

## American Power and the Legacy of Washington: Enduring Principles for Foreign and Defense Policy

Paul O. Carrese \*

It is commonly said that America entered uncharted seas after the Cold War, as the superpower with unrivaled military, economic, and cultural might, and also said that the war on terrorism further swept us into a new era -- a global hegemon, yet beset by shadowy threats and unique burdens. When we ponder the course America should chart it is less common, however, to consult our founding principles and first centuries of experience. Harvard's Stanley Hoffman opened the way to reconsider this longer view when, after the 2001 terrorist attacks and a decade of theorizing about a paradigm to explain the post-Cold War world, he suggested that new constructs from "the end of history" to a "clash of civilizations" in fact obscured our understanding of the enduring politics of nations and the actual demands of statecraft.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while partisanship and rival schools always have marked American debates on foreign and security policy, disputes over the war on terrorism now recall the rancor of the Vietnam War era. This is partly due to the dangers, burdens, and confusion of our new situation, but our tendency to reduce international affairs to doctrines -- realism, liberal-internationalism, democratic peace, postmodernism, or blends thereof -- often yields not candid deliberation but contests between armed camps.

A pause from current anxieties and entrenched quarrels to reconsider George Washington's statesmanship in founding

American foreign and security policy might help us to chart a grand strategy more consonant with the better angels of our history and national character, and with our justifiable interests. America was the first deliberately founded regime in history, and it would be odd to think that her subsequent rise to global dominance in both "hard" and "soft" power somehow justifies amnesia about her original aims. Another of her great statesmen, in the midst of our most terrible crisis, defined her as dedicated to propositions about liberty, equality, the pursuit of happiness, and the rule of law -- not, primarily, to global empire, global commerce, global democracy, a national security state, or a global balance of power. Indeed, much of Lincoln's greatness lay in a strategy of rededication to the principles of America's founders, including great care in balancing the necessities of defense and military power with the higher ends they should serve. He knew that novel challenges required him to think and act anew, but he also knew America was grounded in principles of natural justice and religious truths about the humility yet dignity to which mankind is called -- however much we fail to abide by these.

A half-century ago Hans Morgenthau urged America to revive the realism of its founders, especially Washington and Hamilton, to guide our foreign policy in new circumstances and to transcend both isolationism and Wilsonian internationalism.<sup>2</sup> Morgenthau eloquently advocated his own favored theory of international affairs, but his reconception of Washington as simply a realist did not stick. Washington more

---

\* Professor of Political Science, US Air Force Academy. I am grateful to Dr. Susan Carrese, Dr. Paul Bolt, and Ambassador Roger Harrison for comments. Views expressed are the author's and not those of the Air Force Academy or US Government.

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hoffman, "Clash of Globalizations," *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (2002): 104-15.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hans Morgenthau, "The Mainsprings of American Foreign Policy: The National Interest vs. Moral Abstractions," *American Political Science Review* 44 (1950): 833-54. See also Joseph Cropsey, "The Moral Basis of International Action," in *America Armed*, ed. Robert Goldwin (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), 71-91, and more recently Dmitri Simes, "Realism: It's High-minded . . . and It Works," *The National Interest* 74 (Winter 2003/04): 168-172.

typically labors under another, graver misreading: that his Farewell Address (1796) and other writings avow isolationism or passivity. Fortunately, several scholars in the post-Cold War era have explained why uncertain times call for revisiting this statesman who rarely favored “isms” or doctrines, but who offered sound principles on right, might, and diplomacy that long were cited as the guiding ideals of our republic.<sup>3</sup> We should expand our thinking and assess our current options by recovering the practical wisdom and distinctive American principles found in the Declaration of Independence, *The Federalist*, and the Constitution – all of which both reflect and inform Washington’s statecraft.<sup>4</sup>

Washington closed his career as founder with advice to “Friends, and Fellow-Citizens” that he hoped would endure – offering for “solemn contemplation” and “frequent review” principles he thought “all important to the permanency of your felicity as a people.”<sup>5</sup> Leading statesmen and thinkers did

---

<sup>3</sup> See especially David Hendrickson, “The Renovation of American Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 71:2 (1992): 48-63; Patrick Garrity, “Warnings of a Parting Friend,” *The National Interest* 45 (Fall 1996): 14-26; Matthew Spalding and Patrick Garrity, “Our Interest, Guided by Our Justice,” in *A Sacred Union of Citizens: George Washington’s Farewell Address and the American Character* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 91-139; Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: America’s Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), and “Back to Bedrock,” *Foreign Affairs* 76:2 (1997): 134-146.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Kissinger argued, a decade into America’s status as lone superpower, that we must recover the study of history and philosophy as essential to a clear national strategy and to genuine statesmanship, in *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 283-88.

<sup>5</sup> “Farewell Address,” in *George Washington: Writings*, ed. John Rhodehamel (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997), 962, 964; hereafter cited parenthetically as *W*. Washington’s writings are quoted as in the originals, with spelling and emphases retained. Another useful one-volume

consult his Farewell Address up through Henry Cabot Lodge during the First World War and Morgenthau in the Cold War. In recent decades a consensus has deemed it irrelevant, as isolationist or out-dated. Some also consider Washington just a front for his bright aides Madison and Hamilton. Even brief engagement with the Address, however, sheds light on current dilemmas; deeper study shows that he revised every argument, hoping, as if a latter-day Thucydides, to distill advice for the ages.<sup>6</sup> A recent reappraisal finds him “a leader who sought explanations and explainers all his life, and who mastered both what he was told and those who told him.”<sup>7</sup> His deeds and words are no cookbook of recipes for today, since the main lessons of the Address and the career informing it are architectonic, not specific: **America must base its security policy on principle and prudence rather than power or popularity, and prize a decent republican politics over conquest or glory.** The Address marked the second time Washington had relinquished near-absolute power, when such ambitious and talented men usually grasp for more. This led his countrymen to rank him with an ancient Roman renowned for leaving power after saving his country: he was the American Cincinnatus. He recalled the best of the Republic, not the Empire, for while Washington rose to fame through military command he appraised power and security as means to higher ends. Principles of personal and civic virtue guided his policies and

---

edition is *George Washington: A Collection*, ed.

