Between a Rock and a Hard Place:

Assertive Multilateralism and Post–Cold War

U.S. Foreign Policy Making

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During the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union dealt with “second-tier” fragmentation through the prism of their relationship with one another. For the United States, the end of the cold war has meant that the traditional guidelines for dealing with such fragmentation no longer apply and that new criteria must be established. This chapter examines the rise and fall of “assertive multilateralism,” which was the Clinton administration’s early attempt to grapple with second-tier fragmentation and to establish a new policy for dealing with these conflicts in a post–cold war world. The case study demonstrates that, given the international environment, American political culture, and the institutional context of the early post–cold war period, assertive multilateralism was not a viable strategy for dealing with second-tier fragmentation.

The Background for Assertive Multilateralism

The end of the cold war eclipsed Third World rivalries between the two superpowers and provided an opportunity to initiate new approaches with regard to second-tier fragmentation. Many foreign policy analysts suggested that, in the absence of great power rivalry, the United Nations would now be able to fulfill its originally intended collective-security function. The U.N. Security Council’s initial post–cold war behavior looked promising in this regard, since five of the seven situations of armed conflict in which it has voted to take enforcement action have been since 1990.¹

The 1991 Gulf War was the first post–cold war initiative directed at
second-tier conflicts, and it appeared to set a precedent for multilateral, collective security efforts under the auspices of the United Nations. The compatibility of great power interests during the Gulf War was taken as evidence that more collective security under U.N. auspices would occur in the future. As Karen Mingst and Margaret Karns suggest, Security Council cooperation during the Gulf War “opened up a new era in UN activities” which included “proposals to create a standing UN peace force [and] anticipate the use of such forces for both traditional peacekeeping functions and enforcement.” The post-cold war peacekeeping vision described in Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s 1992 Plan for Action called for the U.N. to engage in actual “peace-making.” Boutros-Ghali recommended that a peace-enforcement unit be created out of troops volunteered from member states, which would be at the disposal of the Security Council and under the secretary general’s command. A new U.N. command and control center would also be created as a “24-hour-a-day warroom,” which would monitor U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world while relying on access to intelligence and troops from member states.

What became known as the policy of “assertive multilateralism” (so labeled by the administration’s U.N. representative, Madeleine Albright) initially found a receptive American audience because it sought to combine traditional yet contradictory impulses from American political culture itself. In the abstract, the policy had something to please everyone. As a means of pulling back from America’s consistent global interventionism during the cold war, the policy sought to rely upon others to shoulder some of the burden of global leadership. Its proponents argued that solutions to second-tier fragmentation could be reached through pragmatic global problem solving because a consensus of interests now existed within the Security Council.

American idealism, its sense of a global mission, and the societal tendency to assume that American values and interests are universal informed the policy. If the United States could afford to be less active globally while others picked up the mantle, it was because American political culture tended to encourage the belief that the cold war had sufficiently transformed great powers in America’s own image. Pragmatic problem solving could occur precisely because America had produced a world of like-minded states who now agreed with Anthony Lake’s assertion that “to the extent democracy and market economics hold sway in other nations, our own nation will be more secure, prosperous and influential.” Thus the policy’s presumptions of global consensus and collective intervention provided a foreign policy rhetoric that allowed for multiple interpretations in a societal context that already tended to breed contradictory impulses in foreign policy.

While the tenets of assertive multilateralism seemed appealing to a broad range of voters, problems were bound to arise. Not only did the policy rely upon contradictory American impulses, but it also ignored (intentionally or unintentionally) the international reality that other states had differing interests and values. An international coalition of like-minded states willing to support U.N. efforts consistent with America’s own specific interests and preferences simply did not exist. The potential for trouble was clear to many foreign policy observers who questioned the policy’s practical viability. John Gerard Ruggie noted in 1993, for example, that the policy “lacks any corresponding expression in military doctrine and operational concepts,” and Evan Thomas argued that it would tend to produce “goals that are at best fuzzy. Rhetoric that is not matched by results. Open-ended commitments to nations with no strategic value to the United States.” Yet within the context of American political culture, it is easy to see why its fuzzy open-endedness may have made assertive multilateralism an attractive policy choice during the first post-cold war presidential campaign.

The Rise and Fall of Assertive Multilateralism

It was against this background that assertive multilateralism was formulated, implemented, and subsequently abandoned. When Clinton took office in January 1993, he inherited several second-tier conflicts which appeared to require some policy response (Bosnia, Somalia, and, to a lesser degree, Haiti). Assertive multilateralism was the administration’s broader policy approach to each of these specific conflicts. As the ensuing discussion suggests, the broader policy and the specific conflicts had reciprocal effects on one another. In each case there was already U.N. involvement, but Bosnia and Somalia (Somalia is discussed in chapter 13) would eventually emerge as the crucibles within which assertive multilateralism would be tested and transformed.

Toward a Policy—Spring 1993

As a presidential candidate, Clinton had argued that the United States needed to be more assertive in second-tier conflicts and to develop and rely upon multilateral mechanisms to deal with them. These mechanisms, it was argued, would allow the United States to reduce the resources it devoted to acting as the “world’s policeman.” Reliance upon
the United Nations specifically was a pivotal piece of the new approach. Many of Clinton’s foreign policy advisers argued that in dealing with second-tier conflicts, the United States should “expand U.N. peace operations and the U.S. role in them.” In an April 1992 campaign speech, Clinton called for the creation of a permanent U.N. rapid deployment force which would be “standing at the borders of countries threatened by aggression, preventing mass violence against civilian populations, providing humanitarian relief and combating terrorism.”

Initial administration efforts to formulate a second-tier conflict policy were consistent with Clinton’s 1992 campaign position. The new secretary of defense, Les Aspin, said at his confirmation hearings that the administration was considering the creation and deployment of both permanent and ad hoc U.N. forces. In February President Clinton signed Presidential Review Directive 13 [PRD-13], which called for the development and articulation of just such a strategy. As Evan Thomas put it at the time, “In their search for a coherent policy—not to mention someone else to share the burden and the blame—the Clintonians have seized on multilateralism. No longer will the United States go it alone; increasingly, it will turn to the United Nations to help keep the peace.”

Efforts to articulate assertive multilateralism occurred simultaneously with the administration’s first attempts to resolve the ongoing Bosnian crisis. Fighting between Croatia and Serbia had begun in mid-1991 and had shifted to Bosnia by that fall. In September 1991 the U.N. Security Council imposed a NATO-enforced embargo on all weapons deliveries, which essentially left most of the former Yugoslavia’s weapons in the hands of the Serbs. Former secretary of state Cyrus Vance was also dispatched to convince the contestants to allow the deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping mission. The U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) mission began in March 1992 with a mandate to serve as a neutral arbitrator for cease-fires and humanitarian relief efforts. It was not initially instructed to enforce flight bans, and Serbian violations became the norm throughout 1992. In October the Security Council approved NATO enforcement of no-fly zones over the region, although NATO did not formally accept this role until April 1993. NATO’s southern command was asked to take overall control of U.N. military operations throughout the former Yugoslavia, but was expected to answer to the Security Council through Boutros-Ghali.

As a presidential candidate Clinton had criticized Bush for not being tough enough with the Serbs. Based on Clinton’s campaign vows to take a more activist approach in Bosnia, the president’s top-level foreign policy team, the NSC Principals Committee, began to discuss Bosnia in

early February 1993. Vance and former British foreign secretary Lord David Owen had been in the process of negotiating a peace plan in January 1993. The Principals Committee immediately and publicly disavowed it by announcing that they would not pressure the Muslims to accept the plan on the basis that it rewarded Serbian gains at the expense of the Muslims.

The problem with this rejection was that no alternatives had been developed within the committee. A list of possible options had been drawn up, which included humanitarian airdrops, U.N. enforcement of the no-fly zone, tightened economic sanctions, dispatch of an envoy to further study the Vance-Owen plan, and a peacekeeping force if all parties would commit to a cease-fire. Yet there was disagreement among Clinton’s foreign policy advisers over which options were preferable. Vice President Al Gore, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and Albright favored more aggressive action and the use of force. Defense Secretary Les Aspin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, and Christopher were skeptical of military action and agreed that the introduction of American ground troops into the conflict with limited, unclear options would be undesirable. Powell wanted an all-or-nothing approach, while Christopher warned that getting involved might lead to another Vietnam. Although subsequent administration statements implied that it was on the verge of taking more forceful action, the Principals Committee and the president postponed a decision. Instead, they adopted a wait-and-see strategy and continued to revisit and discuss the list of options in what one participant referred to as “the world’s most elegant seminar.”

The one option Clinton had definitely ruled out was unilateral action. There was consensus within the administration that Bosnia should not become an “American problem,” a view supported by public opinion poll data collected by Clinton’s consultants which showed “that there was increasing support for action by the United States in Bosnia in conjunction with the U.N., but there was no support for unilateral action.” This meant, consistent with assertive multilateralism, that multilateral interests would influence whatever option would eventually be pursued.

The administration’s indecisiveness dragged on until mid-April when Srebrenica came under siege, and nightly news reports of the fighting finally provided the impetus for a decision. At a press conference on April 16, Clinton expressed outrage over the fighting, and stated that he thought the time had come “to consider things which at least previously have been unacceptable.” The impression he gave was that
use of force against the Serbs was imminent. The Principals Committee met over the weekend of April 17–18 and decided to recommend two options from their February list: to lift the arms embargo against the Muslims and to use air power to punish Serb artillery and cease-fire violations. Yet despite repeated statements supporting greater actions throughout the end of April, Clinton did not officially sign the “lift-and-strike” option until May 1.

Christopher immediately left for Europe to discuss the lift-and-strike option with the other Security Council members. However, it quickly became apparent that they would not support the proposal. Great Britain and France had volunteered troops to UNPROFOR as a means of dealing with the Bosnian situation without having to intervene forcefully to stop the war. Lifting the arms embargo would have meant expanding the conflict with their own troops caught in the cross-fire. They also feared that the Bosnian Serbs would target their troops if the no-fly zone was enforced. Serbia was a traditional Russian ally, and so Russia had no interest in supporting tougher action against them. The final disincentive for supporting lift-and-strike was that the Bosnian Serb leaders signed the Vance-Owen peace plan just as Christopher was arriving in Europe, thus fueling hope that further action would be a moot point.

Consistent with the emerging policy of assertive multilateralism, Christopher was not instructed to sell lift-and-strike to the other Security Council members. He had been dispatched to Europe to “consult” and maintain “maximum flexibility,” not to insist, cajole, or even lead. Despite conveying public impressions that U.S. action was imminent, Clinton and his advisers never intended to take unilateral actions inconsistent with the interests of U.S. allies. When Christopher returned on May 8, he informed the president and the committee that, unless the president personally convinced the allies to pursue the option, European support would not be forthcoming. But Clinton had begun to have misgivings about lift-and-strike even before Christopher had returned home, and there was agreement among the advisers that the president should not take the lead.

Clinton’s response was exactly what one would expect given the parameters of assertive multilateralism. Without consensus on more forceful intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the lift-and-strike option was put on hold indefinitely. As Jane Sharp put it, “Clinton invoked a lack of consensus as an excuse not to act.” Instead, the U.N. began to plan for an expanded peacekeeping force to oversee the Vance-Owen peace plan if it held, and the Clinton White House agreed that it would contribute 25,000 troops to the mission. In a mid-May referendum, the Bosnian Serbs rejected the plan, but since the lack of consensus among Security Council members continued, Clinton did not send Christopher back to Europe to press for lift-and-strike.

The administration also agreed to sign off on a European plan to establish “safe zones” for Muslims inside Bosnia, despite having earlier rejected the idea because, as Clinton had argued, such zones could become “shooting galleries.” Lake was skeptical of the plan as well, yet the administration’s capitulation to European preferences was consistent with assertive multilateralism, which depended on a collective consensus not necessarily determined by American preferences. The policy in turn supported Clinton and Christopher’s preferences for seeing the entire issue go away so that Clinton could concentrate on domestic policy again. When meeting with European allies in early June, Christopher brought no American proposals to the table and was sent simply to see what the United Nations and other Security Council members had decided on safe zone logistics.

