

Support for PBS.org provided by:

[What's this?](#)

Back To School Time Just Got Personal
 FREE personalization on backpacks, lunch bags, pencil cases and more at the **PBS KIDS Shop** [SHOP NOW](#)

[PBS HOME](#) | [PROGRAMS A-Z](#) | [TV SCHEDULES](#) | [WATCH VIDEO](#) | [DONATE](#) | [SHOP PBS](#) | [SEARCH PBS](#)

[VIDEO ARCHIVE](#) | [SCHEDULE](#) | [TOPICS](#) | [ABOUT FRONTLINE](#) | [BUY DVDS](#) | [TEACHERS](#) | [Search FRONTLINE](#) »

THE WAR BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

[HOME](#) | [WATCH THE FULL PROGRAM ONLINE](#) | [ANALYSES](#) | [INTERVIEWS](#) | [CHRONOLOGY](#) | [DISCUSSION](#)

ANALYSES 1992: FIRST DRAFT OF A GRAND STRATEGY

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has been at the center of Pentagon strategic planning in both Bush administrations. A hawk on the use of U.S. military power, Wolfowitz took a lead in drafting the 1992 "Defense Planning Guidance" -- a set of guidelines on America's military posture toward the world. The draft said that containment was an old idea, a relic of the cold war. It advocated that America should maintain military strength beyond challenge and use it to preempt provocations from rogue states with weapons of mass destruction. And it stated that, if necessary, the U.S. should be prepared to act alone. Leaked to the press, Wolfowitz's draft was rewritten and softened by then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney.

Here, Barton Gellman of *The Washington Post*; William Kristol of *The Weekly Standard*; historian John Lewis Gaddis of Yale; and Dennis Ross, former State Department official and Mideast envoy, discuss the 1992 Wolfowitz document and its relation to the new National Security Strategy released in September 2002 -- President George W. Bush's dramatic and sweeping reformulation of U.S. foreign policy.

WILLIAM KRISTOL

Editor, *The Weekly Standard*



Wolfowitz [in 1992] was ahead of his time, beginning to try to think through the post-Cold War era. Wolfowitz saw very early that the fundamental choice was American leadership or increasing chaos and danger. And [the first President] Bush didn't really want to think about that in 1992. There was a certain view of the world that we had won the Cold War, and that was great, but now it was time to come back to normalcy and to retrench quite a bit. We would still be a great power. We would still, you know, fulfill our NATO obligations and that sort of thing. [But] we couldn't be a world policemen.

Wolfowitz's view is very different. I think Wolfowitz is now vindicated by history, but it took a long time to get vindicated. And, obviously, the Bush realists, what might be called the minimalist realism of the first Bush administration, was followed by a kind of wishful liberalism of the Clinton administration. And it really wasn't until 9/11 that Wolfowitz's paper, which by that time was nine years old, I think, came to be seen as perhaps prophetic.



RELATED LINKS

[1992 Defense Planning Guidance \(Draft\)](#)

In 1992 this classified 46-page document circulated for several weeks at senior levels in the Pentagon. But controversy erupted after it was leaked to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and the White House ordered then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to rewrite it. Here are excerpts.

[National Security Strategy of the United States](#)

Released on Sept. 17, 2002, the Bush administration's first formal statement of its national security strategy presents a bold and comprehensive

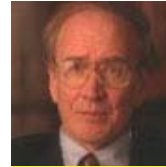
reformulation of U.S.
foreign policy.

JOHN LEWIS GADDIS

Professor of Political Science, Yale University

Why did the first Bush administration reject the Wolfowitz draft back in 1992? Why was it thought to be so dramatic, so surprising?

Well, in the context of the first Bush administration, we're talking about 1991, we're talking about the successful coalition in the Gulf War -- a remarkable coalition effort carried out with U.N. support.



+ READ THE INTERVIEW

We're also talking about a period at that point when there was closer cooperation among all the great powers than we had seen in a very long time indeed. And I think it was simply considered a little too sensitive for the United States to be saying in that context that it wanted to continue to be the greatest of great powers, far greater than any of the other powers. In that context, it was still a very new idea and considered pretty shocking.

As we went through the 1990s, one of the things that we saw is that there were no other contenders out there who were likely to succeed in challenging the United States. The United States came out of the 1990s, if anything, in an even greater position of hegemony and preeminence than it was at the beginning of the 1990s. And after a while, it seems to me, people came around to the view that maybe the world is getting used to this, maybe we are getting used to this kind of relationship. By the end of the 1990s, I think, we had begun to get used to it. And more important, I think, the rest of the world, to some extent, had begun to get used to it. ...

You said that aspects of the Wolfowitz 1992 report and the doctrine that was sort of enunciated in it were followed through by the Clinton administration. What do you mean by that? It's not normally seen that way.

