



## Internationalism of the Post-Cold War World: Clinton's Foreign Policy for the Global Age

Alida Tomja

Dr., Aleksandër Moisiu University,  
Durrës, Albania

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### Abstract

*The end of the Cold War prompted a critical reassessment of America's global role, particularly during the post-Cold War era led by the Clinton administration. Faced with a shifting geopolitical landscape, President Bill Clinton addressed challenges and opportunities, seeking to define America's role in this transformed international arena. As the bipolar structure of the Cold War dissolved, geo-economics took precedence over geopolitics. The 'end of history' narrative signaled a departure from traditional boundaries, and Clinton grappled with the choice of maintaining leadership through global engagement and internationalism. This study analyzes Clinton's foreign policy throughout his presidency, emphasizing key issues like terrorism and the Balkans. It explores how perceptions of American decline, both economically and militarily, influenced internationalist policies. Additionally, it delves into the impact of conceptual frameworks such as 'democratic peace,' 'unipolar moment,' and 'soft power' on Clinton's decisions. Drawing on primary sources and influential literature, the research suggests that Clinton's foreign policy represented a strategic blend of internationalism and pragmatism, addressing the complexities of the post-Cold War world. To conclude, this research contributes to understanding how the end of the Cold War reshaped the global geopolitical landscape and explores the ideological underpinnings guiding the United States in the post-Cold War international arena.*

**Keywords:** Internationalism, Geopolitics, Foreign Policy, Global engagement

### 1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War in the late 20th century marked a seismic shift in global geopolitics, triggering a reevaluation of America's role in international affairs. This era, epitomized by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, pushed the United States into uncharted territory, demanding a recalibration of its foreign policy strategies. The ensuing post-Cold War period witnessed an intricate interplay of challenges and opportunities, and the American response, spearheaded notably during the Clinton administration, set the stage for a new era of international relations.

This transformative epoch unfolded against a backdrop of multifaceted dynamics. The dissolution of the Cold War's bipolar structure led to contemplations about the absence of a defined international order. Amidst these concerns, the prevailing narrative of liberalization, often epitomized as the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992), transcended the conventional geopolitical and ideological realms that defined the preceding era. A noticeable shift emerged in the perception that geo-economics was increasingly shaping geopolitics, in stark contrast to the Cold War period, where geopolitics dictated geo-economics (Cohen, 1991). The 1990s witnessed the rise of new agendas addressing what the Clinton administration termed 'borderless threats' encompassing environmental issues, the evolution of international terrorism, and notably, the vivid manifestation of international disintegration in the Balkans.

The elation that ensued after the Cold War victory intersected with anxieties about global disorder and the United States' capability to address this vacuum. As the world moved towards both integration and disintegration, questions

arose about the optimal trajectory for America. Should it persist in its leadership role, and was global engagement coupled with an internationalist approach the most prudent path? In the mid-1980s, the United States unequivocally assumed the mantle of a debtor nation. However, this relative descent in the early 1980s was tempered by strides in propagating liberal democracy, not only in former communist bastions.

Moreover, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, America's military dominance became unmistakable. Even before the USSR's formal disintegration, analysts deliberated on the 'unipolar moment,' (Krauthammer, 1990-91). While others, like Joseph Nye, emphasized the importance of 'soft power' and the capacity for cooperation in international relations. Nye contended that while America was affluent, its actions fell short (Nye, 2004). His views resonated within the Clinton administration, where there was a prevailing sentiment that the United States might not be equipped to sustain global leadership (Nye 1991: 159). Perceptions of American decline weren't merely tethered to substantial deficits but also to historical setbacks and other international challenges that cast shadows on American competitiveness.

The spectrum of options proposed in the early 1990s ranged from robust internationalism to a retreat into isolationism (Widmaier, 2007). The predominant concern in elite discourse was the specter of renewed isolationism. With the Soviet threat extinguished, some speculated that America might turn inward. It became apparent that the United States should not respond to the Cold War victory by quietly withdrawing (Steel 1995:85) They needed to secure victory in the battle for internationalism, which demanded the will and energy to invest resources and assume risks, even when America itself wasn't directly imperiled. In these circumstances, isolationism was widely regarded as a pejorative term.

