

**American  
Foreign Policy  
and How  
It Changed  
the World**

**SPECIAL  
PROVIDENCE**

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## Chapter Six

# “VINDICATOR ONLY OF HER OWN”

## The Jeffersonian Tradition

The Hamiltonian and Wilsonian approaches to American foreign policy, however controversial they may sometimes be, are relatively well understood. Though in some ways alien and in others offensive to the classical approaches of European diplomacy, over time they have become familiar enough to be easily comprehensible. Furthermore, throughout the twentieth century, other countries to a greater or lesser extent appropriated elements of Hamiltonian and Wilsonian political thought to their own circumstances. This is not difficult to do. The universalism of Wilsonian logic gives it international resonance and popularity. The commercial interest in most countries is strong enough to create some domestic analog of Hamiltonian politics, and the commercial advantages that flow to countries supporting or at least participating in a United States–led international Hamiltonian order are substantial enough to create significant interest groups in most countries that endorse Hamiltonian proposals for reasons of their own.

The Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools, however, which more directly spring from idiosyncratic elements of American (or Anglo-American) culture, remain less well known, less well liked, and much less well

understood. This is natural. Hamiltonian and Wilsonian values are universal, and both Hamiltonians and Wilsonians want the United States both to build an international order and to make domestic concessions and changes for the sake of that order. They believe in reciprocity; if they want the world to become more like the United States, they also want the United States to accommodate better to the rest of the world.

Jeffersonians and Jacksonians would be happy if the rest of the world became more like the United States, though they don't find this likely. They resist, however, any thought of the United States becoming more like the rest of the world. If the United States makes even such trivial concessions to international order as adopting the metric system, it will be because of Hamiltonian and Wilsonian efforts. In very different ways Jeffersonians and Jacksonians believe that the specific cultural, social, and political heritage of the United States is a precious treasure to be conserved, defended, and passed on to future generations; they celebrate what they see as the unique, and uniquely valuable, elements of American life and believe that the object of foreign policy should be to defend those values at home rather than to extend them abroad.

Since the end of the Cold War, the concerns and values of Hamiltonians and Wilsonians have been at the center of the formation of American foreign policy. Under both the first Bush and the Clinton presidency, the construction of a global trading system and the extension of democracy were the central themes of American foreign policy.

To many observers in the United States and abroad, the widespread opposition in the United States to this post-Cold War consensus is both distasteful and difficult to understand. Puzzlingly, the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian opposition to mainstream American foreign policy cuts oddly across ideological and political lines. The AFL-CIO and liberal activists like Ralph Nader joined with arch-conservative Pat Buchanan and quirky populists like Ross Perot in attacking free trade initiatives like the World Trade Organization treaties and the treaties that established NAFTA. Neo-Marxists joined with neoconservatives to oppose American involvement in humanitarian interventions in the former Yugoslavia; Noam Chomsky<sup>1</sup> manned the barricades with Richard Perle to keep our boys out of Kosovo.

The conventional distinctions between isolationist and interventionist, realist and idealist, hawks and doves, and even populist and elitist approaches don't adequately describe the opposition to the dominant post-Cold War foreign policy; nor do they help us understand the poten-

tial for alternative coalitions and foreign policy approaches that now exists in American politics.

Like the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian schools, the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools represent distinct intellectual approaches to American foreign policy that emerge out of distinct cultural, social, and economic elements in American society. Like the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian schools, too, the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools have evolved over the generations while consistently seeking ways of expressing and advancing identifiable interests and concerns. Again like the other schools, both Jeffersonians and Jacksonians see foreign policy not simply as a field of concern in its own right but as an instrument of domestic policy; they favor particular foreign policy ideas because they believe that certain approaches to foreign policy will best advance the kind of domestic policies and order they wish to promote. This does not mean they are indifferent to foreign policy. From the earliest years of the republic, Jeffersonians and Jacksonians have energetically entered the contest to shape American foreign policy, and their efforts have often been crowned with success.

Despite their relegation to the opposition in the George H. Bush and Clinton administrations, the two schools remained deeply rooted in American opinion and were able to force Hamiltonian and Wilsonian globalists to retreat from their most expansive, intoxicating visions of a "new world order." The election of 2000 saw George W. Bush adopt key themes from Jeffersonian and Jacksonian ideas, speaking in the campaign of the need for the United States to lower its profile, to walk more "humbly," and to move back to a narrower and more restricted view of the national interest.

Jacksonian support was a crucial element in the support for Ronald Reagan's presidency, and Jeffersonian opposition to his Central America policy entangled him in the Iran-Contra scandal, inflicting the most serious damage of his presidency. George H. Bush failed to realize lasting political gains from the Gulf War victory because Jacksonian opinion, which traditionally opposes limited war, was outraged by the inconclusive peace. SADDAM HUSSEIN STILL HAS HIS JOB; DO YOU? said a bumper sticker during the 1992 campaign. Although both the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools fell on hard times in the twentieth century, and some observers predicted that they would fade from national life, both now look set to play crucial, perhaps dominant roles in the formation of American foreign policy for many years to come.

## The Jeffersonian Party

When Alexander Hamilton unveiled his proposals for national credit, a strong central government, and a pro-British, commercially oriented foreign policy in the cabinet of George Washington, he soon found himself opposed by Thomas Jefferson, then serving as the first secretary of state. The two had crossed swords before. In the debates over the Constitution, Hamilton had called for a government as strong and as centralized as possible, and for ultimate authority to rest in a powerful executive little different from a king. Hamilton's more extreme proposals were defeated, but Jefferson was so disturbed by the powers delegated to the central government that he had difficulty in supporting the ratification of the new Constitution, and played a part in the development of the Bill of Rights to limit federal authority.

The disagreements between the two leaders have reverberated through American history to this day. For more than two hundred years, the American two-party system has borne the marks of the original quarrels in Washington's cabinet. Parties rise and fall, ideologies come and go, but American politicians continue to wrestle with the issues—the proper relationship of capitalism and democracy, the limits of federal power with respect to the states, the people, and the economy—that divided Jefferson and Hamilton in the eighteenth century.

Both Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians agree that the United States is and ought to be a democratic and capitalist republic. But they differ on which of these two elements is the more important. Hamiltonians argue, justly enough, that without the prosperity that results from a healthy capitalist economy, the United States itself, much less its democratic system of government, cannot endure. In any case, Hamiltonians wonder, what would be the use of a government that was unable to provide appropriate conditions for the protection and development of private property?

But Jeffersonians make the obvious and compelling retort that capitalism and business cannot flourish unless society itself is healthy and democratic. And furthermore Jeffersonians have darkly and repeatedly warned that the unchecked operation of capitalism does not always reinforce democracy. The development of great fortunes and private concentration of wealth perverts and suborns the political process. Democracy cannot be taken for granted; it must be vigilantly defended.

Sometimes, Hamiltonians argue, it must be defended against itself.

Democracy works best, they say, when the people elect thoughtful, experienced legislators and magistrates who make policy and write laws better than the uninstructed public could do on its own. Property is a minority interest. The demagogues who flatter public opinion, and the unscrupulous politicians who will say or do anything to gain office, may please the people, but they will undermine the security of property and therefore ultimately the stability of the government and the happiness of society. For Jeffersonians big business is a necessary evil to be tolerated for the sake of democracy; for Hamiltonians democracy in some of its forms can be a necessary but dangerous evil.

The disagreement over the proper strength and role of the federal government is similar. Hamiltonians (and Wilsonians) see a strong central government as the indispensable guarantor of national freedom. Jeffersonians have generally seen a strong central government as, at best, a necessary evil and, at worst, as the most dangerous enemy of freedom. Hamiltonians believe that if the Jeffersonians would stop trying to interfere, the United States would be better governed than other states, but still very much a state among states. Jeffersonians believe, passionately, that the United States should be something better and different. Hamiltonians believe that a well-ordered, well-administered state provides good government to the people. Jeffersonians believe that the people should govern themselves as simply and directly as possible.

Perhaps most profoundly, Hamiltonians believe that the Revolution was a good thing, but that it is over. Like Wilsonians, Jeffersonians believe that the American Revolution continues. One believes that the United States is a country that has had a revolution; the other believes that America is a revolutionary country. Jeffersonians generally believe that the United States has a long way to go before it achieves the Revolutionary goals of 1776. It is one thing to say that all men are created equal; it is another to build a society that fully embodies this great truth. In more than two centuries of struggle and reflection, Jeffersonians have expanded their understanding of their ideas and expanded their application. Jefferson could write the Declaration of Independence and own slaves; the ideas that he unleashed have gone beyond him. As long as women suffer discrimination, as long as racial and ethnic minorities are excluded from full participation in the political and economic life of the nation, as long as lesbians and gays suffer discrimination based on sexual preference, today's Jeffersonians tell us, the great promises of the Revolution remain unfulfilled.

Even as Jeffersonians labor to extend and fulfill their vast and sweep-

ing vision of that Revolution, they are constantly involved in a bitter struggle against counterrevolutionaries, those who would deny the rights promised in the Declaration of Independence or infringe on the liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. By a logical process obvious and clear to themselves, though sometimes difficult for others to follow, Jeffersonians have convinced themselves that the right of exotic dancers to bare their breasts in bars is guaranteed by the Constitution, as are the rights both to produce and to consume pornography. The temple of liberty is always under siege. Here a Mississippi school board wants children to recite the Lord's Prayer at the start of the school day; there a prosecutor wants to introduce improperly obtained evidence into a criminal trial. Over there a university board of trustees is trying to fire a professor for expounding questionable ideas, and a police chief is refusing a marching permit to a group of American Nazis who want to commemorate Hitler's birthday by marching through a neighborhood populated by Holocaust survivors. In all these cases Jeffersonians will be found (not always enthusiastically) at what they take to be the barricades of freedom.

Government is not the only force from which the Revolutionary legacy must be defended. Since Jefferson tried to persuade Washington to veto the act establishing a charter for the First Bank of the United States, Jeffersonians have worried about the ability of large economic concentrations to infringe on popular liberty. Active in the resistance to the wave of corporate mergers toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jeffersonians overcame their suspicion of federal power to support antitrust legislation. In the contemporary world Jeffersonians like Ralph Nader continue to seek limits on the political power of economic concentrations.

