

Introduction

In the early months of 2009, newly elected President Barack Obama presented a distinct alternative to the muscular tone that characterized much of American foreign policy for the past decade. In his inaugural address, Obama called for the greater use of diplomacy and the “prudent use” of military power in the conduct of the United States’ foreign policy.¹ The Obama administration’s 2010 National Security Strategy reaffirmed this shift toward more reliance on “non-kinetic” (or nonmilitary) power.² It is unclear what the ultimate implications and results of this approach will be at the time of this writing. However, this shift in policy calls for social science scholarship that tests the underpinnings of a greater reliance on nonkinetic power. In the face of a confounding array of national security challenges, from instability in the Middle East to the emergence of radical transnational actors, good social science can provide valuable insight about the promises and risks of a strategy grounded in the concept of “power through its prudent use.”

Nonetheless, there remains a gap between this turn in national security strategy and much of the contemporary foreign policy thinking in American academic and policy circles. There is an ingrained contention in the U.S. that the use of nonmilitary tools of statecraft, such as negotiations, to deal with adversaries amounts to “appeasement” and a demonstration of weakness. This argument has become so pervasive that many policymakers are reluctant to publicly recommend such strategies. Politicians who want to enhance their national security credentials often invoke their commitments to military spending and willingness to use force, and the public often associates national security with the use of the military. Both in policy and public discourse in the United States, the subject of national security revolves largely around the use of military power.

1 “Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2009; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?pagewanted=all>.

2 “National Security Strategy,” May 2010, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.

It would, of course, be naive to assume that diplomacy is appropriate in all situations involving adversaries. Furthermore, negotiations are often more successful when backed with the threat of force. But the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan illustrate that the utility of military power is limited in the sort of nontraditional or asymmetric conflicts that increasingly concern the U.S. and may be more effective when combined with nonmilitary measures. The military is but one instrument in a foreign policy toolkit that contains other useful tools, from economic sanctions and incentives to negotiations and public diplomacy. These nonkinetic tools are an understudied—and perhaps underutilized—option for maintaining national security and, in conjunction with military force, could help support more effective security policies for the U.S.

In this compendium of ten essays, leading scholars from the fields of political science, history, and management examine the utility of nonkinetic power in U.S. national security policy in both a historical and contemporary context. The scholars also consider the risks and benefits of shifting to a more “prudent,” or restrained, use of American kinetic power in foreign policy. The purpose is to assess the utility of nonkinetic power for addressing security challenges and to discover how and where it can be used most effectively. Are there situations in which nonkinetic power is conventionally ignored by policymakers but could actually prove to be useful? The objective is not to downplay the value of force. Rather, it is to understand how nonkinetic tools can better fit into a broader national security strategy that makes use of all available options, including the military.

This publication offers three broad perspectives on the role of nonkinetic power in American foreign policy:

I. The American Experience with Diplomacy and Military Restraint

Part I explores the U.S.’s historical experience with diplomacy from the perspective of foreign relations as well as domestic politics. Jeremi Suri’s essay argues that the U.S. increasingly marginalized its rich tradition of diplomacy and compromise as it achieved superpower status in the first half of the twentieth century. Carolyn Davidson analyzes how the U.S. has addressed the long-standing tension between engaging in formal multilateral partnerships and a desire to maintain a high level of autonomy in foreign policy. The last essay in this section, by Jane Cramer, examines historical public and elite support in the U.S. for a grand strategy that emphasizes the restrained use of military power.

II. Nonkinetic Power and Contemporary National Security Challenges

Moving from historical analysis to contemporary challenges, the essays in part II discuss how the U.S. could make greater use of nonkinetic power to address present-day national security issues. Stephen Van Evera suggests how the U.S.

can wield its diplomatic leverage to resolve four conflicts that endanger national security: India-Pakistan, Israel-Palestine, Iraq's civil war, and Russia's fractious relationship with Ukraine and Georgia. Deepak Malhotra's and Kimberly Elliott's essays focus on specific instruments of nonkinetic power—negotiations and economic sanctions, respectively. Malhotra shows why under particular circumstances negotiating with an adversary without preconditions may be a productive form of diplomacy. Elliott examines the utility of various types of economic sanctions as a coercive tool. Finally, Eugene Gholz and Daryl Press analyze China's efforts to secure sources of natural resources around the world and argue that this behavior does not require a militarized response from the U.S., as many analysts contend.

III. Liquidating Military Commitments

Whereas part II focuses on the use of nonkinetic instruments of statecraft, part III considers the risks and benefits that are associated with a decreased reliance on military power. Stephen Walt examines how states choose to terminate military commitments abroad and what makes these decisions so difficult; he further explores how states can minimize the negative impact of ending these commitments. Daniel Byman and F. Gregory Gause III study the complex implications of a hypothetical American military withdrawal from the Middle East and arrive at contrasting conclusions. Byman argues that removing U.S. forces from the region would increase the risk of terrorist attacks on American interests and would not induce al-Qaeda to cease its activities. Gause, in contrast, contends that a withdrawal to an “over-the horizon” position (that is, a position in which troops would remain within striking distance of the Persian Gulf States but would not be stationed within their borders) would be unlikely to harm American interests so long as Iran did not obtain nuclear weapons.

In the course of examining a rich collection of topics related to nonkinetic power, these essays highlight new directions for research. For one, Carlyne Davidson's piece raises the question of whether history can inform attempts to reshape and adapt existing alliances to meet future security challenges. Kimberly Elliott's analysis of the efficacy of economic sanctions could be complemented by a similar examination of economic incentives, such as promises of aid. Stephen Walt's study on how states can end military commitments could be extended by research on how institutional structures within governments affect decision making and whether they encourage leaders to favor particular policies. There is also much work to be done on several related topics not addressed here, including the relationship between international institutions and American power, elements of soft power such as public diplomacy, and the potential impact of the recent financial crisis on the U.S.'s global stature.

It is our hope that the essays in this publication will motivate scholars, the policy community, and the public to think more deeply about how nonmilitary means can potentially contribute to U.S. national security. President Obama's inaugural address and National Security Strategy outlined a vision of a foreign policy that could make fuller use of nonkinetic instruments of statecraft. As Obama and his successors continue to face international security challenges, they will have to draw on the very best ideas to underpin their policies. We hope that this collection of essays provides an initial contribution to a wider stock of ideas upon which they can rely.

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