

**Nations and Nationalism in U.S. Foreign Policy:
Perspectives from Post-Cold War Strategy**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Major Honors in Political Science

Houghton University, Houghton, New York
May 2024

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1. Introduction

Ten years ago, one journalist declared that nationalism had returned as a threat to international cooperation in the likes of China's Xi Jinping, India's Narendra Modi, and Russia's Vladimir Putin.¹ Ten years later, as Modi's party unravels democracy and Putin's war ravages Ukraine, many argue that nationalism remains a virulent threat not only to international cooperation but to the liberal international order itself.² Others argue that the threat only comes from nationalist populism, that nationalist sentiments have not truly intensified, and that nationalism itself is the foundation of the liberal international order.³

In light of these paradoxical arguments, how does the United States, the leader of the international order, understand and respond to the phenomenon of nationalism? Graham Fuller, a former analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, offers a warning: "That the United States should be tone-deaf to this phenomenon in its dealings with others represents a serious vulnerability in the formulation of its foreign policies."⁴ That

1. Gideon Rachman, "Nationalism is Back," *The Economist*, November 13, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/news/2014/11/13/nationalism-is-back>.

2. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "The Specter of Nationalism," *Foreign Policy*, January 3, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/01/03/nationalism-elections-2024-democracy-liberalism/>.

3. See Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican Books, 2018); Larry Bartels, *Democracy Erodes from the Top: Leaders, Citizens, and the Challenge of Populism in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023); and Andreas Wimmer, "Why Nationalism Works," *Foreign Affairs* (February 12, 2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-02-12/why-nationalism-works>.

4. Graham E. Fuller, "America's Uncomfortable Relationship with Nationalism," Stanley Center for Peace and Security, July 2006,

was in 2006. Since then, the United States has confronted nationalist movements at home and abroad, making the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy more pertinent now than ever before. At the same time, as policy-makers confront nationalism, they offer answers to challenging and pervasive questions about its nature and its goals. Most fundamentally, what is the nation? What are its rights? What is nationalism? Is it good or bad? Is it compatible with liberalism, or are they mutually exclusive?

These questions are best answered from the perspective of nationalism studies, a discipline that has developed since the 1980s from the works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm. It traces its origins to the emergence of nation-states and the thought of German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder in the late Enlightenment.⁵ Most basically, nationalism studies critically analyzes the “political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,” Gellner’s famous definition.⁶ Contemporarily, it analyzes a range of related topics from an interdisciplinary perspective. It draws from anthropology, sociology, economics, history, political science, and international relations to explain nations and national identity in a range of empirical and theoretical contexts.⁷ Nationalism studies has only been

<https://stanleycenter.org/publications/americas-uncomfortable-relationship-with-nationalism/>, 2.

5. Eric Storm, “A New Dawn in Nationalism Studies? Some Fresh Incentives to Overcome Historiographical Nationalism,” *European History Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691417741830>.

6. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

7. “About Us,” Nationalism Studies Program, Central European University, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://nationalism.ceu.edu/about-us>.

formalized in a few universities worldwide, but it provides an underrepresented approach to other subjects in international relations.

Most theoretical approaches to this relationship use the paradigms of international relations (IR): realism, liberalism, and constructivism, among others, which are replete with theories that explain how nationalism affects foreign policy and vice versa. The emphasis on causality reflects the pragmatic bias of IR as a discipline, since causality informs policy. But Giuseppe Paparella draws attention to “the paradoxical status of nationalism in IR scholarship,” where “nationalism is both omnipresent ... as well as absent from it.”⁸ Most scholarship implicitly resists the ontological necessity of this phenomenon when studying the nation, leading to vague assumptions in the prevailing paradigms.⁹ Ultimately, by relying on the paradigms of IR, theories of nationalism and foreign policy suffer from a lack of conceptual clarity that undermines foreign policy analysis. Paparella identifies several manifestations of this problem: first, “the frequent lack of conceptualization and discussion of the concept itself of ‘nationalism,’” and second, “in using interchangeably different concepts such as ‘nation’ and ‘state.’”¹⁰ Foreign policy analysis, a subfield of international relations, is no exception, since these

8. Giuseppe Paparella, “From (the Infrequency of) War to Vaccine Nationalism: Understanding Nationalism and Foreign Policy in the Decade of New Nationalism,” *National Identities* 25, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2022.2089642>, 165.

9. Jaakko Heiskanen, “Spectra of Sovereignty: Nationalism and International Relations,” *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olz007>.

10. Paparella, “From War to Vaccine Nationalism,” 165. An anonymous reviewer of Paparella’s work identified a third manifestation of the problem, IR scholarship’s tendency to focus on inter-state interactions and ignore interactions between nations. This problem must be addressed with a different methodology than that used in this study.

terms are often accepted at face value without considering their intrinsic assumptions. But with each use of *nationalism*, *nation*, and *state*, policy-makers offer answers to fundamental questions about nationalism. The first step toward rectifying the problems of nations and nationalism in foreign policy analysis is to look to nationalism studies for conceptual clarity.

Using U.S. National Security Strategy reports, or NSSs, from 1990 to 2022, loosely defined as the post-Cold War era, I analyze uses of the terms *nationalism*, *nation*, and *state* to address the problems Paparella identifies and derive conceptualizations of nationalism in U.S. foreign policy. Paparella argues that “the concept of strategic culture ... presents specific analytical and interpretative challenges” because it introduces so many variables to foreign policy analysis.¹¹ This is true if one intends to analyze the causal pathways between nationalism and foreign policy. But language, not causation, is at the heart of strategic culture, and the value of grand strategy lies not only in its prescriptive potential but also in its description of the world and constraints on foreign policy.¹² In the case of U.S. National Security Strategies, extensive bureaucratic processes establish and regulate the language used to describe international relations and foreign policy. For this study’s interest in concepts of nations and nationalism, NSSs are the foremost documents in U.S. foreign policy for terminological and rhetorical analysis. Throughout this study, I introduce significant speeches and supplementary national security documents that contribute to a more holistic account of nationalism in each

11. Paparella, 162.

12. Peter Feaver, “What is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?” *Foreign Policy*, April 9, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/>.

presidential administration.

The dates framing this study have been chosen for strategic and historical significance. First, the corpus of unclassified NSSs imposes a natural constraint on the potential range of dates. In addition to reforming the Defense Department, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 required the president to transmit a national security strategy report to Congress annually, which would include “the proposed short-term and long-term uses of the ... elements of the national power of the United States.”¹³ Ronald Reagan published the first NSS in 1987, and by the time George H. W. Bush published his first strategy in 1990, the NSS had matured as a praxis of foreign policy. The second constraining factor is historical. In the same year that Bush published his first NSS, nationalist movements began to emerge from the shadow of the Soviet Union, weakening the country’s grasp on satellite states and constitutive republics. The Cold War was definitively coming to a close. From the start of his presidency, Bush envisioned not only “future freedom, peace, and prosperity” but also “a new era ... that will take us into the next century”—the first implication of the post-Cold War era in a NSS.¹⁴ In contrast, Joe Biden’s 2022 NSS drew attention for declaring that “the post-Cold War era is definitively over.”¹⁵ In addition to being the most recent unclassified

13. *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, Pub. L. No. 99-433, 100 Stat. 1074 (1986).

14. George H. W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1990), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1990.pdf?ver=x5cwOOez0oak2BjhXekM-Q%3D%3D>, 1.

15. Joseph R. Biden, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>, 6. Biden is unlikely to release another report before the end of his term in January 2025.

strategy, it firmly concludes the post-Cold War era.

In an effort to address the problem Paparella identifies of conflating similar terms, the second chapter analyzes the uses and frequencies of the terms *nation*, *state*, *country*, and *people* in National Security Strategies from 1990 to 2022. I use a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the hypothesis that *nation*, *state*, and *country* are used interchangeably, first with the full sample of NSSs and then with the sample separated into Republican and Democratic administrations. Based on the findings, I suggest two conclusions: first, that *nation* has an important and distinctive rhetorical function in grand strategy, and second, that policy-makers engage in methodological nationalism, the assumption that the nation-state constitutes the natural framework for the international order. This assumption has previously been identified in historiographical and IR scholarship but has not yet been applied to foreign policy and strategic studies, despite its prevalence as evidenced by the terminology of *nation*. I substantiate this claim and address the other problem Paparella identified, the lack of clear conceptualization of nationalism in foreign policy analysis, in each presidential administration in subsequent chapters.

Through rhetorical analysis, the third chapter considers George H. W. Bush's uses of *nationalism* in NSSs and presidential addresses, with particular attention to his infamous accusation of "suicidal nationalism" in Ukraine. Bush's conceptualization in the context of post-Cold War Eastern Europe suggests the influence of the persistent dichotomy of civic and ethnic nationalism proposed by Hans Kohn in the mid-twentieth century. Although these concepts are shifting and exploratory in Bush's grand strategy, they lay a foundation for future concepts of nationalism in the United States, especially as

a threat to the liberal international order.

Bill Clinton's concepts demonstrate both historiographical continuity and philosophical counterpoint when compared to the Bush administration: continuity in their tendency toward threat identification, and counterpoint in their stronger theoretical foundations. In the fourth chapter, I distinguish Clinton's first-term uses of nationalism, built on the thought of Isaiah Berlin and the description of "wounded nationalism," from the second-term uses, built on cosmopolitan idealism and more rigorous threat assessments. Using a typology of post-Cold War competition transmitted to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1996, nationalist movements in the first decade of the post-Cold War era can be categorized according to the extent to which they conform to or threaten American values and interests.

George W. Bush and Barack Obama rarely use *nationalism* in their foreign policy rhetoric, including their NSSs. This era, the subject of the fifth chapter, may be called "the twilight of nationalism," a time during which it was rarely discussed as a national security threat due to the preeminence of transnational threats, most significantly terrorism and religious extremism. I briefly explore approaches to nationalism in these presidencies and the endurance of methodological and normative nationalism through the first part of the twenty-first century. The terminology of Barack Obama's 2015 NSS, situated in a changing international political context, suggests the dawn of both a new nationalism and a new strategic ontology in light of nationalistic threats.

After a decade and a half of near-total presidential silence on nationalism, Donald Trump again raises the flag through his rhetoric and by identifying himself as a nationalist. In the sixth chapter, I address the claim that this is a "new nationalism" and

discuss ways in which conceptualizations of Trumpian nationalism adhere to theoretical foundations. Trump himself describes liberal nationalism in an address to the United Nations General Assembly, a more coherent theory than any other suggested in the post-Cold War era, although it is inconsistent with what he operationalizes in the doctrine of “America first.” In turn, I examine Biden’s conceptualization of nationalism, developed primarily as a reaction against Trump’s expressions. Biden places it in a realist paradigm of international relations in conjunction with other threats, most significantly populism but also autocratization and geopolitical competition. From the perspective of Biden’s NSS, the interrelatedness of this “new nationalism” and other threats to the international order definitively signals the end of the post-Cold War era.

Finally, I assess this study according to its two goals: first, modeling a new method for analyzing nationalism in foreign policy, and second, delineating concepts of nationalism in grand strategy in the post-Cold War era. With the more concrete findings of this study, I introduce the concept of *nationalistic consciousness*, a self-awareness about nationalism that impacts fundamental perspectives on international relations, seen in the United States and elsewhere. This idea points toward the future world order intimated in Biden’s National Security Strategy. Ultimately, this research intends to contribute to ongoing analysis of U.S. foreign policy and grand strategy while modeling a method for more holistic interdisciplinary study of nationalism and foreign policy.

2. Terminological Analysis of *Nation and State*

In his critical analysis of nationalism in IR scholarship, Giuseppe Paparella identifies how scholars have frequently conflated the terms *nation* and *state* although the terms are meaningfully different.¹⁶ The concern is not limited to academia; practitioners of international relations, often trained in the same universities and taught the same analytical methods as academics, are equally guilty of imprecise language. Furthermore, think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations and periodicals such as *Foreign Affairs* blur the lines of academia and practice in international relations, so errors in language and methodology pervade the entire discipline. As a result, policy-makers and academics alike can be found conflating *nation* and *state*.

This language is not entirely inaccurate, given the dominance of the nation-state in the world order since the seventeenth century. In the nation-state, the nation legitimates the state's monopoly on power through popular sovereignty, creating a political community that is at least theoretically congruent with the national identity and interests. In a recent article vindicating nationalism, Jonah Goldberg reminds readers that "the nation-state is a relatively recent invention, while the nation is much older," describing the people who share something in common—"a culture, language, ethnicity, or sense of common fate." The promotion of the nation-state is meant to reinforce the ideal of national self-determination that emerged from the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions. "But technically speaking, not all countries are nation-states," and talking about countries, nations, states, and nation-states synonymously is a

16. Paparella, "From War to Vaccine Nationalism," 165.

historiographical and political oversight.¹⁷ If accuracy is to be valued in both creating and communicating foreign policy, the relative dominance of the nation-state cannot account for imprecise descriptions of the world order that assume the nation-state to be the natural political unit.

The language of *nation* and *state* in foreign policy is primarily established through byzantine bureaucratic processes with guidance from the president. On one side, the rhetoric of foreign policy, including that of NSSs, is subject to certain rhetorical conventions. Policy-makers, especially those engaged in public affairs, eschew unnecessary repetition, typically reserving it as a rhetorical device for emphasizing important terms and phrases. Therefore, they may consider *nation*, *state*, and *country*, all referring to the largest political unit of the international order, “synonymous enough” to use interchangeably and avoid repetition. On the other side, it is incumbent on policy-makers and academics alike to use precise language to describe the international order and formulate foreign policy. The bureaucratic process and interagency dialogue that regulate the language of foreign policy afford significant attention to particular words and their definitions, connotations, and potential effects on international relations. Meanwhile, the president sets strategic goals serviced by the language of the foreign policy establishment. It would discredit this process to claim that denotatively different terms are used interchangeably for the sake of avoiding repetition. Instead, there may be underlying patterns and assumptions that guide the use of *nation*, *state*, and *country* in the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy.

17. Jonah Goldberg, “Nations, Nation-States, and Nationalism,” *The Dispatch*, February 23, 2024, <https://thedispatch.com/newsletter/gfile/nations-nation-states-and-nationalism/>.

Methodology

National security strategy reports from 1990 to 2022 constitute a representative sample of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric in the post-Cold War era for a terminological analysis of *nation*, *state*, and *country*. This analysis excludes Joe Biden’s Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, published in March 2021, as it digresses from the standard structure of NSSs by assuming “perceived shortcomings in domestic social and economic policy rather than external threats as its analytic starting point.”¹⁸ It follows the rhetorical conventions of presidential campaign more than those of grand strategy, which are represented in Biden’s 2022 NSS.

Uses of the terms *nation*, *state*, and *country* were counted in each report according to the following rules:

1. Count singular and plural forms.
2. Count all repeated occurrences.
3. Exclude adjectival forms, such as *national* and *state-sponsored*, except for possessive adjectives and references to specific policy, such as *country programs*.¹⁹
4. Exclude proper nouns, such as the *United States* and the *United Nations*, except for references to specific policy, such as the *Heavily Indebted Poor Countries* initiative.

18. U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, by Kathleen J. McInnis, IF11798 (2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11798>.

19. Most adjectival uses of these words are common phrases in foreign policy without specific connotations for a theory of nations and nationalism, such as *national security* and *state-sponsored terrorism*.

5. Exclude references to the United States individually. Include collective self-references, such as *both of our nations*.

In addition to *nation*, *state*, and *country*, the reports sometimes use *people* to refer to a collective group with political rights, much like a nation. Though *people* is not used interchangeably with the other terms and therefore is not appropriate to include in statistical analysis, it is informative to track its mentions alongside other terms according to the following rule:

6. Count *people* when it refers to a group with political rights associated with a specific state, region, or territory, such as *the Iranian people* or *African peoples*.

