to the police station and getting permission. You might run into a long debate by Congress, which would tie your hands completely. You have the right to do so as Commander-in-Chief and under the UN Charter.³

This quotation very aptly demonstrates the idea that the Cold War had created a state of permanent national "emergency", in which the President could justifiably act outside of the normal constraints of everyday politics and legislative procedure. This sense that, in the early 1950s, senior policymakers in the United States saw themselves as being locked in a life and death struggle with the forces of totalitarian Soviet Communism was vividly expressed in the now famous policy paper blandly titled NSC-68:

The design [referring to Soviet plans and intentions as perceived by the authors of NSC-68], therefore, calls for the complete subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the countries of the non-Soviet world and their replacement by an apparatus and structure subservient to and controlled from the Kremlin. To that end Soviet efforts are now directed toward the

³ Robert Mann, *A Grand Delusion. America's Descent into Vietnam* (Basic Books: New York, 2002), p.38-39.

domination of the Eurasian land mass. The United States, as the principal center of power in the non-Soviet world and the bulwark of opposition to Soviet expansion, is the principal enemy whose integrity and vitality must be subverted or destroyed by one means or another if the Kremlin is to achieve its fundamental design.⁴

These fears were only heightened by the recent Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons:

The Kremlin's possession of atomic weapons puts new power behind its design, and increases the jeopardy to our system. It adds new strains to the uneasy equilibrium without order which exists in the world and raises new doubts in men's minds whether the world will long tolerate this tension without moving toward some kind of order, on somebody's terms.⁵

Despite this sense that the United States was locked in a life or death struggle with the Soviet Union, successive Presidents were still eager to prove that this new found freedom in the making of foreign policy had a constitutional basis. Presidents from Truman onwards pointed out that the constitution gave the President the title of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and that, under

⁴ For the full text of NSC-68, see <http://us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/pdocs/nsc68.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

this authority, the President was entitled to send troops anywhere in the world without needing legally to consult Congress⁶.

Although there was widespread initial support for Truman's decision to commit troops to Korea, as it became apparent however that US forces were not going to achieve a quick victory, Republicans felt increasingly free to attack Truman's handling of the war safe in the knowledge that they could not be counter attacked because Truman had not consulted them prior to his decision to commit troops⁷.

Therefore, when situations arose during the 1950s that seemed to require the use of US military force, such as the 1958 crisis in Lebanon or the Quemoy-Matsu dispute between China and Taiwan⁸, Eisenhower used Congressional resolutions as a way of indicating Congressional support for his policies without asking for a formal declaration of war. The novel aspect of these resolutions was that, unlike a declaration of war, these resolutions gave the President the power to act in situations which had not yet arisen. Also, these resolutions were extremely vaguely worded and gave the President wide latitude to interpret exactly what they meant. For example, the Formosa Resolution dealing with the defence of Quemoy and Matsu read:

⁶ This overlooks the fact that the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8) gives Congress the sole power to declare war and issue letters of Marque and reprisal. The full text of the US Constitution can be found online at: <http://www.consource.org/index.asp?bid=529>.

⁷ For a discussion of how these Republican attacks wounded Truman and the Democratic Party and how they eventually led to the McCarthyite witch hunts see, David M. Ofshinsky, *A Conspiracy so Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, (Free Press: New York, 1983).

⁸ For detailed accounts of these crises and the Eisenhower Administration's response to them, see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower. Volume two, The President, 1952-1969* (George Allen & Unwin; London, 1984), and Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles: The Diplomacy of the Eisenhower Era* (Little, Brown: Boston, Mass., 1973).

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the President of the United States be hereby authorized to employ the Armed Forces of the United States as *he* deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the securing and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges to be required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores. This resolution shall expire when the *President shall determine* that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, and shall so report to the Congress.⁹

Under this Resolution the President alone decides when it expires, and it is the President alone who decides exactly under what circumstances US forces will be used to implement this resolution. Effectively, these resolutions act as a blanket grant of authority on the part of Congress to the President limited only by geographical area. Senator William Fulbright (D. Ark) expressed deep concern about the constitutional propriety of granting such authority to a President outside of wartime:

⁹ The text of the resolution is taken from: <http://cns.miis.edu/straittalk/Appendix%2016.htm> (link no longer active). Emphasis added.

Shall we strike down the Senate's rights and duties in the conduct of foreign affairs, as defined by 168 years of constitutional practice?... Shall we say yes to a radical proposal whose adoption would mean that we are abandoning our constitutional systems of checks and balances; that from now on, naked Executive power will rule the highest and most fateful interests of the nation?¹⁰

Given the enormous authority Congress was giving to the President, it would be reasonable to expect these Resolutions to be the subject of heated debate and a close vote. However, this was far from being the case. The Formosa Resolution was passed by House vote 409-3 and by the Senate vote 85-3¹¹. President Johnson used very similar language to the Formosa Resolution when drawing up the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which in addition to Johnson's power as Commander in Chief, allegedly provided the legal justification for the presence of US forces in Vietnam.

This happy consensus over the role of the President and the role of Congress in foreign policy making was to be shattered in Vietnam in a debate about the proper balance between executive and legislative authority which continues to the present day¹².

¹⁰ *A Grand Delusion*. p. 205. Fulbright later put forward his views on the failings of American foreign policy in general and what Congress' proper role should be in making foreign policy in a book: J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (Cape: London, 1967). For a more in-depth discussion of how Presidents were able to dominate foreign policy debates between the end of World War II and the mid-1960s, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

¹¹ These voting records are taken from: <http://cns.miis.edu/straittalk/Appendix%2016.htm> (link no longer available).

¹² A Commission supported by the Miller Centre of the University of Virginia chaired by former Secretaries of State James Baker and Warren Christopher recently issued a report

As America's involvement in Vietnam deepened and the costs (both human and financial), mounted, Congress, and in particular the Senate, began to regret the casual way in which they had granted Johnson the authority to wage war. This regret extended beyond the end of the war. Many, particularly in the Democratic Party, felt that the time had come for Congress to reassert a more active role in the making of foreign policy. The Congressional elections of 1970, 1972 and 1974, brought into Congress a new generation of politicians who were much less willing than their predecessors to defer to the judgements of the Executive on matter of foreign policy, and were much more reluctant to consider potential American military involvement overseas:

The 1972 elections, and especially the 1974 midterm elections, brought into the Congress scores of Democrats (and some Republicans) opposed to the war, many of whom – like Al Gore, Jr., and Stephen Solarz – had been involved in years past in the antiwar movement...the level of Congressional activism with respect to the war increased yearly...The precedent had been set on December 22, 1970, when the Congress voted to cut off all funds for US operations in Cambodia and Laos.¹³

Congress not only voted against further funding for operations in Cambodia and Laos, but over the coming years a series of bills was introduced which sought to end the war, or limit its scope. By the time the Paris Peace Accords

recommending new legislation to spell out the roles of Congress and the President in deciding when to undertake military action. The full text of their report can be found at:
http://www.virginia.edu/uvatoday/pdf/National_War_Powers_Commission_Report.pdf.

¹³ *Telltale Hearts*. p.199.

was signed in 1973, it had become a real fear among the senior members of the Nixon Administration that if no peace treaty were signed, Congress would move to unilaterally end US involvement.¹⁴

The most radical piece of legislation that congress passed to limit the freedom of the executive branch in its ability to use military force was the 1973 War Powers Act. The sponsors of this legislation hoped that it would reassert Congress' traditional power to declare war in a modern context:

It is the purpose of this joint resolution to fulfill the intent of the framers of the Constitution of the United States and insure that the collective judgement of both the Congress and the President will apply to the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities.¹⁵

The resolution was drafted in such a way as to make it legally impossible for the President to deploy US forces overseas without Congressional approval, and perhaps more importantly, the law required that this approval be ascertained by a process of ongoing consultation between Congress and the President. However, there is another way to interpret the legislation. One could argue that it actually gave the President more power rather than less. Nowhere

¹⁴ For a vivid account of how real that fear had become and the role it played in US decision making see: Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrinsication from the Vietnam War* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2003).

¹⁵ Full text of The War Powers Act of 1973, Public Law 93-148, 93rd Congress, H. J. Res. 542, November 7, 1973 can be found at: <http://www.thecre.com/fedlaw/legal22/warpow.htm>.

in the Constitution does it say that the President shall have the power to deploy troops for up to sixty days, yet the War Powers Act grants him that right¹⁶.

Whenever United States Armed Forces are introduced into hostilities or into any situation described in subsection (a) of this section, the President shall, so long as such armed forces continue to be engaged in such hostilities or situation, report to the Congress periodically on the status of such hostilities or situation as well as on the scope and duration of such hostilities or situation, but in no event shall he report to the Congress less often than once every six months.¹⁷

The real teeth of the Act comes from the fact that if Congress has not approved the deployment of troops, they will be withdrawn sixty days after the President first reported to Congress that the deployment of troops was necessary. This period can be extended to ninety days if the President deems the situation to be an emergency or if withdrawal after sixty days is not logistically feasible¹⁸.

The War Powers Resolution was passed over Richard Nixon's veto and has never been invoked. Many scholars and policy makers have questioned its constitutional validity.

¹⁶ This was pointed out by liberal democratic senators Thomas Eagleton and Frank Church among others. See LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Washington State University Press: Pullman, Washington, 1994).

¹⁷ Full text of The War Powers Act of 1973, Public Law 93-148, 93rd Congress, H. J. Res. 542, November 7th, 1973 can be found at: <http://www.thecre.com/fedlaw/legal22/warpow.htm>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The argument over whether the War Powers Act is constitutional hinges on the US Supreme Court's ruling in the case of *INS v. Chadha*. In this case, the Supreme Court held that Congressional vetoes of executive action, such as that contemplated by the War Powers Act, were unconstitutional because they violated Article I, Section 7 of the Constitution, which reads:

Every Bill which shall have passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, shall, before it become a Law, be presented to the President of the United States; If he approve he shall sign it, but if not he shall return it, with his Objections to that House in which it shall have originated, who shall enter the Objections at large on their Journal, and proceed to reconsider it. If after such Reconsideration two thirds of that House shall agree to pass the Bill, it shall be sent, together with the Objections, to the other House, by which it shall likewise be reconsidered, and if approved by two thirds of that House, it shall become a Law.¹⁹

In *INS v. Chadha*, the Supreme Court held that Congress did not have the right to pass legislation or veto executive action without following the procedure laid down in Article I, Section 7 of the Constitution:

The records of the Constitutional Convention reveal that the requirement that all legislation be presented to the President before becoming law was uniformly accepted by the Framers. Presentment to the President and the

¹⁹ US Constitution, Article I, Section 7. Full text available at: <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html>

Presidential veto were considered so imperative that the draftsmen took special pains to assure that these requirements could not be circumvented.²⁰

This court ruling sets a precedent for the War Powers Act as the resolutions to approve or disapprove the commitment of US forces are not subject to a Presidential veto by the terms of the Act. In *INS v. Chadha*, Associate Justice Byron White, dissenting from the majority of the Court, pointed out the implications of the Court's ruling for other acts of Congress, and indeed White specifically cites the War Powers Act as being amongst the acts of Congress likely to be imperilled by the Court's ruling in *INS v. Chadha*:

Accordingly, over the past five decades, the legislative veto has been placed in nearly 200 statutes. The device is known in every field of governmental concern: reorganization, budgets, foreign affairs, *war powers*, and regulation of trade, safety, energy, the environment, and the economy.... [italics added].²¹

Despite the doubts raised about the War Powers Act's constitutionality by the verdict in *INS v. Chadha*, it should be noted that the constitutionality of the War Powers Act has never directly been put before a court and that, despite the insistence of various administrations²² that the Act is unconstitutional, it

²⁰ *INS v. Chadha* 462 U.S. 919 (1983). Full text available at: <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/chadha.html>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² President George H. W. Bush argues strenuously in his memoirs that, in the context of the Gulf War, he held the Constitutional right to act without Congressional approval. See George

remains on the statute books. Indeed, the threat of the Act being invoked by Congress has meant that in every instance of US forces being sent into combat overseas except Grenada and Panama, which in any case did not last long enough for the Act to be an issue, Presidents have sought Congressional approval and have got it. Whatever the legality of the War Powers Act, the very fact that it passed over President Nixon's veto is indicative of the fact that, by the early 1970s, Congress had become much more strident in demanding that its voice be heard in matters relating to foreign policy and National Security.

The change in Congressional mood was to a certain extent driven by the general disillusionment of the American public with the Vietnam War. Although there had been antiwar protest movements in America long before Vietnam, the Vietnam antiwar movement was different in its size and intensity. Its overall effect on US policy is hard to measure in any simple sense. What makes it so difficult to judge its effectiveness is that the antiwar movement was an enormously broad coalition of groups and interests ranging from the totalitarian left²³ through religious pacifism to disillusioned liberals. These groups had massively different criteria for success and whilst the more hardcore, left wing of the antiwar movement tended to alienate mainstream

Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (Vintage: New York, 1999), Pp.397-398.

²³ For a radical account of the Vietnam antiwar movement see Fred Halstead, *Out Now! A participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (Monad Press: New York, distributed by Pathfinder Press, 1978). Halstead was a member of several Trotskyite groups and helped organise antiwar demonstrations in Washington and New York.

American society, the more liberal element served to legitimise dissent on the issue of the war²⁴.

What can be said with certainty is that as the war dragged on, more and more people became disillusioned with the US presence in Vietnam:

The limited patience of the American people affected all Nixon's Vietnam strategies from 1969 through 1973. By spring of 1968, a majority of Americans thought that getting involved in Vietnam had been a mistake. They did not call for immediate withdrawal – only a small minority of Americans ever favoured that option – but they desired an end to the war and the unprecedented societal dislocation that had come with it.²⁵

The nature of this disillusionment was not uniform. Some people questioned the whole basis of US involvement in the war, whilst others wanted the US to adopt a more aggressive strategy in order to win the war more quickly.

Whether hawks or doves, there was one common feature of growing disillusionment with Vietnam which began with the Johnson Administration and reached toxic proportions during the Nixon Administration: people of whatever shade of opinion no longer trusted or believed what they were being told by Government. This breakdown of trust between citizens and

²⁴ For a more left liberal analysis of the antiwar movement see: Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds*, (Scholarly Resources: Wilmington, Del., 2002).

²⁵ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, Kansas, 1999). p.66.

Government was not helped by the Watergate scandal or by the revelations of the CIA's domestic activity.

This phenomenon has come to be known as the "credibility gap". We have already seen in chapter three how Lyndon Johnson's desire that Vietnam not affect his domestic programmes led to limitations on the way the war was fought. This same impulse led Johnson and his Administration to consistently overstate how well the war was going. This led to a situation in which a large section of the press no longer believed Government statements on the war which were flatly contradicted by reporters on the ground in Vietnam. As Stanley Kutler notes,

The problem was serious, and went beyond simple matters of personal tastes and preferences. The credibility of the President – and, in effect, of the United States government – was on the line. The battles with the press, George Reedy (President Johnson's press secretary) noted, became battles with important segments of the public.²⁶

Just how serious the credibility gap became can be demonstrated by the fact that even President Johnson's closest aides, men who had access to the latest intelligence on Vietnam, no longer believed what they were being told. The following is the recollection of Presidential Special Council Harry McPherson to the news of the Tet offensive. It is worth quoting at length because it

²⁶ Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (W. W. Norton: New York, 1992). p.20.

underlines just how far public trust in the Government had been undermined by over-optimistic official assessments of how well the war was going, and also demonstrates the enormous power the modern media, and in particular television, has in shaping the public consciousness:

I would go in two or three mornings a week and study the whole cable book and talk to Rostow [Walt. W. Rostow – the National Security Advisor] and ask him what had happened the day before, and would get from him what almost seemed hallucinatory from the point of view of what I had seen on network television the night before... Well, I must say that I mistrusted what he said, although I don't say with any confidence that I was right to mistrust him, because, like millions of other people who had been looking at television the night before, I had the feeling that the country had just about had it, that they would simply not take any more... I suppose, from a social scientist point of view, it is particularly interesting that people like me – people who had some responsibility for expressing the Presidential point of view – could be so affected by the media as everyone else was, while downstairs, within fifty yards of my desk, was that enormous panoply of intelligence-gathering devices – tickers, radios, messages coming in from the field. I assume the reason this is so, the reason I put aside my own interior access to confidential information and was more persuaded by what I saw on the tube and in the newspapers, was that like everyone else who had been deeply involved in explaining the policies of the war and trying to understand them and render some judgment, I was fed up with the 'light at the end of

the tunnel' stuff. I was fed up with the optimism that seemed to flow without stopping from Saigon.²⁷

This credibility gap was not simply a problem for Johnson personally, or even his Administration. The nature of the relationship between a President and the press was changing throughout the 1960s. With the advent of television and the improvements in communication technology, information could be relayed much faster. Also, this increasingly meant that television became the dominant source of news for many people. This meant that newspapers and magazines were under increasing pressure to deliver sensational news and deliver it quickly. The upshot of this was that news became much more difficult for government to manage effectively:

The modern President and the media have a symbiotic relationship. The President carries a publicity train in his wake; he needs a flow of information to his public constituency. Media workers are conduits, sometimes allowing free flow, sometimes selecting, sometimes adding their own gloss. Meanwhile, White House announcements and printouts gush like a torrent.²⁸

With the White House alone putting this amount of information into the public domain, coupled with the fact that most large media organisations can have reporters covering the Pentagon and the State Department exclusively, and the

²⁷ Herbert Y. Schandler, *The Unmaking of a President. Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1977), Pp.81-82.

²⁸ *The Wars of Watergate*, p.168.

fact that they can have correspondents on the ground around the world, taken together all this means that the chances of being able to run any kind of foreign policy covertly for any prolonged period of time are extremely small. The public will eventually find out about most of the activities their government undertakes, and it is by no means certain that they will find this out from an official source.

Given these enormous changes in the social and political context in which it had to operate, it is not surprising that many within the US Armed Forces came to see the unambiguous support of Congress and the public as being indispensable. The following quotation is taken from an unpublished manuscript of a dissertation undertaken by a US military officer undergoing General Staff training. The context of the quotation is a discussion of what constitutes the Powell Doctrine and whether this can be squared with the policies of the second Bush Administration:

Take on only commitments that can gain the support of the American people and the Congress. Reasonable assurance of public support is vital to the success of any military commitment—it is the underlining force multiplier in obtaining a military end-state, ‘that being success or failure.’²⁹

²⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Herb Brown, USAF, Lieutenant Commander Mark L. Bowlin, USN, and Major Scott C. Sheltz, USA, *How the Bush Doctrine of Preemptive Strike Meets the Test of the Powell Doctrine*, Joint Forces Staff College. Joint and Combined Staff Officer School. September 6th 2002. Full text available at: http://www.jfsc.ndu.edu/current_students/documents_policies/documents/jca_cca_awsp/bush_doctrine.doc.

When we look at the intellectual climate that informed the Powell Doctrine and, indeed, the intellectual climate that still informs the attitude of the Military to public and Congressional opinion up to the present moment, we can see that the need to both gain and hold public support over the long-term ranks high on the list of priorities. It is also not surprising that, given the state of Congressional opinion and the importance of the media outlined above, that the Military sees the maintenance of public support over the long term as something which is difficult to maintain: “Our impatient domestic population may find it hard to maintain support for a Long War, as the end may not be readily in sight, the objectives may be vaguely defined, and the enemy may be obscure.”³⁰ This is not just a recent observation made in connection with the War on Terror. Harry Summers also makes the point that maintaining public support military intervention over the long-haul must be considered vital: “They [senior military officers] needed to tell him that it would be an obvious fallacy to commit the Army without first committing the American people.”³¹ Indeed, General Westmoreland, looking back on Vietnam in retirement, notes the failure to win and maintain public and Congressional support over Vietnam and the corrosive effect it had on the war effort: “By failing to level with the people and failing to impel the Congress to commit itself, the President

³⁰ Lance Luksik, LCDR, USN, Eric Moses, Maj, USAF, and John Woodward, MAJ, USA, *Keeping the Fire Lit. Democracy and the Long War*, Joint Forces Staff College, Joint and Combined Warfighting School. June 2nd2008. Full text available at: http://www.jfsc.ndu.edu/current_students/documents_policies/documents/jca_cca_awsp/Keeping_the_Fire_Lit%20_Democracy_and_the_Long_War.doc.

³¹ Colonel Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Presidio Press, 1982), p.35.

allowed public opinion to become a leaden liability.’³² The reasons why Westmoreland felt that a lack of public support became such a liability were:

When the President and his Administration failed to level with the American people about the extent and nature of the sacrifice that had to be made, they contributed to a credibility gap that grew into an unbridgeable chasm. A low-key approach means that some make sacrifices while most do not, and even those who make no sacrifice dislike it because their consciences trouble them. If a war is deemed worthy of the dedication and sacrifice of the military services, it is also worthy of the commitment of the entire population.³³

What the above discussion shows is that the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate predating it in the late 1970s and early 1980s saw that mobilising and maintaining public support was a vital constituent of military success, and what the discussion also shows is that this concern over what public opinion will and will not stand continues to be a subject of intense concern within the US Military.

Before moving on to look at how the perceived need to win and maintain public support affected US policy towards Nicaragua, it is worth pausing to examine what we mean by “public opinion,” its nature, its impact, and the role it ought to play in deciding on an appropriate national security policy. We will

³² General Williams Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Double Day and Company: New York, 1976), p.412.

³³ *Ibid*, p.411.

first look at the profound pessimism surrounding the nature and utility of public opinion expressed by scholars such as Walter Lippman, Don Oberdorfer and John Mueller. We will then move on to look at those scholars who are more optimistic about the consistency, utility and nature of the public's engagement with national security affairs such as Bruce Jentleson, Stephen Kull and I. M. Destler.

Early scholars of public opinion had a very low opinion both of the public's comprehension of public policy and the public's ability to express consistent and logical preferences over a prolonged period of time. Walter Lippman, writing on the subject of public opinion in 1922, expressed the view that, because public opinion was always based on imperfect information, and, particularly in matters of foreign policy, because the general public has no first-hand experience of either foreign lands or warfare, public opinion in Lippman's mind is largely derived from a series of stereotypes that the public holds, rather than any kind of logical deduction:

Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth's surface, moves in a small circle, and of these acquaintances knows only a few intimately. Of any public event that has wide effects we see at best only a phase and an aspect. This is as true of the eminent insiders who draft treaties, make laws, and issue orders, as it is of those who have treaties framed for them, laws promulgated to them, orders given at them. Inevitably our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things,

than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine.³⁴

For Lippman, what makes public opinion reached by process outlined above so unstable is that the stereotypes the public bases its opinion on are fed to the public at large through the press. The press being a marketplace means that publications are constantly having to fight for market share and survival: “The object of every publisher is, therefore to turn his circulation from a medley of catch-as-catch-can news stand buyers into a devoted band of constant readers.”³⁵ This means that the press have a strong incentive to feed the public the news that the public wants to read about: “The newspaper deals with a multitude of events beyond our experience. But it deals also with some events within our experience. And by its handling of those events we most frequently decide to like it or dislike it.”³⁶ If Lippman noticed this phenomenon among newspaper publishers in the 1920s, Don Oberdorfer, in his account of the Tet Offensive, noticed a similar phenomenon, whereby television network news competed with each other to produce the most sensational and exciting stories:

The Tet story had suspense, high drama and enormous public interest. The United States and its allies were not the inevitable winners in every battle; the Communists had taken the initiative. The plans and purposes of the United States hung in the balance; political and military

³⁴ Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (1922; LaVergne: Greenbook Publications, 2010), 47.

³⁵ *Public Opinion*, 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

reputations were at stake; there was an enveloping aura of controversy at home and in the field.³⁷

If Lippman and Oberdorfer are correct and the press, through market forces, are driven toward parochialism or sensationalism, they are hardly the best sources of information on which the public can base ordered, logical policy preferences.

However, if the press is an unhelpful means by which the general public can form policy preferences, there is also the possibility that the public's underlying biases and stereotypes that Lippman takes for the basis of public opinion may also be prone to alarmingly rapid shifts. John Mueller's work looks at public support for the wars in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq. Mueller's argument is that there is a direct statistical relationship between public support for any of these wars and increases in American casualties. According to Mueller, this relationship is impervious to the existence or non-existence of an anti-war movement or how the public perceives the stakes for the United States. According to Mueller's argument, the relationship between public support and casualties is an inverse one: as casualties go up, public support goes down: "American public opinion became a key factor in all three wars [Korea, Vietnam and the Second Iraq War], and in each one there has been a simple association: as casualties mount, support decreases. Broad enthusiasm

³⁷ Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 160.

at the outset invariably erodes.”³⁸ Also, Mueller is intensely critical of what he sees as the extreme artifice of the whole notion of sampling public opinion on any subject at any particular time:

The interview situation is an odd social experience. The respondent, on his doorstep or in his living room, is barraged with a set of questions on a wide variety of subjects by a stranger ... Few people are accustomed to having their every utterance faithfully recorded and many find the experience flattering. And, aware that their views are being preserved for the ages, they do not wish to appear unprepared at that moment. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find respondents pontificating in a seemingly authoritative, if basically “truthful,” manner on subjects about which they know nothing or to which they have never given any thought whatsoever.³⁹

So, Mueller as an expert statistician and follower of public opinion is essentially supporting Lippman’s argument that public opinion is no more than a snapshot of the stereotypes and biases of whoever is being sampled, and that the problem is less that the general public’s opinion of important policy matters is wrong, but that, on a wide variety of subjects, the general public simply does not have what could be thought of as a considered opinion. The relationship between this observation and Mueller’s observation that support for war is generally inverse to the numbers of casualties suffered and that, initially,

³⁸ John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 6 (Nov/Dec 2005), pp.44-54.

³⁹ John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), p.1.

Korea, Vietnam and the second Iraq War were met with broad public support, is easy enough to explain. The initial broad public support is generated by an instinctive wish to support the President and the country, the so-called “rally around the flag” effect:

Partisan differences were relatively small at the beginning of the wars [Korea and Vietnam], presumably under the influence of a sort of nonpartisan consensus at a time of national emergency. Differences broadened considerably once the wars were underway, becoming entirely unambiguous after the Chinese intervention in Korea and by the second year of the war in Vietnam.⁴⁰

Once this initial effect has subsided, then, Mueller would argue, that public weariness over increasing casualties reasserts itself in a drop in support for the war.

Lippman is sceptical of the value of democratic decision-making when it comes to detailed matters of public policy and would favour a foreign policy made largely by the executive with the minimum amount of input from the general public. Indeed, Lippman spends a good deal of time describing how, ideally, public policy ought to be made. He pays particular attention to the distinction between those whose job it is to make policy and those whose job it is to implement policy:

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.116-117.

The more subtle the elements that enter into the decision, the more irresponsible power the expert wields. He is certain, moreover, to exercise more power in the future than ever he did before, because increasingly the relevant facts will elude the voter and the administrator.⁴¹

We will now move on to look at whether Lippman's rather gloomy assessment of how public opinion is formed and the limited utility it has toward policymaking is in fact borne out.

Certainly, members of Congress and the Executive branch seem to have a fairly dim view of the public's level of interest and intellectual engagement with politics in general, and foreign policy in particular. Research carried out by Steven Kull and I. M. Destler asked members of Congress, their staff, and serving and former members of the Executive branch of Government to describe how they thought the general public thought and felt about foreign policy. The results would seem to be very much in line with Lippman's concept of public opinion. Certainly, insofar as they see the public as being overwhelmingly self-interested:

I think that's a traditional American nationalism or isolationism, caused by our history and our geography, which is interrupted when we feel ourselves menaced by outside forces: Hitler, Communism, whatever ... I think the traditional American feeling is, mind your own business, take

⁴¹ *Public Opinion*, 201.

care of your own problems at home, and don't worry about the carnage in Bosnia or Haiti.⁴²

The aim of Kull and Destler's research was to find out whether policymakers' preconceived notions of the public actually matched reality. In order to test this, Kull and Destler designed a series of focus groups across the USA to give them a rough sample of the America population. Kull and Destler then asked a series of questions, both on the general role the public saw the United States as playing in International Relations and a number of questions dealing with more specific topics, such as what the relationship ought to be between the United States and the United Nations. Kull and Destler on the whole found that the American public were much more willing for the country to play a proactive, and indeed altruistic, role in world affairs than in either Lippman's theory of public opinion or than the policymaking elites would have expected. For instance, the following question was asked: "do you think it would be best for the future of this country [the United States] if we [Americans] take an active part in world affairs, or if we stay out of world affairs?"⁴³ In answer to this question that was asked by four different polling organisations between October 1990 and September 1996, support for an active American role in world affairs never fell below 57%, and peaked at 79%.⁴⁴ This support for American engagement in Kull and Destler's research seems to flow from a public understanding that America's prosperity and security is intrinsically dependent on the security and prosperity of the rest of the world. To quote a

⁴² Steven Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 37.

⁴³ Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 42-43.

⁴⁴ Figure 2-1, Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 43.

participant in one of Kull and Destler's focus groups, "I say invest foreign aid to help people get an education, give them tools to work ... and then they begin to build, and then they develop, and they end up buying goods from us, we buy goods from them, they defend us; we defend them."⁴⁵ The very fact that Kull and Destler went into the level of detail that they did, asking their focus groups not only what they thought but why they thought it, perhaps goes some way to criticising the artifice inherent in polling that John Mueller was so sceptical of earlier in this discussion. The work of Bruce Jentleson on the attitudes of the American public towards the use of force in the post-Vietnam era could be seen as supporting Kull and Destler. Jentleson's central premise is that there are two typologies of the use of force. One is to coerce an adversary not to threaten the United States's interests; the other is the use of force to achieve political change within another country. Jentleson himself explains his dichotomy in the following terms:

The key distinction is between force used to coerce foreign policy restraint by an adversary engaged in aggressive actions against the United States or its interests, and force used to engineer internal *political change* within another country whether in support of an existing government considered an ally or seeking to overthrow a government considered an adversary.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 54.

⁴⁶ Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Pretty Prudent Public: Post Post-Vietnam American Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Mar., 1992), pp. 49-50. Full text available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2600916>

Jentleson finds that, through looking at a study of the mean public support for various foreign policy issues that might have required a military response throughout the 1980s, those that commanded the highest amount of public support over the longest period of time were those engagements where those engagements where the US was seeking to alter or restrain the behaviour of another power, and those scoring the lowest public support were for those issues where US military support was being considered to either remove or sustain a foreign government. So the average support that Jentleson finds for airstrikes against Libya in response to terrorist actions supported by the Libyan Government was 65.2% pre-bombing and 70.9% post-bombing. In comparison, only an average of 27.3% supported aid to the Contras over forty-three public opinion polls conducted on the subject, and an average of 19.7% of respondents over seven polls conducted supported a US-led invasion of Nicaragua.

So Jentleson's work very much reinforces the point that Kull and Desler found in their focus groups. The general public may not have a great deal of knowledge about detailed matters of national security policy, but this is not the same thing as saying that the general public do not have preferences over how the general types of engagement they want to see the United States involved in, and that these preferences do have an underlying logic to them.

The public's attitude towards military intervention seems to follow consistently from the public's desire to be engaged in international affairs, both for reasons of self-interest and altruism. In response to the question, "how much should

the US spend for defense?”, the answers were 10% - “only enough to protect itself,” 17% - “to protect itself and other countries on its own,” and 71% - “enough to protect itself and join in multilateral efforts to protect others.”⁴⁷

What we see from Kull and Destler’s research is that, actually, the public’s attitude towards what US foreign policy ought to be seems to, in contradiction of Lippman’s theory, come from a fairly logically consistent set of propositions: that the US should be involved in world affairs because it is in its own self-interest; that other countries are prosperous and secure enough to trade with and form alliances with the United States; and therefore, that the US should encourage and play its part in a multilateral system of global security.

Interestingly, however, this is not how the policymaking elite see the public. According to Kull and Desler’s research, the policymaking elite would tend to see the public conforming more to the model Lippman lays out. One explanation for this apparent misreading of large swathes of US public opinion might be down to officials treating the most vocal elements of the electorate as though they were the majority. A former Executive branch official described this phenomenon as follows: “Americans who tend to be antiengagement tend to be stronger in their views than those who are proengagement. That has been my experience and Congress has always been sensitive to stronger voices.”⁴⁸

This is perhaps an understandable phenomenon. Both Congress and the Executive branch would need to take into account not only how the majority of

⁴⁷ Figure 6.2, Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 148.

⁴⁸ Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public*, 213.

the public feels but how those whose votes are most likely to be influenced by a particular issue are likely to respond. In other words, in a democracy what is perceived as being “public opinion” may not actually be the opinion of the majority but the opinion of the loudest, best organised, most passionate advocates of a certain position.

So where does that leave us in terms of the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine, and where would that sit in the debate of the pessimism of Lippman, Oberdorfer and Mueller as to both the consistency, utility and validity of public opinion as a means of evaluating alternative policy options, and the optimistic view of public opinion of Kull, Destler and Jentleson, which says that whilst, by definition, the general public are not experts on particular areas of national security policy, they are engaged in international issues in the broad sense of the term, and that the general public has strong, consistent, and logically formed preferences over the types of policy it wishes the United States to pursue? Certainly, the adherence of the ideas that would go on to become the Powell Doctrine were acutely concerned about the volatility of public opinion and would agree with Lippman and Mueller up to a point that public opinion is susceptible to violent shifts between strong support for a policy and strong opposition to a policy, and understood how much it could hurt the Army’s reputation and standing to be on the wrong side of a public opinion that had shifted violently against a particular policy. Norman Schwarzkopf can clearly recall, on his return from Vietnam, thinking, “I am in the nation’s capital, wearing the uniform of the United States Army, and the people around me see me as some kind of monster!’ The mood of the country

had turned ugly.”⁴⁹ And, certainly, as we have already seen in Chapter Three,⁵⁰ one of the perceived advantages of the use of overwhelming force is the perceived ability to minimise your own casualties. This would certainly indicate an acknowledgement of John Mueller’s point that public consent to military action is tied to maintaining relatively low casualties. However, whilst adherence to the intellectual climate that formed the Powell Doctrine might be sceptical of the public’s endurance for prolonged military engagement, the insistence on the need for public support presupposes that public support can be maintained and won, and the public does have underlying logical preferences about the kinds of military operations it wants to see the US getting involved in. As Powell himself puts this, “when we go to war, we should have a purpose that our people understand and support.”⁵¹ This implies that the public in general are capable of maintaining a consistent position based on underlying preferences so long as the original objective of any military intervention meets with public approval.