William B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> For correspondence and successive drafts, see *W*, 804-6, 938-948, 950-51, 954-56, 960-61. Spalding and Garrity defend Washington’s authorship in detail; *Sacred Union of Citizens*, 46-57. See also *Washington’s Farewell Address*, ed. Victor Paltsits (New York: The New York Public Library, 1935).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 139; see “Morals” and “Ideas,” 121-156.

counsel, to a degree that Americans alternately admire and find hard to believe.

Familiarity with Washington's career makes it hard to deny that he was the real thing, his credibility demonstrated in decades of deeds and words devoted to liberty, constitutionalism, and political moderation.<sup>8</sup> The Address encapsulates a comprehensive approach to foreign policy, security, and war, but both his words and his specific deeds are best understood when viewed in light of each other. Indeed, as befits the words of a statesman, one can glean from the Address and the career informing it a handy set of guidelines -- five broad, overlapping principles for strategic thinking: *first*, the priority of a decent republic, rooted in natural justice and guided by transcendent truths about humankind; *second*, the subordination of military to civil authority, and avoidance of either militarism or weakness; *third*, balancing liberty and security through a complex, moderate constitution that divides responsibility for foreign and defense policy; *fourth*, the need for statesmanship within such an order, especially an executive balancing deliberation, prudence, and flexibility in both grand strategy and tactics; and, *fifth*, balancing interest, independence, and justice in foreign affairs through prudent recourse to just war principles and the classic right of nations. Washington was a practical man of policies and action, but he insisted these be chosen in light of sound principles and informed judgment. Those seeking concrete ideas on pressing issues may think these principles vague or useless. He knew,

<sup>8</sup> For broader studies see Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Patriot Sage: George Washington and the American Political Tradition*, ed. Gary Gregg and Matthew Spalding (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999); and my essay "Liberty, Constitutionalism, and Moderation: The Political Thought of George Washington," in Bryan-Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga, eds., *History of American Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Press, 2003), 95-113, including the sources recommended therein.

however, that republics typically falter on strategic thinking, instead seizing on short term problems, adopting favored doctrines of the day, or following popular impulses. For Washington, sound judgments of the moment require candid deliberation guided by fundamental principles, especially when facing great challenges. He doubtless would admit that we face massive, new problems today -- ballistic missiles and catastrophic weapons, terrorist exploitation of modern technology, the cultural and economic pressures of globalization, and the envy and mistrust accompanying our extraordinary political and military might. He might remind us, however, that for over two decades he defeated a superpower and managed an international coalition, forged trust among members of his own federation, and navigated ruthless great power politics – all with vastly fewer resources at his disposal than America can marshal today.

Sober judgment indeed will be needed to chart a course through the opportunities and threats facing America in this complex era. How should we conceive our role in world affairs, given our power and principles? How should we define our security and interests, our force structure and alliances, our commitments to collective security and international regimes? Is America the "Empire" that post-modern theorists and liberal internationalists deem a threat to the world, and that "America First" conservatives deem a threat to itself?<sup>9</sup> Washington's

<sup>9</sup> For a range of recent viewpoints see Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Robert Kagan, *Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003); and the retrospective from Fukuyama and Huntington to Zakaria and Bush,

principles on republicanism and constitutional complexity, and on balancing interest and justice in foreign and defense policy, transcend the doctrines and quarrels of the moment to restore a larger, enduring horizon. He has been caricatured as incompetent at strategy, while in fact his example recalls a Clausewitzian grand strategy that links security policy and larger moral and political aims – a perspective obscured today by our faith in technology and technological thinking, and by the dynamism and drive for novelty in the worlds of policy, the media, and academia alike.<sup>10</sup> At its peak Washington's thought recalls the sober, humane, and complex republicanism of Thucydides, equally aware of the realities and necessity of war and of the imperial temptations to which democracies, and ambitious leaders, are prone. After surveying the principles evident in specific episodes and writings of his statesmanship, I offer some more particular lessons that his republicanism and principled prudence might suggest for current challenges and debates.

### 1) Eyes on the Prize: A Decent Republic, Natural Rights, and Providence

Washington could suggest that his advice be consulted down the ages because he had proven that his deeds and words rested on principles. He first rose in stature in Virginia

and beyond for his exploits and published journal as a colonial officer in the French and Indian War, and he was elected to Virginia's legislature in 1758. In the turbulent 1760s he defended the Americans' rights to liberty and self-governance, and in 1774 attended the First Continental Congress. He justified himself to a loyalist friend: "an Innate Spirit of freedom first told me" that the acts of the British government "are repugnant to every principle of natural justice." Indeed, they are "not only repugnant to natural Right, but Subversive of the Laws & Constitution of Great Britain itself," and the King's ministers are "trampling upon the Valuable Rights of American's, confirmed to them by Charter, & the Constitution they themselves boast of" (August 24, 1774; *W*, 157). He supported strong measures in Congress, and after the battles at Lexington and Concord in 1775 Washington attended the Second Congress in carefully chosen attire: his Virginia uniform. Several principles forged in that crisis directly address our 21<sup>st</sup> century concerns. The founders did not know of terrorism, but they knew of pirates and other outlaws. They therefore justified their rebellion with legal and philosophical principles publicly stated, and formed a professional military force reporting to a duly elected and organized civilian government. The Declaration of Independence carefully justifies a war to protect basic natural rights and constitutional government, as a last resort; it also specifies unacceptable forms of warfare concerning civilians, property, and prisoners. This spirit of constitutional republicanism informed Washington's General Orders of July 9, 1776, ordering the Declaration read to the troops so that they might understand "the grounds & reasons" of the war (*W*, 228).