The counts of each term were adjusted by the number of pages of text in the respective NSS to yield the relative frequencies.²⁰

If *nation*, *state*, and *country* are used interchangeably to avoid repetition, one would expect the mean frequencies of the terms to be equal across all reports. Given this null hypothesis, and after testing for normal distribution, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the mean frequencies, first within the full set of NSSs, and then within the strategies of Republican and Democratic administrations.

Results

The frequencies of all terms are highly variable throughout the NSSs, not only from one presidential administration to the next but also within any given administration. Nonetheless, a graph of the data exposes several trends, with the dates of reports plotted

20. See the appendix for raw data of counts and frequencies and complete ANOVA results.

on the x-axis and frequencies of terms plotted on the y-axis.

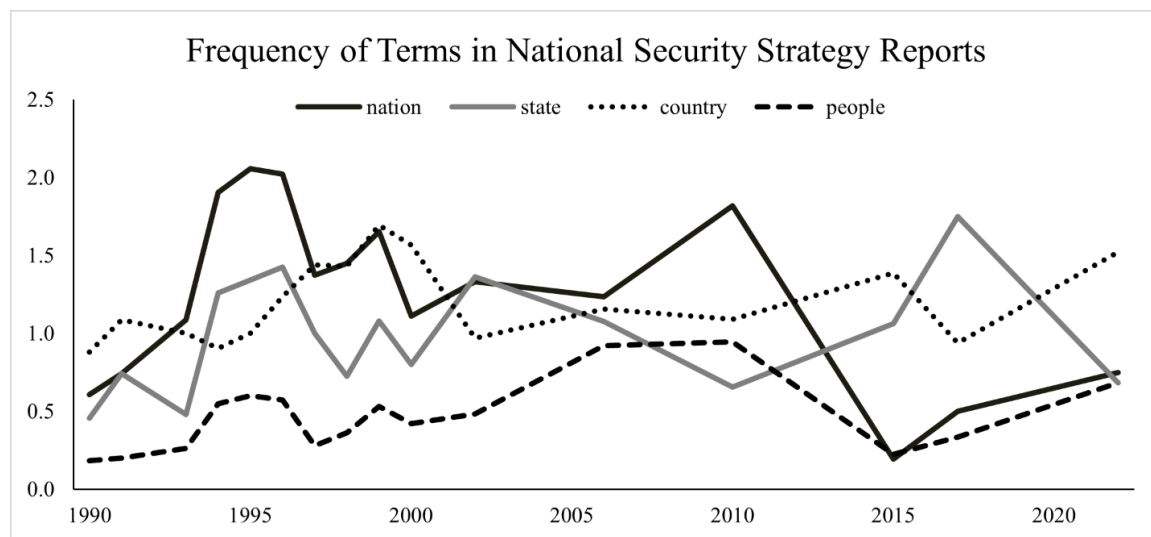


Figure 1. Frequency of the Terms *Nation*, *State*, *Country*, and *People* in National Security Strategy Reports 1990-2022 (Cody Johnson).

First, the strategies generally demonstrate a preference for *nation* over other terms until 2015. In the three most recent strategies, *country* and *state* have supplanted *nation* in frequency.

Second, *state* shows a roughly proportional relationship to *nation* in the first decade of the study, but beginning in 2006, *state* shows a roughly inverse relationship to *nation*, with an increase in one mirrored by a decrease in the other.

Third, the frequencies of *nation*, *state*, and *country* come closest to one another in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies.

Finally, the frequency of *people*, though substantially lower than the other terms in most strategies, follows a similar trend to *nation* throughout the study.

A one-way ANOVA of the frequencies of *nation*, *state*, and *country* using the entire sample ($n = 16$) revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in the frequencies of at least two terms at the 0.10 significance level ($F(2,45) = 1.605$, $p =$

0.212).²¹ The sample was then separated into Republican and Democratic reports. The ANOVA results for Republican reports ($n = 6$) revealed no statistically significant variation among mean frequencies ($F(2,15) = 0.091, p = 0.914$). However, the ANOVA results for Democratic reports ($n = 10$) yielded statistically significant variation between the frequencies of at least two terms in the study ($F(2,27) = 2.948, p = 0.069$). The post-hoc Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) test revealed that the difference of mean frequencies of *nation* and *state* is statistically significant in Democratic reports ($p = 0.0685$).

It is important to note that this statistical analysis, and particularly the Tukey HSD test, has low power due to the small sample. Furthermore, in the sample of Democratic reports, the data may be skewed because Clinton published reports annually during his presidency, and reports in the same administration often recycle language. Despite these limitations, it is appropriate to conclude that the mean frequencies of *nation*, *state*, and *country* are significantly different in Democratic NSSs, and there is some substantial variation throughout all reports.

Discussion

This section presents a high-level discussion of the results of the terminological analysis, considering concepts of the nation, state, and nation-state in post-Cold War grand strategy more broadly. Observations that are specific to the presidential administrations will be discussed in the respective upcoming chapters.

21. The higher significance level is intended to increase the sensitivity of the test given the small sample size in this analysis. Further analysis may benefit from a lower significance level.

Within the uses of *nation* and *state*, there is significant regional variation. *State* is most frequently used in the context of the Middle East, a region where national and political territories rarely align due to a history of European imperialism. Though national identity is strong throughout the Middle East, it is rarely legitimized in the form of a nation-state. Conversely, *nation* is most frequently used in the context of Europe—predominantly Western Europe, but increasingly Eastern Europe and the former republics of the Soviet Union. The modern nation-state arose in Western Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the region is frequently seen as modelling healthy expressions of national identity, though this requires some historical cherry-picking. The NSSs are less consistent in their use of *nation* and *state* in other regions, including Africa, Latin America, and South and East Asia, but they demonstrate an overall preference for *nation*. Over time, *country* arises as preferred language in regions where the congruence of the nation and the state is dubious, especially Africa. It is also the most politically neutral term. This regional variation may justify some of the disparities among *nation*, *state*, and *country*, but it does not explain the Democratic preference for *nation* given that nation-states are overwhelmingly found in Europe and rarely in other parts of the world.²²

Apart from describing the community of a national group, *nation* implies that the group has certain rights, primarily the right to self-determination, and therefore serves an important purpose in affirming democratization in foreign policy. There are two important trends related to this in the NSSs. First, *nation* is often used alongside the language of freedom and democracy, especially in Clinton's strategies, where democratic

22. Outside of Europe, common examples of nation-states include the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Egypt.

enlargement was one of the highest strategic priorities. Democracy continued to feature prominently in grand strategy after the Cold War, whether it was pursued by enabling self-determination in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union or by building infrastructure and institutions for enduring democratic governance. While the process of democratization ideally culminates in the liberal democratic state, “the responsibility for the fate of a nation rests with its own people,” according to Clinton.²³ The nation, through its political connotations, is entitled to self-determination, whatever political system it yields. Second, as this quote shows, *nation* is often syntactically related to the use of *people*, sometimes even appearing side by side—“peoples and nations.” This both distinguishes peoples from nations and suggests that they have common features. In these cases, the nation might be best understood as a political entity with the right to a nation-state and the people as a political entity with the right to a state. The people are to a state what the nation is to a nation-state, and *nation* is often a more natural term to connote that community’s rights. In the end, they are simply different types of political communities with the same fundamental claim to self-determination.

The increased use of *nation* may also be attributed to the broader phenomenon of methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism, according to the seminal work by Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, is “the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences.”²⁴ It refers to the tendency of academia to privilege the nation-state as

23. William Clinton, *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1995), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1995.pdf?ver=pzgo9pkDsWmIQqTYTC6O-Q%3d%3d>, 39.

24. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology,” *The*

the natural unit of analysis in history, globalization, immigration, and a range of other subjects, reinforcing assumptions about the organization of the modern world. At the same time, the concept of methodological nationalism purports to explain the absence of critical analysis of nationalism, including its origins and significance, in contemporary scholarship. This is effectively the paradoxical problem Giuseppe Paparella identified in IR scholarship: the omnipresence of the nation alongside the implicit dismissal of nationalism. Several scholars contributed significant works about nationalism in the 1980s, forming the basis of nationalism studies, but the paradox persists due to the relative isolation of that scholarship from preexisting disciplines like history, political science, and IR.

Among several other expressions of this problem, “*Ignoring* is the dominant modus of methodological nationalism in grand theory,” a subject implicitly intertwined with grand strategy in IR.²⁵ The important feature of ignorance in methodological nationalism is the failure to recognize nationalism in any of its forms, whether by implicitly accepting nationalist principles or by embedding those principles in the very framework of scholarship. During the twentieth century in particular, “Nation-state principles”—understood as nationalism—“were so routinely structured into the foundational assumptions of theory that they vanished from sight.”²⁶ This erasure of nationalism reflects a failure of scholars to engage with ontological questions about the international system, blindly accepting and in some cases imposing the preeminence of

International Migration Review 37, no. 3 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30037750>, 576.

25. Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 578. Emphasis added.

26. Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 579.

the nation-state.

Methodological nationalism is not limited to academia. The prevalence of *nation* in NSSs, sometimes used arbitrarily in favor of *state* or *country*, suggests the presence of methodological nationalism in foreign policy. While policy-makers conceptualize nationalism in a variety of ways, they provide little commentary on concepts of the nation, reinforcing its uncontested role as the basis of the international system. This is especially true through the first decade of the post-Cold War era, when nationalism in the Balkans drove debates about the phenomenon in a way that failed to acknowledge the formational role of national political claims in Europe more broadly. Methodological nationalism offers a valuable critique of foreign policy, suggesting how policy-makers ignore assumptions about the nation, nation-state, and nationalism that are deeply embedded in grand strategy.

Since Wimmer and Glick Schiller's groundbreaking work, scholarship on transnational movements and identities has experimented with new methods that unearth and challenge assumptions about the nation-state and nationalism.²⁷ The sharp decline in the frequency of *nation* in the three most recent NSSs suggests that U.S. grand strategy has similarly challenged methodological nationalism in the last decade. The Obama administration's NSSs show the sudden and precipitous decline of *nation* from the first strategy to the second. Both strategies published since then—by Trump in 2017 and Biden in 2022—did not reclaim the language of nations associated with methodological

27. For examples of this scholarship, see Anna Amelina, *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), http://www.123library.org/book_details/?id=68268.

nationalism. As discussed in later chapters, this may be attributed to the growth of perceived nationalistic threats in the first part of the twenty-first century that remain strong today. Obama claimed in his 2015 NSS that “power is shifting below and beyond the nation-state,” an intimation of the foreign policy establishment’s challenge to longstanding assumptions.²⁸ Though methodological nationalism had been demonstrated in early post-Cold War strategies, recent strategies suggest a fundamental shift in the ontological perception of the international order. The nation no longer sits at its center.

This terminological analysis of *nation*, *state*, *country*, and *people* reveals some of the underlying assumptions and trends of U.S. grand strategy in the post-Cold War era, most significantly the preference for *nation* in Democratic administrations. While this may have rhetorical value for policy, it may also be explained by methodological nationalism, an assumption shared by scholars and policy-makers. The next chapters delve into specific conceptualizations of the nation and nationalism in each administration according to the strategic context.

28. Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf, 22.

3. George H. W. Bush: Exploring Nationalism in the New World Order

Before his inauguration as the forty-first president of the United States in 1989, George H. W. Bush served as Ronald Reagan's vice president. This equipped the office of the president and the foreign policy establishment with strategic continuity in an era of rapid change. Ronald Reagan had played a critical role in thawing relations with the Soviet Union and bringing about the end of the Cold War, and consequently, Bush was deeply cognizant of the United States' potential for leadership in the post-Cold War era from the start of his presidency. Though Bush was notoriously more cautious than his predecessor, his National Security Strategies published in 1990, 1991, and 1993 reflect ongoing commitments to freedom, democracy, and American-led international cooperation.

Despite this strategic continuity, the pace of change during Bush's presidency challenged the strategic planning process and the workability of the NSSs. In 1989, the Berlin Wall collapsed, heralding the reunification of Europe. In 1990, the Persian Gulf War erupted, embroiling the United States in conflict in the Middle East. In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved, leaving fifteen newly independent states to create new governments and effectively annulling the NSS Bush had published five months earlier. According to Don Snider, "The original Goldwater-Nichols legislation had implicitly assumed a fairly steady state in the international environment,"²⁹ and the Bush administration lacked a stable environment in which to develop a strategic vision for the post-Cold War era. The resulting strategies are fragmented, mostly describing the

29. Don M. Snider, "The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision Second Edition," Monographs (U.S. Army War College Press, 1995), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/244>, 8.

changing world order and outlining the United States' perspective rather than generating a productive strategic posture. Furthermore, the 1990 NSS, released in March of that year, was significantly delayed by domestic and international politics, a rocky start for the administration's strategic planning. Nonetheless, according to the original intent of the Goldwater-Nichols Act and Tenets of Strategic Planning, Aaron Dilday evaluates Bush's first two NSSs as "exceptional strategic plans" that "articulate specific objectives with correlating means."³⁰ At the same time, they represent "a rather 'cautious' response to great upheaval," a topic of significant debate among grand strategy commentators.³¹

Nationalism receives only one mention in each of these first two strategies, an indication of its relative insignificance to national security at the beginning of the post-Cold War era. In the 1990 NSS, Bush lists nationalism as a motivation for other countries to pressure the United States to change—especially decrease—its global military deployments. In this section, titled "Forward Defense through Forward Presence," it appears alongside "anti-nuclear sentiment, environmental and social concerns and honestly divergent interests."³² Taken individually, this mention of nationalism is insubstantial. In the context of these other movements, however, this mention reveals Bush's willingness to engage seriously with challenges to U.S. military presence and consider proportional adjustments after strategic analysis. These provocative social

30. Aaron Dilday, "Presidential Strategy: Analyzing the National Security Strategies of the United States" (MA thesis, Georgia Southern University, 2012), <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/604>, 70.

31. John J. Chin, Kiron Skinner, and Clay Yoo, "Understanding National Security Strategies Through Time," *Texas National Security Review* 6, no. 4 (2023), <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/48842>, 108.

32. Bush, NSS (1990), 25.

movements have varying levels of legitimacy, ranging from “honestly divergent interests” to anti-nuclear sentiment that is inconsistent with the American interest in well-governed nuclear energy, but the United States promises to take them seriously. Bush mentions nationalism not as a national security threat but as a challenging ideology that merits strategic engagement.

While the 1991 NSS also has only one occurrence of *nationalism*, the context differs significantly from its precursor and paints a more complete picture of its history and implications for foreign policy.

Historical enmities in Western Europe have been largely consigned to the past but disputes between and among some Eastern European states and ethnic groups appear to have been merely frozen in time by decades of Cold War. In the interwar period, the politics of these states were often dominated by economic hardship, competing nationalisms and overlapping territorial claims. We have reason to be more hopeful today, but security problems could emerge in the East in the course of the 1990s. The powerful centrifugal forces in Yugoslavia are particularly worrisome.³³

Bush was right to worry about nationalistic forces separating Yugoslavia from itself. By the end of the year, Yugoslavia was unrecognizable as a country, and by the end of the decade, the region had ossified into its constituent nations: Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians, and Kosovars, among others, each claiming to be entitled to a nation-state. These ethnic groups, as Bush calls them, exercised a competitive form of nationalism in aligning state and national borders, creating the political patchwork of the modern Balkans. The ethnonational politics of the region has provided fertile ground for scholars to develop theories of nationalism and study national identity, agency, violence, and

33. George H. W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1991), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1991.pdf?ver=3sIpLiQwmknO-RplyPeAHw%3d%3d>, 7.

state-building. To understand Bush's conceptualization and place it in context of this scholarship, though, one must first look to other discussions of nationalism in his presidential rhetoric.

