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A Republic in Doctrine: Reviewing the Evolution of U.S. Grand Strategy

A book Review of "From Containment to Americanism"

Mahdi Niafar[1*], Helia Jalalirad[2]

[1] Bachelors of Finance, Department of Money and Banking, Poznan University of Economics and Business.

[2] English Language Editor and free Researcher of English Literature.

*** Correspondence:** Mahdi Niafar

Contact: elyasaghili@gmail.com

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From Containment to Americanism is an ambitious monograph that traces the evolution of U.S. national security strategy from the Truman administration through the Trump era. The authors analyze each president's doctrine in turn, arguing that U.S. strategy has generally exhibited continuity (each new doctrine builds on its predecessors) until a sharp break under President Trump. Drawing on library research and expert interviews, Aghili Dehnavi and Jamal explore both the power-political and ideological dimensions of American strategy. A recent review highlights their methodology: "analytic descriptive studies, interviews with experts, and extensive library research" to probe how U.S. policies "have evolved over decades, shaped by both internal ideologies and external pressures". In particular, the authors introduce the notion of "Americanism" as an ideological framework – one rooted in founding documents like the Declaration of Independence and Constitution – that has underpinned U.S. expansion abroad. They argue that Americanism justifies promoting democracy and freedom

globally, even while neglecting domestic challenges. By contrast, earlier chapters show how Cold War doctrines were framed in terms of ideology ("imperialism" vs. "communism") as well as power politics. Overall, the book offers a comprehensive narrative of U.S. security policies, framed through the lens of grand strategy, blending historical description with theoretical reflection.

Post-WWII Beginnings: Truman and Containment

The book begins by sitting Truman's policy as a turning point. World War II left the United States and the Soviet Union as rival superpowers, and America assumed a **global** security role. Truman's **1947 Doctrine** – often identified with containment – rested on the premise that the U.S. must "prevent the expansion" of Soviet influence beyond its post-1945 borders. Indeed, the authors note that Truman's strategy was founded on confrontation between "the two opposing ideologies of imperialism and communism", reflecting the postwar division of the world. (They cite Truman's funding of Greece and Turkey as an initial act of containment.) This new U.S. superpower posture, backed by nuclear and conventional strength, made deterrence a permanent feature of American policy. As one blunt summary notes, after 1947 "all [subsequent] U.S. presidents have … doctrines… derived from Truman's doctrine of deterrence and global politics". In other words, the authors argue that the **core goal** – defending U.S. interests worldwide, particularly against Soviet expansion – remained stable throughout the Cold War; this (sort of) policy was player oriented with a focus on specific actors like Iran.

Eisenhower (1953–1961) is treated as a pragmatic extension of containment. As a former general, he built a massive military establishment and created the Eisenhower Doctrine for the Middle East. The book emphasizes that Ike's administration affirmed U.S. leadership of the "capitalist world" and relied on nuclear deterrence, even while advocating limited conventional engagements (e.g. quietly supporting allies). This period also saw the first peacetime burden-sharing (NATO's defense of Europe). However, consistent with the continuity thesis, Eisenhower's policy simply "strengthened" Truman's global presence rather than overturning it.

Cold War Confrontations: Kennedy through Carter

In the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations intensified active competition. Kennedy reoriented U.S. strategy toward developing world "revolutions." As the authors describe, Kennedy argued in 1961 that military means alone could not stabilize "regimes that do not want or cannot bring about social reforms". He launched the "Alliance for Progress" in Latin America and the Peace Corps, aiming to counter communism with development aid as well as force. Yet he simultaneously deepened the Vietnam commitment. In this interpretation, Kennedy's era blended idealism and Cold War realpolitik: promoting democracy abroad while remaining prepared for limited military intervention.