Mounting Criticism—Summer to Early Fall, 1993

The parameters of assertive multilateralism and its application in both the Bosnian and Somalian cases came under increasing scrutiny by mid-1993. The Pentagon let it be known throughout the spring that it had reservations about U.S. involvement in Bosnia. During congressional testimony in April, Powell voiced his misgivings with plans for U.S. participation in a peacekeeping mission. And, even as the Principals Committee was meeting to decide the lift-and-strike option, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral David Jeremiah, was publicly expressing his skepticism of the strike option as an effective deterrent to Serb aggression.

Moreover, while the Defense Department accepted its assigned role in Somalia, from the start it expressed concerns over command and control issues, as well as the mission’s objectives [see chapter 13]. In addition, congressional concerns over the Somalia mission began to mount, especially after June, when American troops were reinserted into the conflict and the United Nation’s attempt to capture General Aaidid dragged on. Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, voiced a common congressional fear that the administration had no real exit strategy for Somalia. Republicans also frequently referred to Boutros-Ghali’s comment earlier in the year that U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Somalia only “when I say they can come out.”

The early results of PRD-13 made Congress even more skeptical of
Clinton’s second-tier conflict policy. Pursuant to the orders in PRD-I.3, the participants of the interagency review, which included representatives from State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and others under the leadership of the National Security Council (NSC) staff (with staff member Richard Clark coordinating the review), had completed a draft “presidential decision directive” in which the assertive multilateralism strategy was laid out. This draft, which was approved in mid-July by the NSC’s Deputies Committee (chaired by Deputy National Security Adviser Samuel Berger), leaked in August and caused an immediate sensation because it called for expanding the role of U.N. peacekeeping missions and for placing U.S. troops under the operational command of foreigners on a case-by-case basis. This was consistent with the goals of assertive multilateralism, but not with Pentagon command and control structures. Powell and the Defense Department were particularly uneasy with the draft, while Christopher and State were highly ambivalent. Stories of divisions among Clinton’s advisers began to surface in the press by September.

In response to these divisions and to the draft directive itself, a House Appropriations Committee voted on September 23 to impose conditions before Clinton could deploy U.S. troops in peacekeeping missions, including notification of the appropriate committees about mission expense, budget plans, projected duration, and goals of the mission. By this time, Congress was also mounting more pressure on Clinton’s Somalia policy. The Senate approved a nonbinding resolution calling on the president to report his Somalia objectives to Congress by October 15 and seek congressional approval by November 15 to keep the troops there. The House was about to adopt similar resolutions. Congress also disliked the United Nation’s reliance on U.S. troops, equipment, and supplies to conduct its missions, and refused to approve the Clinton administration’s request over the summer for $400 million in peacekeeping and another $400 million in unpaid dues.

Both the public and the media were in step with (and perhaps driving) congressional concerns. In the last week of September, a Time/CNN poll found that only 43 percent of respondents approved of keeping U.S. troops in Somalia, while 46 percent disapproved. The news media expressed dissatisfaction with the United Nation’s reliance on American support because it suggested, as Michael Gordon put it, “that the United Nations was not capable of taking forceful action unless the Americans carried most of the weight,” leading one “to wonder whether it should always be the Americans who wield the hammer.” What was being questioned, in essence, were some of the fundamental assumptions upon which assertive multilateralism was based.

There was also considerable congressional and public criticism of the White House’s handling of Bosnia, but here the emphasis was less the content of the policy and more the president’s policy-making style. Congress had generally been supportive of a tougher stance toward Serbian cease-fire violations and had also wanted the arms embargo lifted for Bosnian Muslims. However, there was no strong preference within Congress, the media, or the public for an escalated or unilateral intervention in the Bosnian conflict. In fact, during an April meeting between the president and congressional leaders, many of the latter had expressed deep reservations about becoming more directly involved in the conflict.

Criticism focused instead on the way in which Clinton and his foreign policy team had handled the lift-and-strike option. In May 1993, for example, Joe Klein argued that Clinton’s public threats to get tough with the Serbs followed by his inability to secure allied support meant “the message—to the allies, to the Serbs, to every lobbyist and politician in Washington and to troublemakers around the globe—was irresolution.” Descriptions of Clinton’s foreign policy-making style in the summer of 1993 regularly referred to his indecisiveness, his tendency to hold consultative seminars instead of strategy sessions, and his eagerness to compromise.

The impression of indecisiveness was reinforced when Clinton and the Principals Committee revisited the issue of tougher action in response to the Serbian siege of Sarajevo in early July. For the first time the Principals Committee considered the need to sell the strike plan to the European allies and the possibility of taking unilateral action if they refused. France and Britain agreed to go along with a NATO air strike option if Boutros-Ghali called for them. But when the United Nations proved reluctant to do so in August and September, the administration did not take unilateral action on the grounds that it was “unwise for the U.S. to go it alone,” according to various U.S. officials.

Criticism of Clinton’s foreign policy irresolution in Bosnia cut across both political parties. Democrats agreed with the press that Bosnia was, as one Senate Democrat put it, “not so damn difficult as they keep saying it is.” Another commented on Clinton’s policy-making style: “It is pathological. He just can’t make a choice.” Republican Richard Lugar pressured Clinton during a May meeting to define his Bosnian policy, arguing that his record had created the “perception of drift” and that
he should do more to lead the European allies.\(^8\) Lugar also complained that the administration regularly failed to consult or adequately brief Congress on its foreign policies.

These mounting public, media, congressional, and the Pentagon concerns began to have an impact on the president and his advisers by the fall. On September 17, the Principals Committee met to discuss the draft directive.\(^9\) Albright remained the strongest advocate for the assertive multilateralism approach, Powell was strongly opposed to it, and both Christopher and Aspin remained ambivalent. Lake was most concerned with public perception, arguing that the focus on peacekeeping was damaging the president’s standing. Because the committee could not agree on the directive, it ordered the original interagency working group to redraft the sections dealing with the role of multilateral peace operations in overall U.S. foreign policy.

The draft directive was subsequently revised so that the centrality of multilateral peace operations to U.S. second-tier conflict efforts would be reduced. Guidelines on U.S. support for and participation in peace operations, as well as the use of U.S. troops in operations involving combat, were also made more restrictive, per the Pentagon’s insistence. The new draft improved U.S. control over dangerous, large-scale peacekeeping operations, although it still allowed the ceding of control to U.N.-designated foreign commanders in safer or small-scale missions.\(^4\)

In addition to redrafting the directive, the administration went on a public offensive in mid-September in an attempt to alleviate some of the foreign policy-making concerns expressed by its critics. For the first time since taking office, Clinton told reporters on September 23 that he would seek congressional approval before sending U.S. troops to a Bosnian peacekeeping mission, and he stressed that the troops would be under NATO and not U.N. control.\(^3\) In a September 25 meeting, Christopher, Aspin, Lake, Powell, and White House Chief of Staff Thomas F. McLarty, hammered out criteria for U.S. involvement in a Bosnian peacekeeping mission that clearly reflected congressional and Pentagon concerns about U.N. control, exit strategies, and mission goals.\(^4\)

In the week prior to Clinton’s first address to the U.N. on September 27, Lake, Christopher, and Albright spoke at various forums about the administration’s participation in U.N. peacekeeping. A common theme in these speeches was that a workable basis for determining when to send troops had been developed and that it took into account the need for public and congressional approval.\(^4\) In his own address to the United Nations, Clinton acknowledged that congressional support for U.S. participation in U.N. peacekeeping missions was limited. He argued that a reduction in the U.S. assessment for peacekeeping missions and a more discerning criteria for selecting such missions would “make it easier for me as president to make sure we pay in a timely and full fashion.”\(^4\)

Yet despite Clinton’s caution, his speech at the United Nations also gave support to the U.N. “warroom” headquarters and logistical standby units for use in peacekeeping situations. Although the White House was becoming increasingly sensitive to bureaucratic, congressional, and public skepticism of assertive multilateralism and its application in Bosnia and Somalia, the White House still subscribed to the policy in the early fall.

Reactions to the Somali Debacle—October 1993
Both the broad strategy of assertive multilateralism and its application to Bosnia were dramatically affected by early-October events in Somalia. When supporters of General Aidid retaliated against the continued U.N. man-hunt, several days of fighting resulted in the deaths of eighteen American soldiers. This proved pivotal in the subsequent abandonment of assertive multilateralism and in the administration’s Bosnian policy thereafter. If the Pentagon, Congress, the news media, and the public had expressed reservations about the administration’s Somali policy before October 1993, the death of U.S. Marines led to a concerted attack on the policy in October.

The Somalia debacle appeared to confirm the Pentagon’s worst fears with regard to the command and control structure of U.N. peacekeeping missions. When American relief forces had attempted to get to the ambushed marines, logistical difficulties coordinating with other U.N. troops prevented U.S. forces from reaching them until nine hours after the ambush had taken place. Although Les Aspin put most of the blame on the U.N. command structure, the Pentagon also had reason to reproach him specifically, since only the week before he had denied a request for additional equipment that might have been used to reach the Marines sooner. Aspin’s justification for the refusal, that greater commitment to the Somali mission might have jeopardized support for U.S. participation in the Bosnian mission, reinforced the Pentagon’s opinion that assertive multilateralism was a deeply flawed policy.\(^5\)

Congressional leaders were similarly outraged, and a Capitol Hill brief by Aspin and Christopher given just after the Marines were killed made relations between Congress and the White House even worse. Aspin mistakenly asked lawmakers what they thought should be done, which “managed only to convince congressional leaders that the admin-
istration had no clue as to what policy to pursue.”46 In summing up the congressional perception of Clinton’s foreign policy in October, Lugar argued that there had been a “virtual collapse of Presidential leadership,” and that there was “no significant congressional support for the President’s policy . . . and it’s his own fault.”47 The public tended to agree with Congress. In the week after the marines were killed, a Time/CNN poll found that only 36 percent of those polled approved of U.S. troops in Somalia and 89 percent wanted to bring the troops home as soon as possible.48 The same poll also found that 51 percent of those surveyed did not think Clinton was doing a good job handling foreign policy.

By huge majorities, both Houses of Congress called for a rethinking of administration policy on Somalia in particular and multilateral peace operations in general. Congressional proposals were circulated that sought to place restrictions on U.S. troop deployments in Haiti and to prohibit U.N. payments if U.S. troops were put under U.N. command.49 Any congressional support Clinton may have had for his multilateral approach fizzled. In fact, in February 1994, Congress refused to approve a $570 million supplementary appropriations bill meant to pay for outstanding American peacekeeping bills, beginning a trend that would only get worse when the Republicans later won control of Congress. Hostility toward the administration’s failure in Somalia remained so high during the early part of 1994 that House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman, Democrat Lee Hamilton, could emphatically state in March, “If the Bosnians signed an agreement today, and the president came up tomorrow to ask us for troops, he wouldn’t get them.”50

Abandoning Assertive Multilateralism—October 1993 to May 1994

With his Somali policy under vehement attack from all quarters, Clinton probably had little choice but to abandon assertive multilateralism if he wished to accomplish anything else in foreign or even domestic affairs. Certainly it would have been unlikely that Clinton could have obtained congressional approval for U.S. involvement in the Bosnian peacekeeping mission. Christopher noted within days of the Somalia crisis, for example, that, “[i]t inevitably casts a shadow on Bosnia. It shows the relative impatience of the American people for the involvement of American troops in situations where our vital national interests are not so directly engaged.”51 According to President Clinton, the Somalia debacle made him “more cautious about having any Americans in a peacekeeping role where there was any ambiguity at all about what the range of decisions were which could be made by a command other

than an American command with direct accountability to the United States here.”52

Based on proposals from the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command in Somalia, the White House immediately ordered more armor and reinforcements to Somalia and set a hard deadline of April 1 for their withdrawal. When his political consultants questioned the wisdom of setting an exit date, Clinton told them he was in no position to deny the military what it deemed necessary.53 The new U.S. troops would be under American, not U.N., command, and U.S. troops were ordered to stop the pursuit of Aidid. In addition, the White House dispatched retired ambassador Robert Oakley to organize a peace conference among rival Somali clan leaders, and Oakley was instructed to act as a representative for the U.S. government, not the United Nations. This new hard-line toward the United Nations was greeted with congressional approval, as Dole noted that Clinton’s Somalia orders were finally about “what we were going to do, not Boutros-Ghali.”54

Developments in the Somalia mission would also affect the administration’s policy toward Haiti a week later. The United States was scheduled to send military engineers and medical specialists as part of a U.N. peacekeeping contingent, but Clinton unilaterally canceled the scheduled landing when a Haitian demonstration against their arrival was staged. Despite the fact that Canadian troops were also on board, neither the United Nations nor the Canadian government was consulted. The new White House attitude was summarized by a White House official, who argued: “I don’t think we will give up trying to use the UN to leverage our involvement to do things that are worth doing, but not worth doing alone. But I think we will be far more skeptical about the ability of the United Nations to operate without vigorous involvement of the United States. Ultimately the UN is us. You can’t hand off to an entity that is a bunch of bureaucrats who have never done this before.”55

Events in Somalia also had a direct impact on the redrafting of PDD-13. In late October, Secretary of Defense Aspin contacted Lake to urge “a complete revision of the draft.”56 In November, the interagency working group completed a fresh draft, which was then subjected to a series of legislative-executive consultations. Finally, on May 3, 1994, President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 25, which laid out the administration’s policy vis-à-vis multilateral peace operations. The directive declared that the United States would participate in U.N. peacekeeping missions only if doing so would maximize U.S. interests, and
then only under U.S. command. Before the United States would agree to support U.N. peacekeeping missions, strict conditions would have to be met including clear U.S. interests, congressional support, availability of personnel and funds, explicit objectives, an exit strategy, and an acceptable command and control structure.