Although the 1960s and 1970s left many Americans with the impression that the civil liberties movement was primarily an aspect of the Left, Jeffersonianism (like most American political movements) cannot so easily be fitted into categories drawn from European political battles. The libertarian movement is an expression of Jeffersonian thought. Organizations like the libertarian Cato Institute advocate limited government and individual civil liberties, and attack the nexus of close relationships and mutual support between large corporations and big government in both foreign and domestic policy. One of the most important developments in American society since the end of the Cold War has been the progressive rebirth of Jeffersonian activism among legal circles on the Right, with movements growing to strengthen the rights of private property against government regulation, and to revive the limits on

federal power vis-à-vis the states. That "right" Jeffersonians and "left" Jeffersonians come together on foreign policy issues—that, for example, the Cato Institute supports a limited-objective foreign policy and opposes humanitarian interventions—indicates the strength and continuing vitality of Jeffersonian thought in foreign policy.

In the long sweep of history, neither the Jeffersonians nor the Hamiltonians have had everything their own way. Hamiltonians have had the satisfaction of watching the growth of federal power, the establishment of a professional military and civil public service, and of two centuries of trade and financial policy organized largely in ways that generally accord with the interests of the leading business interests of the day. Jeffersonians, on the other hand, have seen suffrage extended progressively to all adult men, to women, and to racial minorities. The Bill of Rights has preserved individual liberty despite the growing strength of the federal government.

### **The Defense of Liberty**

The Jeffersonian view of the United States as a revolutionary nation with a revolutionary mission runs deep. The Jeffersonian party looks at the American Revolution with something of the same emotion with which good Bolsheviks once viewed Lenin's October revolution. In Jeffersonian eyes, the American Revolution was more than a break with a blundering king and a usurping Parliament; it was the start of a new era in the world.

The original Jeffersonians were steeped in the rich tradition of English and Scottish dissent. They often saw the American Revolution as the latest—sometimes as a secular—step in the British Reformation, and they saw themselves as Cromwellian Roundheads attempting to complete that Reformation against the opposition of the Hamiltonian Cavaliers. The emancipation of the British people from the medieval superstition of the Roman Catholic Church and (so Puritans charged) the only slightly less superstitious patchwork of the Church of England had been the program of the radical church reformers in England and Scotland. Just as the halfhearted official reformers in England had lopped off the pope but otherwise retained the panoply of papistry—bishops, sacraments, divine-right monarchy—so the halfhearted Hamiltonians wanted to get rid of the king of England but set up a social order in the United States that would be as much like the old British version as possible.



The Jeffersonians believed themselves to be the political and intellectual vanguard of the common man, the heirs and the completers of the long British struggle for liberty. For Jeffersonians parasitism, whether of church or state, was the great enemy of the common people. "Their spiritual fetters were forged by subtilty (*sic*) working upon superstition,"<sup>2</sup> as John Quincy Adams said of the British people. Popes and bishops used the artful wiles of priestcraft to beguile the people into supporting their luxurious lifestyles. Government officials and insiders set up a parallel operation in civil life. Aristocrats and courtiers told the people that the mysteries of government were too complex for them to comprehend; they deliberately mystified the inherently straightforward art of government into a byzantine labyrinth in which the honest farmer would be too confused to perceive the larceny of his goods and betrayal of his interests by the effete drones who dedicated themselves to defrauding and confusing him.

The unique circumstances of the American Revolution—the long, popular seasoning in the British struggle for liberty, the agricultural character of the population, the absence of nearby enemies requiring permanent national mobilization for war—offered Americans a rare, perhaps unique, opportunity to try to start over: to build a system of liberty on the purest revolutionary principles. To capitalize on that rare and precious opportunity to build a free country was the highest aim of Jeffersonian domestic policy; to preserve that sanctuary and that Revolution has been and remains the highest aim of Jeffersonian statecraft in international relations.

This defensive spirit is very far from the international revolutionary fervor of the Wilsonian current in American life. Wilsonians could be called the Trotskyites of the American Revolution; they believe that the security and success of the Revolution at home demands its universal extension through the world. Jeffersonians take the Stalinist point of view: Building democracy in one country is enough challenge for them, and they are both skeptical about the prospects for revolutionary victories abroad and concerned about the dangers to the domestic Revolution that might result from excessive entanglements in foreign quarrels. Wilsonians are reasonably confident that the Revolutionary legacy in the United States is secure from internal dangers. They also believe that the United States, without too much blood or gold, can spread democracy around the world. The tide of history is running with American democracy, Wilsonians believe: The American Revolution is sweeping the world.

Jeffersonians have a very different view. They believe that democracy is a fragile plant—difficult to grow, harder to propagate. Looking back at the long struggle in Britain—the Magna Carta, the Reformation, the Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, enemies from within and without, usurpations of kings, intrigues of bishops, invasions and Jacobite risings—then the struggles of the American Revolution with its treasons and disasters, the nation's chief cities in flames or in enemy hands—Jeffersonians could not be so sanguine about the possibilities for defending democracy at home, much less extending it abroad.

In the decades following the American Revolution, there was ample evidence to justify Jeffersonian forebodings about the difficulty of establishing democracy abroad. The French Revolution, originally greeted with hope and support by Jefferson and others, quickly degenerated into bloodshed and tyranny. The wars of liberation in South America set up one bloody shambles after another; neither life nor property was safe in most of that region, and a legacy of misrule was established that lingers in some countries to this day. It was a disillusionment comparable to what many idealists felt more recently as one newly independent African democracy after another collapsed into chaos and tyranny following decolonization in the 1960s. Experiences like these have created an enduring sense among Jeffersonians that the United States could better serve the cause of universal democracy by setting an example rather than by imposing a model.

But democracy was not merely difficult to propagate abroad, it was difficult to defend at home. The gutters of history, ancient and modern, were strewn with the wreckage of democracies. The Thirty Tyrants overthrew the democracy of Athens; Julius Caesar established an empire in Rome. Mobs debased, oligarchies perverted, dukes and princes overthrew republican governments in the city-states of early modern Italy. Almost everywhere in Europe absolute monarchs suppressed traditional institutions like parliaments and assemblies.

Liberty could not even trust her friends. Cromwell set up civil and ecclesiastical powers more arbitrary than those he had suppressed; Napoleon directed the energies of France more thoroughly in the service of his personal ambitions than had any Louis.

The Hebrew Scriptures revealed the distressing truth that not even the chosen people could maintain their liberties. In the days of the judges, "[E]very man in Israel did what was right in his own eyes." But that wasn't enough for them: "Give us a king," the people said to Samuel.

As God asked, Samuel did his best to warn them: If I choose a king

for you, he told the clamorous assembly, "He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your menservants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you that day."<sup>3</sup>

The first Israel had lost its liberty to a centralizing, tax-gathering, bureaucracy-building state. What guarantee could be given for the second?

Liberty is infinitely precious, and almost as infinitely fragile; that is the core belief of the Jeffersonian movement. In this it differs from all the other major political forces in American life. Hamiltonians believe that commercial development can secure the blessings of free government; Jeffersonians note that in one democracy after another, great commercial interests have subverted the political process to its destruction, and that the ambitious rich man can be the greatest danger to a democratic system. Wilsonians believe that the force of progress and enlightenment is moving mankind toward a reign of peace and reason; Jeffersonians believe that history goes backward as well as forward, and that ambition and the lust for wealth are too deeply embedded in human nature to be easily harnessed by just and rational laws. Jacksonians, as we shall see, believe that the deep, good heart of the American people will instinctively repel any threat to their cherished democracy; Jeffersonians know too well the degree to which an unchecked, unbridled popular passion can endanger the very democracy that it wants to protect.

Jeffersonians therefore find themselves in an odd and difficult position. They believe, perhaps more than anyone else, that democracy is the best possible form of government, but they constitute the only major American school that believes history is not necessarily on the side of the American experiment.

### **Jeffersonian Foreign Policy Doctrine**

From this sense of democracy as uniquely precious but achingly vulnerable has developed the Jeffersonian approach to foreign policy. The Jeffersonian mind does not scan the foreign policy horizon in a search for opportunities; rather, it mostly sees threats.

This hasn't always been true. The early Jeffersonians had objectives, mostly territorial: Chiefly they wanted control of the Gulf Coast from Florida to the mouth of the Mississippi, which many of them believed also required the possession of Cuba. The Louisiana Purchase and the annexation of Florida largely satisfied the Jeffersonian hunger for land. Jeffersonians like John Quincy Adams opposed the annexation of Texas, counseled caution in the Oregon controversy with Britain, and bitterly denounced the Mexican War. Wilsonians and Hamiltonians together plotted the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy and U.S. annexation of that land and people; Jeffersonians wanted to leave the Hawaiians alone. Jeffersonians like Mark Twain denounced the war that established American rule in the Philippines with the kind of fierce invective their successors would hurl at the planners of the Vietnam War. Few things were clearer to the Jeffersonians than that the growth of the American republic into an intercontinental empire was a bad business all around.

Once the United States had achieved a reasonably clear title to most of the key real estate on the Jeffersonian shopping list, there was little more, concretely, to be gained from an activist foreign policy. Jeffersonians certainly found little to tempt them in the ambitious plans periodically put forward by Hamiltonians and Wilsonians for global systems. The worldwide commercial system the Hamiltonians wanted would reinforce precisely the commercial elite that Jeffersonians deeply feared at home. It was a bad thing, not a good one. Endlessly involving American arms, credit, honor, and prestige in attempts to spread democracy to ungrateful and incapable republics in South America or, worse, intervening in Balkan wars between the Ottoman sultans and their rebellious Christian subjects seemed to involve risks, including conflicts with other powers and building up a strong military-industrial complex in the United States, dependent on the public treasury and addicted to war.

There are two basic kinds of danger to liberty that might arise from developments in foreign policy: There are those things that foreign countries may do to us that threaten our liberties directly; there are also, perhaps more dangerous, the things we may do to ourselves as we seek to defend ourselves against others, or even as we seek to advance our values abroad. In the first group fall the obvious, notorious dangers of foreign policy: Foreign countries might invade, devastate, occupy, and finally conquer the United States. Using threats or bribes, they could

suborn the government or corrupt politicians and bend the United States to their will. They could so infringe on the rights of American citizens abroad—the impressment of seamen, the confiscation of property, piracy, extortion, mistreatment of diplomats—that the American government would have no alternative but war.