I think the Clinton administration certainly tacitly accepted the premise that we did not want to see rivals to ourselves develop. Certainly the Clinton administration put very little emphasis on collaboration among the great powers. The second Bush administration has actually been more multilateral in that sense than the Clinton administration was.

The Clinton administration was very interested in pushing justice for small powers. This was often at the expense of great power relations. So our relationship with Russia, our relationship with China, suffered a lot in the Clinton administration. Was the Clinton administration's pursuit of justice for small powers part of a strategy of achieving hegemony? No, I don't think so. I don't think they were that sophisticated. But at the same time, I think in the way that they operated, they were reflecting that. ...

[The Next World Order](#)
The New Yorker's Nicholas Lemann examines the roots of the Bush administration's preemption policy and how Sept. 11 served as "a transformative moment" for some members of George W. Bush's foreign policy team. [*The New Yorker*, April 1, 2002]

[George Bush & the World](#)
Frances FitzGerald critiques the Bush administration's foreign policy, citing its break with "the internationalist premises that have been accepted by every other administration since World War II -- with the exception of Reagan's first." [*The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 26, 2002]

There's another side to this as well, and this was the realistic circumstance that they inherited. This is the way the world was when they came into office. And the world did not change by the time that they left office. So American hegemony was not just a doctrine; it was a reality at the end of the Cold War. The Clinton administration inherited that and did nothing to change it.



BARTON GELLMAN

Reporter, *The Washington Post*



+ READ THE INTERVIEW

I see a very strong overlap between the National Security [Strategy] as expressed today and the first and very muscular draft of the 1992 policy [drafted by Paul Wolfowitz]. You have many of the same players who are in primary positions of influence, and you simply have to lay the documents side by side and you will see huge areas in which they're the same, and frankly very few in which there are striking differences.

What were its ramifications?

You have to take yourself back to 1992. This is the first time that the Defense Department gathers itself to say, "What is our new strategic mission in the world now that there is no more Soviet Union?"...

[And] they said, "Our number one mission in the world, now that we are the sole superpower is to make sure we stay that way." They wanted to pocket that gain. And what was so politically insensitive in this internal document, which wasn't meant for distribution, is it talked about not only Russia, but Germany, Japan, India, all as potential regional hegemony that could rise up to challenge the United States as at least a regional and, potentially, a global superpower. They said their number one mission is to quash that.

What was the reaction?

Well, most of the countries I just named were on some kind of friendly terms, or central allies of the United States. They were none too pleased to be named as potential rivals. The public reaction was, "Good God, we're supposed to have a peace dividend now. The Cold War is over. Let's get on with our lives. Of course, stay strong enough to protect ourselves. But what in the world are you doing, going out there and looking for trouble?"

It was very controversial in Congress. There was an enormous amount of commentary by the opinion leaders saying, "This is way over the top." And, it was an election year. And they caved.

Was this a new plan? Or was this following up on other things?

Part of this 1992 Defense Planning Guidance is really expressing a lot of continuity, just in a not very politic way, with American policy since the second World War. Since the containment doctrine was drafted, and since George Kennan's famous "X Article" in *Foreign Affairs*, the U.S. had identified about five regions of the world that had the potential to create global military power. And, the objective of the United States during

the Cold War was to make sure that the Soviets didn't add any of those regions to their orbit and, therefore, change the global balance of power.

So now, you have a shift in which there are not Soviets. And the question is whether any of these powerful regions -- and this is because they have technology, resources, population, economic power -- are going to grow the military power that goes along with that, and rise up to challenge the United States.

There was one important addition, and that was that the United States would be prepared to preempt the use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons by any other nation -- even, the document said, where our interests are otherwise not engaged. That is to say, in a war somewhere else, that's not about us. It spoke of punishing or retaliating for that use. But it also said "preempt." This is the first time.

Now you have to remember, these are exactly the same people [in 1992] who are most influential right now in the U.S. government, and in the formation of U.S. strategic policy. It's Dick Cheney as defense secretary. It's Paul Wolfowitz as undersecretary [of defense] for policy. And it's a guy named Scooter Libby who is, right now, Dick Cheney's chief of staff and chief strategist, who was deputy to Paul Wolfowitz. And they were the three drafting authorities for this Guidance.

Cheney is vice president now. Wolfowitz is number two at Defense Department. These people have had enormous influence in drafting President George W. Bush's key strategic concept for the world. And, whereas a political fury in 1992 required them to back off, that hasn't happened this time.

You have had much the same reaction in Europe and the Middle East, and in other parts of the world to this idea of America not only being the global superpower, but ensuring that it stays that way. But this time, they think they can pull it off.



DENNIS ROSS

Former State Department official and Mideast envoy

What were the roots of Wolfowitz's 1992 draft document?

What drove this was an effort to take a look at where we were in terms of what might be called the "architecture" of international politics and national security.