There is another argument connected with the role of public opinion in foreign and national security policymaking that we have yet to address. Even if we accept that the public care about the US’s role internationally, and even if we accept that the public are capable of determining their broad policy preferences in a logical manner, it does not follow necessarily that these preferences would

⁴⁹ H. Norman Schwarzkopf, with Peter Petre, *The Autobiography: It doesn't Take a Hero* (Bantam Books: London, 1993), pp.202-203.

⁵⁰ See pp.144-145.

⁵¹ Colin L. Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 143.

actually be in the “national interest” of the United States. The diplomat and historian George Kennan sums up this dilemma with the following observation:

A democracy is peace-loving. It does not like to go to war. It is slow to rise to provocation. When it has once been provoked to the point where it must grasp the sword, it does not easily forgive its adversary for having produced this situation. The fact of the provocation then becomes itself the issue. Democracy fights in anger – it fights for the very reason that it was forced to go to war. It fights to punish the power that was rash enough and hostile enough to provoke it – to teach that power a lesson it will not forget, to prevent the thing from happening again. Such a war must be carried to the bitter end.⁵²

Notice that nothing that Kennan has described is illogical or necessarily subject to violent changes in public opinion. After all, it is perfectly logical to say that, because wars are painful, they ought to be avoided, and that when war is necessary those who cause it should be punished. However, Kennan’s point is that, whilst his position may be logical and may make a degree of moral sense, it is not necessarily in the US’s interest to behave this way. For instance, Kennan has this to say about the US’s role in the First World War:

In any case, once we were at war, it did not appear to us that our greatest danger might still lie precisely in too long a continuation of the war, in

⁵² George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 65-66.

the destruction of Europe's equilibrium, and in the sapping of the vital energies of the European peoples. It did not appear to us then that the greatest interest we had in the war was still that it should be brought to an end as soon as possible on a basis involving a minimum maladjustment and as much stability as possible for the future.⁵³

In order to have perceived the true stakes for the US in the First World War and to come to the conclusion that Kennan comes to, one would have to either be looking back on the First World War in hindsight or be possessed of a high degree of knowledge of various European cultures and European political history. It is not reasonable to expect the majority of people in a democracy to have these attributes. Therefore, if we accept Kennan's argument, foreign policy ought to be made primarily by a diplomatic elite sensitive to the country's true interests by virtue of their knowledge of history, their cultural sensitivity, and their diplomatic skill. Presumably in the American system of government, this elite would reside in the Executive branch of government. If we follow Kennan's argument, this elite would make policy with little regard to the public opinion of the moment, but would instead be focused on longer range American "interests."

The problem with Kennan's argument is twofold. First, on a theoretical level, if you follow what Kennan is saying to its logical conclusion, it undermines the very basis of democracy. If the general public is unable to see what is good for itself and needs to rely on a self-selected elite to make its foreign policy, why

⁵³ Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*, 66.

would the same not hold true in domestic policy. In his more melancholic moments, Kennan recognised this shortcoming himself. Kennan's biographer Nicholas Thompson describes an essay Kennan wrote called "The Prerequisites." Thompson describes the argument of the essay as follows:

He [Kennan] did not want a dictatorship but, in full misanthrope mode, he declared that this dreadful country needed the firm hands of a group of young, dedicated, organized, and highly educated men. The new order would deny suffrage to immigrants, women, and blacks. Clear-sighted white men would make decisions wisely and quickly for the general good.⁵⁴

Fortunately for Kennan's reputation, this essay was not discovered until the 1970s and the essay's extreme tone can be excused as a letting off of steam by a fairly misanthropic intellectual in a bad mood. However, the implication of a more authoritarian system of government than most Americans would recognise or be prepared to contemplate is still at least present in the background of Kennan's views on the "correct" way of making foreign policy. The second flaw with Kennan's argument is, even if we were to accept for a moment that his way of making foreign policy was desirable, and even we were to accept that a democracy in domestic affairs tied to an elite-led foreign policy were possible, it is unlikely that the American public, raised on the political idea that they live in the world's greatest democracy, would actually

⁵⁴ Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove: Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 41.

be prepared in the real world to accept the state of affairs that Kennan asks them to accept. Nevertheless, as we shall see later in this chapter, Kennan's idea of a foreign policy decided by those in the Executive branch of government most "qualified" has an enduring appeal. However, advocates of the Powell Doctrine would argue, as Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger did argue, that, whatever the theoretical merits of Kennan's position, given the changing nature of the press and Congress's willingness to assert itself in foreign policy, following Kennan's model was not a practical proposition in the modern world.

We have looked at how public, Congressional and media attitudes changed during Vietnam. Also, having looked at how public opinion on foreign policy matters and the role public opinion ought to play in foreign policy matters, it is time to turn our attention towards the case study for this chapter, which is US policy towards Central America between 1979 and 1984. Before we can discuss US foreign policy towards the region during this period and why the public debate over the issue raised so many of the ghosts of Vietnam, we must first look at the historical context that this policy was made in.

The United States has traditionally seen Central America as its geo-political backyard. This should not be surprising, given the geography of the region and the enormous economic leverage that the US could wield. By the end of the US Civil War the United States was ready to become the pre-eminent power in the western hemisphere:

By the 1890s, the primary North American influence in the region was rapidly growing investments in banana and coffee plantations, railroads (to haul the bananas, not people), gold and silver mines, and, a little later, utilities and government securities.⁵⁵

With growing economic interests came increasingly frequent military interventions in order to protect those interests, both from the British, who, in the late nineteenth century, were seen as potential competitors, but more often from local political instability and civil war. Theodore Roosevelt declared that ‘The United States had to assume an attitude of protection and regulation with regard to all these little states’⁵⁶. This policy was known as the Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.⁵⁷ Roosevelt described the policy in the following terms:

Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the

⁵⁵ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolution : the United States in Central America*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded (W.W. Norton: New York, 1993). p.31.

⁵⁶ Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (Free Press: New York, 1996). p.4.

⁵⁷ The Monroe Doctrine declared that any attempt by European nations to establish new colonies in the Americas would be treated as a threat to the United States. For the first elucidation of the Doctrine, see James Monroe’s Seventh State of the Union Address, 2 December, 1823. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29465&st=&st1=>.

Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.⁵⁸

Roosevelt's expansion of the Monroe Doctrine meant not only that the US would seek to prevent European involvement in the Americas but that in effect Roosevelt speech unilaterally gave the United States the authority to in large measure regulate the domestic politics and economies of the states of Central America.

The Administration of William Howard Taft sent two and a half thousand marines to Nicaragua in 1912, to put down a rebellion against a government friendly to the US. Taft claimed that the US had a 'moral mandate to exert its influence for the preservation of the general peace of Central America which is seriously menaced by the present uprising.'⁵⁹ US Marines were constantly deployed throughout Central America, particularly Nicaragua, throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The point to be taken is that US has a long history of military intervention in Central America and an even longer history of economic and strategic interests in the region.

If one wanted a more recent example of US military intervention in neighbouring states in Central America and the Caribbean, one need look no further than the decision to intervene in the Dominican Republic in 1965. The

⁵⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, 6 December, 1904. Full text available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29545&st=&st1=>

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

Dominican intervention took place at precisely the same time that Lyndon Johnson was taking the fateful decisions that would commit the US to war in South-East Asia. There are a number of striking parallels between the situation in the Dominican Republic in 1965 and in Nicaragua in 1978-79. In both cases the US had to deal with the aftermath of long periods of dictatorial rule. Jerome Slater, one of the earliest authors on the Dominican intervention, describes the presidency of Rafael Trujillo as “thirty years of one of the worst tyrannies of the twentieth century.”⁶⁰ Bernard Diederich explains how, “In essence, the Somoza doctrine didn’t change for the next twenty-seven years. In practice, however, all it meant was that only the Somozas had the right to abuse whom they liked – all in the name of anticommunism.”⁶¹

In both cases the US was seen as having endorsed, supported and at times propped up, both Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and the Somozas of Nicaragua. Diederich writes that the departure of US marines from Nicaragua in 1932 left two legacies: “The National Guard they created and trained and the man who was later referred to as ‘the last Marine’, Anastasio Somoza García (Tacho I*), who was immediately appointed *jefe director* of the guard at the age of thirty-seven.”⁶² In the case of Trujillo, Abraham Lowenthal refers to the fact that, “Trujillo assiduously maintained his contacts with American Marine

⁶⁰ Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation. The United States and the Dominican Revolution* (Harper and Row: New York, 1967), p.2.

⁶¹ Bernard Diederich, *Somoza and the Legacy of US Involvement in Central America* (Markus Wiener Publishers: Princeton, 2007), preface p.vii.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.15.

* Both Somozas were referred to as ‘Tacho’.

officials and subsidized extensive lobbying operations of various types to advance his personal and political interests.”⁶³

There was concern that a broad based opposition movement to dictatorship could be hijacked by Communist elements:

The leaders included at least two prominent members of ex-President Juan Bosch's Dominican Revolutionary Party: Jose Francisco Pena, a skilled and eloquent agitator, and Miguel Soto, who directs the party's affiliated labor federation. Both are identified with the party's left wing and both have been suspected of ties to the extreme left. Available information indicates that individuals identified with the pro-Castro 14th of June political movement were also involved, along with representatives of extremist student groups.⁶⁴

Congressman Charlie Wilson (D-TEX), summed up the conservative view of the opposition to the Somozas with the following observation:

Twenty years ago we believed Castro when he stated that he was neither a communist nor a socialist... Look we were wrong from the beginning to the end. We sympathized with the Castroites because of the human rights issue and we destabilized Somoza's regime because of the same

⁶³ Abraham F. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1972). p.10.

⁶⁴ Telegram from the White House Situation Room to President Johnson at Camp David. Source Johnson Library, National Security File, Dominican Republic, White House Cable, 4/65-7/65. Full text available at: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32/d21>.

issue. Now we are condemned to lose both. On the one hand our friend and ally and on the other hand the Nicaraguan people will not enjoy human rights.⁶⁵

However, this is where the similarity between the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua ends. The US took the radical step of invading the Dominican Republic with 22,000 marines, installing a provisional government largely of its own choosing, and holding elections that resulted in a democratic, but decidedly pro-American government. The US intervention in the Dominican Republic took place without the approval of the Organisation of American States (OAS). The initial intervention involved US troops exclusively.

As we shall see, US policy towards the situation in Nicaragua never moved close to this level of aggressive involvement. Of course the one major geopolitical difference between these two cases was that the Dominican intervention took place contemporaneously with US involvement in Vietnam. The Nicaraguan revolution of 1978-79 took place in the aftermath of the end of US involvement in Vietnam. As we have already seen in this chapter, Vietnam had a profound impact on Congress and the general public's appetite for US military interventions.

We will now move on to look at the situation in Nicaragua between 1979 and 1984, and how the Carter and Reagan Administrations chose to cope with the emergence of a Marxist Government in mainland Central America.

⁶⁵ *Somoza and the Legacy of US Involvement in Central America*. p.306.

The argument under consideration is not that the US tried but failed to follow through on a policy of military intervention, but rather that the US government, knowing that it would not be able to rally public support, never seriously considered the option in the first place.⁶⁶ As we have seen, this reluctance to contemplate military intervention in Central America goes against the grain of past US policy dating from at least the nineteenth century. This led to a situation during the Reagan Administration in which a President desperate for a solution to what he viewed as a pressing problem would resort to covert and eventually illegal action. The watershed moments we will look at are the coming of the Sandinistas to power in 1979, the early deliberations of the Reagan Administration in 1981, concern in the possibility of overt intervention in Nicaragua, and the undertaking of covert action against Nicaragua from 1981-1984.

The events of 1979 could not possibly have come at a worse time for the Carter Administration. Already buffeted by events in Iran and Afghanistan, Carter's beleaguered foreign policy team now had to turn their attention to events closer to home. Nicaragua at this point was not a subject that merited much serious public attention, the only exception being when US citizens found themselves caught in the crossfire between government and rebel forces. Therefore, policy makers were initially free to devise a strategy toward Nicaragua without having to take public opinion into account. The divisions within the Carter

⁶⁶ The curious exception to this rule was Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of State Alexander Haig (January 1981 – July 1982) who frequently called for military intervention, not only in Nicaragua but throughout Central America, and did so both publicly and privately.

Administration soon became apparent and deeply entrenched. The State Department's view was that the best way to deal with the situation was to accept the change of regime as a *fait accompli* on the grounds that the US was in no position to reverse the outcome of the revolution and that hostility towards the new government was only likely to push it towards Cuba and the Soviet Union. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance summed up the state departments position in a memo to President Carter: "Our ability to exert influence during this formative period is contingent on their belief that our policies are not aimed against them"⁶⁷ The State Department's view of the Sandinista regime was that it could be manipulated by the giving or withholding of aid:

There were likely to be some important differences say between Tomás Borge, who had been a member of the communist party and the rest of the leadership, which was young, less educated and unlikely to have deep doctrinal convictions... The question was, who would prevail and whether ideology could be moderated by a tolerant US policy.⁶⁸

The National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, argued that the revolution in Nicaragua was part of a pattern of Soviet expansion in the Third World and that the US should do everything in its power to make sure that a friendly regime was installed in Nicaragua. Brzezinski's preferred solution was that the US should intervene as part of a regional multilateral force, but he was

⁶⁷ Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*. (Free Press: New York, 1996), p.124.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

prepared to consider unilateral intervention, should that be the only option open:

On the other side of the debate in June 1979 was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who now took a more direct role in the brewing Nicaraguan crisis. Brzezinski shared neither Vaky's [Viron Vaky, assistant Secretary of State for Latin America] hopes for moderating the Sandinista revolution, nor his pessimism about the possibility of preventing a Sandinista victory... Brzezinski had argued that 'Soviet Military activity and by proxy in the Third World require a strong American response'⁶⁹.

Brzezinski's proposal was that the US ought to intervene as part of a multilateral force under the authority of the Organisation of American States (OAS). In order to be a credible proposal this required significant participation by other Latin American States, and this was not forthcoming because most Latin American States had a visceral aversion to US intervention in their internal affairs and because the Sandinistas were seen as preferable to the previous regime. Given the lack of OAS support, the US was left in the position of having to intervene unilaterally in order to prevent the Sandinista victory.

There is no evidence that this possibility was seriously considered by anybody other than Brzezinski at a senior level of the Administration. Considering its history in the region and given the fact that there is simply no way that the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

Nicaraguans could have offered any meaningful resistance, intervention, on the face of it, would seem to be the preferred US policy. The fact that the US did not intervene, coupled with the fact that this prospect was never even seriously contemplated, leads to only one conclusion. In the wake of Vietnam, senior US policymakers were simply not prepared to engage in overt military intervention in the developing world to prop up a friendly but corrupt regime with a poor human rights record.

The point to be noted here in terms of winning and holding public support for a military intervention is that, if one subscribes to the model of public opinion put forward by scholars such as Lippman and Mueller, public opinion on National Security policy is essentially a formless series of images and stereotypes that is waiting for Executive action to mobilise and mould in a certain way. Then before one can get to the point of talking about public opinion on the subject of military intervention in Nicaragua, there is a requirement that the Executive's branch of Government should have a clear idea and a consensus within the Executive branch ought to exist about what policy ought to be pursued if public opinion is going to be mobilised. Because, when it came to Nicaragua, the Carter Administration never came close to achieving this kind of consensus, public opinion, as described by Lippman and Mueller, never had a settled view on military intervention on Nicaragua. If one subscribes to the notion that the actions of the Executive provide a strong lead to public opinion, then the lack of will among the members of the Executive branch of Government to pursue a line of policy has the consequence that public opinion will not come to support that policy option by itself.

What we can also see is that part of the reason for the reticence of senior US officials to even consider the possibility of military intervention was that they saw a strong parallel between what was going on in Nicaragua and Vietnam. The majority of the Carter Administration rejected intervention in Nicaragua on those grounds. Some in the Reagan Administration were keen for military intervention on those grounds. Some hoped that Nicaragua would be the turning point beyond which the US could lay the ghost of Vietnam to rest. President Reagan's First Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, summed up how Central America could be used to erase the mistakes of Vietnam: "A quick victory in Central America would begin purging the national psyche of the Vietnam syndrome, rebuilding the pre-Vietnam consensus for aggressive containment."⁷⁰

The US Military also clearly understood the parallel between Central American and Vietnam:

Many of the senior military had feared a Central American Vietnam and by making their fears known in advance, they had sought to shape the debate to pre-empt certain policies. Most important, the military had advised publically against the commitment of US combat forces in the region except in certain conditions – conditions developed with an eye to avoiding another Vietnam.⁷¹

⁷⁰ William LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America* (University of North Carolina Press: North Carolina, 1998), p.100.

⁷¹ *The Logic of Force*, p. 252.

We can see here a fundamental difference in views between Haig and senior Military Officers. Implicit in the two quotations given above are different views of the Vietnam War. For Haig, the US's commitment to Vietnam was the correct strategic decision for the United States to take at the time, and part of what he calls "aggressive containment," which had marked US policy towards the Soviet Union since the late 1940s. For Haig, one of the factors driving his view of Central American policy was to re-establish an atmosphere in the US that was conducive to the pursuit of "aggressive containment." On the other hand, according to the senior Military figures that Gacek is quoting the US decision to intervene in Vietnam was not strategically correct, nor would they necessarily see the US strategy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia as being central to containing the Soviet Union. The entire point of drawing parallels between the situation in Central America and the situation in South Vietnam was to avoid creating an atmosphere in which the pursuit of Vietnam-style strategies of "aggressive containment" could be pursued. Interestingly, the general public took the side of the senior Military officials. Gallup found, in polling done between 1981 and 1983, between 62 and 74% of the public who knew about the situation in El Salvador thought that it had the potential to turn into a Vietnam-style situation.⁷²

Having seen that both civilian policy elites, the Military and the general public all saw that the situation in Central America at least had the potential to turn

⁷² Figures taken from Richard Sobel, "A Report: Public Opinion About United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), p.116.

into another Vietnam-type situation, we will now go on to look at how the Carter Administration dealt with Central America for the remainder of its time in office, and how the transition between Carter and Reagan fundamentally changed US policy towards Central America.

In the absence of an acceptable way of preventing the Sandinistas coming to power, the US policy for the remainder of the Carter Administration was to extend a limited amount of aid and to maintain polite but non-committal diplomatic relations in the hopes of moderating Sandinista behaviour. In this policy too we can see an attempt to avoid the mistakes of Vietnam when the US perceived the North Vietnamese as irrevocably hostile and made no effort to establish any kind of a relationship.

The transition between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan was one of the starkest changes in philosophy between two Presidents. Jimmy Carter represented the political zenith of the idea that Vietnam should mark a fundamental transition in the way US foreign policy was conducted. Carter believed that US foreign policy should be less militaristic, less obsessed with the threat of global communism and more attentive to the promotion of democracy and human rights. Ronald Reagan was, in contrast, the arch cold warrior. To him, Vietnam was a temporary aberration, an example of what happens when politicians lacked the will to do what was necessary to stand up to the expansion of global communism. These philosophical differences were to have a major impact on every facet of US foreign policy, none more so than in US dealings with Nicaragua:

The transition from Carter to Reagan was the most dramatic changing of the guard of the Cold War era. The contrast between the man who had warned against an “inordinate fear of communism” and the old Republican anti-communist who warned against insufficient vigilance.⁷³

Although Reagan had a very definite idea about what his foreign policy objectives should be, he also had to face the political reality that, although he personally had won in a landslide against Carter,⁷⁴ he had not been able to carry Congress with him. The House of Representatives remained in Democratic control, with no immediate hope of this being over turned. Despite a slim Republican majority in the Senate, the presence of a small group of moderate Republicans meant that in order to achieve both his domestic and global goals Reagan would have to engage in coalition building.

Central American problems were high in the in-tray of the incoming Administration. The Nicaraguan revolution had given left-wing guerrillas in the region, particularly in El Salvador, inspiration, and had also provided an important logistical staging area for the smuggling of arms from Cuba. The early months of 1981 were spent in furious internal debate, the outcome of which would shape policy for the remainder of Reagan’s seven and a half years in office. On the eve of Reagan coming to office left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador stepped up their campaign against the right-wing government there:

⁷³ *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua*, p.167.

⁷⁴ Reagan beat Carter by 489 to 49 votes in the Electoral College and 50.7% to 41% in the popular vote. Full result available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1980>.

“Through no direct fault of Ronald Reagan, Central America became a front burner issue.”⁷⁵

It is in this context that we see for the first time a real debate between those who favoured direct military intervention in Central America, represented principally by Reagan’s first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, and those who were much more wary of the idea of military intervention, represented principally by Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, and it is this debate that we will now look at in detail.

Alexander Haig was the most senior advisor who advocated a military solution to US problems in Central America, having served in Vietnam as a Colonel and in Washington as a military aide to Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger. Haig was intimately familiar both with the military and political history of US involvement and with extrication from Vietnam. From this experience Haig drew lessons that were to inform his approach to Nicaragua and Central American issues in general:

From these two miscalculations, the first in Korea and the second in Vietnam, one can draw two morals:

i) He who refuses to believe the evidence before his eyes in order to protect an illusion will suffer for his mistake

⁷⁵ Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981 – 1987* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1988). p. 22.

ii) A President who does not know the whole truth cannot enjoy a full range of policy choices.⁷⁶

Haig viewed world affairs as a zero sum game involving the US and the USSR. The North Vietnamese, in Haig's view had been proxies of the Soviet Union and the biggest single mistake the US made in Vietnam was not addressing the source of the problem. Instead of bombing targets in North Vietnam, the US should have put more pressure on the Soviets to cease the economic aid, which, in Haig's view, kept the North Vietnamese economy going. The US could have killed as many North Vietnamese troops as it liked; the fundamental problem was that the Soviet Union would make sure that their replacements were always properly supplied.

When it came to Central America then, Haig was not keen to see US Marines patrolling the Nicaraguan jungle. This for Haig would have been buying into the illusion of what the US's problems really were in Central America. Nicaragua was not the problem. It was the Soviets and the Cubans who provided support for Nicaragua that were the real problem. Rather, he felt that the focus should be on removing the logistical support from Central American leftists by taking strong action against Cuba. Shortly after his inauguration, Haig asked his assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, Thomas Enders, to draw up a list of options for retaliatory action against Cuba. The most severe option that Haig favoured was a reintroduction of the 1962 blockade. Haig was

⁷⁶ Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1984). p.122.

aware that such action had the potential to raise tension with the Soviets to dangerous levels but from his point of view this had its advantages. First, it would signal to the Soviets that the US had recovered from its post Vietnam malaise and was prepared to assert itself when its interests were threatened. On a more regional level, it would prove to the Soviets that the US took the potential spread of communism in Central America as a matter of the highest importance, and that if the Soviet wanted progress on other issues they should not interfere in Central America.

Haig had no time for the argument that such a high-risk policy was impractical because it would not command public or Congressional support. In Haig's view, the executive should decide what the best policy is in terms of national interest and then worry about selling it to the public. Haig's attitude can be summed up by a passing comment he made in his memoirs on what the priority for the in-coming President ought to be "The new President, in his first days, had to move against the uncertainty. He had to act decisively and directly on the Soviet Union⁷⁷." In this short passage Haig shows that it is up to the President and those around him to act decisively and with speed and public opinion is an issue to be addressed later, very much in line with the views of George Kennan, discussed earlier in this chapter. Haig also believed that public disenchantment with Vietnam was not due to the US being overly aggressive, but was in fact due to the opposite. Haig argued that up until the US began withdrawing troops, the majority of the American public was in favour of more forceful action in Vietnam, not less. Haig was confident that in the final

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.31.

analysis if the Administration could present its case as to why Central America was so important the American people would support tough action. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, the intellectual climate nurtured by people like Summers, that led to the Powell Doctrine, would hold the opposite opinion to Haig.⁷⁸ In terms of the intellectual climate that engendered the Powell Doctrine, public support is not something you go out to win after deciding what policy ought to be. For advocates of those ideas that formed the above intellectual, a level of public support ought to exist for a policy before it is embarked upon. We will now move on to see how Haig's argument was challenged by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who, as we have already seen, was to articulate in 1984 a version of those ideas that would go on to form the Powell Doctrine.

Haig's opponents on this debate alongside Weinberger were the President's domestic policy advisers James Baker, Michael Deaver and Edwin Messe.

Weinberger's chief concern was to re-establish strategic parity with the Soviets. Any course of action that threatened to derail his spending and policy priority, he was opposed to. Weinberger knew that military action in Central America had the potential to become a sinkhole down which the extra billions of the Reagan defence build-up would be poured. Aside from this argument, of all the people who held the office of Secretary of Defense, Weinberger was probably the one most sympathetic to the military's point of view. One of

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the intellectual climate around the need for public support and how that was influenced by the US experience in Vietnam, see pp.180-182.

Weinberger's chief priorities in restoring the military's effectiveness was to rebuild its public image and re-establish trust between the military and the American people. One of the worst things that could happen from Weinberger's point of view was that the military would once again be bogged down in an open-ended, complex and morally ambiguous war in Central America: "You had to have some reasonable anticipation of the support of the American people and the Congress. You couldn't fight a war against an enemy here and against the American people at home."⁷⁹ Whereas Haig saw public opinion and Congress as essentially passive institutions waiting for the Executive to decide on matters of foreign policy, Weinberger saw the Legislative and Executive branches of the US Government as being jointly responsible for the conduct of foreign policy and that, not only are they jointly responsible for any decisions taken, but that the evolution of policy is a process of ongoing consultation between the two branches:

there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress. This support cannot be achieved unless we are candid in making clear the threats we face; the support cannot be sustained without continuing and close consultation. We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win a war.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Reagan Oral History Project, Caspar Weinberger, Tape 2 of 4, "Interview with Caspar Weinberger," by Stephen Knott, & Russell L. Riley [online], 19 November 2002, Miller Center of Public Affairs. Available at:

http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_2002_1119_weinberger.pdf.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Weinberger was not alone in believing this. In 1983, recently retired Chief of Staff of the Army Lieutenant General Edward C. Meyer commented that military intervention in Central America should not be undertaken unless there is "a consensus within the United States that what we're doing is sufficiently important that American soldiers go there."⁸¹

The President's domestic advisers worried that a strong stand in Central America would distract Congressional attention away from the ambitious programme of economic reform that Reagan hoped to pass. The polls would certainly give the President's domestic advisors cause for serious concern about the public's attitude towards Nicaragua. A poll conducted for the *ABC* television network and *The Washington Post* newspaper found that in 1983 only 13% of respondents favoured overthrowing the government of Nicaragua, while 78% were against US involvement in any change of regime⁸². Reagan's domestic policy advisors knew that Central America was an issue that was likely to split the fragile coalition that they had managed to assemble between conservative Democrats and Republicans.

Nicaragua was an issue where Congressional opinion was very evenly divided between those in favour of the US supporting a change in regime, and those

⁸¹ Norman Podhoretz, "Military Intervention in Nicaragua?", *New York Times*, 24 July 1983. Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/02/21/specials/podhoretz-central.html>.

⁸² Richard Sobel, "The Polls (A Report). Public Opinion about United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua", *Public Opinion Quarterly*. **53** (1), (1989), Pp. 114-128. These particular numbers were taken from a poll conducted in May 1983, the sample for the poll was 1,501, the exact question asked was, "Should the US be involved in trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua? Or not?" The highest percentage in support of overthrowing the Nicaraguan government recorded using this question was 29% when asked in August 1987.

that believed that the US ought to stay out of Nicaraguan politics. In the 98th, 99th and 100th Congress, 70.5% of all Members of the House of Representatives had a perfectly consistent voting record when it came to Nicaragua. That is to say, their votes for and against the Contras did not change at all in any of the House floor votes.⁸³ The swing votes that did exist were overwhelmingly those of Southern Democrats and a few Northern liberal Republicans in the House. The group of Southern Democrats that constituted the bulk of the swing vote on the Nicaragua issues also constituted the group that gave President Reagan a working majority in a Democrat-controlled House. As William LeoGrande put it, “The success of Ronald Reagan's legislative program was largely due to his ability to win the support of these conservative southern Democrats.”⁸⁴ Since Reagan needed the support of these Southern Democrats on a wide variety of domestic and foreign policy debates, the constant raising of the prospect of intervention in Central America, an issue which the Democratic leadership in Congress felt extremely strongly about, could only serve to strain the fragile coalition between Republicans and Southern Democrats, which was key to controlling the House of Representatives. Therefore, Reagan's political advisers wanted to put as little strain as possible on this coalition, and wanted to avoid protracted debates on Central American issues, particularly any inference that the US was considering direct intervention.

⁸³ Data taken from William M. LeoGrande and Philip Brenner, “The House Divided: Ideological Polarization over Aid to the Nicaraguan ‘Contras,’” *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb., 1993), p.110. Full text available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/440028>

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.112.

As we can see, Haig was badly outnumbered in this debate and his preferences, particularly with regard to Cuba, were quickly swept aside. This left the Reagan Administration in a quandary; it wanted to take some form of strong action that would stand the tide of Communist expansion in its own backyard, but at the same time it feared that to do so was to invite rancorous public debate and distract it from other priorities:

At the White House a 'troika' of senior staff members Edwin Messe, James Baker and Michael Deaver dominated Administration decision making ... 'These men were intensely sensitive to the public mood and reluctant to take any action that might alter it in the President's disfavour. Every day they put their finger to the wind to see what the people wanted.'⁸⁵

We can see here how the intellectual climate that gave rise to the Powell Doctrine's insistence on public support before overt military action can be undertaken has had profound effect on US policy. Because President Reagan realised that his Secretary of Defense was not likely to go along with overt military intervention in Nicaragua without overwhelming public support. This led President Reagan to turn towards the CIA and a programme of covert action to achieve his objectives in Nicaragua.

We will now move on to look at the reasons why covert action was a way for the Reagan Administration to pursue its desired policy objectives in Nicaragua,

⁸⁵ *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America*. p.84.

whilst at the same time avoiding the Military's objection to the lack of public support for overt intervention. However, we will also see that the resort to covert action created a situation whereby the Department of Defense's input into policy debates over Nicaragua became sharply circumscribed.

One of the principal advantages of covert action is that, because such operations by definition take place in secret, it would not be necessary to have public support before undertaking them. Normally the logistical support for such operations would be provided by the Department of Defense, but because such support might have rung alarm bells in Congress, in the case of Nicaragua this support was provided by third parties – in particular Honduras and Argentina⁸⁶. Ironically, this resort to covert action made gaining public support for any consideration of overt action in the future that much more difficult to gain because the Reagan Administration had to take care not to reveal too much of its policy towards Nicaragua for fear of exposing its covert operations, and this therefore restricted its ability to shape the debate over what the US ought to do about the situation in Nicaragua.

By 1984, the CIA's operations in Nicaragua had expanded massively and the Contras were able to support and maintain a force numbering several thousand in the field at any one time. However, the Nicaraguan government was no closer to being overthrown and, disturbingly from the CIA's point of view, still

⁸⁶ For a detailed discussion of this relationship see: Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1988), Chapter 1.

had access to overseas aid and trade. In order to remove this lifeline a plan was hatched to mine Nicaragua's main harbours:

Clarridge [Duane Clarridge, Director of Operations, Latin America and the highest ranking CIA officer to deal directly with the Contras] drew up a plan to attack the Nicaraguan coastal fuel depots, but not with half-assed amateur Contras in operational roles. The CIA would run and coordinate it. Clarridge hired so-called 'unilaterally controlled Latino assets'. These were full time agency Latinos who might give it a more 'Contra' feel.⁸⁷

By undertaking this operation, the CIA had placed itself in a role which violated international law, and would be seen by the world as an act of war. If this operation was blown there was every chance that the Nicaraguan government would have retaliated directly against Americans. This retaliation could possibly have taken the form of kidnapping American citizens or officials, or stepping up support to guerrilla organisations in the region etc. The intellectual climate within the US Military that led to the Powell Doctrine, wholly supported by Secretary Weinberger, had ruled out the overt use of military force by the United States. In order to achieve its objectives the Reagan Administration had undertaken covert action, which had far fewer institutional restraints on it and did not require public support. Nevertheless, this action could have placed the US in a state of war. Because of the

⁸⁷ Bob Woodward, *Veil: The secret wars of the CIA 1981-1987*. (Headline: London, 1987), p. 336.

straightjacket restrictions of the Powell Doctrine, and, because of its own internal division, the Reagan Administration had placed the United States in a situation where its covert military involvement meant the US could have found itself at war without the public, Congress or even the Military having been consulted. Clarridge himself takes a somewhat more relaxed view of how serious the situation was:

People seem to get all bent out of shape about sea mines. Sea mines damage property primarily, but somehow they have been pegged as dastardly, inhumane weapons. Like chemical and biological warfare, sea mines have become ordnance pariahs that ‘civilized’ nations somehow should be above using... In fact, fewer people have been killed by sea mines than by any of the other means of destruction we have invented over the centuries. Mining is one of the least cruel and most economical means of warfare, especially if you warn your enemy and interested third parties that an area is mined.⁸⁸

These mines were not intended to destroy ships, they were intended to frighten the Captain and crew and raise the insurance rates on cargoes travelling to Nicaragua to unaffordable levels. Under international law, the laying of mines is an act of war. The CIA’s cover story for this operation was that the Contras themselves laid the mines. However, this story was fatally undermined by the fact the mines were of US manufacture and the explosive used was US-made

⁸⁸ Duane R. Clarridge, *A Spy for all Seasons. My Life in the CIA* (Scribner: New York, 1997), p. 269.