The publication of the 1991 National Security Strategy coincided with a speech to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev on August 1, 1991. Bush defines *freedom* and *democracy*, advocates for the free trade of goods and ideas, and encourages engagement with the Soviet Union instead of disengagement. With the December independence referendum looming over the republic, Bush urges the Supreme Soviet and the people of Ukraine to pursue *perestroika*—reform—rather than declare independence from the Soviet Union. In declaring independence, Ukraine could “replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism.” And Americans “will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred,” says Bush.³⁴ Journalist William Safire dubbed Bush's address the “Chicken Kiev speech” in *The New York Times*, a reference to a Ukrainian recipe that had been appropriated by the Soviet Union. The name served as a criticism of Bush's appeal to keep Ukraine beholden to the Soviet Union despite their irreconcilable national identities.³⁵ Bush favored liberalization over disintegration for the Soviet Union. He feared that independent republics would lack the ability and desire to sustain freedom, democracy, and open economies apart from the federation. Yielding liberal goals to nationalist ideals would be reckless, implying that

34. George H. W. Bush, “Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union” (speech, Kiev, August 1, 1991), George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/3267>.

35. William Safire, “After the Fall,” *The New York Times*, August 29, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/29/opinion/essay-after-the-fall.html>.

liberalism and ethnic nationalism are mutually exclusive.

Four months later, Ukraine asserted its nationhood and overwhelmingly declared independence from the Soviet Union. Bush reflected on this process of people “reasserting their historical identities” in Eastern Europe in an address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1992. “Where this is taking place in a democratic manner with tolerance and civility and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, this new democratic nationalism is all to the good.”³⁶ Having seen the effects of Ukrainian independence, Bush reconceptualizes the country’s ethnic nationalism as democratic nationalism. In the post-Cold War order, cooperative nations like Ukraine reject nationalistic exclusivism and embrace shared liberal democratic interests. Bush builds a dichotomy of the two concepts by reminding the United Nations of ongoing ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia in the very next sentence. In a speech at Texas A&M University a few months later, Bush reinforces negative portrayals of nationalism, describing it as “virulent,” “hostile,” and “aggressive” in three separate mentions.³⁷ Violent ethnic nationalism remains “the greatest threat to the democratic peace we hope to build,” but democratic nationalism can be reconciled with an internationalist vision.

This democratic concept of nationalism can also be drawn from principles of nationhood Bush outlines in the 1991 NSS. Though the strategy explicitly characterizes

36. George H. W. Bush, “Address to the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, September 21, 1992), U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207267.htm>.

37. George H. W. Bush, “Remarks at Texas A&M University” (speech, College Station, December 15, 1992), University of Virginia Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-15-1992-remarks-texas-am-university>.

nationalism as ethnic and incendiary, it characterizes the sovereign nation as a vehicle for liberal democratic values, particularly individual rights and freedoms.

It is our deepest belief that all nations and peoples seek political and economic freedom; that governments must rest their rightful authority on the consent of the governed, and must live in peace with their neighbors. The collapse of the Communist idea has shown that our vision of individual rights — a vision imbedded in the faith of our Founders — speaks to humanity's enduring hopes and aspirations.³⁸

Liberal democracy, which prevailed over communism in the Cold War, implicitly relies on a sovereign nation that values international harmony and individual rights. The distinction between *nations* and *peoples* here is interesting, since a nation is a politicized people with shared identity and interests. It may be that peoples are groups that do not coalesce around a shared identity but nonetheless act as a political unit. In that case, peoples are to states what nations are to nation-states, and their common search for political and economic freedom creates different types of states. The nation's search for freedom finds its expression in the nation-state, undergirded by democratic nationalism. Nationalism as the belief that the nation has a right to be consistent with the state comes predominantly from Ernest Gellner, whose definition Bush channels without the explicit terminology of *nationalism*.

These descriptions of nations and nationalism suggest the influence of Hans Kohn, a historian who introduced the civic-ethnic dichotomy of nationalism in the mid-twentieth century. Kohn sought to explain the differences between benign nationalism in Western Europe and the more virulent, ethnocentric variety in Central and Eastern

38. Bush, NSS (1991), v.

Europe.³⁹ He begins his history of nationalism in the Enlightenment. Social contract theory, introduced by philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, argued that governments derive their legitimate authority from the consent of the governed, challenging Europe's political reality. "In search of a new basis for society," explains Kohn, "European thought crystallized around the three concepts of liberty, humanity, and patriotism."⁴⁰At first, these concepts circulated only among the educated minority, but they eventually became accessible to the lower classes and found their expression in national consciousness. However, Western and Eastern Europe had fundamentally different cultural traditions and social institutions through which these concepts could be interpreted and realized. As a result, shared values from the Enlightenment produced two contrasting visions of the nation: "one based upon liberal middle-class concepts and pointing to a consummation in a democratic world society, the other based upon irrational and pre-enlightened concepts and tending towards exclusiveness."⁴¹

Western or civic nationalism, the supposedly truer national expression of social contract theory, conceptualizes the nation as a voluntary union of citizens who aspire toward individual freedom and prosperity. It is "optimistic, pluralistic and rationalist."⁴² Among the three virtues of the Enlightenment which Kohn identified—liberty, humanity, and patriotism—it emphasizes liberty and humanity, pointing intuitively toward liberal

39. Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2001), 39.

40. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1960 [1944]), 455.

41. Kohn, 457.

42. Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 42.

democracy. This is Bush's "democratic nationalism," an expression of national consciousness that protects individuals' rights and dignity.

Eastern or ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, misconstrues the social contract and Enlightenment virtues, resulting in authoritarian systems that preserve national freedom at the expense of individual freedom.⁴³ Among the Enlightenment virtues, it emphasizes patriotism, the individual's emotional investment in the wellbeing of the nation, even at the expense of freedom and humanity. It fights for self-sufficiency. It is "founded on history, on monuments and graveyards," and its central challenge is to overcome the "inertia" of the past.⁴⁴ This is Bush's suicidal nationalism, painted against the same backdrop of Eastern Europe.

Since its conception in the mid-twentieth century, the civic-ethnic dichotomy has come under fire for historical reductionism and blatant normativity. The two charges are interrelated. According to Umut Özkırımlı, "Kohn was much more interested in the moral worth of different types of nationalism than in providing a descriptive classification of these types."⁴⁵ With this goal in mind, Kohn upholds civic nationalism as the ideal expression of national virtues and denounces ethnic nationalism as a backward expression of tribal exclusivity. The civic nation is good; the ethnic nation is bad. However, Kai Nelson brings the two conceptions together and identifies national culture as a necessary condition for both, leveling a charge at proponents of civic nationalism

43. Özkırımlı, 42.

44. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 573-74.

45. Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism*, 42.

who claim that it is a purely political principle.⁴⁶ In effect, those defendants cherry-pick cultural artifacts of civic nations to justify its moral value, usually by ignoring the linguistic and historical roots of national identity. Toward the other accusation of normativity, Matthew Blackburn concedes that the normative binary is “comfortable for the human mind in terms of moral psychology” but argues that it perpetuates methodological biases of Western scholarship.⁴⁷ George H. W. Bush demonstrates many of the same insensitivities these scholars identify. Consider his plea for Ukraine to remain coupled with Russia, a characterization of ethnic nationalism, or his ex post facto identification and commendation of democratic nationalism. Consider the language of violence that describes nationalist movements in the Balkans. Any charges directed at Kohn’s civic-ethnic dichotomy must also be directed toward Bush’s conceptualizations of nationalism, given how interconnected they appear to be.

The 1991 NSS and foreign policy rhetoric around the same time demonstrate Bush’s adherence to the theory of civic and ethnic nationalism, at least in the high-priority context of Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Bush administration was exploring visions of the new world order for the post-Cold War era. The 1993 NSS, released in the same month Bush left office, recorded those visions and the administration’s accomplishments, resulting in a document “devoid of any strategic

46. Kai Nelson, “Cultural Nationalism, Neither Ethnic nor Civic,” in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 124.

47. Matthew Blackburn, “The Persistence of the Civic-Ethnic Binary,” *National Identities* 24, no. 5 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2021.2006169>.

substance.”⁴⁸ It is nonetheless beneficial in crafting Bush’s conceptualization of nations and nationalism, since it espouses a particular view of the world by virtue of the strategic planning process.

The 1993 NSS features three mentions of nationalism, an increase in count and adjusted frequency from the preceding strategies; these mentions are only somewhat consistent with the use of nationalism in the 1991 NSS and foreign policy rhetoric. With the first mention, Bush promises that the United States “will also work toward the peaceful solution of ethnic and nationalistic tensions and crises in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.”⁴⁹ Bush clarifies his concept of nationalism by explicitly separating nationalistic tensions from ethnic tensions. This language would find support from Kai Nelson, who argues that a nation’s political aspirations distinguish it from an ethnic group.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, nationalism and ethnicity appear together both here and later in the 1993 NSS, where Bush states, “The end of the Cold War has coincided with a virtual explosion of long-dormant ethnic and aggressive nationalistic tensions around the world, many of which have degenerated into international crises.”⁵¹ Even if Bush intended a theoretical distinction between these movements, they are at least syntactically related. The strategy’s failure to clearly delineate the national security threat as ethnic or nationalistic perpetuates the perception of anti-liberal ethnonationalism in Eastern Europe.

48. Dilday, “Presidential Strategy,” 54.

49. George H. W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1993), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1993.pdf?ver=Dulx2wRKDaQ-ZrswRPRX9g%3d%3d>, 7.

50. Nelson, “Cultural Nationalism,” 123.

51. Bush, NSS (1993), 13.

The third mention of nationalism in the 1993 NSS is not regionally specific, but it is still styled in clear opposition to liberal democratic values. Bush states, “America’s postwar policies have provided leadership so that the industrial democracies have chosen to work together, rather than pursue the destructive economic nationalism of the inter-war period.”⁵² This context for economic nationalism mirrors Bush’s contextualization of ethnic tensions that thawed with the Cold War. Both economic and ethnic nationalism were associated with the inter-war period, which was characterized by an “every nation for itself” mentality, protectionist policies, and the emergence of authoritarian regimes. The era was inherently anti-liberal, and returning to its anti-liberal policies would be antithetical to the march toward liberalism and the “end of history.”⁵³

Economic nationalism is somewhat different from the variants discussed thus far, but like all nationalist ideologies, it centers the state as a vehicle for the perceived common good of a particular group. In this case, the state discriminates against foreign economies in order to reinforce and assert the nation’s own economic power in the international system.⁵⁴ This often occurs in response to an economic crisis that highlights the weaknesses of the global economy, such as the Great Depression or the COVID-19

52. Bush, NSS (1993), 9.

53. Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>. Fukuyama describes the Hegelian evolution of history toward liberalism as an organic process, but many readers internalized a responsibility to defend liberalism from contradictory ideologies, including nationalism.

54. C. Christopher Baughn and Attila Yaprak, “Economic Nationalism: Conceptual and Empirical Development,” *Political Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1996), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3792137>.

pandemic. More recently, the threat of economic nationalism has become synonymous with protectionism, usually seen in policies that restrict trade.⁵⁵ This was especially recognizable in the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, when industrializing nations turned inward after World War I and further inward after the Great Depression. Bush placed ethnic nationalism in the same period of history, associating that era with illiberalism and isolationism on both the ethnic and economic fronts.

The 1993 NSS crystallizes an illiberal conceptualization of nationalism in Bush's grand strategy, despite suggestions in earlier rhetoric of "democratic nationalism" and productive nationalist movements. Perhaps the distinction is too intricate to draw in a document that resembles "an extended speechwriting exercise," according to Paul Lettow.⁵⁶ Or perhaps deteriorating political conditions in the Balkans throughout 1992 made the Bush administration hesitant to legitimize any form of nationalism. A terminological analysis of the use of *nation* and *state* in Bush's strategies suggests the latter.

It cannot be said that Bush succumbs to methodological nationalism: the frequency of *country* is stable through all three strategies, and the frequencies of *nation* and *state* are nearly equal to each other in both the 1990 and 1991 NSSs. The context of each of these terms reveals their systematic use. *Nation* appears most frequently in reference to countries of strategic interest that are aligned with American national

55. Sam Pryke, "Economic Nationalism: Theory, History and Prospects," *Global Policy* 3, no. 3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2011.00146.x>.

56. Paul Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned," *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 2 (2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13195>, 118.

interests: always Western European allies, sometimes Latin American and Asian partners. In all three strategies' discussion of alliances, the term *state*, used to identify nonaligned countries, appears only once, compared to the term *nation*, used to describe all other actual and potential alliances.⁵⁷ Bush also favors the term *free nations* when discussing international cooperation in the 1990 and 1991 NSSs, putting forth a plan to “strengthen and enlarge the commonwealth of free nations that share a commitment to democracy and individual rights.”⁵⁸ Bush boldly affirms nations' inclusion in the international community when they demonstrate democratic nationalism, an implicit affirmation of both statehood and nationhood. Nations qua nation-states are critical to the American-led international order, although Bush resists the assumption that nations are the natural building block by using the term deliberately.

In contrast, *state* appears mostly in references to countries of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. The use of *state* in each of these regions is telling. In the Middle East, ethnic tensions are infamously volatile, especially because of imperialist intervention during the twentieth century. As discussed in the previous chapter, the language of *state* implicitly recognizes that national and political borders rarely coincide and therefore represents the region more accurately. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, *state* disavows national identities and intends to preserve the status quo. Bush communicated this as part of his grand strategy in the Chicken Kiev speech, in which he conceptualized nationalism as a dangerous revolt against a flawed but reparable system. By not affording the recognition of *nation* to the constituent republics of the

57. Bush, NSS (1991), 13.

58. Bush, NSS (1990), 3.

Soviet Union, before and after its collapse, the Bush administration effectively denies their right to national sovereignty. The 1993 NSS was the first to describe the countries of the former Soviet Union as newly independent states, language that persisted through the Clinton administration.⁵⁹ The terminology of *state* represents a systemic bias against the nation in these regional contexts due to the risk of nationalistic uprisings.

The language of *nation* and *state* in Bush's National Security Strategies brings continuity to his exploratory conceptualization of nationalism. As a movement, it is conceived differently in each strategy: it appears first as a tangential suggestion, then as an ethnic provocation, and finally as an illiberal ideology. From Bush's foreign policy rhetoric, however, one can derive a more complete theory of nationalism that channels Kohn's civic-ethnic dichotomy, regardless of its theoretical shortcomings. Ethnic nationalism stands in stark contrast—politically, culturally, and normatively—to civic or democratic nationalism. Bush bases this dichotomous idea on alarming political realities and a cautious strategic approach to volatility in Eastern Europe. At the same time, it is reinforced by the uses of *nation* and *state* throughout the strategies, which provide a systematic language for discussing statehood and nationhood relative to American national security interests in the international order. In the end, Bush's exploration of nationalism, although lacking in nuance and consistency, lays a theoretical and strategic foundation for conceptualizing nationalism in foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

59. Bush, NSS (1993), 16.

4. Bill Clinton: Engagement and Encroachment

While George H. W. Bush had introduced several concepts of nationalism for foreign policy, Bill Clinton viewed it in a new light. By the time Clinton became president of the United States in January 1993, the political and humanitarian crisis in the Balkans was at the forefront of the international agenda, and the international community looked to the United States for leadership, either through the United Nations or through its own might. Clinton responded in kind and brought the Balkans to the forefront of the American agenda.⁶⁰ While the United States did not respond decisively until 1995, this discourse undoubtedly influenced strategic thought from the start of the Clinton administration. The larger challenge for the Clinton administration was to respond to the Balkans and other items on the international agenda in a foreign policy vacuum inherited from George H. W. Bush, a remnant of Bush's cautious and exploratory approach to the post-Cold War order.⁶¹

Among all presidents since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, Bill Clinton came the closest to fulfilling the annual requirement of the National Security Strategy report, publishing seven strategies during his administration. Whether the strategies were satisfactory is a different question. Aaron Dilday claims that Clinton's strategies captured "not only the spirit of the [Goldwater-Nichols Act], but also the essence of proper strategic planning."⁶² The strategies outline a clear vision of an

60. Richard Sobel, "Trends: United States Intervention in Bosnia," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1988), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2749625>, 253.