These were real and alarming enough—particularly in the era of Napoleon—but they were far from the most insidious dangers Jeffersonians saw lurking in the world of foreign affairs. What they feared most was not successful foreign invasions of the United States. Distance, the sea, and the American victory in the Revolution all counseled courage in the face of that danger. Rather, they feared what the effort of continually resisting invasion, or participating in foreign politics, would do to American democracy. Victory, even universal global hegemony, would be a hollow prize.

"She well knows," John Quincy Adams said, speaking of the United States,

that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself, beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. . . . She might become the dictatress of the world: she would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Senator Borah, the Jeffersonian chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who drove Hamiltonians and Wilsonians almost to despair with his resourceful opposition to the League of Nations, echoed Adams's thoughts almost a hundred years later when he rose on the Senate floor to make a last attempt to block ratification of the Versailles Treaty, including U.S. membership in the League of Nations: "When you shall have committed this Republic to a scheme of world control based upon force . . . you will have soon destroyed the atmosphere of freedom, of confidence in the self-governing capacity of the masses, in which alone a democracy may thrive. . . . And what shall it profit us as a Nation if we shall go forth to the domination of the earth and share with others the glory of world control and lose that fine sense of confidence in the people, the soul of democracy?"<sup>5</sup> Like Adams, Borah believed that excessive intervention in the Hobbesian world of international politics would corrupt and undermine the Lockean, democratic order that the American people had established at home.

These dangers that the Jeffersonians foresaw from the beginning and sought to ward off were, to a large extent, unavoidable. The world intrudes on us whether we like it or not. Enlightened Jeffersonians have always therefore known that real isolation is impossible; the task of foreign policy as they see it is to manage the unavoidable American involvement in the world with the least possible risk and cost. Unlike the other major schools, the Jeffersonians are always braced to choose among evils. Government itself is a necessary evil to the Jeffersonian mind. The same thing is true about foreign policy: We would be much better off if we didn't have to have one at all. As it is, Jeffersonians believe, we will bear what we must while avoiding what we may. Since we must have a foreign policy of some kind, let us find one that does the least possible damage to our democratic institutions.

Some might call this an isolationist attitude, and isolation has always been an attractive alternative to the Jeffersonian mind, but we should recognize that it proceeds not out of an ignorant and ostrichlike sense of the nation's indestructibility, but rather out of a keen, aching, and even morbid sensitivity about the exquisite vulnerability of the American experiment to the consequences of developments overseas.

### **The Avoidance of War**

War was the first and greatest evil Jeffersonians sought to avoid. Jefferson genuinely hated and feared it, "as much a punishment to the punisher as to the sufferer."<sup>6</sup> War was not detestable only because of the casualties it caused or the hatreds it fomented but also because it threatened to undermine American democracy at home. Frequent participation in major international wars would, the early Jeffersonians believed, pose—win or lose—a major threat to American liberties. Wars cost money, piling up debts that concentrated power in the central government and forced most of the population to labor and pay taxes to support the minority that owned the government bonds issued to cover the debt; wars built up a concentrated economic and political machinery dependent on government funds, addicted to secrecy, and with a permanent interest in discovering ever new dangers abroad; they also made the development of strong standing armies and navies inevitable, a development that, historically, has often been fatal to republican liberty.

Though Jeffersonian thinking about the economic dangers of war has

changed somewhat over the years, the core ideas remain similar. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jeffersonians hated and feared the national debt with a passion that today is difficult for even the most dedicated "debt hawks" to appreciate. In addition to all the arguments that are still brought forward by those who wish to cut the federal deficit (the burden for future generations, the "crowding out" by federal spending of private investment, the danger of inflation), the early Jeffersonians brought forward a political argument as well. The national debt was a danger to democracy because it divided the citizens into two classes—taxpayers and interest collectors. In American circumstances that generally meant that the products and income of farmers were taxed to provide a stream of income for merchants, capitalists, and others with ready cash to invest. The hallmark of Jefferson's administration through 1807 had been his success in paying down the debt. When he assumed office, the debt stood at \$83 million; by 1807 it was \$69 million;<sup>7</sup> had it not been for the Louisiana Purchase, it would have stood at \$54 million.

In 1809, as yet another war crisis with Britain loomed on the horizon, Jefferson advised his friend James Monroe, the new secretary of state, to do everything possible to avoid war: "If we go to war now, I fear we may renounce forever the hope of seeing an end of our national debt. If we can keep at peace eight years longer, our income, liberated from debt, will be adequate to any war, without new taxes or loans, and our position and increasing strength put us *hors d'insulte* from any nation."<sup>8</sup>

The prospect of debts resulting from wars horrified generations of orators. After the Civil War, President Andrew Johnson lamented that the cost incurred in the war to free the slaves would reduce millions of Northerners to debt peonage for generations.<sup>9</sup>

"We are going to pile up a debt that the toiling masses that shall come many generations after us will have to pay," said Nebraska senator George W. Norris in a speech against Wilson's proposed 1917 declaration of war against Germany. "Unborn millions will bend their backs in toil in order to pay for the terrible step we are now about to take."<sup>10</sup>

For Jeffersonians there were two key goals in domestic politics. Merchants and bankers had to be prevented from setting up a monetary aristocracy as antidemocratic as the blood aristocracies of Europe, and the central government had to be prevented from growing so powerful that it threatened the freedoms and rights of the states and citizens alike.

Those goals were related, and one of the most important connections was the national debt. Debt strengthened the mercantile classes, and

government spending made possible by that debt strengthened the central government. What Jefferson and the Jeffersonians feared would happen next was simple: The creditor class would use its wealth to gain effective control of an ever more powerful government. Almost two hundred years before Eisenhower's warning along similar lines, Jeffersonians feared the growth of a military-industrial-financial complex. The more the government spent, the larger and stronger the class of military contractors and other dependents would be. The deeper into debt the government went, the larger and stronger would be the class of creditors, insisting that the government use its monopoly of force and its taxing authority to extract resources from the mass of the people to pay off the creditor class.

The other reason Jefferson hated war was that it led the state to build up its armed forces. Such buildups were often associated with deficit spending and therefore with increases in the national debt, and they also put force in the hands of the central government. Much of this feeling originally came out of reflection on the long struggle between the British Parliament and the House of Stuart. The efforts of the Stuart kings to build a Continental-style absolute monarchy in Britain often turned on the question of standing armies; once the king had an irresistible standing army he could overawe Parliament and do exactly as he pleased.

War requires secrecy, and it strengthens the executive against the legislature, thought Jeffersonians, and they were right. Today's imperial presidency is the offspring of fifty years of crisis and of hot and cold war between 1939 and 1989. In 1935 the U.S. armed forces consisted of 251,799 people in uniform and 147,188<sup>11</sup> civilian employees. The total budget of the Army and Navy Departments was \$924 million.<sup>12</sup> There was no independent national intelligence operation. The United States kept informed about foreign countries through its regular diplomatic service, which employed 4,471<sup>13</sup> people. The total State Department budget was \$16 million.<sup>14</sup> Sixty years later the total intelligence budget was classified—that fact in itself a horror for Jeffersonian democrats. The Pentagon employed 3.25 million people, including both civilians and those in uniform.<sup>15</sup> The number of intelligence employees was also classified information and unavailable to the general public, but reliable estimates indicated that between 70,000 and 80,000 people were employed from a total budget of about \$27 billion.<sup>16</sup> An estimated 15 million<sup>17</sup> classified documents rested in government vaults, unavailable for citizens' inspection. The costs from the last sixty years of crisis and



war have seen the national debt rise from \$40.4 billion<sup>18</sup> (with annual interest payments of \$1 billion) in 1939 to peak at \$5.5 trillion early in the Clinton administration (with annual interest payments of \$362 billion).<sup>19</sup>

The United States won most of the wars fought in these years, but the government and the people were much farther apart at the end of the experience than they were at the beginning. It was not only misguided militia members stockpiling canned goods and reading up on secret government missions in fearful black helicopters who distrusted the government; tens of millions of otherwise perfectly sensible Americans believed in vast government conspiracies and coverups regarding everything from the Kennedy assassination to alleged contacts with aliens. The corrosive effects of secrecy on public trust and democratic government are an important reason why Jeffersonians are led so reluctantly even into just wars.

For most of American history Jeffersonian opinion has seen war as a last and very undesirable resort. Instinctively Jeffersonians are slow to react to provocations. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's refusal to resort to force during the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-80 parallels Jefferson's resolute determination to avoid intervention in the Napoleonic Wars despite provocations from both Britain and France. This was the policy that another Jeffersonian, William Jennings Bryan, hoped to follow with respect to German provocations during World War I.

When it becomes politically or morally impossible to ignore provocations, or to respond to them with nothing more than verbal protests, Jeffersonians will still not turn to war. They see economic sanctions, for example, as far preferable. Not only do sanctions not embroil the country in alliances and debt, but they strike at the very commercial interests that Jeffersonians wish to contain at home. From the days of Jefferson's economic sanctions intended to force Britain and France to recognize American rights to the attempts to use economic sanctions as a tool to improve human rights conditions in contemporary China, Jeffersonian opinion has been quick to disrupt commerce to serve national political objectives and slow to resort to outright war.

Wilsonians hate war, too, but for different reasons. The Wilsonian hatred of war stands more on humanitarian than on political grounds. As we know, Wilsonians do not share the Jeffersonian fear of central authority. Nevertheless, from the nineteenth century through the Cold War, Jeffersonians worked with Wilsonians to make wars less likely or

less horrible through legal means. They looked to arms limits, disarmament agreements, and strict rules of war as ways to achieve these goals—and, if possible, to reduce the costs of defense in times of peace. Beginning after the Civil War, Jeffersonians sought to induce foreign countries to enter into arbitration agreements with the United States and one another, pledging to submit their differences to peaceful arbitration and accepting cooling-off periods before resorting to hostilities.

That war should be the last resort of policy remains a primary pillar of Jeffersonian thought today. After negotiation has failed, after arbitration has been unsuccessful, after sanctions have had no effect—you can still go to war if you must. Even then, however, Jeffersonians would prefer a gradual approach to war: Turn the thermostat up a little at a time; try to get your results with the least possible application of force.