The same General Orders provide for chaplains and religious services, and call upon the "blessing and protection of Heaven;" indeed, Washington hoped every officer and enlisted would live "as becomes a Christian

---

*America and the World: Debating the New Shape of International Politics*, ed. James Hoge and Gideon Rose (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> On Washington and Clausewitzian grand strategy see Donald Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 5, 114, 117, and Mackubin Owens, "General Washington and the Military Strategy of the Revolution," in *Patriot Sage*, 61-98. In general see Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Soldier defending the dearest Rights and Liberties of his country” (W, 228). After the war his major writings always cite the guidance of transcendent ideals but in more careful, non-sectarian language, broadened to embrace the rights to religious liberty for which the war also had been fought. Still, Washington did not separate republicanism, justifiable and limited force, and divine guidance about decency and honorable conduct. The radical direction of the French Revolution by the mid-1790s confirmed these views, given its replacement of Christianity with a religion of reason, progress, and ferocious republicanism. The famous exhortations in the Farewell Address to instill religious faith as well as moral and intellectual virtue thus defy the categories of recent American disputes about church and state. He tempers the utility of piety and morals with genuine appreciation for them: “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports”; “A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity”; just policies are “recommended by every sentiment which ennoble human Nature” (W, 971, 972–73). This endorses neither a secularist wall of separation between faith and government nor the sectarian view that America is a Christian nation; similarly, a republic should neither ignore the mutual influence between governmental and private morality nor adopt religious zealotry in its policies, at home or abroad. Throughout his career he balanced respect for Christian churches and Biblical religion with a modern republican’s enlightened tolerance.<sup>11</sup> These were ideals worth dying for, but military and security

<sup>11</sup> See the 1783 Circular to the States (W, 516-17), and as President his 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation and letters to religious minorities: Proclamation, October 3, 1789, and to Roman Catholics, March 15, 1790, in *Collection*, ed. Allen, 534-35, 546–47; to Hebrew Congregation, August 18, 1790 (W, 766–67).

measures were neither ends in themselves nor a replacement for a decent republican politics at home and abroad.

## 2) Civil-Military Relations, and Necessary Defenses, for a Republic

Throughout his decades in public life, from colonial Virginia to establishing a sound national constitution by the 1790s, Washington noted the dangers of either militarism or weakness. He established the republican principle of civil-military relations, which many nations of the world still do not enjoy. Although he drew upon British practice, both America and the world chiefly should thank Washington for demonstrating that a professional military is both necessary to protect liberty and can be safe for it through subordination to laws and civil authority. This reflected his basic political moderation: real liberty is ordered liberty, securing self-government and political decency under law. Indeed, John Marshall, the great Chief Justice of the United States, served as a young officer under Washington and argued that without his character and principles the American cause would have failed in the war’s darkest hours.<sup>12</sup> Washington resisted temptations of power when the war prospects brightened, and when President under the Constitution. After the victory at Yorktown in 1781 an American colonel suggested he should be king, perhaps a tempting offer for a general admired by his army, and who—like a Caesar, Cromwell, Arnold, Napoleon, or Musharraf—was ambitious and proud. The temptation might strengthen given the great disorder in Congress: Washington long had proposed reforms about supplies, equipment, and pay for his men. Still, he immediately expressed “abhorrence” and “astonishment” to learn of

<sup>12</sup> John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington: Special Edition for Schools*, ed. Robert Faulkner and Paul Carrese (Indianapolis, IN.: Liberty Fund, 2000 [1838]), 75. Hereinafter cited parenthetically as *LGW*.

“such ideas” in the army: “Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your Country, concern for yourself or posterity, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your Mind” (*W*, 468–69).

After more than two centuries enjoying this principle, Americans tend to forget that our civil-military relations have not been trouble-free, and that Washington’s high standard is not easily met. A concern arose in post-Cold War America that the military is isolated from the civilian population it serves, especially that it is politically conservative. However valid this may be, regaining the perspective of Washington clarifies that America recently has become one of the first republics in history to define citizenship as requiring neither military nor any other national service. Many analyses of a civil-military gap, or demands that the military adopt the individualistic and egalitarian trends of the wider society, similarly misunderstand the need for a distinct military character, professionalism, and education, both for military missions and to inculcate an ethic of the rule of law. Washington’s example also sheds light on modern debates about the strictly professional versus professional-political models of officership offered by Huntington and Janowitz. More recently some scholars have argued that the military and its distinct services are semi-autonomous interests pressing elected officials for money, personnel, capabilities, and security policies; others argue that elected civilians have a constitutional duty to challenge and manage top officers and the armed services – on everything from tactics to force structure -- to ensure that larger political objectives are served.<sup>13</sup> Familiarity with Washington

reminds us of the stakes involved for our constitutional republic, and recommends a balance between the functional and political models of officership. He was no wall-flower as General, but he always respected civilian authority; conversely, as President he selected and then closely supervised the generals fighting Indian tribes in the northwest (replacing St. Clair with Wayne) and the army that suppressed the Whiskey Rebellion (see *LGW*, chs. 29, 32).<sup>14</sup>

From early in the revolution Washington had urged Congress to establish executive offices and procedures for supplying the army, and for managing revenue. When these finally were adopted by 1781 the improvements in everything from transportation to readiness were crucial to the Yorktown campaign (*LGW*, 259-260). Simultaneously, he upheld discipline and civil authority during two troop mutinies in 1781 over pay and supplies, dealing moderately with the first but severely with the second (*LGW*, 245–48). Trouble arose again in 1783 when the peace process threatened to disband the army before being paid. An anonymous letter at headquarters in Newburgh, New York summoned officers to discuss a threat of mutiny against Congress; Washington denounced that meeting but called an official one at the officers’ meeting house, the Temple of Virtue (*W*, 490). His extraordinary speech warned that “sowing the seeds of discord and separation between the Civil and Military powers” would undermine “that liberty, and . . . that justice for which we contend” (*W*, 495–500). His final appeal was to both reason and emotion: “let me conjure you, in the name of our common Country, as you value your own sacred honor, as you

<sup>13</sup> Compare Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) with Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002). For Higginbotham the model of Washington and George C. Marshall blends professionalism and

republicanism in a way that transcends Huntington’s categories; *Washington and the Military Tradition*, 114-138.