There was a view that we had not come up with what was a coherent way yet to deal with what was the post-Cold War world. We knew there were going to be new realities in this post-Cold War world. You had the deputy secretary of state at the time, Larry Eagleburger, who gave a speech that was described as being nostalgic for the Cold War, because he talked about what was the kind of order that existed in the Cold War, with all of its potential for catastrophic threats to our survival. After all, one was talking about literally threats to our survival. Nonetheless, it created a kind of order and contained conflicts around the globe.

Now suddenly without the superpower competition to keep a lid on other conflicts, now you were going to see the potential for much greater conflict. You were going to see the potential for many more conflicts that looked like what you were seeing in Yugoslavia which was erupting at that point. You could see that there was a certain risk of terrorism



that might be different than the Cold War, even though terrorism was certainly a part of it. And, I think, the feeling was, if you're going to face new threats, you need new premises to deal with those threats. And you can't simply use all the same theories, premises and doctrines that have guided us in a world that was vastly different than the one that we're facing.

So, I think, it was very much motivated by a desire to try to deal with what was seen as a new array of threats in a world that was inherently more messy, where the threats to us were going to look different, where it might come from actors who were much less of an obvious threat, but have the capacity to hurt us in smaller but nonetheless meaningful ways. And this was an effort to try to cope with that new world.

Explain to me, if you can, the relation between the '92 document and Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy.

I wouldn't overstate the relationship, but I do think some of its concepts, some of its intellectual premises, were picked up in the year 2002. I think the critical thing about looking at a new architecture internationally, recognizing the threats were very different, some of that was certainly picked up, but then refined and developed and made much more comprehensive.

The 2002 document is an effort to look at national security with a very broad set of brushstrokes. In effect, there's an effort to look at national security and look at some of the threats that are not even traditional threats: to look at health issues like AIDS that could be a threat, to see that in a place like Africa there has to be an approach to trying to transform the reality there. This is something that you didn't find at all in the 1992 document, because it was a narrow DOD approach designed to try to anticipate what were new kinds of military threats that the military would have to plan against.

In 1992, what was clear is that the Cold War was over and we had won it. We didn't know exactly what the shape of the new world was going to be, and this was an effort to look at the nature of the threats, but we were the predominant power. That was unmistakable then. So there was an effort to look at new threats, but to look at them through the lens of how could you use the power that we had to deal with those, recognizing that we had no peer, no real competitor, as a power?

So that's where I think some of the intellectual wellsprings of the 2002 document do emerge, because 2002 is making it very clear, very explicit, that we will use our power to pursue these objectives, to pursue objectives that we consider to be important not for only American interests, but for the world's interests. In many respects, the character of this document is in keeping with what might be described as America's image of exceptionalism: that we always use power for good, that we have selfless purposes. This is the way we see ourselves. It's not necessarily the way the rest of the world sees us

[The '92 guidance] took a hit. There was a strong reaction against it. Explain that.

Well, at the time when it came out, I mean, there was a concern that it would produce a kind of -- the term is "preemption", but in fact the right term is "prevention." You preempt when there is an imminent attack, you preempt before you can be struck. Prevention is looking at longer-term threats and saying, "I'm not going to wait until they materialize." And so, I think, this was suggesting that we were lowering the threshold to military action in a way that wouldn't be understood internationally.

At the time, the only cautions that I had, from my approach, were not that this was a wrong way to be thinking; it was a question of whether or not you wanted it out there in the open before you fully vetted it, number one. And number two, one of the elements of vetting it had to do I think -- and I still do, with what the administration's put out now -- with how you begin to suggest where this applies and where it doesn't apply.

I mean, it really is a case-by-case approach because if it's a blanket set of rules, then others will use it to deal with the problems of their immediate neighbors. And that was never its intent. The drafting of it was never designed to suddenly say, "Alright, it's a free for all now." Or, "We're going to approach this in a kind of mindless way. We're establishing principles that are going to govern what we do, and it doesn't apply to anybody else." This was the beginning of what was going to be a serious dialogue about trying to take a look at what were new threats. From that standpoint, I found it legitimate. Its early exposure was, I'm afraid, premature because it was bound to distort what was the intention.

Why the reaction by the administration at that point? Why Cheney's sanitization, or whatever, of the document re-released in a different manner?

Because I think at the time there was a sense that this was an overstatement. In fact, this was not something that had been reviewed with President George H.W. Bush. The president's own instincts were much more cautious than this. He would want much more discussion before he would suddenly put it out. And he was also someone who was, I think, highly sensitive also to his relationships with other leaders.

[home](#) · [introduction](#) · [view program](#) · [analyses](#) · [interviews](#) · [chronology](#) · [discussion](#) · [readings & links](#)
[producer's chat](#) · [tapes & transcripts](#) · [press reaction](#) · [credits](#) · [privacy policy](#)
[FRONTLINE home](#) + [wgbh](#) + [pbsi](#)

white house photo copyright ©alan schein photography/corbis
web site [copyright](#) 1995-2005 wgbh educational foundation