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From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: Shifting Generational Paradigms and Foreign Policy

MICHAEL ROSKIN

United States foreign policy can be seen as a succession of strategic conventional wisdoms, or "paradigms," on whether the country's defense should start on the near or far side of the oceans. An interventionist paradigm favors the latter, a noninterventionist paradigm the former. This article argues that each elite American generation comes to favor one of these orientations by living through the catastrophe brought on by the application *ad absurdum* of the opposite paradigm at the hands of the previous elite generation. Thus the bearers of the "Pearl Harbor paradigm" (themselves reacting to the deficiencies of the interwar "isolationism") eventually drove interventionism into the ground in Vietnam, giving rise to a noninterventionist "Vietnam paradigm." These paradigms seem to shift at approximately generational intervals, possibly because it takes that long for the bearers of one orientation, formed by the dramatic experiences of their young adulthood, to come to power and eventually misapply the lessons of their youth.

Recently much foreign-policy discussion has focused on economic interpretation of United States actions, bureaucratic politics and malfunctions, and executive-legislative relations. While such approaches have made interesting contributions to the field, none have been able to gather together seemingly disparate elements of foreign policy into an overall view that explains this behavior over several decades. The reason is that these popular approaches consistently downplay or even ignore

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the key element to such an overall view: the strategic assumptions held by decision-making elites—that is, who defines what as strategic; why; and when.¹ In other words, these approaches failed to consider that in certain periods United States policy makers deem much of the globe to be worth fighting for, while at other times they regard most of the world with indifference.

The Concept of “Paradigm”

The concepts of “paradigm” and “paradigm shift” are borrowed from Thomas Kuhn, who used them to describe intellectual growth in the natural sciences. Kuhn called paradigms “universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.”² A paradigm is the basic assumption of a field; acceptance of it is mandatory for practitioners (e.g., those who do not accept the conservation of energy are not physicists; those who do not accept the gas laws are not chemists). Practitioners, having accepted the paradigm, then typically engage in “normal science,” that is, the interpretation and detailing of the basic paradigm, which itself is not open to question.³

The importance of Kuhn’s framework for our purposes is that it is a dynamic view: the paradigms shift. When researchers, operating under their old paradigm, begin to notice that their empirical findings do not come out the way they are supposed to, disquiet enters into the profession. Anomalies or counterinstances crop up in the research and throw the old paradigm into doubt. Then an innovator looks at the data from another angle, reformulates the basic framework, and introduces a new paradigm. Significantly these innovators tend to be younger men who, “being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, are particularly likely to see that those rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive another set that can replace them.”⁴ The new paradigm does not triumph immediately and automatically. Now there are two competing, antithetical paradigms; each demands its separate world view. The discussants “are bound partly to talk through each

¹ This formulation owes something to John Kenneth Galbraith’s 1962 query to President Kennedy apropos of Vietnam: “Incidentally, who is the man in your administration who decides what countries are strategic?” Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal* (Boston, 1969), p. 311.

² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1970), p. viii.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

other" because they are looking at the same data from differing angles.⁵ The new paradigm makes progress, however, because it claims it "can solve the problems that have led the old one to a crisis."⁶ The new paradigm makes particular headway among younger workers. The old practitioners may be beyond conversion; they simply die out. This "paradigm shift" is what Kuhn calls a "scientific revolution," and these "revolutions close with a total victory for one of the two opposing camps."⁷

There is one more point we must include from Kuhn. Which paradigm, the old or the new, is the "truth"? The answer is neither. The new paradigm is at best merely a closer approximation to reality. It seems to explain the data better and offers better paths to future research; it is never the last word. Wide areas of uncertainty remain, especially during the changeover period when the data can be interpreted ambiguously. It is impossible to say when—or even if—the holders of the old paradigm are completely wrong. The profession merely comes to turn its back on them, ignoring them, leaving them out in the cold.⁸

Kuhn has suggested a theory of the innovation and diffusion of knowledge applicable to all fields, including foreign policy. The crucial difference with foreign-policy paradigms is that they are far less *verifiable* than natural-science paradigms. Students of foreign policy have only the crudest sort of verification procedure: the perception that the old paradigm has given rise to a catastrophe. More subtle perceptions of marginal dysfunctionality tend to go unnoticed (by all but a handful of critics) until the general orientation produces an unmistakable disaster.

How, then, can we adapt the Kuhnian framework to the study of United States foreign policy? The community of practitioners is an elite of persons relevant to foreign policy—both in and out of government, the latter including such opinion leaders as professors and journalists—who structure the debate for wider audiences.⁹ While the relationship between mass and elite opinion in foreign policy is well beyond our scope here, most scholarly opinion holds that the mass public has only low or intermittent interest in foreign affairs. One study, for example, found more "isolationism" as one moves down the educational

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹ The role of the elite in foreign policy should need little elaboration here. See Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, 2d ed. (New York, 1960), pp. 138–139; James N. Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1961), pp. 35–36; James N. Rosenau, *National Leadership and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N. J., 1963), pp. 6–10.

ladder.¹⁰ Foreign aid has never been popular with American voters; only elite opinion sustains it. When the elite ceases to define overseas situations as threats to United States security, the mass public soon loses interest. Major American participation abroad is sustainable only when the elite has been mobilized to support it. Lose this support and America stays home.

The content of the foreign-policy paradigm varies in detail but is generally reducible to the question of whether overseas areas "matter" to United States security. That is, should the defense of America start on the far or near side of the ocean? The Yale scholar of geopolitics Nicholas Spykman recognized the question as "the oldest issue in American foreign policy" and posed it in 1942 as well as anyone has ever done: "Shall we protect our interests by defense on this side of the water or by active participation in the lands across the oceans?"¹¹ The former view constitutes what we shall call a "noninterventionist" paradigm; the latter is an "interventionist" paradigm. These antithetical views shift under the impact of catastrophes which seem to prove that the old paradigm was wrong and its adherents mistaken. At that point the previous outsiders (gadflies, radicals, revisionists, etc.) find many of their views accepted as mainstream thinking; their critique becomes the new framework.

Our model resembles Kuhn's but with the important provision that neither old nor new foreign-policy paradigms have much intrinsic validity because neither can be objectively verified in an indeterminate world. Instead of verified, a new foreign-policy paradigm is merely internalized. Counterinstances are ignored; the range of conceivable strategic situations is narrowed to exclude possible alternate paradigms. It may be impossible to distinguish whether this process is emotional or rational, affective or cognitive. The acrimony accompanying foreign-policy paradigm shifts, however, suggests a strong emotional component. Chances are that a member of the American elite who as a young person witnessed the events leading up to Pearl Harbor has developed a very definite orientation to foreign policy, an interventionist one, the

¹⁰ Herbert McCloskey, "Personality and Attitude Correlates of Foreign Policy Orientation," in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York, 1967), pp. 51-109. As Almond put it: "There is some value in recognizing that an overtly interventionist and 'responsible' United States hides a covertly isolationist longing." Almond, *The American People*, p. 67. An attempt to refute Almond's "instability of mood" theory was marred by having all its data drawn from the peak years of the cold war. William R. Caspary, "The 'Mood Theory': A Study of Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review*, LXIV (June 1970), 536-647.