The directive also stated that the administration did not support the creation of a U.N. standing army and that it would not contribute American troops to such a force. In preparing the final draft, the administration bowed to congressional and Defense Department preferences and insisted that “[a]ny large scale participation of U.S. forces in a major peace enforcement mission that is likely to involve combat should ordinarily be conducted under U.S. command and operational control or through competent regional organizations such as NATO” (see also the list of conditions and discussion in chapter 13).

Public statements were supported by public deeds. Albright reported that the administration was already following many of the directive’s guidelines in the Security Council and had blocked requests for U.N. peacekeeping operations in Burundi, Georgia, Angola, and Rwanda because they looked more like peace enforcement missions with goals that could not be easily achieved. Tougher U.S. standards were necessary. Albright argued, because, “the UN has not yet demonstrated the ability to respond effectively when the risk of combat is high and the level of local cooperation is low.” Ten days later, Albright refused to authorize the immediate dispatch of U.N. troops to Rwanda, telling a House foreign affairs subcommittee, “We want to be confident that when we do turn to the UN, the UN will be able to do the job.”

When the Republicans took control of Congress in January 1995, it demanded greater restrictions on U.S. support for U.N. peacekeeping missions. Based on provisions in the “Contract with America,” the House passed the National Security Revitalization Act in February, which sought among other things to limit U.S. contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations and to restrict the placement of U.S. troops under U.N. command. Yet the White House had already substantially complied with these demands in the spring of 1994, including unilaterally reducing U.S. contributions to U.N. peacekeeping from 31.7 percent to 25 percent as provided for in PDD-25. Despite Republican declarations to the contrary, by early 1995 the policy position between the White House and Congress on peacekeeping interventions had become a difference of degree and not kind.

A similar convergence of interests had occurred between the White House and the Department of Defense (DOD). PDD-25 had not only agreed that U.S. peacekeeping participation would only occur under Pentagon-preferred command structures, but had also given the Pentagon control over the management of allocated peacekeeping funds involving U.S. combat units. Clinton also decided to replace Aspin as secretary of defense in late 1993. He was careful to choose a nominee whom the military would approve, eventually deciding on Deputy Defense Secretary William Perry. As a former under secretary of defense for research and engineering responsible for military acquisitions under Carter and a leading advocate of defense industrial policy, Perry was a Pentagon insider. This tended to placate Pentagon criticisms of the administration, particularly since Perry proved to be a strong advocate of DOD interests in subsequent Bosnian policy.

Thus by mid-1994, the administration had essentially abandoned assertive multilateralism: it would no longer attempt to work through the United Nations and with its command structures in order to deal with second-tier fragmentation. There was a growing understanding, as State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns described it, that the United Nations “can keep the peace, but in terms of applying force, it’s not a good instrument.” Recognizing that the dream of enhanced U.N. peacemaking was dead by 1995, a former U.S. representative to the United Nations noted, “We now realize how difficult certain peacekeeping operations are and that they should be restricted in scope.”

The administration’s new attitude toward the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions had direct ramifications for its policy toward the ongoing Bosnian conflict.

**Multilateralism the Old-Fashioned Way—Bosnian Policy between 1994 and 1995**

By early 1994 it was clear that the administration had become markedly less deferential to U.N. and allied concerns in Bosnia. Rather than take its cues for action from allied hesitancy and back away from the option of more robust force, the administration began to exert continual pressure on the United Nations to get tough with cease-fire violations. The first NATO engagement in the Bosnian conflict occurred on March 1 and was not an air strike but an enforcement of the no-fly zone. NATO had a mandate to enforce these zones at will and had not consulted the United Nations prior to its actions. U.N. officials were surprised and upset by the lack of notification, as well as by the aggressiveness of the action itself, but the Clinton White House was said to be “jubilant” that U.S. fighter jets had finally had the opportunity to take action. Congressional leaders were supportive as well, and Dole gave “strong bipartisan
support" to these air strikes saying, "I think it would certainly send a strong message to Belgrade." 65

In subsequent months, the relationship between the United Nations and NATO began to deteriorate over when and how much retaliatory force to use. U.N. officials were predisposed to let violations pass, while NATO officials became increasingly frustrated at their inability to respond to violations with air strikes. 66 Even when the United Nations did call for air-strikes, NATO tended to want to pound Serb military installations, while the United Nations wanted attacks on isolated artillery pieces. Given DOD's experience with U.N. preferences and command structures in Somalia, it overwhelmingly supported NATO in these disagreements. Defense Secretary Perry spoke on behalf of both NATO and the Pentagon when he argued in the fall of 1994, "When we go in, I want to go in with compelling force. Force not necessarily just proportionate to the act at stake, but enough to make it clear that there's a heavy price to pay for violating the rules that NATO has established." 67 Because the new Republican Congress supported DOD's preferences, it also preferred NATO action over U.N. inaction in these disagreements.

Clinton and his other foreign policy advisers remained responsive to DOD and congressional concerns through early 1994. Administration officials consistently stressed that the United States would participate in a Bosnian peacekeeping mission only if it were NATO-led, which essentially meant under an American commander. In March the administration refused to support an expanded U.N. peacekeeping mission in Bosnia on the grounds that it would be unable to secure financial support from Congress. When the Security Council officially extended the UNPROFOR's Bosnian mission for another six months later in April, Albright vetoed a U.N. supplementary plan to send an additional ten thousand peacekeepers. She reiterated the administration's position that no American troops would be sent to Bosnia under a U.N. command and that a durable peace would have to be established. 68

During the summer of 1994, administration officials also convinced the Security Council to turn over responsibility for Bosnian negotiations to a joint U.S.-European-Russian contact group, which would effectively exclude Boutros-Ghali and other U.N. officials. Responsibility for air strike decisions still resided with U.N. officials, but the White House was not satisfied and in 1994 consistently worked to push the United Nations out of the way so that it could pursue its preferred solutions in Bosnia through NATO. As a nod to continual congressional pressure, and over the objections of the United Nations and its allies, the administration ended U.S. participation in the NATO-enforced weapons embargo to Bosnia in November. U.N. officials later accused the United States of participating in, or at least turning a blind eye to, arms deliveries to Bosnian Muslims. 69

A tenuous U.S.-negotiated cease-fire held into the spring of 1995, but by that summer the situation in Sarajevo had deteriorated again as Bosnian Serbs stole back weapons and began shelling the city. When the Serbs overran two U.N. "safe zones" in July, the Clinton administration reopened the U.N.-NATO debate regarding force levels. Because U.S. negotiators were now dominating negotiations to the exclusion of the United Nations, they informed Bosnian Serbs that NATO would react to Serb provocations with "disproportionate" and wide-ranging force. When the Serbs bombed a Sarajevo market at the end of August and killed thirty-eight people, the United States arranged for NATO air bombardment of Serbian positions. A two-week bombing campaign ensued to break the siege of the city and force the Serbs to negotiate.

The combination of a major offensive launched by Croats and Muslims between August and October and the NATO bombardment in September finally brought all three sides to the negotiating table. U.S.-brokered talks in the fall led to the Dayton Accords in November 1995 and the signing of a formal peace agreement in December. The accords outlined an American-envisioned, unified, and democratic Bosnian state, and called for a multinational peacekeeping force to oversee the transition. The administration's plan for this international peacekeeping force (IFOR) was designed to preempt congressional criticisms and alleviate Pentagon anxieties, and its parameters were precisely the opposite of those in the Somali mission.

At a November 21 news conference, Clinton argued that only NATO could oversee the Dayton Accords, "and the United States, as NATO's leader, must play an essential role in this mission." He pointed out that NATO's military mission would be clear and limited, that U.S. troops would only take orders from the American NATO commander, that they would follow NATO rules of engagement (which meant shoot first if necessary), and that there was a one-year timetable for their withdrawal. The United States insisted that NATO command was to be clear and unambiguous, and that U.N. officials would have no ability to interfere with NATO forces once IFOR went into effect. The United Nations was to play no part in what amounted to a U.S. NATO-led peacekeeping mission.

Although the House immediately voted to block money to send U.S. troops to Bosnia until hearings could be held, Clinton insisted from the moment he announced the IFOR plan that full consultation with
Congress would have to occur. In addition, congressional critics were greatly undercut by DOD’s acceptance of the mission. The Pentagon was satisfied with the terms of IFOR because, as Eric Schmitt pointed out, “the agreement meets virtually every condition the American military insisted on for success.”

It is only within the context of failed assertive multilateralism in Somalia that it is possible to understand why the administration organized IFOR as it did. It did not wish to abandon multilateralism entirely, since IFOR expected and relied upon other NATO members to contribute troops and supplies to the effort. However, the Clinton administration had come to understand that in order to retain control over international outcomes while also meeting the particular interests of other American foreign policy institutions, the United States would have to be willing to accept a disproportionate share of the burden. While its greater share could be measured in terms of expense and personnel, it also involved taking a more forceful leadership position if it had a preference for particular solutions to second-tier conflicts. International consensus consistent with American preferences was not a given and continued to require encouragement, cajoling, and even imposition.

The multilateralism of IFOR, as well as its structure and command chain, had more in common with allied occupational strategies employed by the United States just after World War II than it did with the type of U.N. missions envisioned by assertive multilateralism. Thus by 1995 there was consensus within the administration that returning to a more traditional model of American-style multilateral intervention was preferable. This meant that the criteria for U.S. intervention in second-tier conflicts would be based solely upon American interests.

Conclusions

The initial desire and subsequent inability of the Clinton administration to implement assertive multilateralism between 1993 and 1995 reflects both the possibilities and limitations of developing new policies toward second-tier fragmentation in the post–cold war period. The origin of the policy derived from a variety of sources including a changed international context, contradictory societal impulses, and Clinton’s own preferences and inexperience in foreign policy making. Yet other elements of the foreign policy community had different preferences. As a result, these institutions had reasons to be skeptical of the policy. The broader foreign policy community mounted increasing pressure on assertive multilateralism throughout the summer of 1993 and, when the policy actually produced a crisis, congressional, military, public, and media displeasure coalesced into a concerted attack. In October 1993, the president was confronted with united opposition to his second-tier policy, which made his ability to achieve other foreign and domestic policy goals highly unlikely. In the face of these attacks, the White House reversed its course.

