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Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011

243 pages

\$19.95

## ***In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11***

edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro

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As recounted by former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, when asked in February 1990 who NATO's adversary was now that the Soviet threat had gone away, President George H.W. Bush responded that "the enemy is unpredictability . . . instability." At the time of the comment, threats or challenges like those posed by failed states, terrorists, Islamic fundamentalists, and

Russian nationalists were emerging and helped to shape an unfamiliar landscape for the late 20th and early 21st century international system. The challenge for the policy and strategy maker has always been how to sort the threats, whether they be familiar or not, and develop approaches that will permit an ability to influence them to the advantage of the state. The less the policy/strategy maker knew, the harder the process became.

This superb work examines American strategic planning in a world forced to confront the massive change brought about by the events of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 (11/9) and the tragedy of the World Trade Center attack in September 2001 (9/11), described by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as bookends for a transitional period in world history. The intent of the editors was to assess the challenges associated with the development of national strategy in uncertain times, both good and bad as represented by the threats and opportunities related to the events surrounding these two dates.

Trying to determine how officials attempted to reconfigure American foreign policy in the wake of these events, University of Virginia professors Melvyn Leffler and Jeffrey Legro brought together a leading group of former practitioners and scholars to examine how national-level policy and strategy was developed during this period and what lessons could be identified to address future policy and strategy making in ambiguous and changing circumstances. The analysis examined the development of American policies and strategies ranging from 11/9, the disintegration of the former Soviet bloc, and long-range defense planning in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War, to the crafting of US bilateral relations with the new Russian Federation during the 1990s, and concluding with an examination of US strategic planning in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

The chapter authors with former practitioner backgrounds described their actions, motivations, challenges, and accomplishments as they sought to craft policy and strategy to guide the United States during this turbulent period. Zoellick assessed the 1989 strategic concept as one that could evolve to meet

changing circumstances, while Wolfowitz and Edelman characterized post 11/9 defense planning as responding to legislative demands for budget cuts, but one that would also reassure traditional allies and remake the force structure to shape an environment framed by uncertainty. Slocombe indicated that states had a much easier time thwarting threats than exploiting opportunities in a benign international environment. And through the lens of the drafting of the 2002 National Security Strategy in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Zelikow depicted an environment inspired by fear of more and larger terror attacks, with the belief that war was real and not distant. The result was strategic thinking determined to minimize the risk and focus on planning that would be immediate and protective in nature.

The authors coming from academia were frustrated by a perceived inability on the part of American policy and strategy makers to seize the moment during this period and create real change for the international system. Sarotte and Mueller felt that the United States missed an opportunity in the immediate aftermath of the events of 11/9 to create new international institutions that could have integrated Russia vice simply maintaining the established structures. Cummings and Westad assessed that people do not change easily, especially when something entirely unanticipated takes place; as a result, they become resistant to the potential meaning of new information and fall back on past lessons and assumptions. And Wolforth felt that reasoning style in times construed as normal may interfere with an individual's ability to update their thinking rapidly when the conditions of a long-established equilibrium are thrown off balance. In the end, these authors questioned whether US strategy either did or could adapt to rapidly changing times.

Both benign and threatening environments come with their own sets of challenges and opportunities in time of change. The more benign environment after 11/9 allowed democratic constituencies to focus inward with parochial conditions dominating. Threats were subdued and policymakers could feel less reason to experiment; the defense establishment could be downsized but not significantly modified. The world was in a relatively peaceful place with little real reason to endorse change that might alter the international system's status quo. After 9/11, the perceived terror threat was all encompassing—people were terrified, catalyzing a strategic response that was primarily defensive and reactive; preempt or prevent attacks as necessary. In each of the two time periods, there was clearly a reluctance to advocate for real strategic change. This does not necessarily mean that valid policies and strategies did not exist. This work makes clear that policy and strategy are more difficult to craft in periods of upheaval, when innovation and creativity come in second to the need for consistency and security. But it also leaves the national security professional with the understanding that it is not an impossible task. The work of the policy and strategy crafter got done; the issue for further consideration is did it get done, or could it have gotten done in the most effective manner possible? Read this book to decide for yourself; it's well worth the time.