Military issue. What is startling about this episode is that the CIA conceived and executed the entire project entirely off its own back. Although the US Military supplied the explosives, they did not know what they were supplying them for. Not only was the US Military kept in the dark, but also the Congressional Intelligence Committee was informed of the mining in such a way that it was almost inevitable that the true implications would be missed. It is not a stretch of the imagination to see why the CIA did this⁸⁹. Had senior Military Officials been aware of what was happening, they would have been duty bound to have reported the fact that Weinberger, who in all probability, given his previous record, would have done everything he could to have the operation stopped. The Military's intense desire not to get into a war that did not command public support meant that it was cut out of the policy-making loop.

The case study of US policy towards Central America 1979-1984 clearly demonstrates the emphasis the US Military placed on public and through that, Congressional support. Witness Weinberger's flat refusal as Secretary of Defense to countenance any intervention in Central America that did not carry public support. Also witness the attitude of General Edward C. Meyer, the recently retired Chief of Staff of the Army⁹⁰, who, as we have seen, supported Weinberger's stance. Witness also, in terms of creating the intellectual climate that gave birth to the Powell Doctrine, in work published only a few years prior to the beginning of this case study, as we have seen, William Westmoreland

⁸⁹ This account of the mining fiasco is taken from: *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, pp. 387-396.

⁹⁰ See p.217.

and Harry Summers place a high premium on the need to obtain public support.⁹¹ However, it also demonstrates that the need for such support can hang like a weight around the Military's neck. Because Secretary of Defense Weinberger was reluctant to engage in any activity that did not have overwhelming public support, he found himself in the position of being cut out of the decision making loop and US policy towards Nicaragua became more and more the preserve of the CIA. Also because US involvement in Nicaragua was covert, the Reagan Administration was not forced to clearly articulate what its goals were. So whilst the Administration knew that it did not like the Sandinistas and wanted to prevent the spread of Communism in Central America, it was never clear whether its objective should be the removal of the Sandinistas from power or whether its objectives should be simply to prevent the export of the Sandinista revolution.

We must now turn our attention to how the need for public and Congressional support affects the other elements of the Powell Doctrine. First, we will look at how the need for public support makes clarity of objectives even more important and then we will look at how the need to sell policy to the public helps to define what counts as a vital interest.

It is important to understand in the context of US policy towards Central America what we mean when we are talking about the need for public support. Clearly, covert action, by its very definition, does not require public support, as the public does not and should not know about it. In a discussion of the

⁹¹ See pp.180-182..

Reagan Administration's policy lacking public support, what we are talking about in this context are the overt acts of policy or discussions of policy alternatives that the public did see. So, in the context of Nicaragua, the overt options that were under consideration, as we have already seen, were overt military intervention and overt support for the Contras' insurgency against the Sandinista Government and the elements of the CIA's operations against the Sandinistas which were briefed to Congress.

One of the reasons why the Reagan Administration consistently struggled to win public acceptance of its overt policy towards Nicaragua⁹² was that it was never entirely clear exactly what the Reagan Administration was hoping to achieve. Was it trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua? Was it trying to persuade the government of Nicaragua to moderate its behaviour internationally? Or was it trying to promote democracy in Nicaragua? Roy Gutman, a journalist and author specialising in Central American affairs, characterised the debates taking place within the Reagan Administration about what US policy towards Nicaragua should be in the following way,

It was a classic Washington power struggle. Each side could block the other. The hard right was a broad, informal, and shifting group. All processed, and most shared, Reagan's ideology – in particular his anticommunism and his deep distrust of the Soviet Union... Enders

⁹² In a series of polls conducted by the Harris Polling Organization between October 1984 and July 1987, never less than 51% of respondents opposed the sending of aid to the Contras. The highest figure for opposition was 74% in a poll conducted in June 1987. The mean average opposition to Contra aid taken from all these polls was 62.7%. See Richard Sobel, "A Report: Public Opinion About United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), p.124.

[Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America] and the Central America specialists at State who backed him up certainly were not soft on communism, but they tried to preserve flexibility in policy that would allow occasional testing of the possibilities for a peaceful solution.⁹³

The Reagan Administration's public rhetoric and its private discussions at different times support all three interpretations. For instance, the first finding⁹⁴ on Nicaragua justified the operation in terms of recruiting Nicaraguan fighters in order to prevent arms smuggling between Nicaragua and El Salvador. Yet, the operations the Contras undertook seemed to suggest that the objective was to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. At the same time, Assistant Secretary of State Enders was travelling to Nicaragua to attempt to negotiate a settlement with the Sandinistas to reduce armed smuggling to El Salvador.

Reagan was not beyond using sweeping, not to say bloodcurdling, rhetoric in order to justify US support of the Contras:

I must speak to you tonight about a mounting danger in Central America that threatens the security of the United States. This danger will not go away; it will grow worse, much worse, if we fail to take action now. I'm speaking of Nicaragua, a Soviet ally on the American mainland only 2 hours' flying time from our own borders... Gathered in Nicaragua already are thousands of Cuban military advisers, contingents of Soviets and East

⁹³ *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987*, p.89.

⁹⁴ A finding refers to a document signed by the President which gives the CIA authority to undertake a specific operation. These findings must be reported to the Congressional intelligence committees within 30 days of being signed.

Germans, and all the elements of international terror -- from the PLO to Italy's Red Brigades. Why are they there? Because as Colonel Qadhafi has publicly exulted: 'Nicaragua means a great thing: it means fighting America near its borders, fighting America at its doorstep.'⁹⁵

One can certainly be forgiven for being confused over how such rhetoric was supposed to square with the idea that CIA support for the Contras was limited to simply stopping arms smuggling across Nicaragua's borders.

As late as 1986, there was still confusion between the Reagan Administration and Congress over what the US' objective in Nicaragua was – six years after the Reagan Administration had first begun to grapple with this problem. *Time* magazine's chief diplomatic correspondent Strobe Talbott summed up the Administration's problem in an article connected to an upcoming Congressional vote on restoring American funding to the Contras:

The starting point for a fresh approach has to be a consensus about what Shultz's [Secretary of State George Shultz] depiction of the Sandinistas as unacceptable means, not in terms of anyone's tastes and preferences but in terms of a policy that can be carried out in the real world: What is it that the U.S. cannot accept about the junta in Managua? And what must

⁹⁵ Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua. March 16th 1986. *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Full text available at: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm>.

the U.S. do to transform the Sandinista regime into something the U.S. can live with?⁹⁶

That the media felt that the Administration had to clarify such basic questions over its policy towards Nicaragua, six years after taking office, would tend to suggest that at least certain sections of the media were confused about what Reagan's policy towards the region was.

These contradictory activities tended to suggest that the Reagan Administration itself did not know what it wanted to achieve. The consequence of this was that it sent out mixed messages to various foreign and domestic audiences. All this activity served merely to confuse Congress as to what exactly it was being asked to support. At best the Administration looked evasive, at worst it looked like it did not know what it was doing. A clear example of this is the different recollections that members of the Congressional Intelligence Committees have of their briefing on the aims and objectives of CIA operations in Nicaragua:

Some members of the committee later claimed that Casey 'did nothing to suggest an anti-Sandinista political dimension' to the covert program.

Others recall that he did... Congressman Lee Hamilton wrote years later that Casey told the committee 'there would be a military arm and a separate political arm which would attempt to secure support from other nations.'⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Strobe Talbott, "Essay: Why Congress Should Approve Contra Aid," *Time*. March 24th 1986. Talbott later went on to serve as President Clinton's Under Secretary of State, 1993-2001.

⁹⁷ *A Twilight Struggle*, p. 206.

It is of course arguable that the Administration's goal from first to last was perfectly clear. It wanted to remove the Sandinistas from power. However, from what we now know of the internal discussions, which took place within the first year of the Reagan Administration, it does seem that, at least initially, the US's objective was something short of overthrowing the Sandinista regime. Thomas Enders, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, described the initial covert plan of action for Nicaragua presented to Ronald Reagan as, "a lowball option, a small operation not intended to overthrow," and which would "harass the government, waste it."⁹⁸ And William Casey, in his first description of the CIA's role in arming the Contras, described it as "a small number of paramilitary fighters who would be trained and armed to conduct raids against the Sandinistas' supply of arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas."⁹⁹ Even if one were to accept the argument that the Reagan Administration, whatever it said to Congress and the press, always, in the final analysis, wanted to remove the Sandinista regime, because these were not the terms in which the policy was sold, either to Congress or the public, at the very least the Reagan Administration's public rhetoric was not consistent with the more limited objectives it claimed to be interested in. At the very least, in the public and Congressional minds, this made the Reagan Administration look as if it did know what it wanted to achieve, because its means and its rhetoric were out of step with one another.

⁹⁸ *A Twilight Struggle*, p.202.

⁹⁹ *Our Own Backyard*, p.286.

The idea of what constitutes “vital interest” is, almost by definition, an extremely vague and nebulous one. Perhaps one of the best ways of defining it is, what does the public and its elected representatives think is vital. Nicaragua clearly did not fall within the definition of “vital” for a large part of the American public or many members of Congress.¹⁰⁰

The reason for this is not hard to find. The further south and west one moves, the closer to the Mexican border one gets and the more Central America seems ominously close at hand. It was a constant feature of Reagan’s public rhetoric to point out how close Nicaragua was to the United States. The following quotation is taken from a speech Reagan delivered to Congress on the need to resume funding of lethal aid to the Contras:

I’ve asked for \$100 million and we’ll fight for it... you can’t stop tanks and gunships with bandages and bedrolls. Defeat for the Contras would mean another Cuba on the mainland of North America... It would mean consolidation of a privileged sanctuary for terrorists and subversives just two days driving time from Harlingen, Texas.¹⁰¹

Reagan was not above using even more blatantly anti-immigrant rhetoric to justify US involvement in Nicaragua:

¹⁰⁰ In a series of polls conducted for *ABC News/ The Washington Post* between November 1983 and March 1986, in a response to the question, Would you say that the situation in Nicaragua is a threat to the security of the United States or not? (Is that a major threat or a minor threat?), never less than 51% said that the situation posed a minor or no threat. The highest response rate for minor or no threat was 65% in March 1986. The average response for no or minor threat was 58.4% of all respondents. See “A Report: Public Opinion About United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua,” p.121.

¹⁰¹ Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2006), p.313.

Should that [Reagan is referring to the consolidation of Soviet and Cuban influence in Central America] happen, desperate Latin peoples by the millions would begin fleeing north into the cities of the southern United States or to wherever some hope of freedom remained.¹⁰²

However, even with this strategy of playing on the fear of the domestic repercussions of events in Nicaragua, the Reagan Administration was never able to convince the majority of the American people that the Sandinistas posed a real threat to national security.¹⁰³ This is something that the Reagan Administration acknowledged, at least in private. A National Security Council memo noted that the Administration had, “Failed to make the case that the Sandistas are indeed a sufficient threat to our national security that justifies a major covert action/paramilitary program.”¹⁰⁴

In order to have gained the public support necessary for a major overt military intervention or a ramping up of aid to the Contras, Reagan would have had to have convincingly demonstrated that events in Nicaragua posed a major and imminent threat to the United States as a whole. This would have been in itself

¹⁰² Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua. March 16th 1986. *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Full text available at: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/061287d.htm> .

¹⁰³ A majority of Americans in polls conducted between 1983 and 1986 by *ABC Television* and the *Washington Post*, 50-55 percent of respondents said that the greatest danger to the United States “lay in the United States becoming too entangled in internal Central American problems as a result of trying to stop the spread of communism.” “A Report: Public Opinion About United States Intervention in El Salvador and Nicaragua,” p.116.

¹⁰⁴ Nicaragua Options Paper, January 15th, 1985. Full text available at: <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/marketing/index.jsp>, with valid username and password.

a hard task given the enormous disparity in relative power between Nicaragua and the US.

As we have already seen the second strategy which the Reagan Administration used was to ignore the local implications of the Nicaraguan conflict, and instead focus on how events in Nicaragua formed part of a greater Soviet push for influence in Central America. This was an argument that the Reagan Administration made with much fanfare and great gusto. However, a number of problems stood in its way. First, however hard the Reagan Administration may have insisted to the contrary, what the US was doing in Nicaragua was not defensive. It was trying to remove a leftist regime already in power. Second, whilst the Soviets were prepared to supply the Sandinistas with arms, they went to great lengths not to supply them with anything that could be perceived as an offensive threat towards the United States. For example, when the US protested against the delivery of high performance military jets¹⁰⁵, their delivery was swiftly cancelled. Finally, the Soviets themselves seemed eager for a solution to the Nicaraguan problem. From a Soviet point of view, the revolution in Nicaragua was a mixed blessing. On the one hand it provided the Soviets with a potential new ally in the western hemisphere, on the other it provided them with another ally far from their own shores which would demand the same economic aid received by Cuba and Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe at a time when the USSR could scarcely afford another drain on its resources. In summation, the Reagan Administration was never able to

¹⁰⁵ For an account of the diplomacy surrounding Soviet arms deliveries to Nicaragua see: Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1984), p.109, and George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (Charles Scribner's sons: New York, 1993), Pp.424-425.

form a public consensus around the idea that events in Nicaragua represented a vital interest, not because the public or Congress were stupid or uninformed, but because there were solid reasons why Nicaragua was of no more than marginal strategic interest to the United States. Clearly, what constitutes “national interest” is always a matter of debate and contestation. The point to be noted here is that the Reagan Administration failed to win that debate in the minds of a large majority of the American public when it came to Nicaragua.

The case study of US policy towards Nicaragua throws up one of the most interesting philosophical questions this thesis will tackle. Namely, what happens when the foreign policy objectives of a democratically elected Administration fall outside the scope of what the Powell Doctrine is prepared to contemplate. As we have seen, the Reagan Administration’s policy towards Nicaragua fails at least three of the tests laid down by the Doctrine. It did not have public and Congressional support, its objectives were neither clear nor consistent, and the issue of whether events in Nicaragua fell within the scope of the United States’ vital interests was debateable at best.

Having looked at the relationship between the element of the Powell Doctrine calling for the need for public support and the elements of the Powell Doctrine that call for military intervention to have clear objectives and that military intervention should be in the “vital national interest,” and how the overt policy of the Reagan Administration failed to address all three of these points, we must now look at the covert policy the Reagan Administration pursued and why that made it even harder to gain public support for its overt policies.

If overt military intervention was not a viable option and overt support for the Contras was at least controversial, then the next best option from Reagan's point of view was some form of covert action which would hopefully bring down the Nicaraguan government, or at the very least destabilise it enough that accommodation with the US would be possible. Better still, from the Administration's point of view, covert action by its very nature is conducted without wide public knowledge and what the public do not know about they are not required to support:

For Reagan officials, one of the main virtues of the new covert program was that it required no public explanation, no public debate, and no public vote by Congress. The Administration had only to inform the intelligence committees in both houses of the new finding and gain their quiet acquiescence.¹⁰⁶

However, as we shall see, this reliance on covert action would only serve to make gaining public support for those overt actions that the Reagan Administration wanted to undertake even more complicated and even more difficult to secure.

In the wake of the domestic spying scandals and revelation of CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Congress in 1976

¹⁰⁶ *A Twilight Struggle*, Pp. 204-205.

held a series of investigations into the CIA's activities.¹⁰⁷ This resulted in the passage of the Foreign Intelligence Oversight Act of 1980. As a result of this Act, the President now had to sign a formal document known as a "finding," authorising any covert action the CIA undertook. The CIA Director was then required by law to inform House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) of these findings within a specified timeframe. Whilst this clearly did not make covert action impossible, it meant that there was a far greater and institutionally embedded oversight structure that did not exist in 1954, or, for that matter, in 1973. Whilst the CIA's covert action capability was not exactly open to full public scrutiny, if the Executive obeyed the law it did mean that Congress had a statutory right to request and require the CIA to provide it with information. This clearly meant that the Executive branch of Government's room to implement covert action without scrutiny had been circumscribed and, as we shall see, Reagan's first CIA Director, William Casey, ran into almost constant trouble with these two committees as to the candour and veracity of the information he supplied to them.

Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz)'s reaction to what he felt was an inadequate briefing on the mining of Nicaraguan harbours sums up the distrust that mounted against the Administration when it was seen as not being forthcoming. The following quotation is from a letter Goldwater wrote to CIA Director William Casey:

¹⁰⁷ For the full text of the United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, also known as the Church Report, see http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/contents/church/contents_church_reports.htm

The President has asked us to back his foreign policy. Bill, how can we back his foreign policy when we don't know what the hell he is doing? Lebanon [Goldwater was referring to the deployment of US marines in Lebanon, see Chapter 5], yes, we all knew that he sent troops over there. But mine the harbours of Nicaragua? This is an act violating international law. It is an act of war. For the life of me, I don't see how we are going to explain it.¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, Clarridge maintains that both the Senate and the House Intelligence Committee were fully aware of his activities, and those of the Contras, and that Goldwater and the rest of his Committee's indignation had much more to do with the reaction of the Press when it found out about the mining of Nicaraguan ports, than it did with being uninformed. Clarridge's argument is somewhat undermined by the fact that he has a somewhat elastic definition of what "informed" means:

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence was briefed about the mining on multiple occasions. Maybe Casey didn't make a big deal of the mining, but he didn't make a big deal of a lot of things. That was his way of presenting a briefing, and he was already notorious for it.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1991), Pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁹ *A Spy for all Seasons*, p.274.

Clarridge believed that if members of the Intelligence Committee were ignorant of the CIA's activities, it was because they chose to be:

That the mining wasn't highlighted in yellow, spelled out in capital letters, and stuck on the front page of their agenda doesn't mean we were trying to obscure what we were doing. Even if the senators themselves didn't get it when Casey said it, they had hot- and cold-running staff members who were paid to cull this kind of information from the briefing materials we prepared.¹¹⁰

Clarridge's defence is utterly flawed. As this chapter already pointed out, whatever his views on the effectiveness of sea mines, the act of mining ports is internationally recognised as an act of war. This is not something one should have to fine-comb a briefing for in order to find out, and it is not the sort of thing that should only be brought up before a select group of Congressmen and Senators. Apart from being flawed, this argument also misses the point. Congress and the American public are unlikely ever to react well to the impression of being kept in the dark on issues of this importance.

What we can see from Goldwater's letter¹¹¹ is the vicious circle the Reagan Administration had got itself into. It could not win public support for its overt Nicaraguan policies, therefore it resorted to covert methods that did not require public support, and when the public learned of these methods it became even

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.274.

¹¹¹ See p.236.

more suspicious of the Administrations overt policies. It was virtually inevitable that the public would, sooner, or later, learn what the CIA was up to, for the simple reason that in order for the kinds of activities the CIA were conducting to have any impact, they would have to be carried out on a scale that meant that somebody sooner or later was going to notice what was going on.

The Reagan Administration had some cause for optimism about the efficacy of covert action. The US had a long history of successful covert interventions in the region, notably in Guatemala in 1954, and in Chile in 1973.¹¹² However in the aftermath of Vietnam – the prospects for successful covert action were greatly diminished.

Vietnam and the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 raised the spectre of US sponsored covert action failing and then drawing the US into greater involvement than it didn't plan for. In the case of Vietnam, we can see this in the case of the US complicity in the overthrow of President Diem¹¹³. The CIA was aware months in advance of the actual coup that senior members of the South Vietnamese military were prepared to move against the President yet did nothing to warn Diem or do discourage the plotters, in fact they did precisely the opposite assuring the coup leaders that the US would look favourably on a

¹¹² For an account of the history of CIA covert actions see, John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II through the Persian Gulf*. Rev. and expanded ed. (Elephant Paperbacks: Chicago, 1996), and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA and American Democracy*. 3rd ed., [with new pref. and prologue], (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2003).

¹¹³ For an account of the American and in particular the CIA's role in Diem's overthrow and assassination see, Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003).

new government. As a result of this, when Diem was overthrown, the US in a sense was obliged to support his successors. Many in Congress saw a danger that by supporting covert aid to the Contras the US would eventually be drawn in to the Nicaraguan conflict in a more direct way. This concern was not without justification. One of the consistent objectives of the Contras was to take and hold a small enclave of Nicaraguan territory so that they could declare themselves a provisional government and appeal to the US for direct military support. Finally, as Secretary of State Haig pointed out, in order to make a meaningful difference to the outcome in Nicaragua, US aid had to be on a scale which by definition could not be kept covert. Therefore sooner or later Congress and the American public were going to find out what the Administration was doing in Nicaragua.

The point to be taken from this is that Vietnam not only impacted on future Administrations' ability to use overt force, it also limited future Administrations' ability to use covert action to replace or complement more traditional forms of intervention.

For these reasons it was a constant uphill fight for the Reagan Administration to keep the US in the business of supplying the Contras with military aid.

When Congress moved in late 1984 to shut off funds for these activities, the Reagan Administration instead of closing down its Nicaraguan operation, continued to support the Contras in expressed defiance of the will of Congress and the law of the land. This was done through a variety of means. Soliciting funds from third countries, funnelling the profits from illegal arms sales to Iran

to the Contras, and all of this was done through the National Security Council's staff that Congress was not mandated to oversee because they were the personal staff of the President.¹¹⁴

The point to be noted here is that the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that influenced Powell's thinking, by in practice limiting the options open to the President as Commander in Chief, helped compel Reagan to undertake a covert and eventually illegal course of action. This is important because the military's desire for public support perversely led to an important element in the nation's foreign policy being taken in secret, without Congressional approval or oversight, and without public knowledge much less support. Reagan's Contra policy was eventually exposed and halted and many of those most closely involved with it were the subject of criminal prosecution. But suppose for a moment that this policy was never exposed and that the Contras succeeded with the help of illegal US support. Might not future Presidents when faced with the constraints of a military reluctant to be used except on its own terms, be tempted to resort to measures outside of the Constitution in order to achieve the objectives they had been elected to pursue.

¹¹⁴ The literature on the Iran Contra scandal is large and growing. Some of the best accounts of what happened and what the consequences were; *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs*, Lawrence E. Walsh, *Firewall: the Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-up* (W. W. Norton: New York, 1997), and Robert C. McFarlane; with Zofia Smardz, *Special Trust* (Cadell & Davies: New York, 1994). The report of the special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh has also been published, Lawrence E. Walsh, *Iran-Contra: The Final Report* (Times Books: New York, 1994).

The Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that led to its insistence on public support raises a second fundamental question about the nature of the public's participation in foreign policy decisions in a democracy. In an ideal world, the President, the Congress and public opinion would always be bound by some consensus as to what an appropriate foreign policy for the nation should be, and this consensus would be created by informed public debate. However, real world experience tells us that this is not always the case. First, the level of public knowledge about foreign policy matters varies widely between different issues and over time. Second, Congress is composed of 535 individuals, each with their own political priorities, ideologies and moral compasses. To expect such a disparate group to reach a consensus on most issues is not realistic. Of course there are exceptions to this general rule but they are almost always situations where the US and its citizens have been directly attacked, or a short term impulse on the part of Congress to support a President in a crisis. Such support nearly always dissipates after time. There are times when Congressional and public support for a course of action does not exist *a priori*, however the President may be able to create that support by taking bold military action and acting to shape public and Congressional public support.

Although writing in the context of the Clinton Administration, David Halberstam sums up the dilemma facing the post Vietnam presidency when it comes to creating a public consensus around foreign policy objectives and the huge pressure that modern polling and modern communications technology places on politicians:

Because of modern technology, the two most important developments in American politics were the use of polling and television advertising, both of them joined together in zeroing in on and then manipulating what the voting public thought at a given moment. But did the voting public really feel that way, how deep were those feelings, and did the public always want to be catered to so instantaneously? If the public seemed to want its politicians to bend, a month or two later it might be sceptical of any politician who was so readily bent.¹¹⁵

In this chapter we have seen that the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that gave birth to an insistence on the need for public support was created less by imperatives originating from within the military than by a broader change in social and Congressional attitudes towards the Presidency and the military in the mid to late 1970s. We have also seen how the lack of clear support for Administration policy in Nicaragua effectively killed US military intervention as a viable option before it had been seriously discussed. Finally, we have seen how the demand for public support has the potential to lead to one of two extremes - on the one hand forcing the President towards covert and possibly illegal action in order to achieve foreign policy goals they consider vital, on the other hand we have seen how insistence on public support before the fact makes the President dependent on a consensus that may never

¹¹⁵ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (Bloomsbury: London, 2002), p.208.

emerge and in fact renders his constitutional position as Commander in Chief of the armed forces practically meaningless.

Having a public that is willing to make the sacrifices that prolonged military action requires is vital for success, but the key element that the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that brought it about miss is that they seem to assume that Presidents can only react to public and Congressional opinion, rather than shaping it. Whether he was right or wrong about the particular instants of US policy towards Central America, Alexander Haig was right to point out that sometimes Presidents cannot afford to wait for public opinion to swing behind them. Sometimes a President has to act and then explain and bring the public along behind a course of action. Haig's immediate successor George Shultz summed up the problem that relying on consensus for foreign policy decisions poses: "his [Shultz's] most important remark was a statement made in passing that decisions to use force 'cannot be tied to opinion polls,'"¹¹⁶ and the military should be very weary about demanding that the public support any action before it is taken – as we have seen this can lead to them being marginalised and we have also seen that insistence upon prior public consensus can lead to a situation where the temptation to act covertly is strong and that when such covert action goes wrong or is revealed, it makes the consensus which the Powell Doctrine seeks even more difficult to establish. Ultimately, despite the concerns about the ability of the public at large to make rational, consistent foreign policy choices in the "national interest" raised by scholars such as Walter Lippman or practitioners such as George Kennan, in the modern

¹¹⁶ *The Logic of Force*, p.265.

era it is simply not possible to either conduct “national security” policy in a way that the general public will not eventually become aware of. Because this is so, it is difficult to conduct “national security” policy in a way that the general public sees as being inconsistent with its preferences and values.

The lesson that the Reagan Administration’s policy towards Nicaragua teaches us is that the Powell Doctrine and its preceding intellectual climate are essentially correct insofar as they acknowledge the importance of public support, although they are incorrect in that they assume that public support must exist a priori and cannot be built, and that policymakers should avoid the twin extremes of either trying to execute policy by stealth or by pandering the interest group that shouts loudest and longest about a particular policy.

Instead, an administration should realise that a public, whilst not knowing the intricacies of foreign policies debates, do have underlying preferences about how they see themselves and their country. Policy should be made in such a way as to conform as closely as possible to these preferences.

Chapter 5 - The Objective of US Military Forces Should be Clear

The Commission concludes that the "presence" mission was not interpreted in the same manner by all levels of the chain of command and that perceptual differences regarding that mission, including the responsibility of the USMNF for the security of Beirut International Airport, should have been recognized and corrected by the chain of command.¹

In this chapter, the case study we will use is the US intervention in Lebanon between 1982 and 1984. What we will see from this case study is that, in both Vietnam and Lebanon, the US Military and Colin Powell personally were extremely critical of the lack of a clear, militarily achievable objective being set for intervention and insisted that in the future the US policymakers must set clear, unambiguous and militarily achievable objectives for any intervention. And how, to some extent, what happened in Lebanon served as further reinforcement to the lessons that those who created the intellectual climate behind the Powell Doctrine took from Vietnam.

In this chapter, we will again be dealing with the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine because the events of this chapter take place before either the publication of Powell's 1992 Foreign Affairs article or Powell's term as

¹ The Commission in the quote refers to the Long Commission of enquiry established by Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger in the aftermath of the attacks on the marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983, chaired by Admiral Robert L. J. Long, USN (Ret). The full text of the report, along with appendices can be found at: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/XX/MidEast/Lebanon-1982-1984/DOD-Report/Beirut-1.html>.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, in this chapter, it is appropriate to refer to Powell's personal opinions on the decision to intervene in Lebanon, and subsequent decisions as to how that intervention was carried out, as Powell was in a position to closely observe these events as a Military Assistant to Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. What we will see is that, in terms of developing the intellectual climate that led to the creation of the Powell Doctrine, the experience of the US Marines in Lebanon tended to act as a reinforcement and reminder of lessons that first emerged out of the US experience of the Vietnam War.

When looking at how the US intervention in Lebanon actually played out on the ground, it is important to realize that there were actually two separate US military missions to Lebanon: the first took place in August 1982, and its purpose was to provide security for the safe evacuation of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's (PLO) fighters and leadership from Beirut. I will argue that this mission was largely undertaken for reasons of prestige and that the US wanted to restore its position as a credible mediator and partner in the wider Middle East, which had been damaged by Israel's unilateral decision to invade Lebanon. I will also argue that, whilst this first intervention can technically be seen as a success, because of poor co-ordination between the US military and diplomatic strategies, this first intervention did not achieve what was hoped for it, or indeed the objectives which US negotiators had in mind for it. The caution of US commanders on the ground, coupled with the Secretary of Defense's disinclination to be involved in Lebanon in the first place, caused the US to fold the first international force in Lebanon before its task had been

completed. The second intervention was undertaken from September 1982 to February 1984. Intervention, it will be argued, had no clear objective and was largely undertaken because of President Ronald Reagan's moral revulsion at the suffering of Beirut's civilian population, and that, because of these failings, both missions constituted a serious intellectual disagreement with the climate that led to the Powell Doctrine's insistence on the need for clear and achievable objectives.

We will then move on to discuss how the need for clear objectives relates to the rest of the Powell Doctrine, paying particular attention to how it relates to the need for a clear exit strategy and the need for public support. But first, in order for us to understand the Reagan Administration's decision to intervene in the Lebanese conflict, we need to understand the context in which this decision was made.

Lebanon has, since its creation in 1919, been an unstable mix of various religious and ethnic groups. The political history of this small nation could fill many theses by itself, but there are a couple of crucial things to know about Lebanon's political history if we are to understand the events of 1982-1984. First, Lebanon was established as a majority Christian state. But, by the time of the Israeli invasion, this was no longer the case. This change in the balance of population had led to a vicious civil war breaking out in 1975. Second, Syria had never recognized Lebanon's right to exist. Syria regarded Lebanon as part of its own national territory which had been stolen by the French at the end of the First World War. Syria had used the Lebanese civil war as a pretext to

station a large military force in Lebanon, ostensibly to keep the peace but, in reality, this force served to bring Lebanon under much greater Syrian influence and helped guard against an Israeli strike at Syria through Lebanon. Third, since the mid 1970s, the South of Lebanon had become a focal point for Palestinian terrorism, directed against Israel. Lebanon represented the last secure haven that the PLO had which bordered Israel. For this reason, tension between Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinians had been growing and the south of Lebanon had become the scene of many small scale military clashes between Israel and the PLO.²

In order to understand America's role in Lebanon in 1982, it is first crucial to take into account the context in which American diplomacy was forced to operate. We therefore need to look in detail at the situation in Lebanon and Israel in early 1982.

By the summer of 1982, the situation facing Israel had become increasingly complex. The Syrian presence in Lebanon had been maintained and strengthened, despite the fact that the Civil War had settled into a state of uneasy truce, a UN force (United Nations Force In Lebanon – UNFIL) had been deployed in Southern Lebanon, with the aim of providing a barrier between the PLO and Israel. However, the PLO regularly infiltrated into

² The following is just a sample of a wide body of literature dealing with Lebanese political history and culture: Dilip Hiro, *Lebanon: Fire and Embers: A History of the Lebanese Civil War* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1993); Richard Augustus Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1987); Richard Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israel-PLO War in Lebanon* (Hill and Wang: New York, 1984); and Jonathan Randall, *Going all the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers and American Bunglers* (Viking Press: New York, 1983).

UNFIL's area of operations but the presence of UN troops made it politically sensitive for the Israelis to strike back at the PLO.

Also, by 1982, there was a new Israeli government led by the hard line Likud Party. The Likud had first come to power in the 1977 elections; this first Likud government contained a number of more moderate members who had switched parties from the dominant Israeli Labor Party. Also, the coalition that Likud headed depended for its survival on the support of small Centrist Parties. This first government also contained many members whose first career had been in the military, in particular Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman. This first government had in fact concluded the first ever peace treaty between Israel and one of its Arab neighbors by signing the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty in 1979. The Likud was returned to power in 1980, but the make-up of the second government was very different. Although still led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and although this government in common with all Israeli governments was a coalition, because of the death of Dayan and Weizman's retirement, this government had far fewer members with direct military experience and Begin had been forced by political expediency to give the post of Minister of Defense to Ariel Sharon. Sharon was a man who raised very strong feelings among those who knew him:

Many Israelis viewed him as in one writer's words, an 'ultra-hawk with tendencies towards extreme action'. In time he would make a powerful – and overwhelmingly negative – impression on American Diplomats.

Under Secretary Lawrence Eagleburger was among the more restrained

in describing Sharon as a ‘bull in the china shop’ and a ‘rogue elephant’ who ‘would hear what he wanted to hear.’³

Sharon had additional clout in that the Israeli elections of June 1981 had left the Likud party with a plurality of only one seat and Sharon controlled at least three votes. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that Begin’s decision to appoint Sharon in the first place had been the result of political blackmail. Boykin quotes US Ambassador Samuel Lewis: “Arik [Sharon’s nickname] controlled three Likud votes – his own and two others. He threatened Begin that if he’d not become defense minister, he and his two friends would ‘take a walk’ and make the Likud a minority party.”⁴

Sharon believed that it had been a grave mistake for Israel to have allowed the Syrians to intervene in Lebanon in the first place:

But before long they [the Syrians] were demonstrating that their true interests had nothing to do with an independent Lebanon. (In fact Syria had never recognized Lebanon and continues to formally regard the country as part of greater Syria) with the strategic objective of establishing dominance in Lebanon, Syrian tactics changed according to the needs of the moment.⁵

³ John Boykin, *Cursed is the Peacemaker. The American Diplomat versus the Israeli General, Beirut 1982* (Applegate Press: Belmont, 2002). p.48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵ Ariel Sharon and David Chanoff, *Warrior: An Autobiography*, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1989), p.424.