By 1995 the divisive relationship between the White House and the rest of the foreign policy community over post–cold war second-tier fragmentation policy had largely been resolved. A consensus had developed among the relevant policy-making circles that American policy toward such situations would not be assertive multilateralism but would instead continue to put American international and institutional interests first. While the president tended to hold the initiative in subsequent decisions, policy was informed by and responsive to other institutional circles. Because policy reflected the interests of multiple actors and institutions, it also represented a modicum of foreign policy democratization. Both the failure of assertive multilateralism and its implications for the making of post–cold war U.S. foreign policy in general need greater exploration in this regard.

Post–Cold War U.S. Foreign Policy and the Failure of Assertive Multilateralism

The shift from “gung-ho” optimism over the possibilities of multilateral peace operations to skepticism over their desirability, feasibility, and utility is best explained as a function of the interaction among the White House, Congress, and foreign policy bureaucracy, whose actions were affected by both international and societal forces. Given the international environment, American political culture, and the institutional context of the early post–cold war period, assertive multilateralism was not a viable strategy for dealing with second-tier fragmentation. It sought to modify the intense U.S. internationalism of the cold war by relying upon collective decision making and burden sharing, yet it was based upon erroneous assumptions and contradictory aims. Moreover, it failed to account for diverging interests in Congress and the foreign policy bureaucracy, whose opposition forced the abandonment of the approach.

Internationally, assertive multilateralism suffered from a number of weaknesses that produced contradictions and limitations in policy. These contradictions also affected the preferences and decisions of U.S. policy makers, especially those who opted to oppose the initiative. Among these weaknesses, four warrant special mention. First, assertive multilateralism failed to account for weaknesses in U.N. organiza-
Finally, for all its promise as a way for the United States to remain engaged and share the costs of engagement at a time in which pressures toward neoisolationism were growing, assertive multilateralism failed to account for the loss of control and the apparent encroachment of U.S. sovereignty implicit in the notion that such U.N.-led peacemaking would entail. Given the penchant for exceptionalism, and perhaps unilaterism, rooted in the American experience, this failure proved costly as it generated opposition and suspicion from various quarters within the government and in the public. As the new Clinton administration attempted to operationalize this policy, its inherent contradictions would have a significant impact on particular American foreign policy institutions. Many of these institutions were already experiencing new pressures as a result of the cold war’s end and had reasons for resisting this new post–cold war policy toward second-tier conflict. If the international environment created a hard place where consensus was not readily available, the interests of particular American foreign policy institutions were the rock upon which the policy would eventually founder.

Having little foreign policy experience, the president was initially neither comfortable with nor interested in foreign affairs. During his campaign Clinton had made it clear that foreign policy would be a lower priority in his administration than domestic issues. Polling data acquired by his political consultants seemed to confirm the public’s relative lack of interest in foreign policy and so reinforced his own disinclination to address it. According to Christopher’s description of the foreign policy process in February 1993, the president would lay down “the broad guidelines of foreign policy, expecting his State Department and national security advisers to implement them as a team, working together, and holding them accountable if they don’t carry it out in a fairly straightforward way.” Clinton expected to delegate foreign policy formulation to his advisers, whom he assumed would work out solutions for him to approve or reject and thus free him to concentrate on domestic issues. As one foreign policy official put it, “He is there to do things when asked, but that is the extent of it.” Given the president’s own preferences, assertive multilateralism appeared to be a relatively low-cost strategy for dealing with what were already considered low-priority issues. If a situation warranted action, the Security Council would collectively agree to intervene, otherwise a situation could safely be ignored. On paper, at least, it was the kind of approach that Clinton as candidate had argued “will permit us the freedom to focus on America’s problems at home.”
The president’s lack of experience in foreign affairs was coupled with a distinct unease over issues of military force. This was partly a function of Clinton’s own personal history during the Vietnam War, which had done little to prepare him to be commander in chief or to earn him the Pentagon’s respect. In fact, relations between the White House and Pentagon were so bad in that first year that, as one high-ranking Pentagon official later described it, “I had the feeling the White House wanted the Department of Defense to cease to be a part of the US Government. We had terrible relations with the White House.” In this context, assertive multilateralism appeared to provide Clinton with a convenient means to avoid making tough decisions about when to use military force. By depending on an allied consensus for collective intervention in situations of Third World unrest, the president could shift responsibility for the use (or nonuse) of military force onto an external U.N. collective.

Among the foreign policy bureaucracies most affected by the end of the Cold War and the implementation of assertive multilateralism, DOD must be singled out. To say, based on DOD’s own institutional interests in the early post-Cold War period, that it was highly skeptical of assertive multilateralism would be an understatement. Within the context of a shrinking budget and reassessments of war strategies, assertive multilateralism could not have come at a worse time for the Pentagon. Part of the problem with peacekeeping was that it required a different type of military training from that traditionally given to American soldiers who, as Evan Thomas points out, “are trained to maneuver and pour on the firepower, not to stand and obey fuzzy rules of engagement.”

Exactly how the Pentagon was expected to pay for peacekeeping training, troops, and supplies was another problem.

Yet perhaps the greatest weakness of the new policy from DOD’s perspective was its implications for battlefield command and control. Within the U.S. military, there is no tradition of or support for turning over command to an independent international actor such as the United Nations. Responsibility for American troops on the battlefield resides in a chain of command which begins with the constitutional provision for president as commander in chief and is then subsequently determined by and lodged in the military itself. If DOD was expected to work with troops from other countries in battlefield conditions, it preferred doing so through NATO because it had a clear and precise command structure dominated by the U.S. military, and it gave American commanders control over member state troops, equipment, and intelligence on the battlefield. In addition, NATO forces had experience conducting military exercises with one another, had developed intelligence and battlefield procedures in a variety of contingencies, and had already addressed logistical compatibility and language problems.

Other elements of the foreign policy bureaucracy were less opposed to the policy, at least initially. As might have been expected, the State Department—particularly the U.N. mission and the Bureau for International Organization Affairs—were the strongest advocates for the approach. Thus, for example, Madeleine Albright was the most assertive high-level official to argue in favor of the initiative. The NSC staff also supported the strategy prior to the fall of 1993. However, even those agencies that benefited from the policy did not develop vested interests in its continuation. This may have been because many of Clinton’s early foreign policy advisers were more concerned with protecting the president than with the prerogatives of their respective agencies. Despite policy disagreements, Christopher, Lake, and Aspin all agreed that protecting the president was their first priority and that disagreements should be kept private. Thus they may have been more willing to abandon assertive multilateralism when its implementation began to negatively affect the president’s popularity.

If assertive multilateralism lacked an advocate among the foreign policy bureaucracies, it had an outspoken critic in the form of the U.S. Congress, largely because of its negative impact on the military and its reliance on the United Nations. Many members had long accused the U.N. bureaucracy of being bloated and inefficient and insisted that the U.S. share of the U.N. budget be reduced. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Congress began to regularly delay its payment assessments to the U.N. operating budget, though it continued to approve voluntary payments that it could earmark for particular U.N. programs. By 1993, however, it was not only refusing to pay its portion of the operating budget but the separate assessment for peacekeeping as well. Furthermore, skepticism over the policies stemmed from the painful budget contractions DOD was experiencing. If money was to be reallocated within DOD’s budget, members of Congress had little interest in funding a U.N. standby force or more U.N. peacekeeping missions in place of programs that more directly benefited their own constituencies.

One of the arguments used by some members of Congress to justify their skepticism over assertive multilateralism was that public opinion would not support U.S. involvement in U.N. peacekeeping missions. There was actually little evidence for this argument. During the early 1990s, the American public was generally more supportive of the United Nations and its functions than was Congress. Depending on how questions were phrased, most respondents to polling questions...
about post–cold war international events consistently tended to favor multilateral international efforts over unilateral ones. However, this support never translated into active pressure for U.N. peacemaking. As one observer pointed out, the minority who contact Congress about the United Nations tend “to have more concerns about the U.N. being too powerful,” and are “more verbal about it, more active, and belong to organizations that mobilize people.” This would certainly prove to be the case when the reality of assertive multilateralism involved the loss of American soldiers.

**Assertive Multilateralism and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy**

The institutional and societal factors discussed above reflect more general post–cold war features in U.S. foreign policy making, including a lack of consensus, an expanding congressional assertiveness, and a public ambivalence about U.S. leadership in the world. These forces combined to generate a policy process that defeated assertive multilateralism, and several aspects of this process should be highlighted. First, the White House retained the advantage of initiative, but then gradually peeled away its tenets in response to various criticisms from within the executive branch and Congress (both of which drew on public sentiment). Second, the White House faced multiple pressures between formulation and implementation which arose from the bureaucracy (DOD), Congress, the public, the international community, and President Clinton’s own interests. Within the United States bureaucratic and congressional actors allied themselves to pressure or thwart the White House and eventually managed to force a policy reversal. Third, without utilizing substantive legislation, Congress effectively shaped U.S. policy through the use of legislative threat, nonbinding resolutions and hearings, other attempts at signaling and framing opinion, and collusion with other actors. Through it all, members seemed emboldened in their challenges by public opposition or, in some cases, lack of public approval of President Clinton. In the end, opponents in Congress, with allies elsewhere in the government, provoked a series of “anticipated reactions” that brought White House policy in line with broad congressional preferences. Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the executive branch did not speak with one voice. In fact, it may be argued that it was executive disagreement that generated increasing congressional intervention and, in the end, policy reversal.

This case study suggests that the fate of assertive multilateralism was the result of *interbranch leadership*, in which interactions among White House, congressional, and bureaucratic actors led to changes (and finally consensus) in the broader second-tier fragmentation policy and its application to Bosnia specifically. Moreover, at different times during the period examined, policy making followed the institutional competition, confrontation and stalemate, and constructive compromise variants, depending on the extent to which the White House responded to the objections raised by its challengers in Congress and the bureaucracy.

The policy-making patterns suggested by this case imply a difficult foreign policy arena for the post–cold war world. The failure of assertive multilateralism says much about fragmenting interests and lack of consensus over the role, purposes, and costs of the U.S. foreign policy. It also implies that in times of uncertainty over role and interests in the world, policy making widens to include actors outside the executive branch, even as those actors inside the executive branch become increasingly divided. This indicates that U.S. foreign policy after the end of the cold war is likely to emerge from a complicated process involving both branches of government.

**Notes**


12 The committee consisted of National Security Adviser Lake, Secretary of State Christopher, Defense Secretary Les Aspin, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright, CIA Director James Woolsey, and Gore’s representative on the NSC staff Leon Fuhr. When Clinton attended the meetings, Chief of Staff “Mac” McLarty and Gore would also be present. Drew, *On the Edge*, p. 145.


26 *Time*, October 18, 1993, p. 50.


37 *Newsweek*, May 24, 1993, pp. 16–17.


39 This account of the nscc Principals Committee meeting is drawn from Daalder, “Multilateral Peace Operations,” pp. 462A, 10, and 462B, 1–2.


46 Church, “They Beat Me,” p. 49.


48 *Time*, October 18, 1993, pp. 42, 49.


50 *Congressional Quarterly*, March 26, 1994, p. 752.

51 *Time*, October 18, 1993, p. 46.


54 *Time*, October 18, 1993, p. 50.


68 Sean Kay, “The Future of European Security: Institutional Enlargement or Realist
As the previous chapters in this volume have described, the cold war abrupt collapse forced the United States to redefine its role in the transformed international system. In the absence of the Soviet threat, the bipolar balance of power, and the ideologically charged regional rivalries of the cold war era, the containment doctrine pursued by nine presidential administrations had suddenly become obsolete. The new era demanded a new grand strategy.

This task, of course, would have tangible consequences for the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy, whose structures and standard operating procedures were built around the overriding goal of communist containment. Consequently, each institution of foreign policy—the diplomatic corps, armed services, and intelligence agencies—was required to clarify and justify its relevance in the new systemic environment. And the White House, which oversaw these institutions, required support from the legislative branch in implementing their reform. This institutional interdependence was crucial in the mid-1990s because, at peacetime, Congress historically has assumed a more assertive role in foreign policy than it has when the United States is at war. Thus, as Robert Lieber recently observed, "the disappearance of the Soviet threat has been conducive to an erosion of presidential and executive power and a reassertion of the Madisonian features of the American political system."