Johnson's presidency (1963–69) continued Vietnamization of Truman strategy. The authors note that Lyndon Johnson's 1965 NSS pledged U.S. support for any Latin American government aligned with American interests (even while professing support for "representative" regimes). Johnson mostly stayed within the containment framework, though the Vietnam War greatly expanded U.S. military involvement. Nixon and Kissinger in the early 1970s then ushered in another shift. Rejecting open-ended "limited" wars near the Soviet sphere, Nixon announced on Guam the famous Nixon Doctrine: the U.S. would "help other countries defend themselves" but would not send troops unilaterally in every conflict. In practice this meant Vietnamization and winding down Korea; U.S. weapon sales replaced direct combat. The book presents Nixon's approach as a pragmatic turn – still anti-communist, but less interventionist militarily (though backed by overwhelming U.S. naval and nuclear power).

The monograph treats **1970s détente** and the end of Cold War more cursorily, focusing instead on the **shift to unipolarity**. For example, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter (not quoted extensively) largely refined existing policies: arms control treaties, energy crisis management, and (for Carter) human rights rhetoric. By contrast, **Reagan (1981–89)** is credited with reviving a hard line. The Reagan Doctrine "sought to reverse" communist gains by supporting anti-communist insurgents worldwide. Through arms buildups and aid to proxies in Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua, the U.S. aimed to overtax the USSR's system. The authors

note that Reagan's strategy "weaken[ed] and curb[ed]" Soviet client states, though they point out that many Eastern Bloc collapses ultimately came from Soviet implosion, not just U.S. policy.

The Unipolar Moment: Bush, Clinton, and Clinton's Dilemma

With the Cold War won, the book turns to the "New World Order" of George H.W. Bush (1989–93) and the liberal internationalism of Clinton (1993–2001). Bush 41 proclaimed a democratic peace and a U.S.-led global stability (American exceptionalism) with goals like "ending disputes through peaceful means" and arms control. However, the authors emphasize that Clinton's years exposed contradictions. They argue that with no obvious superpower rival, U.S. grand strategy fell into **strategic ambiguity**. Clinton himself famously focused on domestic issues early on – the book quotes Clinton's assertion that economic renewal at home was the prerequisite for a "strong America" abroad. Indeed, public opinion surveys of the 1990s are cited to show that foreign policy often ranked low in voters' priorities. The collapse of Soviet communism freed Americans from a clear enemy, generating a consensus that "nations need an enemy" to define strategy.

The authors describe how Clinton's doctrine ultimately coalesced into a form of liberal internationalism (and alignments in different directions. They note his emphasis on "global order… based on democracy, free markets, and institutions". Institutions like NATO were expanded, and U.S. interventions were justified in humanitarian terms. Thus, by the 1990s the United States was the undisputed unipolar power, promoting "international principles" through both multilateral institutions and the willing use of force. Yet the book argues that this approach was underpinned by a concern: in the absence of the Cold War's clear foe, Americans felt a "security vacuum." Consequently, Clinton's NSS spoke ambiguously of preemption and constant U.S. leadership. In this light, the authors see Clinton's strategy as a pragmatic continuation of U.S. primacy – one that tried to "rationalize the continuity" of U.S. dominance by wrapping it in values-language (e.g. linking democracy promotion to peace).

From War on Terror to Obama: Unilateralism and Rebalancing

The 2001 attacks on September 11 ushered in George W. Bush's **definitive break from Clinton-era ambiguity**. The book portrays Bush 43 (2001–09) as repudiating Clinton's elusive multilateralism. It quotes critiques that Clinton's foreign policy "lacked the necessary infrastructure" and coherence, arguing that it was "dangerous for the only superpower… to forbid the use of force" simply to appease public opinion. In this view, 9/11 shattered American complacency: the fall of the World Trade Center "ended the myth of invulnerability". Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy – here identified explicitly as the Bush Doctrine – prioritized preventive war, preeminence, and U.S. "supremacy". Quoting Bush administration texts, the authors note that U.S. policy now insisted on global alignment: "at the international level, you have to move in one direction". In short, early 2000s strategy is framed as a very **explicit quest for American hegemony** – militarily, technologically, and ideologically. Indeed, they conclude that "the main goal of the Bush Doctrine is to move toward American hegemony or empire".