Linked to this, Sharon had also been a long term advocate of what Israelis called “The Peripheral Strategy”:

The fact was that every Israeli government has wrestled with the profound difficulties of existing in isolation amid a sea of enemies. For Begin’s predecessors as Prime Minister, and mine as defense minister, one answer has always been to look for allies among the peripheral nations.*⁶

In simple terms, this strategy was the idea that Israel should support other non-Arab minorities within the greater Middle East. As part of this strategy, Sharon stepped up Israeli contact with the Christian forces inside Lebanon. Such contact had been going on since 1976 and Christian forces had even received Israeli supplies of light arms and a limited form of military liaison had been maintained. Sharon added a significant amount of fuel to this fire; he personally travelled to Lebanon to meet with the Christian leadership, particularly with Bashir Gemayel, leader of the largest Christian faction. These discussions centered on the role that Lebanese Christian forces would play in the event that Israel launched a large scale invasion of Lebanon:

Escorting him throughout his tour was Bashir Gemayel, who showered his distinguished guests with every type of respect... Sharon lectured that there was no point in an action in Lebanon unless it was a thorough one,

⁶ Ibid., p.422.

* Sharon is referring to non-Arab nations on the edge of the Greater Middle East – examples include Iran, Sudan, Chad, and, crucially, Lebanon. For a critical analysis of the evolution of Israeli security doctrine, see: Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab world* (Penguin: London, 2001).

and no action against the PLO would be thorough unless it drove the terrorists out of Beirut.⁷

It is also clear from the account of this visit who Sharon expected to take care of matters in Beirut. Schiff and Ya'ari quote Sharon as saying the following: "We should let the phalange [Gemayel's Christian militia group] take Beirut. We won't have to enter the city at all; they'll capture it instead."⁸

Throughout 1981 and the first six months of 1982, tension between Israel, Lebanon and Syria steadily mounted. So much so that President Reagan appointed Special Envoy Philip Habib to negotiate a ceasefire and prevent a much larger confrontation. What Habib managed to negotiate was a simple ceasefire in place, in other words the PLO would not shell Israel from Lebanon, and the Israelis would not attack the PLO in Lebanon. From Sharon's point of view, this ceasefire was fatally flawed. He pointed out that it did nothing to address the problem of PLO terrorist activity outside of Lebanon, but it tied Israel's hands in terms of responding to it because the PLO's headquarters and leadership were in Lebanon.

Even 25 years after the event, it is still extremely difficult to ascertain precisely what happened next. What we know for certain is this – In May 1982 Sharon visited Washington and had a series of meetings with US Secretary of State Alexander Haig. We know that in these meetings Sharon outlined the problems he saw with the ceasefire that Habib had negotiated, and he laid out how Israel

⁷ Z. Schiff and E. Ya'ari, Edited and translated by Ina Friedman, *Israel's Lebanon War* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1984), p.49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.49.

intended to respond to any further PLO terrorist action. Recollections of exactly what Sharon told Haig vary according to the participant. However, what all the participants are in agreement with is that Haig said that the US would only support Israeli action if there was an “internationally recognized” violation of the ceasefire:

Late in May, while on an official visit to Washington, General Sharon shocked a room full of State Department bureaucrats by sketching out two possible military campaigns: one that would pacify Southern Lebanon and a second that would rewrite the political map of Beirut in favour of the phalange. It was clear that Sharon was putting the United States on notice; one more provocation by the Palestinians and Israel would deliver a knockout blow to the PLO.⁹

Haig’s reaction to this surprising news was a mixture of shock and anger:

In a strenuous argument with Sharon, in the presence of my staff, I challenged these plans, after the meeting, so that there could be no question that I was playing to an audience, I invited Sharon into my office and told him privately, in the plainest possible language, what I had repeated to him and Begin and their colleagues many times before; unless there was an internationally recognized provocation and unless Israeli retaliation was proportionate to any such provocation, an attack by

⁹ Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1984), p.335.

Israel into Lebanon would have a devastating effect in the United States.¹⁰

Interestingly in light of all the subsequent claims of misunderstanding, Sharon's account of the meeting is not dissimilar to Haig's: "Both Habib and Haig stressed that there would have to be an 'internationally recognized provocation' and that if Israel took any kind of 'disproportionate action' it would create the most severe consequences within the United States."¹¹

Sharon does not seem to have been intimidated by Haig's dire threats. "I had not come to Washington to get American approval for whatever we decided to do, but to let them know, as friends and allies, exactly where we stood."¹²

In early June the Israeli ambassador in London was assassinated by Palestinian terrorists. Although the evidence seems to suggest that the PLO was not involved in the assassination, at the time there was at least enough doubt about who was responsible to make the Israeli Cabinet consider retribution against the PLO: "Scotland Yard had yet to issue a formal statement on the episode, but the attack was most probably the work of the terrorist group headed by Abu Nidal"¹³: the Israeli Cabinet was no in the mood for convoluted explanations about the differences between various Palestinian groups. What they knew for certain was that an ambassador had been assassinated and that this constituted an attack on the state of Israel. Before Israeli officials could begin to explain

¹⁰ Ibid., p.335.

¹¹ *Warrior*, p.451.

¹² Ibid., p.451.

¹³ *Israel's Lebanon War*, p.98.

the evidence, Prime Minister Begin pronounced “they’re all PLO.”¹⁴ Chief of the defense staff Raphael Eitan was even less interested in nuance. “Before entering the cabinet room, he had been informed by one of his intelligence men that Abu Nidal’s men were evidently responsible for the assault. ‘Abu Nidal, Abu Shmidal, we have to strike at the PLO!’”¹⁵

The Israeli Cabinet decided to approve air strikes on PLO targets in Beirut, something it had only ever approved once before. These air strikes provoked the inevitable Palestinian response and towns and settlements all across northern Israel sustained prolonged artillery bombardment. Shortly thereafter Israeli troops crossed the Lebanese border in three main thrusts; one column headed up the coast towards Beirut, the other two columns moved to cut the main highway between Beirut and Damascus. This inevitably led to confrontation with the Syrian forces stationed in Lebanon, who were in imminent danger of being cut off.

By early August the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) had reached the outskirts of Beirut. They had linked up with Christian forces and were now faced with the problem of how to remove several thousand PLO fighters from a city with a population of over half a million.

US diplomacy in the run up to the Lebanon war had been characterized by a deteriorating relationship with Israel that was punctuated by the Israelis repeatedly ignoring their closest ally and now the US’s greatest friend in the

¹⁴ Ibid., p.98.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.98.

Middle East was poised on the brink of attacking an Arab capital for the first time in its history in full view of the world's media.

It is not a stretch of the imagination to assume that part of the motivation for the US's subsequent military involvement in Lebanon was due to a desire to show on the one hand that the Israelis were making a sizable mistake by ignoring the US and to demonstrate to the rest of the Middle East that the US was not complicit with or beholden to the Israelis. Vietnam era diplomat George Ball caustically sums up the predicament the Reagan Administration found itself in: "an even larger question is of course why the Reagan Administration meekly ignored so many broken promises without bringing Israel up short."¹⁶ On top of this was the realisation that Israel was involved in a brutal siege on an Arab capital using mostly American manufactured weapons. The consequences for the US's diplomatic position in the Middle East, should this situation be allowed to stand, could have been potentially catastrophic. As well as this stark geopolitical reality was the fact that the siege of Beirut was broadcast live around the world and senior American policy makers, particularly President Reagan, felt a sense of moral outrage at what Israel was doing. The following is an extract from President Reagan's diary kept during his time in office: "I told Begin it had to stop or our entire future relationship was endangered. I used the word 'Holocaust' deliberately.' 'Menachem, this is a Holocaust.'"¹⁷ These factors taken together serve to

¹⁶ George W. Ball, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon* (Foundation for Middle East Peace: Washington DC, 1984), p.38.

¹⁷ Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p.124.

explain why the Reagan Administration undertook its first military intervention in Lebanon.

It is at this point that the role of the United States changes from that of being an observer and mediator towards active consideration of military involvement in the situation in Lebanon. It is at this point that we can move on to discuss how the lack of clearly defined, militarily achievable objectives bedeviled the US both in Vietnam and in Lebanon, and how Powell and other senior military officers attempted to ensure that in future operations clear objectives would be set.

The idea of deploying some kind of international force to Beirut had obvious appeal to anyone trying to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the siege. The Israelis would not end the siege until the PLO had been evicted from Beirut and preferably the whole of Lebanon, and the PLO was not going to leave Beirut unless it had some guarantee of safe passage for its fighters and some assurance that the civilian Palestinian population would be safe from retribution after they had left.

An international force could provide the means by which the PLO could safely leave by placing itself between them and the Israelis. President Reagan had, from an early point, been willing to consider the commitment of US troops in order to police a settlement. When Ambassador Habib began to float the notion of an international force, he asked both the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington and the Lebanese Government to estimate the size of the force that would be

needed to permit the safe evacuation of PLO fighters and to provide temporary security to the civilian population of Beirut. The Lebanese Government came back with a figure of 250,000¹⁸. Although the figure from the Joint Chiefs of Staff was not quite this high, it was not far off. Habib dismissed the quarter of a million figure as ridiculously over the top and completely impractical. Instead, he settled on a force of 800 Americans, 800 French and 600 Italian soldiers.

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was deeply skeptical about the idea of putting US troops in Lebanon. First, because he believed that the US interest in the outcome of the Lebanese crisis was not strong enough to merit the risk to US personnel; second, because he believed that the US might find itself in a situation where it was engaged in hostilities against an Arab enemy, as this would serve to undermine the US' position in the Middle East. Finally, because Weinberger feared that the deployment of small numbers of US troops to such a volatile part of the world carried with it the risk that the US would get sucked into deeper and deeper commitment, and that this would distract funding and political attention away from the enormous defense build-up that the Reagan Administration was undertaking. Weinberger himself is tight lipped about the reasons for his opposition to American participation in the Multinational Force, limiting himself to saying that: "General Vessey [General John Vessey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] and I argued that we should not be one of the participants; but this argument we lost"¹⁹.

¹⁸ This argument between Habib and the military rumbled on for some time before Habib just announced what the final figure would be in a plan he came up with entirely by himself. For a painstaking review of this argument see: John Boykin, *Cursed is the Peacemaker: The American Diplomat versus the Israeli General, Beirut, 1982* (Applegate Press: Belmont, 2002).

¹⁹ Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting For Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (Warner Books: New York, 1991), p.44.

At this point, we will look at how the US mission in Lebanon was seen as lacking clear, well-defined, militarily achievable objectives, and how this criticism leveled at the US mission in Lebanon tended to reinforce lessons already learned by those who would contribute to the intellectual climate that produced the Powell Doctrine, and how the perceived mistakes made in Lebanon tended to act as confirmation of the validity of those lessons, and how and why, despite misgivings from the Military because of the lessons of Vietnam, the US intervention in Lebanon was still undertaken.

In analysing the Marines' mission in Beirut in retrospect, certain members of the US Military have been scathing in their criticism of what they see as a poorly defined, open-ended mission:

The introduction of U.S. forces into Lebanon without a thoughtful risk assessment by senior leaders and in the absence of a realistic and unified strategic concept of how they should be employed was a miscalculation of considerable proportion. When coupled with an inability to simultaneously and effectively use the other elements of power in connection with the military application, it was clearly a recipe for disaster.²⁰

²⁰ The quote is taken from an unpublished manuscript of a study undertaken by Lieutenant Colonel John E. Kasperski USMC and Major Benjamin D. Crockett USA, as part of a course at the Joint Forces Staff College: Joint and Combined War Fighting School in March 2004. The full text can be found at: http://www.jfsc.ndu.edu/current_students/documents_policies/documents/jca_cca_awsp/US_Involvement_Lebanon_4-7-04.doc.

Commander Steven K. Westra, writing in the US military journal *Small Wars*, goes even further in criticising what he sees as the simultaneously grandiose but uncoordinated strategy of the Reagan Administration:

These goals, by any standards of foreign policy, were highly aggressive and extremely difficult to achieve. There existed no coordinated plan on how to resolve the complex religious and political antecedents of the civil war itself. American policy pursued the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces from Lebanon.²¹

Just how ill-defined and sweeping US goals in Lebanon were can be seen by the National Security Decision Directives (NSDD) issued by Reagan. These documents are supposed to be the official and unambiguous statements of policy on which all government departments should base their actions. The following quotation is taken from NSDD 64, the first Directive issued by Reagan concerning Lebanon:

Our strategy for this next phase in the restoration of Lebanon has two principal objectives. First, we seek, and we will facilitate, the prompt disengagement and quickest orderly withdrawal of Israeli, Syrian and Palestinian armed forces from Lebanon. Second, we must strengthen the

²¹ Lieutenant Commander Steven, K. Westra, USN, "Beirut's Lesson for Future Foreign Policy", *Small Wars*, (1993). Full text can be found at: <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/westra.htm>.

ability of the Government of Lebanon to control, administer, and defend its sovereign territory.²²

Here we can see a clear parallel between Lebanon and Vietnam. National Security Action Memorandum 288 (NASM),²³ issued by Lyndon Johnson in 1964, gave similarly sweeping objectives for US forces to achieve in Vietnam:

We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam. We do not require that it serve as a Western base or as a member of a Western alliance. South Vietnam must be free, however, to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security. This assistance should be able to take the form not only of economic and social measures but also police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.²⁴

It is interesting to note that neither the NSDD issued by Reagan or the NSAM issued by Johnson spelled out in any detail how the deployment of US troops was related to the broader National Security objectives set for the United States.

²² NSDD was the designation used by the Reagan Administration for national security policy documents; other Administrations have used different acronyms. The Directives were issued in chronological order, rather than by subject area. Not all of Reagan's Directives are publically available and some are only available in heavily edited form. The online source of all publically disclosed Directives is: <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/index.html>. The Reagan Presidential Library also holds paper copies of all NSDDs.

²³ National Security Action Memoranda perform the same function as NSDDs performed in the Reagan Administration.

²⁴ Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers: American Generals Reflect on Vietnam* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), p.18.

Kasperski and Crockett clearly see the major political implications behind the rather bland and bureaucratic language used in Reagan's Directive.

American policy sought to end the civil war, secure the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces, prop-up the minority Maronite Christian government, secure a homeland for the Palestinians, and win a de-facto victory over the Soviet Union by evicting the Syrians from Lebanon.²⁵

The notion that objectives for US military intervention ought to be maintained within the realm of what it is possible for military force to achieve on its own goes back to the attempt by the US Army to try and understand the lessons of Vietnam, and was an important component in creating the intellectual climate that created the Powell Doctrine. Summers notes that, when it came to trying to define US goals in Vietnam, the guidance the Johnson Administration gave to its commanders was at the very least divergent:

Even a cursory mission analysis reveals two divergent specified tasks. The first specified task – “To assist the Government of Vietnam and its armed forces to defeat externally directed and supported communist subversion and aggression” – is clearly a legitimate military objective, albeit one difficult to accomplish. The second specified task – to “attain an independent South Vietnam functioning in a secure environment” – is more a political than a military objective. The confusion over objectives

²⁵ Kasperski and Crockett.

inherent in the MACV mission statement was to plague our conduct of the war.²⁶

In a series of interviews conducted with officers holding the rank of Major General or above during the Vietnam conflict, Colonel Douglas Kinnard, in his attempt to evaluate the lessons that the Senior Officer Corps in Vietnam drew from its experiences, found that US objectives in Vietnam were vague to the point that 68 per cent of the most senior officers managing the war either did not understand or only partially understood what US objectives were. Two of the most striking comments recorded by Kinnard on an anonymous basis conveyed just how little understood US objectives were: “The national objective in Vietnam was never clear to anyone” and “Objectives lost meaning and were modified to justify events.”²⁷ Given these lessons taken from Vietnam, it is easy to see why the likes of Westra, Kasparski and Crockett, plus Caspar Weinberger and Colin Powell, as we shall see later, were extremely reluctant to commit US troops to Lebanon and absolutely determined that, if the US Military was forced to enter Lebanon, it would be there for the shortest amount of time possible.

Secretary of State George Schultz’s department had a somewhat different view of the Marines’ utility in Lebanon. The new Secretary of State supported the idea of US troops being sent to Lebanon because he agreed with Habib that US participation was the only way that the international force would be credible to

²⁶ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982), p.144.

²⁷ *The War Managers*, p.25.

all sides of the conflict. On a more general philosophical level, Schultz was a firm believer in the idea that, in order to be successful, diplomacy in the final analysis had to be backed up by military force and that this held true not just in the context of a major crisis with the Soviet Union but for US diplomacy in regional conflicts around the world:

A stable Lebanon could be a bridge country in the middle east; a Lebanon dominated by Syria and the Soviet Union would contribute to tension and constitute a site for threats against Israel. Lebanon had taken the brunt of turmoil from Middle East problems. Peace in Lebanon could contribute to peace elsewhere.²⁸

Ultimately what guaranteed that the US would participate were not the diplomatic or military arguments between Shultz and Weinberger; rather, it was President Reagan's dismay at the brutality of the siege of Beirut and revulsion at the prospect at what might happen if the siege was not brought to a peaceful end:

During that period the President was increasingly worried and unhappy about the fate of the people living in Beirut, including many American citizens. He was very critical of the Israelis' use of force and particularly their use of the CBU or "cluster" bomb units, which had been given to Israel to use in their own defense; they had used them in urban areas,

²⁸ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State*, (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1993), p.232.

inflicting heavy casualties on civilians. As a result the President was a strong supporter of the plan to send in the first MNF.²⁹

We will now see how US participation in the first MNF played out on the ground.

The two most important conditions attached to US participation were that, the French contingent would arrive and deploy a week ahead of the Americans in order that US troops could deploy in an environment that was relatively secure. This had a number of implications for the evacuation. The Israelis did not trust the French, seeing them as pro-PLO and unlikely to be strict about disarming Palestinian forces before they were evacuated. This meant that the Israelis refused to allow the evacuation to commence before the American contingent arrived, which in turn meant that the relationship between the MNF and the IDF got off to an acrimonious start. The second major caveat that the Pentagon placed upon US involvement was the agreement of all parties that the MNF would not remain in Lebanon longer than thirty days after the completion of the removal of all PLO fighters from Beirut. This arrangement meant that at the end of the thirty day period there would be nobody, apart from the enfeebled Lebanese Government, to provide security to the civilian Palestinian population. This in an atmosphere in which Lebanon's other ethnic and religious groups, in particular the Christians, bore a deep resentment towards Palestinian refugees and wished, if possible, to remove all Palestinians from

²⁹ *Fighting for Peace*, p.144.

Lebanon. Ambassador Habib was acutely aware of the danger of a security vacuum developing in Beirut:

Intrinsic to his [Habib's] plan all along had been the idea that the MNF would be on the ground for about 30 days. The presence for three weeks or so beyond the evacuation was to serve two purposes. To help smooth the transition from Anarchy to Lebanese rule, and to protect the remaining Palestinian civilians. Once the PLO fighters were gone, the families that they left behind would have no other protection from their enemies, the Israelis and the Phalange. The PLO fighters would not have left without Habib's guarantee of the civilians' safety.³⁰

The Marine commander, Col. James Mead, was in no doubt about how strongly Habib felt on this issue:

Habib was absolutely furious when there was any discussion of not going the full 30 days. We told our chain of command "hey, we need to hang tough here for a little bit longer to get done what the ambassador wants done." But no, boom, we got the order.³¹

Secretary of Defense Weinberger had a very different view of how complete the Marines' mission in Beirut was. Weinberger was determined that the Marines should leave as soon as the evacuation of the PLO was complete:

³⁰ *Cursed is the Peacemaker*, p.266.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.266.

I judged the MNF action to be a complete success because with virtually no losses, we had not only taken out the PLO army, one of the principal magnets for an Israeli house to house attack through Beirut, but we had removed a principal cause of instability in Lebanon itself. With this first MNF, we also had greatly eased conditions for all the people living in Beirut.³²

Weinberger persuaded President Reagan to withdraw the Marine contingent from Beirut only seven days after their deployment.

This ignored both the text and the spirit of the agreement that Ambassador Habib had spent the better part of three months arranging, and which was a complex series of interlocking obligations and agreements between all parties to the conflict. Once the US had made the decision to withdraw, the French and Italian contingents had no choice but to follow suit. And ten days after the end of the evacuation, the first multi-national force in Lebanon folded.

The MNF withdrawal left a complete security vacuum in west Beirut. This potentially dangerous situation exploded into violence with the assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel. Gemayel had been one of the key leaders of Lebanon's Maronite Christian community and head of its militia, The Lebanese Forces.³³ He was a charismatic, if somewhat bloodstained politician. His supporters believed that he would end the domination of the ageing political class that had governed Lebanon since its independence. They also

³² *Fighting for Peace*, Pp.144-145.

³³ Also known as the Phalange.

believed that he would rid Lebanon of the Palestinian refugees they blamed for causing the civil war. Even his opponents believed that he was the best man to be President of Lebanon at the time because he was the only Christian politician with enough popularity to convince the Christians that they would be better off living in a united and pluralist Lebanon instead of a Christian mini-state. Exactly who was behind the assassination is a matter of controversy but what happened next is a matter of certainty.

The IDF occupied west Beirut in order to maintain order. However, the other powerful motivation for this occupation was Sharon's conviction that the PLO had left behind a substantial number of fighters in the Palestinian refugee camps. The prospect of Israeli troops having to fight in the refugee camps was one of the key reasons why the Israelis were persuaded to accept the PLO's evacuation. The Israeli plan now was to use their allies, The Lebanese forces, to fight for them. Predictably given the atmosphere, the operation to clear the Palestinian refugee camps turned into a complete slaughter with many innocent civilians being deliberately murdered. The following is a note taken by an Israeli officer serving in Lebanon. This note was later entered in evidence as part of the official Israeli inquiry as to what happened in the camps:

During the night the Phalangists entered the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps. Even though it was agreed that they would not harm civilians, they "butchered." They did not operate in orderly fashion but dispersed. They had casualties, including two killed. They will organize to operate

in a more orderly manner - we will see to it that they are moved into the area.³⁴

As this quotation makes clear, although the Israeli Army was not directly responsible for the massacres, it certainly knew of them, and was complicit because it did nothing to stop them.

The withdrawal of the multinational force was one of the major contributing factors to this massacre. Because of the withdrawal there was no neutral force capable of providing security in west Beirut. The multinational force, had it been on the ground, could easily have been redeployed to the refugee camps to ascertain what truth, if any, there was to Sharon's suspicions. The PLO would have had no interest whatsoever in opening fire on Western troops and thus alienating American and European opinion at the very moment when it was at its weakest having just been thrown out of the last country which bordered Israel that would allow their presence. The same logic holds equally true for the Lebanese Forces. They would have had no interest in antagonizing the US right at the moment that they were leaderless with no guarantee for the future of the Christian community in Lebanon. But the US military establishment's fear of expanding a mission once its "objectives" had been achieved, proved stronger than its ability to see the need for a third party to provide minimal security during the transition between the PLO's evacuation and the re-establishment of some kind of Lebanese government authority.

³⁴ Report of the Kahan Commission on the Sabra and Shatila Massacres, February 7th, 1983. Full text available at: http://www.mideastweb.org/Kahan_report.htm.

After the appalling loss of life in the camps, President Reagan authorised a second multi-national force to establish a “presence” in Beirut, and to help the Lebanese government regain control over its territory. I will now move on to look at how US participation in the second MNF played out, and how the US role in Lebanon came to a tragic end. The objective for US forces was, again, both vague and sweeping at the same time.

The following were the orders issued to the Marines outlining the nature and scope of their mission:

To establish an environment which will permit the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out their responsibilities in the Beirut area. When directed, USCINCEUR [US Commander in Chief Europe] will introduce U.S. forces as part of a multinational force presence in the Beirut area to occupy and secure positions along a designated section of the line from south of the Beirut International Airport to a position in the vicinity of the Presidential Palace; be prepared to protect U.S. forces; and, on order, conduct retrograde [logistical] operations as required.³⁵

The idea of a “presence” mission was an entirely new concept. The Marine commander on the ground Colonel James Mead appears to have been pretty much left to make up his own mind on a definition of his mission:

³⁵ Report of the DOD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23rd, 1983. Full text available at: <http://ftp.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/XX/MidEast/Lebanon-1982-1984/DOD-Report/Beirut-1.html>.

The imprecision of the “presence” phase in Col Jim Mead’s mission directive provided this able and ambitious officer with a crucial role in the command structure reaching down from the Oval Office. Indeed, Mead’s responsibility for conducting US foreign policy in Lebanon became, at the turn of a phrase, unique in modern American military *and* diplomatic annals.³⁶

Despite the occasional verbal slip in press conferences by President Reagan, the mission of US forces in Lebanon was never one of peace keeping. There were far too few troops committed to the force to make that practical. The US contingent of the second MNF was deployed at Beirut International Airport, with a small force detailed to protect the US Embassy. The deployment of the second MNF was in many ways everything the US Military had come to fear after the end of Vietnam. Civilian policy makers had no idea how to solve Lebanon’s considerable problems, they had no idea what they wanted from US involvement in Lebanon, but the images of suffering that came from Lebanon, and the possibilities that the Soviets might exploit this for their own ends, plus their own revulsion at what they were seeing, led them to the conclusion that the US had to do something and had to be seen doing something about the situation. Therefore, they would commit a small number of troops in order to demonstrate their commitment, and with the vague hope that somehow this deployment would act as a spur to re-start diplomacy.

³⁶ *The Root: The Marines in Beirut*, p.38. Emphasis in original.

For the Marines on the ground, their nebulous mission was both frustrating and potentially dangerous. On the one hand, the fact that they were in Beirut at all, made them tempting targets for any Lebanese faction that wished to put pressure on the US. This was equally true of the Syrians who, since the Camp David agreement, had been trying to force the US to take it seriously as a regional power. The Syrians engaged in a complicated game with the US in Lebanon. They supported the various anti-American groups in Lebanon, just enough so that they would make the US presence difficult to maintain, but not enough to lead to a complete breakdown in their relationship with Washington. In addition to this already combustible mixture, the Iranian government, seeing an opportunity to hurt the US, who was at that time supporting their Iraqi enemies, began to spend substantial amounts of money and personnel to train various militant Shia groups. Colin Powell from his position as Weinberger's military aide considered the Marines' mission in Beirut moronic:

What I saw from my perch in the Pentagon was America sticking its hand into a thousand year old hornet's nest with the expectation that our mere presence might pacify the hornets...lives must not be risked until we can face a parent or a spouse or a child with a clear answer to the question of why a member of that family had to die. To "provide a symbol" or "a presence" is not good enough.³⁷

The US Marines in Beirut were operating according to peacetime rules governing the use of force and combat readiness because the Reagan

³⁷ Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (Ballantine Books: New York, 1996), p.281.

Administration did not want to make it seem like US forces were actively involved in a foreign civil war. This placed the Marines in an entirely reactive posture. They were only allowed to return fire at clearly identifiable targets, they were only permitted to return fire to the extent necessary to guarantee their own safety, and they were not allowed to initiate any kind of combat or action which might lead to combat. This set of restrictions totally seeded the initiative to whatever group wished to use Marine casualties to make a point. Yet at the same time, sooner or later, when the Marines did act to defend themselves, this would be taken by all parties to the conflict as a sign of American partiality³⁸.

The Americans also had their share of problems with the Israelis. Because the mission of the Marines was so ill defined and because the conditions under which they could employ force were so strict, the Americans often ended up acting as a buffer between the Israelis to the south of Beirut airport, and the Muslim militia to the north. This meant that the Israelis could not effectively return fire at enemy targets without running the risk of catching the MNF in crossfire. There were also repeated incidents of Israeli tanks deliberately encroaching on the airport perimeter which led to increasingly bitter arguments, and, in at least one case, a stand-off involving loaded weapons. As Hammel puts it:

³⁸ The exact text of the Marines' rules of engagement can be found in the Long Commission Report The full text of the report, along with appendices can be found at: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/XX/MidEast/Lebanon-1982-1984/DOD-Report/Beirut-1.html>.

American political requirements of the day ... had a definite anti-Israeli bias, at least insofar as it was important for the US MNF contingent to show no favoritism toward the mission or aspirations of the IDF. As a result of the clear divergence of the missions of the two forces, there were several ludicrous exchanges, some muscle-flexing by both forces, and, alas, the creation of a powder-keg mind-set that was very nearly detonated.³⁹

With the deployment of the second MNF, Ambassador Habib began a second frantic round of shuttle diplomacy to try and secure the mutual withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces. The Israelis would not withdraw without a peace treaty with Lebanon and assurances that southern Lebanon would be demilitarized, and that the Syrians would leave. The Syrians would not withdraw unless the Israelis withdrew first. They would not accept a peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel and rejected any Israeli attempt to dominate southern Lebanon. By May 7th 1983, Habib had agreed a rough framework by which the Israelis would withdraw, but they would be allowed to continue to supply Christian forces in southern Lebanon, and an agreement on limited diplomatic recognition and the movement of goods. However, this agreement was subject to the Syrians agreeing to withdraw at the same time; this effectively gave Syria a Veto which it promptly used by refusing to withdraw its forces. The failure of the May 7th agreement removed the last possible logical reason why the MNF should remain. There was now no prospect of foreign forces withdrawing from Lebanon, or of the

³⁹ *The Root*, p.60. Hammel provides several detailed examples of incidents between US and Israeli forces at various points in his work.

Lebanese government re-establishing its authority. There would be no environment in which the MNF could provide any kind of meaningful assistance to the Lebanese government and there was no thought of making the MNF large enough or giving it a mandate to forcibly roll back the occupying armies.

Secretary Weinberger was very well aware of the fundamental flaw in using the presence of American troops as a lever to try and extract a diplomatic solution:

The problem, of course, was that there was *not* an agreed-upon withdrawal... When the second Multinational Force landed, there was still not an agreement for withdrawal. Indeed, a tentative, wholly unworkable agreement was reached only eight long months later, during which period the Syrians, whose air force had been largely destroyed and its army weakened by the Israelis, were rearmed by the Soviets. Meanwhile, and as a result, the tasks assigned to the elements of the MNF were very limited and circumscribed.⁴⁰

Why then did it take until November 1983 for the second MNF to be withdrawn? Here again we see eerie parallels to Vietnam and the reasons why the US remained committed in spite of the fact it had no clear or achievable objective.

⁴⁰ *Fighting For Peace*, Pp.152-153.

First, in both cases there was the hope that some new factor or diplomatic initiative would come along and change the situation for the better and that the mere presence of US forces in whatever number or capacity would give Washington an important bargaining chip in some hypothetical future negotiations. The problem with this line of argument is that no-one in the case of either Lebanon or Vietnam had the faintest clue where this new initiative would come from, or what it might look like. The reaction of high powered politicians in both cases was all too human. The belief that if they just hung on a little bit longer, some drastic new development would come and spare them from the painful admission that they had been wrong in the first place and that US casualties had been in vain:

What the president did not want to do, above all, was to pull out of Lebanon immediately, to be seen as running away as a result of the tragedy that had taken place. To the contrary, the barracks bombing seemed to strengthen his resolve to stay.⁴¹

These casualties themselves were an important factor in the stubborn refusal to withdraw. Once blood had been shed, both Presidents Johnson and Reagan were keen to show that they would not be intimidated by the death of US soldiers and that they personally were tough enough to accept losses and not be deflected from the “right” policy. These casualties also made it harder to withdraw because there is a sense in which politicians want to be able to give meaning to the sacrifices that they have asked for. Nobody wants to admit that

⁴¹ Robert C. McFarlane with Zofia Smardz, *Special Trust* (Cadell & Davies: New York, 1994), p.268.

they asked another man to die for an unclear and unachievable objective. The problem with both lines of logic is that one death does not justify more death, and that there is a difference between being intimidated and simply doing the right thing once the facts on the ground change.

Finally, there was a sense in both Lebanon and Vietnam that the world was watching and that other nations would judge their future actions by what they saw the US doing. The USA could not afford to be seen as weak; in Vietnam it needed to show that it was capable of standing up to Communist aggression, and in Lebanon it needed to show that it was not so traumatized by the experience of Vietnam that it could not resort to military measures when the situation required it. Additionally, in both cases, there was a sense in which the US was attempting to draw a line against a new type of threat. In the case of Vietnam this meant Communist revolutionary warfare, in the case of Lebanon it meant terrorism. The problem with this logic is that it assumes that vastly different regional and global problems are somehow related and that, because of this, the US has no freedom of action to respond to different situations in different ways, and second it assumes that the wider world only respects US strength and not US discretion. There is nothing wrong with great powers carefully choosing to intervene in those situations where their intervention can make a difference, and refusing to intervene in those situations where it can make no positive contribution.

We will now move on to look at how the insistence on clear objectives relates to the rest of the intellectual climate leading to the Powell Doctrine, in

particular how it relates to Chapter 6, the need for an “exit strategy,” and Chapter 4, the need for public support.

The linkage between the need for clear objectives and the need to build public support should be clear enough. It is hard to build public support around ideas that you cannot succinctly and clearly put across. The public are more likely to support action where the aims of the US are easily understood and Congress is more likely to vote to fund operations that they can see have some clear purpose. The drawback to this is that the need for clarity may tempt the President to paint the mission of US forces in overly stark terms in order to make it easy for the public to understand why US forces are involved in a particular situation. For example, President Reagan’s repeated statements in press conferences that US forces were in Beirut on a peace keeping mission may have been clear and concise, but they were also somewhat misleading in that US forces were not committed to a traditional peace keeping role and indeed, as we have already seen, the mission as it was described to US commanders was unclear to the point of being vague. In other words, just because a President can put things across in simple and clear terms, it is not the same as them being simple and clear to the Military on the ground, and a search for clarity can easily turn into gross oversimplification of complex and evolving situations.