This chapter explores the practical effects—and adverse consequences—of this pattern. It builds on the general discussion in chapter 3 by examining the protracted struggle between the Clinton administration and Congress over a primary arm of the foreign policy bureaucracy—the U.S. State Department and its affiliated agencies. Critics of the State Department had been calling for its restructuring since
II. The Background for Assertive Multilateralism

The end of the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union dealt with "second-tier" fragmentation through the prism of their relations with one another. For the United States, the end of the cold war meant that the traditional guidelines for dealing with such fragmentation no longer apply. This chapter examines the rise and fall of assertive multilateralism, which has meant that the traditional guidelines for dealing with second-tier fragmentation and to establish a new agenda for dealing with a post-cold war world. The case study demonstrates that given the historical context of the early post-cold war period, assertive multilateralism was not a viable strategy for dealing with second-tier fragmentation.

Jennifer Stirling Folker
second-tier conflicts, and it appeared to set a precedent for multilateral, collective security efforts under the auspices of the United Nations. The compatibility of great power interests during the Gulf War was taken as evidence that more collective security under U.N. auspices would occur in the future. As Karen Mingst and Margaret Karns suggest, Security Council cooperation during the Gulf War "opened up a new era in UN activities" which included "proposals to create a standing UN peace force [and] anticipate the use of such forces for both traditional peacekeeping functions and enforcement." The post–cold war peacekeeping vision described in Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 Plan for Action called for the U.N. to engage in actual "peace-making." Boutros-Ghali recommended that a peace-enforcement unit be created out of troops volunteered from member states, which would be at the disposal of the Security Council and under the secretary general's command. A new U.N. command and control center would also be created as a "24-hour-a-day warroom," which would monitor U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world while relying on access to intelligence and troops from member states.

What became known as the policy of "assertive multilateralism" (so labeled by the administration's U.N. representative, Madeleine Albright) initially found a receptive American audience because it sought to combine traditional yet contradictory impulses from American political culture itself. In the abstract, the policy had something to please everyone. As a means of pulling back from America's consistent global interventionism during the cold war, the policy sought to rely upon others to shoulder some of the burden of global leadership. Its proponents argued that solutions to second-tier fragmentation could be reached through pragmatic global problem solving because a consensus of interests now existed within the Security Council.

American idealism, its sense of a global mission, and the societal tendency to assume that American values and interests are universal informed the policy. If the United States could afford to be less active globally while others picked up the mantle, it was because American political culture tended to encourage the belief that the cold war had sufficiently transformed great powers in America's own image. Pragmatic problem solving could occur precisely because America had produced a world of like-minded states who now agreed with Anthony Lake's assertion that "to the extent democracy and market economics hold sway in other nations, our own nation will be more secure, prosperous and influential." Thus the policy's presumptions of global consensus and collective intervention provided a foreign policy rhetoric that allowed for multiple interpretations in a societal context that already tended to breed contradictory impulses in foreign policy.

While the tenets of assertive multilateralism seemed appealing to a broad range of voters, problems were bound to arise. Not only did the policy rely upon contradictory American impulses, but it also ignored (intentionally or unintentionally) the international reality that other states had differing interests and values. An international coalition of like-minded states willing to support U.N. efforts consistent with America's own specific interests and preferences simply did not exist. The potential for trouble was clear to many foreign policy observers who questioned the policy's practical viability. John Gerard Ruggie noted in 1993, for example, that the policy "lacks any corresponding expression in military doctrine and operational concepts," and Evan Thomas argued that it would tend to produce "goals that are at best fuzzy. Rhetoric that is not matched by results. Open-ended commitments to nations with no strategic value to the United States." Yet within the context of American political culture, it is easy to see why its fuzzy open-endedness may have made assertive multilateralism an attractive policy choice during the first post–cold war presidential campaign.

The Rise and Fall of Assertive Multilateralism

It was against this background that assertive multilateralism was formulated, implemented, and subsequently abandoned. When Clinton took office in January 1993, he inherited several second-tier conflicts which appeared to require some policy response (Bosnia, Somalia, and, to a lesser degree, Haiti). Assertive multilateralism was the administration's broader policy approach to each of these specific conflicts. As the ensuing discussion suggests, the broader policy and the specific conflicts had reciprocal effects on one another. In each case there was already U.N. involvement, but Bosnia and Somalia (Somalia is discussed in chapter 13) would eventually emerge as the crucibles within which assertive multilateralism would be tested and transformed.

Toward a Policy—Spring 1993

As a presidential candidate, Clinton had argued that the United States needed to be more assertive in second-tier conflicts and to develop and rely upon multilateral mechanisms to deal with them. These mechanisms, it was argued, would allow the United States to reduce the resources it devoted to acting as the "world's policeman." Reliance upon
early February 1993. Vance and former British foreign secretary Lord David Owen had been in the process of negotiating a peace plan in January 1993. The Principals Committee immediately and publicly disavowed it by announcing that they would not pressure the Muslims to accept the plan on the basis that it rewarded Serbian gains at the expense of the Muslims.

The problem with this rejection was that no alternatives had been developed within the committee. A list of possible options had been drawn up, which included humanitarian airdrops, U.N. enforcement of the no-fly zone, tightened economic sanctions, dispatch of an envoy to further study the Vance-Owen plan, and a peacekeeping force if all parties would commit to a cease-fire. Yet there was disagreement among Clinton’s foreign policy advisers over which options were preferable. Vice President Al Gore, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, and Albright favored more aggressive action and the use of force. Defense Secretary Les Aspin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, and Christopher were skeptical of military action and agreed that the introduction of American ground troops into the conflict with limited, unclear options would be undesirable. Powell wanted an all-or-nothing approach, while Christopher warned that getting involved might lead to another Vietnam. Although subsequent administration statements implied that it was on the verge of taking more forceful action, the Principals Committee and the president postponed a decision. Instead, they adopted a wait-and-see strategy and continued to revisit and discuss the list of options in what one participant referred to as “the world’s most elegant seminar.”

The one option Clinton had definitely ruled out was unilateral action. There was consensus within the administration that Bosnia should not become an “American problem,” a view supported by public opinion poll data collected by Clinton’s consultants which showed “that there was increasing support for action by the United States in Bosnia in conjunction with the U.N., but there was no support for unilateral action.” This meant, consistent with assertive multilateralism, that multilateral interests would influence whatever option would eventually be pursued.

The administration’s indecisiveness dragged on until mid-April when Srebrenica came under siege, and nightly news reports of the fighting finally provided the impetus for a decision. At a press conference on April 16, Clinton expressed outrage over the fighting, and stated that he thought the time had come “to consider things which at least previously have been unacceptable.” The impression he gave was that
use of force against the Serbs was imminent. The Principals Committee met over the weekend of April 17–18 and decided to recommend two options from their February list: to lift the arms embargo against the Muslims and to use air power to punish Serb artillery and cease-fire violations. Yet despite repeated statements supporting greater actions throughout the end of April, Clinton did not officially sign the “lift-and-strike” option until May 1.

Christopher immediately left for Europe to discuss the lift-and-strike option with the other Security Council members. However, it quickly became apparent that they would not support the proposal. Great Britain and France had volunteered troops to unproffor as a means of dealing with the Bosnian situation without having to intervene forcefully to stop the war. Lifting the arms embargo would have meant expanding the conflict with their own troops caught in the cross-fire. They also feared that the Bosnian Serbs would target their troops if the no-fly zone was enforced. Serbia was a traditional Russian ally, and so Russia had no interest in supporting tougher action against them. The final disincentive for supporting lift-and-strike was that the Bosnian Serb leaders signed the Vance-Owen peace plan just as Christopher was arriving in Europe, thus fueling hope that further action would be a moot point.

Consistent with the emerging policy of assertive multilateralism, Christopher was not instructed to sell lift-and-strike to the other Security Council members. He had been dispatched to Europe to “consult” and maintain “maximum flexibility,” not to insist, cajole, or even lead. Despite conveying public impressions that U.S. action was imminent, Clinton and his advisers never intended to take unilateral actions inconsistent with the interests of U.S. allies. When Christopher returned on May 8, he informed the president and the committee that, unless the president personally convinced the allies to pursue the option, European support would not be forthcoming. But Clinton had begun to have misgivings about lift-and-strike even before Christopher had returned home, and there was agreement among the advisers that the president should not take the lead.

Clinton’s response was exactly what one would expect given the parameters of assertive multilateralism. Without consensus on more forceful intervention in the former Yugoslavia, the lift-and-strike option was put on hold indefinitely. As Jane Sharp put it, “Clinton invoked a lack of consensus as an excuse not to act.” Instead, the U.N. began to plan for an expanded peacekeeping force to oversee the Vance-Owen peace plan if it held, and the Clinton White House agreed that it would contribute 25,000 troops to the mission. In a mid-May referendum, the

Bosnian Serbs rejected the plan, but since the lack of consensus among Security Council members continued, Clinton did not send Christopher back to Europe to press for lift-and-strike.

The administration also agreed to sign off on a European plan to establish “safe zones” for Muslims inside Bosnia, despite having earlier rejected the idea because, as Clinton had argued, such zones could become “shooting galleries.” Lake was skeptical of the plan as well, yet the administration’s capitulation to European preferences was consistent with assertive multilateralism, which depended on a collective consensus not necessarily determined by American preferences. The policy in turn supported Clinton and Christopher’s preferences for seeing the entire issue go away so that Clinton could concentrate on domestic policy again. When meeting with European allies in early June, Christopher brought no American proposals to the table and was sent simply to see what the United Nations and other Security Council members had decided on safe zone logistics.

Mounting Criticism—Summer to Early Fall, 1993
The parameters of assertive multilateralism and its application in both the Bosnian and Somalian cases came under increasing scrutiny by mid-1993. The Pentagon let it be known throughout the spring that it had reservations about U.S. involvement in Bosnia. During congressional testimony in April, Powell voiced his misgivings with plans for U.S. participation in a peacekeeping mission. And, even as the Principals Committee was meeting to decide the lift-and-strike option, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral David Jeremiah, was publicly expressing his skepticism of the strike option as an effective deterrent to Serb aggression.

Moreover, while the Defense Department accepted its assigned role in Somalia, from the start it expressed concerns over command and control issues, as well as the mission’s objectives (see chapter 13). In addition, congressional concerns over the Somalia mission began to mount, especially after June, when American troops were reinserted into the conflict and the United Nation’s attempt to capture General Aidid dragged on. Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, voiced a common congressional fear that the administration had no real exit strategy for Somalia. Republicans also frequently referred to Boutros-Ghali’s comment earlier in the year that U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Somalia only “when I say they can come out.”

The early results of PRD-T13 made Congress even more skeptical of
Clinton's second-tier conflict policy. Pursuant to the orders in PRD-13, the participants of the interagency review, which included representatives from State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs, and others under the leadership of the National Security Council (NSC) staff (with staff member Richard Clark coordinating the review), had completed a draft “presidential decision directive” in which the assertive multilateralism strategy was laid out. This draft, which was approved in mid-July by the NSC's Deputies Committee (chaired by Deputy National Security Adviser Samuel Berger), leaked in August and caused an immediate sensation because it called for expanding the role of U.N. peacekeeping missions and for placing U.S. troops under the operational command of foreigners on a case-by-case basis. This was consistent with the goals of assertive multilateralism, but not with Pentagon command and control structures. Powell and the Defense Department were particularly uneasy with the draft, while Christopher and State were highly ambivalent. Stories of divisions among Clinton's advisers began to surface in the press by September.

In response to these divisions and to the draft directive itself, a House Appropriations Committee voted on September 23 to impose conditions before Clinton could deploy U.S. troops in peacekeeping missions, including notification of the appropriate committees about mission expense, budget plans, projected duration, and goals of the mission. By this time, Congress was also mounting more pressure on Clinton's Somalia policy. The Senate approved a nonbinding resolution calling on the president to report his Somalia objectives to Congress by October 15 and seek congressional approval by November 15 to keep the troops there. The House was about to adopt similar resolutions. Congress also disliked the United Nation's reliance on U.S. troops, equipment, and supplies to conduct its missions, and refused to approve the Clinton administration's request over the summer for $400 million in peacekeeping and another $400 million in unpaid dues.