<sup>14</sup> See Ryan Barilleaux, “Foreign Policy and the First Commander in Chief,” in *Patriot Sage*, 141-164, at 144-150.

respect the rights of humanity, and as you regard the Military and National character of America,” to reject civil war (W, 498–500). He then stumbled in reading a letter from Congress: “Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray, but almost blind, in the service of my country” (W, 1109; see note 496.12). The once-rebellious officers, some in tears, unanimously reaffirmed allegiance to civil authority.

The main doctrinal manual of the U.S. Army today opens with “Washington at Newburgh: Establishing the Role of the Military in a Democracy,” finding there “the fundamental tenet of our professional ethos.”<sup>15</sup> Principled to the end, he disbanded the army once the peace treaty was official. After a last Circular Letter to the states recommending national reforms, and final orders to the army with more political advice, he resigned before Congress in December 1783 (W, 547–48). Jefferson wrote to him: “the moderation & virtue of a single character has probably prevented this revolution from being closed as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.”<sup>16</sup>

### 3) A Constitutional and Moderate Path to Foreign and Defense Policy

The Clausewitzian character of Washington’s approach to foreign and security policy, placing particular forces and policies in a framework of larger political aims, is evident in his commitment to

founding a constitutional order.<sup>17</sup> He was the most important leader in the constitutional reform movement from 1783 to 1789, both in his public acts and by quietly encouraging Madison, Hamilton, and other framers. He had defended Congress at Newburgh as an “Hon[ora]ble Body” not to be distrusted merely because “like all other Bodies, where there is a variety of different Interests to reconcile, their deliberations are slow” (W, 498-99). His subsequent 1783 Circular to the States emphasized the need for a stronger federal government and executive power, and by 1787 he endorsed a complex federal government of separated powers that shared enough functions to keep one another in balance. The Circular formulates clear convictions on these issues -- announcing his retirement from public life, then urging constitutional reforms to secure and perpetuate liberty. He noted that a general should abstain from politics, but it was “a duty incumbent upon me” to address these issues since, in “the present Crisis” of affairs, “silence in me would be a crime” (W, 516–18). The third of four “pillars” he proposed for national reorganization was “adoption of a proper Peace Establishment,” which included “placing the Militia of the Union upon a regular and respectable footing.” The common good required that state militias have “absolutely uniform” organization, equipment, and training – a complex system of defense that prevented militarism through

<sup>15</sup> *The Army*, Field Manual 100–1 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2001). See also Douglas Johnson and Steven Metz, “Civil-Military Relations in the United States,” in *American Defense Policy*, ed. Hays, Vallance, and Van Tassel, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 495–96.

<sup>16</sup> Jefferson to Washington, April 16, 1784, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch (New York: Modern Library), 791. See Marshall’s tribute, *LGW*, 301.

<sup>17</sup> See Peter Paret, “Clausewitz,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 187-213, arguing that Clausewitz adopted Montesquieu’s theory of the complexity, or spirit, of politics. Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert, “Reflections on Strategy in the Present and Future,” *ibid.*, 869-70, praises Washington and *The Federalist* for grand strategic thinking akin to Clausewitz’s formulation that “War is the continuation of politics by other means.”

citizen engagement, while providing an effective national capability (W, 524).<sup>18</sup>

From 1787 to 1789 Washington risked his reputation to establish a complex, effective constitutional order, by serving as president of the Philadelphia Convention; helping to reprint *The Federalist* in Virginia; letting his name be used in state ratification debates; and, serving as the first President under the new Constitution. Still, even with the Electoral College's unanimous support he returned to office reluctantly. He knew from the war that effective statesmanship, legislative deliberation, and popular opinion did not always harmonize. He nonetheless was a strong, moderate, and faithfully constitutional executive, justifying decisions with principles and working patiently with an increasingly divided Congress. He sought to quell the partisanship gripping America by calling his countrymen to the enduring interests and higher ends that united them, in both domestic and foreign matters.

The great themes of Washington's presidency were that executive power was safe for republicanism, and that constitutional government, not populism or parties, should guide the way through domestic and foreign trials. He established the principle that presidents should recruit the best talents and characters for offices, from a range of political and regional viewpoints; his cabinet included the rival views of Hamilton and Jefferson; his ambassadors included John Jay, Gouverneur Morris, and John Quincy Adams; he replaced General St. Clair after the

disastrous campaign in the Northwest Territory. His adherence to separation of powers dictated respect for the legislative dominance of Congress: the President should recommend a few measures, mostly concerning core Article II powers of foreign and security policy. Similarly, the executive should use the veto power with care, on constitutional and not policy grounds; he qualified this only with a veto late in his second term over a core presidential power, the size of the army. The executive and Senate should collaborate on treaties while maintaining separate roles and judgments: the House had no role, given "the plain letter of the Constitution" and his knowledge of "the principles on which the Constitution was formed" (W, 930–32). Dear to him was the principle that the President represents all the American citizenry, its common principles and highest ideals, and not one party, region, or doctrine. This was especially so regarding war and foreign affairs, as is evident in his firm but patient conduct during both terms.

Washington's general principle guiding foreign and defense policy is moderation, understood as the sober balance among ideas or actions advocated by Montesquieu – the modern philosopher most keen to instruct statesmen in practical judgment. This quality made Montesquieu the most cited philosopher in America in the 1780s and 1790s (e.g., in *The Federalist*), and later provided Clausewitz a model for capturing the complexity of war and strategy. Such moderation is familiar to us today in the more obvious elements of Montesquieuan political science, the complexity of viewpoints and balancing of interests inherent in separation of powers and federalism.<sup>19</sup> This same spirit, however, also animates Washington's endorsements of liberal learning and

<sup>18</sup> In May 1783 he had sent Congress "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment," which mixed a small professional army with larger state militias; he also recommended forts, arsenals, a navy, coastal defenses, and a military academy but noted the political and economic limits to defense requests. See *Writings of George Washington*, ed. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 26: 374-398; Higginbotham, *Washington and the Military Tradition*, 124-25, 129-130; Barilleaux, "Foreign Policy," 156-57.