The need for public support and the need to state the mission to US forces clearly – both of these elements of the intellectual climate leading to the Powell Doctrine can be used to help define a third element: the idea that US military

intervention should be in the national interest. If the national interest cannot be objectively defined, then perhaps the closest any Administration can come is to gain public support for an honest and clear plan of their intentions. The decision to send the Marines to Beirut clearly did not follow this logic. The Reagan Administration was never able to accurately and coherently explain what their purpose was. The reason it was never able to explain to the public the purpose of the Marines' presence was that the Administration itself was divided on what that purpose was or should be.

The intellectual climate leading to the Powell Doctrine also calls for US forces not to be deployed overseas without a clear "exit strategy" being defined. To put it in simpler terms, the US should never commit forces to a situation if it does not know how it is going to get them out again. The need for clear objectives can be seen as a prerequisite to this. If you do not know clearly what it is that you wish to achieve, how can you ever say that you have been successful or, indeed, how can you ever say you have failed. Thus policy makers have no point of reference to decide when it is time for American forces to leave. The second MNF is a classic example of this logic breaking down. Because the Reagan Administration did not really know what the Marines wanted to achieve in Beirut there was no way of putting any kind of time scale on their presence. There was not even a set of criteria under which the Marines could be said to have succeeded in their mission. Consequently, Marines occupied positions at Beirut airport, month after month, while Washington hoped that their presence would produce some kind of a result right up until the Marine Barracks were bombed, there were no plans to

withdraw US troops. The fact of the matter is that US forces were forced out by the weight of domestic opinion demanding that they come home. Had the bombing not taken place, there is no telling how long the Reagan Administration would have maintained a US military presence in Lebanon or what it would have been able to achieve.

Of course the problem with having preconceived notions of what it is that you want to achieve is that they do not actually correspond to the situation on the ground. We can see this clearly in the first US mission to Lebanon in 1982.

The Military has a preconceived notion that all it was in Lebanon to do was to guarantee the safe evacuation of the PLO from Beirut. However, as we have seen, this preconception completely ignored not only Lebanon's complex political situation but both the text and spirit of agreements that the US had actually entered into. What this shows us is that, whilst it is important, the Military should only be used in situations where its use has some clear purpose. It must also be flexible enough to adapt to conditions on the ground.

What we have seen in this chapter is that, in spite of the US Military's determination not to repeat what was commonly regarded as the mistakes of Vietnam, the Military's reticence could ultimately be overcome by a Commander in Chief determined to act. What we have also seen is that the mistakes made in Vietnam and Lebanon over how the US defined the objectives of military intervention were very similar to one another. What we have also seen is that the US commitment of Marines to a peacekeeping role in Lebanon was undertaken without a thorough analysis and an agreed upon

definition of what it was exactly that the United States was trying to achieve in Lebanon, and without sufficient thought being given to how a deployment of only 800 Marines could bring about what were, as we have seen, very sweeping, very nebulous goals that the Reagan Administration set itself.

Chapter 6 – The Need for a Clear “Exit Strategy”

“How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?”¹

John Kerry

In this chapter we will look at the element of the Powell Doctrine that calls for a clear “exit strategy” for US forces. We will look at how, in the case of Vietnam, the US failed to define and execute a viable exit strategy, and the impact that this had on the Armed Forces and the formation of the Powell Doctrine. We will then move on to look at how the Military’s insistence upon a viable exit strategy was to influence the debate over US policy towards Bosnia. In this chapter, we will look mostly at the policy decisions that took place during the Clinton Administration², as this was the period during which military intervention was most actively discussed as a potential policy. It will be necessary to review the Clinton Administration’s Bosnia policy in extensive detail, as the argument made in this chapter is not so much that the US failed to come up with an exit strategy for its commitment to Bosnia, but that, by the spring and summer of 1995, other concerns had come to outweigh the Military’s concerns about them not having an exit strategy for any commitment to Bosnia. These concerns, as we shall see, centred on the continuing credibility of NATO in post-Cold War Europe, the credibility of the United

¹ This quote is taken from testimony by John Kerry to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 23rd 1971. The full text of Kerry’s testimony can be found at: <http://usliberals.about.com/od/extraordinaryspeeches/a/KerryVietnam.htm>.

² For a discussion of Bosnia policy under George H. W. Bush, see Chapter 2.

States as a leading actor in European security issues, and Bill Clinton's credibility as Commander-in-Chief. To understand how and why these concerns became so important, it is necessary to review the events leading up to the summer of 1995 in some detail.

Finally, we will look at how the element of the Powell Doctrine calling for a clear "exit strategy" relates to the other elements of the Powell Doctrine, principally the need for clear objectives and the need for public and Congressional support. But first we need to define what we mean by "exit strategy."

In this chapter, it is appropriate to talk about the Powell Doctrine, as the case study largely takes place after the publication of Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article and Powell was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for part of the case study period, between 1991 and 1993. But we will also look at the intellectual climate that arose out of the way the US went about extricating itself from Vietnam that led to the insistence of the Powell Doctrine on a viable exit strategy.

In his 1984 National Press Club speech, perhaps the most public enunciation of the ideas that would form the Powell Doctrine before Powell's article, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, although he never explicitly used the phrase "exit strategy," did say:

We must continuously keep as a beacon light before us the basic questions: "Is this conflict in our national interest?" "Does our national interest require us to fight, to use force of arms?" If the answers are "yes," then we must win. If the answers are "no," then we should not be in combat.³

What we can see from this quotation is that Weinberger, with Powell as his Military Assistant, is clearly acknowledging that policymakers must have some notion of when and under what circumstances they would wish to end US involvement in a particular conflict. The logic of Weinberger's statement leaves three options for US disengagement. The first and most obvious one is that the US achieves whatever objectives it sets itself. In other words, the US "wins." The second option is that the US decides that the conflict is no longer in its "national interest,"⁴ and therefore is free to disengage at its leisure. The third option is for an Administration to conclude that "winning" is either too costly or not feasible, but that the reading of the national interest that led to a conflict in the first place is still valid. The only option logically left open is to try and alter the nature of the conflict so that the US can leave without damaging its national interest. This could be done in one of two ways: a negotiated settlement that ends a conflict on terms not catastrophically damaging to the national interest, or the US is able to pass on responsibility for its part in the conflict to a third party. The logic of what Weinberger is saying must either lead to victory

³ Caspar W. Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power," National Press Club, Washington, D.C., Nov. 28th 1984. Full text available at: <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2004/January%202004/0104keeperfull.pdf>

⁴ See Chapter two.

withdrawal, a negotiated settlement, or the transfer of the US's responsibilities to a third party. Either a negotiated settlement or a handing off of US responsibility could be said to constitute an "exit strategy," that is to say, a means by which the US can end direct involvement in conflicts without undermining either its future credibility or the objectives the US set itself when it originally entered a conflict. As we shall see in the case of Vietnam, the US attempted both to negotiate an end to the war and to hand off responsibility for any future fighting to the South Vietnamese.

By 1968, it had become clear that the war in Vietnam had essentially reached a point of stalemate⁵. The commitment of US forces had prevented the Communists from overrunning South Vietnam, but by the same token it appeared that no commitment of military force or money could induce the South Vietnamese to create either armed forces or a government that was capable of victory. The stark alternatives facing the new Administration were: an open-ended commitment of US forces on a large scale, which neither US public opinion or the state of the US economy could sustain; alternatively, the Administration did not feel capable of simply withdrawing from Vietnam and letting events take their course. To do so would have been seen by Richard Nixon as abandoning a commitment made by his four predecessors. To Nixon's eyes, the risk of this was a fatal breach in the credibility of US commitments around the world. "I rejected this option, to [withdraw]...As

⁵ There is much historical work detailing US strategy in Vietnam and the events in 1968, which forced US policy makers to the conclusion that the war was a stalemate. See Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (W.W. Norton: New York, 1989) and Lloyd C. Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Elephant Paperbacks: Chicago, 1997). See in particular Clark Clifford, "A Vietnam Reappraisal", *Foreign Affairs*, 47(4), (1969), Pp.601-622.

President, I continued to believe that the moral and geopolitical reasons behind our intervention remained valid.”⁶

The third alternative was to slowly pull US forces back as South Vietnamese forces became more capable of taking over greater responsibility for the war effort. Running parallel to this was a negotiating effort that the Administration hoped, by a combination of great power, pressure, inducements and threats, to end the war.

This alternative was what we have come to call Vietnamization. Lieutenant General Phillip B. Davidson MACV G-2 (Head of Military Intelligence) describes Vietnamization in the following terms:

The central thrust of the new strategy, then, would concentrate on improving ARVN's [Army of the Republic of Vietnam – South Vietnamese Army] capabilities and strengthening the government of South Vietnam's control over the population so that they could eventually oppose the Communists alone. American forces would provide the shield behind which this enhancement would take place, and they would be withdrawn when the RVNAF [Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam] and GVN [Government of Vietnam] could defend themselves.⁷

⁶ Richard Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (W. H. Allen: London, 1986). p.104.

⁷ Lt. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson (Ret.), *Vietnam at War: The History 1946-1975* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1988), p.476.

There are three major reasons to believe that this was a doomed effort from the start. First, it ran up against a perennial problem that all US policy towards Vietnam had founded on. Namely that, however much training, money and expertise the US was prepared to throw at Vietnam, it could not force the South Vietnamese people or government to act as the US wanted them to act. Testifying before the House Appropriations subcommittee, the deputy director of AID (Agency for International Development) in South Vietnam described the corruption in South Vietnam with the following anecdote:

For example, speculators hoarded imported American fertilizer and created artificial shortages that sent prices skyrocketing. One of the most notorious speculators was the brother-in-law of General Nguyen Van Thieu [the President of South Vietnam, 1967-1975]...But he was piker [small-time thief] compared to Thieu himself, who carried away millions of dollars in gold when he fled Vietnam in April 1975⁸.

Added to the problem of simple venality was the fact that the South Vietnamese government never created a sense of national purpose or an ideology that a large number of the South Vietnamese people could support. Consequently, the best way for it to keep itself in power was by the use of a complicated system of patronage. Continuing the testimony in the above quotation, the AID administrator described South Vietnam's political system as one which was based primarily on "a style of secular simony [a form of tithe],

⁸ William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part IV: July 1965-January 1968* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1995), p.424. For a discussion of just how pervasive and engrained in South Vietnamese politics corruption had become, see Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, The United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (Phoenix Press: London, 2001).

trafficking in jobs that gave their subordinates the opportunity to make money.”⁹ The practical effect of this system was to ensure that corruption ran from the very bottom of the administrative and political system to the very top. In order for the system the AID administrator describes to work, even individually honest members of the government had to engage in a certain amount of corruption in order to pay off their superiors so that they could keep their job. The US was further hampered by the fact that, although South Vietnam was overwhelmingly dependent on US aid, it was in a legal sense a sovereign country. Therefore, the US could not insist upon the removal of corrupt officials. It could merely point out examples of corruption to the South Vietnamese government and hope that action would be taken. Given the situation outlined above, this very rarely happened. Instead, the tendency was for a game of musical chairs to take place. The US would point out corrupt officials; the South Vietnamese government would dismiss them. Then they would be reappointed to another post that would not bring them into contact with the Americans who complained about them in the first place.

In theory at least, the US could always threaten to cut off the supply of aid to South Vietnam. But in the context of Vietnamization, this was never a practical option. Such a withdrawal or conditioning of aid would have slowed down or prevented any improvement in the technical capabilities of either the South Vietnamese armed forces or the South Vietnamese government. In that situation, the US would either have had to halt the process of withdrawal or effectively cut its losses from South Vietnam by accepting that the South

⁹ *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, p.424.

Vietnamese government could not properly use the aid it was given. For reasons outlined above, the second option was never seriously contemplated by the Nixon Administration. We will come to the reasons why the first option was never contemplated in a moment.

The first reason why the US could never slow down the rate of Vietnamization was that public opinion at home was becoming increasingly polarized between the two extreme options of either total victory in Vietnam, with all the risk that that entailed of a wider war, or a fast, complete withdrawal from Vietnam. The only way the Nixon Administration could maintain a tenuous hold on public opinion was constantly to reassure the public that the strategy of slowly turning the war over to the Vietnamese was working. The most public way to demonstrate this success was through continued withdrawal of troops. Henry Kissinger in his memoirs describes the trap the Nixon Administration had set itself with a tone of bitter regret:

The withdrawal increased the pressures from families whose sons remained at risk. And it brought no respite from the critics...As a result, the Nixon Administration's commitment to unilateral withdrawal would come to be seen, at home, abroad, and particularly in Vietnam, as irreversible.¹⁰

Kissinger was also in no doubt of the effect that this irreversible withdrawal was having on North Vietnamese policy:

¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extradition from the Vietnam War*, (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2003). p.84.

The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, were not interested in symbols but in the balance of forces on the ground. They coolly analyzed the withdrawal, weighing its psychological benefits to America in terms of enhanced staying power against the decline in military effectiveness represented by a shrinking number of American forces.¹¹

The second factor that made American withdrawal from Vietnam irreversible once it began was a defence budget that was rapidly declining. In constant dollars, the budget fell from \$346.90 billion in January 1969 to \$278.80 billion in October 1975, a difference of \$67.1 billion.¹² On the face of it, this decline would seem natural. After all, US forces were being withdrawn, reducing overall costs. But the sting in the tail was that the Defense Department budgeted on the assumption that US forces would be withdrawing. This meant that any attempt to slow down or reverse the withdrawal would mean that the defence budget would remain the same but the expected savings from the withdrawal would not materialise, meaning that any shortfall would have to be found by cuts to non-Vietnam-related expenditure. This system of budgeting effectively allowed Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird to pose a cruel dilemma to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yes, they could slow down the rate of withdrawal from Vietnam, but they would have to sacrifice a large amount of expenditure

¹¹ Ibid., p.84.

¹² http://www.data360.org/dsg.aspx?Data_Set_Group_Id=55. This website records quarter by quarter US Defense expenditure from January 1947 to October 2008. It does this in constant 2008 dollars.

elsewhere, particularly in the Defense Department's research and development programmes.¹³

What Vietnamization amounted to then was an exit strategy that was based on hope rather than expectation. It was a strategy whose success depended not on the efforts of the US but on a complete root and branch overhaul of the South Vietnamese system of government and politics. Ultimately, as Kolko points out, the war in Vietnam was more than just a military struggle: "In wars against revolutionary movements, between social systems and ideologies as well as armies, major changes in either side's social and economic power can critically affect the outcome of the struggle"¹⁴. As the US withdrew its troops from Vietnam it not only lost leverage over the military situation but also lost what little leverage it had over the evolution of South Vietnamese politics. The US withdrawal from Vietnam in the final analysis was conditioned much more by domestic political and economic considerations rather than any measure of how well South Vietnam could survive without massive US assistance.

We can see then that Vietnamization did not constitute a viable "exit strategy" in the sense that, whilst it provided cover by which the US could terminate its involvement in Vietnam, it did not, and, more to the point, could not provide a means by which South Vietnam could defend itself. This is not a judgement made in hindsight but, as we can see from the quotations given above, even

¹³ For the most detailed account of Laird machinations with the JCS, see Mark Perry, *Four Stars: The Inside Story of the Forty-Year Battle Between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and America's Civilian Leaders* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1989). Chapter 7.

¹⁴ *Anatomy of a War*. p.483.

those charged with implementing Vietnamization had the gravest doubts about its usefulness as an “exit strategy.”

However, it is important to stress that the Nixon Administration had to improvise the best exit strategy it could because no-one had thought ahead of time how US forces could be withdrawn from Vietnam if total victory for the US seemed impossible.

As early as 1965, shortly after the commitment of large-scale US combat forces, US diplomats were commenting on the fact that, in spite of a massive financial, moral and recently-added military assistance, the government of South Vietnam remained fundamentally weak. The following quotation is an extract from a cable sent by Maxwell Taylor, the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, commenting on the relative merits of the newly-installed Prime Minister, Air Vice Marshal Ky, who was installed after a bloodless military coup:

He is completely without the background and experience necessary for an assignment as difficult as this one. The American General Officer closest to him describes him as “a proud man and a fine military commander, although a naive, inexperienced politician and civil affairs administrator. I believe he will do his absolute best to succeed in his new position, but he will require a lot of technical assistance, moral support

and a normal amount of conscientious understanding.” We will do our best to provide these missing ingredients.¹⁵

Although the commitment of half a million US troops had managed to stave off the immediate threat of South Vietnam being overwhelmed by Communist forces, the fundamental weaknesses of the South Vietnamese political system and its leadership were to remain an endemic problem that both the Johnson Administration and the Nixon Administration completely failed to remedy. As well as the inherent corruption in the system discussed above, another major weakness was the corrosive effect of religious, ethnic, and regional divisions.

The following quotation is taken from an assessment the US Embassy carried out in 1965, assessing the potential strengths and weaknesses of the South Vietnamese Government. The quotation demonstrates the innate mistrust between a small but influential Catholic minority and the Buddhist majority of the South Vietnamese:

A potential opposition grouping lies in the recent temporary alliance of Catholics with southern regionalists. This coalition might tend to regard present GVN as being in a sense Quat's [former Prime Minister of South Vietnam, who had been removed in the coup that had put Ky in power] spiritual heirs. One of major roots of Catholic enmity towards Quat had been belief that he was in league with leaders of central faction of UBA

¹⁵ Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, June 17th, 1965. The text of the telegram is taken from the series: The Foreign Relations of the United States: Johnson Administration, Volume III, document 5, full text available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/index.htm>.

(Tri Quang-Thien Minh) [key Buddhist leaders] and was consolidating his power through backing of coalition of Generals and police officials whose hostility towards Catholics they believed was clear.¹⁶

Essentially, while the US saw everything that happened in Vietnam through the prism of anti-Communism, the South Vietnamese themselves were fighting a number of different conflicts, some amongst themselves, to define South Vietnamese identity and nationhood. These conflicts tended to baffle and infuriate the Americans in equal measure, but worst still, once the Americans were committed to large-scale military action, it essentially became possible for the South Vietnamese to leave the war against the Communists to the Americans, while they got on with their own conflicts.

Nixon's Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, summed up the difference between a US view of the conflict and the South Vietnamese view of the conflict with the following observation: "We're engaged in fighting a limited war, for limited objectives, and with limited resources. At the same time we're advising and supporting the Vietnamese in their efforts to carry out – carry through – a social revolution."¹⁷ Left unanswered by Bunker was the question of whether or not the US and South Vietnamese had the same ideas about what this revolution ought to look like, or what the outcome should be.

¹⁶ Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, June 21st, 1965. The text of the telegram is taken from the series: The Foreign Relations of the United States: Johnson Administration, Volume III, document 9, full text available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/index.htm>.

¹⁷ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Harcourt Brace & Company: New York, 1999). p.113.

The larger point here is that, although the Nixon Administration's policy of Vietnamization was unlikely to be successful because of the structural weaknesses of South Vietnam, these weaknesses were not in any way new, nor were they entirely of the Americans' making. One of the fundamental flaws of US policy towards Vietnam, and one of the principal reasons why the Powell Doctrine was to insist upon a clearly defined exit strategy was because no-one at the time of the initial commitment of large-scale US troops to Vietnam in July 1965 had considered the underlying weakness of South Vietnam as a nation, and no-one had seriously considered how this weakness might impact upon the length and depth of the US commitment to Vietnam. The underlying assumption of US policymakers seems to have been that, with a large enough commitment of US manpower and resources, the US could shape the future of South Vietnam regardless of any underlying weaknesses in its South Vietnamese allies. As one of the chief architects of America's Vietnam War Robert McNamara would later put it, "We viewed the people and leaders of South Vietnam in terms of our own experience. We saw in them a thirst for – and a determination to fight for – freedom and democracy. We totally misjudged the political forces within the country"¹⁸. McNamara also acknowledges that US policy suffered from the hubris of thinking that there was no problem that America could not solve:

We failed to recognize that in international affairs, as in other aspects of life, there may be problems for which there are no immediate solutions.

For one whose life has been dedicated to the belief and practice of

¹⁸ Robert McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (Vintage Books: New York, 1996). p.322.

problem solving, this is particularly hard to admit. But, at times, we may have to live with an imperfect, untidy world¹⁹.

The US commitment to South Vietnam had been designed in such a way that there was no exit strategy that the Nixon Administration could have chosen which would have stood a high chance of success. The US could withdraw from Vietnam, but it could not exit from Vietnam in such a way as to not undermine its initial objectives, because the success of those objectives depended upon the South Vietnamese carrying through Bunker's "social revolution", and this was something that, no matter how much advice the US gave or however many resources would be dedicated to it, had to be a task primarily for the South Vietnamese. If the US was not able to convince the South Vietnamese to undertake this revolution whilst providing half a million troops for its defence, it was even more unlikely to persuade the South Vietnamese to undertake a revolution whilst these troops were going home.

Of course, the argument that Vietnamization did not and in fact could not work is not without its critics. These critics fall into two main groups. First, there is the argument that Vietnamization had succeeded but was then fatally undermined by a Congress that refused to support a large but steadily declining programme of aid to South Vietnam. The second school of thought is that the war could have been won without Vietnamization and that instead of withdrawing, the Nixon Administration should have pursued the war more aggressively, and that in particular it should have recommenced the bombing of

¹⁹ Ibid., p.323.

North Vietnam, and it should have used US forces to invade and permanently occupy Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos. Both of these schools of thought are fundamentally flawed. We will deal with the argument that the Nixon Administration should have been more aggressive first. The argument for invading and remaining in Laos and Cambodia with substantial numbers of US troops runs something like this: Indochina is effectively one theatre of operations, the North Vietnamese presence in Laos and Cambodia renders any neutrality meaningless, and the only way to prevent resupply and reinforcements going to South Vietnam from North Vietnam was to cut the supply routes through Cambodia and Laos. As Dale Walton puts it,

To secure the South Vietnamese countryside, it was necessary to cut the Communists off from the north and grind them down. There are strong reasons to believe that the United States could have performed the former task in Laos and the northern RVN... Indochina was a unified theater of war. The leadership in Hanoi was entirely cognizant of this fact and North Vietnam formed a cogent warfighting strategy that involved operations in all four of the countries of Indochina. US policymakers preferred not to dwell on the strategic unity of the theater, and sustained an intellectual fiction – the neutrality of Cambodia and Laos²⁰.

As should be clear from the above quotation, the operations that the US did mount against Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos were not sufficient. First, because the operation in Laos was only mounted with South

²⁰ C. Dale Walton. *The Myth of Inevitable US Defeat in Vietnam* (Frank Cass: London, 2002). Pp.78-79.

Vietnamese troops, and second because in neither instance did the US or allied forces remain in Cambodia or Laos.

The Nixon Administration was certainly tempted to take a more aggressive role in hopes of ending the war quickly. One of the initial negotiating scenarios drawn up by Kissinger envisaged a situation where the US would make the most generous offer it could, consistent with not overthrowing the government of South Vietnam. If the North Vietnamese refused to negotiate on this basis, the Americans would take a number of steps to dramatically extend the scope and intensity of the war. As Jeffrey Kimball describes it, the plan was:

To make the most sweeping and generous proposal of which we were capable, short of overthrowing an allied government but enduring a free political contest. If it were refused, we would halt troop withdrawals and quarantine North Vietnam by mining its ports and perhaps bombing its rail links to China. The goal would be a rapid negotiated compromise²¹.

Although Laos and Cambodia are not explicitly mentioned in this scenario, if the overall aim of the plan was to cut off the Communists' ability to supply themselves, then an offensive against the sanctuaries would certainly have made a great deal of strategic sense.

Perhaps if this course of action had been taken from the outset of the war, it may have stood a chance of success. However, for the Nixon Administration to

²¹ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, 1998). p.159.

have undertaken it in 1969 would have been folly. First, because as we have already seen in this thesis²², by the time the Nixon Administration entered office, the domestic political atmosphere in the US had already become poisonous. Such an expansion of the war would only have led to even greater protest and division. This was a point that Nixon himself recognised. “I doubted whether I could have held the country together for the period of time needed to win in view of the number of casualties we would be sustaining”²³. The second point that Walton fails to address is that had the US invaded Cambodia and Laos²⁴, it is perfectly possible that the Communists would have simply been able to move their sanctuaries and supply lines further to the west. Any limited invasion would effectively be an invitation to the enemy to simply shift their supply system out of the area that was being invaded. This course of action would have had the additional problem that it pushed Communist forces that much closer to Thailand, the US’s main ally in south-east Asia, and would have offered the North Vietnamese greater incentive to have offered more support to what was then small scale Communist insurgency in north-western Thailand. Had the US decided to completely occupy Cambodia and Laos, this obviously would have required a major increase in US troop levels and would have further complicated the pacification of South Vietnam as now it would have to compete for resources for the pacification of Laos and Cambodia.

The argument that Vietnamization had effectively worked, and that an isolationist Congress undercut a successful policy by refusing to properly fund

²² See Chapter 4.

²³ *No More Vietnams*. p.102.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of US planning regarding policy ground action in Cambodia and Laos, see William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Doubleday: Garden City, 1976). Pgs.271-272, 314, 346 & 410.

it, can be considered one of the great myths of the Vietnam War and Henry Kissinger one of the chief mythmakers. Kissinger's argument is that South Vietnam would have survived had the US Congress been willing to grant greater amounts of ongoing aid, and that the Nixon Administration's ability to lobby successfully to get this aid was critically undermined by the Watergate scandal and a basic collapse in confidence and trust between the executive and legislature:

Support for military or economic assistance to Indochina was disintegrating. Appropriations for Vietnam had been reduced by 50 percent each year since the signing of the Paris Agreement, from \$2.1 billion in 1973, to \$1.4 billion in 1974, and to \$700 million for fiscal year 1975.²⁵

Kissinger is in no doubt as to what caused the steady decline in US funding:

Only two years earlier, in the Presidential election of 1972, George McGovern had been defeated in the second largest landslide in American history importantly over the issue of Vietnam. In the Congressional elections of 1974, in the aftermath of Nixon's forced resignation, his erstwhile supporters prevailed on the issue of Watergate and emerged in a position to reverse the voters' earlier verdict on Vietnam.²⁶

²⁵ *Ending the Vietnam War*. p.493.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.500.

In this view, the steadily declining aid to Vietnam had a crippling effect on South Vietnam's military capability, fatally undermining its ability to replace destroyed or damaged equipment, or to replace stocks of ammunition.

According to South Vietnamese general Cao Van Vien, ARVN required US support in three crucial areas: "tactical and strategic air, to include troop transport; sea transport; and the replacement of weapons, materials, and supplies"²⁷. The provision of air and naval support was already ruled out by the terms of the Paris Peace Agreement and now, according to this argument, the steady reduction of funds was making the third condition more and more difficult.

This argument that South Vietnam was strangled by American tight-fistedness is fundamentally unconvincing for two reasons: first, for reasons outlined above, it is unlikely that larger amounts of US aid would have been used efficiently, and in fact, during the last days of South Vietnam's existence, a team of experts was dispatched from the Pentagon to recover sensitive US military technology from South Vietnamese stocks²⁸. This team found that, in terms of equipment, the South Vietnamese army was still well supplied. The problem was that, due to the corruption outlined earlier in this chapter, the supplies never actually reached the front line. The second reason why this argument is unconvincing is simply that during the final North Vietnamese offensive most South Vietnamese units did not actually engage the enemy. In order for Kissinger's argument to hold any water, it would require that South Vietnamese units had attempted to fight but had been overwhelmed due to lack

²⁷ Cao Van Vien, op-cit., *A Better War*. p.373.

²⁸ For a detailed account of this mission and its findings, see Alan Dawson, *55 days: The Fall of South Vietnam* (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1977).

of supplies when the truth is, in the majority of cases, the South Vietnamese army simply disintegrated. In these circumstances, the amount of US aid would have made very little difference. If the South Vietnamese army refused to fight, then any additional US aid would simply have been wasted.

So what does the above discussion tell us about the need for an “exit strategy”? First, that Vietnamization, that is to say, the idea that the US could hand off responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese, was not in the long run a viable exit strategy because it depended ultimately on the will of the South Vietnamese to actually shoulder a greater burden. As we have seen from the above discussion, the basic social, political and economic weakness of the South Vietnamese state meant that, in the first place, it was unlikely to be able to shoulder a greater burden, and second, that, no matter how much time, money and effort the US was prepared to throw at the problem of creating a viable South Vietnamese state, they were ultimately dependent upon the ability and will of the South Vietnamese to put in at least as great an amount of effort as the US in creating a viable state, and the South Vietnamese political elite simply was not prepared to do this. So Vietnamization could not work as an “exit strategy” because it was ultimately dependent upon factors outside of direct American control. Henry Kissinger, one of the principal architects of the US withdrawal from Vietnam, recognised the idea that the US could or should exert decisive influence over the internal affairs of its allies was dangerous hubris: “America cannot – and will not – conceive *all* the plans, design *all* the programs, execute *all* the decisions and undertake *all* the defense of the free

nations of the world.”²⁹ More to the point, in the developing intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine, Caspar Weinberger, at a conference in 1986 to address the issue of counterinsurgency and low intensity conflict, had this to say on how the US ought to go about conducting counterinsurgency and the limits of American power:

if our interests justify intervention . . . if the leadership of the country threatened is capable of using our assistance to proper effect, which is to say for the security and wellbeing of the nation, rather than merely to sustain itself in power and to reinforce those abuses which may have contributed to the nation's difficulties from the beginning. We must decide whether an existing leadership is better or worse for its people and our interests than possible alternatives We must decide what form intervention should take, if we are to intervene, and by what means, and through which agencies.³⁰

It should not be forgotten that, whilst Caspar Weinberger was making his remarks, Colin Powell was Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and, as such, had a hand in writing the vast majority of the Secretary’s public remarks.

As Powell himself put it, the prospect of getting involved in somebody else’s civil war was not one that should be taken lightly and that the ability of the

²⁹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 298.

³⁰ D. Michael Shafer, “The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 1 (Spring, 1988), p.76. Full text available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2151141>

United States to shape the political systems or sensibilities of other cultures’
deeply entrenched conflicts:

The crisis in Bosnia is especially complex. Our policy and the policy of the international community have been to assist in providing humanitarian relief to the victims of that terrible conflict, one with deep ethnic and religious roots that go back a thousand years. The solution must ultimately be a political one. Deeper military involvement beyond humanitarian purposes requires great care and a full examination of possible outcomes.³¹

Second, what the above discussion demonstrates is that “victory” as an “exit strategy” was, by 1968, extremely unlikely and that, although the process of US withdrawal from Vietnam was halting and erratic, it nevertheless gained irreversible momentum, which meant that, whether or not the US had a strategy, it was certainly exiting Vietnam:

The new concept of Vietnamization was essentially a “cut and run” strategy, designed by and for the United States. Vietnamization was dictated not so much by the increased potential of the South Vietnamese as shown at Tet ... but by the collapse of the will to support the war among the decision-making elite in the United States. American policymakers approved and supported the policy of Vietnamization without any assurance that it would leave South Vietnam capable of

³¹ Colin Powell, “Why Generals get Nervous,” New York Times, Thursday October 8th 1992. Full text available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/08/opinion/why-generals-get-nervous.html>

defending itself. To the American leadership this was not its primary purpose.³²

The final point to be taken with this discussion was that it was not completely the fault of the Nixon Administration that, whilst the US left Vietnam, it did not pursue a viable “exit strategy.” The lack of an “exit strategy” was woven into the very fabric of the initial decision to commit US forces to Vietnam. US policymakers in the Johnson Administration were aware of the endemic weakness of the South Vietnamese state, yet chose to commit US forces in spite of this weakness. From the very first, then, US policymakers made any viable “exit strategy” other than victory extremely unlikely:

South Vietnam, comprising Cochin China, centered about Saigon, and Annam, centered about Hue, lacked political and social cohesion, having no history or tradition as a unified nation or as a united people. Leaders were scarce and generally came from the privileged class.³³

So what was the kind of intellectual climate that arose from Vietnamization and what were its implications? First, that US policymakers in future needed to have a clear understanding of the local political situation and the history of any particular region before they undertook any intervention. Such an understanding would allow foreign policymakers to frame US objectives in such a way that they were actually achievable and not to be overconfident in

³² *Vietnam at War*, p.477.

³³ Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p.174.

the ability of the US, despite its enormous power and wealth, to stamp its authority on a foreign culture. Looking back on Vietnam after retiring as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Powell made the following observation:

I recently reread Bernard Fall's book on Vietnam, *Street Without Joy*. Fall makes it painfully clear that we had almost no understanding of what we had gotten ourselves into. I cannot help thinking that if President Kennedy or President Johnson had spent a quiet weekend at Camp David reading that perceptive book, they would have returned to the White House Monday morning and immediately started to figure out a way to extricate us from the quicksand of Vietnam.³⁴

Second, the US policymakers should not find themselves committing to a military intervention that they could not get out of. This requires that policymakers think about how they could extricate themselves from a particular theatre of operations before they enter it. As we have already seen in Chapter 3, the US Military after Vietnam was profoundly sceptical of an idea of an incremental use of force. Another reason for this scepticism is that policymakers may be tempted to use incremental force without thinking through all of the possible ramifications of their actions because a gradual incremental use of force does not seem like an irrevocable commitment of US resources or prestige. David Halberstam reports the following exchange between Powell and Clinton's first Defense Secretary, Les Aspin:

³⁴ Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (Ballantine Books: New York, 1995). p.143.

On one occasion when they had been talking about Bosnia, Aspin said something rather casually to the effect that the United States ought to hit the Serbs hard and see if it worked. “And if it doesn’t work?” Powell asked him. “Then we’ll try something else,” Aspin said. So Powell quoted to Aspin what he believed was a paraphrase of a remark made by General George Patton Jr.: “When you put your hand to the thing, make sure that the thing works.”³⁵

The major problem with this line of thinking is that the difficult questions always have to be answered by those that advocate intervention, whilst those that advocate non-intervention are always asking the questions. Those advocating non-intervention can always point to the “otherness” of any other country the US might intervene in, and also those advocating non-intervention can always point to the intractability of any problem and the limits of the United States’s ability to change the situation in another country, whereas those advocating intervention have to try and demonstrate the counter-factual is that US intervention can work before it has taken place. In short, those advocating intervention will always be treated sceptically; those opposing intervention will always have the advantage of being able to ask question rather than having to answer them.