Both the public and the media were in step with (and perhaps driving) congressional concerns. In the last week of September, a Time/CNN poll found that only 43 percent of respondents approved of keeping U.S. troops in Somalia, while 46 percent disapproved. The news media expressed dissatisfaction with the United Nation's reliance on American support because it suggested, as Michael Gordon put it, “that the United Nations was not capable of taking forceful action unless the Americans carried most of the weight,” leading one “to wonder whether it should always be the Americans who wield the hammer.” What was being questioned, in essence, were some of the fundamental assumptions upon which assertive multilateralism was based.

There was also considerable congressional and public criticism of the White House's handling of Bosnia, but here the emphasis was less on the content of the policy and more on the president's policy-making style. Congress had generally been supportive of a tougher stance toward Serbian cease-fire violations and had also wanted the arms embargo lifted for Bosnian Muslims. However, there was no strong preference within Congress, the media, or the public for an escalated or unilateral intervention in the Bosnian conflict. In fact, during an April meeting between the president and congressional leaders, many of the latter had expressed deep reservations about becoming more directly involved in the conflict.

Criticism focused instead on the way in which Clinton and his foreign policy team had handled the lift-and-strike option. In May 1993, for example, Joe Klein argued that Clinton's public threats to get tough with the Serbs followed by his inability to secure allied support meant “the message—to the allies, to the Serbs, to every lobbyist and politician in Washington and to troublemakers around the globe—was irresolution.” Descriptions of Clinton's foreign policy-making style in the summer of 1993 regularly referred to his indecisiveness, his tendency to hold consultative seminars instead of strategy sessions, and his eagerness to compromise.

The impression of indecisiveness was reinforced when Clinton and the Principals Committee revisited the issue of tougher action in response to the Serbian siege of Sarajevo in early July. For the first time the Principals Committee considered the need to sell the strike plan to the European allies and the possibility of taking unilateral action if they refused. France and Britain agreed to go along with a NATO air strike option if Boutros-Ghali called for them. But when the United Nations proved reluctant to do so in August and September, the administration did not take unilateral action on the grounds that it was “unwise for the U.S. to go it alone,” according to various U.S. officials.

Criticism of Clinton's foreign policy irresolution in Bosnia cut across both political parties. Democrats agreed with the press that Bosnia was, as one Senate Democrat put it, “not so damn difficult as they keep saying it is.” Another commented on Clinton's policy-making style: “It is pathological. He just can't make a choice.” Republican Richard Lugar pressured Clinton during a May meeting to define his Bosnian policy, arguing that his record had created the “perception of drift” and that
he should do more to lead the European allies. Lugar also complained that the administration regularly failed to consult or adequately brief Congress on its foreign policies.

These mounting public, media, congressional, and the Pentagon concerns began to have an impact on the president and his advisers by the fall. On September 17, the Principals Committee met to discuss the draft directive. Albright remained the strongest advocate for the assertive multilateralism approach, Powell was strongly opposed to it, and both Christopher and Aspin remained ambivalent. Lake was most concerned with public perception, arguing that the focus on peacekeeping was damaging the president’s standing. Because the committee could not agree on the directive, it ordered the original interagency working group to redraft the sections dealing with the role of multilateral peace operations in overall U.S. foreign policy.

The draft directive was subsequently revised so that the centrality of multilateral peace operations to U.S. second-tier conflict efforts would be reduced. Guidelines on U.S. support for and participation in peace operations, as well as the use of U.S. troops in operations involving combat, were also made more restrictive, per the Pentagon’s insistence. The new draft improved U.S. control over dangerous, large-scale peacekeeping operations, although it still allowed the ceding of control to U.N.-designated foreign commanders in safer or small-scale missions.

In addition to redrafting the directive, the administration went on a public offensive in mid-September in an attempt to alleviate some of the foreign policy-making concerns expressed by its critics. For the first time since taking office, Clinton told reporters on September 23 that he would seek congressional approval before sending U.S. troops to a Bosnian peacekeeping mission, and he stressed that the troops would be under NATO and not U.N. control. In a September 25 meeting, Christopher, Aspin, Lake, Powell, and White House Chief of Staff Thomas F. McClarty, hammered out criteria for U.S. involvement in a Bosnian peacekeeping mission that clearly reflected congressional and Pentagon concerns about U.N. control, exit strategies, and mission goals.

In the week prior to Clinton’s first address to the U.N. on September 27, Lake, Christopher, and Albright spoke at various forums about the administration’s participation in U.N. peacekeeping. A common theme in these speeches was that a workable basis for determining when to send troops had been developed and that it took into account the need for public and congressional approval. In his own address to the United Nations, Clinton acknowledged that congressional support for U.S. participation in U.N. peacekeeping missions was limited. He argued that a reduction in the U.S. assessment for peacekeeping missions and a more discerning criteria for selecting such missions would “make it easier for me as president to make sure we pay in a timely and full fashion.”

Yet despite Clinton’s cautions, his speech at the United Nations also gave support to the U.N. “war room” headquarters and logistical standby units for use in peacekeeping situations. Although the White House was becoming increasingly sensitive to bureaucratic, congressional, and public skepticism of assertive multilateralism and its application in Bosnia and Somalia, the White House still subscribed to the policy in the early fall.

Reactions to the Somali Debate—October 1993

Both the broad strategy of assertive multilateralism and its application to Bosnia were dramatically affected by early-October events in Somalia. When supporters of General Aidid retaliated against the continued U.N. manhunt, several days of fighting resulted in the deaths of eighteen American soldiers. This proved pivotal in the subsequent abandonment of assertive multilateralism and in the administration’s Bosnian policy thereafter. If the Pentagon, Congress, the news media, and the public had expressed reservations about the administration’s Somali policy before October 1993, the death of U.S. Marines led to a concerted attack on the policy in October.

The Somalia debacle appeared to confirm the Pentagon’s worst fears with regard to the command and control structure of U.N. peacekeeping missions. When American relief forces had attempted to get to the ambushed marines, logistical difficulties coordinating with other U.N. troops prevented U.S. forces from reaching them until nine hours after the ambush had taken place. Although Les Aspin put most of the blame on the U.N. command structure, the Pentagon also had reason to reproach him specifically, since only the week before he had denied a request for additional equipment that might have been used to reach the Marines sooner. Aspin’s justification for the refusal, that greater commitment to the Somali mission might have jeopardized support for U.S. participation in the Bosnian mission, reinforced the Pentagon’s opinion that assertive multilateralism was a deeply flawed policy.

Congressional leaders were similarly outraged, and a Capitol Hill brief by Aspin and Christopher given just after the Marines were killed made relations between Congress and the White House even worse. Aspin mistakenly asked lawmakers what they thought should be done, which “managed only to convince congressional leaders that the admin-
istration had no clue as to what policy to pursue. In summing up the congressional perception of Clinton's foreign policy in October, Lugar argued that there had been a “virtual collapse of Presidential leadership,” and that there was “no significant congressional support for the President’s policy . . . and it’s his own fault.” The public tended to agree with Congress. In the week after the marines were killed, a Time/CNN poll found that only 36 percent of those polled approved of U.S. troops in Somalia and 89 percent wanted to bring the troops home as soon as possible. The same poll also found that 51 percent of those surveyed did not think Clinton was doing a good job handling foreign policy.

By huge majorities, both Houses of Congress called for a rethinking of administration policy on Somalia in particular and multilateral peace operations in general. Congressional proposals were circulated that sought to place restrictions on U.S. troop deployments in Haiti and to prohibit U.N. payments if U.S. troops were put under U.N. command. Any congressional support Clinton may have had for his multilateral approach fizzled. In fact, in February 1994, Congress refused to approve a $670 million supplementary appropriations bill meant to pay for outstanding American peacekeeping bills, beginning a trend that would only get worse when the Republicans later won control of Congress. Hostility toward the administration’s failure in Somalia remained so high during the early part of 1994 that House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman, Democrat Lee Hamilton, could emphatically state in March, “If the Bosnians signed an agreement today, and the president came up tomorrow to ask us for troops, he wouldn’t get them.”

Abandoning Assertive Multilateralism—October 1993 to May 1994
With his Somali policy under vehement attack from all quarters, Clinton probably had little choice but to abandon assertive multilateralism if he wished to accomplish anything else in foreign or even domestic affairs. Certainly it would have been unlikely that Clinton could have obtained congressional approval for U.S. involvement in the Bosnian peacekeeping mission. Christopher noted within days of the Somalia crisis, for example, that, “[i]t inevitably casts a shadow on Bosnia. It shows the relative impatience of the American people for the involvement of American troops in situations where our vital national interests are not so directly engaged.” According to President Clinton, the Somalia debacle made him “more cautious about having any Americans in a peacekeeping role where there was any ambiguity at all about what the range of decisions were which could be made by a command other than an American command with direct accountability to the United States here.”

Based on proposals from the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command in Somalia, the White House immediately ordered more armor and reinforcements to Somalia and set a hard deadline of April 1 for their withdrawal. When his political consultants questioned the wisdom of setting an exit date, Clinton told them he was in no position to deny the military what it deemed necessary. The new U.S. troops would be under American, not U.N., command, and U.S. troops were ordered to stop the pursuit of Aidid. In addition, the White House dispatched retired ambassador Robert Oakley to organize a peace conference among rival Somali clan leaders, and Oakley was instructed to act as a representative for the U.S. government, not the United Nations. This new hard-line toward the United Nations was greeted with congressional approval, as Dole noted that Clinton’s Somalia orders were finally about “what we were going to do, not Boutros-Ghali.”

Developments in the Somalia mission would also affect the administration’s policy toward Haiti a week later. The United States was scheduled to send military engineers and medical specialists as part of a U.N. peacekeeping contingent, but Clinton unilaterally canceled the scheduled landing when a Haitian demonstration against their arrival was staged. Despite the fact that Canadian troops were also on board, neither the United Nations nor the Canadian government was consulted. The new White House attitude was summarized by a White House official, who argued: “I don’t think we will give up trying to use the U.N. to leverage our involvement to do things that are worth doing, but not worth doing alone. But I think we will be far more skeptical about the ability of the United Nations to operate without vigorous involvement of the United States. Ultimately the U.N. is us. You can’t hand off to an entity that is a bunch of bureaucrats who have never done this before.”

Events in Somalia also had a direct impact on the redrafting of PDD-13. In late October, Secretary of Defense Aspin contacted Lake to urge “a complete revision of the draft.” In November, the interagency working group completed a fresh draft, which was then subjected to a series of legislative-executive consultations. Finally, on May 3, 1994, President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 25, which laid out the administration’s policy vis-à-vis multilateral peace operations. The directive declared that the United States would participate in U.N. peacekeeping missions only if doing so would maximize U.S. interests, and
then only under U.S. command. Before the United States would agree to support U.N. peacekeeping missions, strict conditions would have to be met including clear U.S. interests, congressional support, availability of personnel and funds, explicit objectives, an exit strategy, and an acceptable command and control structure.57

The directive also stated that the administration did not support the creation of a U.N. standing army and that it would not contribute American troops to such a force. In preparing the final draft, the administration bowed to congressional and Defense Department preferences and insisted that “[a]ny large scale participation of U.S. forces in a major peace enforcement mission that is likely to involve combat should ordinarily be conducted under U.S. command and operational control or through competent regional organizations such as NATO”58 (see also the list of conditions and discussion in chapter 13).