61. James D. Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy: US Foreign Policy in a Post-Cold War World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 42.

62. Dilday, "Presidential Strategy," 89.

American-led international order, even if Clinton's actual foreign policy came under fire. The strategic planning process was less successful. Clinton did not publish the first strategy until eighteen months into his presidency, failing to meet the requirement to publish a report within the first one hundred days that a president is in office. According to Don Snider, the first strategy went through twenty-one drafts before publication, revealing the time and labor it took for the Clinton administration "to settle on a set of principles from which to design and implement a consistent foreign policy."⁶³ The administration was divided from the start on whether a presidential doctrine should fill the foreign policy vacuum and whether that doctrine would provide simple explanations for Americans or high-level directives for policy-makers. Ultimately, Clinton and his advisors developed a grand strategy of "engagement and enlargement," which they intended to announce publicly in a series of addresses to the United Nations General Assembly in September 1993.⁶⁴ The strategy described by Clinton, Warren Christopher, Anthony Lake, and Madeleine Albright garnered little popular or congressional support, forcing Clinton back to the drawing board.⁶⁵

Theorizing "Wounded Nationalism" in the First Term

A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement finally emerged in July 1994. Once again, it was not without its critics. William Safire, three years after deeming Bush's warning address on nationalism "Chicken Kiev," called the 1994 "En-En

63. Snider, "The National Security Strategy," 10-11.

64. Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy*, 82-83.

65. Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy*, 98-99.

Document” “so determinedly anti-controversial that it should provoke controversy.”⁶⁶

Engagement meant that the United States would be an active participant in the international order, a rebuke to post-Cold War isolationist tendencies. *Enlargement* meant that the United States would center democracy and the free market among its foreign policy objectives. While these ideas are not inherently incompatible with each other, the choice to use both suggests the ideological “tumescence” of the Clinton administration, according to Safire. Taken together as strategic principles, these ideas assert the United States’ bloated self-concept in the emergent international order. The strategy rightly recognizes the importance of American leadership, but it fails to describe specific tools of foreign policy that could effect meaningful change in persistent autocracies and emerging democracies. Furthermore, the strategy conflates an internationalist vision with specific national security objectives. The En-En Document is not strictly idealist, but internal tensions bureaucratic and ideological tensions challenged the actionability of Clinton’s internationalist vision.⁶⁷

To the administration’s credit, the first three strategies were at least remarkably consistent. Each under the title of “Engagement and Enlargement,” the strategies consolidated national security into three major priorities: enhancing security, promoting prosperity at home, and promoting democracy abroad.⁶⁸ The administration retained

66. William Safire, “The En-En Document,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/25/opinion/essay-the-en-en-document.html>.

67. Chin, Skinner, and Yoo, “Understanding National Security Strategies,” 110.

68. William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1994), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1994.pdf>.

similar language throughout the 1994, 1995, and 1996 strategies and only inserted sections as needed to reflect new priorities and international commitments, including the additions of “Summit of the Americas” in 1995 and “fighting international organized crime” in 1996.⁶⁹ With such consistency in structure and language, the first three strategies of the Clinton administration can be analyzed together.

In the first-term strategies, nationalism appears in two contexts. The first mention appears in the introduction, elevating nationalism to a more prominent place in the strategic assessment: “Worldwide, there is a resurgence of militant nationalism as well as ethnic and religious conflict.”⁷⁰ Clinton identifies this threat not only in Eastern Europe but also in Rwanda and Somalia, suggesting that it is not geographically contained to Europe as thought in earlier strategies. The second mention, however, comes in the integrated regional approach for Europe, which retains its place of importance in Clinton’s strategies. Clinton says that “democratic reforms...are the best answer to the aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatreds unleashed by the end of the Cold War.”⁷¹

The lesson is clear: nationalism is a threat to democracy. The administration that had debated the nature of strategic rhetoric and presidential doctrine ultimately decided that it should convey straightforward explanations and principles of foreign policy for American constituents. Descriptors such as *militant* and *aggressive* depict nationalism as

69. William Clinton, NSS (1995), Contents; William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1996), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1996.pdf?ver=4f8riCrLnHIA-H0itYUp6A%3d%3d>, Contents.

70. Clinton, NSS (1994), 1.

71. Clinton, 23.

an unambiguous threat to the international order. However, Clinton is careful—at least more careful than his predecessor—to distinguish nationalistic and ethnic tensions, pushing back on a theory of ethnic nationalism. Though these factors may be intertwined, nationalism is not inherently ethnic. Furthermore, if aggressive nationalism threatens national security and international order, there may be a non-aggressive variant that is more conducive to the internationalist vision.

Clinton’s 1993 address to the United Nations General Assembly, which was intended to introduce the administration’s grand strategy, describes a more nuanced idea of nationalism for an audience that included heads of state, policy-makers, and topical experts. Clinton introduces the principles and theories underlying his internationalist vision, including the nature of nationalism in the post-Cold War era.

As we work to keep the world's most destructive weapons out of conflict, we must also strengthen the international community's ability to address those conflicts themselves. For as we all now know so painfully, the end of the cold war did not bring us to the millennium of peace. And indeed, it simply removed the lid from many cauldrons of ethnic, religious, and territorial animosity.

The philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, has said that a wounded nationalism is like a bent twig forced down so severely that when released, it lashes back with fury. The world today is thick with both bent and recoiling twigs of wounded communal identities.⁷²

Clinton’s reference to Isaiah Berlin, a twentieth-century philosopher and champion of liberalism, grounds his conceptualization of nationalism in the broader intellectual discourse of the 1990s. Philosophy rarely makes such obvious intrusions into the rhetoric of foreign policy, but when it does, it must be taken seriously. In this instance, one can

72. William Clinton, “Remarks to the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, September 27, 1993), U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207375.htm>.

draw conclusions about the nature of nationalism and its aggressive tendencies in the post-Cold War era according to the Clinton administration.

The reference to “wounded nationalism” comes nearly verbatim from an interview Nathan Gardels conducted with Isaiah Berlin in 1991. Berlin said, “I have written elsewhere that a wounded *Volksgeist* is like a bent twig, forced down so severely that when released, it lashes back with a fury.”⁷³ The idea of *Volksgeist* comes from the work of Johann Gottfried von Herder, an eighteenth-century German poet and philosopher who crystallized Enlightenment ideas about the nation. For Herder, the nation is predominantly linguistic and cultural, and it provides a context for individual belonging and cultural development in an egalitarian, cosmopolitan world.⁷⁴ According to Berlin, “All [Herder] wanted was cultural self-determination...He only spoke about soil, language, common memories and customs.”⁷⁵ The realization of *Volksgeist* is an inclusive community constructed around shared language and culture. *Volksgeist* has been loosely translated as nationalism, such as in the context of Clinton’s address to the United Nations, but it literally translates to “the spirit of the people” and does not come with the political baggage of nationalism. Thus, when Clinton replaces *Volksgeist* with *nationalism*, the latter should be understood with all the characteristics of the former:

73. Nathan Gardels, “Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin,” *The New York Review*, November 21, 1991, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1991/11/21/two-concepts-of-nationalism-an-interview-with-isai/>.

74. Michael Forster, “Johann Gottfried von Herder,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023), ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/herder/>.

75. Gardels, “Two Concepts of Nationalism.”

cultural, aspirational, and non-aggressive.⁷⁶

If the nation is inherently non-aggressive, the conditions that compel nations to engage in aggressive conflict still need to be explained. For that, Berlin uses the bent twig analogy. The nation at peace is like a twig at rest, safe and nonthreatening. But an outside force may inflict stress and push the twig down, and when that force is removed, the twig recoils, threatening violence to anything in its path. Nations can be much more violent than a twig, but the core principle of Berlin's analogy is that stress from an outside force prompts a psychological reaction against it. In the case of nations, stress comes from "some form of collective humiliation"—colonialism, genocide, or another oppressive national experience, typically inflicted by another nation or state. National consciousness swells in opposition to the oppressor, eventually resulting in aggressive nationalistic recoil. Berlin writes, "It might be said that [nationalism] is an automatic psychological accompaniment of liberation from foreign rule—a natural reaction, on Schiller's 'bent twig' theory, against oppression or humiliation of a society that possesses national characteristics." In his final estimation, nationalism is "an inflamed condition of national consciousness," under which conditions the nation asserts itself in dangerous ways on the international stage.⁷⁷ Throughout his work, Berlin describes nationalism somewhat inconsistently, and here, it is unclear whether it is found in the recoiling of the twig or in

76. Fania Oz-Salzberger, "Isaiah Berlin on Nationalism, the Modern Jewish Condition, and Zionism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Joshua L Cherniss and Steven B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). By inserting *nationalism*, Clinton distorts Berlin's Herderian description of the nation, which identifies these characteristics with national consciousness. Berlin reserves *nationalism* for political expressions of national consciousness.

77. Isaiah Berlin, "The Bent Twig," *Foreign Affairs* (1972), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1972-10-01/bent-twig>.

its experience under stress.⁷⁸ But in either case, nationalism is rooted in a distorted conception of national consciousness as a result of outside forces.

Clinton and Berlin both attribute these outside forces to political conditions during the Cold War, from which nationalism emerged aggressively in the last decade of the twentieth century. Berlin attributes the rise of nationalism to the end of communism: “Stalin did keep it – and everything else – down, but he didn’t kill it. As soon as the stone was rolled away from the grave it rose again with a vengeance.”⁷⁹ Following decades of communist suppression and ideological competition, many nations felt an urgent need to vindicate their existence apart from political ideologies. Communism had inflamed national consciousness throughout Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and even parts of Africa and Asia. Because of that, the end of the Cold War was not the beginning of peace, as many had hoped. It was the beginning of a new kind of conflict spurred on by “bent and recoiling twigs of wounded communal identities,” in the words of Bill Clinton. The recognition of woundedness suggests that these nations deserve sympathy and an outlet for national expression. But from the perspective of the Clinton administration, the time for that had passed. Twigs were recoiling rapidly and violently throughout the world, and it was the task of the United States to moderate those nations’ aggressive self-assertion for the good of the international order.

Thomas Pick theorizes the causes of militant nationalism in Eastern Europe after the Cold War, pointing to various mechanisms by which communism may have

78. David Miller, “Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Isaiah Berlin’s Nationalism,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2005.00519.x>.

79. Gardels, “Two Concepts of Nationalism.”

facilitated its resurgence. His most persuasive hypothesis can be summarized as the “communist suppression of nationalism.” This hypothesis provides more depth to Berlin and Clinton’s account of nationalism, which describes it as dormant during the Cold War and resurgent in its aftermath. Pick claims that the Marxist emphasis on class identity and class struggle subsumed national identity, which had been an important force in Eastern Europe prior to World War II. With class identity rendered irrelevant by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ideology, national identity reemerged and effectively replaced class conflict with national conflict to maintain a sense of meaning. Revolutionaries superimposed the messages of class conflict onto nations, and as a result, nationalism which had roots in the early twentieth century took on a violent character by the century’s end.⁸⁰ In this model, aggression can be attributed to the wounds inflicted by communism on the nations rather than to an offensive national identity, which was necessary to create meaning in the ideological void of post-Soviet states.

Pick provides just one potential theory of the relationship between nationalism and violence. Within the discipline of nationalism studies, aggressive nationalism has perhaps been the most studied variant since it has overt effects on international relations and foreign policy. Claims that resurface every three or four decades about the “new nationalism” focus predominantly on these aggressive tendencies. Lawrence Rosenthal and Vesna Rodic, for example, identify the emergence of aggressive nationalistic expression in the late nineteenth century. The “new nationalism” of this era, characterized by radical ingroup and outgroup discrimination, would later “animate movements of

80. Thomas M. Pick, “Eastern European Militant Nationalism,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 3, no. 4 (1997), https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327949pac0304_5.

national liberation in the second half of the twentieth century.”⁸¹ In the last days of the Cold War, Charles Krauthammer pointed to “intolerant aggressive nationalism in a disintegrating communist bloc” as a threat that necessitated American leadership.⁸² The conflict that followed in the Balkans elicited extensive interdisciplinary scholarship on the relationships between ethnicity, nationalism, and violence.⁸³ In a collection of essays titled “The New Nationalism,” Lars-Erik Cederman traces the connection between nationalism and violence in multiple regions and eras, most recently in the form of violence against international norms and institutions.⁸⁴ This brief survey reveals diverse and enduring expressions of national aggression in the modern world.

Aggression is often unpredictable—its form, its severity, its object, and its goal. Anticipating and theorizing aggressive nationalism thus requires more attention to the conditions from which it might arise. In a review of theories of nationalism and foreign policy, Harris Mylonas and Kendrick Kuo identify two fundamentally different visions of nationalism: one following Ernest Gellner that sees nations and nationalism as the benign bedrock of the liberal international order, and another following Eli Kedourie that sees

81. Lawrence Rosenthal and Vesna Rodic, “A Storm before the Great Storm: New Faces of a Distinctly Twentieth-Century Nationalism,” in *The New Nationalism and the First World War*, ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Vesna Rodic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137462787_1.

82. Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* (1990), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1990-01-01/unipolar-moment>.

83. For one of the most representative works in this area, see Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/223488>.

84. Lars-Erik Cederman, “Blood for Soil: The Fatal Temptations of Ethnic Politics,” *Foreign Affairs* (2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-02-12/blood-soil>.

nationalism as a “war-prone ideology.”⁸⁵ Many scholars of nationalism and war—and most policy-makers, by way of oversimplified theory—follow Kedourie’s assumption, occasionally introducing other variables such as political ideology and military capability to create an illusion that nationalism is more nuanced. As a result, nationalism is assumed to be inherently aggressive. The natural foreign policy response is to quell nationalism itself.

Beneath Clinton’s austere rhetoric, though, lies a more sophisticated account of nations and their discontents. Through a theory of nationalism drawn from Isaiah Berlin, the Clinton administration assumes a more sympathetic approach aligned with the thought of Ernest Gellner. While nationalism has its violent expressions, foreign policy should focus on restraining aggression and vindicating peaceful nations rather than altering the fundamental social order. The United States’ international engagement has the potential to heal the wounds of the Cold War, restore national pride, and simultaneously enlarge democracy among the nations.

Reconceptualizing Nationalism in the Second Term

The 1997 *National Security Strategy for a New Century* departs from the familiar structure of the first three strategies. It reduces U.S. national interests to two main priorities, “enhancing security” and “promoting prosperity,” and demonstrates much stronger analytical and strategic approaches to major regions such as Europe and East Asia. Furthermore, it references the twenty-first century in the title and twenty other

85. Harris Mylonas and Kendrick Kuo, “Nationalism and Foreign Policy,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. Cameron G. Thies (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.452>, 230.

times throughout, creating a document that is strikingly forward-looking and methodologically sound.⁸⁶ But for all these changes, it retains the same objectives as Clinton's previous strategies, "dusted off, reworded, and injected into the 1997 NSS to appear as though they are novel and exciting initiatives."⁸⁷ It is true that the 1997 NSS recycles a significant amount of language from earlier strategies, but criticizing it for that is unfair to the bureaucratic environment in which it was produced. Instead, it is best understood as a transitional document from the first term to the second term of the Clinton administration. The cabinet in Clinton's first term had been riddled with conflict, as evidenced by the delay of the first NSS. In his second term, Clinton formed a "more robust" cabinet with personalities such as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen.⁸⁸ While preserving and championing Clinton's familiar internationalism, this cabinet brought pragmatic and proactive sensibilities to Clinton's foreign policy, which are reflected in the changes in the 1997 NSS published five months into the second term. The subsequent second-term strategies demonstrate less continuity than their first-term counterparts because the cabinet designed them to be more responsive to changing priorities and threats.