¹¹ Nicholas John Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York, 1942), pp. 5, 7.

assumptions of which are not open for discussion. Similarly, by the early 1970s the interventionist views of Walt Rostow, Dean Rusk, and William Bundy produced mostly irritation (if not outright vituperation) on the part of younger foreign-policy thinkers.

It is here that we add the concept of generation to the Kuhnian model. Political scientists have not looked much at generations in their analyses. Some hold that to separate out a "political generation" is to reify an abstract and nebulous concept. People are born every day and constitute more of a continuum than a segment. The German sociologist Karl Mannheim agreed that generation is a reification, but no more so than the concept of social class, which is indispensable for much modern analysis.¹²

An elite generation freezes upon either an interventionist or noninterventionist paradigm usually after some foreign-policy catastrophe wrought by the application of the opposite paradigm. During a transition period the two paradigms clash. Because they are antithetical, compromise is impossible. The two generations with their different assumptions talk past each other. Eventually the new paradigm wins because it gains more younger adherents, while the advocates of the old paradigm retire and die off. The new paradigm triumphs not so much on an intellectual basis as on an actuarial one.

The Pearl Harbor Paradigm

It may be profitable to look at the foreign-policy paradigm as having a natural life—a birth, a period of growth, and a death. The birth is characterized by a mounting criticism of the old paradigm and then by the conversion of a large portion of the elite to the new paradigm. An event "proves" the old paradigm wrong, as it did to Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, a staunch isolationist whose turning to interventionism "took firm form on the afternoon of the Pearl Harbor attack. That day ended isolationism for any realist."¹³ In honor of Vandenberg's conversion we can label this interventionist orientation the "Pearl Harbor paradigm."

Pearl Harbor, of course, was merely the culmination of an increasingly heated argument in the interwar period between the dominant noninterventionists and interventionist Cassandras. We could also call the latter

¹² Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. by Paul Kecskemeti (London, 1952), p. 291. Samuel P. Huntington has recently stressed the importance of generations in American political change. See "Paradigms of American Politics: Beyond the One, the Two, and the Many," *Political Science Quarterly*, 89, no. 1 (March 1974).

¹³ Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr. (ed.), *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg* (Boston, 1952), p. 1.

view the Munich paradigm, the Ethiopian paradigm, or even the Manchurian paradigm.¹⁴ But the Pearl Harbor attack clinched the interventionists' argument by demonstrating they were "right" in warning that an isolated America was impossible. The isolationists either shut up or quickly changed sides.¹⁵ The handful of holdouts, such as those who charged Roosevelt with dragging the country into war, were by and large simply ignored.

The most clearly visible starting point for the rise of the Pearl Harbor paradigm was Secretary of State Stimson's 1932 "nonrecognition" of Japanese expansion into Manchuria. Thereafter concern slowly grew among the American elite that aggressive powers abroad could eventually threaten America. The growth of this concern among younger persons is important for two reasons: First, people who were in their twenties during the late 1930s were less committed to the then-prevailing noninterventionism of the older generation. Accordingly, more of the younger group were open to formulate a new paradigm—an interventionist one. Second, although some older elite members may have been similarly alarmed at overseas threats, it was mostly the younger generation that would staff foreign-policy positions in future decades.

By the time war broke out in Europe in 1939, elite opinion was starting to split. The formation of two committees expressed this division: the isolationist America First and the increasingly interventionist Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. On December 7, 1941, the interventionists could (and did) say, "I told you so," and then enshrine their argument—permanently, they thought—as the basic assumption of American foreign policy: If we do not nip aggression in the bud it will eventually grow and involve us. By not stopping aggressors immediately, you encouraged them. Apart from the moral issue of helping a victim of aggression, you are also setting up the first line of defense of your own country. Accordingly, altruism and self-interest merge.

The discredited "isolationists" could only meekly retort that, in principle at least, the defense of the United States did not start on the other side of the globe, for that merely guarantees American participation in wars that were not intrinsically hers. The last gasps of the remaining noninterventionism came in the 1951 debate to limit troops in Europe and the 1954 Bricker amendment to restrict executive agreements. Occasional

¹⁴ Paul Seabury and Alvin Drischler called it "the Manchurian assumption" and saw it as the basis for our postwar alliances. Seabury and Drischler, "How to Decommmit Without Withdrawal Symptoms," *Foreign Policy*, 1 (Winter 1970–1971), 51.

¹⁵ It is surprising to learn, for example, that liberal internationalist Chester Bowles served on the national committee of America First. See Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention* (Madison, Wis., 1953), p. 22.

whiffs of preinterventionist views could be sensed in debates over foreign aid.

The interesting aspect of the Pearl Harbor paradigm, however, was its duration long past World War II. The interventionist orientation had been so deeply internalized in the struggle with the isolationists that it did not lapse with the Allied victory. By that time almost all sections of the globe now "mattered" to American security, particularly as a new hostile power—the Soviet Union—seemed bent on territorial and ideological aggrandizement. In the 1930s, the fate of East Europe bothered Washington very little, but in the span of a decade East Europe became a matter of urgent American concern.¹⁶ Not only had the Soviets inflicted brutal, Hitler-like dictatorships upon the nations of East Europe, it was taken for granted that they were preparing to do the same to West Europe and other areas. But this time America was smarter and stood prepared to stop aggression. In the span of one decade, 1945–1955, the United States committed itself to the defense of more than seventy nations.

A few quotes might suffice to demonstrate the persistence of the Pearl Harbor paradigm into the Vietnam era. Warning of a "new isolationism," Senator Thomas J. Dodd, in a 1965 floor speech, explained:

The situation in Viet-Nam today bears many resemblances to the situation just before Munich. . . .

In Viet-Nam today, we are again dealing with a faraway land, about which we know very little.

In Viet-Nam today, we are again confronted by an incorrigible aggressor, fanatically committed to the destruction of the free world, whose agreements are as worthless as Hitler's. . . .