<sup>19</sup> See Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1748]) Preface; Bk. 29 ch. 1; Bk. 9 chs. 1–3; Bk. 11 chs. 5, 6, 8, 20.



institutions “for the general diffusion of knowledge” from his First Annual Message in 1790, to the Farewell Address, to his final Annual Message in 1797, it being “essential that public opinion should be enlightened” (W, 972, 750). He repeatedly proposed a national university and military academy, and when Congress declined he privately endowed schools and educational funds; Washington and Lee University is one result of this commitment (W, 982-83). The intellectual confidence he worked to develop allowed him to consult a wide range of intelligent advisers, and then to rely upon one over another as he saw fit.<sup>20</sup> He tried to perpetuate this ideal of wide consultations and balanced judgment among a new generation of military and civilian leaders. Fashioning sound foreign and defense policies requires proper deliberation and judgment, within and across constitutional branches, about particular situations -- a complex, messy process in a constitutional republic, but a path of political moderation and sobriety that avoids extremes of doctrine or of momentary passion.

#### 4) Executive Power, Prudence, and Flexibility in Statecraft and Tactics

Washington’s complex, political approach to formulating foreign and defense policy included a chief executive who balanced consultation, prudential judgment, secrecy, speed, and flexibility in both grand strategy and tactics. The arguments in *The Federalist* on the necessity of such an office to secure republican liberty employ the theories of Locke and Montesquieu, but they draw distinct shape and weight from Washington as General and citizen-founder. Indeed, many scholars and statesmen have admired his balance of executive toughness and

republican principle as embodying an ideal of the prudent statesman traceable to Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch. A recent analysis of the qualities of strategic sense he displayed as a general and field commander -- marrying long-term objectives with constant short-term adjustments – could just as well describe his later record as a civilian chief executive:

He always kept the political object foremost in his considerations. He always seemed to examine his alternatives in terms of the whole strategic picture. Learning from his early mistakes, he constantly adapted his strategy to the circumstances. Recognizing the defects of his tactical instrument, he never asked too much of it.<sup>21</sup>

Several scholars cite Washington in rejecting any restriction of “strategy” to Napoleonic annihilation or Upton’s bureaucratic war machine, arguing, as one puts it, that “Washington’s military career provides a model of leadership and strategic and tactical expertise.”<sup>22</sup> As General he eventually discerned the blend of tactics, campaigns, and geopolitical alliances that could deny victory to his superpower opponent, while ensuring an American victory that would provide geographic and political independence. He had to keep an army in the field during dark years of conflict, and forge a French alliance without succumbing to their ambitions, until he could maneuver the British into fatigue or a spectacular defeat. His understanding of the

<sup>20</sup> Higginbotham notes that Washington and George Marshall shared the unusual quality of seeking out diverse views from their aides, in *Washington and the Military Tradition*, 76-78, 121-22.

<sup>21</sup> Mackubin Owens, “Washington and the Strategy of the Revolution,” in *Patriot Sage*, 98.

<sup>22</sup> Albert T. McJoynt, “Washington, George (1732-99),” in *International Military and Defense Encyclopedia*, ed. Dupuy (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s U.S./Maxwell Macmillan, 1993) 6: 2932-34; see also Dave Palmer, *The Way of the Fox: American Strategy in the War for America, 1775-1783* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975). Compare the treatment in Russell Weigley, “American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Paret, 408-443 at 410-413.

enemy, potential allies, and resources in the American character and domestic materiel dictated that he control his passion for reputation and honor, so as to retreat or fight as this strategy required. Marshall, drawing on Plutarch, compared him to two Romans who fought the great Carthaginian general Hannibal – Fabius, who harassed and retreated, and Marcellus, who attacked: “He has been called the American Fabius; but those who compare his actions with his means, will perceive as much of Marcellus as of Fabius in his character” (*LGW*, 467). A. T. Mahan, the founder of American strategy studies, credits Washington with seeing the decisive importance of naval power; he might have done better to include him when analyzing principles of grand strategy or praising such exemplars of a strategic sense as Lord Nelson.<sup>23</sup>

Washington’s development of practical judgment would be merely Machiavellian if the aims were immoral or amoral, or if the ends were thought to justify any means. The pattern throughout his career, however, was to avoid either amoral expedience or an impractical moralism. The widespread rediscovery in the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Aristotelian ethics has restored such traditional ideas about political conduct as “statesman” and “prudence,” which one scholar defines as long reserved for those “who have exercised the art of ruling with sufficient excellence to earn the gratitude of their contemporaries and posterity.” Recent figures like Washington, Lincoln, and Churchill exhibited “moral wisdom” in the face of extraordinary political emergencies, guided not by abstract moral principles alone but by prudence understood as “the mediating process and personal virtue through which they connected the moral ends

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1944 [1890]); on Washington, 342-43, 364-65, 387-89, 397-400; on grand strategy, 7-10, 22-23; on Nelson, 23-24.

they pursued with their everyday actions and policies.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, as general and President Washington employed realistic modes of intelligence and covert operations while stopping short of ruthlessness.<sup>25</sup> On larger matters Tocqueville praised his ability to discern a sound policy in the 1790s when the French Revolution and Europe’s great power contest unleashed a storm of ideas and passions upon the American body politic. A statesman’s hand at the wheel was needed:

The sympathies of the people in favor of France were . . . declared with so much violence that nothing less than the inflexible character of Washington and the immense popularity that he enjoyed were needed to prevent war from being declared on England. And still, the efforts that the austere reason of this great man made to struggle against the generous but unreflective passions of his fellow citizens almost took from him the sole recompense that he had ever reserved for himself, the love of his country. The majority pronounced against his policy; now the entire people approves it. If the Constitution and public favor had not given the direction of the external affairs of the state to Washington, it is certain that the nation would have done then precisely what it condemns today.<sup>26</sup>

The same spirit informed Washington’s policy on the popular protests to a federal tax on liquor that blossomed into the Whiskey

<sup>24</sup> Alberto Coll, “Normative Prudence as a Tradition of Statecraft,” in *Ethics & International Affairs: A Reader*, ed. Joel Rosenthal (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 58-77 at 75. On Lincoln and Churchill see Cohen, *Supreme Command*; on Washington, see especially *LGW*, 465-69, and Brookhiser, *Founding Father*, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Knott, “George Washington and the Founding of American Clandestine Activity,” in *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13-26; see also 27-57.