## **2. Main Objectives and the Significance of the Study**

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of American internationalism in the post-Cold War era, with a specific emphasis on the foreign policy initiatives led by President Bill Clinton. By analyzing key events and policy choices, the research seeks to shed light on how the United States strategically addressed the challenges and opportunities that arose during this transformative period. The study addresses the central question of how the conclusion of the Cold War reshaped the global geopolitical landscape, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the United States. Central to the investigation is an exploration of the defining features of President Clinton's foreign policy during his second term. A particular focus is placed on key issues, including terrorism and the Balkans. The research aims to unravel the complexities of how these specific challenges were approached and managed within the broader framework of Clinton's internationalist strategy.

Moreover, the study examines the influence of perceptions regarding American decline, encompassing both economic and military dimensions, on the formulation and execution of Clinton's internationalist policies. It seeks to uncover the extent to which these perceptions shaped the administration's approach to global engagement. In addition, the research explores the impact of conceptual frameworks such as 'democratic peace,' 'unipolar moment,' and 'soft power' on the foreign policy decisions of the Clinton administration. By analyzing the incorporation of these concepts, the study aims to provide insights into the ideological underpinnings that guided the United States in the post-Cold War international field.

## **3. Literature Review & Methodology**

To construct a comprehensive understanding, a wide array of primary sources and influential literature are synthesized. President Bill Clinton's firsthand account, presented in "Remarks on International Security Issues at George Washington University" (1996), provides valuable insights into the administration's strategic considerations. Furthermore, Clinton's memoir, "My Life" (2005), serves as a personal narrative that enriches our comprehension of the decision-making processes and challenges faced during his presidency. Warren Christopher's "Overview of the FY 1996 International Affairs Budget" (1995) contributes a governmental perspective, shedding light on the fiscal dimensions and resource allocations that shaped Clinton's foreign policy. Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s exploration, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy" (2004), adds a theoretical underpinning, exploring the concept of soft power and its implications for U.S. diplomatic strategies. Additionally, Stephen M. Walt's article, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy" (2000), offers a critical analysis, presenting both commendations and critiques of Clinton's international approach. Ryan C. Hendrickson's "The Clinton Wars: The Constitution, Congress, and War Powers" (2002) delves into the constitutional and legislative aspects, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and debates surrounding war powers during the Clinton presidency.

This study employs a comprehensive research methodology that relies on the analysis of secondary data,

extensive literature review, scrutiny of official press statements, and surveys capturing the American public opinion during the post-Cold War era. The methodology encompasses a meticulous examination of scholarly works, government documents, and public addresses by President Bill Clinton and its administration.

#### **4. Clinton's Foreign Policy Strategy**

In the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton directed significant attention towards domestic issues, critiquing his predecessor, George H.W. Bush, for an undue emphasis on foreign policy. However, upon assuming office, Clinton perceived the need to redefine Bush's New World Order. His objective was to formulate a vision that harmonized a commitment to geo-economics with a discernible moral purpose, laying the groundwork for potential military or diplomatic engagements.

The introduction of Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff's concept of 'secure multilateralism' marked a strategic shift, advocating for a case-by-case decision-making approach to curtail U.S. engagement (Cited in Clark, 1994). Early in Clinton's presidency, specific criteria for engagement were established, focusing on the internal consequences of regional conflicts, alliance obligations, and clear American economic interests. Concurrently, the term 'democratic expansion,' as articulated by National Security Adviser Tony Lake in 1993, emerged as a foundational objective in Clinton's foreign policy agenda, aligning the U.S. with the principles of economic globalization (U.S. Department of State Archive 1993-2001).

In the post-Cold War era, the Clinton administration exhibited a nuanced demeanor, blending newfound confidence with cautious considerations about the United States' role in the Western hemisphere. Doubts surrounding the viability of 'secure humanitarianism' surfaced notably following events in Somalia. By 1995, Clinton encountered the challenge of coexisting with a Republican Congress that exhibited skepticism towards idealistic altruism in foreign policy. A pivotal directive in May 1994 emphasized the United States' multifaceted contributions, endorsing support for UN operations only under conditions of acceptable risks and clear objectives (The White House, 1994).

Clinton's second term witnessed a thematic pivot towards the globalization of market democracy, encapsulated within the conceptual framework of a 'family of nations.' States designated as "charlatan" or "states of concern," comprising Iraq, Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and Libya, found themselves excluded from this envisioned community (Dumbrell, 2002). The post-Cold War concept of Democratic Peace sought to expand and fortify market democracy by systematically isolating these states.