If we fail to draw the line in Viet-Nam, in short, we may find ourselves compelled to draw a defense line as far back as Seattle and Alaska, with Hawaii as a solitary out-post in mid-Pacific.¹⁷

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, in commenting on Lin Piao's 1965 statement on the universal applicability of "people's war," said, "It is a program of aggression. It is a speech that ranks with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*."¹⁸

¹⁶ Historian Norman Graebner poses the following as the key question in the debate over the origins of the cold war: "Why did the United States after 1939 permit the conquest of eastern Europe by Nazi forces, presumably forever, with scarcely a stir, but refused after 1944 to acknowledge any primary Russian interest or right of hegemony in the same region on the heels of a closely won Russian victory against the German invader?" The shift of foreign-policy paradigms helps answer this question. Graebner, "Cold War Origins and the Continuing Debate: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 13 (March 1969), 131.

¹⁷ U. S., *Congressional Record*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess. (1965), CXI, Pt. 3, 3350–3351.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, October 3, 1965 (supplement), p. 5.

President Johnson too was immersed in the World War II imagery. In his 1965 Johns Hopkins speech he warned:

The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must say in Southeast Asia—as we did in Europe—in the words of the Bible: “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.”¹⁹

In a 1966 speech to NATO parliamentarians, Senator Henry M. Jackson, put it this way:

Analogies with the past may be misleading and I would not argue that this is the 30’s all over again. But looking back we think, as I am sure many of you do, that it is wise to stop aggression before the aggressor becomes strong and swollen with ambition from small successes. We think the world might have been spared enormous misfortunes if Japan had not been permitted to succeed in Manchuria, or Mussolini in Ethiopia, or Hitler in Czechoslovakia or in the Rhineland. And we think that our sacrifices in this dirty war in little Vietnam will make a dirtier and bigger war less likely.²⁰

President Johnson said, in a 1966 talk in New Hampshire:

Few people realize that world peace has reached voting age. It has been 21 years since that day on the U.S.S. *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay when World War II came to an end. Perhaps it reflects poorly on our world that men must fight limited wars to keep from fighting larger wars; but that is the condition of the world. . . .

We are following this policy in Vietnam because we know that the restrained use of power has for 21 years prevented the wholesale destruction the world faced in 1914 and again in 1939.²¹

The Pentagon Papers are replete with the World War II analogy. Among these, in a 1966 memo, Walt Rostow explained how his experience as an OSS major plotting German bomb targets taught him the importance of cutting the enemy’s POL—petroleum, oil, and lubricants:

With an understanding that simple analogies are dangerous, I never the less feel it is quite possible the military effects of a systematic and sustained bombing of POL in North Vietnam may be more prompt and direct than conventional intelligence analysis would suggest.²²

¹⁹ U. S., President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D. C.: Office of the *Federal Register*, National Archives and Records Service, 1945–), Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, p. 395.

²⁰ U. S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, *United States Troops in Europe*, Report, 90th Cong., 2d Sess. October 15, 1968 (Washington, D. C., 1968), p. 18.

²¹ *Public Papers of the Presidents*, Johnson, 1966, Book II, p. 861.

²² *The Pentagon Papers, as Published by the New York Times* (New York, 1971, paper ed.), p. 499.

Rostow seems to have retained a petroleum version of the Pearl Harbor paradigm and to have assumed that Hanoi had *Panzers* and a *Luftwaffe* that could be knocked out.

The Special Role of Kennedy

One member of the foreign-policy elite deserves to be examined at greater length. John F. Kennedy not only internalized what we are calling the Pearl Harbor paradigm, he helped install it.²³ His 1940 best seller, *Why England Slept*, originally written he was 21–22, was his Harvard senior thesis. The book concerned not only Britain's interwar somnolence in the face of the German threat but posited America in the same position. Kennedy's position at that time, it is interesting to note, was in marked contrast to the isolationism of his father, who was then the United States ambassador to Britain.²⁴

The *Why England Slept* of Kennedy's youth laid down a remarkably full-blown view of national security, one that Senator and later President Kennedy retained practically intact. The following were some of the important themes which first appeared in *Why England Slept* and then in his senatorial and presidential speeches:

1. Peace-loving democracy is weak in the face of expansionist totalitarianism.²⁵
2. The democratic leader's role is to teach the population that isolated events form an overall pattern of aggression against them.²⁶
3. Defense preparedness must be kept up, even if this means increasing defense expenditures.²⁷
4. Reliance on a single-weapon defense system is dangerous; a country must have several good defense systems for flexibility.²⁸
5. Civil defense measures must be instituted in advance to protect the population in case of war.²⁹

²³ A parallel figure in the field of journalism was Kennedy's friend Joseph Alsop, who also published a book in 1940 that established his views for decades. See Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner, *American White Paper* (New York, 1940).

²⁴ Such items raise the possibility that some of the paradigm shift may be explicable in terms of father-son conflict on the psychoanalytic plane. But that approach tends to minimize the substantive issue of strategic assumptions, which is the one that concerns us here. The elder Kennedy's isolationism is from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Greenwich, Conn., 1967, paper ed.), pp. 85, 125.

²⁵ John F. Kennedy, *Why England Slept*, 2d ed. (New York, 1961), p. 222.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169–170.

6. The nation must be willing actually to go to war in the final crunch; bluffing will not suffice.³⁰

In the case of Britain in the late 1930s, argued the young Kennedy, democracy simply did not take the Nazi menace seriously, and British leaders failed to point out the danger and build up defenses. British defense was overconcentrated on the fleet, at the expense of the army and most importantly of the air force. Britain's civil defense was weak, particularly in anti-aircraft batteries. And finally, British leaders had been so hesitant to actually apply force when needed that Hitler could not take them seriously.

Representative and later Senator Kennedy found these arguments highly applicable to the Eisenhower period, which he often compared to inter-war Britain, as in this 1959 speech:

Twenty-three years ago, in a bitter debate in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill charged the British Government with acute blindness to the menace of Nazi Germany, with gross negligence in the maintenance of the island's defenses, and with indifferent, indecisive leadership of British foreign policy and British public opinion. The preceding years of drift and impotency, he said, were "the years the locusts have eaten."

Since January, 1953, this nation has passed through a similar period. . . .³¹

America in the 1950s, said Kennedy, refused to see the "global challenge" of Soviet penetration of the Third World. Eisenhower had let United States defense preparedness slide; a "missile gap" had appeared. America must spend more on defense: "Surely our nation's security overrides budgetary considerations. . . . Then why can we not realize that the coming years of the gap present us with a peril more deadly than any war-time danger we have ever known?"³² The country relied on "massive retaliation" when it needed a flexible response of many options, including counterinsurgency. Kennedy accordingly opposed Republican cuts in our ground troops. And, in a 1959 interview, he emphasized that the United States must be willing to fight for Berlin:

If we took the view which some Englishmen took, that Prague or the Suden-tendutsch were not worth a war in '38—if we took that view about Berlin, my judgment is that the West Berliners would pass into the Communist orbit, and our position in West Germany and our relations with West Germany would receive a fatal blow. . . . They're fighting for New York and Paris when they struggle over Berlin.³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 229–230.