<sup>26</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Vol. 1, pt. 2, ch. 6, 220.

Rebellion of 1794.<sup>27</sup> Still, his highest achievements of prudence and principled power involved the crises of foreign affairs and war in his second term. Voices of all persuasions, including both Hamilton and Jefferson, saw these clouds on the horizon in 1792 and pleaded that he postpone his wish to retire. He shelved the draft of a farewell address he had asked Madison to prepare; he again was the unanimous choice in the Electoral College. After navigating a stormy second term he asked Hamilton to re-draft a parting address, but, ever moderate, he insisted that his increasingly partisan aide include ideas from the initial version by Hamilton's once partner, now bitter rival, Madison.

### 5) Balancing Interest, Independence, and Justice: Just War and International Law

Washington wanted rival views joined in his Farewell Address to affirm the balanced thinking and shared principles nearly lost in the partisan 1790s. Tocqueville describes this "admirable letter addressed to his fellow citizens, which forms the political testament of that great man" as the basic charter of American foreign and defense policy.<sup>28</sup> As President his main policies sought an adequate federal army and navy; peace with Indian nations and defense of existing American settlements by force if necessary, but not expansion; and, protection of the republic from European great powers but also from two rival doctrines about relations with them. In light of more recent disputes between doctrines of international relations it is telling that he adopted neither the realism of Hamilton nor the liberal internationalism or idealism advocated by Madison and Jefferson in germ, later by Woodrow Wilson more

fully. Washington did not face globalization, or the temptation of Pax Americana, or postmodern relativism and pacifism; but, it is noteworthy that he neither embraced nor overreacted to the doctrines of *realpolitik* or perpetual peace of his day.<sup>29</sup>

The two great crises of Washington's presidency stemmed from the upheaval of the French Revolution and the radical democratic theory France sought to impress upon the world. His two measures to shield America from such storms brought partisan attacks -- his 1793 Neutrality Proclamation and 1795 treaty with Britain (the Jay Treaty). He knew these policies would offend the revolutionary French republic and its zealous supporters in America. Amidst charges of monarchism and of groveling to Britain he defended his "system" as maintaining America's true independence and a just peace. His Seventh Annual Message (1795), and letter to the House rejecting its request for Jay Treaty documents (1796), defended the Framers' principle that foreign policy should bow neither to popular passions nor abstract creeds but should be debated by the branches somewhat insulated from popular opinion, the Senate and President. Indeed, despite his reservations about the Treaty he pressed to ratify it in part to quell disorder from the kinds of partisan clubs that had stoked civil and international war in France, and the Whiskey Rebellion in America. The "prudence and moderation" which had obtained and ratified the Treaty sought an honorable peace as the basis for America's future prosperity and strength. These

<sup>27</sup> See Brookhiser, *Founding Father*, 84-91, 97-100; W, 789, 829, 870-73, 882-84, 887-893, 922.

<sup>28</sup> Tocqueville, "The Manner in Which American Democracy Conducts External Affairs of State," in *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, pt. 1, ch. 5, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Karl-Friedrich Walling, *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999) with Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); see also Madison's essay "Universal Peace" (1792) in *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack Rakove (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1999) 505-508.

“genuine principles of rational liberty” would prove essential to “national happiness;” having been “[f]aithful to ourselves, we have violated no obligation to others” (W, 920–22, 930–32; *LGW*, chs. 30-32).

The Farewell Address, published in September 1796, encapsulates and elevates the principles Washington had stood for during his entire career.<sup>30</sup> It was printed without a title in a newspaper to avoid the self-importance and air of demagoguery that a speech might suggest; its common title was bestowed by a newspaper editor. It opens by invoking republican virtue and civic duty; patriotic devotion to the common good; gratitude to Heaven for America’s blessings and prayers for continued Providence; and, the need for prudence and moderation to sustain such goods. He pledged “unceasing vows” that his country and the world would enjoy the further blessings of Heaven’s beneficence, Union and brotherly affection, perpetuation of a free constitution, and wisdom and virtue in government. He further prayed that the happiness of a free people would be so prudently used as to gain for them “the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it” – an invocation of the widely held view that American was unique among the nations and in history (W, 963–64). Only after further advice on perpetuating the Union and the constitutional rule of law, on moderating partisan politics, and on ensuring both religion and education in the citizenry (W, 964–72) does Washington raise his final

counsel -- that America should seek both independence and justice in foreign affairs.

Washington’s maxim “to steer clear of permanent Alliances” is among the best-known ideas of the Address (W, 975). That said, many accounts of his foreign policy mistakenly cite Jefferson’s later maxim about “entangling alliances,” which fosters the erroneous view that the Address launches a doctrine of isolationism.<sup>31</sup> Washington had for years criticized the French Revolution and its effects in America for imposing visions and doctrines when knowledge of human nature and practical realities supported more moderate views. His main principle was that a secure, independent nation should surrender to neither interest nor abstract justice, passions nor fixed doctrines, but must balance and find moderation among these human propensities. In this prudential spirit, he obliquely refers to the circumstances of the 1790s that suggest America should not be a “slave” either to hatred of Britain or adoration of France. He cites no names, presumably to avoid offense but also to state a general principle: “a predominant motive has been to endeavor to gain time to our country to settle and mature its yet recent institutions, and to progress without interruption, to that degree of strength and consistency, which is necessary to give it, humanly speaking, command of its own fortunes” (W, 973, 977).