In its discussion of nationalism, the 1997 NSS balances the precedent of past strategies with the second-term cabinet's analytically stronger threat assessment. The first mention is recycled from the first-term strategies, describing how "Democratic

86. William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1997), <https://history.defense.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=AT2OuxrhV4k%3d&tabid=9115&portalid=70&mid=20231>.

87. Dilday, "President Strategy," 85.

88. Boys, *Clinton's Grand Strategy*, 271.

reforms...are the best answer to the aggressive nationalism and ethnic hatreds unleashed by the end of the Cold War.” But it continues with new analysis: “Already, the prospect of joining or rejoining the Western democratic family has dampened the forces of nationalism and strengthened the forces of democracy and reform in many countries of the region.”⁸⁹ This description pits nationalism against democracy, implying that they are inconsistent and competitive ideologies. The preface to the 1998 NSS reinforces the perception of nationalism as a threat, among other transnational challenges: “The same forces [of integration] that bring us closer increase our interdependence, and make us more vulnerable to forces like extreme nationalism....” The United States’ responsibility, in contrast, lies in “harnessing the forces of global integration for the benefit of our own people and people around the world.”⁹⁰ Nationalism appears in similar contexts to the earlier strategies, but it is styled much more clearly in opposition to Clintonian internationalism. The 1997 and 1998 NSSs posit a less sympathetic view than the first-term conceptualization of “wounded nationalism.”

Clinton’s 1997 address to the United Nations General Assembly served a similar purpose to his 1993 address—outlining the principles and theoretical undercurrents of his grand strategy—but was met with a more modest response. Nonetheless, it serves to clarify the National Security Strategies. Clinton explains the antagonistic role of nationalism in his internationalist vision:

The forces of global integration are a great tide, inexorably wearing away the established order of things. But we must decide what will be left in its wake.

89. Clinton, NSS (1997), 27.

90. William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1998), <https://history.defense.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=f609EzpOtB0%3d&tabid=9115&portalid=70&mid=20231>, iii.

People fear change when they feel its burdens but not its benefits. They are susceptible to misguided protectionism, to the poisoned appeals of extreme nationalism, and ethnic, racial, and religious hatred.⁹¹

Clinton's focus on individual human experience here and throughout his strategies suggests a vision of a world order that is not only international but cosmopolitan.

According to Thomas Kwasi Tiekku, quoting Andrew Linklater, "In the Clintonian cosmopolitan world, human beings inhabit a moral community with equal rights and values that go beyond the 'parochial world of the sovereignty state.'"⁹² It is primarily a moral ideal rather than a political one, and as such, it does not require a particular state.⁹³ Nonetheless, nationalism is often described as diametrically opposed to such a system due to different ideals of justice—one conforming to national interests, the other conforming to liberal aspirations. On popular conceptions of these ideas, including those that circulate among policy-makers, the nation-state would be incompatible with a cosmopolitan order.⁹⁴

This raises an important question: are nationalism and cosmopolitanism reconcilable? Alongside Cederman's warning about violent nationalism in *Foreign Affairs*, Kwame Anthony Appiah attempts a defense of cosmopolitanism, calling the

91. William Clinton, "Remarks to the 52d Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (speech, New York, September 22, 1997), U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207553.htm>.

92. Thomas Kwasi Tiekku, "Clinton's Liberal Cosmopolitan Narrative," in *United States-Africa Relations in the Age of Obama* (Ithaca: The Cornell Institute for African Development, 2012), <https://cornellpress.manifoldapp.org/read/united-states-africa-relations-in-the-age-of-obama/section/f9aaf71c-7847-404c-8994-13ada58d0871#ch02>.

93. Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice Without Borders: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ProQuest Ebook Central, 10.

94. Tan, *Justice Without Borders*, 86-87.

ideology “an expansive act of the moral imagination.”⁹⁵ In his view, nationalism, conceptualized as an individual’s identification with a nation-state, embeds cosmopolitan principles—egalitarianism, “imaginative identification,” and concern for others—in local norms and institutions. These practices at the national level facilitate moral universalism as people inevitably engage with one another across national boundaries. In attempting to reconcile these ideologies, Appiah loses the essence of both: nationalism is no longer particular, and cosmopolitanism is no longer universal. Cosmopolitanism cannot be fully learned when nationalism is the teacher. Another attempt comes from Kok-Chor Tan. Liberal nationalism, a strand of thought that describes the liberal order in terms of national identification, may provide a path toward reconciliation; it shares ideals of autonomy, justice, and democracy with cosmopolitanism, although with different institutional orientations.⁹⁶ However, that is not the strand of nationalism represented in Clinton’s second-term grand strategy. Nationalism as he conceptualizes it encroaches on the liberal international order. As a result, it must be excluded from Clinton’s cosmopolitan vision.

Nationalism was increasingly conceptualized as a threat not only to the ideological foundations of Clinton’s grand strategy but also to national security itself. Though it does not appear at all in the 1999 NSS, its mention in the 2000 NSS reads more like a threat assessment: “Unfortunately, in the Republika Srpska (RS) some hard-line nationalists still resist efforts to implement several Dayton [Accords] objectives, from

95. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Importance of Elsewhere: In Defense of Cosmopolitanism,” *Foreign Affairs* (2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/importance-elsewhere-cosmopolitanism-appiah>.

96. Tan, *Justice Without Borders*, 91.

refugee returns to the arrest of war criminals.”⁹⁷ The 2000 NSS, released less than two months before the end of Clinton’s presidency, reads much like Bush’s 1993 strategy: a “pat on the back” and a loaded proposal for the next administration, instead of a document with any strategic import.⁹⁸ However, the Clinton administration thought it important enough to identify nationalism as a standing threat for the next presidential administration.

This kind of threat identification can also be found in records of annual hearings before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The threat of nationalist obstruction of the Dayton Accords in Bosnia, a peace agreement creating a single state composed of several ethnic groups, appeared in the 1998 hearing on “current and projected national security threats to the United States,” which also references terrorists’ exploitation of nationalism and nationalist movements in Turkey, Russia, and India. Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet expresses the need for international engagement to weaken the influence of “hardline nationalists” and ensure stability in unpredictable regimes.⁹⁹ With discussions such as these at the highest levels of government, nationalism is explicitly conceptualized as a national security threat, decreasing its legitimacy in the international order and increasing the focus due to it in foreign policy.

97. William Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a Global Age* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2000), <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2000.pdf>, 55.

98. Chin, Skinner, and Yoo, “Understanding National Security Strategies,” 111.

99. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., January 28, 1998, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/current-and-projected-national-security-threats-united-states-january-28-1998#>.

Conceptualizing nationalism as a concrete threat requires a more concrete mode of analysis to respond with appropriate foreign policy. Patrick Hughes, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, introduces such a paradigm for threat analysis in the 1996 Select Committee on Intelligence hearing on national security threats. The military threat paradigm describes four classifications of actors and situations according to their relationship to the U.S. military and national interests.¹⁰⁰

1996 Military Threat Paradigm			
Compliant Competitors	Non-Compliant Competitors	Renegade Adversaries	Emergency Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No violence against the U.S. - High alignment with U.S. values and interests - Military allies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrequent violence against the U.S. - Low alignment with U.S. values and interests - Circumstantial engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent violence against the U.S. - Opposed to U.S. values and interests - May become military enemies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Require immediate military response

Figure 2. Military Threat Paradigm of the Clinton Administration, (Cody Johnson, adapted from Patrick M. Hughes Statement for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 22, 1996).

The first category, “compliant competitors,” includes those “who generally conform to U.S. values and interests, and who can be viewed as military allies,” such as countries in Western Europe. The second category, “non-compliant competitors,” encompasses the range of those “who do not generally conform to U.S. values and interests but who are not military adversaries.” The United States’ relationship with these

100. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Global Military Threats to the United States and its Interests Abroad*, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., February 22, 1996, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/currentprojected00unit.pdf>, 233-243.

actors is highly circumstantial but predictably nonviolent. Third, “renegade adversaries” “are those who engage in unacceptable behavior,” including potential or actual violence against the United States. These first three categories may include nation-states or transnational entities. Hughes includes a fourth category, “emergency conditions,” which accounts for situations that warrant immediate military engagement, including humanitarian disasters and conflict de-escalation. To account for the full range of international actors, these classifications are dynamic; actors may move freely within and among classifications. Therefore, the United States must invest in ongoing analysis to understand “the changing nature of the operational environment.”

The military follows significant trends and conditions which may turn them into threats. Among these trends, Hughes includes “ethno-linguistic pan-nationalism” as a trend of military significance which “has been and is likely to be a source of conflict.”¹⁰¹ This paradigm helps decision-makers classify nationalist threats and inform the United States’ response. Some nationalist movements are not aligned with American interests but are not aggressive in a way that requires engagement. Other movements may position themselves as renegade adversaries in violent opposition to American interests. Bosnian nationalists, for example, may be squarely classified as non-compliant competitors that warrant continued attention, lest they become renegade adversaries. With the conceptualization of nationalism as an explicit national security threat, this paradigm provides continuity to evaluate and respond to nationalist threats.

The continued emphasis on the nation-state as a primary actor in this paradigm, in

101. This threat identification in 1996 found its strategic voice in the 1997 NSS, which reconceptualized nationalism as an explicit threat. The Intelligence Community’s threat assessments typically precede threat identification in strategic rhetoric by one year.

addition to the use of *nation* and *state* throughout the NSSs, suggests methodological nationalism in Clinton's foreign policy. Even when nationalism is antithetical to national security priorities, the Clinton administration sees the nation-state at the center of the international order and imbues foreign policy with the language of nations. In Clinton's first three National Security Strategies, the use of *nation* is abnormally high: 1.903 counts per page in 1994, 2.057 in 1995, and 2.021 in 1996. The use of *people* in a political context is also noticeably higher in Clinton's strategies than in George H. W. Bush's strategies: 0.548 counts per page in 1994, 0.600 in 1995, and 0.574 in 1996, compared to frequencies in Bush's strategies which never exceeded 0.261 counts per page. Clinton follows many of the same conventions as the Bush administration, such as using *nation* for countries in Europe and *state* for countries in the Middle East. Beyond those conventions, however, Clinton also uses *nation* and *people* in reference to regions like East Asia, Africa, and specific countries like Haiti, Cuba, and Bosnia that were fighting for democracy. Clinton's nation-centered language, with connotations of national sovereignty and self-determination, served his strategic priority of democracy in the post-Cold War era.

Of all presidential administrations in this study, concepts of the nation and nationalism are the most complex and dynamic in Clinton's administration. During his presidency, the idea of nationalism evolves from Isaiah Berlin's wounded national consciousness to an unambiguous national security threat. Like Bush before him, Clinton responds to nationalist movements abroad by reconceptualizing nationalism in his grand strategy, although Clinton uses more robust theoretical foundations. At the same time, these changes reflect the Clinton administration's increasing disillusionment with

nationalism as it proves itself to be aggressive and incendiary in the Balkans and elsewhere. In response, the administration developed a compelling paradigm for understanding and responding to nationalist threats. Clinton's intentional strategic and theoretical engagement with nationalism laid the groundwork for understanding it in the twenty-first century, although the threat seemed to be petering out by the end of his administration.

5. George W. Bush and Barack Obama: The Twilight of Nationalism

Perhaps it was more difficult to see the world in three dimensions when the sun stood at its zenith. In the evening, shadows grow and allow us to perceive the environment in clearer contours. What we discover in this twilight is how transnational the modern world has always been.

– Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller¹⁰²

The dawn of the new century brought the twilight of nationalism. The nationalist crisis in the Balkans had been quelled by compromise and international peacekeeping operations, nationalist rhetoric in Russia quieted after Putin's election, and the United States had anchored itself as the leader of a global community. In his final National Security Strategy, Clinton heralded a global age that disavowed nationalism, conceptualizing it as a fading threat to democracy and human rights. George W. Bush inherited a foreign policy that pushed nationalism to the side, based on both strategic threat assessments and internationalist ideals.

Bush campaigned with a foreign policy platform more strongly rooted in realism, a marked contrast to Clintonian idealism.¹⁰³ Much like his predecessor, though, Bush championed a liberal international order characterized by effective international organizations, peaceful competition, and American leadership. Nationalist threats were few, and those that persisted were hardly a threat to this strategic vision, especially if the United States continued actively defending liberal values and rallying the international community against nationalistic exclusivism. Bush's only mention of *nationalism* in a

102. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>, 302.

103. Janine Yagielski and Candy Crowley, "Bush Lays Out Foreign Policy Vision," *CNN*, November 19, 1999, <https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/11/19/bush.speech/>.

public address during his entire presidency came in remarks at Warsaw University in Poland on June 15, 2001. Even then, Bush speaks of nationalism in the Balkans in the past tense, explaining how the region took a different course than Poland after the Cold War: “There, communism fell, but dictators exploited a murderous nationalism to cling to power and to conquer new land.” The post-nationalist peace in the Balkans is fragile. Nonetheless, Bush says, “For the first time in history, all governments in the region are democratic, committed to cooperating with one another, and predisposed to join Europe.”¹⁰⁴ Democratization in the Balkans illustrates the global trend towards liberal democracy that brought the twilight of nationalism at the turn of the century.

The sidelining of nationalism in favor of democracy, as both a matter of fact and a matter of strategy, demonstrates the pervasive impact of democratic peace theory, “a virtual truism in the study of international relations.”¹⁰⁵ The central dogma of democratic peace theory maintains that democracies do not fight one another, so an international order with more democracies will be more peaceful. As one example of this, Bush says in the 2002 NSS, “America will encourage the advancement of democracy and economic openness in [Russia and China], because these are the best foundations for domestic

104. George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President in Address to Faculty and Students of Warsaw University” (speech, Warsaw, June 15, 2001), The White House, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010615-1.html>.

105. Omar G. Encarnación, “Bush and the Theory of the Democratic Peace,” *Global Dialogue* 8, no. 3 (2006), retrieved on April 24, 2024, from <http://proxy.houghton.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/bush-theory-democratic-peace/docview/211505649/se-2>.

stability and international order.”¹⁰⁶ However, Bush’s version of democratic peace theory ignores an important premise: “it applies only to mature democracies.”¹⁰⁷ Emerging democracies—in the Balkans, Ukraine, Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico, as of 2000—are inherently unstable, and their adherence to an electoral democratic system is not enough to guarantee liberal democratic values like the rule of law and pluralism which operationalize democratic peace.¹⁰⁸ Transitioning to democracy, even while minimizing nationalist threats, is only one step in cultivating international peace which depends on sustainable democratic institutions. This is a fundamental error in Bush’s concept of nationalism and democracy.

Three months after Bush’s address in Warsaw, nationalism became entirely irrelevant in the scheme of grand strategy. The September 11 terrorist attacks provoked the Bush administration and redefined its priorities, resulting in a nearly immediate shift from positive internationalism to the war on terror. Any grand strategy Bush developed in the first months of his presidency was nullified and reformulated to confront transnational threats, especially terrorism. Though terrorism had been understood as a transnational threat in earlier presidential administrations, 9/11 forced the United States to imagine a new range of existential threats, compounded by the unanticipated strength of non-state actors and abuses of technology. The 2002 National Security Strategy, published a full

106. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2002), <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss.pdf>, v.