³¹ John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. by Allan Nevins (New York, 1960), p. 193.

³² U. S., *Congressional Record*, 85th Cong., 2d Sess. (1958), CIV, 17571.

³³ Kennedy, *Strategy of Peace*, p. 213.

One might be tempted to dismiss Senator Kennedy's views as campaign rhetoric. But once in the presidency, Kennedy proceeded to implement them: bigger defense budgets, larger ground forces, "flexible response" (including counterinsurgency), civil defense (especially the 1961 fallout-shelter panic), and finally overt warfare in Southeast Asia. Throughout his presidency, Kennedy and his advisers stuck to the image of the Pearl Harbor paradigm. In his dramatic 1962 television address on the Soviet arms buildup in Cuba, Kennedy used his favorite analogy: "The 1930s taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war."³⁴ Vice-President Johnson, in a 1961 memo to Kennedy on Vietnam, wrote:

The battle against Communism must be joined in South-east Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there—or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores.³⁵

One wonders if Johnson or one of his assistants had read Spykman. Further perusal of the Pentagon Papers shows much the same evaluation of the alleged strategic importance of Vietnam; its fall was defined as a major setback to United States security.³⁶

We do not here argue that Vietnam is important or unimportant to the defense of America. That is indeterminate, although within the last decade a considerable portion of elite opinion has switched from the former view to the latter. What interests us is the inability of Kennedy and his advisers to define Southeast Asia as anything but strategic.

Kennedy's age surely contributed to his highly interventionist orientation. He retained what we are calling the Pearl Harbor paradigm as a young man in his early twenties. Eisenhower, by way of contrast, was twenty-seven years older and witnessed the events that led up to American involvement in World War II as a man in his forties. It seems likely, then, that the impact of the events of the late 1930s and early 1940s was far stronger in forming Kennedy's foreign-policy orientation than Eisenhower's.

This perhaps partially explains why the Pearl Harbor paradigm eventually was applied to an extreme, and why this process took about a generation. A generation of the United States elite experienced as relatively young people the momentous events leading up to Pearl Harbor. Kennedy was of this generation, which gradually surfaced into public life.³⁷ Each year there were more members of this generation in posi-

³⁴ *Public Papers of the Presidents, Kennedy, 1962*, p. 807.

³⁵ *Pentagon Papers*, p. 128.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 35–36, 148–149, 284.

³⁷ For a good exposition of this "age-cohort hypothesis," in this case on the atti-

tions of foreign-policy leadership. The older generation retired and the proportion of this new generation increased. After about twenty years, there were few members of the older generation left in the political machinery. By the time Kennedy assumed the presidency, there were few countervailing views to dilute and moderate a policy of thoroughgoing interventionism. In this sense, we can say that the Pearl Harbor paradigm "blossomed" under Kennedy, who applied it more completely than did Eisenhower.

But while Kennedy was applying the wisdom learned in his youth to its full extent—the Green Berets, the Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development, the Counterinsurgency Committee—the real world was going its own way, becoming less and less relevant to the mental constructs of American foreign-policy planners. We have then a "dysfunction" growing between policy and reality. On the one hand, we have a foreign orientation essentially frozen since the 1940s, and, on the other hand, a world which defied pigeonholing into the compartments of the 1940s.

The most conspicuous indicator of this discrepancy was the persistent American inability to evaluate "communism" as no longer monolithic. Here, as with Kuhn's scientific paradigms, the data can be interpreted ambiguously in transitional periods. One side reads the data as still showing essentially a monolith, the other as a badly fractured movement. But at what point in time did it become unreasonable for United States foreign-policy planners to continue to hold the former view? Scholars had been emphasizing the Sino-Soviet split since the early 1960s,³⁸ but it was not until the early 1970s—after the trauma of Vietnam had set in—that reality was incorporated into policy. When communism became perceivable as nonmonolithic, under President Nixon, it perforce lost its most threatening attribute. Thus redefined, Indochina was no longer worth evaluating as a strategic prize, and American withdrawal became possible. The paradigm had shifted: Vietnam was no longer part of a gigantic pincer movement enveloping us.

After the Vietnam debacle was over, few voices could be heard advocating a return to "business as usual," that is, to continuing the interventionist paradigm. Nixon introduced a policy markedly different from that of his predecessors. It differed rhetorically in announcing to Amer-

tudes of European youth toward regional integration, see Ronald Inglehart, "An End to European Integration?" *American Political Science Review*, LXI (March 1967), 94–99.

³⁸ See, for example, G. F. Hudson, Richard Lowenthal, and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Sino-Soviet Dispute* (New York, 1961); Donald S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict, 1956–1961* (Princeton, N. J., 1962); and Leopold Labedz and G. R. Urban (eds.), *The Sino-Soviet Conflict* (London, 1964).

ica's allies that they would have to bear primary responsibility for their defense,³⁹ and it differed physically in reducing United States ground forces to the point where few were available to send abroad. (Total U.S. armed forces fell from 3.5 million in 1968 to 2.2 million in 1974; especially hard hit were the army and the marines, without whom there can be no overseas intervention.)

Just as Pearl Harbor brought with it a massive and general shift in the foreign-policy orientation of the United States elite, so did Vietnam. Pearl Harbor and Vietnam were the points in time at which critics could say, "I told you so," and win widespread if grudging agreement from the old guard. The Pearl Harbor paradigm, applied for three decades to a world from which it was increasingly alienated, eventually was "shipwrecked" on Vietnam.

The Vietnam Paradigm

What follows? It is not difficult to discern an emerging noninterventionist orientation which can be termed the "Vietnam paradigm." Varying in emphasis and nuance, the bearers of the new view all urge *limitation* of American activity (above all, military activity) overseas, particularly in the Third World. John Kenneth Galbraith, for example, wants

an even more positive commitment to coexistence with the Communist countries. It means a much more determined effort to get military competition with the Soviets under control. . . . It means abandoning the Sub-Imperial ambitions in the Third World and recognizing instead that there is little we can do to influence political development in this part of the world and less that we need to do.⁴⁰

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., believes the "lessons of Vietnam" show:

First, that everything in the world is not of equal importance to us. Asia and Africa are of vital importance for Asians and Africans . . . but they are not so important for us. . . .

*Second, that we cannot do everything in the world. The universalism of the older generation was spacious in design and noble in intent. Its flaw was that it overcommitted our country—it overcommitted our policy, our resources, and our rhetoric. . . .*⁴¹

³⁹ The Nixon doctrine was first enunciated on Guam, July 25, 1969, to this effect. See *Public Papers of the Presidents, Nixon, 1969*, p. 552.