Public statements were supported by public deeds. Albright reported that the administration was already following many of the directive’s guidelines in the Security Council and had blocked requests for U.N. peacekeeping operations in Burundi, Georgia, Angola, and Rwanda because they looked more like peace enforcement missions with goals that could not be easily achieved. Tougher U.S. standards were necessary, Albright argued, because, “the UN has not yet demonstrated the ability to respond effectively when the risk of combat is high and the level of local cooperation is low.”59 Ten days later, Albright refused to authorize the immediate dispatch of U.N. troops to Rwanda, telling a House foreign affairs subcommittee, “We want to be confident that when we do turn to the UN, the UN will be able to do the job.”60

When the Republicans took control of Congress in January 1995, it demanded greater restrictions on U.S. support for U.N. peacekeeping missions. Based on provisions in the “Contract with America,” the House passed the National Security Revitalization Act in February, which sought among other things to limit U.S. contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations and to restrict the placement of U.S. troops under U.N. command. Yet the White House had already substantially complied with these demands in the spring of 1994, including unilaterally reducing U.S. contributions to U.N. peacekeeping from 31.7 percent to 25 percent as provided for in PDD-25.61 Despite Republican declarations to the contrary, by early 1995 the policy position between the White House and Congress on peacekeeping interventions had become a difference of degree and not kind.

A similar convergence of interests had occurred between the White House and the Department of Defense (DOD). PDD-25 had not only agreed that U.S. peacekeeping participation would only occur under Pentagon-preferred command structures, but had also given the Pentagon control over the management of allocated peacekeeping funds involving U.S. combat units. Clinton also decided to replace Aspin as secretary of defense in late 1993. He was careful to choose a nominee whom the military would approve, eventually deciding on Deputy Defense Secretary William Perry. As a former under secretary of defense for research and engineering responsible for military acquisitions under Carter and a leading advocate of defense industrial policy, Perry was a Pentagon insider. This tended to placate Pentagon criticisms of the administration, particularly since Perry proved to be a strong advocate of DOD interests in subsequent Bosnian policy.

Thus by mid-1994, the administration had essentially abandoned assertive multilateralism: it would no longer attempt to work through the United Nations and with its command structures in order to deal with second-tier fragmentation. There was a growing understanding, as State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns described it, that the United Nations “can keep the peace, but in terms of applying force, it’s not a good instrument.”62 Recognizing that the dream of enhanced U.N. peacemaking was dead by 1995, a former U.S. representative to the United Nations noted, “We now realize how difficult certain peacekeeping operations are and that they should be restricted in scope.”63 The administration’s new attitude toward the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions had direct ramifications for its policy toward the ongoing Bosnian conflict.

**Multilateralism the Old-Fashioned Way—Bosnian Policy between 1994 and 1995**

By early 1994 it was clear that the administration had become markedly less deferential to U.N. and allied concerns in Bosnia. Rather than take its cues for action from allied hesitancy and back away from the option of more robust force, the administration began to exert continual pressure on the United Nations to get tough with cease-fire violations. The first NATO engagement in the Bosnian conflict occurred on March 1 and was not an air strike but an enforcement of the no-fly zone. NATO had a mandate to enforce these zones at will and had not consulted the United Nations prior to its actions. U.N. officials were surprised and upset by the lack of notification, as well as by the aggressiveness of the action itself, but the Clinton White House was said to be “jubilant” that U.S. fighter jets had finally had the opportunity to take action.64 Congressional leaders were supportive as well, and Dole gave “strong bipartisan
support" to these air strikes saying, "I think it would certainly send a strong message to Belgrade."65

In subsequent months, the relationship between the United Nations and NATO began to deteriorate over when and how much retaliatory force to use. U.N. officials were predisposed to let violations pass, while NATO officials became increasingly frustrated at their inability to respond to violations with air strikes.66 Even when the United Nations did call for air-strikes, NATO tended to want to pound Serb military installations, while the United Nations wanted attacks on isolated artillery pieces. Given DOD's experience with U.N. preferences and command structures in Somalia, it overwhelmingly supported NATO in these disagreements. Defense Secretary Perry spoke on behalf of both NATO and the Pentagon when he argued in the fall of 1994, "When we go in, I want to go in with compelling force. Force not necessarily just proportionate to the act at stake, but enough to make it clear that there's a heavy price to pay for violating the rules that NATO has established." Because the new Republican Congress supported DOD's preferences, it also preferred NATO action over U.N. inaction in these disagreements.

Clinton and his other foreign policy advisers remained responsive to DOD and congressional concerns through early 1994. Administration officials consistently stressed that the United States would participate in a Bosnian peacekeeping mission only if it were NATO-led, which essentially meant under an American commander. In March the administration refused to support an expanded U.N. peacekeeping mission in Bosnia on the grounds that it would be unable to secure financial support from Congress. When the Security Council officially extended the UNPROFOR's Bosnian mission for another six months later in April, Albright vetoed a U.N. supplementary plan to send an additional ten thousand peacekeepers. She reiterated the administration's position that no American troops would be sent to Bosnia under a U.N. command and that a durable peace would have to be established.68

During the summer of 1994, administration officials also convinced the Security Council to turn over responsibility for Bosnian negotiations to a joint U.S.-European-Russian contact group, which would effectively exclude Boutros-Ghali and other U.N. officials. Responsibility for air strike decisions still resided with U.N. officials, but the White House was not satisfied and in 1994 consistently worked to push the United Nations out of the way so that it could pursue its preferred solutions in Bosnia through NATO. As a nod to continual congressional pressure, and over the objections of the United Nations and its allies, the administration ended U.S. participation in the NATO-enforced weapons embargo to Bosnia in November. U.N. officials later accused the United States of participating in, or at least turning a blind eye to, arms deliveries to Bosnian Muslims.69

A tenuous U.S.-negotiated cease-fire held into the spring of 1995, but by that summer the situation in Sarajevo had deteriorated again as Bosnian Serbs stole back weapons and began shelling the city. When the Serbs overran two U.N. "safe zones" in July, the Clinton administration reopened the U.N.-NATO debate regarding force levels. Because U.S. negotiators were now dominating negotiations to the exclusion of the United Nations, they informed Bosnian Serbs that NATO would react to Serb provocations with "disproportionate" and wide-ranging force. When the Serbs bombed a Sarajevo market at the end of August and killed thirty-eight people, the United States arranged for NATO air bombardment of Serbian positions. A two-week bombing campaign ensued to break the siege of the city and force the Serbs to negotiate.

The combination of a major offensive launched by Croats and Muslims between August and October and the NATO bombardment in September finally brought all three sides to the negotiating table. U.S.-brokered talks in the fall led to the Dayton Accords in November 1995 and the signing of a formal peace agreement in December. The accords outlined an American-envisioned, unified, and democratic Bosnian state, and called for a multinational peacekeeping force to oversee the transition. The administration's plan for this international peacekeeping force [IFOR] was designed to preempt congressional criticisms and alleviate Pentagon anxieties, and its parameters were precisely the opposite of those in the Somaliian mission.

At a November 21 news conference, Clinton argued that only NATO could oversee the Dayton Accords, "and the United States, as NATO's leader, must play an essential role in this mission."70 He pointed out that NATO's military mission would be clear and limited, that U.S. troops would only take orders from the American NATO commander, that they would follow NATO rules of engagement (which meant shoot first if necessary), and that there was a one-year timetable for their withdrawal. The United States insisted that NATO command was to be clear and unambiguous, and that U.N. officials would have no ability to interfere with NATO forces once IFOR went into effect. The United Nations was to play no part in what amounted to a U.S. NATO-led peacekeeping mission.

Although the House immediately voted to block money to send U.S. troops to Bosnia until hearings could be held, Clinton insisted from the moment he announced the IFOR plan that full consultation with
Congress would have to occur. In addition, congressional critics were greatly undercut by DOD's acceptance of the mission. The Pentagon was satisfied with the terms of IFOR because, as Eric Schmitt pointed out, "the agreement meets virtually every condition the American military insisted on for success."  

It is only within the context of failed assertive multilateralism in Somalia that it is possible to understand why the administration organized IFOR as it did. It did not wish to abandon multilateralism entirely, since IFOR expected and relied upon other NATO members to contribute troops and supplies to the effort. However, the Clinton administration had come to understand that in order to retain control over international outcomes while also meeting the particular interests of other American foreign policy institutions, the United States would have to be willing to accept a disproportionate share of the burden. While its greater share could be measured in terms of expense and personnel, it also involved taking a more forceful leadership position if it had a preference for particular solutions to second-tier conflicts. International consensus consistent with American preferences was not a given and continued to require encouragement, cajoling, and even imposition.

The multilateralism of IFOR, as well as its structure and command chain, had more in common with allied occupational strategies employed by the United States just after World War II than it did with the type of U.N. missions envisioned by assertive multilateralism. Thus by 1995 there was consensus within the administration that returning to a more traditional model of American-style multilateral intervention was preferable. This meant that the criteria for U.S. intervention in second-tier conflicts would be based solely upon American interests.

Conclusions

The initial desire and subsequent inability of the Clinton administration to implement assertive multilateralism between 1993 and 1995 reflects both the possibilities and limitations of developing new policies toward second-tier fragmentation in the post–cold war period. The origin of the policy derived from a variety of sources including a changed international context, contradictory societal impulses, and Clinton's own preferences and inexperience in foreign policy making. Yet other elements of the foreign policy community had different preferences. As a result, these institutions had reasons to be skeptical of the policy. The broader foreign policy community mounted increasing pressure on assertive multilateralism throughout the summer of 1993 and, when the policy actually produced a crisis, congressional, military, public, and media displeasure coalesced into a concerted attack. In October 1993, the president was confronted with united opposition to his second-tier policy, which made his ability to achieve other foreign and domestic policy goals highly unlikely. In the face of these attacks, the White House reversed its course.

By 1995 the divisive relationship between the White House and the rest of the foreign policy community over post–cold war second-tier fragmentation policy had largely been resolved. A consensus had developed among the relevant policy-making circles that American policy toward such situations would not be assertive multilateralism but would instead continue to put American international and institutional interests first. While the president tended to hold the initiative in subsequent decisions, policy was informed by and responsive to other institutional circles. Because policy reflected the interests of multiple actors and institutions, it also represented a modicum of foreign policy democratization. Both the failure of assertive multilateralism and its implications for the making of post–cold war U.S. foreign policy in general need greater exploration in this regard.

Post–Cold War U.S. Foreign Policy and the Failure of Assertive Multilateralism

The shift from "gung-ho" optimism over the possibilities of multilateral peace operations to skepticism over their desirability, feasibility, and utility is best explained as a function of the interaction among the White House, Congress, and foreign policy bureaucracy, whose actions were affected by both international and societal forces. Given the international environment, American political culture, and the institutional context of the early post–cold war period, assertive multilateralism was not a viable strategy for dealing with second-tier fragmentation. It sought to modify the intense U.S. internationalism of the cold war by relying upon collective decision making and burden sharing, yet it was based upon erroneous assumptions and contradictory aims. Moreover, it failed to account for diverging interests in Congress and the foreign policy bureaucracy, whose opposition forced the abandonment of the approach.

Internationally, assertive multilateralism suffered from a number of weaknesses that produced contradictions and limitations in policy. These contradictions also affected the preferences and decisions of U.S. policy makers, especially those who opted to oppose the initiative. Among these weaknesses, four warrant special mention. First, assertive multilateralism failed to account for weaknesses in U.N. organiza-
tion and command structures, both for broad decision making and for actual military operations. Although the U.N. commands actual field operations, its peacekeeping missions are logistically reliant upon U.N. member states for both approval and manpower/supplies. The United Nations cannot lead in any tangible sense when it comes to the determination of missions, commitments to action, or application of resources. Moreover, U.N. field command structures are unwieldy, inefficient, and poorly equipped to manage complex military combat operations involving volunteer troops with incompatible equipment, training, operational guidelines, intelligence, and languages.

Second, assertive multilateralism was predicated on the highly questionable assumption that the Security Council had reached a consensus on the need for and parameters of second-tier intervention in general. Sharp differences continued to exist within the Security Council and among non-Security Council states over which conflicts deserved the U.N.’s attention, how this attention should be manifest, and what the precise formula would be for member-state responsibility. Other states proved either unwilling to provide leadership in order to arrive at solutions, or they sought solutions which the United States did not necessarily favor or perceive to be in its own interests. While the belief that assertive multilateralism would work only in support of U.S. interests was consistent with America’s own societal impulses, it continued to be unrealistic within the context of the international environment.