President Obama's turn (2009–17) is described in stark contrast. Obama is said to have learned that "unilateralism" and overreliance on force had created strategic backlash. The authors outline Obama's negative-axioms doctrine: **no more unilateral preventive wars** and a pronounced emphasis on economic power. This reflects a continuity yet recalibration: Obama accepted the need for U.S. leadership but sought to "rebuild the legitimacy" of American power by acting multilateral and by "showing America's hegemonic power with a peaceful and friendly face". The book underscores that Obama made economic issues central – in part because the 2008 financial crisis and rising competitors (notably China) had exposed vulnerabilities. In their account, Obama's grand strategy was one of **"soft" Americanism:** maintain relative superiority, but balance hard power with diplomacy and global economic engagement, in order to sustain a U.S.-led order with broader buy-in.99

Trump's "Americanism": A New Paradigm?

The final chapters argue that Donald Trump represents a **paradigm shift** – from the globalist consensus to a nationalist "America First" doctrine. Trump's 2017 NSS is quoted as explicitly framing policy around four "National Interests": protection of the American people and way of life; economic prosperity; peace through strength; and American influence. The authors label this the advent of U.S. "Americanism" – an inherently introverted, nationalist strategy. They stress that Trump's doctrine broke with the post-Cold War norm of seeking "win-win" outcomes; instead it openly adopted a zero-sum stance. Under Trump, alliances became conditional and cooperation "selective," reflecting pure national interest. The book notes Trump's skepticism of long-standing institutions (e.g. NATO, UN) and his threats to withdraw if allies did not "pay their fair share". In essence, Trump's approach is portrayed as abandoning the liberal international order paradigm. The conclusion emphasizes that for the first time national interests "are no longer a function of global interests," but rather "America's first doctrine prevails over any global model". This shift is seen as "in conflict with past U.S. doctrinal trends," institutionalizing a hard-edged unilateralism (zero-sum competition) as the new norm (his second term poses new administrative challenges, including the containment of the illegal migrants and their threat to the American identity

A comparative Review Regarding the important terms

Various works have been published in this field with different variations; most of these works have been influenced by two or more U.S president foreign policy or a branch of policy produced within the circles of the United States elite circles; in , authors have scrutinized the Iranian proxy strategy as a response to shifting U.S foreign policy's doctrine (and specifically, the maximum pressure campaign) or in , the discords in the middle east have been analyzed from a FPA perspective and in relation with the shifting security dynamics in the great power political agendas; a practical example in response changes can be witnessed in where diplomatic negotiations are tied to a specific political orientation (Obama's diplomatic engagement policy) or in , readers can see how the continuity of the foreign policy can influence the broader region of the Middle East and Persian Gulf Countries. The

path to the future is also one dependent variable and index that should be probed all in connection with the political shifts, in the authors have clearly mentioned the possible scenarios and ways of diplomatic negotiations.

Sometimes such foreign policy doctrines have domestic effects in the targeted countries, campaigns like maximum pressure can lead to tangible forceful immigration, in such effects have been clearly studied. Correlation between democracy as a permanent factor in the U.S foreign policy (an occurring theme) and push towards reforms in specific areas of importance (the middle east) has been also probed in using a clear comparative structure; the role of non-state actors and how they can influence the foreign policy doctrines have also been studied in.