⁴⁰ John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Decline of American Powers," *Esquire*, March 1972, p. 163.

⁴¹ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Vietnam and the End of the Age of Superpowers," *Harper's*, March 1969, p. 48.

The critics of only a few years ago might reflect with satisfaction on how much of their critique (not all, to be sure) has been absorbed by the Nixon doctrine.

A deluge of foreign-policy criticism has appeared in the last several years. If we were to boil down the new conventional wisdom and compare it with the old, it might look like this:⁴²

Pearl Harbor Paradigm	Vietnam Paradigm
Communism is a monolithic threat.	Communism is a divided spastic.
If we don't intervene overseas we may get dragged into a war.	If we do intervene overseas we are sure to get into a war.
We must nip aggression in the bud.	We are not the world's policeman.
The dominoes are falling. Quick, let's do something!	The dominoes are falling. So what?
United States aid and technology will develop backward countries.	Backward countries will develop themselves or not at all.

The catastrophe that each generation experienced implanted viewpoints which, based on the importance for United States security accorded to overseas events, are flatly antithetical. Rational discussion between the two paradigms tends to be impossible, not for want of "facts" but for how they are structured. The structure, or paradigm, is imparted by a traumatic foreign-policy experience. Without such a trauma the inadequacies of the old paradigm might have gone unnoticed. Unfortunately, the indiscriminate application of one paradigm to increasingly changed circumstances tends to produce just that mishap. Given many interventions, it is likely that one will misfire. The adventures which do not misfire conspicuously—Lebanon, the Congo airlifts, Berlin, the Taiwan Straits, Santo Domingo—can be shrugged off or even used to justify continuing interventionism ("It worked there, didn't it?"). In this manner a foreign-policy paradigm actuates a built-in self-destruct mechanism: its eventual application *ad absurdum* by its elite generation.

The Foreign-Policy Paradigms of Yesteryear

Is the above a comparison of just the two most recent epochs in United States diplomatic history, or might the approach be extended backward

⁴² Graham Allison came up with a similar, but longer, comparison of his foreign-policy "axioms" from interviews with more than 100 elite young Americans. Allison, "Cool It: The Foreign Policy of Young America," *Foreign Policy*, 1 (Winter 1970-1971), 150-154.

in time to validate the generational-paradigm approach as a more general tool of analysis? The author wishes to attempt the latter by dividing American foreign policy into periods on the basis of alternating interventionist and noninterventionist paradigms. To do this, it is necessary to ask how the elite of a given period answered Spykman's old question of where the defense of America should start—on the near or far side of the oceans. If the answer is "far," then the lands across the seas "matter" to United States security. If the answer is "near," the lands across the seas "do not matter" so much to the security of the United States. In the former case, we have an interventionist period; in the latter, we have a noninterventionist period.

Let us examine United States diplomatic history, looking at periods first in reverse chronology and then by functional categories. As previously stated, the bearers of the Pearl Harbor paradigm were themselves reacting to what they believed were the gross deficiencies of the interwar "isolationism." The 1920 to 1940 period can be called the "Versailles paradigm"; its bearers were condemned as blind for failing to recognize the obvious threat from abroad in 1939–1941. Who were these people? Prominent among them were Senators Borah, Hiram Johnson, Nye, and La Follette, the same "battalion of irreconcilables" who opposed the Versailles Treaty and League Covenant in 1919–1920.⁴³ For such persons World War II was a conflict the United States must and could—through rigorous application of the Neutrality Acts—avoid. Their great lesson was the aftermath of World War I, which, they believed, had achieved nothing: Europe stayed fractious and, even worse, refused to pay its war debts. American participation in that war had been a mistake. As with the Pearl Harbor paradigm, in their arguments self-interest and morality were intertwined. Versailles had been unfair to various nations (the demands of ethnic groups played a role here); the treaty enshrined the victors in positions of superiority; and the League of Nations' Covenant would then entangle America in the next European crisis. The depth of the interwar bitterness probably was not reached until the 1934–1936 Nye Committee hearings which, in part, sought to blame munitions manufacturers for United States involvement. Out of the Nye hearings grew the Neutrality Acts of 1935–1937. Like the Pearl Harbor paradigm, the Versailles paradigm seems also to have reached full flowering shortly before its demise, exaggerating its increasing irrelevance to the world situation.

It took the critics of the Versailles paradigm at least half a decade to dislodge it. The "isolationists" fought the growing interventionism ev-

⁴³ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *From Wilson to Roosevelt: Foreign Policy of the United States, 1913–1945* (New York, 1968), p. 260.

ery inch of the way. Strong emotions came to the surface. "I could scarcely proceed further without losing my self-control," wrote Secretary of State Cordell Hull of a 1939 confrontation with Senator Borah in which the latter disparaged State Department cables on an impending war in Europe.⁴⁴ Other sources said that Hull actually wept at the meeting. It took the catastrophe at Pearl Harbor to squelch the obdurate bearers of the Versailles paradigm.

Was this Versailles paradigm a reaction to a previous orientation—an interventionist one? That there was a previous period, sometimes called imperialistic, from the 1890s extending into the next century, cannot to be doubted. The problem with labeling the period from 1898 (the Spanish-American War) through 1919 (the aftermath of World War I) an "imperial paradigm" is that the continuity of an interventionist policy between the two wars is not clear. With the Pearl Harbor paradigm we can show a consistent propensity for United States intervention over three decades, but with the 1898–1919 period we have interventions mostly clustered at the beginning and end. In 1898 the United States occupied Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, and Wake (and part of Samoa in 1899). Then, mostly relating to World War I, the United States occupied or had troops in Mexico, the Virgin Islands, France, and Russia. In between there were only the relatively minor Caribbean occupations. Thus, if this was an imperial paradigm, it sagged in the middle. It may be further objected that two distinct lines of thought accompanied respectively the beginning and end of this period. The earlier thinking favored unilateral colony grabbing, in recognition of the fact that the great European powers were carving up the globe and leaving America without colonies or areas of influence. The later thinking, accompanying World War I, was much more internationalistic, stressing cooperation rather than unilateralism. Some figures, like Senator Albert J. Beveridge, were imperialists at the turn of the century and isolationists about World War I.⁴⁵

The author agrees that such an imperial paradigm is not nearly so consistent as the later interventionist epoch, the Pearl Harbor paradigm. Nonetheless there is a good deal of unity in the three decades of the 1890s, 1900s, and 1910s, and the period generally was an interventionistic one. In the first place, it was a time of almost continual United States naval growth. Starting with Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy's 1889 plans for a vast American fleet and pushed by Theodore Roosevelt

⁴⁴ Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York, 1948), Vol. 1, pp. 650–651.