During the tenure of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright from 1997-2001, a prevailing advocacy for the United States as an 'indispensable nation' (Albright, 1998) took shape. Albright characterized the late twentieth century as the 'global age,' marked by escalating interdependence, overlapping national interests, and multifaceted challenges encompassing terrorism and disease. While cognizant of inherent limitations, Albright posited that the United States could exercise leadership in steering global progress towards market democracy.

#### **5. Clinton's First Term: Global Challenges through an Internationalist Perspective**

President Bill Clinton's initial term, spanning from 1993 to 1996, witnessed significant developments in U.S. foreign policy, shaped by a dynamic post-Cold War landscape and marked by strategic recalibrations. This period was characterized by a multifaceted approach to international affairs, reflecting both successes and challenges.

In the realm of policymaking, Clinton responded to the post-Cold War decentralization process by introducing bureaucratic changes aimed at recognizing the growing prominence of the international economic agenda. The establishment of the National Economic Council (NEC), chaired by figures such as Robert Rubin and Laura Tyson, represented a pivotal innovation. Clinton proudly hailed the NEC as the "most important innovation in the White House decision-making process for decades" (Clinton 2005: 636).

Initially, Clinton's foreign policy faced efficiency challenges, particularly evident in the Balkans before 1995 (Szandzik, 2023) However, around 1995, the administration displayed a clearer and more effective focus on foreign policy, a trajectory that continued into the second term. Despite encountered difficulties, key figures in Clinton's administration, including Warren Christopher and Tony Lake in the first term, and Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, and Defense Secretary William Cohen in the second term, formed a cohesive team, minimizing public disagreements that had marred previous administrations. The Republican-controlled Congress, particularly post-1994, asserted its position on Bosnia, adding complexity to Clinton's foreign policy challenges.

The early foreign policy agenda inherited confrontational issues from the preceding Bush years. Key priorities

included the ratification of NAFTA in 1993, a significant victory for the president, setting the stage for his commitment to bilateral and multilateral free trade policies. The administration expanded its focus to emerging markets in China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, exemplifying a prioritization of economic interests over concerns about human rights violations in China.

The approach toward Russia during this period encompassed contradictory elements, from acknowledging Boris Yeltsin as a credible leader to a commitment to Russian and Eastern European democratization. Simultaneously, efforts were made to control and dismantle nuclear weapons in the former USSR, alongside the strategic goal of marginalizing Russia as a future international security actor (Golts, & Putnam 2004). The Clinton administration played a central role in the rapid transformation of the Russian economy into a market economy, albeit complicated by the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe.

Regarding military strategy post-Cold War, Clinton's administration, following the trajectory set by President Bush, announced a commitment in 1993 to reduce defense spending as a percentage of GDP by 1998. This strategy revolved around the capacity to engage in two major regional conflicts simultaneously.

Clinton's initial response to the Bosnian conflict paralleled the cautious approach of the Bush administration, reluctant to directly intervene in what was considered a 'European situation' (Hendrickson 2002: 73). However, the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 prompted a diplomatic offensive led by Richard Holbrooke, resulting in the Dayton Agreement.

The Somalia disaster and minimal international attention to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 cast shadows on Clinton's foreign policy. Military interventions occurred in Iraq as part of the 'keeping Saddam in his box' policy and the 'dual containment' of Iraq and Iran. Notably, Haiti witnessed a bloodless invasion in 1994. Clinton also engaged in Northern Ireland, addressed North Korea's nuclear development, and made progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during his first term.

Summing up Clinton's initial term, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, (1995: 8) reflected on the potential consequences without American leadership, highlighting the pivotal role the U.S. played in preventing scenarios such as nuclear proliferation, the rise of protectionism, and the destabilization of regions like Haiti and Kuwait. Notably, Christopher's summary, while reasonable, omitted challenges in Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda from his observation.

## **6. Clinton's Second Term Diplomacy and International Dynamics**

During his second term, President Clinton underwent a notable transformation in foreign policy, particularly evident in the reevaluation of approaches toward Bosnia in 1995. By this time, the decline of American power as a guiding philosophy had waned, replaced by a White House replete with confidence in America's capacity to assert global leadership. Concurrently, the Republican-majority Congress exerted influence, pushing for unilateralist foreign policy options. This term witnessed substantial presidential concessions to Congress and international setbacks, notably the inability to prevent India and Pakistan from acquiring nuclear capabilities.