Third, assertive multilateralism also foundered on the potential disparity between the costs of resolving second-tier fragmentation and the “national interest” in doing so. For assertive multilateralism to work, the United States either had to accept that in some situations no U.N. solutions would be forthcoming, or that it would have to support missions where it did not necessarily have a pressing national interest. By definition, the policy involved (at best) secondary issues for the United States, yet it expected the type of resource commitment normally reserved for issues of great threat and at a time when threats in the international environment had been dramatically reduced. This anomaly found voice in the objections and opposition from the U.S. Defense Department, members of Congress, and the broader public. The policy’s overestimation of commitment extended to other countries as well. Despite the Gulf War and its accompanying consensus rhetoric, other states were also unwilling to make the necessary physical, financial, and command sacrifices in order to impose collective security in situations where their own national interests and security were not directly threatened.

Finally, for all its promise as a way for the United States to remain engaged and share the costs of engagement at a time in which pressures toward neoisolationism were growing, assertive multilateralism failed to account for the loss of control and the apparent encroachment of U.S. sovereignty implicit in the notion that such U.N.-led peacemaking would entail. Given the penchant for exceptionalism, and perhaps unilateralism, rooted in the American experience, this failure proved costly as it generated opposition and suspicion from various quarters within the government and in the public. As the new Clinton administration attempted to operationalize this policy, its inherent contradictions would have a significant impact on particular American foreign policy institutions. Many of these institutions were already experiencing new pressures as a result of the cold war’s end and had reasons for resisting this new post-cold war policy toward second-tier conflict. If the international environment created a hard place where consensus was not readily available, the interests of particular American foreign policy institutions were the rock upon which the policy would eventually founder.

Having little foreign policy experience, the president was initially neither comfortable with nor interested in foreign affairs. During his campaign Clinton had made it clear that foreign policy would be a lower priority in his administration than domestic issues. Polling data acquired by his political consultants seemed to confirm the public’s relative lack of interest in foreign policy and so reinforced his own disinclination to address it. According to Christopher’s description of the foreign policy process in February 1993, the president would lay down “the broad guidelines of foreign policy, expecting his State Department and national security advisers to implement them as a team, working together, and holding them accountable if they don’t carry it out in a fairly straightforward way.” Clinton expected to delegate foreign policy formulation to his advisers, whom he assumed would work out solutions for him to approve or reject and thus free him to concentrate on domestic issues. As one foreign policy official put it, “He is there to do things when asked, but that is the extent of it.” Given the president’s own preferences, assertive multilateralism appeared to be a relatively low-cost strategy for dealing with what were already considered low-priority issues. If a situation warranted action, the Security Council would collectively agree to intervene, otherwise a situation could safely be ignored. On paper, at least, it was the kind of approach that Clinton as candidate had argued “will permit us the freedom to focus on America’s problems at home.”78
The president’s lack of experience in foreign affairs was coupled with a distinct unease over issues of military force. This was partly a function of Clinton’s own personal history during the Vietnam War, which had done little to prepare him to be commander in chief or to earn him the Pentagon’s respect. In fact, relations between the White House and Pentagon were so bad in that first year that, as one high-ranking Pentagon official later described it, “I had the feeling the White House wanted the Department of Defense to cease to be a part of the US Government. We had terrible relations with the White House.” In this context, assertive multilateralism appeared to provide Clinton with a convenient means to avoid making tough decisions about when to use military force. By depending on allied consensus for collective intervention in situations of Third World unrest, the president could shift responsibility for the use or nonuse of military force onto an external U.N. collective.

Among the foreign policy bureaucracies most affected by the end of the cold war and the implementation of assertive multilateralism, DOD must be singled out. To say, based on DOD’s own institutional interests in the early post-cold war period, that it was highly skeptical of assertive multilateralism would be an understatement. Within the context of a shrinking budget and reassessments of war strategies, assertive multilateralism could not have come at a worse time for the Pentagon. Part of the problem with peacekeeping was that it required a different type of military training from that traditionally given to American soldiers who, as Evan Thomas points out, “are trained to maneuver and pour on the firepower, not to stand and obey fuzzy rules of engagement.”

Exactly how the Pentagon was expected to pay for peacekeeping training, troops, and supplies was another problem.

Yet perhaps the greatest weakness of the new policy from DOD’s perspective was its implications for battlefield command and control. Within the U.S. military, there is no tradition of or support for turning over command to an independent international actor such as the United Nations. Responsibility for American troops on the battlefield resides in a chain of command which begins with the constitutional provision for president as commander in chief and is then subsequently determined by and lodged in the military itself. If DOD was expected to work with troops from other countries in battlefield conditions, it preferred doing so through NATO because it had a clear and precise command structure dominated by the U.S. military, and it gave American commanders control over member state troops, equipment, and intelligence on the battlefield. In addition, NATO forces had experience conducting military exercises with one another, had developed intelligence and battlefield procedures in a variety of contingencies, and had already addressed logistical compatibility and language problems.

Other elements of the foreign policy bureaucracy were less opposed to the policy, at least initially. As might have been expected, the State Department—particularly the U.N. mission and the Bureau for International Organization Affairs—were the strongest advocates for the approach. Thus, for example, Madeleine Albright was the most assertive high-level official to argue in favor of the initiative. The NSC staff also supported the strategy prior to the fall of 1993. However, even those agencies that benefited from the policy did not develop vested interests in its continuation. This may have been because many of Clinton’s early foreign policy advisers were more concerned with protecting the president than with the prerogatives of their respective agencies. Despite policy disagreements, Christopher, Lake, and Aspin all agreed that protecting the president was their first priority and that disagreements should be kept private. Thus they may have been more willing to abandon assertive multilateralism when its implementation began to negatively affect the president’s popularity.

If assertive multilateralism lacked an advocate among the foreign policy bureaucracies, it had an outspoken critic in the form of the U.S. Congress, largely because of its negative impact on the military and its reliance on the United Nations. Many members had long accused the U.N. bureaucracy of being bloated and inefficient and insisted that the U.S. share of the U.N. budget be reduced. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Congress began to regularly delay its payment assessments to the U.N. operating budget, though it continued to approve voluntary payments that it could earmark for particular U.N. programs. By 1993, however, it was not only refusing to pay its portion of the operating budget but the separate assessment for peacekeeping as well. Furthermore, skepticism over the policies stemmed from the painful budget contractions DOD was experiencing. If money was to be reallocated within DOD’s budget, members of Congress had little interest in funding a U.N. standby force or more U.N. peacekeeping missions in place of programs that more directly benefited their own constituents.

One of the arguments used by some members of Congress to justify their skepticism over assertive multilateralism was that public opinion would not support U.S. involvement in U.N. peacekeeping missions. There was actually little evidence for this argument. During the early 1990s, the American public was generally more supportive of the United Nations and its functions than was Congress. Depending on how questions were phrased, most respondents to polling questions
about post–cold war international events consistently tended to favor multilateral international efforts over unilateral ones. However, this support never translated into active pressure for U.N. peacemaking. As one observer pointed out, the minority who contact Congress about the United Nations tend “to have more concerns about the U.N. being too powerful,” and are “more verbal about it, more active, and belong to organizations that mobilize people.” This would certainly prove to be the case when the reality of assertive multilateralism involved the loss of American soldiers.

Assertive Multilateralism and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy

The institutional and societal factors discussed above reflect more general post–cold war features in U.S. foreign policy making, including a lack of consensus, an expanding congressional assertiveness, and a public ambivalence about U.S. leadership in the world. These forces combined to generate a policy process that defeated assertive multilateralism, and several aspects of this process should be highlighted. First, the White House retained the advantage of initiative, but then gradually peeled away its tenets in response to various criticisms from within the executive branch and Congress (both of which drew on public sentiment). Second, the White House faced multiple pressures between formulation and implementation which arose from the bureaucracy (DOD), Congress, the public, the international community, and President Clinton’s own interests. Within the United States bureaucratic and congressional actors allied themselves to pressure or thwart the White House and eventually managed to force a policy reversal. Third, without utilizing substantive legislation, Congress effectively shaped U.S. policy through the use of legislative threat, nonbinding resolutions and hearings, other attempts at signaling and framing opinion, and collusion with other actors. Through it all, members seemed emboldened in their challenges by public opposition or, in some cases, lack of public approval of President Clinton. In the end, opponents in Congress, with allies elsewhere in the government, provoked a series of “anticipated reactions” that brought White House policy in line with broad congressional preferences. Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the executive branch did not speak with one voice. In fact, it may be argued that it was executive disagreement that generated increasing congressional intervention and, in the end, policy reversal.

This case study suggests that the fate of assertive multilateralism was the result of interbranch leadership, in which interactions among White House, congressional, and bureaucratic actors led to changes (and finally consensus) in the broader second-tier fragmentation policy and its application to Bosnia specifically. Moreover, at different times during the period examined, policy making followed the institutional competition, confrontation and stalemate, and constructive compromise variants, depending on the extent to which the White House responded to the objections raised by its challengers in Congress and the bureaucracy.

The policy-making patterns suggested by this case imply a difficult foreign policy arena for the post–cold war world. The failure of assertive multilateralism says much about fragmenting interests and lack of consensus over the role, purposes, and costs of the U.S. foreign policy. It also implies that in times of uncertainty over role and interests in the world, policy making widens to include actors outside the executive branch, even as those actors inside the executive branch become increasingly divided. This indicates that U.S. foreign policy after the end of the cold war is likely to emerge from a complicated process involving both branches of government.

Notes

2 Mingst and Karns, United Nations, p. 76.
12 The committee consisted of National Security Adviser Lake, Secretary of State Christopher, Defense Secretary Les Aspin, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, U.N. Ambassador Madeleine Albright, CIA director James Woolsey, Lake’s deputy Samuel Berger, and Gore’s representative on the nsc staff Leon Fuert. When Clinton attended the meetings, Chief of Staff “Mac” McLarty and Gore would also be present. Drew, On the Edge, p. 145.
16 Drew, On the Edge, p. 150.
17 Drew, On the Edge, p. 151.
19 Newsweek, May 24, 1993, p. 18; Drew, On the Edge, p. 156.
26 Time, October 18, 1993, p. 50.
36 Drew, On the Edge, p. 279.
37 Newsweek, May 24, 1993, pp. 16–17.
39 This account of the nsC Principals Committee meeting is drawn from Daalder, “Multilateral Peace Operations,” pp. 462A, 10, and 462B, 1–2.
45 George J. Church, “They Beat Me Violently with Their Fists and Sticks,” Time, October 18, 1993, p. 49.
46 Church, “They Beat Me,” p. 49.
48 Time, October 18, 1993, pp. 42, 49.
50 Congressional Quarterly, March 26, 1994, p. 752.
51 Time, October 18, 1993, p. 46.
53 Drew, On the Edge, p. 349.
54 Time, October 18, 1993, p. 50.
68 Sean Kay, “The Future of European Security: Institutional Enlargement or Realist
As the previous chapters in this volume have described, the cold war abrupt collapse forced the United States to redefine its role in the transformed international system. In the absence of the Soviet threat, the bipolar balance of power, and the ideologically charged regional rivalries of the cold war era, the containment doctrine pursued by nine presidential administrations had suddenly become obsolete. The new era demanded a new grand strategy.

This task, of course, would have tangible consequences for the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy, whose structures and standard operating procedures were built around the overriding goal of communist containment. Consequently, each institution of foreign policy—the diplomatic corps, armed services, and intelligence agencies—was required to clarify and justify its relevance in the new systemic environment. And the White House, which oversaw these institutions, required support from the legislative branch in implementing their reform. This institutional interdependence was crucial in the mid-1990s because, at peacetime, Congress historically has assumed a more assertive role in foreign policy than it has when the United States is at war. Thus, a Robert Lieber recently observed, “the disappearance of the Soviet threat has been conducive to an erosion of presidential and executive power and a reassertion of the Madisonian features of the American political system.”

This chapter explores the practical effects—and adverse consequences—of this pattern. It builds on the general discussion in Chapter 3 by examining the protracted struggle between the Clinton administration and Congress over a primary arm of the foreign policy bureaucracy—the U.S. State Department and its affiliated agencies. Critics of the State Department had been calling for its restructuring since