⁴⁵ Selig Adler, *The Isolationist Impulse: Its Twentieth Century Reaction* (New York, 1966), pp. 28–29.

(both as assistant secretary of the navy and as president), the U. S. Navy rose from sixth to fourth place in 1900, to third place in 1906, and to second place (to Britain) in 1907. The naval budget went from \$21 million in 1885, to \$31 million in 1891, to \$79 million in 1902, to \$104 million in 1906, and to \$137 million in 1909. Wilson, although initially cutting the naval budget somewhat, ended up with a \$2.2 billion one in 1919.⁴⁶ In respect to naval expenditures then, the imperial paradigm did not “sag in the middle.”

Further, although some of the foreign-policy elite of this period moved from unilateral imperialism at the turn of the century to equally unilateral withdrawal from Europe’s war, there was also a good deal of consistency in positing a need for a major United States role abroad. Woodrow Wilson, for example, after some uncertainty, endorsed both the war with Spain and the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines. His motives, to be sure, differed from the imperialists; Wilson wanted to prepare Puerto Rico and the Philippines for self-government.⁴⁷ But we are less interested in motive than in general orientation, and in this Wilson was unmistakably an interventionist. Indeed, as president, Wilson “carried out more armed interventions in Latin America than any of his predecessors.”⁴⁸ In 1898 the twenty-seven-year-old Cordell Hull even raised his own infantry company and went with his men as their captain to Cuba (although they requested the Philippines).⁴⁹ Liberalism by no means precludes interventionism, as Waltz has pointed out.⁵⁰

We might even consider the imperial paradigm as a sort of training period for the senior staffers of the later Pearl Harbor paradigm: Congressman Hull as ardent Wilson supporter; Franklin D. Roosevelt as enthusiastic assistant secretary of the navy under Wilson; and Stimson as secretary of war under Taft. This helps explain why the Pearl Harbor period was not staffed exclusively by young converts to the growing interventionism of the late 1930s. There was on hand a much older age cohort who had internalized an interventionist framework some forty years earlier and who were eclipsed by the militant noninterventionism of the 1920s and 1930s. This group formed a countertrend subculture which sat out the interwar isolationism until called back into power for the higher positions during World War II. By the 1950s, however, they

⁴⁶ Duroselle, *From Wilson to Roosevelt*, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁷ Harley Notter, *The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 1965), pp. 106–129.

⁴⁸ Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of American People*, 8th ed. (New York, 1969), p. 553.

⁴⁹ Hull, *Memoirs*, pp. 33–36.

⁵⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, 1959), pp. 95–114.

had mostly been replaced by the younger interventionists of the Kennedy generation.

Can we discern a period still further back out of which grew the imperial paradigm? The 1870s and 1880s are commonly considered the “nadir of diplomacy.” The period was marked by massive indifference to overseas affairs, Anglophobia (over Britain’s aid to the confederacy) preoccupation with filling out the presumably self-sufficient United States. We might, therefore, label this epoch the “continental paradigm.” As with later periods, a minority critique starts in the middle of it on the strategic assumptions of the established orientation. In this case there was a growing strategic insecurity and the efforts of navalists—of whom Admiral Mahan was not the first—to rebuild the decrepit United States Navy. The year 1889 was a turning point; the Harrison administration began to discard the passive, inert policies which had characterized the previous two decades and to start actively making policy for the first time since the Civil War.⁵¹ One need only compare the relatively weak American reactions to the bloodshed of the Cuba uprising of 1868–1878 to the much firmer stand of the 1890s.

It is not necessary to go further back than this. Our principal analytical distinctions—a near or far defense, interventionism or noninterventionism, few or many troops overseas—do not readily apply to nineteenth-century America. The United States was too busy, in a Turnerian sense, with filling out its own frontiers. Further, America had little to fear from Europe or Asia, especially with the British fleet ruling the waves.

Comparing Paradigms

While this division of United States diplomatic history into periods is admittedly an artificial construct, we can compare the periods, or the “paradigms” that accompany the periods. (This comparison is summarized in Table 1.) The concrete expression of an interventionist or non-interventionist view is the number of United States troops overseas. During the imperial and Pearl Harbor periods America had relatively many troops abroad, and they were abroad not merely because of World Wars I and II respectively. Long before our entry into World War I, there were American soldiers in Cuba, the Philippines, and throughout the Caribbean, including Mexico. During the intervening Versailles period the troops came home not only from Europe, but from the Caribbean as well. Only in Nicaragua and Haiti did United States occupation continue past the 1920s. The Philippines were lightly garrisoned and almost for-

⁵¹ Robert L. Beisner, *From the Old to the New Diplomacy, 1865–1900* (New York, forthcoming 1975).

TABLE 1

Paradigms in Comparison

	<i>Continental</i> 1870s, 1880s	<i>Imperial</i> 1890s-1910s	<i>Versailles</i> 1920s, 1930s	<i>Pearl Harbor</i> 1940s-1960s	<i>Vietnam</i> 1970s-?
General view of foreign areas	"Don't matter"	"Matters"	"Don't matter"	"Matters"	"Don't matter"
View of Europe	Indifference (Anglophobia)	Imitation (Anglophilia)	Irritation	Salvation	Irritation
Losers		Antiimperialists	Wilsonian internationalists	Isolationists	Globalists
Troops overseas	Almost none	Caribbean, Philippines, China, West Europe, Russia, Mexico	Few in Caribbean, Philippines	Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa	Decreasing
Congress	Obstructive	Cooperative	Obstructive	Cooperative	Obstructive
Funds for overseas	None	War loans	Begrudging of war debts, anticellat-ionists, Johnson Act	Marshall Plan, Point Four, AID, arms-sales credits	Begrudging of aid, balance of payments force cutback
Commitments	None	Open Door, Caribbean protectorates, Associated Power in World War I, Philippine defense	Continued Open Door, reduction of Caribbean protectorates	U.N., NATO, SEATO, (CENTO), Congressional resolutions on Formosa, Middle East, Cuba, Berlin, Vietnam	Senate res. 85, War Powers Bill, attempt to repeal resolutions

gotten in the interwar period. During the Pearl Harbor period there were troops overseas not only during World War II but long after it. The United States foreign-policy elite during this time was disposed to consider an overseas defense as the only reasonable American strategy. With President Nixon, this strategy seems to be changing, and there are fewer troops overseas.