We will now move on to look at how US policy towards Bosnia and the Clinton Administration was shaped, and what role these lessons from Vietnam played in shaping it. It will be necessary for us to look at US policy towards

³⁵ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (Bloomsbury: London, 2001). p.247.

Bosnia in detail because the argument that will be made here is that the Clinton Administration was never able to fashion a policy towards Bosnia that had at its core a viable “exit strategy.” It is necessary to look at policy towards Bosnia in some detail to examine why this was so. It is also necessary to look at US policy towards Bosnia in some detail because the second argument I will make is that, eventually, the perceived need for an “exit strategy” was rendered less important by the perceived need to maintain the credibility of NATO, the United States, and Bill Clinton as Commander in Chief. In order to understand how these different pressures accumulated over time to eventually come to be seen as more important than the need for an “exit strategy,” it is necessary both to see how US policy towards Bosnia developed and the context within which it developed.

There are two further reasons for the profound reluctance on the part of the US Military to get drawn into the conflict in Bosnia in the mid-1990s. The first answer to this question is simply a matter of time. Those junior officers who had served in Vietnam and had witnessed the catastrophic effect on morale and combat effectiveness that the prolonged withdrawal from Vietnam had created were determined that, when it was their turn to move into senior positions of command, they would do it better. In the words of Powell himself, “I had gone off to Vietnam in 1962 standing on a bedrock of principle and conviction. And I had watched the foundation eroded by euphemisms, lies, and self-deception.”³⁶ Powell certainly saw a connection between Bosnia and Vietnam: “When the nation’s policy was murky or nonexistent – the Bay of Pigs,

³⁶ *My American Journey*. p.140.

Vietnam, creating a Marine ‘presence’ in Lebanon – the result had been disaster. In Bosnia, we were dealing with an ethnic tangle with roots reaching back a thousand years.”³⁷

The second major cause of concern for a generation of officers who had served in Vietnam was the potential for guerrilla warfare. Bosnia is extremely mountainous, with few large cities; in other words, the ideal terrain to mount guerrilla warfare. In fact, so well suited to the task was Bosnia, that before the break up of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Army’s plan to defeat an invasion from either east or west was to fight a delaying action in the rest of the country and withdraw to the Bosnian mountains. Also, Yugoslavia had a proud and famous history of guerrilla fighters. In World War II, Tito’s partisans managed to tie down six German divisions in anti-guerrilla operations. And lastly, there seemed to be little idea of what US objectives would be in Bosnia. In her biography of Colin Powell, Karen DeYoung sums up his view of what “doing something” might actually mean:

His view that limited air strikes would accomplish little in getting the Serbs to behave had not changed... “As soon as they tell me it is limited... it means they do not care whether you achieve a result or not. As soon as they tell me ‘surgical’, I head for the bunker”³⁸.

Added to these concerns was the fact that the Clinton Administration did not seem to place a high priority on matters of foreign policy. Certainly Bosnia had

³⁷ *My American Journey*. p.544.

³⁸ Karen DeYoung, *Soldier. The Life of Colin Powell* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2006). p.235.

proved a useful stick to beat Bush with³⁹, but that did not necessarily mean that Clinton was going to actually do anything about the situation. Emblematic of the new President's lack of interest was the last minute way in which the Administration's foreign policy team was thrown together. Warren Christopher, the Secretary of State, who had denied wanting any job in the Administration all the way through the transition period, was then offered the job which he accepted at the last minute. David Halberstam sums up how difficult it was for the incoming President to find a Secretary of State and the rather haphazard way Warren Christopher eventually got the job:

The damage done by Vietnam had effectively wounded some in the ascending generation. Some of the men coming of age, in their late fifties to early sixties, were in general too close to the now contaminated policy makers of that era, and the next generation was, as Jordan [Vernon Jordan, co-director of Clinton's presidential transition] suggested, still too young.⁴⁰

Jordan raised the subject of becoming Secretary of State with Christopher in blunt terms: "he wanted to raise Christopher's name for Secretary of State. It was speak now or forever hold your ambition. "Do you want the fucking job?" Jordan asked. Yes Christopher answered"⁴¹.

³⁹ All references to Bush in this chapter refer to George H. W. Bush.

⁴⁰ David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace. Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (Bloomsbury: London, 2002). p.172.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.173.

The job of National Security Advisor went to Anthony Lake, who had been Clinton's principal foreign policy advisor during the campaign:

He had passed a crucial test during the campaign as an architect of the policy that helped neutralize Bush's greater national security experience. Lake's interest in foreign policy also paralleled that of the new president and his quite influential wife, who thought of it in humanitarian and moral terms rather than in old-fashioned strategic geopolitical ones⁴².

Lake had been one of the Kissinger aides who resigned in protest over the decision to invade Cambodia, and was well aware of the dangers of the US getting sucked into foreign conflicts it did not understand, and that were not vital to its interests. On the other hand, Lake personally had a strong Wilsonian streak: "He was ambivalent about the use of power; he both liked it and was apprehensive about using it. His view of foreign policy had always had a certain moral rectitude"⁴³.

Lake had also long believed that how the US dealt with conflict in the Third World and the newly emerging Europe would define American foreign policy well into the twenty-first century. Lake had also held a ringside view of the bitter dispute between the State Department and the National Security Advisor during the Carter Administration. He was determined that on his watch there would be a smooth relationship between Clinton's foreign policy team. Writing in the mid-1980s about how to improve the quality of national security decision

⁴² Ibid., p.190.

⁴³ Ibid., p.287.

making, Lake had this to say about the ideal relationship between Presidential advisors: “The President should therefore choose his lieutenants not only for their separate talents, but with an eye to how they will work together”⁴⁴.

Overall, Lake’s position on Bosnia was a deeply ambivalent one. On the one hand he felt the US ought to do something, both for humanitarian reasons, and for what he perceived as reasons of national interest. On the other hand Lake was not going to get too far ahead of the President’s willingness to act, nor was he going to propose a course of action that would upset a harmonious relationship with the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense.

Clinton’s first Secretary of Defense would be Wisconsin Congressman Les Aspin. Aspin had been the long-time Chair of the House Armed Services Committee, and as such had a deep well of knowledge about issues of strategy and national defence. Before entering Congress, Aspin had served in the Pentagon as one of McNamara’s “whiz kids”. Although Aspin had served in a very junior post in the Office of Systems Analysis, nevertheless he too was aware of the danger of the US making small commitments which gradually snowballed into large ones.

Also, Aspin had ambitions to seriously reduce the Military budget. Although with the end of the Cold War, the Bush Administration had cut the defence budget by \$300 billion over ten years, Aspin believed that there were further cuts that could be found. To say the least, this was not an attitude which was likely to endear him to the Joint Chiefs; however, it did mean that they had a

⁴⁴ I.M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy. The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1984). p.279.

readily formed argument against any intervention in Bosnia. They could, and did, say to Aspin, you can cut the budget, or you can intervene in Bosnia, but you cannot do both: “Putting a division into Bosnia would require a so-called rotational base of three divisions; that, in turn, would prevent Clinton from [reducing] the Army as much as he aims to”⁴⁵. Aspin was not fated to have a very easy relationship with the uniformed Military in general; for years, Aspin had been the Congressman who had demanded answers from the Military and on more than one occasion had embarrassed the Military through his dogged questioning of witnesses. It was perhaps too much to ask that they now embrace him as Secretary of Defense: “Powell and Aspin had fought constantly about a number of issues, and Aspin had often seemed in the past like a man going round with a butcher knife to cut force levels”⁴⁶. Added to this was the fact that Aspin had a rather relaxed style that tended to irritate the Military. The Secretary frequently showed up late to meetings, and was not a man who seemed to take a great deal of pride in his appearance. This ran counter to the Military’s ethic of efficiency and immaculate uniform: “He could not run the Pentagon because he could not run himself. Stories of Aspin’s lack of discipline flooded the building from the first day – of his exploding in a rage at a subordinate over some minor infraction”⁴⁷.

To sum up, the key players of the Clinton Foreign Policy team were a Secretary of State who had taken the job at the last possible second, a Secretary of Defense who had a difficult relationship with the Military, and a National

⁴⁵ Christopher M. Gacek, *The Logic of Force. The Dilemma of Limited War in American Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1994). p.331.

⁴⁶ *War in a Time of Peace*, p.244.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.246.

Security Advisor, who at least to begin with would not force the issue of Bosnia onto the agenda.

On top of these personal and bureaucratic issues, the Clinton Administration was not free to make policy towards Bosnia in a vacuum. The Administration's views on foreign intervention, particularly in the area of multilateral peacekeeping operations, were heavily influenced by the events of October 1993 in Somalia.⁴⁸ Here, the US had sent a limited peacekeeping force to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the US had found itself over a period of time drawn into the Somali civil war. This involvement eventually led to the deaths of eighteen American troops and the wounding of seventy-five. This led to the US mission to Somalia folding shortly afterwards. In the aftermath of the Somalia fiasco, President Clinton ordered a review of US participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations of the kind that would, in all likelihood, need to be undertaken in the event of a ceasefire being agreed in Bosnia. This led to what became known as Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25.⁴⁹

PDD 25 expressly limited the role and timescale US forces would be deployed on in US peacekeeping operations and was crystal clear in stating that, before the US would even consider committing troops as part of a multilateral

⁴⁸ For an account of the entire Somalian intervention, see John L. Hirsch, and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, DC : United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995). Robert Oakley was the US Special Representative to Somalia between 1992 and 1993. For a specific account of the Ranger mission that led to eighteen American deaths and seven-five wounded, see Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (London: Bantam, 1999).

⁴⁹ Presidential Decision Directives were used in the Clinton Administration as definitive policy guidelines.

peacekeeping force, there would need to be an “exit strategy” in place. The exact language the Directive used is as follows: “The operation's anticipated duration is tied to clear objectives and realistic criteria for ending the operation.”⁵⁰ From this quotation, we can clearly see that PDD 25 as established US policy was clearly intended as a break on open-ended US operations by ensuring at the outset that there existed “realistic” conditions for bringing the operation to a close. PDD 25 also put other roadblocks in the way of US participation or, indeed, the employment of any effective peacekeeping force to Bosnia, by the US pledging to use its veto to prevent the UN from taking money from other areas and loaning it to peacekeeping missions and also by insisting that Congress would have to approve of any peacekeeping deployments. What we can see clearly from PDD 25 is that the need for clear objectives and a definable “exit strategy” were established as clear criteria which needed to be fulfilled before the US would make a commitment to any peacekeeping force anywhere in the world, and, as we shall see from our discussions below, none of the peace plans or military operations considered by the US in Bosnia had such clearly definable end-states.

Added to all this was the fact that the Clinton Administration faced a far more complex situation on the ground than the situation which had confronted Bush. Desperate to show that they were not impotent in the face of a crisis, the Europeans, in particular the British and the French, had deployed troops to Bosnia as part of a UN “peace keeping” force. This force was wholly

⁵⁰ Presidential Decision Directive 25, "U.S. Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations," The White House, Washington, May 6, 1994. Full text available at: <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd25.htm>

inadequate either to end the fighting or to provide protection to the civilian population. The best that this force could do was to provide an armed escort for humanitarian supplies:

Mr Major [British Prime Minister, John Major 1990-1997] pledged 1,800 British troops for Bosnia, under the UN flag and ready to provide protection to UN relief convoys. Under the rules of engagement, the soldiers would be able to return fire in self-defence if a convoy was attacked, but could not “fight their way through”...The UN had scrapped ambitious plans for a peacekeeping force of 100,000, in favour of a 6,000-strong force compatible with Britain’s offer⁵¹.

This force, known ironically as the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), massively complicated the task of anybody advocating stronger military intervention to end the fighting. The peacekeepers were spread out all over the country in small units, and in line with their mandate they were not heavily armed. This made them extremely vulnerable to hostage taking. The Commander of the UN force in Bosnia between the end of 1993 and 1995, Sir Michael Rose, commented on the difficulty of the US using air power while the UN force was still on the ground: “The peacekeepers referred to this new policy as “stay and pray”, observing that it was, after all, *their* lives, not American lives, that were put at risk by this policy”⁵².

⁵¹ Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell. Understanding Bosnia’s War* (Simon and Schuster: London, 1994). p.159.

⁵² General Sir Michael Rose, *Fighting for Peace. Lessons from Bosnia* (Warner Books: London, 1999). p.13. Italics in the original.

The nightmare scenario for London, Paris, and a host of European capitals, was that the US would bomb the Serbs in a hope of either altering their behaviour or forcing them to the peace table, and the Serbs would react by killing or kidnapping peacekeepers. This in turn posed a problem for the US: supposing that the situation actually came to pass, what would the US response be? If the bombing was stepped up, that would only increase the risk to any hostages. If the bombing was stopped, then the point would have been made loud and clear that all you had to do was kidnap some blue helmets to get your way. Any rescue attempt would be risky to execute, and even if successful, would escalate the level of US involvement in the conflict. On the other hand the US would be morally obligated to do something. After all it would be US actions, either unilaterally, or through NATO, that would bring this situation to pass:

In Christopher's view [Secretary of State Warren Christopher], a pullout or collapse of the UN protection force would be a disaster and had to be avoided at all costs because it would obligate the United States to live up to its commitment to supply the 20,000 troops to cover a retreat. Clinton could renege, but at the risk of destroying NATO. It would be unthinkable to abandon NATO, the most important alliance in the post-World War II period⁵³.

The deployment of European peacekeepers to Bosnia meant that any conceivable US action in Bosnia had to consider more than just an air campaign. If the European allies were ever to be sold on the concept of military

⁵³ Bob Woodward, *The Choice* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1996). p.257.

intervention, there would need to be some guarantee that the peacekeeping troops would either be able to defend themselves, or could be safely withdrawn. In either event, this seemed to imply a massive show of force on the ground by NATO, inevitably with US involvement.

The new Administration also found itself in the awkward position of having to either endorse or reject the latest peace plan for Bosnia within a few weeks of taking office. Since the previous spring, former British Foreign Secretary David Owen and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance had been trying to negotiate a settlement on behalf of the European Union and the UN respectively. The plan they came up with would retain Bosnia as a sovereign entity but would divide the country internally into a series of “cantons.” Each of these areas would have broad authority over domestic and policing affairs, whilst leaving the federal government in Sarajevo to deal essentially in foreign affairs and monetary matters. Each of the cantons was divided along ethnic lines so there would be majority Serb, majority Muslim, and majority Croat cantons. On the one hand, the plan had the advantage of being the first comprehensive plan to end the fighting in Bosnia and reach some kind of a political settlement, and it seemed to meet the basic demands of all sides. From a Muslim point of view, it guaranteed Bosnia’s continued existence. From a Serb and Croat point of view, it promised autonomy bordering on independence. David Owen described the principles of his plan in the following way:

[The plan] defines Bosnia and Herzegovina as a decentralized state, with guaranteed freedom of movement throughout. [The plan] gives substantial autonomy to the provinces while denying them any international legal character. [The plan] provides for democratically elected national and local government and a mechanism for resolving disputes between them. [The plan] stresses strong, internationally monitored human rights provisions⁵⁴.

However, from Washington's point of view, the plan had a number of serious defects. First, the cantonal borders reflected gains on the grounds that the Serbs had made rather than the pre-war division of population. So the plan seemed, at least implicitly, to reward the Serb aggression that candidate Clinton had spoken so strongly against: "They were uncomfortable with a settlement that seemed to legitimize Serbian gains made at gunpoint. To do so would not jibe with their campaign rhetoric"⁵⁵. Second, the plan had no mechanism for its policing and implementation. How exactly were the boundaries between the cantons to be enforced, and what would be the future of the armed forces of each faction? The only logical answer to this question was that some kind of military intervention would be necessary in order to separate the warring parties and keep the borders intact. This task would in all likelihood fall to NATO, so this would require some kind of U.S. participation. David Owen acknowledges that a substantial military force would have been required to enforce his plan: "It is often forgotten that implementation of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan in January 1993 did not involve NATO troops, but

⁵⁴ David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (Indigo: London, 1996). p.94.

⁵⁵ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.198.

envisaged a deployment of 15,000 UN troops, later revised upwards to 25,000”⁵⁶. What Owen neglects to mention in his outline of the plan is that it lacked any exit strategy. The plan essentially would have resulted in the ethnic hostilities that had started the war being frozen in place by the new Cantonal boundaries he was proposing. What the plan lacked was any means by which Bosnia’s different ethnic communities could live together in peace without outside military forces separating them. Owen’s plan was seemingly predicated on the idea that the UN would remain in force in Bosnia for an indefinite period of time. The Vance-Owen Plan contained the same fatal drawback that Vietnamization had had as an “exit strategy” in that the date at which foreign forces could leave Bosnia would be decided by factors beyond the control of the US. Under the Vance-Owen Plan, foreign forces could only leave when Bosnia’s various communities were prepared to leave in peace with each other without an international military presence. Given the centuries of enmity between these different groups, nobody could say when that would be or how long foreign forces might have to be committed to Bosnia. In other words, it could be said that Vance and Owen were making the same mistake that the Johnson Administration made, that is to say, committing troops in order to mask fundamental underlying weaknesses that a commitment of military force might temporarily alleviate but could not solve.

Added to this was the fact that there did not seem to be a readily available alternative. The same objections to military intervention that had confronted Bush confronted Clinton. Every time the option of airstrikes was considered,

⁵⁶ *Balkan Odyssey*. p.392.

the question the military always posed in response was what if airstrikes don't work? Was the Clinton Administration prepared to commit overwhelming force?⁵⁷ And was the Administration prepared for the potential long-drawn out commitment to Bosnia? UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright sums up Powell's attitude with the following observation:

He replied consistent with his commitment to the doctrine of overwhelming force...saying it would take tens of thousands of troops, cost billions of dollars, probably result in numerous casualties, and require a long and open-ended commitment of US forces. Time and again he led us up the hill of possibilities and dropped us off on the other side with the practical equivalent of "No can do"⁵⁸.

What we can see from Albright's quotation is that Powell considered any strategy based purely on American airstrikes, whether intended to alter the behaviour of Bosnian-Serbs, or to equalise the battlefield between Bosnia's Serbs, Muslims and Croats, was that, by the act of airstrikes, the United States was committing itself to a role in the conflict without committing enough to ensure that its objectives were met. If airstrikes did not achieve their objective, the US would be left in the position of having to continue to engage in military action on an open-ended basis. In terms of an "exit strategy," airstrikes alone had the same fundamental problem that the Vance-Owen Plan suffered from, in that the exit from such a commitment relied on factors beyond US control. It would depend on how much punishment the Serbs were willing to take before

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁸ *Soldier*. Pp.235-6.

they changed their behaviour, a threshold the United States could not know beforehand. It also relied on the Muslims and Croats being able to take advantage of the cover US airstrikes provided. Again, the US could not guarantee that that would necessarily materialise before undertaking airstrikes. Airstrikes alone offered the possibility that the US would find itself committed to a course of action the ultimate outcome of which it was beyond its power to determine.

This reluctance should not be taken for insubordination. If Clinton had ordered airstrikes early in his Administration they would have been carried out aggressively and the Navy and Air Force would have done everything in their power to make sure that they were successful. The question the Military was really asking of its civilian masters was, how committed are you to military action? What price are you prepared to pay? And if we get into Bosnia, how do we get out again?

So the Clinton Administration was prevented from taking part in a peacekeeping operation in Bosnia by the lack of an “exit strategy.” It was also prevented from the selective use of air power to try and balance the military capabilities of the warring factions again by the lack of an “exit strategy.” The lack of a readily defined exit strategy made the Vance-Owen Plan unattractive, and the lack of control over the response of the combatants to a strategy based on airstrikes alone meant that this policy option also lacked an “exit strategy” that the United States could be certain of:

He [Powell] thought that no one in Washington was willing to pay the price that a commitment like this [military intervention in Bosnia] might demand. To him the interventionists were talking a policy based on hope rather than reality, a hope that things could be affected with a minimum, casualty-free application of airpower⁵⁹.

Powell's objective in raising these issues is perhaps best summed up by an observation Admiral Leighton Smith, Commander of NATO forces in the Mediterranean, made:

If you are in a position to talk to the political bodies that guide you, and give you your missions; if you are not honest with them, and tell them precisely what you think, no matter what the personal consequences, you deserve whatever the hell you get. And you ought not be in command.⁶⁰

The fact of the matter was that nobody really had any answers to these questions. In the absence of a plan to end the fighting, smaller scale military options were also considered, such as the use of U.S. forces that would open a permanent land corridor between Sarajevo and the outside world. However, these schemes too ran into a problem. When asked how many troops it would take to accomplish this, the Military, in line with the Powell Doctrine, erred on the side of overwhelming force and produced an estimate of up to 50,000 troops. If the Administration was prepared to make that large a commitment of troops for a very limited objective, why not commit more troops and try to find

⁵⁹ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.141.

⁶⁰ Interview with Admiral Leighton W. "Snuffy" Smith, Jr. (Ret). Frontline. Full text available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/guys/smith.html>

a solution to the underlying problem of the war?⁶¹ And, crucially in the context of this chapter, what was the exit strategy? Again, we can see here a clear echo of the failures of Vietnamization as a credible “exit strategy.” The end of any military action, the objective of which was the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, would, by definition, lack an “exit strategy,” as the end of this mission would be dependent upon factors that the United States had no means of exerting decisive influence over. The United States could offer to mediate the conflict, it could put forward its own plan to end the conflict, or it could try and hand off the protection of aid to the “international community.” It could do all of these things, but none of them could guarantee a willingness on behalf of the combatants to end the war or guarantee an international willingness to take over any mission from the United States. The US could then simply stop protecting the delivery of aid, but that would be an “exit” rather than an “exit strategy” because, presumably, if the United States simply stopped offering protection, that would not obviate the need for that protection.

In the end, the US position on Vance-Owen was neither to support nor reject the plan. If all sides agreed to it and a cease-fire was put in place, the US would send a limited number of troops to act as peacekeepers – 25,000 was the number usually mentioned. However, the US would exert no pressure to sign the agreement on any of the parties. Just how reluctant the US was to support the Vance-Owen plan can be seen from comments made by a State Department spokesman: “the State Department spokesman remarked that the incoming secretary of state had ‘expressed doubts about whether it can realistically be

⁶¹ For a discussion of plans to end the siege of Sarajevo, see, Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1994). Chapter 14.

achieved, whether they can, in fact, find an agreement.”⁶² President Clinton was even more emphatic in his non-endorsement of the plan: “Even President Clinton weighed in, describing the plan as ‘flawed’ and making clear that the United States would not pressure the Muslims into accepting an agreement they would be unwilling to live by on their own.”⁶³ The Clinton Administration also, in the end, rejected any limited military action to guarantee the supply of humanitarian aid.

With Vance-Owen safely disposed of, Clinton’s national security team was free to fashion its own policy. However, this was done with remarkably little input from the President himself. For reasons laid out above, foreign policy did not command the same level of priority in the Clinton White House that it had in previous Administrations, and Bosnia had to compete for the President’s time with Clinton’s efforts to massively reduce the federal deficit⁶⁴ and launch an ambitious healthcare plan that was deeply controversial⁶⁵.

The Bosnia strategy that was finally agreed came to be known as “Lift and Strike.” This policy called for the lifting of an arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims. However, the problem with simply lifting the arms embargo was that the Serbs’ massive inbuilt advantage in fire power was not likely to be offset for some time, even with an influx of arms to the Muslims, and it would be necessary to mount airstrikes against the Serbs in the interregnum to prevent

⁶² Ivo H. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America’s Bosnia Policy* (The Brookings Institution: Washington D.C., 2000). p.11.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶⁴ See Bob Woodward, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1994).

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the Clinton healthcare proposal in the context of Clinton’s overall political situation, see Haynes Bonner Johnson, and David S. Broder, *The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point* (Little and Brown: Boston, 1996).

them from ending the war on their own terms before the Muslims could benefit from new weaponry. The basic premise behind the strategy was that by arming the Muslims the US could create a level playing field between the various armies, thus leading to a stalemate and renewed interest in negotiation. This strategy had three principal advantages: first, it would require no US ground presence as the peace could be maintained by a balance of power between the factions themselves; second, it promised to end the war on negotiated terms, which the parties themselves could agree to; and third, by linking the airstrikes to the embargo, it promised to reduce the level at which and the period of time that the US was committed to airstrikes. In terms of an exit strategy, “Lift and Strike” had the advantage that it did not require an exit strategy because it did not envisage the US having to directly enter the conflict. However, for advocates of the Powell Doctrine it did have crippling disadvantages. Because of the limited nature of the proposed US intervention, there was no way that “Lift and Strike” could guarantee the outcome that its supporters promised. Second, returning to the theme of exit strategy, opponents of “Lift and Strike” wondered what would happen if US aircraft were shot down and their crews needed to be rescued. The US would then have to send in troops to rescue the pilots, who in turn could be engaged by the Serbs. In other words, “Lift and Strike” held within it the possibility of incrementally increasing the US commitment to the conflict with no obvious point at which the US could disengage itself.

However, the President approved the plan on the condition that it was agreed to by the Europeans. This condition can be seen in one of two ways: either that

Clinton was not completely convinced by the policy and hoped that the Europeans would reject it for him, or that, with European troops already deployed to Bosnia, Clinton did not want to strain NATO any further by taking unilateral action. In any event, the European allies were not convinced that “Lift and Strike” was a viable policy, and Secretary of State Christopher was distinctly lukewarm in selling the plan:

He [Christopher] would note that there were “no good options” for dealing with Bosnia, but that lift and strike was the “least worst” among them. The tone of the secretary of state’s presentation reflected the long internal discussions and bore the unmistakable imprint of General Powell, notably in denigrating the effectiveness of air power and other limited forms of military force.⁶⁶

Lift and Strike was essentially intervention on the cheap. Halberstam fairly describes “Lift and Strike” in the following terms: “America sought to be internationalist on the cheap and remain partially isolationist.”⁶⁷ It did not meet at least three of the tests laid down by the Powell Doctrine. It did not promise intervention with overwhelming force. Its objective was somewhat fuzzy insofar as it had nothing to say about what would happen if the Sarajevo government could not turn its position around, even with additional weaponry. And finally, Lift and Strike threatened to entangle the US in a war where its interests were poorly defined. In terms of an “exit strategy,” Lift and Strike was better than a policy based on airstrikes alone insofar as Lift and Strike did

⁶⁶ *Getting to Dayton*. p.16.

⁶⁷ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.225.

at least offer a mechanism by which Bosnia's Muslims and Croats could even the military balance with the Serbs for themselves. However, it was still flawed insofar as "exit strategy" was concerned because it still relied, as Vietnamization had, on the ability of an indigenous force to absorb aid proffered by the United States. There was also the question of what would happen if the scales tipped too far in the opposite direction. Would the US be infinitely committed to ensuring a balance of force between the various parties to the Bosnian conflict? Lift and Strike ultimately suffered from the same flaw as the Vance-Owen Plan and all other military options considered by the Clinton Administration in that, in order to get to the end-state the Clinton Administration desired, the United States was reliant on other actors behaving as the United States would want them to behave, whilst, at the same time, the US had limited leverage to make sure that other actors would act as the United States wanted them to.

Between the springs of 1993 and 1995, US policy towards Bosnia could accurately be summed up as one of containment to try and limit the conflict's intensity and to try and alleviate human suffering by continuing the supply of aid and to prevent the conflict from spreading outside the borders of the former Yugoslavia. During this period there was a whole plethora of peace plans and initiatives put forward. As the Serb author Dusko Doder observed,

The Bosnian war dragged on. Month after month, year in year out, peace negotiators raised hopes that major breakthroughs had been achieved. But the people of Bosnia continued to die; many more were left

homeless. The world had become impervious to the daily Serb shellings of Sarajevo; it blamed UN generals and international bureaucrats for their prevarications, indeed stigmatized them as men with feet of clay, hearts of stone, and heads of wood. In reality this merely obscured the unwillingness of top Western leaders to get embroiled in the Yugoslav mess⁶⁸.

All of these well-intentioned plans came to nought because they ran up against two fundamental facts. First, without outside intervention to alter the military balance of power there was no reason for the Serbs to negotiate. They were in by far the strongest military position and could effectively take and keep what they wanted through force. Second, the inverse of that was also true in that the Bosnian Muslims desperately wanted negotiations, but had no leverage with which to bargain. And finally, without some neutral but heavily armed arbiter to enforce the peace, no agreement was likely to stick amongst the mutual hate and suspicion of the warring parties.

By 1995, although the situation on the ground in Bosnia remained relatively static, the situation in Washington was beginning to shift dramatically. The Presidency of Bill Clinton had been through a rocky ride. Although for the first two years of his Administration the Democrats had for the first time in twelve years controlled both the Presidency and Congress, Clinton had never been able to establish a very comfortable relationship with Congress and had struggled to pass key elements of his economic recovery plan and other

⁶⁸ Dusko Doder, translated by Louise Branson, *Milosevic: Portrait of a Tyrant* (The Free Press: New York, 1999). p.206.

important pieces of legislation. On top of these domestic troubles⁶⁹, Clinton's foreign policy was scattered with crises which had either not been dealt with, or were seen not to have been dealt with well. The US humanitarian mission to Somalia had met with loss of life and embarrassing withdrawal, attempts to restore the democratically elected government of Haiti had been halting, if ultimately successful, and there was a general sense that foreign policy was not an area in which Clinton was particularly comfortable. Bosnia had become more than just a series of facts on the ground, it had become a symbol of an Administration that was skating from crisis to crisis, and had yet to set a firm direction for US foreign policy in the post Cold War world. As Clinton himself acknowledged,

We're in the worst possible situation. We are not in a position we can sustain. The Europeans could bring forces to bear but they prefer to whine at us. We have a war by CNN. Our position is unsustainable, it's killing the U.S. position of strength in the world.⁷⁰

The second major domestic factor which drove a reappraisal of US policy towards Bosnia was that the Republican Party gained control of Congress after the 1994 mid-term elections⁷¹. Just as Clinton had used Bosnia as a stick to beat George Bush in 1992, so the Republicans had used it against Clinton in 1994. Shortly after Congress reconvened, a Bill was introduced that would

⁶⁹ For a detailed account of Clinton's first two years in office, see Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1994), and Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton. Mastering the Presidency* (Century: London, 2007). Pp. 5-383.

⁷⁰ *The Choice*. p.261.

⁷¹ For a discussion of Clinton's general relationship with this new Republican Congress, see Elizabeth Drew, *Showdown: The Struggle between the Gingrich Congress and the Clinton White House* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1995).

mean that the US would no longer enforce the UN mandated arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia, and would provide \$ 200 million worth of arms to the Bosnian Muslim government:

Among its [Congress] very first acts was the introduction on January 4, 1995, of a bill by Senate majority leader Bob Dole [Republican, Kansas] to lift the arms embargo under one of two conditions: if the Bosnian government asked it to be lifted; or once the four-month cease-fire expired on April 30, 1995. In either case, the embargo would be lifted unilaterally⁷².

From Clinton's point of view this Bill was damaging on three fronts; first, to sign such a Bill would effectively seed control over Bosnian policy to Congress; second, it was likely to lead to a major crisis in the relationship between the US and the UN, and by extension a crisis in the relationship between the US and a variety of western European countries, in particular Britain and France, whose troops on the ground would be left exposed to even greater risk, and third, there was the possibility that such an infusion of arms would not do anything to end the war but merely escalate it to new levels of violence, prompting even greater pressure for eventual US intervention. And, to add to President Clinton's worries, from late 1994 onwards public opinion had begun to turn against Clinton's handling of Bosnia.⁷³

⁷² *Getting to Dayton*. Pp.61-62.

⁷³ In a series of polls commissioned by *NBC* and *The Wall Street Journal* between August 1992 and September 1997 in response to the question, In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job (President) Bill Clinton is doing in handling the situation in Bosnia?, between the end of 1994 and the end of 1995, public disapproval of Clinton's handling of Bosnia averaged 45%. See Richard Sobel, "Trends: United States Intervention in Bosnia", *The Public Opinion*

Also, factors on the international stage were driving the US towards a more robust stance over Bosnia. Bosnia was becoming a road block to improving relations with Russia⁷⁴, and also the issue had the effect of completely overshadowing the US's other priorities for its European policy. Second, attitudes in Europe were changing. Although the British remained stubbornly opposed to the use of force to try to bring the conflict to an end, the French, who were the largest contributors to UNPROFOR, had begun to shift their position towards being ready to consider intervention in order to bring what seemed like a never ending presence in the middle of a civil war to an end:

Chirac was a genuine hawk who wanted to do more but was willing, if that was not possible, to do less. He would no longer accept the status quo. He talked with John Major about the creation of a Rapid Reaction Force, an elite French-British unit, far better armed with much heavier weapons, which, with American air support and helicopters, could move quickly and strike the Serbs with genuine force if they violated any more agreements⁷⁵.

The position of the US Military had also begun to change in subtle ways. Colin Powell was no longer Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. His replacement was Lieutenant General John Shalikashvili. Although Shalikashvili broadly agreed

Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp.262-263. Full text available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2749625>.

⁷⁴ Interestingly, the memoirs of Clinton's second Secretary of Defense William Perry, only ever mention Bosnia in the context of its impact with the relationship with Russia. See, Ashton Carter and William Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington D.C., 1999).

