
 FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

called Radford's proposal an "old delusive idea" because success could not be won through air and naval action alone.

Petraeus sees the generation of commanders trained in Vietnam as harboring old frustrations similar to those of their Korean War predecessors. Their "circumspect approach to the use of force," he contends, may play a key role in the shaping of future American foreign policy. As columnist Joseph Kraft once noted, "The skepticism of the military about applying force weighs far more on the president than does the sniping of the political opposition."

Tocqueville Today

"Tocqueville's Challenge" by David Clinton, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1988), 55
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In *Democracy in America* (1835–40), French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) argued that U.S. democracy could not pursue long-term foreign policy interests. "A democracy," Tocqueville wrote, "finds it difficult to . . . fix on some plan and carry it through with determination." Any president, trying to distinguish himself from his predecessor, lacks political incentives to continue existing diplomatic strategies.

Tocqueville's challenge—how to preserve stability in foreign policy *and* be flexible enough to satisfy democratic demands—is one each American president must resolve anew, writes Clinton, a Union College political scientist. For the "trade-off between democracy and effective diplomacy" is one of the perennially unresolved questions of American governance.

Tocqueville believed that American isolation meant that the United States could remain democratic *and* free to pursue limited foreign interests without being enmeshed in international politics. Until the Second World War, American foreign policy analysts continued to stress the importance of U.S. isolation. British politician James Bryce (1838–1922), Tocqueville's successor as a sympathetic foreign critic of America, argued in *The American Commonwealth* (1888) that senatorial checks on presidential power kept the U.S. from "being entangled" with "responsibilities of all sorts beyond its own frontiers." American historian Charles Beard (1874–1948) recommended that the U.S. pursue "continentalism," withdrawing from international power politics in favor of "domestic prosperity within its own broad territory."

Today, some foreign policy analysts continue to insist that isolation is the best solution to the dilemma Tocqueville posed. George Kennan, for example, believes that the U.S. cannot pursue complex or secretive foreign policies, and should not act like a "Czar of Russia" in imposing its will on the world. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., suggests that pursuit of a "messianic foreign policy" might spell the return of "the imperial presidency."

But Clinton concludes that U.S. isolation is not possible because "there is no alternative candidate" to replace America on the world stage. To solve Tocqueville's dilemma, the president and Congress should work out "a public consensus" on such long-term foreign policy questions as arms control. Without such a consensus, he warns, America might well have to "abridge political freedoms" when decisive action is needed in a crisis.