His main concern was that a nation be independent enough to act wisely and justly; the fundamental principle was to be able to “choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel” (W, 975). He long had advocated provision for “the national security;” Theodore Roosevelt

<sup>30</sup> Classic studies are Samuel Bemis, “Washington’s Farewell Address: A Foreign Policy of Independence” (1934), in Bemis, *American Foreign Policy and the Blessings of Liberty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 240-58, and Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 115-136, esp. 124-136. I am indebted to the studies by Garrity, Spalding and Garrity, and McDougal cited in note 3 *supra*.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Muravchik contrasts “Washingtonian” isolationism and “Wilsonian” internationalism in *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1996), 20-21, 210; see Patrick Buchanan’s similar misreading in *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America’s Destiny* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1999; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2002).

praised the maxim from Washington's First Annual Message that "[t]o be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace" (W, 749, 791–92, 848).<sup>32</sup> Roosevelt did not observe, however, Washington's balance, for the Address also reiterates his maxim that America must avoid "those overgrown Military establishments, which under any form of Government are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican Liberty" (W, 966). He thus calls America to "[o]bserve good faith and justice towds. all Nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be that good policy does not equally enjoin it?" He endorses the utilitarian maxim that "honesty is always the best policy," but also urges America to "give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a People always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence" (W, 972, 975). This blend of principles lies within the just war tradition developed by classical philosophy, Christianity, and modern natural law and international law. Enlightenment writers on the right of nations developed more specific principles of war and diplomacy, while recognizing that prudent judgment by statesmen must govern particular cases. One source for Americans was Montesquieu's effort, drawing on the international jurists Grotius, Pufendorf, and Vattel, to formulate guidance for statesmen that balanced the necessity of military power with limits to war found in natural rights of individuals and basic international right.<sup>33</sup> The guiding spirit

of the Address thus echoes the great theme of Washington's career: intellectual, moral, and political moderation. Prudence and decency should guide private and public life; he hoped such "counsels of an old and affectionate friend" would "controul the usual current of the passions" and "moderate the fury of party spirit" in domestic and foreign affairs (W, 976; see also 832, 851, 924).

### Republican Prudence for a Globalized World

Our pitched battles in academia and the public journals today between schools of international relations, and the rhetoric volleyed between parties and pundits about our foreign policy since the 2001 attacks, suggest that a call for moderation and recourse to fundamental principles is not dated. We should recall that Washington steered American foreign and defense policy through such polarization and warned against it, and that the great authority on moderate republicanism, Montesquieu, warned that a free people could be as blinkered or irrational as those under despotism: "In extremely absolute monarchies, historians betray the truth, because they do not have the liberty to tell it; in extremely free states, they betray the truth because of their very liberty, for, as it always produces divisions, every one becomes as much the slave of the prejudices of his faction as he would be of a despot."<sup>34</sup>

Whatever the reach and technology of our power now, or the complexity of global threats or opportunities, Washington reminds us that such essential challenges remain. Still, examples of particular policy advice drawn from his legacy might spur greater engagement with our founding principles today. Just as there is overlap in these five principles, any effort to apply them to

<sup>32</sup> See Theodore Roosevelt, "Washington's Forgotten Maxim" (address at Naval War College, 1897), in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, National Edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), 13:182–99.

<sup>33</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, Bk. 1 ch. 3, Bk. 9, Bk. 10 (especially chs. 1–6); see also Gerhard von Glahn, *Law Among Nations: An Introduction to Public International Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 3, 22–25, 27–35; and David Hendrickson, "Foundations of the New Diplomacy," in *Peace Pact:*

*The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 169–176.

<sup>34</sup> *Spirit of Laws*, Bk. 19 ch. 27 (end), 333.

situations finds that each at once informs and presupposes the others. Moreover, such counsels of republican prudence may seem platitudes but are in fact difficult to practice, since they require tempering of the jealousy for power that always marks human affairs, at home or abroad.

First, we should observe the great success achieved by placing principle above power, by sticking to moderate policies amidst partisan claims, and, by carefully matching means to ends. America should note that her Founder, in his own moment of dominance, resisted both the fog of power and the thrill of partisanship, instead sticking to the virtues and aims that got him there and that justified the burdens of power. A Kantian may detect Machiavelli in advice that honesty is the best policy, while some realists may find it naïveté or sheer cunning, but this maxim echoes Washington's first principle – adherence to republicanism, natural justice, and transcendent truths about humankind. He is sure America will be “at no distant period, a great Nation” (W, 972), but he holds to a blend of Aristotelian teleology and Biblical Providence: power and goodness ultimately coincide; power only endures if founded on virtuous aims and decent conduct; greater power brings greater temptation to perversion or loss of one's true aims. Washington's other principles, and all his policies, rest on this foundation. If such discipline brought about the founding of America, and was at least partially adhered to by his successors as we rose to world power, on what grounds should we ignore it now? Our grand strategy must have this moral-political principle as its lodestar, lest like most cases in human history ours, too, loses its grandeur. What does this mean not only for our use of military power, but for our national desire for wealth and global economic dominance, for our energy policy, or how we deliberate about any such means to these larger ends? Are our compromises with this principle – and

Washington knew that human affairs always require compromises to some degree -- justified by larger support for this principle itself?

Second, his insistence upon civil authority, and avoidance of either militarism or weakness, implicates a range of issues from force structure to public and private diplomacy. Washington's advice to balance the claims of republican liberty and national defense suggests restoration of a brief period of national service, military or civilian, for all young citizens – a policy long debated, but only partially engaged, by national political leaders.<sup>35</sup> More generally we should recall, as the global power with vast superiority in everything from training to weaponry and technology, that the Romans lost their republic to empire and that the British gave up empire to preserve liberty under constitutional monarchy. In the post-Cold War era voices such as George Kennan and Henry Kissinger invoked the Washingtonian warnings against power and a militarized foreign policy that had been echoed shortly after the founding by John Quincy Adams. Adams worried not about the temptation of sheer power, but that moral aims might tempt us to pursue power projection: America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy,” he warned, for efforts to right all wrongs in world affairs would change her focus “from liberty to force;” she “might become the dictatress of the world,” but would no longer be “ruler of her own spirit.”<sup>36</sup> While our armed forces need a distinct professional culture and full national support, we must not

<sup>35</sup> See William Galston, “Thinking About the Draft,” *The Public Interest* 154 (2004): 61-73.