⁷⁵ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.303.

with the Powell Doctrine, his experience of the Military and his background was somewhat different from Powell's. Shalikashvili had come to America as a fifteen year old, his family was Georgian in origin, and he spent his formative years growing up in Poland. The point to be noted here is that his family had fled to the United States as refugees from post-war Europe. This may have served to give him a sense of empathy with people facing similar situations, and he certainly had an intimate knowledge of the history of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Although like Powell, Shalikashvili had served in Vietnam, his later career had taken him in a very different direction from Powell – whilst Powell had been serving in the military bureaucracy in Washington, Shalikashvili had been serving in a variety of European commands and assignments. And whilst Powell was serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Shalikashvili had been serving as Deputy SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe). As such he had been responsible for organizing the relief operation for the Iraqi Kurds at the end of the first Gulf War. The lesson he took from this was that whilst the Powell Doctrine was certainly valid, it had to be applied more flexibly in the post Cold War world, where the US was likely to find itself faced with a variety of challenges which would involve civil wars and civilian displacement: “Shalikashvili would go around saying that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs did not have the right to put a notice on his door saying, ‘I’m sorry – we only do the big ones,’ and signed ‘John Shalikashvili.’”⁷⁶ But engaging in humanitarian missions was not just a matter of finding a rationale for the Military's existence. Shalikashvili also believed

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.391.

that they were intrinsically worthwhile: “Shalikashvili’s sensitivity to the plight of refugees was genuine, and it was to be a consistent part of his career”⁷⁷.

The following quotation is taken from a report of a conversation between Shalikashvili and US troops in Haiti:

I know you’re all tough warriors, and I know that sometimes some of you feel that being here is something of a disappointment and that this is not exactly your kind of mission. But when you wake up tomorrow, I want you to look in the mirror and say to yourselves, “I think I saved a lot of lives today – I think I’ve done something of value”. You have a right to feel good about yourselves and I hope you do⁷⁸.

Shalikashvili was not alone in reassessing the Military’s attitude towards Bosnia. Because European NATO members had taken it upon themselves to become involved with the UNPROFOR, NATO had steadily acquired a role in supporting the UN’s activities in Bosnia; this changed the nature of the stakes in Bosnia in a significant way. No longer was Bosnia somebody else’s civil war, it had become a test of NATO’s relevance in the post Cold War world. As Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke put it:

We could not remain aloof from this. For larger strategic reasons, for historical reasons, and for humanitarian and moral reasons, American leadership was still needed in Europe, and that leadership was essential,

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.323.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.325.

because, left to themselves, the European Union members could not deal with the problem.⁷⁹

This led senior US officers within NATO, in particular SACEUR George Joulwan, to press for a more forceful response to Serb actions against UN designated safe areas. This brings us on to the final catalyst for US and NATO intervention:

As the war escalated in the autumn of 1994, senior American officers, such as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, and the NATO Supreme Allied Commander [SACEUR], General George Joulwan, began to see the reputation of the NATO alliance being undermined⁸⁰.

If Shalikashvili and Joulwan were moving towards a more activist stance, then the immediate commander on the ground, Admiral Leighton “Snuffy” Smith, was much more reluctant. Smith’s attitude and biography fitted the Powell Doctrine like a glove. Smith graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1962 and went on to fly combat missions over North Vietnam, earning two Distinguished Service medals in the process. The two principal lessons that Smith seems to have taken from his experience in Vietnam are, first, a very strong distrust of politicians,

⁷⁹ “Interview with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke”. *PBS. Frontline*. Full text available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/guys/holbrooke.html>.

⁸⁰ Tim Ripley, *Operation Deliberate Force. The UN and NATO Campaign in Bosnia 1995* (CDISS, Lancaster, 1999). p.92.

If you and a politician are bantering back and forth about the use of military, military officers are not trained to be politicians. We don't eat like them, sleep like them, drink like them, talk like them, think like them. And that's neither good nor bad, it's just a fact of life.⁸¹

While Shalikashvili and Joulwan may have been thinking about the broader geopolitical implications of Bosnia, Smith was dealing with the complex and messy reality of day to day operations in Bosnia: "...now you're trying to sort out claims of territory, because that's where my ancestor lived seven hundred years ago. ... It's a terribly terrible complex issue..."⁸² Smith was not necessarily completely opposed to any kind of US intervention in Bosnia, but if intervention was going to happen, he wanted it to be as small scale as possible, as short as possible, and with very limited objectives:

...get the military mission as clear as you can. Colin Powell and others before him have said, give me clear statement, give me a clear mission, it's got to be unambiguous. What you need to understand is, when you've got 54,000 soldiers from 34 to 35 different nations involved, you've got to make it as plain as possible...⁸³

In terms of keeping any US commitment as small scale as possible, Smith took the very strong view that the limit of US involvement should be the separation of opposing forces. Smith was very strongly against any kind of policing or

⁸¹ "Interview with Admiral Leighton Smith". *PBS. Frontline*. Full text available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/guys/smith.html>

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

humanitarian mission, "...soldiers do not make good policemen, this is not a good idea. Don't send these guys on police missions; they are not policemen"⁸⁴.

So to summarise, by the spring and summer of early 1995, of the three most crucial uniformed military commanders dealing with Bosnia, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Commander Allied Forces Europe, and the Operational Commander of NATO Forces in the Mediterranean, two out of the three were moving towards a position of supporting US intervention, and the third was prepared to accept intervention under certain very specific conditions. The point to be noted here is that, from first to last, the Clinton Administration never came up with a Bosnian policy that included a viable exit strategy. However, by the spring of 1995, this concern had been overtaken by larger concerns about the future credibility of NATO, the credibility of the United States as an actor involved in European security issues, and the credibility of Bill Clinton as Commander-in-Chief.

It fell to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake to be the man who formed the sense that something had to be done into a coherent plan. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lake had always been something of an advocate of stronger action over Bosnia, but had not wanted to get out in front of the President he served. Now it was the President's turn to be urging Lake on. Bob Woodward describes Clinton's reaction to Lake's urging that policy on Bosnia needed to change: "The current position was untenable. He wanted rethinking. They had to break out of the old mind-set. He hadn't heard

⁸⁴ Ibid.

anything new, Clinton said, and new was what he wanted.”⁸⁵ Lake’s approach to the Bosnia problem was to ask, ‘where did the United States want the situation in Bosnia to be in six months?’, and then to work backwards from that point: “Suppose, Lake proposed, they calculated where they wanted to be six months from now? Define that place and then work backwards? ‘Let’s think from the end backwards,’ Lake said. ‘I don’t want to hear about what next.’”⁸⁶

The strategy Lake developed called for the US and NATO to use a combination of sticks and carrots to cajole all three sides into negotiation. For the Serbs, the stick was to be the threat of strategic airstrikes, and the carrot was to be the removal of sanctions on Belgrade. And for the Muslims and Croats, the carrot was to be the threat of strategic bombing against the Serbs if they did not agree to negotiate, and the stick was to be a threat that the US and Western Europe would walk away and leave Bosnia to its fate if they failed to negotiate. The basis for this negotiation was to be a map which divided Bosnia-Herzegovina into two “entities” – a Muslim-Croat federation, which had been agreed to in 1994, and a Bosnian-Serb entity. Both of these entities would have broad powers over domestic issues, leaving a federal government headed by a joint presidency, including one Muslim, one Croat and one Serb, to deal with external relations and monetary affairs. The map split Bosnia 51 per cent to 49 per cent in favour of the federation. This would mean that under the plan the Serbs would have to give up approximately 20 per cent of the land they currently occupied. This plan had been formulated by the so-called

⁸⁵ *The Choice*. p.258.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.257.

“Contact Group.” This was the US, Britain, France, Russia, Germany and the UN. As such, this plan was able to win broad acceptance within NATO.⁸⁷

At the same time that Lake was formulating his strategy, American and European leaders were meeting in London to decide what to do to protect the remaining safe areas in the wake of Srebrenica. Holbrooke describes the London conference as effectively an act of desperation on the part of the Western alliance, but one that had far-reaching consequences: “The London conference was one of those remarkable events in which something unexpectedly positive emerges from an initially unpromising idea.”⁸⁸

Essentially, two decisions were reached. First, that the safe area of Zepa would effectively be abandoned as there was no effective means of preventing the Serbs from overrunning it. The remaining safe areas of Sarajevo, Goražde, and Bihac would be defended by air power. Any Serb action against any of these three cities would be met not only by retaliatory airstrikes against positions or troops moving or firing against them, but would also be met by strategic bombing of key military communications facilities, ammunition dumps and other infrastructure directly supporting the Bosnian-Serb Military. In addition to this, UNPROFOR would consolidate its forces into central Bosnia and would also be reinforced by a mixed British, French and Dutch force of heavy armour and artillery. Known as the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), this would massively increase the fire power available to UN commanders on the ground, and the process of consolidation would reduce the risk of isolated outposts

⁸⁷ For a description of Lake’s plan by the man who had to negotiate for its acceptance, see Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (The Modern Library: New York, 1998). Pp.78-79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.71.

being taken hostage. British Chief of Defence Staff Sir Peter Inge described the outcome of the London conference as follows: “We got a way ahead. I don’t think anyone expected it wouldn’t be. Some very hard decisions would have to be taken if we were going to be successful. Military operations are not neat and tidy.”⁸⁹ It is important to note that the decisions of the London conference and Lake’s strategy for ending the war were not coordinated with each other. In the immediate aftermath of the war, a myth grew up that the London conference and Lake’s policy review were part of a coordinated strategy. This is simply not true – they were separate events taking place at the same time. The interesting point to be noted is that neither the London Conference nor Lake’s strategy review ever directly addressed the question of exit strategy. Both these events were principally concerned with how to end the war in Bosnia and deal with its immediate aftermath. Neither the London Conference nor Lake paid any particular attention to how long a peace-keeping mission in Bosnia might last, and under what circumstances it might be brought to a close. There was the implicit understanding that disarming the various warring parties and enforcing a ceasefire would be potentially time-consuming, but little thought was given to exactly how time-consuming this process might be. In other words, the exit strategy was left undefined because the “entry strategy” was seen as being complicated enough.

Were airstrikes to be launched by NATO, the man in charge would be Commander Allied Forces Southern Europe Admiral Leighton Smith. Smith already had responsibility for enforcing the UN-mandated no-fly-zone over the

⁸⁹ *Operation Deliberate Force*. p.162.

former Yugoslavia, and his staff had planned for years for the potential need to launch the kind of air campaign that was being contemplated. However, Smith personally was not convinced that the US should take a major role in enforcing an end to the Bosnian war. He was acutely aware of the possibility for guerrilla warfare and sceptical of the idea that air power alone could guarantee a change in Serb behaviour. Nevertheless, Smith was determined that if called upon to execute an air campaign it would be swift and massive:

The plan entailed striking the eastern IADS [Integrated Air Defence Systems] first with SEAD [Suppression of Enemy Air Defences]...attacking the BSA's [Bosnian Serb Army] air facilities at night to minimize civilian casualties. By this time, it would be first light and NATO aircraft could fly against heavy weapons in the Sarajevo exclusion zone.⁹⁰

In late September 1995, the issue was finally settled when a Serb mortar landed in a Sarajevo marketplace. Immediately following this, the plans agreed at the London conference were put into effect. NATO aircraft began a series of coordinated strikes against Serb positions around Sarajevo. These strikes were backed up by artillery fire from the RRF. Within two days the Serb gun positions around Sarajevo had been silenced and the air campaign had expanded to cover a broad range of military targets across Serb-held areas of Bosnia.

⁹⁰ David L. Dittmer and Stephen P. Dawkins, *Deliberate Force: NATO's First Extended Air Operation, The View from AFSOUTH* (Center for Naval Analyses: Alexandria, June 1998). p.19. Dawkins served as Political Advisor to Admiral Smith and Dittmer was embedded with AFSOUTH, specifically to write the official history of Deliberate Force.

At the same time, although unconnected to the air campaign, the Croatian army launched a massive ground offensive to retake areas of Croatia occupied by a rebel Serbian Croat army in 1991. Since the cease fire in Croatia had gone into effect in 1992, the Croat army had been completely re-equipped with supplies shipped in defiance of the UN arms embargo: “Croatian forces on what was the Serb western front, somewhat belatedly armed by the outside world, had been in training under former American army officers for more than half a year and could for the first time match the Serbs in firepower.”⁹¹

The net result of this was that the Croats were far better armed and far better trained than their Serb opponents, the predictable result being that the Serb-held enclave in Croatia all but collapsed within a matter of weeks. This Croat offensive threatened to spill over into Western Bosnia. Croat and federation forces had already been cooperating with each other for some time, and under the cover of allied airstrikes federation forces had already managed to launch their own offensive on Western Bosnia, driving large numbers of Serb refugees before them, and threatening to take the largest city in Serb hands, Banja Luka.

It was at this point that the president of Serbia proper, Slobodan Milosevic, decided to take matters into his own hands. He arranged for a meeting between himself and the Bosnian Serb leaders, at which it was agreed that Milosevic would head a joint Bosnian Serb/Serb delegation to peace talks at an American

⁹¹ *War in a Time of Peace*. p.293.

Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio. As Holbrooke relates, this joint delegation served to make the negotiating process much easier:

For sixteen months, the Contact Group had argued fruitlessly with Milosevic over how to get the Bosnian Serbs to participate in negotiations...Now we had the answer to the question we had asked for those sixteen months: who would speak for Pale? And the answer was: Slobodan Milosevic.⁹²

After more than two weeks of talks, an agreement broadly in line with the Contact Group Map was initialled. As part of this agreement, a multi-national peacekeeping force known as the Stabilization Force (SFOR) was formed. As part of this force, the US agreed to deploy 25,000 troops for one year: “The plausibility of this statement, even when slightly softened by the President a few days later, was widely questioned at the time – and would cause serious difficulty for the Administration later.”⁹³ This year was likely to be extended, and eventually the US presence became open-ended. Holbrooke understood that this one-year deadline would not prove helpful: “Nevertheless, announcing before the peace talks began that we would withdraw in twelve months, no matter what happened on the ground, was not an ‘exit strategy’ but an exit deadline – something quite different, and quite misleading.”⁹⁴ The last US troops were withdrawn from Bosnia in 2005. US troops were deployed to Bosnia on a one-year timetable so that they would have a guaranteed exit strategy. However, this rather neat assumption simply did not take into

⁹² *To End a War*. Pp.105-106.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.211.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.211.

account the reality of the situation on the ground. It took US forces several months of the year they were notionally supposed to be in Bosnia just to finish deploying to the region. Even without the Holy Grail of a guaranteed exit, US forces in Bosnia were not to suffer a single casualty as a result of hostile action. Far from being a quagmire, US involvement in Bosnia after 1995 was a cakewalk. It is interesting to note that the strictures laid down by PDD 25, as discussed earlier in this chapter, when they came into contact with the reality of the situation on the ground in Bosnia, were ignored as American troops ended up being deployed in Bosnia on peacekeeping duties on an open-ended basis.

What we have seen in this chapter is that a successful exit strategy depends on the ability of the US to shape the circumstances of its environment so that it can choose a point at which to exit a conflict. However, conflicts are by definition never one-sided affairs. The opponent will always have at least a degree of control over the environment in which the conflict takes place. Therefore, an exit strategy in the sense of having a defined means of bringing a conflict to an end before you engage in it, whilst at the same time not undermining the objectives you are fighting for, is almost an impossibility. Therefore, an exit strategy as defined by the Powell Doctrine can only rarely be achieved. Perhaps a better way of proceeding would be to rely instead on the element of the Powell Doctrine which requires clear objectives. This would give policy makers the chance to identify when they had reached a conclusion to a conflict rather than the near impossible proposition that they should know when and exactly how to end a conflict before it has begun.

We will now move on to look at how the need for a clear exit strategy meshes with the rest of the Powell Doctrine, in particular, we will look at the relationship between the need to maintain public and Congressional support⁹⁵ and the need for clear objectives⁹⁶.

The need for an exit strategy and the need to maintain public support are linked by the notion that there is a finite amount of time that the public is prepared to support any commitment, and also the fact that it is easier to maintain public support if you can explain in simple terms when and under what conditions you expect to be able to bring military commitment to a close. Extended military operations by their very nature are monetarily expensive. If you add to this the fact that they may ultimately also turn out to be costly in terms of life, it is clear that in a democratic system people will only support this kind of expenditure for a limited amount of time. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, it had become clear to US policy makers by 1968 that the point of diminishing public support had been reached. However, because policy makers had no well thought out plan to leave Vietnam and were essentially dependent upon an improving political and military situation in South Vietnam in order to allow them to withdraw, the US found itself in the invidious position of having to continue to fight with ever diminishing public and legislative support because public support for the war ebbed away faster than US forces could be withdrawn. Therefore in order for these two elements of the Powell Doctrine to make logical sense, they have to work in tandem. A withdrawal cannot go on past the point at which public support has been lost for a particular deployment,

⁹⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 5.

otherwise the situation will become corrosive as with Vietnam, and the public will begin not only to lose support for a particular operation or undertaking, but will begin to withdraw support from the Armed Forces themselves and the institutions that support them. Likewise, a well founded exit strategy will inevitably be based on how long the planners think that public support can be maintained. So for example the initial one-year deadline on troop deployments to Bosnia was premised on the idea that the public and Congress would only support a sharply limited deployment, both in terms of the time US troops would actually spend on the ground, and also the limit that such a short period of deployment would put on the tasks that US forces could perform. When Admiral Smith took command of SFOR [Stabilization Force], he made it clear that the force's mission was to maintain a ceasefire and compel the warring parties to withdraw heavy weaponry from the front lines. Smith made it clear he was less interested in tasks such as the arrests of war criminals, building the institutions laid out by the Dayton Agreement or the return of refugees. Smith was able to take these stands partly because the force he was in command of had a very short space of time in which to operate. In other words, a time limited deployment serves to reinforce public support not only because it defines that a US presence is limited in timescale, it also implicitly limits the risks that US forces might have to face because it reduces US forces to carrying out the simplest and therefore quickest tasks.

Interestingly in the case of Bosnia, this initial exit strategy was abandoned and public support for the deployment did not significantly suffer. Yet US forces remained extremely reluctant to build on this initial success and carry out some

of the more complex and potentially riskier tasks laid down in the Dayton Accords. The logical reasons for this would be that US planners retained the fear that taking on these additional risks might have undermined support or more likely, these tasks may have resulted in increased US casualties which would also have had the effect of undermining public support for the mission.

In terms of the connection between the need for a clear exit strategy and the need for clear objectives, one clearly follows from the other. In order to know when the time has come to wind down a particular operation, there needs to be a clearly defined objective that can be said to have been achieved. An exit strategy need not necessarily be one based on a period of time, it could be a strategy based on the achievement of a very clearly measurable objective. For example, if we look at the Bosnian case study, a different exit strategy could have been adopted based on setting up the federal structures agreed to in the Dayton Agreement, and returning refugees. US forces could have been deployed to Bosnia for as long as it took to establish these institutions and then begin to withdraw once these institutions were functional. Eventually this was to become the *de facto* exit strategy that the US would adopt. The problem with tying an exit strategy to a particular objective is that the objective needs to be quantifiable. For instance, if an exit strategy was predicated on the basis of, for example, creating a stable and secure environment in Bosnia, this would not be a particularly credible exit strategy because there are numerous different ways one could go about defining “stable and secure”. It would not be an easy matter to define how far you are from achieving this objective, and so your presence could easily become an open-ended one, whilst a never ending debate about

what constitutes progress means that a credible exit strategy can never be agreed upon. To some extent this was the problem that the US faced in Vietnam, in that there was consensus within the Nixon Administration that the US forces would not be able to leave Vietnam until the capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces had been improved. But the question of how and what measures should be used to define increased capability became a vexed one. Was it a matter of just measuring the size and sophistication of the South Vietnamese armed forces? Was it a matter of how much territory they controlled (and if so, how do you define control)? Or was it a matter of how they performed in combat? And what happens if there is no improvement? It is at least partially because this debate over what constituted progress towards US objectives, that the withdrawal of US ground troops in effect became an exercise that was, to a large extent unrelated to the situation on the ground in Vietnam and a process that owed much more to the state of domestic politics in the US.

Before closing this chapter it seems appropriate to return briefly to the definition of an exit strategy given at the opening of this chapter. How often is it possible for the US, or for that matter any single actor, in anything as complex and involved as conventional military operations, to have the degree of control over the circumstances surrounding it as is required by a successful exit strategy. Certainly this is easier in the context of a conventional war between two states. In this context the US can simply set its objective as the destruction of the enemy's capability to make war and with the massive industrial and technological advantage the US enjoys over any conceivable

opponent, it can shape the circumstances of the battlefield to achieve this objective and there is little that an opponent can do to prevent this.

However, in the context of a situation such as Bosnia, where the US's objective is not to defeat an enemy but to create a political and military process which is compatible with its interests; the question of how much control any single actor can have over that process is questionable. On paper, the need for a clear exit strategy sounds eminently sensible and the connection between this element and other elements of the Powell Doctrine is a matter of simple deductive logic. However, in reality there are too many competing political, strategic, economic and perhaps even moral considerations to allow the US to have the freedom of action that a true exit strategy needs in order to succeed. If the Powell Doctrine had been strictly applied to the Bosnian case study the US would never have become involved. There was simply too much about the situation that the US could not control, and that therefore a clear exit strategy could not be envisioned. It was only when the political consequences of doing nothing had reached critical mass for the Clinton Administration, and the exit strategy point of the Powell Doctrine for Bosnia was essentially "fudged", the imposition of a one year deadline on US involvement was widely seen as being unrealistic, and it came as no great surprise when that deadline was extended and then abandoned.

Perhaps then, rather than insisting upon the need for an exit strategy at the outset, a better question for policy makers to ask might be, is the operation that we are about to undertake worth the possibility of an open ended military

commitment? The answer to that question ultimately lies in how a President defines a “national interest”, and their confidence in their ability to convince the majority of the American people that this definition is the correct one, and their confidence in their ability to maintain that conviction through potentially serious US loss of life.

What we have seen in this chapter then is that the Powell Doctrine’s insistence on an exit strategy was borne from the fact that in Vietnam the US found itself continuing to fight a war its political class and the public at large had given up on winning, simply because the Nixon Administration tried to tie US withdrawal to factors that were largely beyond its control. When this effort failed the Nixon Administration unilaterally withdrew from Vietnam, leading to the ultimate defeat of South Vietnam. The result of this was that the US Armed Forces had been asked to fight for five years from 1968-1973 for essentially no purpose and also that the Nixon Administration’s efforts to maintain the US presence whilst simultaneously admitting that the US had to withdraw, led to a political crisis that was to inflict long term damage on the American people’s confidence in their own institutions of government. Second, we have seen how the need for an exit strategy was one of the factors that stymied serious US involvement in the worst European war in fifty years, and third we have seen that the need for a clear exit strategy has to be an element of the Powell Doctrine if we are to properly to understand the Doctrine’s insistence on the need for clear objectives and public support.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

After Vietnam, I never envisioned that I would again know so many who died so young. What angered me after six years of reporting from the lines was how many at the top talked mainly to one another and did not take the time to study the war. The same was true of the war's critics.

Francis West, a Vietnam veteran, author and reporter¹

We are a civilian-controlled military, and it is our business to stay out of politics.

LtGen Ricardo Sanchez²

In this thesis, we have seen the influence that the Powell Doctrine and the intellectual climate that gave birth to it have had on US foreign policy over the 20 years between the end of the Vietnam War and the mid-1990s. We have seen, in each of our case studies, that the ideas that form the Powell Doctrine can be traced back to the US experience in Vietnam and the attempt to learn the lessons of that war. We have also seen that, generally within the US Military, the strategy adopted by the United States in Vietnam was seen as fundamentally flawed and that the Powell Doctrine was an attempt to make sure that what were seen as strategic mistakes on the part of the United States were not repeated.

¹ Quoted in Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (Random House: New York, 2008). Preface, xix.

² Op cit. Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (Bantam Books: New York, 2005). p.223.

Added to this, we have seen that no single element of the Powell Doctrine can be treated as if it were the preeminent or most salient element of the Doctrine. We have seen that, for each element of the Doctrine, other elements of the Doctrine have an influence and a bearing on them. So, in order to adequately understand the full significance of the Powell Doctrine and the debates within the US Army that gave rise to it, one must look at the Doctrine in its totality.

We have also seen that, whilst Colin Powell's 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article can be treated as the definitive statement of the Powell Doctrine, Powell was not breaking new intellectual ground. The points that Powell raises in that article are strongly influenced by the historical and theoretical work of Officers such as Harry Summers, Douglas Kinnard, and the retrospective attempts to understand the lessons of the war undertaken by those who were in senior command positions at the time, such as U.S. Grant Sharp, William Westmoreland, Philip Davidson and Bruce Palmer among others.

The one remaining question that we can only provide a tentative answer to is, what is the future of the Powell Doctrine? The aim here is not to give a definitive answer as to what the future of the Powell Doctrine will be, but simply to suggest what could be seen as likely possibilities for the Powell Doctrine's future and to describe the political and strategic contexts that would need to exist in order for these possibilities to come to pass.

In order to provide a tentative answer to this question, we will analyse a number of possible alternatives. The first answer we will look at is perhaps the

easiest answer: that the Powell Doctrine has no future. The second answer we will look at is that some of the elements of the Powell Doctrine will continue to survive and be influential in some kind of modified form. The final answer we will look at is that the Powell Doctrine in its totality will experience a renaissance. For any of these three answers to hold any water, we must assess them by the yardstick of the US Military's experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. Any analyses of these experiences are by definition incomplete. The US Military is likely to remain in strength in both countries for the foreseeable future.

We will start by looking at the simplest and most pessimistic answer, what we could call the death of the Powell Doctrine. The first issue that may kill the Powell Doctrine is that it is so tied up with and historically contingent upon the US experience in Vietnam that once the generation of officers who had any kind of experience in Vietnam retires or passes from the scene, the Powell Doctrine will simply fade from memory as lessons of a war now finally consigned to the history books. The moment that the last Vietnam veterans pass out of military service is approaching fast. David Petraeus, the current CINC -CENTCOM, graduated West Point in 1974, the year after US involvement in Vietnam formally ended. Linda Robinson, who has written an account of Petraeus's time in Iraq with his extensive cooperation, describes the impact of Vietnam on the graduating class of 1974 as follows: "The Vietnam War was not far from the minds of the cadets at West Point...They were beginning their careers in the shadow of the lost war".³ The current cadre of

³ Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (Public Affairs: New York, 2008). p.53.

four star officers is going to be the last that had any firsthand experience of Vietnam. As we've seen throughout this thesis, every element of the Powell Doctrine can ultimately be traced back to some facet of the Vietnam War. Once this war is no longer part of the living memory of the United States' Military, it is questionable whether the Powell Doctrine will carry the same intellectual force.

Historical contingency may undermine the Powell Doctrine from another direction. The Powell Doctrine may have been formulated as a guide to help orientate US policy towards limited war. However, this does not mean that it is strictly applicable to the situations in which the US finds itself in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words, the lessons learned from one limited war, Vietnam, may not be of much use in the limited wars the US finds itself fighting today. This is particularly true when it is borne in mind that, as we saw in Chapter Three, those elements of the US Army's Officer Corps whose ideas led to the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine, tended to see Vietnam through the prism of a conventional threat against South Vietnam by North Vietnam.⁴

It is true to say that Vietnam in some senses prefigured Iraq and Afghanistan in terms of the tactics the Vietcong used and the problems the US had in trying to build up a viable South Vietnamese government, economy and society. However, as we saw in Chapter Three, it would be too simplistic to stick the label of "guerrilla war" on Vietnam. There were many elements of

⁴ See pp.130-133.

conventional conflict that the Powell Doctrine sought to address that were present in Vietnam that are not present in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. First, as we have seen, although the extent of North Vietnamese support and its bearing on the ultimate outcome of the conflict are matters of historical debate, what cannot be denied is that, to some extent, the Communist war effort was directed, supported and the burden of it shouldered by a conventional State. So, whilst in a tactical sense certainly Vietnam bore some of the hallmarks of a guerrilla war, in the strategic sense of identifying where the enemy's "centre of gravity" was located, Vietnam is a more ambiguous case than either Iraq or Afghanistan. As Summers puts it:

Instead of focusing our attention on the external enemy, North Vietnam – the source of the war – we turned our attention to the symptom – the guerrilla war in the south – and limited our attacks on the North to air and sea actions only. In other words, we took the *political* task (nation building/counterinsurgency) as our primary mission and relegated the *military* task (defeating external aggression) to a secondary consideration.⁵

It can be argued that Vietnam was a much more conventional war than the current conflicts the United States finds itself in.⁶ The quotation below demonstrates just how diffuse the threats the US finds itself fighting have become:

⁵ Colonel Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Dell, 1982), p.145. Emphases in original

⁶ See Chapter Three for a discussion of the historical debate about the nature of the war in Vietnam and the position that various writers within the US Military have taken on the issue.

Many of these terrorists – some loosely organized and some representing groups – claimed to act for Islam and operated, increasingly, on a global scale. These transnational terrorists benefit from modern communications and transportation, have global sources of funding, are knowledgeable about modern explosives and weapons, and are much more difficult to track and apprehend than members of the old established groups or those sponsored by states.⁷

Aside from the tactical similarity between the Vietcong and Iraqi and Afghan insurgents, there is one other important respect in which these wars are similar to one another, and that is the extent to which the US has found itself in the middle of interethnic, interreligious conflict that it does not adequately understand.

In all three wars, to a certain extent, the US is a bystander to conflicts that have been going on before US intervention and will carry on after the US has left in some form. As General Petraeus put it in his 2007 Progress Report to Congress,

The fundamental source of the conflict in Iraq is competition among ethnic and sectarian communities for power and resources. This competition *will* take place, and its resolution is key to producing long-

⁷ Quote taken from Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, 3rd edition (Penguin: London, 2007). p.5. Originally published 2003.

term stability in the new Iraq [emphasis added]. The question is whether the competition takes place more – or less – violently.⁸

In this discussion of interethnic and sectarian competition, we can certainly see echoes of Vietnam. The following quotation is taken from a policy paper prepared by Chester Cooper of the National Security Council staff in January 1965:

However, we still confront the Buddhists, who will continue to retain the power to move [make] any government unworkable, even if they cannot actually topple it--a fact of contemporary Vietnamese political life we will simply have to accept and reckon with. The problem is that the Buddhists--or, more accurately, the militant bonzes who now control the "Buddhist movement"--don't know what they want, in a positive sense. The Buddhist leadership enjoys the exercise of political power but prefers to veto rather than propose. It does not want the responsibility of office or, actually, direct participation in the governmental process. This leadership is hypersensitive to affronts to its honor or present political position, and to any recrudescence of what it considers "Neo-Diemist" or "Catholic" authority.⁹

⁸ General David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq, *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, September 10th-11th 2007. Full text available online at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Petraeus-Testimony20070910.pdf>.

⁹ Paper Prepared by Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff, Washington, January 6, 1965, Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, SEA Special Intelligence Material, Vol. III. Full text available at: http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_ii/10_18.html.

However, the US has an additional problem to face in Iraq and Afghanistan that it did not have to deal with in Vietnam. The US has had to face the problems of general lawlessness and chaos that have accompanied the fall of repressive regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan: “Various elements push Iraq’s ethno-sectarian competition toward violence. Terrorists, insurgents, militia extremists, and criminal gangs pose significant threats.”¹⁰

There are other similarities and differences between Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan that call the Powell Doctrine’s usefulness into question. This revolves around the nature of the US commitment to these wars. It could be argued that, in the case of all three wars, the US had a moral obligation to maintain its involvement. By removing the Taliban, overthrowing Saddam Hussein and conspiring in the coup that removed South Vietnamese President Diem, the US had an obligation to see that something was put in their place, as Secretary of State Colin Powell recognised: “‘You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people’ ...Privately, Powell and his deputy and closest friend, Richard Armitage, referred to this as the Pottery Barn rule: you break it, you own it.”¹¹ However, in a practical, more self-interested sense, the US was much less committed to Vietnam than it is to Iraq and Afghanistan. Although it was frequently argued, both by contemporaries and by some historians, that a defeat in Vietnam would weaken US credibility, no-one has ever argued that a Communist victory in Vietnam would have led to a direct threat against the

¹⁰ General David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi-National Force–Iraq, *Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq*, April 8th-9th 2008. Full text available online at <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/General%20Petraeus%20Testimony%20to%20Congress%208%20April%202008.pdf>.

¹¹ Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008* (Simon and Schuster: London, 2008). Pp.328-329.

United States. Therefore, the US could afford to follow the policy of “Vietnamization,” which, as we have seen, was fatally flawed, without impinging on its own physical security. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara goes so far as to speculate that, had he lived, President Kennedy would never have committed large numbers of troops to Vietnam in the first place:

He [Kennedy] would have concluded that the South Vietnamese were incapable of defending themselves, and that Saigon’s grave political weaknesses made it unwise to try to offset the limitations of South Vietnamese forces by sending U.S. combat troops on a large scale. I think he would have come to that conclusion even if he reasoned, as I believe he would have, that South Vietnam and, ultimately, Southeast Asia would then be lost to Communism.¹²

However, the physical danger to the US of defeat in Afghanistan or Iraq is arguably much greater. Ahmed Rashid notes that the Soviet-Afghan War,

left a legacy of expert and experienced fighters, training camps and logistical facilities, elaborate trans-Islam networks of personal and organization relationship, a substantial amount of military equipment including 300 to 500 unaccounted-for Stinger missiles, and, most

¹² Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1996), p.96.

important, a heady sense of power and self-confidence over what had been achieved and a driving desire to move on to other victories.¹³

As we have seen, the Powell Doctrine stipulates that “vital national interests” of the United States should be at stake before the US considers military intervention. There is a difference between interests in the abstract sense of issues of the balance of power or credibility and the more tangible interests of physical security. This places the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a different realm from the cases we have looked at in this thesis and Vietnam.