107. Encarnación, “Democratic Peace.”

108. Larry Diamond, “A Report Card on Democracy,” *Hoover Institution*, July 30, 2000, <https://www.hoover.org/research/report-card-democracy>.

year after 9/11, commits to “defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants.”¹⁰⁹

Describing the context for his grand strategy, Bush says,

The militant visions of class, nation, and race which promised utopia and delivered misery have been defeated and discredited. America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few. We must defeat these threats to our Nation, allies, and friends.¹¹⁰

These characterizations of the new national security threats suggest that nationalist threats have been supplanted by rogue states and “embittered” individuals. Bush embraced that challenge by shaping his internationalist goals around these threats, resulting in a strategy and foreign policy defined by the war on terror. In contrast, nationalism makes no appearance in the 2002 or 2006 NSS.

Barack Obama assumed the presidency during the Great Recession of 2008 to 2009. While the effect of this financial crisis on foreign policy was less drastic than the effect of 9/11, it reinforced the foreign policy for globalization that Obama inherited from Bush. At the same time, Obama recognizes more of the challenges associated with such a vision. He states in the preface to the 2010 NSS, “Globalization has also intensified the dangers we face—from international terrorism and the spread of deadly technologies, to economic upheaval and a changing climate.”¹¹¹ Obama attempts to reprioritize or “rebalance” these policy issues, downgrading terrorism and spotlighting Asia, but the

109. Bush, NSS (2002), iv.

110. Bush, NSS (2002), 1.

111. Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf, preface.

result is a strategic amalgamation of his predecessors' visions and principles to respond to threats of a new decade.¹¹² Nationalism has no home in the landscape of transnational threats described in the 2010 NSS. Like Bush, Obama rarely mentions *nationalism* in foreign policy rhetoric—never in NSSs—and focuses instead on threats that transcend national borders and exclusive national interests. Bush and Obama share an approach to nationalism in grand strategy at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which is to say that they have no approach to it at all; it is simply absent.

It is necessary to distinguish the absence of nationalism in foreign policy rhetoric from the presence of nationalism in deliberative discourse. Nationalism identified as such was not entirely absent during the Bush and Obama administrations. Since 2006, the Intelligence Community has produced Annual Threat Assessments in the tradition of earlier Senate hearings, which have since been codified in the same section of U.S. law as national security strategy reports. Throughout the Bush and Obama administrations, these reports regularly identify nationalism in a variety of contexts: Sunni nationalism in Iraq,¹¹³ Arab and Islamic nationalism throughout the Middle East,¹¹⁴ and ethnic nationalism in the Balkans,¹¹⁵ to name a few. The Bush and Obama administrations were

112. Chin, Skinner, and Yoo, "Understanding National Security Strategies," 113.

113. John D. Negroponte, "Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," February 2, 2006, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20060202_testimony.pdf, 7.

114. Dennis C. Blair, "Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Armed Services Committee," March 10, 2009, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20090310_testimony.pdf, 9, 12-13.

115. James R. Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," February 9, 2016, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/SASC_Unclassified_2016_ATA_SFR_FINAL.pdf, 20.

not oblivious to nationalist movements that threatened stability in multiple regions of the world. However, such movements were relatively unimportant to grand strategy, as seen in their absence from National Security Strategies and public addresses. Furthermore, due to the lack of rhetorical attention, the conceptualization of nationalism is underdeveloped; where it appears in Annual Threat Assessments, it is rarely described with any detail or context that would suggest its conceptualization beyond a simple threat in the tradition of the Clinton administration's military threat paradigm.

Instead, in the new landscape of militant state and non-state actors, especially those espousing extremist ideologies, the nation itself is under attack—not the American nation per se, but the nation as a community of belonging. Nationalism scholar Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as “an imagined political community”—imagined in that members will never know all their fellow members, and a community in that members feel “deep, horizontal comradeship” in spite of this.¹¹⁶ This camaraderie exists as both a characteristic of the nation and an end in itself, satisfying individuals' desire for a sense of belonging and cultivating their national consciousness. Extremism preys on the fact that this camaraderie is imagined. It exploits those who are disillusioned with their community, who do not feel that sense of belonging, and inculcates antinational sentiments. Disenfranchised individuals in diverse communities like the United States are especially vulnerable to radicalization, since diversity precludes many ethnocultural similarities that conventionally unite nations. Obama describes the threat extremism poses to the United States in the 2010 NSS: “Without our own communities,

116. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6-7.

those who seek to recruit and radicalize individuals will often try to prey upon isolation and alienation.”¹¹⁷ Bush similarly wrote of the need “to ensure that the conditions and ideologies that promote terrorism do not find fertile ground in any nation.”¹¹⁸ He says, “The characteristics we most cherish—our freedom, our cities, our systems of movement, and our modern life—are vulnerable to terrorism.”¹¹⁹ The challenge for a democratic nation, then, is to maintain national unity so that it can effectively counter the existential threat posed by extremism. The United States must strengthen and defend its imagined community.

This line of thought demonstrates a strand of nationalism that is endogenous to U.S. foreign policy, and scholars have generally approached questions about nationalism from this perspective, at least in the Bush administration.¹²⁰ While the subject of nationalist expression in foreign policy is outside the scope of this study, it is relevant to consider nationalist expression against transnational threats that discourages naming nationalism as a threat. Consider, for example, the Bush Doctrine of preemption, best described in the 2006 NSS: “The first duty of the United States Government remains what it always has been: to protect the American people and American interests. It is an enduring American principle that this duty obligates the government to anticipate and counter threats, using all elements of national power, before the threats can do grave

117. Obama, NSS (2010), 37.

118. Bush, NSS (2002), 6.

119. Bush, 31.

120. For a review of claims about nationalism and the Bush Doctrine, see Chris W. Baum, “Nationalism in United States Foreign Policy in the Post 9/11 Era” (MS thesis, Portland State University, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.2528>.

damage.”¹²¹ With this mission and ethos in clear view, Bush emphasizes the United States’ role as a leader among nations against transnational threats. The preemptive posture of the United States is grounded in a national self-concept and, as a result, a brand of nationalism characterized by “liberal exceptionalism.”¹²² The American people pursuing national interests through the state affirm preemption against perceived threats—what critics of the Bush Doctrine might term aggressive nationalism. This nationalistic strand of thought within the United States itself has an ardent manifestation in foreign policy.

Scholars would be right to study nationalism similarly in the Obama administration, since Obama claimed it for himself. He explained this in an address in Osawatomie, Kansas, on December 6, 2011.¹²³ One hundred years earlier, Theodore Roosevelt had introduced “the New Nationalism” in the same town, an idea which became the basis for his unsuccessful 1912 presidential campaign; Obama had more success with it in 2012. This “New Nationalism” emphasized the capacity of the American people to meet contemporary challenges when acting according to the national interest. Obama quotes Roosevelt’s Osawatomie address directly: “We are all Americans. Our common interests are as broad as the continent.” Obama also quotes Roosevelt’s

121. Bush, NSS (2006), 18.

122. Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy,” *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137499>.

123. Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Economic in Osawatomie, Kansas” (speech, Osawatomie, December 6, 2011), The White House, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/12/06/remarks-president-economy-osawatomie-kansas>.

First Annual Message to Congress on the state of the union: “The fundamental rule in our national life—the rule which underlies all others—is that, on the whole, and in the long run, we shall go up or down together.”¹²⁴ This expression of nationalism emphasizes the unity of the American nation and the shared interests of the American people, especially in the face of novel challenges. Where Bush relied on the strength of the nation for his foreign policy, Obama relied on the unity of the nation—in both cases, an expression of nationalism. It would be rhetorically inconsistent for these presidents to name something as a threat that is vital to the conceptual foundations of foreign policy.

These appeals to the nation in light of transnational threats demonstrate methodological nationalism by privileging the nation-state as the primary unit of the international system. Bush and Obama describe extremism, terrorism, and other issues as threats to the nation rather than the state, and the nation is assumed to be congruent with the state in most instances. Methodological nationalism is most strongly evidenced by the prevalence of *nation* rather than *state* or *country*. The 2010 NSS is no exception, with *nation* earning a total of one hundred mentions in reference to countries apart from the United States, a frequency of 1.818 counts per page. Obama also refers to the United States as a nation twenty-five times. In comparison, the strategy uses *state* thirty-six times and *country* forty-three times.¹²⁵ With this language, in addition to implicit appeals to nationalistic sentiments, Obama demonstrates methodological nationalism. Bush similarly demonstrates this assumption, although it is not evidenced by the same

124. Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Message,” The American Presidency Project, December 3, 1901, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/first-annual-message-16>.

125. Obama, NSS (2010).

terminological trends. Among all strategies since the Cold War, the terms *nation*, *state*, and *country* come the closest to equal frequencies in the 2002 and 2006 documents. However, with the aforementioned descriptions of the American nation and national interests, methodological nationalism still persists in the Bush administration.

Beneath this methodological nationalism lies another error: normative nationalism, which assumes not only that the nation is foundational to the international order but that it establishes normative standards. Normative nationalism privileges and defends the presumed normative authority of the nation-state against intrusive moral actors, including terrorists. It is “bound up with the idea that polities possess some trait(s) from which the concepts of legitimacy and justice germinate,” in contrast to “antecedent apolitical notions of justice.”¹²⁶ Eric Storm describes the expression of this bias in “normatively charged vocabulary that is used in speaking of ‘imposition’, ‘exploitation’, ‘subjugation’, ‘shadow’ and ‘darkness’” which violated nation-state ideals in colonial histories. Such language reflects the belief that the nation-state is not only the natural political unit of the international order but also the source of international norms.¹²⁷ Storm is one of only a few scholars to identify normative nationalism. Sometimes it is subsumed under methodological nationalism, but he argues convincingly that scholars, especially historians, must recognize the different biases expressed in methodological and normative nationalism. The first implies that nations are incontrovertibly foundational for the modern world; the second implies that interactions among nations are foundational

126. Ashish George, “Against Normative Nationalism” (MA thesis, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2011), <https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis/194>.

127. Storm, “A New Dawn in Nationalism Studies?”

for modern conceptions of justice.

Normative nationalism explains why transnational threats such as terrorism and extremism are so dire in Bush and Obama's grand strategies: they challenge the moral precedent set forth by nations and their interactions. In the 2010 NSS, Obama describes how international cooperation has generated contemporary norms. "America has not succeeded by stepping outside the currents of international cooperation. We have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice — so that nations thrive by meeting their responsibilities and face consequences when they don't."¹²⁸ International norms are the product of the system of nation-states, which are then responsible to sustain those norms.

Methodological nationalism does not necessarily lead to normative nationalism, but it is necessarily prior to normative nationalism. This is best seen by comparing Obama's strategies to Clinton's. Clintonian cosmopolitanism derives notions of justice from what people owe to one another. Obama's internationalism, however, derives notions of justice from what nations owe to one another and what non-nation-state actors owe to the nation. This kind of normative nationalism is blatantly inconsistent with cosmopolitanism. Obama looks to the shared interests of peoples and nations, instead of the rights and obligations of people alone, as a source of international norms for establishing peace.¹²⁹ The nation provides not only a political framework but also a normative framework for international cooperation for common interests. Clinton engages in methodological nationalism, whereas Obama's biases are both methodological

128. Obama, NSS (2010), preface.

129. Obama, 7.

and normative, as seen in their different sources of justice.

To this point, I have only referenced Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy, which demonstrates these methodological and normative assumptions through the significant use of *nation* and nation-centered language. The 2015 National Security Strategy marks a significant shift in the assumptions of Obama's grand strategy that has not been recognized by commentators.

Several authors have highlighted strategic shifts in the 2015 NSS. Stewart Patrick highlights the elevated idea of "strategic patience," the broadened conceptualization of national security threats, and the renewed interest in "the institutional foundations of world order."¹³⁰ Nathan Lucas and Kathleen McInnis for the Congressional Research Service highlight changing priorities and changing ideas of American leadership.¹³¹ Underscoring all of these points, however, is an indisputable rebuttal of methodological and normative nationalism in the 2015 NSS.

In the 2015 National Security Strategy, the frequency of *nation* declines precipitously to 0.194, a mere six counts in thirty-one pages. *State* and *country* earn frequencies of 1.065 and 1.387, respectively, roughly a 0.3-point increase in both from the 2010 NSS. Within five years, the Obama administration shifts from conceptualizing the United States and other members of the international community as *nations*, an

130. Stewart M. Patrick, "Obama's National Security Strategy: New Framework, Same Policies," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 6, 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/obamas-national-security-strategy-new-framework-same-policies>.

131. U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The 2015 National Security Strategy: Authorities, Changes, Issues for Congress*, by Nathan J. Lucas and Kathleen J. McInnis, R44023. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R44023.pdf>.

expression of methodological nationalism, to conceptualizing them as *states* or *countries* and turning a blind eye to their national character.

Such a dramatic change in the language of Obama's grand strategy can be explained by the apparent rebirth of nationalist sentiments in 2014. Though the Intelligence Community had identified several nationalist threats through the first part of the twenty-first century, the 2014 Annual Threat Assessment introduced several new situations, suggesting a global trend of rising nationalist sentiments. Territorial "nationalist fervor" in China was hampering Asian regional cooperation; "growing nationalist sentiment among the ethnic Russian population" was raising new tensions in Russia; nationalist and populist political parties elsewhere in Europe, including the Balkans once again, were threatening the internationalist vision; and Turkish-Kurdish negotiations antagonized Turkish nationalists.¹³² While all these nationalist movements had been developing for at least several years—many more, in most cases—they seemed to be coming to a head in 2014. According to the threat assessment, nationalists were responding to two global trends: immigration and economic integration, both of which contributed to a "crisis in national identity."¹³³

Though nationalism remained mostly absent from the Obama administration's rhetorical discussion of national security threats and foreign policy priorities, it featured

132. James R. Clapper, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," January 29, 2014, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Intelligence%20Reports/2014%20WTA%20%20SFR_SSCI_29_Jan.pdf.

133. Yascha Mounk, "Pitchfork Politics: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* (2014), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-08-18/pitchfork-politics>.

prominently in the administration's deliberative process.¹³⁴ Nationalist movements, sometimes channeling populist politics, espoused policies of exceptionalism and protectionism to the exclusive benefit of a narrowly defined nation. With the potential for a nation to mobilize against the international community, it seemed to pose a new threat to the United States. As a result, Obama became cautious about the terminology of *nation*, eliminating it almost entirely from his second and final National Security Strategy in favor of the more politically neutral—and more accurate—terminology of *state* and *country*. If the world order were built on *states* rather than *nations*, the nation could be denied moral authority when it came into conflict with international interests. This was a major terminological and fundamentally ontological shift in Obama's grand strategy in response to threats identified a year earlier.¹³⁵

The United States itself was not immune to the populist and nationalist movements Obama feared. Four months after the release of the 2015 National Security Strategy, on June 16, Donald Trump announced his presidential campaign at Trump Tower in New York City. In the speech that kicked off an infamous campaign and presidency, Trump appealed to the same populist ideas and reinforced the same “crisis of

134. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Open Annual Hearing on Current and Project National Security Threats to the United States*, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., January 29, 2014, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113shrg93211/html/CHRG-113shrg93211.htm>. In the unclassified hearing on the 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessment, nationalism is not mentioned; it only appears in the Intelligence Community's report.

135. Adam B. Lerner and Ben O'Loughlin, “Strategic Ontologies: Narrative and Meso-Level Theorizing in International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqad058>.

national identity” that unnerved Obama.¹³⁶ One of Obama’s only mentions of nationalism in his foreign policy rhetoric came in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2016, four months before the end of his term and two months before the American presidential election. Obama implicitly offers a critique of his own grand strategy for global integration and acknowledges the challenges of globalization. At the same time, he addresses “alternative visions” that have festered as a result of these challenges and implicitly responds to domestic political trends.

In order to move forward, though, we do have to acknowledge that the existing path to global integration requires a course correction. As too often, those trumpeting the benefits of globalization have ignored inequality within and among nations; have ignored the enduring appeal of ethnic and sectarian identities; have left international institutions ill-equipped, underfunded, under-resourced, in order to handle transnational challenges.