The security agenda of Clinton's second term encompassed diverse geopolitical challenges, including Taiwan, Iraq, international terrorism, and the Balkans. The escalating prominence of the international terrorist threat prompted a shift in bureaucratic priorities. President Clinton, in August 1996, characterized international terrorism as an indiscriminate force that transcends borders (Clinton 2005: 719). High-profile attacks on U.S. embassies in East Africa and the 2000 assault on the USS Cole sustained the urgency of this issue. The 9/11 Commission's assessment (2004: 340), acknowledging the administration's recognition of the threat but critiquing insufficient efforts against first- or second-tier enemies, found resonance.

In March 1999, NATO forces, predominantly led by the United States, initiated a seventy-eight-day bombing campaign against Serbia. Termed the first humanitarian war by Clinton (DiPrizio 2002: 130), this intervention aimed to compel Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet Agreement, defining conditions for halting violence against Kosovo Albanians. The conflict, characterized by Clinton as the first war won solely through air power, unfolded outside the United Nations framework, anticipating a likely Russian veto in the Security Council. The administration's unilateralist stance further manifested in opposition to U.S. involvement in the International Criminal Court, a position reversed on Clinton's final day in office. Pressures from Republicans and a reevaluation of U.S. military readiness contributed to heightened defense spending, notably emphasizing the revitalization of anti-missile defense—an issue closely aligned with Republican priorities originating from President Reagan's Strategic Missile Defense program.

In his concluding year, Clinton fervently pursued a Middle East peace deal rooted in the 1998 accords between Israel and Palestine. Despite significant concessions from both sides, addressing issues such as Israeli settlements and

the status of East Jerusalem, unresolved matters, notably the plight of Palestinian refugees, persisted (Ross, 2004). The peace process, while demonstrating goodwill, ultimately underscored the enduring challenges rooted in decades of mistrust and the unwillingness of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to depart from entrenched positions. Clinton's final endeavors confirmed that the conditions for regional peace remained elusive.

It is worth noting that in the post-Cold War era, the concept of public opinion was often perceived as closely linked to domestic politics (Bacevich, 1996), characterized by a neo-isolationist trend known as 'new populism'. In the 1990s, there was a noticeable wane in public preference for foreign policy matters, coupled with diminishing enthusiasm for established international institutions like the UN and NATO. Despite these trends, President Clinton successfully guided the United States along an internationalist trajectory. In essence, even beyond the Cold War, Clinton's foreign policy continued to employ military force, grounded in a blend of ideals and interests. His overarching objective was to navigate a foreign policy balancing expansive internationalism with the contentious climate of the 1990s, aspiring towards a concept of low-cost hegemony, as articulated by Walt (2000: 78).

## 7. Conclusions

Conclusively, the examination of President Clinton's foreign policy reveals several key insights:

- In the initial phase of his first term, Clinton confronted the imperative of crafting a comprehensive foreign policy strategy tailored to the post-Cold War milieu.
- Negotiating the spectrum of post-Cold War possibilities, from expansionism to isolationism, Clinton adeptly steered the U.S. towards an internationalist stance. This transformative shift prioritized the international economic agenda, prompting the establishment of the National Economic Council and the elevation of economic foreign policy to a status equivalent to traditional diplomatic considerations.
- Despite strides in economic dimensions, the Clinton administration grappled with significant challenges in addressing humanitarian crises, notably exemplified by the minimal attention given to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda - recognized later by President Clinton as a profound lapse in humanitarian response.
- The Bosnian conflict initially witnessed a reluctance to directly intervene, framed as a "European situation." However, the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 prompted a diplomatic offensive, ultimately resulting in the Dayton Agreement.
- The second term brought forth pivotal developments, including the Senate's ratification of NATO expansion to Eastern Europe in 1997 and the initiation of a NATO-led bombing campaign against Serbia in March 1999.

In essence:

- The first term (1993-1996) was characterized by a focus on free trade agendas and selective international engagement.
- Conversely, the second term (1996-2001) marked a discernible shift towards unilateralism and a more militarized approach.

President Clinton grappled with the formidable challenge of aligning expansive internationalism with the evolving global landscape of the 1990s. The pursuit of "low-cost hegemony" encapsulated his overarching objective in navigating the complexities of post-Cold War foreign policy.

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