Much of United States foreign policy hinges on the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches of government. If the Congress follows the president's lead and delivers what he wants, the United States is then able to engage in interventionist moves. When the Congress, specifically the Senate, tires of such activity and starts resenting strong presidential leadership, the possibilities for intervention are reduced. We would therefore expect to find an assertive Congress during noninterventionist periods, particularly at the beginning of these periods. It is for this reason that we get dramatic showdowns between key senators and the president. Especially important is the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whose chairmen appear "irascible" and "contentious" when they engage in limiting executive initiatives in foreign affairs. Ranting Anglophobe Charles Sumner defeated President Grant's scheme to annex Santo Domingo in 1870. Henry Cabot Lodge (and William Borah) stopped America's entry into President Wilson's beloved League. J. William Fulbright (and Mike Mansfield) cut down President Nixon's foreign-aid program and tried to put the executive on a leash by means of the 1973 War Powers Bill.

There are also, to be sure, executive-legislative difficulties when the paradigm shifts the other way, from noninterventionist to interventionist, which are perhaps not quite as dramatic because in this case the congressional opponents are the "losers" (see below). From 1898 to 1900 there was the bitter but unsuccessful rear guard of those protesting the war with Spain and the Philippines annexation, such as George F. Hoar and George G. Vest in the Senate and Thomas B. Reed, speaker of the House.⁵² In 1939 to 1941 there was a similar rear guard (discussed earlier), of those demanding United States neutrality. One characteristic of a paradigm shift in either direction, then, is a serious fight between the White House and Capitol Hill over who will have the upper hand in foreign policy. When the paradigm is established, conflict between the two branches subsides because there is relative consensus and the acquiescence of one branch to the other; a spirit of "cooperation" and "bipartisanship" then prevails.

The shift from one paradigm to another also involves a rather clearly

⁵² Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York, 1968), pp. 139-164, 203-211.

identifiable group of “losers”—those whose orientation is repudiated. This is not a happy process and much rancor accompanies the displacement of the bearers of the old paradigm and their consignment to obscurity. The antiimperialists of 1898–1900 sought to preserve a more limited, continental America. Their arguments—strategic, moral, constitutional, and economic—bear a striking resemblance to some of the arguments used to oppose the Vietnam war.⁵³ The antiimperialists were condemned by the interventionists of their day; Theodore Roosevelt called them “simply unhung traitors.” The losers of twenty years later, the Wilsonian internationalists, also did not go down without a vituperative fight. The isolationists were the clear and unhappy losers as the Pearl Harbor paradigm replaced the Versailles paradigm. One is not yet certain what to call the present crop of losers, but perhaps “globalists” is a label that will stick.⁵⁴ Those who defend the dying paradigm appear as obdurate fools who are unable to come to grips with the new realities and who must therefore be ignored. The losers, who stick with the old paradigm while the new one triumphs, gradually cease to be practitioners.

Another characteristic of noninterventionist periods is the begrudging to friends and allies of United States aid, which flowed rather freely during the preceding interventionist period. The failure of the European powers to pay their World War I debts created both a public and congressional furor in the 1920s and culminated in the 1934 Johnson Act prohibiting debtor nations from raising funds in the United States. The “anticancellationists” helped spread the feeling that America had been cheated by tricky and unreliable ex-partners. In the late 1960s a critique of United States foreign aid developed along similar lines: billions have been wasted; they’ll never be repaid; we’ve been much too generous; the recipients are ungrateful; etc. The interesting point here is that the critique came not only from conservatives, but from liberals who previously spoke in favor of foreign aid.

Arms and munitions appear as a minor but interesting point in noninterventionist periods. Arms sales abroad are viewed with great suspicion, as a possible avenue by which the country could get dragged into foreign wars. The Nye Committee hearings and the ensuing Neutrality Acts in the 1930s were attempts to prevent a repetition of America’s gradual entanglement in another European war. It can be argued that pre-

⁵³ Robert L. Beisner, “1898 and 1968: The Anti-Imperialists and the Doves,” *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXV, no. 2 (June 1970).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy 1938–1970* (Baltimore, 1971); and Gary Porter, “Globalism—The Ideology of Total World Involvement,” in Marcus G. Raskin and Bernard B. Fall (eds.), *The Vietnam Reader* (New York, 1965), pp. 322–327.

cisely such an entanglement was repeated under Roosevelt with “cash and carry,” Lend Lease, and the destroyers-for-bases deal with Britain. It indeed led to de facto war in the North Atlantic between the United States and Germany months before Pearl Harbor. But, it is interesting to note, in the interventionist Pearl Harbor period there was practically no regret that the Neutrality Acts had thus been circumvented. The problem of arms sales again flared as the Pearl Harbor paradigm came under question. As a result of a 1967 Senate debate, arms sales by means of Export-Import Bank financing and Pentagon loan guarantees were stopped. Nixon’s program to supply military hardware instead of United States troops was severely trimmed in the Senate.

The movement away from interventionism seems also to include the congressional and popular scapegoating of manufacturers of munitions. While Senator Nye had his “merchants of death,” Senator Proxmire has his “military-industrial complex.” In both cases it was alleged that armaments programs take on a life of their own and weapons makers manipulate public spending to their own advantage. The Nye Committee even “began to attack the warmaking potential of the executive branch of the government,” records Wayne Cole, and “also began to see the President as part of the compound.”⁵⁵

In interventionist periods there is a willingness to enter into arrangements that pledge the country to military action overseas. Admittedly, this was slow in coming during World War I which the United States entered belatedly and only as an “associate” of the Entente. During the Pearl Harbor period, however, the United States carpeted the globe with commitments.

Following these times of generous pledges have come periods of limiting or discarding commitments. In addition to the already-mentioned League rejection and the Neutrality Acts there was the interesting Ludlow Amendment (shelved in the House in 1937 by a vote of 209–188) to require a national referendum to declare war except for actual invasion. As the Vietnam paradigm took hold there was the National Commitments Resolution (without force of law) in 1969 expressing the sense of the Senate that America should fulfill no commitment without specific legislation. In 1973 a War Powers Bill to permit the president only ninety days to use troops abroad without additional legislation overrode Nixon’s veto. Further conflict over commitments seemed inevitable as Senator Mansfield continued his efforts to prune United States forces in Europe.

On a more general level, in the noninterventionist periods there is a

⁵⁵ Wayne S. Cole, *An Interpretive History of American Foreign Relations* (Homewood, Ill., 1968), p. 443.

lessened interest in Europe and in the interventionist periods a heightened interest. During the Continental period there was aloof indifference to Europe buttressed by a sharp Anglophobia in the wake of Britain's aid to the Confederacy. As American leaders adopted imperial views there was an imitation of Europe (colony grabbing) and some cooperation, as in the Peking expedition in 1900. There was also a marked Anglophilia starting in the Spanish-American War. After Versailles there was disgust at European greed and squabbling and regret that America had ever become involved in Europe's war. During the Pearl Harbor period there was the virtual United States occupation of West Europe and an almost crusading American involvement in European recovery, rearmament, and unification. By the early 1970s the devalued dollar and pressure to withdraw our forces marked the beginning of a diminished American role in Europe, a trend that was heightened in 1973 and 1974 by differing United States and European approaches to the Middle East and the petroleum shortage. Again the view surfaced that the Europeans were selfish and hopelessly fractious.