### **The Constitutional Conduct of Foreign Policy**

If the avoidance of war is the first principle of Jeffersonian statesmanship, the second is the constitutional conduct of foreign policy. Here Jeffersonians often stand alone; the other three schools are willing and ready to lay the sacred scrolls aside when the cannons thunder, or even when they threaten to thunder. “*Silent enim leges inter arma*,” Cicero told a Roman jury in 52 B.C.: The law shuts up when weapons speak.<sup>20</sup>

Hamiltonians like Dean Acheson have roundly and frankly cursed the Constitution with its intricate framework of toils and snares, the opportunities it gives for recalcitrant senators to gum up the works of the executive machine. Wilsonians, too, when their blood is up because of some pestilential foreign evildoer, are able to emancipate themselves from an excessive reverence for constitutional norms. Few of them, for example, sought to apply the War Powers Act in the Yugoslav war of 1999. As for Jacksonians, it was Andrew Jackson who said, when, in 1832, the Supreme Court overturned the Indian Removal Act, “John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it.”<sup>21</sup>

Not only do Jeffersonians actually value what so many regard as the odious constitutional restrictions on executive power, they would sometimes even like to see them tightened. Throughout American history they have sought to defend congressional power and dignity in foreign affairs. In the fights over the League of Nations, the UN Charter, and the treaty that founded NATO, Jeffersonians insisted on language that

affirmed that no treaty could bind the United States to send troops abroad for war without congressional consent. The War Powers Act of 1973, requiring congressional consent when American troops are placed in harm's way and the bane of every president since Richard Nixon, was a classically Jeffersonian measure in attempting to assert congressional control over American involvement in foreign conflicts.

The concept of government secrecy is deeply inimical to Jeffersonian ideas. Efforts to control the CIA, to declassify as many secret documents as quickly as possible, and to subject intelligence and military institutions to constant and intensive congressional oversight within a framework of law proceed directly from Jeffersonian values.

Opposition to fast-track authority—a system by which recent presidents have negotiated broad multilateral trade agreements under congressional rules that allow a vote on the entire final package, rather than rules that would allow either house to pick the deals apart—also reflects Jeffersonian concerns about the integrity of congressional authority. Supporters of the fast track decry the way the traditional procedure allows individual representatives and senators to conduct horse trading, erect procedural obstacles, and distinguish themselves by all the tricks that our legislators have developed through more than two centuries of parliamentary maneuvers. To Jeffersonians, giving a powerful voice in trade negotiations to the representatives of each state and section is a good thing, not a bad one. If this annoys our trading partners, it's probably because they know that the constitutional process improves our chances of getting a better deal. In any case Jeffersonians don't feel the same sense of urgency about concluding ever new and improved trade agreements that drives Hamiltonians from one round of trade talks to the next.

Frustrated Hamiltonians roar that in fact opposition to fast-track comes from special interests that just want protection. Jeffersonians shrug; they are well aware that the U.S. government system is one that proceeds more by personal interests than principles. They see nothing wrong with cooperating with South Carolina textile mill owners one week and Oregon timber cutters the next. The constitutional system has lasted this long, they believe, precisely because there are many competing interests in this country that do not want to give up their right to be heard and to shape policy, even foreign policy. To the Jeffersonian mind this is not a disagreeable and possibly dangerous defect in our system; it is one of the glories and strengths of that system, and they aim to defend it.

## Economy of Interests

In 1806, President Thomas Jefferson wrote a congratulatory letter to Alexander I on his accession to the Russian throne. "It will be among the latest and most soothing comforts of my life," wrote the author of the Declaration of Independence to the most autocratic ruler on earth, "to have seen advanced to the government of so extensive a portion of the earth, and at so early a period of his life, a sovereign whose ruling passion is the advancement of the happiness and prosperity of his people; and not of his own people only, but who can extend his eye and his good will to a distant and infant nation, unoffending in its course, unambitious in its views."<sup>22</sup>

Flowery compliments to an autocrat? Uriah Heepish comments about the humble rank of the United States in the family of nations? "[U]noffending in [our] course, unambitious in [our] views"?

This is not the tone of William B. Travis crying out "Give 'em hell!" from the ramparts of the Alamo; this is not the "I have not yet begun to fight" spirit of John Paul Jones or the spirit that moved Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe to reply "Nuts!" to the German demand that he surrender his outnumbered and surrounded forces in the Battle of the Bulge.

It is, however, the classical and unmistakable tone of Jeffersonian diplomacy. Speak softly, and carry the smallest possible stick; Jeffersonians believe that is the best method for avoiding unnecessary war. Define your interests as narrowly as possible, and you will have the fewest possible grounds for quarrels with others.

Hamiltonians argue that American commercial interests provide justification for interventions abroad. Jeffersonians disagree. "No, it wouldn't be much thrill to die for Du Pont in Brazil," replied the unwilling young soldier in a 1941 antiwar version of "Billy Boy," as sung by the Almanac Singers, an influential folk ensemble.<sup>23</sup>

In a speech that was widely quoted by Jeffersonian opponents of the Vietnam War (and was more recently reprised by Gore Vidal), a Jeffersonian who had somehow surmounted the handicap of being named Smedley Butler to reach the rank of general in the Marine Corps summed up a career of military intervention in the interest, as he saw it, of American business. "I spent most of my time being a high-class muscleman for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. . . . In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. . . . I helped make Mexico . . . safe for American oil interests in 1914 . . . made Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in."<sup>24</sup>

If the broad commercial interests asserted by Hamiltonians and the Hamiltonian willingness to sacrifice constitutional niceties and parochial interests to the construction of an international trade system seem excessive and dangerous to Jeffersonians, the even more universal moral interests and duties asserted by Wilsonians horrify them. Arguing with China over self-determination in Tibet, demanding free elections in Kosovo, or opposing ethnic murder in Rwanda look, to the Wilsonian mind, like simple and self-evident cases in which the American national interest in an orderly world coincides with the country's moral duty. The Jeffersonian view on this subject was stated by John Quincy Adams in 1821: "Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her [America's] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own."<sup>25</sup>

This view is not based on cowardice or moral indifference. It rests in the Jeffersonian belief that excessive involvements overseas can compromise our democratic standards at home. Governing foreign peoples—in the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the former Yugoslavia at its end—undermines American democratic institutions and values, say the Jeffersonians. We shall find ourselves mixed in with corrupt and unworthy allies; today we help the Afghan mujahideen by arming and training them against the Soviet Union, and tomorrow they turn those weapons against us and become a thorn in our flesh throughout the Middle East. We protect the Albanians in Kosovo from Serb "ethnic cleansers," only to behold the Albanians using their new freedom to drive their Serbian enemies from their homes in turn.

More often than Hamiltonians and Wilsonians, Jeffersonians believe that the best policy for the United States is to let well enough alone. Jeffersonians see the risks and costs of intervention as so high that only real threats to the nation's existence justify such adventures. They are critical of others' claims that the national interest is endangered by particular crises. Wilsonians argued for intervention in Yugoslavia on the analogy of the West's failure to deter Hitler. Jeffersonians replied that there is a substantial difference between Hitler's Germany and Milosevic's Yugoslavia, that Yugoslavia has far less ability to disturb the general European equilibrium and threaten vital American interests.

Jeffersonians use the same skepticism to ask where the nation's true security perimeter is to be found. Particularly with the end of the Cold War, they often question American troop commitments in Europe and

the Far East. Is it really in the national interest, they ask, for the United States to be at the center of negotiations between the South Koreans, the North Koreans, the Japanese, and the Chinese over North Korea's development of a missile program?

This is essentially the argument that Jeffersonian opponents of a large and intrusive federal government make in domestic policy. Is a given federal program or regulation really necessary? Will the benefits truly outweigh the costs? Do we in any case want to see the federal government growing continually larger and more powerful?

Jeffersonian skepticism about the merits of an active foreign policy has libertarian roots, and more than any of the other schools, Jeffersonians have consistently tried to ensure that the same anti-big-government logic that is so often so powerful in domestic politics be extended to the conduct of the nation's foreign policy.

### **Economy of Means**

Having defined American interests as narrowly as possible, Jeffersonians then seek to serve them as economically as possible. This is partly about money. A dollar not spent on the military or diplomatic establishments is a dollar not taxed from American citizens, a dollar not devoted to the projects of a centralizing government, and a dollar that can't be spent by the dominant political party on corrupt contracts and sweetheart deals that cement its hold on power. Jeffersonian politicians want to see defense and diplomatic expenses kept low, and they want State Department and military accounts carefully kept and regularly scrutinized.

But Jeffersonian parsimony is about more than saving taxpayer money. Jeffersonians have imposed qualitative as well as quantitative restrictions on U.S. military and diplomatic establishments.

Once Jeffersonians conceded that a standing army and a defensive navy were necessary, they did their best to keep both of these institutions as humble and as close to the people as possible. Professional career soldiers in the federal service were suspect; military academies even more so. In 1830 Congressman Davy Crockett of Tennessee denounced the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, noting that its graduates were "too delicate" for military service, unlike the hardy sons of the western soil. Was the academy being properly managed, Crockett asked: "I want

to know if it has been managed for the benefit of the noble and wealthy of the country, or for the poor and orphan."<sup>26</sup> West Point, thundered the future Massachusetts senator and Reconstruction heavyweight Charles Sumner in 1845, was "a seminary of idleness and vice."<sup>27</sup> For some time it was unclear that the dangerous institution would survive. Ulysses Grant, who went to West Point only because his father forced him to, eagerly followed congressional discussions of a proposal to close the institution during his plebe year. But after a close and bitter debate the proposal was defeated, and after an abortive attempt to get himself expelled, Grant resigned himself to the prospect of a military career.<sup>28</sup>

The populist disdain still felt for "career politicians" was at one time also extended to career soldiers, with the added worry that career soldiers (knowing no trade but war, dependent on their political masters for employment and advancement) would be at best advocates of warlike policies and at worst the willing tools of any central government wishing to subvert popular liberties.

Thus Jeffersonians opposed the establishment of a peacetime standing army. Then they opposed the establishment of West Point. With West Point a fact of life, they did their best to keep it on short commons (with notoriously stingy appropriations) and, by giving the power of appointment to representatives and senators, did their best to ensure congressional control over this dangerous institution. Finally Jeffersonians supported militias and, later, the various National Guard formations as alternatives and supplements to a professional standing army.

Their approach to the navy was even more draconian. Jeffersonians wanted naval appropriations kept to the absolute minimum. There was nothing so likely to get the United States involved in foreign quarrels as a blue-water navy. The larger the navy the more pressure there would be on the United States to defend various commercial and humanitarian "interests" in far-off lands, and the mere presence of American forces in foreign ports made confrontations more likely. In 1872 an American vessel in the port of Smyrna came close to firing on an Austro-Hungarian vessel in a controversy over the imprisonment of a Hungarian citizen who had declared his intention of becoming an American citizen.<sup>29</sup> Why, asked Jeffersonians, should questions of war and peace be left to cocky naval commanders in distant lands? Keep the ships home, and there will be fewer fights.