And as these real problems have been neglected, alternative visions of the world have pressed forward both in the wealthiest countries and in the poorest: Religious fundamentalism; the politics of ethnicity, or tribe, or sect; aggressive nationalism; a crude populism — sometimes from the far left, but more often from the far right — which seeks to restore what they believe was a better, simpler age free of outside contamination.¹³⁷

With his final address to the United Nations, Obama describes new but somehow familiar challenges to the global system, echoing Clinton’s threat assessment two decades earlier. The twilight seemed to be giving way to the dawn of a new nationalism.

136. Time Staff, “Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech,” *Time*, June 16, 2015, <https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>.

137. Barack Obama, “Address by President Obama to the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly” (speech, New York, 2016), The White House, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/20/address-president-obama-71st-session-united-nations-general-assembly>.

6. Donald Trump and Joe Biden: The Dawn of a New Nationalism?

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election seemed to confirm the resurgence of nationalism. Trump brought nationalism back to politics with his promises to restore power to the people and "make America great again," a callback to some undefined epoch of American greatness.¹³⁸ To many Americans, that rhetoric distorted benign national values with angry chauvinism, harkened to similar trends in adversarial countries like Russia and China, and typified "the new nationalism." But to a critical mass of voters, Trump's promises and "America first" policies allayed concerns about the nation's social and economic degradation. On one hand, their concerns were particular to the United States and two decades of internationalism; on the other hand, they fit into a global trend of national crises of identity, which the Obama administration and forward-thinking scholars had identified in 2014. In response, the United States and other countries welcomed Trumpian nationalism.¹³⁹ Support for Trump remains strong ahead of the 2024 presidential election, with no end in sight for the tidal wave of nationalism he has brought to the United States.

Through his attention-grabbing rhetoric and provocative policies, Donald Trump almost single-handedly reinvigorated scholarship on the role of nationalism in American

138. Donald J. Trump, "The Inaugural Address" (speech, Washington, DC, January 20, 2017), The White House, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>.

139. Griff Witte, Carol Morello, Shibani Mahtani, and Anthony Faiola, "Around the Globe, Trump's Style is Inspiring Imitators and Unleashing Dark Impulses," *The Washington Post*, January 22, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/around-the-globe-trumps-style-is-inspiring-imitators-and-unleashing-dark-impulses/2019/01/22/ebd15952-1366-11e9-ab79-30cd4f7926f2_story.html.

politics and foreign policy. Nobody denies that he is a nationalist; he embraced the label himself ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, styling himself in contrast to “corrupt, power-hungry globalists.”¹⁴⁰ “America first” leaves little ambiguity on the preeminence of the nation in Trump’s ideology. Instead, the central question of his presidency is whether Trump actually embodies a “new nationalism” or instead revitalizes and verbalizes a longstanding and pervasive nationalist tradition in the United States. The answer to that question will place his concept of nationalism in the broader post-Cold War context.

According to both supporters and detractors, what makes Trump’s nationalism new is not its fundamental principles. It maintains the characteristically modern argument that governments derive their power from the sovereign nation and defend the national interest from outside threats. What makes Trump’s nationalism new is its concept of the nation and *how* the government defends its interests. The loudest voices in the debate are those who warn against the new nationalism, accepting the term’s popular connotation as something inherently threatening to liberal society, drawing from Clintonian threat assessments. *The Economist* represented these voices in a special edition published less than two weeks after Trump’s election. It places Trump in a “league of nationalists” with other chauvinists like Viktor Orban, Marine le Pen, Geert Wilders, and Vladimir Putin who contest globalization and progressive identity politics, arguing instead that the nation should take priority as a source of identity and authority.¹⁴¹ It describes their politics as

140. Quint Forgey, “Trump: ‘I’m a Nationalist,’” *Politico*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/10/22/trump-nationalist-926745>.

141. *The Economist*, “League of Nationalists,” November 19, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/international/2016/11/19/league-of-nationalists>.

“angry,” “pessimistic,” and “dangerous” and draws parallels to ethnic nationalism.¹⁴²

Trump’s ideology has also become more and more intertwined with the racist ideology of white nationalism through rhetoric and policy—both often conceived in hotheaded tweets—reinforcing the ethnic shades of Trump’s nationalism.¹⁴³ *The Economist* explicitly names the civic-ethnic dichotomy introduced by Hans Kohn and perpetuated by George H. W. Bush, so even when Trump’s nationalism is “new,” it has a theoretical precedent in American foreign policy. Bush identifies it as external to the United States, and Trump welcomes it into American politics. Ethnocentric nationalism, a trend of military significance identified in the Clinton administration’s 1996 military threat paradigm, may also be appropriate for interpreting the phenomenon and danger of Trumpian nationalism.

Trump’s apologists look to the other side of the dichotomy; they explain his nationalism, whether or not it is new, according to its civic qualities. This argument relies on Trump’s more calculated rhetoric, such as campaign speeches and the inaugural address, than on tweets and policy. In a commentary titled “The New Trumpist Nationalism,” David Azerrad points to the lack of explicit references to race, ethnicity, and religion and appeals to anti-cosmopolitan sentiments to describe the new nationalism. He says, “Trumpism represents not the rebirth of an older European ethnic nationalism, but instead constitutes a re-affirmation of American civic nationalism to deal with the

142. *The Economist*, “The New Nationalism,” November 19, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2016/11/19/the-new-nationalism>.

143. Sean Collins, “What is White Nationalism? Take a Look at Trump’s Agenda,” *Vox*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/21313021/trump-white-nationalism-supremacy-miller-bannon-immigration>.

realities of the 21st century.”¹⁴⁴ Perhaps Azerrad gave his article the wrong title, because in that case, Trump’s nationalism is not new at all, only reframed for contemporary threats. Kori Schake contends that the protectionist and isolationist policies of the “America first” ideology “have long and bipartisan pedigrees in American politics.” She points to Andrew Jackson, a “rough-hewn” president who “revivified American democracy,” as a precedent for Donald Trump.¹⁴⁵ Trump would certainly place himself in this tradition, emphasizing his advantage as a political outsider and his potential to restore American power to the people. In the 1992 address to the United Nations General Assembly, George H. W. Bush recognized a kind of democratic nationalism in Ukraine, the counterpart of ethnic nationalism, which was compatible with American values. George W. Bush and Obama channeled similar ideas in the first decade of the twenty-first century when they appealed to liberal democratic nations to combat transnational threats. We once again return to a theoretical foundation for Trump’s nationalism that has a precedent in post-Cold War foreign policy.

Considering Trump’s strident promise of “America first,” many feared a grand strategy that would isolate the United States and renege on commitments the country had accumulated under several decades of internationalism. But the final National Security

144. David Azerrad, “The New Trumpist Nationalism,” *The Heritage Foundation*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/immigration/commentary/the-new-trumpist-nationalism>.

145. Kori Schake, “Precedents for the New Nationalism,” *Hoover Institution*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/research/precedents-new-nationalism>. Schake has since walked back her defense of Trump, calling his nationalism “sharp-elbowed” and “shallow.” Kori Schake, “Back to Basics: How to Make Right What Trump Gets Wrong,” *Foreign Affairs* (2019), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/back-basics>.

Strategy allayed those fears by reflecting the civic side of Trump’s nationalism.¹⁴⁶ According to several commentators, the 2017 NSS “fits squarely in the post-Cold War grand strategic tradition” and demonstrates remarkable continuity with the internationalist vision of earlier presidents.¹⁴⁷ To be sure, it presents a revisionist history of American foreign policy and contradicts Trump’s actual predilections, according to critic Hal Brands.¹⁴⁸ But at least rhetorically, the strategy recognizes many of the same national security threats as its predecessors and promotes many of the same tools of internationalist foreign policy. Terminologically, the strategy maintains the convention that Obama introduced in 2015 of using *state* and *country* in favor of *nation*. In the 2017 NSS, the frequency of *nation* is only 0.500 counts per page, while the frequency of *state* is 1.750, the highest frequency of *state* in any NSS. With this language, the Trump administration repudiates methodological nationalism and describes the international order in more accurate political terms. Nationalism by name is notably absent from the NSS, though this may be attributed to continuity with George W. Bush and Obama’s strategies, which also failed to mention nationalism.

Though the NSS does not discuss nationalism, the annual threat assessments published during the Trump administration present an account of perceptions of

146. Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

147. William Inboden et al., “Policy Roundtable: What to Make of Trump’s National Security Strategy,” *Texas National Security Review*, December 21, 2017, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-make-trumps-national-security-strategy/>.

148. Hal Brands, “A Bold Strategy to Save Trump from Trumpism,” *Bloomberg*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-12-19/a-bold-strategy-to-save-trump-from-trumpism>.

nationalist threats abroad. Whereas earlier assessments had identified rising nationalist sentiments in Europe, the 2017 threat assessment describes “growing populist sentiment” that could be exploited by Russia against European integration.¹⁴⁹ The 2018 threat assessment states in the foreword that economic challenges are fueling populism and nationalism that contribute to “tension among countries,” without identifying a region; the 2019 threat assessment specifies the rise of nationalism in Europe and India.¹⁵⁰ However, the 2019 assessment—the last produced by the Trump administration—also identifies the rise of “violent ethno-supremacist and ultranationalist groups in Europe” that pose “a potential threat to US and allied interests.”¹⁵¹ This hyperbolic language, introduced only after Trump’s self-identification as a nationalist, distances Trumpian nationalism from perceived national security threats. The nationalist threat conceptualized in the Obama administration persists, but due to Trump’s espousal of nationalism, it takes on a different character in threat assessments. Implicitly, a more benign form exists in Trump and the United States that contrasts violent ultranationalism abroad and necessitates the distinction.

As an ardent apologist for nationalism, even in the face of violent nationalistic threats, Trump develops a theory that not only justifies his rhetoric but reframes the role

149. Daniel R. Coats, “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” May 23, 2017, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SASC%202017%20ATA%20SFR%20-%20FINAL.PDF>, 18.

150. Daniel R. Coats, “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” February 13, 2018, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf>, 4; Daniel R. Coats, “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” January 29, 2019, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf>, 4, 35.

151. Coats, “Worldwide Threat Assessment,” 2019, 13.

of the nation in the international order. The best description of this conceptualization came in his 2019 remarks to the United Nations General Assembly.

Americans know that in a world where others seek conquest and domination, our nation must be strong in wealth, in might, and in spirit. That is why the United States vigorously defends the traditions and customs that have made us who we are. Like my beloved country, each nation represented in this hall has a cherished history, culture, and heritage that is worth defending and celebrating, and which gives us our singular potential and strength.

The free world must embrace its national foundations. It must not attempt to erase them or replace them. Looking around and all over this large, magnificent planet, the truth is plain to see: If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first.

The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique.¹⁵²

Among concepts of nationalism put forth by U.S. presidents, Trump's version is perhaps the most theoretically coherent, accounting for the origins, ontology, and obligations of nations. According to this description, the nation arises from shared histories, traditions, and customs that imply a distinctive national identity, which individuals embrace as part of their own identities. In turn, the nation derives its strength and continued existence from individuals who defend and celebrate that national identity. Certain obligations follow from the nation's ontological dependence on its members: the individual has a responsibility to love and sustain their nation; the nation has a responsibility to love and protect the individual. In this view, the nation is the largest community capable of reciprocating a person's affection, since the global community

152. Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (speech, New York, September 25, 2019), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

cannot protect the individual in the same way. Nationalism, conceived as a demonstrated commitment to one's national community, is a fundamentally better path than globalism for securing individual rights and freedoms.

While nationalism is best for the individual, it is also best for the world at large. "The free world must embrace its national foundations," says Trump, suggesting a theory of liberal nationalism that undergirds the liberal international order. David Miller identifies two versions of this political philosophy. First, "the weaker thesis is simply that liberalism and nationalism are in principle compatible" and are not mutually exclusive—effectively the theory propounded by civic nationalism with its ideals of freedom, individual rights, and voluntary membership. This thesis integrates liberal values into a theory of national identity but implicitly rejects the idea that there could be a necessary relationship between the two. "In contrast," says Miller, "the stronger thesis holds that liberalism needs nationality to survive: there cannot be a liberal society that does not have a national basis."¹⁵³ This is Trump's thesis for the United Nations. Liberalism and nationalism are necessarily interdependent, sharing not only values but also a history that resulted in the modern system of nation-states. Yael Tamir, one of the most zealous proponents of this theory, recounts this development in *Why Nationalism* and argues, to Trump's credit, that nationalism is the solution to the stresses associated with hyperglobalism.¹⁵⁴ Andreas Wimmer, the same scholar who identified methodological

153. David Miller, "The Coherence of Liberal Nationalism," in *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics: Normative and Empirical Questions*, ed. Gina Gustavsson and David Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198842545.002.0003>.

154. Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

nationalism, takes her argument one step further: “In both the developed and the developing world, nationalism is here to stay. There is currently no other principle on which to base the international state system.”¹⁵⁵ This theory comes with a multitude of qualifiers, mostly eschewing the violent and discriminatory tendencies of nationalist movements, but at its core, it argues that liberal nation-states in the international order need to secure individual rights and freedoms.

Apologists’ claims of civic nationalism and Trump’s description of liberal nationalism should not be naively conflated with the ideology that guides Trump day-to-day. The claims of white nationalism and Christian nationalism festering in the United States under his leadership hold significant weight popularly and academically, especially in light of the mob attacks on the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021.¹⁵⁶ In all fairness, Deputy National Security Advisor Nadia Schadlow and Director for National Security Strategy Seth Center, the principal authors of the NSS, should be credited with tempering the president’s nationalist predilections, as should other staff for systematizing Trump’s rhetoric and policy.¹⁵⁷ Trump’s fiery rhetoric, isolationist tendencies, and accusations of impropriety in American democracy provoked many of the same warnings that have emerged about liberal nationalism. The discontinuity between thought and actions does not necessarily discredit the descriptive and normative value of a theory of liberal nationalism in foreign relations. But if the new nationalism takes a liberal form in

155. Andreas Wimmer, “Why Nationalism Works.”

156. Paul D. Miller, “What Is Christian Nationalism?” *Christianity Today*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/february-web-only/what-is-christian-nationalism.html>.

157. Inboden et al., “Policy Roundtable.”

Trump's presidency, it also takes a more dangerous form that became the source of Joe Biden's conceptualization of nationalism.

Joe Biden's 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, released only two months into his presidency, came primarily as a reaction against Trump's "America first" nationalism.¹⁵⁸ "America cannot afford to be absent any longer on the world stage," writes Biden. "And under the Biden-Harris Administration, America is back. Diplomacy is back. Alliances are back."¹⁵⁹ This strong rhetorical language sounds more like it comes from Biden's presidential campaign than the foreign policy establishment's strategic goals and threat assessment. Significantly, though, it removes the frame of nationalism that Trump had created for his grand strategy, replaces it with the more conventional frame of international cooperation, and puts nationalism back in the picture with a definitive threat assessment.