On a more general level still, in the noninterventionist periods the lands abroad "do not matter" much to the United States elite; in the interventionist periods foreign lands "matter" a great deal. (Professors in foreign-area and international studies, as well as of foreign languages, have recently noticed the former view among students.) We may also note that the last three periods each began with a catastrophe of overseas origin. Versailles appeared to demonstrate that American participation in a European war had been futile and a profound mistake. Pearl Harbor appeared to demonstrate that the interwar "isolationism" had been absurd and had led to a disaster. And Vietnam appeared to demonstrate that the long-standing interventionist policy had been "wrong" and had led to a disaster.

Cyclical Theories Revisited

This approach to diplomatic history, of course, is not completely new or unique. Several writers have advanced views that United States foreign policy tends to swing like a pendulum (an image used by both President Nixon and Senator Fulbright) from extremes of overinvolvement to underinvolvement. Stanley Hoffmann, for example, discerned "the two *tempi* of America's foreign relations," alternating "from phrases of withdrawal (or, when complete withdrawal is impossible, priority to domestic concerns) to phases of dynamic, almost messianic romping on the world stage."⁵⁶ Hans Morgenthau saw United States policy mov-

⁵⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969), p. 19.

ing “back and forth between the extremes of an indiscriminate isolationism and an equally indiscriminate internationalism or globalism.”⁵⁷

Getting more specific, historian Dexter Perkins divided American foreign relations into cycles of “relatively pacific feeling,” followed by “rising bellicosity and war,” followed by “postwar nationalism,” and then back to “relatively pacific feeling.”⁵⁸ Getting even more specific, a behaviorally inclined political scientist, Frank L. Klingberg, using such indicators as naval expenditures, annexations, armed expeditions, diplomatic pressures, and attention paid to foreign matters in presidential speeches and party platforms, discovered alternating phases of “introversion” (averaging twenty-one years) and “extroversion” (averaging twenty-seven years). Klingberg added: “If America’s fourth phase of extroversion (which began around 1940) should last as long as the previous extrovert phases, it would not end until well into the 1960’s.”⁵⁹ As social scientists, of course, we do not accept the notion that God plays numbers games with United States foreign policy. The most fruitful approach to this cyclical phenomenon, the author believes, is the generationally linked paradigm, which helps explain both the changes in orientation and their spacing in time.

Other writers have found a roughly generational interval of about twenty-five years between upsurges of world violence. (Klingberg too mentioned generations as one possible explanation for his foreign-policy cycles.) Denton and Phillips suggest what we might term a “forgetting” theory to explain their twenty-five-year cycles of violence: That generation, and particularly its decision makers, that experienced an intensive war, tends to remember its horrors and avoid similar conflicts. The following generation of decision makers may forget the horrors and remember the heroism; this generation is more likely to engage in violence.⁶⁰ This explanation helps account for our Versailles paradigm, but it is flatly at odds with our Pearl Harbor paradigm, during which a generation, virtually all of whom experienced World War II first hand, displayed little reluctance to apply force overseas. This generation was of course repelled by the violence of World War II, but used it to explain why aggression must be “nipped in the bud” to prevent another large

⁵⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York, 1969), p. 15.

⁵⁸ Dexter Perkins, *The American Approach to Foreign Policy*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 146–147.

⁵⁹ Frank L. Klingberg, “The Historical Alternation of Moods in American Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, IV (January 1952).

⁶⁰ Frank H. Denton and Warren Phillips, “Some Patterns in the History of Violence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, XII (June 1968), 193.

conflagration. Walt Rostow, for example, continued to insist that Vietnam *prevented* a large war. "If we had walked away from Asia or if we walk away from Asia now, the consequences will not be peace," said Rostow in 1971. "The consequence will be a larger war and quite possibly a nuclear war."⁶¹

This author subscribes to a cyclical theory of United States foreign policy only in the most general terms—namely, that if there are alternating orientations of interventionism and noninterventionism then logically the former will produce more "action" and this will show up as intermittent peaks in statistical tabulations. The question of cycles falls behind the question of the conventional wisdom of foreign-policy thinkers.

In searching for explanations of any cyclical theory, of course, we cannot rule out purely external factors such as threats or challenges from abroad. It may be that such external forces have impinged upon the United States at roughly generational intervals and that we have merely reacted to them. This then dumps the generation question onto the offending land across the sea. The problem here is that during one epoch American foreign-policy thinkers may largely ignore threats and in another epoch they may take threats very seriously. As we have already considered, the Cuban uprising of the 1870s elicited relatively little response from the United States compared to our response to the Cuban uprising of the 1890s. America paid little attention to East Europe in the 1930s and a great deal of attention in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1948 the Soviet-Yugoslav split was seen as an anomaly; in the 1970s the Sino-Soviet dispute is seen as natural, the almost inevitable collision of two nationalisms. *Quisquid recipitur recipitur secundum modum recipiensis*. The world changes, of course, but it takes a changed set of American attitudes to perceive the new situation.

The problem is one of perception catching up with reality not on a continual and incremental basis, but delayed and in spurts. May we hazard that Vietnam will leave behind it a continuation of this pattern? The immediate impact of Vietnam on United States foreign policy is already apparent: the Senate's restorative revolt, demoralized armed forces, international economic difficulties, and skeptical allies. The longer-term effects may be far deeper. If the above generational-paradigm hypothesis is even approximately correct, we can expect persons who witnessed Vietnam while they were in their twenties to retain a noninterventionist orientation. As the elite of this generation gradually surfaces into policy-relevant positions, we can expect them to implement their views. The most important reactions to Vietnam, then, may be yet to come. We

⁶¹ *Washington Post*, July 12, 1971, p. A14.

might remember in this regard that the depths of interwar isolationism did not come immediately after Versailles but, rather, a full decade and a half later, with the Neutrality Acts. Will the foreign-policy elite of the 1980s and 1990s still be slaying their long-dead foes?

1974. "From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: Shifting Generational Paradigms and Foreign Policy." *Political Science Quarterly* 89 (3): 563-88. Skowronek, Stephen. That comparison is not meant to insult policy makers or students but rather to convey that the exercise of pitching complex topics to a sophomore-level audience is useful in multiple settings. It also is giving me confidence to stretch into new professional areas. My podcast was born of a desire to find a novel way of teaching others about complex political issues.