Jeffersonians developed theories of coastal defense and coastal fortification to divert spending from blue-water-navy vessels to coastal barges

and forts. More than once in the nineteenth century, the chronically underfunded navy declined to levels well below the minimum needed for combat effectiveness even against second-rate naval powers.

Today, the Jeffersonian approach to foreign policy looks to cut military costs to the lowest possible level, and aims to ensure civilian control over military and intelligence institutions. Contemporary pressure for the declassification of as many Cold War documents as possible, and for new restrictions on the ability of bureaucrats to classify government papers as secret, reflects the traditional Jeffersonian attempt to keep the military and intelligence communities open, accountable, and weak.

Diplomats can be as deadly as ships, and the State Department, too, has had to endure hostile scrutiny from tightfisted Jeffersonians. The thought of bewigged, bejeweled, and bepowdered American diplomatic fops mincing across ballroom floors with their European colleagues inspires a visceral revulsion in the honest Jeffersonian mind, akin to the one that overcomes readers when the pigs in *Animal Farm* dress up like humans to have dinner with the neighboring farmers.

Jeffersonians consistently act to ensure that American diplomats do not forget the important distinction between a virtuous republic and decadent monarchies and dictatorships. From 1778 to 1893, U.S. emissaries to foreign lands went by the title of "minister" rather than "ambassador," because of a widespread view that an ambassador was, and could only be, the personal representative of one monarch to another.<sup>30</sup> In 1854 Secretary of State William L. Marcy issued orders that no ministers of the United States could dress in court uniforms of any kind. Embarrassed American diplomats wore ordinary evening dress to glittering European court receptions and were occasionally mistaken for butlers.<sup>31</sup>

American diplomats were well aware of the political perils that lay in the practices of European courts. At times they obeyed the dictates of court etiquette, but took pains not to advertise this fact back home. Thus when George III, mad and blind, finally died in 1820, the diplomatic corps made a collective decision to dress their servants in mourning. Richard Rush, the American minister to Britain at the time, went along with the decision but chose to pay the cost out of his own pocket rather than submit mourning expenses for George III to congressional scrutiny.<sup>32</sup> This was surely wise.

At other times, as in 1828, when U.S. minister James Barbour created a stir by refusing to kiss the hand of the queen of Portugal at a reception, the Americans preferred to scandalize their diplomatic colleagues rather than offend against republican principles back home.<sup>33</sup>



To ensure that American diplomats abroad remembered their republican roots, Jeffersonians limited their number and were anything but extravagant in making provision for them. As late as 1916 the entire budget for the Department of State, including janitorial staff in its Washington headquarters, came to \$6 million.<sup>34</sup> And the tradition of relative meanness in diplomatic budgets continues. In 1999 Philip Lader, the American ambassador to Britain, had a salary about half that of Britain's ambassador to the United States. Congressional refusal to allocate an adequate representation allowance is one reason why many of the most prominent U.S. diplomatic posts are reserved for wealthy campaign contributors who can pay the costs of wining and dining foreign elites out of their own pockets. Such congressional penny-pinching on the diplomatic budget was widely blamed for leaving American embassies in Africa dangerously exposed to terrorist attacks like those that killed 223 people at the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.<sup>35</sup> At a time of critical economic negotiations with China, when the Chinese trade surplus with the United States was one of the leading issues in American foreign policy, the staff of the economic section of the U.S. Embassy in Beijing did not even have a fax machine, much less the computers and software needed to monitor developments there.<sup>36</sup>

Yet Jeffersonians are unwilling to cut the diplomats off completely. True, secret discussions and decisions among a champagne-drinking elite in foreign ballrooms are hardly the Jeffersonians' preferred method for the settlement of great issues of state. On the other hand Jeffersonians agree strongly with Winston Churchill that "to jaw-jaw is better than to war-war." An effective diplomacy can be an effective means of staving off worse evils, and from Jefferson forward some of America's most effective ballroom mincers have been Jeffersonian democrats.

### **Jeffersonian Strategic Ideas**

Based on their core values and ideas about the national interest, Jeffersonians have put forward a variety of suggestions for American grand strategy. As circumstances have changed, Jeffersonian strategic concepts have changed, but as in the case of Hamiltonian and Wilsonian ideas, Jeffersonian approaches to American foreign policy continually seek to advance a core set of interests and values from one generation to the next.

In all of the four major eras of American foreign policy (1789–1823, 1823–1914, 1914–1947, 1947–present), Jeffersonians have attempted

to shape the American strategic response. In the first, tumultuous era, Jeffersonians proposed balancing France's dominant power in Europe against Britain's too-threatening power on the seas. They reversed course following the War of 1812, and Jeffersonian strategic concepts largely dominated American grand strategy in the decades following the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine.

As British power declined, Jeffersonians opposed attempts to enlist the United States in the support of the British world system, resisting entry into World War I and opposing United States membership in the League of Nations. Jeffersonians played a significant role in shaping American foreign policy between the two world wars and were largely responsible for inventing and popularizing the myth of virtuous isolation to justify their strategic ideas. Badly damaged by the failure of American foreign policy between 1919 and 1939 to stabilize world politics, during the Cold War Jeffersonians were generally relegated to a secondary position in foreign policy debates until the Vietnam War revived interest in a foreign policy of limits.

Intellectually the first era of American foreign policy remains in some ways the most interesting, and the strategic concepts advanced at that time were more radical than any seen since. In particular, while Hamiltonians steadfastly believed that the only real policy for the United States was some kind of alliance with Great Britain, Jefferson and others asked whether, instead of siding with Britain to balance any aspiring hegemon on the continent of Europe, we should balance with Napoleon against Britain? Britain, after all, was the most dangerous power in the world to American interests. The British fleet was the mightiest military force that could be brought into action against the United States. It was British merchants and traders who, armed with the mother country's backing and their superior access to London finance, competed with American interests around the world. Two land powers, one in Europe and one in North America, would limit Britain's pretensions; at the same time, British sea power would keep the continental European powers safely on their own side of the ocean.

At various times during his presidency, Jefferson flirted with both alternatives. He came closest to an alliance with Britain when Napoleon forced a weak Spanish government to return the Louisiana Territory (which France had ceded to Spain in 1767) to France. A French presence in New Orleans, Jefferson wrote to Robert R. Livingston,<sup>37</sup> then American minister to France, would force the Americans to "marry ourselves"

to the British fleet and nation. At other times British provocations, especially to American shipping, grew so outrageous that it was difficult to craft a response short of war.

While puzzling over these alternatives, Jefferson in his diplomacy concentrated on keeping the United States out of the Napoleonic Wars and, hopefully, on luring Britain and France into a bidding war for American support.

It worked, sort of. Neither Britain nor France offered the United States the assurances it wanted for freedom of the seas, but France sold us Louisiana and Britain recognized the transfer. In the long run the peaceful acquisition of 828,000 square miles comprising some of the most fertile soil in the world far outweighed any temporary problems with the impressment of seamen and the seizure of cargoes.<sup>38</sup>

Some of his diplomatic moves were more successful than others—the Louisiana Purchase is considered one of the great strokes in American, or indeed, world history; the embargo prohibiting all American trade with Europe was seen even at the time to be a dismal failure—but in success or in failure, Jefferson stood by his core principles: Almost anything is better than war, and the first duty of the government is to protect liberty rather than commerce.

### **The Monroe System**

This period of strategic uncertainty came to an end under the presidency of James Monroe, as he struck up what Jefferson, in a congratulatory letter written from Monticello, called a "cordial friendship with England." The rapprochement with Britain that the Monroe system entailed was, Jefferson agreed, the best possible policy for the United States. "Great Britain," he wrote, "is the nation which can do us the most harm of any one, or all on earth; and with her on our side we need not fear the whole world."<sup>39</sup> Although the United States and Britain would move repeatedly to the brink of war in the next seventy years, neither country ever broke with the logic of the arrangement proposed by British foreign secretary George Canning and shrewdly modified by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams.

Later Jeffersonian mythmakers would recast the Monroe Doctrine as a unilateral American declaration of principled isolation from European affairs, but as those who developed the idea well knew, the doctrine in

fact represented the U.S. answer to the strategic dilemma of its first fifty years. Given basic British respect for American interests and territorial integrity (an attitude enforced by Britain's fears of political isolation by a combination of conservative Continental states, and strengthened by British appreciation for the fighting qualities occasionally exhibited by American forces in the War of 1812), the United States would no longer hesitate. It was better to come to an arrangement that would strengthen Britain on the seas than to support the efforts of Continental powers to limit British power.

The rationale for this step was clear in 1823, and only became clearer as the United States grew steadily stronger through the nineteenth century. If Britain ever weakened, the Continental powers would have been only too eager to take advantage of Latin America's prevailing anarchy and weakness to intervene and carve new empires for themselves in the New World. The fear of European dynastic adventures in Latin America was anything but fanciful. The Portuguese royal house of Braganza maintained a grip on Brazil until the overthrow of the emperor Dom Pedro II in 1889. France, Spain, Prussia, Russia, and Austria supported a Bourbon restoration after the Congress of Vienna. Spain did not recognize the independence of Peru until 1879. Most of the Latin American states were so weak and so badly governed during much of this time that without foreign protection they would have faced great difficulties defending their independence.

For all its arrogance and ambition, Britain was, Jefferson, Adams, and Monroe agreed, a safer partner than any of the Continental states could be. Although many of the obstacles persisted that had caused Jefferson in the 1790s to gag at the Hamilton-Jay policy of an understanding with Britain, by 1823 an understanding with the mother country was the least bad option. Let a British rather than an American fleet police the waters of Latin America against the powers of Europe. Let Britain guarantee the independence of Latin republics, with tacit American support. Preserving its freedom of action, the United States could enjoy most of the benefits of a full-fledged alliance with Britain, while leaving Britain, for reasons dictated by its own interests, to pay almost all of the cost.

With this great step decided, and with the strategic relationship between the two countries more or less determined, Jeffersonian politics in the nineteenth century did its best to palliate the costs of the new policy while extracting every possible ounce of benefit.