The practical implications for the usefulness of the Powell Doctrine of these differences and similarities between the issues the US faced in Vietnam and in the period covered by this thesis and it faces at present are huge. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the US is fighting an enemy lacking the conventional apparatus of a State, so there is no central authority upon which the United States can seek to impose its will. The concept of “overwhelming force” is useful in situations such as the first Gulf War,¹⁴ where the US is seeking to impose its will upon another state. But, in the context the US finds itself in, it could be argued the Powell Doctrine’s reliance on overwhelming force can be counterproductive, creating new recruits for the insurgents and undermining domestic support for the war by creating large-scale civilian casualties. The following quotation is taken from instructions issued to marines deploying to Iraq in 2004:

¹³ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.130.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.

If shot at, no fusillade would be loosed in response. Mattis [James N. Mattis, Commanding Officer, 1st Marine Division] emphasized marksmanship – one shot, one kill. The hope was that restraint in attitude and firepower would lead to more toleration of U.S. troops and less toleration of the armed resistance.¹⁵

This criticism that the use of “overwhelming force” is inappropriate to a guerrilla war is exactly the same criticism that was levelled at the Search and Destroy missions US troops undertook in Vietnam. In the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, this criticism was even more pointed. There are no main force Vietcong or conventional North Vietnam units against which “overwhelming force” could be used. Neither is there an option of launching conventional invasions of North Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos. In other words, whilst Vietnam contained within it both elements of conventional and unconventional warfare, in Iraq and Afghanistan the US finds itself fighting a completely unconventional war against an enemy with none of the attributes of a state.

Also, the Powell Doctrine’s insistence on a pre-planned exit strategy, as we have seen earlier in the thesis, was problematic when faced with an issue like the Bosnian civil war.¹⁶ In Afghanistan, the US is faced with a country which has had no legitimate central government for 30 years. British author James Fergusson describes the situation in Afghanistan just prior to the initial rise of the Taliban in 1994: “In those days it was hardly possible to drive a mile without encountering a chain across the road, manned by some Kalashnikov-

¹⁵ *No True Glory*. p.50.

¹⁶ See Chapter 6.

toting militiaman demanding money. Farmers were unable to get their crops to market, ordinary trade was paralysed and the economy was stalled.”¹⁷

Afghanistan is also a country facing a major narcotics problem,¹⁸ and a country where US vital interests are certainly at stake given the fact that the most deadly attack on the US mainland ever staged was launched from that country. It seems wildly implausible to insist that any US government has a completely pre-planned exit strategy before committing US troops. Certainly President George W. Bush seemed to accept that the stakes in Afghanistan for the US were effectively so large that to put any kind of timescale on the US presence in the country would be imprudent to say the least. “It is not only repressing its own people; it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists. By aiding and abetting murder, the Taliban regime is committing murder.”¹⁹

The overriding point here is that the situation the United States has found itself in, in the opening decade of the 21st century is in many respects very different to the situation the Officers who created the intellectual climate behind the Powell Doctrine perceived that they had encountered in Vietnam. Among the most salient of these differences is the fact that in 9/11 the US homeland was attacked so, unlike the Viet Cong, the transnational networks of Islamist fighters do pose a clear and direct danger to the US. Also, the US finds itself

¹⁷ James Fergusson, *A Million Bullets: The Real Story of the British Army in Afghanistan* (Bantam Press: New York, 2008). p.31.

¹⁸ See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*, 2nd ed., (Pan Books: London, 2001). Chapter 9.

¹⁹ George W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11,” September 20th, 2001, *Public Papers of the President George W. Bush, Book II – July 1- December 31, 2001*. p.1159.

in a position where there is no conventional state for it to coerce. No equivalent of the North Vietnamese Government is supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan or Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The question has to be asked, can the Powell Doctrine, a set of ideas so closely associated with one particular war, still play a valuable role in the vastly different circumstances of which the US Military now finds itself?

The third key historical change which may kill the Powell Doctrine is that civilian policy makers no longer seem to be cowed by the spectre of Vietnam. Between the end of the first Gulf War and the beginning of the second Gulf War, the US enjoyed an unprecedented run of military success in Bosnia, in Haiti, in Kosovo: “Franks was a product of his Army, and his faults reflected those of that institution. The Army went into Iraq with a considerable amount of hubris, a circumstance notably different from that of the First Gulf War, whose leaders had been the junior officers of the Vietnam War.”²⁰

This “hubris” paradoxically left the US Armed Forces in a weaker position to lecture civilians on the dangers of intervention overseas. Madeleine Albright’s question about the reluctance of the US Military to act when it was receiving the better part of \$500 billion a year in funding became more and more urgent as advocates of intervention could point towards recent successes when the Military could only point to a failure that was receding into the distant past. Furthermore, a generation of officers was moving towards senior positions who not only had not experienced Vietnam but had experienced an unbroken string

²⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, 2nd ed., (Penguin: London, 2007). p.129.

of successes, both on the battlefield and as peacekeepers, and that moreover was more confident than Powell's generation of the ability of US Armed Forces to intervene successfully.

Iraq and Afghanistan have certainly done much to dent this confidence. Nevertheless, Iraq and Afghanistan will only be two campaigns mixed in with a string of successes. The Vietnam generation of officers had no such comparable experiences. Vietnam was their war, their only war, and there were no Bosnia's or Kosovo's to take the edge off the failure in Vietnam. This run of success makes it harder for the US Military to be able to stray beyond the confines of traditional military doctrine. Faced with a run of successes, civilian policy makers are less likely to be intimidated by the dire predictions of a Military determined not to underestimate the difficulty of any intervention. Equally civilian policy makers are likely to be less tolerant of the Military straying beyond the traditional limits of military doctrine as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and moving onto the much more overtly political terrain which, as we have seen, is covered by the Powell Doctrine.

We can certainly see, from the history of George W. Bush's Administration, that to a degree unprecedented since the McNamara era, civilian officials, particularly in the Department of Defense, have been willing to overrule the uniformed Military. Donald Rumsfeld's controversial tenure at the Pentagon left perhaps the greatest strain on civil-military relations in the US since the 1960s. Rumsfeld came to office having had the unique experience of being Secretary of Defense once before: "[i]t was unprecedented for someone who

had served as Secretary of Defense – or for that matter any top cabinet post – to come back 25 years later to the same job. It was a chance to play the hand again. Rumsfeld was determined to play it better”.²¹ Rumsfeld also had very definite ideas about what he wanted to achieve. Essentially, Rumsfeld’s vision was of smaller, more flexible Armed Forces that were easy to deploy: “The only way these things can be done well is if risk is elevated, put on the table and discussed, instead of trying to mitigate it down below at a level where you don’t have the benefit of trading off with and balancing risk.”²² It was Rumsfeld’s aim to come up with a more flexible alternative to the Powell Doctrine, something that would allow force to be used in a rational and focused way. Bob Woodward records Rumsfeld’s reaction on being briefed on existing US war plans: “That is insane, that is crazy. Either it’s world peace or it’s World War III. Either the switch is off or on. We’re not going to do it that way.”²³

This was not out of step with what many inside the Military wanted.²⁴

Rumsfeld tended to cause tension not necessarily because of his ideas but because of his management style, which was to place a great deal of power in the hands of relatively junior civilian officials whilst at the same time treating the Joint Chiefs of Staff as his own personal planning staff rather than as military advisers to the President. Thomas Ricks quotes Norman

²¹ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2004). p.16.

²² *Ibid.*, p.35.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.35.

²⁴ For an example of the kind of thinking in the Pentagon on the need for military transformation before Rumsfeld’s appointment, see Douglas A. Macgregor, *Breaking The Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century* (Greenwood Publishing Group: Washington D.C., 1997).

Schwarzkopf's opinion of the relationship between civilians and the Military in Rumsfeld's Pentagon,

It's scary, okay? Let's face it: There are guys at the Pentagon who have been involved in operational planning for their entire lives, okay?...And for this wisdom, acquired during many operations, wars, schools, for that just to be ignored, and in its place have somebody who doesn't have any of that training, is of concern.²⁵

What concerned Schwarzkopf in retirement infuriated those still serving. The following quotations contain descriptions of Rumsfeld's Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith: "Rumsfeld, not a man to give praise easily, describes Feith: 'just a rare talent. And from my standpoint, working with him is always interesting. He's been one of the really intellectual leaders in the Administration in defense policy aspects of our work here.'"²⁶ However, within the uniformed Military, Feith was nowhere near as highly thought of. Jay Garner describes Feith as follows: "I think he's incredibly dangerous. He's a very smart guy whose electrons aren't connected, so he arc lights all the time. He can't organize anything."²⁷ And General Franks describes him in typically pungent terms as "the dumbest fucking guy on the planet."²⁸

This kind of relationship has profound implications for the future of the Powell Doctrine. The whole point of the Powell Doctrine was to make sure that the

²⁵ *Fiasco*, p.83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.78.

Military would have a cohesive position that it could aggressively argue for in debates at the highest level of government when it came to deciding what US National Security policy ought to be, particularly when it came to Military interventions overseas. It is frankly too soon to tell whether Rumsfeld's more aggressive and civilian-led management style was simply a reflection of the personality and priorities of Donald Rumsfeld or whether it signals a more permanent shift in the balance of power between the civilian and military sides of the Defense Department. One thing is certain: any future Secretary of Defense would certainly want to avoid the kind of public acrimony that erupted between Rumsfeld and the Military. Although written in fairly bland language, the final report of the Iraq study group makes clear that under Donald Rumsfeld, the relationship between the civilian and military sides of the Department of Defense had become enormously strained.

The U.S. military has a long tradition of strong partnership between the civilian leadership of the Department of Defense and the uniformed services. Both have long benefited from a relationship in which the civilian leadership exercises control with the advantage of fully candid professional advice, and the military serves loyally with the understanding that its advice has been heard and valued. That tradition has frayed, and civil-military relations need to be repaired.²⁹

So, if one were to argue that the Powell Doctrine is too much a product of the debates surrounding the US experience of the Vietnam War, to be the compass

²⁹ James A. Baker, III, and Lee H. Hamilton et al., *The Iraq Study Group Report*, p.52. Full text available at: http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq_study_group_report.pdf.

by which the US Army sets its course in the early decades of the twenty-first century, what individual elements of the Powell Doctrine might continue to be seen as useful guidance? As we have seen throughout this thesis, although some individual elements of the Powell Doctrine might continue to be useful, those elements by themselves should not be thought of as the Powell Doctrine. Because of the influence and the intellectual relationship that we have seen between different elements of the Powell Doctrine, only when all the elements of the Doctrine are taken together can they be considered as part of the Powell Doctrine.

We will first look at those elements of the Powell Doctrine which are most likely to survive without any modification. The first of these is the need for clear public and Congressional support. Although the nature of the threat the United States faces has changed since the end of Vietnam, the same factors which produced the sensitivity to public and Congressional support after Vietnam remain intact. Principally, neither the general public nor Congress has shown itself willing to grant any executive branch of government the kind of long term deference that they were prepared to show in the pre-Vietnam Cold War period. The following quotation is Bob Woodward's description of how difficult Petraeus found giving Congressional testimony:

He said he'd been prepared for the policy disagreements, but he'd been taken aback by the assaults on his character... "Everybody sort of gets used to that," Petraeus said, "because everybody talks about it. But when it's you, when it's your name and your picture that's there, it's definitely

an assault on your character.” He said he didn’t know if he could ever get over it.³⁰

We can see the consequences of not having clear and consistent public support when we look at US policy regarding Iraq between 2006 and 2008. The second Bush Administration was forced to fight a series of political rearguard actions to stave off Congressional attempts to tie further funding of the war to a specific time frame for withdrawal. If Congress and the general public are not prepared to trust the executive to carry out foreign policy unsupervised, then the media is even less willing. As we can see from coverage of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, the American Government is yet to close the credibility gap which first opened in Vietnam. The following quotation, taken from an article in the *Washington Post*, demonstrates, even with the demise of the Bush Administration, large parts of the American media are still demanding that senior Administration officials are called to account for what happened at Abu Ghraib, and also demonstrates the level of cynicism surrounding the official Schlessinger Report into what happened at the prison:

When the photos of detainee abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq surfaced in 2004, U.S. officials portrayed Army Pvt. Charles A. Graner Jr. as the ringleader of a few low-ranking "bad apples"...Now, the recent release of Justice Department memos authorizing the use of harsh interrogation techniques has given Graner and other soldiers new reason

³⁰ *The War Within*. p.391.

to argue that they were made scapegoats for policies approved at high levels.³¹

The second element of the Powell Doctrine that is unlikely to change is the need for clear objectives. The need for clear objectives in clear military planning was not an invention of the Powell Doctrine, but has been seen since Sun Tzu as a prerequisite for successful military planning. The reason for this is a simple matter of logic – if you don't know what your objective is, how do you know what resources to allocate to achieve it? Also, how can you design a successful strategy if you are not clear on what constitutes success?

We will move on now to look at the elements of the Powell Doctrine that may need to be modified or redefined, as part of the process of forming a new doctrine that still maintains elements of the Powell Doctrine.

As has been discussed above, the concept of overwhelming force³² may not be suitable in the context of a counterinsurgency, but the argument given above largely depends on how one defines force. If force is defined as the application of firepower then, for the reasons cited above, overwhelming force is not an appropriate strategy for counterinsurgency. If we define force as the number of troops present in a theatre of operations then the argument against overwhelming force becomes slightly more complex. Certainly, large numbers of troops can be extremely useful in combating the early stages of an

³¹ Josh White, "Abu Ghraib Guards Say Memos Show They Were Scapegoats," *Washington Post*, May 1st 2009. Full text available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/30/AR2009043004077.html>.

³² See Chapter 3.

insurgency, by policing the population by controlling movement and generally by demonstrating the power and resolve of the authorities. This has been seen in counterinsurgency and stabilisation operations across the world. British Major General Tim Cross, who was Jay Garner's Deputy in the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Activities, the first occupation Allied authority in Iraq and a man who had extensive experience in Northern Ireland and Kosovo:

Therefore although the 150,000 [troops] ... the Americans had ... was "fine" for the main military campaigns to deal with this [the conventional war to remove Saddam Hussein] ... if things did not go well afterwards, if there was a need to bring stability to the place [Iraq], the force ratios were dramatically too low.³³

The dramatic effect of this lack of manpower could be seen on the ground in Iraq. Colonel Peter Mansoor, who commanded a brigade during the occupation of Iraq, describes the problem vividly:

Shortage of forces left large swaths of Iraq untouched by a coalition presence and kept open borders through which foreign fighters and terrorists would soon filter. Iraqis poured into the streets to loot and pillage any facility left unguarded, which, given the rapid collapse of the Ba'athist regime, included nearly all government buildings. Not only would the coalition face a lack of civil servants to run a government, but

³³ Tim Cross, interview with the author, February 2011.

the seat of government itself would require massive rebuilding and refurbishment.³⁴

The usefulness of large numbers of troops may dwindle over time as consent for an occupation decreases, and large numbers of troops may in fact prove somewhat of a burden as the native armed forces and government tend to rely more on outside assistance than they do on developing their own institutions and capabilities. Even after the relative success of the US “surge” between 2006 and 2008, there remains a feeling amongst some US observers that the only thing holding Iraq together is the continuing presence of large numbers of American troops. The following is a quotation from John McCreary, a veteran analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA):

The Americans have imposed power sharing on Iraq’s factions, and that should worry us for several reasons. First, it produces what looks like peace but isn’t. Second, in such situations eventually one of the factions seeks to break out of the arrangement. “Thus, power sharing is always a prelude to violence,” usually after the force imposing it withdraws.³⁵

So the requirements for overwhelming force may not be as irrelevant as it looks on first inspection. The usefulness of overwhelming force in an environment such as Iraq or Afghanistan depends on the first instance on how we go about defining force, and over what kind of timescale we plan on

³⁴ Colonel Peter R. Mansoor, *Baghdad at Sunrise: A Brigade Commander’s War in Iraq* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008). p.108.

³⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the Untold Story of the American Surge in Iraq, 2006-2008*, (Allen Lane: London, 2009). p.317.

keeping that force in place. And how much risk we wish to take in withdrawing that force. As outlined in Chapter Three, this continuing requirement for overwhelming force is likely to have an impact on the need for public and congressional support and on the need to set clear objectives.

The Powell Doctrine's insistence that force should only be used in the "vital national interest"³⁶ may also need to be modified. Specifically, the problem is with the use of the word "vital". The problem with restricting the use of force to national interests that are "vital" is that vital-ness is not a fixed concept. For instance, a strong argument could be made that the US had a national interest in preventing Afghanistan from being used as a base for international terrorist organizations as early as the first World Trade Center bombings in 1993.

Indeed the following quotation is an excerpt from a diplomatic cable sent by the State Department's Special Representative to Afghanistan in October 1988:

"There is a growing frustration, bordering on hostility, among Afghans across the ideological spectrum and from abroad range of backgrounds, towards the government of Pakistan and toward the U.S."³⁷ But it took until the Embassy bombings of 1998 for the US to mount any kind of military action:

"The Taliban's hosting of Al Qaeda's leadership gradually became the Clinton Administration's overriding agenda item with Afghanistan...Some observers assert that the Administration missed several other opportunities to strike him, including following a purported sighting of him by an unarmed Predator drone at his Karnak Farms camp

³⁶ See Chapter 2.

³⁷ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars. The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (Penguin: London, 2004). p.183.

in Afghanistan in mid-2000. Clinton Administration officials say they did not try to oust the Taliban militarily because domestic and international support for doing so was lacking³⁸.

It took until September 11th 2001 for the US to decide that its interests in Afghanistan were vital enough to warrant large scale sustained military action. The point to be noted is that the level of American interest in Afghanistan varied markedly over a relatively short space of time. From concern over growing anti-Americanism in 1988, to cruise missile strikes in 1998, and regime change in 2001. If the Clinton Administration had decided that it had an interest worth pursuing militarily in Afghanistan in 1993, it could have pursued this interest at a far lower cost by arming one of the rival factions in Afghanistan in return for a commitment not to allow Afghanistan to become a haven for anti-American groups,³⁹ rather than waiting until the US interest in Afghanistan had become “vital” and so acute that the only viable military option was a major involvement of US forces to tip the balance of the Afghan civil war, followed by an indefinite commitment to help build a modern Afghan state.

We will now move on to look at those elements of the Powell Doctrine that are of least use in the context that US forces now find themselves operating in.

³⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy* (Congressional Research Service, 2009), p. 11. Full text available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>.

³⁹ For an in depth discussion of the various factions competing for power in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, see *Taliban*, chapters 1-5.

The element of the Powell Doctrine most likely to be scrapped is the need for a clear “exit strategy.” This element of the Powell Doctrine simply places too great a burden on the advocates of military intervention. It effectively asks them to pre-ordain the future. If the test of the need for a clear “exit strategy” had been strictly adhered to, the US would not have committed itself to either Iraq or Afghanistan. Predictable and clear exit strategies only exist in a situation where the US finds itself fighting in other conventional armed forces. In this instance the “exit strategy” is obvious: defeat the enemy on the battlefield and destroy their ability to engage you in the future. In less conventional circumstances, a pre-planned “exit strategy” is more or less impossible to devise. For instance one may have the clear objective of building an Iraqi or an Afghan state that has the capability to defend its own borders and maintain itself against insurrection, but one cannot set a clear timeline in which this will be achieved, because one cannot guarantee that the Afghans or the Iraqis will work to the timetable. As an official US Government report understatedly puts it, US efforts in Afghanistan have been hampered by “the effects of the years of war, the low literacy rate of the population, the difficult terrain and geography, and the relative lack of trained government workers.”⁴⁰ This list of problems ignores tension between the various ethnic groups that make up Afghanistan, and the lack of any history of strong central government. As Zalmay Khalilzad and Daniel Byman put it,

Once the Soviet-backed regime fell, war, anarchy, and fragmentation followed. The conflict became increasingly one of ethnic and sectarian

⁴⁰ *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*. p.14.

groups, particularly Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and the Shi'a Hazaras. Without the glue of the common enemy, the opposition turned their guns on one another. During the battle for Kabul from 1992 to 1996, every major group had both allied with and fought against every other major group at one time or another. In many other parts of the country, warlords ruled⁴¹.

The other great problem with setting an “exit strategy” in the context of an insurgency is that because the insurgent always has the possibility of withdrawing back into the civilian population, there is always time and space for the insurgent to become more innovative. In other words, unlike the conventional opponent, the insurgent always has the possibility of retreating and waiting for a more opportune moment. “But anyone still alive to fight the Americans in Iraq in 2007 had learned a lot in the preceding years. In the spring and summer the American surge was met with a counteroffensive involving new tactics and more lethal weapons”⁴².

Instead of insisting on an “exit strategy,” a doctrine that drew on elements of the Powell Doctrine could instead focus more heavily on defining what the US’s objective is in the first place, and making sure that that objective is militarily achievable. So a doctrine that drew on elements of the Powell Doctrine would be deeply suspicious of the rhetoric of George W. Bush with its emphasis on the spread of democracy and the promotion of liberal values

⁴¹ Zalmay Khalilzad and Daniel Byman, “Afghanistan: The Consolidation of a Rogue State”, *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2000, p.3. Full text at <http://www.twq.com/winter00/231Byman.pdf>. Khalilzad later became the US Ambassador to Afghanistan under the Bush Administration.

⁴² *The Gamble*. p.171.

around the world: “So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁴³

As laudable as this might be as an objective, the instilling of democratic values is not something that the US Military can achieve. Rather, it would insist on minimal objectives, consistent with the US national interest, such as the establishment of a viable state that can secure its borders and its population. This point was as good as acknowledged by Bush’s Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice: “Rice asked if it were possible to scale back the goals. Suppose, she said, that the U.S. objective was simply to try to enforce a balance of power inside Iraq, to stabilize the existing and emerging divisions of political power.”⁴⁴ There is some evidence from the US experience in Iraq that this is exactly the position the US Military is moving towards. Thomas Ricks points out that, in his 2008 Congressional testimony, General Petraeus was less than enthusiastic about the chances of Iraq becoming a Jeffersonian democracy.

On top of that, he [General Petraeus] was telling Republicans that the light at the end of the tunnel wouldn’t be the bright beacon of democracy that the Bush Administration originally envisioned as the payoff for invading Iraq. Reflecting the lowered goals of the U.S. effort in Iraq, Petraeus pointedly called himself a “minimalist.”⁴⁵

⁴³ George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address, January 20th 2005. Full text available at <http://www.bartelby.com/124/pres67.html>.

⁴⁴ *The War Within*. Pp.184-185.

⁴⁵ *The Gamble*. p.287.

If elements of the Powell Doctrine are going to find renewed relevance in some form of new politico-military doctrine, who is likely to write this doctrine? As we have already seen from the above discussion, the level of civilian deference to military opinion was severely reduced under the Administration of George W. Bush and it was the civilian side of the defence establishment that increasingly came to decide policy and priorities. So it will not be surprising if future Presidents, in search of more flexibility than the Powell Doctrine is prepared to grant, should push the Military towards rethinking its relationship with the Powell Doctrine.

We can also see evidence that the Military itself has started to push beyond the Powell Doctrine. There seems to be an increasing recognition that whatever the strengths of the Powell Doctrine in dealing with the threats of the Cold War, it is not completely applicable to the situations the United States now finds itself in. For example, it is the Military arguing against a timetabled exit from either Iraq or Afghanistan, against civilian insistence on pursuing such a strategy. Over the next few years we may well find ourselves in the rather perverse situation of the Military arguing against the doctrine born in its own ranks when it is repeated back to them by civilians. The following quotation is taken from a speech delivered by Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV):

And yet we hear little about the aftermath of war in Iraq. In the absence of plans, speculation abroad is rife. Will we seize Iraq's oil fields, becoming an occupying power which controls the price and supply of

that nation's oil for the foreseeable future? To whom do we propose to hand the reigns of power after Saddam Hussein?⁴⁶

One could not ask for a more succinct plea for the Iraq War to have a clear objective, and this speech is being delivered not by anybody with any recent military experience but by a veteran Senator.

The third and final scenario we will look at is the re-emergence of the Powell Doctrine in an unmodified form. This seems to be the least likely scenario we will deal with as it would require a major change not only in terms of specific policy but in terms of the way the United States conceives of its security interests in light of the events of 9/11. In order for this scenario to come to pass, the US Military would have to consider issues of national security that go far beyond the realms of traditional military doctrine. However, as we have seen in our study of the Powell Doctrine, the US Military has not been afraid of doing this. However, such activism is predicated upon the US Military being able to learn a single and widely accepted version of the “lessons” of Iraq and Afghanistan. As we have seen throughout this thesis, Colin Powell was only lending his prestige and giving public voice to a set of ideas and an intellectual climate which existed long before the publication of his 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article.

In this scenario, the US Military would become exasperated beyond the point of endurance with the long, open-ended commitment of troops to the kind of

⁴⁶ US Senator Robert Byrd, Senate Floor Speech: “We Stand Passively Mute,” Wednesday, February 12th 2003. Full text available at: <http://www.prorev.com/byrdtalk.htm>.

counter-insurgencies we see today in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ironically, this attitude was perfectly summed up by George W. Bush, the then candidate, in a speech delivered in 1999 to the US Military Academy, the Citadel, in South Carolina: “But our military requires more than good treatment. It needs the rallying point of a defining mission. And that mission is to deter wars – and win wars when deterrence fails. Sending our military on vague, aimless and endless deployments is the swift solvent of morale.”⁴⁷

In this scenario we would see a renewed call for the Military to only be committed in situations where the US objective was military victory in the classical sense, that is to say, the destruction of an enemy’s armed forces or their will to use them. In this context, the Powell Doctrine has shown itself, particularly by its application in the first Gulf War⁴⁸, to be an excellent means of ensuring quick, decisive conventional military victory, and with the US continuing to enjoy a massive lead in terms of the technology it can bring to bear on the battlefield and the sheer size, professionalism and enormous financial resources that its Armed Forces enjoys, the United States is well placed to dominate any conventional battlefield, well into the twentieth-first century.⁴⁹

This scenario would require the US to redefine its view of terrorism. In essence, such a redefinition would involve the reclassification of terrorism

⁴⁷ George W. Bush, “A Period of Consequences,” The Citadel, South Carolina, Thursday, September 23rd, 1999. Full text available at: http://www.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁹ See the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook 2007. In dollars adjusted for purchasing power, the US spent \$528.7 billion compared to China and Russia, who spent \$188.2 and \$82.8 billion respectively. See <http://yearbook2007.sipri.org/files/YB0708.pdf>.

from a national security threat that could be dealt with in terms of military force, as has been the policy under the second Bush Administration, to a problem of law enforcement to be dealt with by civilian investigative agencies such as the FBI. Such a redefinition of the problem is certainly plausible. Before 9/11, the Clinton Administration very much saw terrorism as a law enforcement problem rather than as a threat to national security. This approach was described pejoratively but accurately by former Vice President Dick Cheney in a 2009 speech to the American Enterprise Institute: “The first attack on the World Trade Center was treated as a law enforcement problem, with everything handled after the fact – crime scene, arrests, indictments, convictions, prison sentences, case closed.”⁵⁰

This scenario would also require the emergence of a credible conventional threat to the United States. In the absence of such a threat, it would seem to be politically implausible for the US Military to continue to receive its current level of funding whilst primarily focusing on a threat that does not yet exist. Certainly, the re-emergence of a conventional competitor to the United States is not beyond the realms of possibility. Both the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China continue to possess large conventional forces and, given the right economic circumstances, could begin to narrow the gap with the United States in terms of research and development.

⁵⁰ Transcript of Former Vice President Dick Cheney's Speech on Interrogation, Delivered to American Enterprise Institute, May 21st 2009. Full text available at: http://usconservatives.about.com/od/capitalpunishment/a/Cheney_AEI_Speech.htm.

However, there are a number of reasons to doubt the plausibility of this scenario.

First, in the current context, it is hard to see the kind of mass public reaction that was seen in response to US policy in Vietnam being repeated towards US policy in the war on terror. This is because the United States now operates an all-volunteer Armed Forces, whereas during Vietnam the US Armed Forces met its manpower requirements by means of a draft by which, in theory at least, every US male between the ages of 19 and 25 had an equal chance of being drafted. This gave a vast swath of the population a direct stake in what US policy towards Vietnam ought to have been. The draft acted as a kind of Sword of Damocles, which meant that at any time for a six-year period any male could become directly involved in a war. Not only did this serve to energise the people directly affected but also, and for obvious reasons, it served to energise the family and friends of those people. In the context of an all-volunteer army, the individual citizen is as involved in national defence as he or she chooses to be. In a sense, the biggest act of protest against US policy has been falling rates of recruitment rather than the kind of massive protest that characterized the Vietnam era.

Politicians are unlikely to respond as forcefully to public pressure when it is expressed in such a passive fashion. Also, it is possible to argue that drop-offs in recruitment are not politically motivated or a form of protest. Not only does the voluntary army make a contribution to the national defence optional, it also serves to pass on apathy to the relatives of those who have chosen not to serve.

Finally, the voluntary system means that the vast majority of the American public has no experience of what military life is actually like beyond the mediated experience of reading a newspaper or watching television news. This means that, although the public may be sympathetic towards the troops and the sacrifices they make, they have little to no understanding of what these sacrifices mean in a practical sense, and therefore little interest or understanding in military and defence affairs.

Second, a reversion to simply dealing with the kind of conventional threats that the Powell Doctrine has proven so well suited towards leaves unanswered the very important question of how the US actually wants to deal with unstable or failed states around the world. Even if we view the phenomenon of global terrorism through the prism of law enforcement, it cannot be ignored that failed states such as Afghanistan and Somalia represent the perfect training ground for the next generation of terrorists. The kind of chaos and grinding poverty creates its own set of problems independent of terrorism, particularly involvement in the international narcotics trade, piracy and general lawlessness that threatens to spill over borders.

The other major danger to any reversion towards an unadulterated version of the Powell Doctrine is that, if the conventional Military is seen as unwilling or unable to deal with security considerations beyond traditional conventional warfare, governments will seek solutions outside of the traditional Military and traditional foreign policymaking structures. As we have already seen in our case study of US policy towards Nicaragua, when unable to meet the criteria

set down by the Powell Doctrine, past US Administrations have resorted to bypassing the Military altogether.

In the context of the so-called War on Terror, this kind of covert policymaking could be seen in a massive proliferation of private security companies, otherwise known as mercenaries. Companies such as Blackwater,⁵¹ Dyncorp and Triple Canopy have already stepped into the breach in Afghanistan and Iraq to provide a wide array of security and even combat services to the United States in order to allow the more parsimonious use of conventional military forces⁵². Were the United States to base its defence policy in the future on a strict interpretation of the Powell Doctrine, it is reasonable to expect that these companies would move even more aggressively to take on missions that the Powell Doctrine would not be prepared to contemplate.

If we accept that the problems of such states cannot be confined within the borders and are in fact likely to have massive ramifications, then the rational response⁵² is to help these countries set up viable states that can control their territory and enforce a minimum standard of law and order. Such assistance requires a military element to it, and by definition this means that Militaries in the twenty-first century cannot be focused solely on conventional threats.

Therefore, if the US Armed Forces wished to maintain their relevance regardless of how we view the threat of terrorism, they are going to have to

⁵¹ See Jeremy Scahill, *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*, updated ed., (Serpent's Tail: London, 2008). Originally published 2007.

⁵² In terms of demonstrating just how dependent the US military has become on civilian security contractors, see *US Quadrennial Defense Review*, 2006. p.75. Full text available at: <http://www.comw.org/qdr/qdr2006.pdf>.

have the capability to intervene in failed or failing states and the ability as part of an overall international or governmental effort to restore a functioning state.

Overall, the prognosis for the Powell Doctrine surviving completely intact is bleak. The Powell Doctrine is simply too closely tied to the US experience in Vietnam; not only are those who served in Vietnam now a distinct minority within both civilian and military policy making circles, but also the circumstances the US finds itself in are as different from one another as they are similar to the situation the Officers who created the intellectual climate that led to the Powell Doctrine perceived as existing in Vietnam. However, this is not the same thing as saying that the Powell Doctrine does not hold within it some important lessons for the future. In particular, the emphasis on overwhelming force,⁵³ perhaps defined more in terms of numbers than in kinetic force, will undoubtedly remain important as it has since the writings of Sun Tzu. Likewise, the need for clear objectives⁵⁴, the need for the Military to understand what it is trying to do, and for those objectives to be militarily achievable will be needed in whatever context US forces find themselves fighting. In particular, in situations other than conventional warfare it will probably become increasingly important for military authorities to help civilian leaders define what are and are not militarily achievable objectives. The need for an exit strategy, as has been pointed out earlier in this thesis and earlier in this chapter, is unlikely to survive in situations like Iraq and Afghanistan, where the military objective is not to defeat a conventional enemy but to provide a benign security environment under which states can be built. It is

⁵³ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 5.

simply too difficult to predefine an exit strategy. Likewise, the need for overwhelming public and Congressional support⁵⁵ is likely to remain less salient than it was in the immediate aftermath of Vietnam, simply because, for the vast majority of American citizens, war has become a spectator sport in which they can be as involved or uninvolved as they wish. Finally, the need for force only to be used in the “vital national interest” is very unlikely to be observed in the future. First, because the issue of “vital-ness”⁵⁶ is such a subjective and fluid notion, and second, because we have seen, particularly in the case of Afghanistan, an area that was considered peripheral to US interests can suddenly and unexpectedly move to the forefront of the nation’s foreign policy concerns. So, the most likely scenario for the future is that elements of the Powell Doctrine will survive and continue to be important, but the Powell Doctrine, as such, as an integrated, coherent body of thought, is not likely to stage a comeback at any point in the near future.

What we have laid out in this conclusion are three plausible scenarios for the future of the Powell Doctrine. All of them have elements to them that suggest they could be the way of the future and all of them have problems which affect their practicality. The most likely scenario, however, would be some kind of new doctrine that incorporates elements of the Powell Doctrine, as laid out above. The only thing that can be said with any degree of certainty is that the Powell Doctrine will continue to be influential in two never-ending debates. The first debate is, what is the proper balance of power between the Military and its civilian masters in the context of a democracy? The second is what

⁵⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2.

should be the foreign policy of the world's only superpower, and what limits does that super power operate under?

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