In, a multi-faceted network of effects has been presented, stating how a specific doctor in U.S foreign policy can influence the action mechanism of its allies or how it can define and redefine the inherited features within a political range and ultimately its position in the international stage

Theoretical Foundations and Narrative Style

The authors do not explicitly align with one IR school, but their analysis leans heavily on **realist** themes (great-power rivalry, balance-of-power, deterrence) infused with ideological rhetoric. From the outset they emphasize power: the wartime mobilization and nuclear monopoly made the U.S. a “superpower” that “no longer wanted to leave the arena of the world”. At the same time, they frame strategy in ideological terms: Cold War policies are discussed as clashes of “imperialism” versus “communism,” and post-9/11 policy as a quest for an “American empire.” This suggests a critical realist or even neo-Gramscian tone (referring to U.S. policy as “imperialist” at times and its Hiroshima attack as a “criminal act”). They also incorporate liberal concepts when convenient, noting for example that the U.S. has promoted democracy and institutions, echoing mainstream analyses. Indeed, the RAND perspective on U.S. grand strategy (not cited in the book) would note that Washington has long pursued a liberal international order – building institutions, free trade, and democratic norms – to secure its interests. Aghili Dehnavi and Jamal

implicitly acknowledge this continuity as well but interpret it through "Americanism" as a quasi-ideological drive.

Historically, the narrative is broad and sweeping. It draws on both Western and non-Western sources (e.g. cited speeches, scholarly works, and Persian-language references). The story is generally linear: each president reacts to the previous context, making adjustments rather than wholesale reversals – until Trump's era. In this way the book aligns with many academics who see an underlying **coherence** in U.S. grand strategy (containment mutated into global hegemony, then a partial retrenchment) but highlights tensions too (especially the post-Cold-War identity crisis).

Contribution and Critique

From Containment to Americanism makes a valuable **contribution** by offering a single-volume, Iran-perspective survey of U.S. strategy from 1945 onward. Its systematic chapter-by-chapter approach is thorough: few works cover every administration in comparable detail. In particular, its thematic framing of an ideological "Americanism" adds a distinct lens. By tracing "Americanism" back to founding ideals and projecting it forward to Trump, the authors invite readers to view U.S. strategy as a product of both interests and ideology. The recent IJELS review agrees that the book uncovers "the nature of U.S. foreign policy – one characterized by expansive global ambitions supported by ideological principles". For students of IR and policymakers alike, the book serves as a useful compendium of quotes and summaries of official doctrines (e.g. NSS statements, speeches).

However, the work also has **limitations**. Its tone occasionally feels polemical – for example labeling the Hiroshima bombings "criminal" or calling U.S. policy "imperialist." This reflects the authors' vantage, which may lean an Iranian critical perspective. While the analysis of continuity is reasonable, it may understate the **disagreements** within U.S. strategy debates. For instance, many American scholars emphasize tensions between "realist" and "ideal" factions (balancers vs. liberal internationalists) that the book only sketches implicitly. Likewise, describing Trump as a complete break ignores some continuities (continued primacy in Asia, etc.),

though the authors acknowledge his relative innovativeness. In terms of IR theory, the book does not engage in formal debate (e.g. it does not use terms like "offshore balancing" or "neo-isolationism," though its description of selective alliances overlaps with those concepts).

Nonetheless, the authors succeed in presenting a comprehensive narrative that is unusually broad in scope. The result is a review that is factual and detailed yet accessible. It blends academic depth (with chapter citations and quotes) with policy relevance, and its prose is clear enough for a general informed audience. For example, it explains abstract strategy changes with concrete examples – from Truman's Marshall Plan to Trump's embassy move to Jerusalem – making the material vivid. The writing style is formal but not overly jargon laden.

Conclusion

In conclusion, From Containment to Americanism is a thorough survey of U.S. grand strategy that will interest scholars of international relations and foreign policy. Its core argument is that U.S. strategy has largely followed a continuous trajectory of global engagement (containment, liberal order, primacy) until a discernible turning point under Trump. The book's theoretical lens – framing policy as driven by "Americanism" ideology and vital national interests – offers a distinct viewpoint. This perspective both resonates with and challenges conventional accounts: it resonates in underlining U.S. ideological motivations, and it challenges by treating Trump's approach as an outright rupture (from a "win-win" to a zero-sum stance). Ultimately, the volume contributes to the literature by mapping out four generations of strategy under one theme. Its balanced tone – neither uncritical praise nor cynical condemnation – invites readers to reflect on how American strategy has evolved and what principles (if any) unify it.

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