From a Jeffersonian point of view, the chief defect of the new policy



"A BRUTAL ASSAULT"

This illustration from "Coin's Financial School," the most important populist economic tract of the 1890s, shows the continuing Jeffersonian unease about participation in the British-dominated international financial system of the time. As a sinister John Bull (the standard symbol for Great Britain) throttles the fair maid Prosperity, her hero, Silver, is prevented from coming to the rescue. Jeffersonians believed that British capital and its American hirelings represented a permanent danger to the interests of American farmers.

*Library of Congress, Rare Books Division, HG529.H33 1894*

was that it forced the United States several steps along the path of economic and political development supported by Hamilton. The end of the Napoleonic Wars and the new relationship with Britain opened many doors to American trade, strengthening the seaboard commercial interests against the Jeffersonian farmers and artisans. "The spirit of manufacture has taken deep root among us, and its foundations are laid in too great expense to be abandoned," Jefferson acknowledged as early as

1809.<sup>40</sup> Jeffersonian Republicans introduced and carried the chartering of the Second Bank of the United States; if we were to proceed closely with Britain we needed a national financial system suitable for a commercial and maritime power. At the same time leading Jeffersonians found themselves endorsing protective tariffs and internal improvements distressingly similar to those originally proposed by Hamilton. At a time of British technological and financial superiority, a system of protective tariffs was the only way to ensure that the United States would not sink utterly into the role of a provider of raw materials for the British industrial machine, and an outlet for its finished products. In the last analysis the lesser evil was the development of a domestic manufacturing sector; the greater evil was to remain a permanent appendage to the British dynamo.

Throughout the nineteenth century, right up to the free silver fight under William Jennings Bryan, Jeffersonians would try to limit the scope of these concessions and preserve as much monetary independence from Britain as possible. It might be necessary to operate within the British international order, but one could still test the limits. At the same time, Jeffersonians did their best to limit the tariff to the level genuinely needed to foster "infant industries," and to prevent the system from becoming a form of permanent entitlement for influential industrialists.

On the other hand, the great advantage of the Monroe system, from the Jeffersonian point of view, at least, was the degree to which it freed the United States from the distasteful necessity of maintaining large military forces. The nineteenth century saw Jeffersonians trying with a great deal of consistency and a reasonable amount of success to hold the level of American forces at the absolute minimum required.

In the decade preceding the Civil War, the United States had 27,958<sup>41</sup> men under arms, compared to 293,224<sup>42</sup> for Great Britain, 390,000 for France, 350,000 for Austria, 220,000 for Prussia, and 550,000<sup>43</sup> for Russia. Although American military strength rose to unprecedented levels during the Civil War, the demobilization afterward was thorough and swift. In 1877, the year in which federal troops were finally removed from the South, army enrollment had fallen back to 34,094.<sup>44</sup> In 1881 the U.S. Navy was widely believed to be inferior to the naval forces of Chile.<sup>45</sup> An important element in this program of minimum military force was the demilitarization of the United States-Canada frontier. Thanks to understandings with Britain, beginning in 1817 with the Rush-Bagot Convention, demilitarizing the Great Lakes,<sup>46</sup> the frontier

was one of the most lightly fortified major borders in the world even at a time when American-British relations were still crisis-prone.

In a sense Jeffersonians built a strategic relationship with Great Britain that had some interesting structural similarities with the balance the United States reached with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Britain, a potentially hostile global superpower, had the option at any time of devastating American cities with its navy, and of throwing American financial markets into chaos and collapse through its control of the international credit system. On the other hand the Americans could withhold needed imports of cotton and wheat, and the loss of access to the American market meant ruin for many of Britain's major industrial companies. British banks were also so dependent on their loans and securities in the United States that financial disruptions on the American market would have brought London down. In addition, as many British strategists recognized as early as the Civil War, any military conflict between the two powers might begin with British attacks on the major American cities; it would involve a catastrophic economic upheaval in both countries before its probable ending in the American conquest of Canada, and possibly in the loss of the British possessions in the West Indies as well.

Thus the two powers were in a situation of mutual deterrence—either could inflict unacceptable damage on the other, but only at the cost of accepting similar damage itself. In the nineteenth century as in the Cold War, Jeffersonians wanted to maintain this deterrence at the lowest possible cost. That meant nuclear arms limitations and other agreements with the Soviet Union in the Cold War; during the nineteenth century it meant, above all, the demilitarization of the American-Canadian frontier.

This frontier, including the Alaska boundary, stretches for 5,525 miles. In the early twentieth century, France maintained a regular army, not counting reserves, of 540,000 troops to defend the 280 miles<sup>47</sup> of frontier it shared with Germany: 1,928 soldiers for every mile of frontier. At even one-tenth of this ratio, the United States would have had to maintain a standing army of more than a million men to fortify its land frontier with the British Empire. As it was, the United States was able to defend its boundaries against the British threat with approximately 1 percent of the manpower-to-mile ratio forced on France.<sup>48</sup> Diplomacy had succeeded in maintaining deterrence with disarmament.

The Jeffersonian diplomats of the 1820s charted a course for the United States that enabled it to win the greatest possible security divi-

dends at the lowest political and military cost. For three generations the Monroe system met basic American security needs while allowing the American people to escape much of the cost of great-power politics. Unfortunately, as British power began to weaken, American statesmen were forced to move beyond the Monroe system. From a Jeffersonian point of view nothing since has worked as well. There is something to be said for this view. The United States spent very little on defense in 1900 but was very secure. One hundred years later we spend far more than any country in the world on defense, and are no more secure than we were.

### **The Great Dilemma**

Although Jeffersonians were traditionally far more suspicious of the British than were either Wilsonians or Hamiltonians, the decline and fall of the British Empire presented Jeffersonians with more serious challenges than the ones faced by those global schools. Accustomed to seeing foreign policy as a kind of field of dreams, both Hamiltonians and Wilsonians made a relatively easy transition from cooperating with Britain to replacing it.

No such easy option existed for Jeffersonians. An American effort to set up a global system to replace Great Britain is, on the face of things, a very bad choice from a Jeffersonian point of view. A global hegemon leads a hard and busy life. Are the tribes revolting in Kabul? Is a coup brewing in Manila? Is piracy on the upswing in the South China Sea? Are Arabs bombing Israelis (or vice versa) in the Holy Land?

A global hegemon must determine if any of the thousands of crises that occur in any random decade pose a threat to the hegemonic order. Moreover, even if the hegemon decides that, this time, the revolt of this particular tribal group in this particular sector of the hinterlands of Kabul does not require an armed response, forces must still be maintained in reserve that are capable of acting in Afghanistan, Korea, Somalia, or Taiwan.

Meanwhile, to the capital of a global hegemon come the representatives of every power on earth, many armed with the means of bribery. (Herod, Jugurtha, Mithridates, Cleopatra—all went to Rome or sent their plenipotentiaries.) Once there the visitors seek by fair means or foul to win hegemonic backing for their various schemes. Bribing the press, bribing politicians, offering lucrative contracts to powerful companies in



order to win their support for their lobbies—no expense, no craft, is too much when it comes to influencing the policy of a hegemonic power.

Moreover, the capital of a hegemon is invariably a place of secrets, many of them dirty. There are secret agreements with allies, the secrets of military planning, the secrets of a vast and active intelligence community and a web of agents. Many of the hegemon's allies are not particularly nice. In most of this sad world's bloody struggles, both sides are crooked, both drenched in blood, and neither attached to the cause of liberty, virtue, or anything else that goes beyond personal and clan ambition. Inevitably the hegemon enters into arrangements with murderers and thugs; inevitably the hegemon seeks to make its allies more effective at murder and thuggery than their opponents. Hegemonic agents and officials first wink at, then connive at, then foment and encourage murder.

This is no Jerusalem, no "City upon a Hill." This is Babylon; it is Nineveh. It is the Augean stables, not an honest republic. Jeffersonians saw nothing attractive in the prospect of the United States replacing Great Britain as the world's hegemonic power.

Jeffersonians therefore spent much of the first half of the twentieth century looking for ways to avoid this crown of thorns. Jeffersonians were the last of the major schools to accept the necessity of American participation in the two world wars and the Cold War; during the Cold War they were the least convinced of the necessity or the utility of the struggle.

Jeffersonians in the twentieth century had mixed political fortunes. In the short term the aftermath of World War I resulted in a groundswell of support for Jeffersonian ideas. Opponents of American participation in the war had consistently pointed to the dubious role played by Wall Street and New York banks in the gradual movement toward war. "We have loaned many hundreds of millions of dollars to the allies in this controversy," Senator Norris told the Senate in 1917, adapting to new conditions the old arguments that Jeffersonians had used against the Hamiltonian merchants who wanted an alliance with Britain in the Napoleonic Wars. Citing the banks and the munitions contractors "who would expect to make millions more if our country can be drawn into the catastrophe," Norris frankly blamed Wall Street for bribing newspapers and waging a sophisticated and well-financed campaign to drag the United States into a horrible, pointless, immoral war.

"Their object in having war and preparing for war is to make money.

Human suffering and the sacrifice of human life are necessary, but Wall Street considers only the dollars and cents," said Norris. As a result of this propaganda, he passionately warned, "Millions of our brethren must shed their lifeblood, millions of broken-hearted women must weep, millions of children must suffer with cold, and millions of babes must die from hunger, and all because we want to preserve the commercial right of American citizens to deliver munitions of war to belligerent nations."<sup>49</sup>

Norris failed to sway his colleagues, who voted by 82 to 65<sup>o</sup> for the declaration of war against Germany, but the aftermath of the war convinced many Americans that he had been right all along. The Bolshevik publication of the secret treaties among the Allies revealed the selfish purposes that lay behind British and French professions of democratic idealism. The naked display of British imperialism after the war—including the violent suppression of independence protests in India and the bloody extension of British rule in the Middle East and over the former German colonies in Africa—further soured American opinion of the postwar Allies, as did the harsh, shortsighted, and vindictive French policy toward Germany in the immediate postwar era.

The final blow came after the depression gravely undermined American respect for business leaders and the famous 1934 Nye hearings in Congress, conducted by Senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota, substantiated many of Norris's claims about the corrupt and hidden influence of New York banks in building political support for U.S. entry into the war. With Britain and France defaulting on their war debts to the United States while finding plenty of money to oppress their colonial subjects, American opinion turned against further cooperation with its wartime allies.