<sup>36</sup> George Kennan, “On American Principles,” *Foreign Affairs* 74 (1995): 116-126, and Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, 237-240; see “Address of July 4, 1821” in *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire*, ed. Walter LaFeber (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 45 (emphasis in original); see also Hendrickson, “Renovation of Foreign Policy.”

mistake this noble instrument for an end in itself or as obviating more complex means to formulate national policy – especially political debate at home, and forthright diplomacy and cultivation of good relations abroad. Thucydides’s analysis of the long Athenian decline from hubris to disaster buttresses Washington’s advice that patient diplomacy must always be equal to, or supersede, the claims of pride and power in making national policy. This is not to say Washington would place a primary trust in international institutions or law, or in utopias of perpetual or democratic peace, but that we should maintain perspective and balance about our own temptations and motives as well as those of allies and adversaries.

Third, Washington’s specific constitutional ideas also touch policy at home and abroad. We should affirm a complex structure for formulating foreign and security policy as best for balancing liberty and security, and vet policies through multiple branches and actors -- seeking not the lowest common denominator but the highest possible consensus on means and aims. Recent decades have emphasized the natural tendency of executive offices to dominate policy debates and decisions on use of force, and in Congress to only reluctantly insist upon full deliberation about war and deployment of force and then to snipe about subsequent problems or setbacks. Washington hoped his moderate principles would “prevent our Nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the Destiny of Nations” (W, 976), but this presupposed that vigilance about both necessary defenses and the perils of war would animate all elements of the complex political order he founded. Abroad, if necessity demands we engage in regime building we should underwrite not democracy but liberal constitutionalism – extending to new regimes

the political complexity and moderation that we enjoy, or should enjoy, at home.<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, Washington’s counsel that executives should employ consultations, prudence, and flexibility in both grand strategy and tactics is difficult to achieve today, since we embrace populism, partisanship, and permanent campaigning more than the founders ever could. Still, those in elected office, and both the temporary and more permanent officials serving them, can strive to emulate the balanced thinking of the first administration. Such moderation also implicates the last of Washington’s principles, on balancing interest and justice, but the aim of Clausewitzian grand strategy to assess the entire moral and political complexity of war has special relevance for the executive. One maxim both Thucydides and Washington might offer is to resist the temptation to let current dominance and superior technology narrow thinking about when to wage war, and what the consequences or complications might be when the battle is long over.<sup>38</sup>

The fifth Washington principle is to balance interest and justice through prudent recourse to just war principles and the classic right of nations -- a difficult ideal for a weak and defensive power, and one that now taxes the patience of a superpower. If we think the grand strategy and international regimes America built for the Cold War are no longer relevant, what policies and tactics will satisfy both Washington’s high standards and the

---

<sup>37</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton, 2003), advocates liberal constitutionalism with guidance from Montesquieu, the American framers, and Tocqueville.

<sup>38</sup> For Clausewitzian strategy as alert to the limits of “total war” and of technology, see Andreas Herberg-Rothe, “Primacy of ‘Politics’ or ‘Culture’ Over War in a Modern World: Clausewitz Needs a Sophisticated Interpretation,” *Defense Analysis* 17: 2 (2001): 175-86, and Frederick Kagan, “War and Aftermath,” *Policy Review* 120 (August 2003).

threats and opportunities of the moment?<sup>39</sup> His counsels do not fit our typical menu of rival doctrines, nor the recent blend of Wilsonian zeal and realism advocated by some after the Cold War. Does Washington no longer fit our character and defining purposes, or do such doctrines fail to fully comprehend America? For example, isn't a policy of non-proliferation and counter-terrorism animated both by interest and benevolent justice -- an enlightened self-interest of inextricably blended motives? Such a blend is as characteristic of American self-understanding as Washington hoped it would be, and perhaps we should revise our theories to recognize the propriety of balancing these motives in given situations, rather than depicting ourselves as polarized or confused.

Our challenges indeed are new in many ways, but the highest consensus of the founders still is the general aim proclaimed by all American presidents and parties -- to benefit mankind and ourselves by respecting "the obligation[s] which justice and humanity impose on every Nation" (W, 977). Each of the doctrinal alternatives of the past century asks us to place either too much faith in ourselves or in international institutions and other states; some schools suggest we now could lead only by force, others that we could lead only by example and principle. The genius of Washington's advice is to ever seek the proper equilibrium among these tendencies in any given situation and for the long haul, so as to abide by republican principles of natural justice. He knew that international affairs always requires "temporary alliances" and engagement with foreign nations, while trying to "cultivate peace and harmony" with all (W, 975, 972). He might accept that the complexities of our

<sup>39</sup> An analysis of the Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy from this larger perspective is John Lewis Gaddis, "A Grand Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2002: 50-57.

age and our power now compel this to a great degree, but that America still could retain independent judgment about balancing interest and justice if it was leading alliances and not dominated by them. Indeed, his advice on "permanent alliances" did not concern only alliances; the error of thinking so is evident in Jefferson's reduction of this to "entangling alliances," which lends itself to an isolationist reading. Washington's core concern was in fact the blinkered thinking and "permanent, inveterate" antipathies or attachments behind such commitments (W, 973). He instead sought the independence and flexibility necessary to find a sound blend of the possible, the expedient, and the dutiful.

While his basic moderation might tell us to avoid either isolationism or unilateralism, it also would counsel that America would only mark a *Novus Ordo Saeclorum* (new order of the ages) if we heeded the classic just war prudence that carefully balances power with right, necessity with decency.<sup>40</sup> Specific debates on a preemptive strike, or a regime change, or a humanitarian intervention always must be pulled up to that broader calculus, and there is no codebook in the sky that spells out in advance just what is right or what will succeed. Washington's counsels thus are difficult and elude snappy slogans, but are worthy of the effort -- calling for both the moral principle to stand up to evil and the humility to check one's own power, to lead alone if necessary but with allies and by persuasion whenever possible.

Washington knew his standards were lofty. He knew he had barely succeeded in steering his country through international and domestic crises. He was far from sure that the

<sup>40</sup> Recent examples of just war realism range from Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), to Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), to Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).



American experiment would succeed at all. Still, it is precisely the gravity of the threats and opportunities facing America today that justifies recurrence to the thought of such great statesmen as Washington and Lincoln, even if our novel circumstances require new applications of their principles and prudence to our problems.