This interim strategy takes a realist approach to nationalism and the problems it creates for the liberal international order, placing it in the context of strong-armed geopolitical competition. Many expected Biden to return the United States to pre-Trump foreign policy, characterized by its militaristic defense of liberalism and universal vision for liberal democracy, but Biden may have gone farther back in American foreign policy than commentators expected. After two decades of relative silence on nationalism, Biden

158. Emma Ashford, "Reality Check #7: Red-teaming the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," *Atlantic Council*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/reality-check/reality-check-7-red-teaming-the-interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

159. Joseph R. Biden, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>, 4.

is the first president to name it among national security threats: “Today, more than ever, America’s fate is inextricably linked to events beyond our shores.... We face a world of rising nationalism, receding democracy, [and] growing rivalry with China, Russia, and other authoritarian states.”¹⁶⁰ According to Biden, post-Trump foreign policy must accept the reality that such a liberal internationalist vision is unsustainable for the United States and the international order.¹⁶¹ After all, in his assessment, “Free societies have been challenged from within by corruption, inequality, polarization, populism, and illiberal threats to the rule of law. Nationalist and nativist trends – accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis – produce an every-country-for-itself mentality that leaves us all more isolated, less prosperous, and less safe.” Instead of Bush and Obama’s liberal internationalism, Cold War-era realism is the natural response to these challenges, including nationalism, since it acknowledges both the anarchic state of the international system and the unreliability of systemic interdependence among nations. According to the preeminent neorealist scholar Kenneth Waltz, the effects of interdependence are “sometimes good, providing the benefits of divided labor, mutual understanding, and cultural enrichment, and sometimes bad, leading to protectionism, mutual resentment, conflict, and war.”¹⁶² The COVID-19 pandemic underscored these negative aspects of interdependence by exacerbating nationalistic imaginations, including the likes of Donald Trump and his followers. With

160. Biden, INSSG (2021), 6.

161. Joshua Shiffrin and Stephen Wertheim, “Biden the Realist: The President’s Foreign Policy Doctrine Has Been Hiding in Plain Sight,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 19, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-09-09/biden-realist>.

162. Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2626772>, 15.

the pandemic still raging, the interim strategy provides immediate and necessary guidance on how the United States should respond to complex political challenges.

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan announced the release of the administration's National Security Strategy proper at an event at Georgetown University in October 2022. The strategy drew attention for clearly positioning itself at the end of the post-Cold War era, which Sullivan reinforces in his remarks: "The actions now will shape whether this decisive decade is an age of conflict and discord or the beginning of a more prosperous and stable future."¹⁶³ The NSS conceives a new era and a renewed role for the United States in fostering international cooperation, although it fundamentally relies on the realist paradigm introduced in the interim strategy. Where the NSS fails, according to Colin Dueck, is in its attempt to reconcile competing priorities "by creating two silos" for the range of threats in the realist world, "one containing geopolitical challenges and one containing transnational ones."¹⁶⁴ By conceptualizing a wide range of threats and failing to prioritize them adequately, "the policies pursued by President Biden do not correspond to the scale of the challenge, and several of the priorities laid out in the NSS contradict the needed effort."¹⁶⁵ The Biden administration clearly focused its time on reconceptualizing and describing the new international order instead of responding to

163. Jake Sullivan, "Jack Sullivan on National Security Strategy" (interview, Washington, DC, October 12, 2022), *C-SPAN*, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?523551-1/jake-sullivan-national-security-strategy>.

164. Colin Dueck, "Assessing Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy," in *Expert Commentary on the 2022 National Security Strategy, Occasional Paper 3*, no. 2 (Fairfax: National Institute Press, 2023), <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/OP-Vol-3-No.-2.pdf>, 40.

165. Dueck, "National Security Strategy," 47.

it systematically, suggesting similarities between the George H. W. Bush and the Biden administrations' strategic engagement during transitional periods at the start and end of the post-Cold War era.

While the 2022 strategy is less clearly situated in opposition to Trump than the 2021 interim guidance, it is nonetheless cognizant of Trumpian nationalism in the new international order. Biden describes a “competitive international environment” marked by interrelated trends of “heightening geopolitical competition, nationalism and populism.”¹⁶⁶ The Intelligence Community’s 2021 threat assessment describes the threat of nationalism in more detail:

DVEs [domestic violent extremists] motivated by a range of ideologies...pose an elevated threat to the United States. This diverse set of extremists reflects an increasingly complex threat landscape, including racially or ethnically motivated threats and antigovernment or antiauthority threats.

Of these, violent extremists who espouse an often overlapping mix of white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and exclusionary cultural-nationalist beliefs have the most persistent transnational connections via often loose online communities to like-minded individuals and groups in the West. The threat from this diffuse movement has ebbed and flowed for decades but has increased since 2015.¹⁶⁷

While the Intelligence Community uses some of the same language of violent extremism from the Trump administration’s 2019 threat assessment, contextualizing this trend as an increasing threat since 2015 connects it more closely to Obama’s late-term concept of nationalism oriented around globalization and a crisis of identity, introduced in the 2014 Worldwide Threat Assessment. In the section on migration, the 2021 assessment

166. Joe Biden, NSS (2022), 3.

167. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” April 9, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>, 24.

describes how “previous waves [of migration] fanned nationalist sentiments in many European countries. Countries are witnessing the rise of populist politicians and parties campaigning on loss of sovereignty and identity.”¹⁶⁸ The nationalism that induces isolation and competition, according to the Biden administration, is fundamentally rooted in the same fears about globalization and transnationalism that gave birth to Trumpian nationalism.

Both of Biden’s strategies and the 2021 threat assessment mention nationalism alongside populism, implying a trend that scholars have named national populism. In their seminal book by that name, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin reveal trends that unite Donald Trump, Hungary’s Viktor Orban, France’s Marine le Pen, and the United Kingdom’s Brexit movement against aspects of liberal democracy.¹⁶⁹ National populism is illiberal insofar as it takes issue with the pluralist and egalitarian tendencies of liberalism associated with political elites, Biden among them. It thrives on people’s fear of “the destruction of their wider group and way of life” embodied in their idea of the nation—ideas which are clearly reinforced in the Biden administration’s strategies and threat assessments.¹⁷⁰ In turn, populist leaders tend to exploit the institutions of justice, welfare, and free and fair elections for nationalistic aims, leading to the erosion of liberal democracy that has afflicted countries in every region around the world.¹⁷¹

168. ODNI, “Annual Threat Assessment,” 2021, 22.

169. Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*, x-xi.

170. Eatwell and Goodwin, 132.

171. V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2023), <https://v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>.

National populism intertwines two distinct concepts, nationalism and populism, to leverage the ambiguity of populist rhetoric with national discourse for political mobilization.¹⁷² Scholars have debated the extent of each concept that is present in contemporary national populism, especially its manifestations in far-right party politics. Goodwin and Eatwell, for example, claim that national populism integrates fascist ideals of the nation into the core themes of populism, which by itself pits the popular will and ordinary person against “corrupt and distant elites.”¹⁷³ Conflating these two ideas creates an inflammatory but democratically viable campaign against perceived injustices and national security threats. At the core of this bipartite ideology, however, remains a version of ethnic nationalism focused on the nation’s exclusivity, territoriality, and sovereignty. Though it is operationalized in populist terms and politics, it is nonetheless nationalist.¹⁷⁴

As previously discussed, the nationalism that Biden describes and Trump emulates is not really new to the United States. What makes it seem new is that, in combination with populism, it reinforces a realist paradigm which scholars and practitioners had neglected in the years leading up to Trump’s presidency and the COVID-19 pandemic—one which pits nations against nations in the struggle for survival and self-actualization. If one embraces Biden’s warnings, nationalism threatens the

172. Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12522>.

173. Eatwell and Goodwin, *National Populism*, 64.

174. Benjamin De Cleen, “Populism and Nationalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.18>.

values and stability of the hard-won liberal international order. If one embraces Trump's defense to the United Nations, liberal nationalism constitutes the very fabric of the international order. Both challenge longstanding assumptions in foreign policy about the nature of the international order, and the competition between these ideas sets the stage for the world to follow the post-Cold War era.

7. Conclusion

This survey of nationalism in post-Cold War American grand strategy and foreign policy rhetoric has endeavored to demonstrate a new method for foreign policy analysis. Existing literature typically only considers nationalism qua national identity, entertaining the ways it exists in a dialectical relationship with foreign policy. The causal pathways between these subjects are indeed important but come with assumptions about the nature of nations and their politicization. I argue for analysis of nationalism qua nationalism, focusing on the terminology and theories that lie beneath presidential rhetoric and form the conceptual foundations of foreign policy. The literature of nationalism studies is especially useful due to its conceptual clarity and interdisciplinarity, which protect against IR-specific assumptions. This approach not only addresses underlying assumptions and enduring questions, but it is also truer to the relationship between theory and practice in IR: very few policy-makers and their advisors exist in a theoretical vacuum. By first answering the question of how the United States—or any other government, organization, or individual decision-maker—conceptualizes nationalism, scholars can avoid methodological errors and engage in more robust foreign policy analysis. Similar questions may be asked of any number of other isms, such as internationalism, globalism, liberalism, and authoritarianism.

At the same time, this study can offer several non-methodological contributions to strategic studies and foreign policy analysis in the United States in response to the question above.

Our story of American conceptualizations of nationalism, especially as a national security threat, begins with George H. W. Bush's foundational explorations. Through

National Security Strategies and, more prominently, rhetoric on Eastern European politics, Bush implies a civic-ethnic dichotomy that has its theoretical origins in Hans Kohn at the start of the Cold War. Kohn's negative characterization of ethnic nationalism leads the Bush administration to an early but noncommittal assessment of nationalist movements as national security threats. Clinton attempts to nuance that assessment in his first term, grounding his rhetoric in Isaiah Berlin's theory of "wounded nationalism." In Clinton's second term, as cosmopolitan ideas crystallize in his grand strategy, the threat assessment of aggressive nationalism becomes explicit due to its encroachment on cosmopolitan idealism. The threat becomes much less existential after 9/11 under George W. Bush and Obama due to the rise of transnational threats, but the competition between terrorism and extremism on one hand and the integrity of the nation-state on the other demonstrates the persistence of methodological and normative nationalism. Foreign policy and grand strategy broadly reflect this assumption in the first two decades of the post-Cold War era by privileging the nation and subsequently the nation-state in conceptions of the international order.

The United States' own national consciousness is one of the most significant themes of foreign policy analysis in this period, as seen in the discussion of nationalism under Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama in the preceding chapters. NSSs regularly identify the United States as a nation under attack by other nation-states or transnational threats. Both of these threats reinforce an American identity and foreign policy described in terms of what it is not—ethnocentric, illiberal, or aggressive. National consciousness coalesces the American people and policy-makers around civic values, creating a foreign

policy that defends national interest while expanding supposedly universal principles of democracy and liberalism that hold a special place in American national identity.

The trend described in this research suggests the rise of a related phenomenon, what I call *nationalistic* consciousness. National consciousness describes the state of people being self-aware of an identity as a nation, especially in contrast to other nations. But the mere consciousness of a nation with political claims is insufficient to explain the rise of nationalism in the last decade. Nationalistic consciousness describes the state of being self-aware of the nation's political claims and responding accordingly.

Obama demonstrated the development of this phenomenon in the 2015 NSS's strategic response to the assessment of nationalist threats in 2014; the strategy's terminology shifted dramatically to revoke the nation's privilege in the international order and disavow nationalist uprisings. Trump demonstrated nationalistic consciousness in a different way by affirming the nation's political claims and espousing a theory of liberal nationalism. Though Trump and Obama have fundamentally different orientations to this phenomenon, they strategically integrate the nation's political claims into their grand strategies—one by resisting those claims, the other by privileging them—and thereby advance the United States' nationalistic consciousness. It explains the consciousness that Germany gained after its struggle with national socialism or that Israel developed more recently with its self-identification as a nation-state.¹⁷⁵ Putin demonstrates nationalistic consciousness in the way he relies on Russian national

175. Israel controversially declared itself a nation-state with the passage of a basic law titled "Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People" in 2018. However, no National Security Strategy identifies Israel—or any other country in the region—as a nation, referring only to the people and the state.

consciousness to justify militaristic advances in Ukraine. Nationalism is not new per se, but nations and individuals are increasingly self-conscious of it, with varying consequences for international relations.

From the perspective of American grand strategy, nationalistic consciousness is one of the defining features of the transition from the post-Cold War era to the era to follow. It explains competing ideas of the nation and its political claims that are shrouded in explicit nationalist and antinationalist rhetoric. Though Biden's NSS has been widely criticized for its failure to prioritize issues, it reflects the deep-set problem that this nationalistic discourse poses to grand strategy today: an effective strategy must respond simultaneously to realist challenges and alternative visions of the international order that arise through nationalistic consciousness. Leaders and nations who engage with this new consciousness find themselves with a powerful new rhetorical tool for harnessing the democratic forces underlying foreign policy, whether that leads to an exclusive national agenda in the case of Trump or an inclusive international one in the case of Obama. This discourse is unfamiliar to the post-Cold War era, and it frames a renewed paradigm of realism. Whatever comes next, one lesson is clear: nationalism is here to stay.

Appendix

	<i>nation</i>	<i>state</i>	<i>country</i>	<i>people</i>
March 1990	20	15	29	6
August 1991	26	26	38	7
January 1993	25	11	23	6
July 1994	59	39	28	17
February 1995	72	47	35	21
February 1996	95	67	58	27
May 1997	44	32	46	9
October 1998	84	42	83	21
December 1999	81	53	83	26
December 2000	90	65	127	34
September 2002	44	45	32	16
March 2006	63	55	59	47
May 2010	100	36	60	52
February 2015	6	33	43	7
December 2017	24	84	45	16
October 2022	33	30	67	30

Table 1. Counts of the Terms *Nation*, *State*, *Country*, and *People* in National Security Strategy Reports 1990-2022.

	pages	<i>nation</i>	<i>state</i>	<i>country</i>	<i>people</i>
March 1990	33	0.606	0.455	0.879	0.182
August 1991	35	0.743	0.743	1.086	0.200
January 1993	23	1.087	0.478	1.000	0.261
July 1994	31	1.903	1.258	0.903	0.548
February 1995	35	2.057	1.343	1.000	0.600
February 1996	47	2.021	1.426	1.234	0.574
May 1997	32	1.375	1.000	1.438	0.281
October 1998	58	1.448	0.724	1.431	0.362
December 1999	49	1.653	1.082	1.694	0.531
December 2000	81	1.111	0.802	1.568	0.420
September 2002	33	1.333	1.364	0.970	0.485
March 2006	51	1.235	1.078	1.157	0.922
May 2010	55	1.818	0.655	1.091	0.945
February 2015	31	0.194	1.065	1.387	0.226
December 2017	48	0.500	1.750	0.938	0.333
October 2022	44	0.750	0.682	1.523	0.682

Table 2. Frequencies of the Terms *Nation*, *State*, *Country*, and *People* in National Security Strategy Reports 1990-2022.

Summary						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
nation	16	19.83532538	1.239707836	0.324337291		
state	16	15.90330426	0.993956516	0.136526808		
country	16	19.29687665	1.20605479	0.069920048		

One-way ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F-crit</i>
Between Groups	0.5680636	2	0.2840318	1.6053519	0.21210	3.2043173
Within Groups	7.9617622	45	0.1769280			
Total	8.5298258	47				

Table 3. Summary and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results of Terminological Frequencies in all National Security Strategies 1990-2022.

Summary

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Variance</i>
nation	6	5.504501722	0.917416954	0.120885361
state	6	5.867731203	0.977955201	0.266764375
country	6	6.028561879	1.004760313	0.010266760

One-way ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F-crit</i>
Between Groups	0.0240245	2	0.0120123	0.0905636	0.9139118	3.6823203
Within Groups	1.9895825	15	0.1326388			
Total	2.0136070	17				

Table 4. Summary and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results of Terminological Frequencies in Republican National Security Strategies 1990-2022.

Summary

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Variance</i>
nation	10	14.33082366	1.433082366	0.362607443
state	10	10.03557306	1.003557306	0.079069138
country	10	13.26831477	1.326831477	0.067608893

One-way ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F-crit</i>
Between Groups	1.0009574	2	0.5004787	2.9481228	0.0694921	2.5106087
Within Groups	4.5835693	27	0.1697618			
Total	5.5845267	29				

Table 5. Summary and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results of Terminological Frequencies in Democratic National Security Strategies 1990-2022.

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