This feeling resulted in the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936, which prevented American banks from lending money to belligerent nations and took other steps to curtail Hamiltonian efforts to involve the United States in future European wars.<sup>51</sup> Behind the acts stood a powerful American consensus that the United States had been snookered into participation in World War I by a combination of Hamiltonian bankers and European imperialists. The lessons of history, Americans believed, counseled against participation in future conflicts of this kind.

The rise of fascism did not, at first, disturb this consensus. In assessing the events of those years, however, it is important to understand that, at least in the beginning, it was historical sophistication and knowledge of the world that informed the Jeffersonian reluctance to take

an active role in resisting Hitler. At least until Neville Chamberlain's Munich folly in 1938, Jeffersonians hoped and believed that France and Britain could contain a greatly weakened Germany, and that disarmament agreements could limit the ability of Japan and other revisionist powers to challenge the existing world order. Unfortunately the abject failure of the British and French governments to stop Hitler created an untenable situation in Europe, while Japan proved more aggressive, and China more feeble, than informed American opinion had supposed.

The failure of Britain and France to take effective action against Hitler in the 1930s was in no way the fault of the United States. Military experts almost unanimously agree that until the cession of the strategic Sudetenland in the Munich accords, a show of resistance from Britain and France would quickly and easily have forced Germany to back down and led to a military coup against Hitler.

Jeffersonians, accustomed from the Revolution forward to think of both Britain and France as effective and aggressive imperial powers, failed to understand the degree to which World War I had destroyed the moral capacity of both countries to act like great powers. Their assessment was wrong, but it was not foolish or naive. (Such charges could more properly be leveled at U.S. policy in the Pacific, where the widespread American tendency to overestimate the ability of China to defend itself against Japanese aggression was rooted in Wilsonian rather than Jeffersonian illusions.)

Jeffersonians and many others hoped and believed until much too late that the international balance of power would take care of itself without direct American intervention. Surely, they reasoned, Britain and France would crush Hitler before he became a real danger to them. Once that point was passed, they assumed again, with all of history and reason on their side, that Britain and France would swallow their ideological hatred of the Soviet Union to make common cause against revisionist Germany. After all, Catholic France had made an alliance with the Turks against Catholic Austria.

Sadly and ironically the Jeffersonians were undone by their faith that the European powers would recognize and act on their own self-interest. They could not believe that the historic great powers of the modern world would sit passively by and watch the destruction of the European power balance on which they depended.

Jeffersonians could and did argue rationally, up until the summer of 1939, that a coalition of European powers pursuing their own best interests could stop Germany without American help. It was only after the

Soviet-German alliance of 1939 that war was inevitable; only after Hitler's blitzkrieg victory over France in May and June 1940 was it inescapably clear that vital American interests would sooner or later require U.S. participation in the European war.

Unfortunately a great many Jeffersonians continued to make the case against United States participation in the war long after a dispassionate study of the strategic realities would have shown that the time had come to prepare, urgently, for war. Distinguished and brilliant Jeffersonians like the historians Charles and Mary Beard, whose earlier work had masterfully summarized two centuries of Jeffersonian thought and exposed the connections between arms sales, bank loans, and American entry into World War I, did lasting damage to their reputations by persisting too long in opposition to American entry into World War II. Even in 1947 Charles Beard was obsessively trying to prove that Roosevelt had deceived the American people into a course that inexorably led to an unnecessary war.

The Jeffersonian party was badly damaged by its persistent and ill-timed isolationism in the run up to the war. Jeffersonians found themselves once more on the wrong side of history, politically speaking, after war, when they either opposed the Cold War outright or argued for a less muscular American response to Soviet behavior.

Other factors combined to reduce Jeffersonian influence to historic lows in the middle of the twentieth century. As the school most opposed to a strong and centralized federal government, Jeffersonian political power was deeply shaken by a series of events that convinced most mid-century Americans, left and right, that the problems of the twentieth century demanded a much stronger federal government than the country had tolerated in the past.

The economic distress of the depression led first to a vast expansion of the role of the federal government, as the New Deal provided economic leadership and emergency assistance to millions of Americans who were otherwise without hope. The acceptance of deficit spending as a routine tool to stimulate the economy undermined one of the basic doctrines of Jeffersonian political economy. A large government deficit was seen as a method of transferring money from the rich to the middle class. By 1950 few Americans doubted that the economic realities demanded a strong and active federal government.

The growth of the power and size of private corporations was an additional factor leading many Americans to find new merit in the growth of federal power. States were helpless to regulate large corporations; the

safety and liberty of individual Americans seemed as threatened if not more so by unaccountable private power than by politicians who in the last analysis were subject to at least some kind of democratic controls.

Conservatives who opposed the New Deal state and economic regulations found their own reasons to support a vast increase in the federal government as a result of the Cold War. The life-and-death struggle with the Soviet Union, the vast expenses of money and the large standing military forces required by the struggle convinced most conservatives that the federal government had to outgrow its traditional size.

Other developments of the period also undermined the strength of Jeffersonian politics in the United States. The middle of the twentieth century was the high-water mark of the administrative state, a time when the American people and their elected representatives increasingly felt that crucial decisions should be left to experts and professionals. The development of antibiotics and the conquest of terrifying diseases like tuberculosis, syphilis, and polio gave scientific medicine enormous prestige. Scientists and engineers created new miracles like television and scourges like nuclear weapons.

Given these new and powerful technologies, it seemed reasonable that the average citizen needed to defer to expert opinion. Traditionally Jeffersonians had denounced elites as parasites who deceived public opinion into believing that government was too complicated for anyone but "experts" to understand and administer. The claims of those parasites to necessary special knowledge had not been true in 1800, and American democracy had put power into the hands of ordinary people.

But what if those claims had become true by 1950? What if the questions of modern life really *were* too difficult and complicated for ordinary people to judge?

A final blow came with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Classic Jeffersonian thought always saw the federal government as the threat to liberty; state and local governments were closer to the people and less likely to abuse their power. But the civil rights movement put this conviction to the test. What if states and local governments used their power to deny citizens their constitutional rights? Wasn't it the duty of the federal government to assert the power of the federal Constitution in defiance of state discrimination? And shouldn't all true friends of liberty stand with the federal government against the usurping states?

All these developments powerfully reinforced the central anti-

Jeffersonian myth of the Cold War era: that America's democratic values both at home and abroad were the truths of a simple, bygone age. In the complex, sophisticated world of the middle of the twentieth century, the American people needed to discover the maturity to part with their Jeffersonian ideals.

Under all these pressures Jeffersonian thought went into eclipse and came close to disappearing as one of the four main influences on American foreign policy, and in domestic policy as well. Nevertheless, Jeffersonian ideals were too deeply entrenched in American life to vanish completely. Unpopular though their ideas sometimes became, Jeffersonians continued to do their best to shape American policy through what for them were often the dark days of the mid-twentieth century.

In foreign policy the residual strength of Jeffersonian opinion made itself felt in opposition to or, at most, in very critical support of the Cold War. Even in decline, schools are not monoliths. People with Jeffersonian backgrounds had different views during the Cold War. Unlike the small group in the United States who in principle supported socialist revolutions in the developing world, and the even smaller number of Americans who consciously supported the Soviet Union, Jeffersonians generally adopted one of a number of positions.

A minority of the Jeffersonian minority, shifting in size but always of intellectual importance, believed that the entire effort of the Cold War was unnecessary. Arguments in support of this position changed during the forty years of confrontation but often included the assertion that the Soviet Union was a defensive, not an offensive, power. United States policy was forcing it into hostility; if we relaxed and made the Soviet Union feel more secure, international tension would diminish.

Another, typically Jeffersonian argument brought forward during the Cold War maintained that the European balance of power could regulate itself effectively without so much American participation. Whatever the USSR's intentions might be, once Western Europe had stabilized after the war, the Soviets were no longer capable of dominating Europe. The Soviet Union was too backward and its internal tensions too great, while the Western Europeans had no interest in undergoing a Soviet revolution.

As the focus of the Cold War competition shifted to the developing world, Jeffersonians (with occasional Wilsonian support) argued that American strategy was counterproductive. By allying itself with cor-

rupt tyrannical regimes in the interests of anticommunism, the United States actually strengthened the forces it sought to oppose. Disgusted by the corruption, incompetence, and greed of kleptocratic but pro-Washington dictators, many of the brightest and most idealistic of the rising generation of the developing world were drawn toward the communists—just as idealistic Europeans had been drawn, temporarily, toward the communists during the antifascist struggles of the 1930s. Many of the revolutions we were opposing, argued some Jeffersonian critics, actually deserved to win. We were betraying our own professed commitment to human rights and democratic institutions, and sullyng ourselves by becoming the accomplices—indeed, in some cases the trainers and enablers—of murderers, torturers, and thieves.

More moderate Jeffersonian opinion was influenced by these arguments, but not so far as to dissent from the Cold War effort completely. Rather, moderate Jeffersonians looked for ways to minimize the cost of what they saw as a necessary struggle (necessary, some thought, because of Soviet intransigence; necessary, others believed, because of the strength of pro-Cold War opinion in the United States).

Desperate for alternatives to what was seen as an excessively risky, dangerous, and expensive Cold War strategy, Jeffersonians looked for cheaper ways to contain the Soviet Union than a worldwide coalition financed and led by the United States. Many supported a positive response to the 1950s peace feelers from the Soviet Union, proposing a settlement on the basis of a neutralized, permanently disarmed Germany.

Perhaps the most often mentioned alternative strategy was to identify and exploit divisions within the Communist bloc. Arguing that Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and others were, like Tito, more profoundly nationalist than they were pro-Soviet, Jeffersonians urged the early recognition of China, and proposed that the United States try harder to detach China, Vietnam, Romania, and other countries from the Soviet Union. Treating these countries with unremitting hostility would only drive them further into the Soviet embrace, strengthening rather than undermining the opposing bloc.

Another Jeffersonian response to the Cold War was to argue the logic of arms control. If America's strategic goal was deterrence and a balance of armaments, there was nothing to be lost and a great deal to be gained—money saved, military-industrial complex weakened, perhaps a lessened chance for nuclear war—and nothing to be lost by reaching a strategic balance at the lowest possible level of arms.

In keeping with their traditional ideas and priorities, Jeffersonians

did their best to limit the tendency of the Cold War climate to curb civil liberties. Jeffersonians generally opposed what they saw as the excessive and demagogic efforts to root out communists and left-wing sympathizers from the government, universities, pulpits, and media. They led the charge against laws that made membership in the American Communist Party illegal and defended the right of Communists and Communist sympathizers to speak freely.

From a Jeffersonian perspective there were times—many times—in the Cold War when American liberty was less endangered by the machinations of its Communist enemies than by the ham-fisted and repressive tactics of its alleged friends.

While Jeffersonian voices were generally in the minority during the Cold War era, they were not without influence in the formation of American foreign policy. When arch-hawk Richard Nixon began the rapprochement with Communist China, Jeffersonian ideas about the conduct of the Cold War had clearly reached the mainstream. Nixon's approach to détente with the Soviet Union—minimizing ideological conflicts with a dangerous great power in order to reduce the costs and risks of American foreign policy—is something that Jefferson himself might have tried. Certainly Nixon's determination to take human rights off the agenda in working out arms control agreements with Leonid Brezhnev recalls Jefferson's humble and unctuous letter to Alexander I.

During the 1980s the Reagan administration tacitly acknowledged the merit of Jeffersonian arguments against a too-close association with criminal regimes in the name of anticommunism when it withdrew American support from the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Jeffersonian logic on disarmament was also widely accepted; every president from Kennedy through Reagan engaged in serious efforts to limit the development and spread of nuclear weapons.

After two decades in which the Jeffersonian ideas and language of limited American involvement in the world and limiting the exercise of U.S. power were distinctly out of fashion, they enjoyed a revival as the Vietnam War reminded many Americans of the case against the arrogance of power and the imperial presidency that grew up after a generation of Cold War and crisis. With Walter Lippmann, one of the chief coauthors of Wilson's Fourteen Points, writing one Jeffersonian column after another attacking imperial hubris in Vietnam, and William Fulbright of Arkansas thundering against "the arrogance of power" on the



Senate floor, the Jeffersonian ideas that animated the despised isolationists of the 1940s returned to the center of American foreign policy debate.

From the 1970s onward, the tide began to turn back in favor of Jeffersonian ideas. The disappointments and defeats of the Vietnam War, and the revelations of government deceit published in the Pentagon Papers and blaring in the daily headlines during the Watergate scandal, revived popular distrust of the federal government.

The resurrection of Jeffersonian influence in foreign policy was assisted by the partial reversal in the late twentieth century of the centralizing, professionalizing trends of the century's middle years. The nuclear power accident at the Three Mile Island plant contributed to an ongoing revival of skepticism about turning important social decisions over to scientists and experts. A mass rebellion against medical authority saw millions of Americans second-guessing their doctors and the medical establishment, "taking control of their own treatment," and returning to old ideals of self-reliance.

Libertarianism also revived as an economic doctrine. The regulated commercial oligarchies and monopolies, such as the three major television networks and AT&T, that were the pride of the midcentury American establishment were derided as inefficient dinosaurs. Central control, it was suddenly discovered, hindered innovation and fostered mediocrity. Deregulation became the watchword in regulatory policy; the American economics profession rediscovered the wonders of freedom.

A similar reevaluation took place in government. After years of centralization, policy-makers began to find new virtues in state government. Beginning with the Nixon administration, Washington began to return revenue and power to state governments. By the 1990s even the Supreme Court had rediscovered federalism, issuing a series of decisions limiting the legislative powers of the national government.

Other developments in American society in the closing years of the twentieth century also pointed to a Jeffersonian renaissance. Jeffersonians and Wilsonians share a passion for freedom, but they have very different ways of securing it. It is a difference of approach that can be traced back to the seventeenth century, when the Puritans drove freethinkers like Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson from Massachusetts. Wilsonians share the Puritan view that the godly have the right and the duty to

enforce conformity with good principles on the weaker members of society. They see the state as the appropriate entity to enforce God's law.

Late-twentieth-century American society appeared to be moving from a Puritan and Wilsonian era into a libertarian and Jeffersonian period. The late 1960s began a period in which the American people were moving from asserting the importance of social and sexual conformity to asserting their right to live in their own way without permission or restraint from authority of any kind.

While American politics is a big, muddy river with many eddies and countercurrents, it appears that on the whole society continues to move away from supporting government efforts to control personal choices and behaviors. The best marker might be the war on drugs, perhaps the most sustained effort of our times by government at all levels to regulate personal behavior. In the closing years of the 1990s an interesting backlash appeared to be developing against efforts to control drugs by blanket prohibitions, long sentences, and enforcement tactics that infringed classic Jeffersonian concepts of civil liberties. The rising popularity of a family of approaches known as "harm reduction" as alternatives to the war on drugs show Jeffersonian ideas once again at work. The prospect that American money and, worse, troops might find themselves associated with dubious paramilitary organizations in a twilight struggle against drug dealers and their guerrilla allies is a classic nightmare for Jeffersonians. The potential impact on the morale and even the morality of American armed forces of prolonged involvement in messy, brutal, and inevitably corrupt drug interdictions mixed with civil wars in foreign countries makes Jeffersonians shudder. Efforts to change United States domestic policy to avoid the dangers of a shooting war on drugs abroad reflect the deepest Jeffersonian strategic and political values.

In any case, the recovery from its midcentury eclipse of the Jeffersonian approach, bolstered by a revived interest in libertarian economics and decentralized government, now seems well positioned to continue.

### **The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Jeffersonian Tradition**

Like the other schools we have examined, the Jeffersonian approach to foreign policy has both advantages and disadvantages. At times, as in the years 1939-41, Jeffersonian ideas would have led the United States into a major disaster. At other times, as in the long period during which the Monroe system gave a basic strategic direction to American foreign

policy that was notably successful, Jeffersonian ideas have been responsible for policies that brought many years of peace and stability to the United States at a very low cost.

To some degree analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the Jeffersonian contribution to American foreign policy is an intrinsically partisan process that yields no universally accepted answers. Hamiltonians would criticize Jeffersonian timidity and constitutional fetishism, say, on the issue of fast-track, as endangering major trade opportunities for the United States. Wilsonians might denounce the Jeffersonian reluctance to support humanitarian interventions in Somalia and Rwanda and argue that the resulting weakness in American foreign policy resulted in major losses for American prestige.

Jeffersonians simply disagree, arguing that the democracy they defend is more valuable than the opportunities they lose.

There are, however, a number of areas in which the positive contributions of the Jeffersonian approach to foreign policy are indisputable. As one example, the Jeffersonian emphasis on maintaining and extending the power of democracy in American life plays a major role in keeping the political system healthy and in conserving what trust remains between the rulers and the ruled in the contemporary United States. Legitimacy in mass democracy is a fragile thing; the power of Jeffersonian ideas about democracy is one of the primary supports enjoyed by our form of government. Furthermore the long Jeffersonian struggle against central authority may have won only limited victories against Hamiltonian and Wilsonian centralizers, but those victories are important and will be more so in the future. As the sheer size of the American population grows, maintaining the health and autonomy of state and local governments will become steadily more important. The less power individual citizens can hope to exercise at the national level, the more important it is that serious questions can be debated and resolved at the state and local levels, where the average person can still be a participant in democracy rather than simply a spectator.

Another major contribution is that Jeffersonian ideas have produced and continue to produce some of the most brilliant thinkers and scholars in the field of American foreign policy. Whether one looks at Jefferson himself, John Quincy Adams, or, more recently, figures like George Kennan and (in some phases of his long and varied career) Walter Lippmann, it is striking how many of our most brilliant foreign policy intellectuals have been shaped in large part by Jeffersonian concerns.

The Jeffersonian mind-set, eager to understand foreign states and

conditions, but also eager to leave them as they are, is peculiarly conducive to the intellectual formation of brilliant regional students. Of the four schools Jeffersonians are most often moved by a disinterested appreciation and respect for foreign cultures. Jeffersonians are less eager to make sales than Hamiltonians are, and less preoccupied with either secular or religious proselytization than Wilsonians are—but they are interested in understanding foreign cultures and peoples on their own terms. Very often Jeffersonian regional specialists have talked policy makers out of what would have proved rash and ill-founded initiatives and found ways of achieving important American objectives with less friction and trouble than we might otherwise face.

The greatest advantage the country derives from the Jeffersonian tradition emerges out of the Jeffersonian desire to define the national interest as tightly as possible and then to develop the most elegant possible strategy for securing that interest. It is a tradition that adds intellectual rigor and, often, great practical value to the foreign policy debate. It is arguably the natural home for American grand strategy. The combination of a realistic grasp of the problems of the external world with a passionate desire to secure the nation's vital interest at the lowest possible cost may be the mind-set best suited to conceive and promulgate national strategic initiatives.

Furthermore, the Jeffersonian tradition supplies something occasionally lacking in the other three schools: a critical tradition that seeks systematically to investigate, and in some cases controvert, the claims made by proponents of Hamiltonian and Wilsonian activism. If nothing else, Jeffersonian skepticism keeps Wilsonians and Hamiltonians on their toes, forcing them to think through their policies more thoroughly than they otherwise might, and to be able to defend their programs in public debate.

Paradoxically, Jeffersonian pacifism and skepticism tend to unite American opinion once war has finally come. In the case of World War II, the large and well-organized isolationist movement came out openly in support of the war effort after Pearl Harbor. With one exception (Montana representative Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress [1916], who also voted against America's entry into World War I), the eloquent congressional and senatorial critics of intervention voted for the declaration of war on Japan. The existence and visibility of a high-powered antiwar lobby can mobilize public opinion for war: If even these people think we have to fight, then maybe war is really inevitable.

The Jeffersonian approach to foreign policy has one other advantage: Every vehicle should have at least one reverse gear, and Jeffersonianism often provides exactly that. When the United States needs to lower its international profile for some reason—as, for example, in the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam defeat in the 1970s—Jeffersonian ideas and values allow us to approach the problem in a positive, thoughtful way. Rather than recoiling after a humiliating defeat, the United States was recovering its traditional values, abandoning the arrogance of power, returning to a more constitutional approach to foreign policy, and scaling back the imperial presidency. From a Jeffersonian perspective, these are all good things. We don't do them simply because a loss of prestige compels us to draw in our horns. Rather we do them because we now have an opportunity to introduce some overdue reforms. If the long flow of this century should bring about conditions in which the United States can no longer design and uphold a world order, but must adjust to the designs and plans of others, it will be the Jeffersonian strain in American foreign policy thinking that will come forward with strategies that allow us to make the best of it, to accommodate to changing international conditions while as far as possible preserving our domestic institutions and values.