

The Stopping Power of Land: The Geopolitics of American Use of Force in the International Arena since 1898

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Abstract

This study explores the rationale of the American use of force in the international arena since the US became a great power in 1898. It uses geopolitical theories to map the American ability to project military power around the world. Instead of asking what the US *should* do with its military forces, the question posed here is what it *can* do with them. The paper argues that American use of force is the result of a balance of interests and accessibility, both emerging from geopolitical theory.

The paper argues that American military in its present form has been established based on geopolitical considerations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This military, whose strength is above all naval, can rapidly reach any littoral location in the world, but finds it difficult to access land-locked regions. Although this problem was partly reduced thanks to improvements in technology, the ability to project American power is still limited.

To test the theoretical argument, the paper examines three case studies -- the intervention in Siberia 1918-1920, the American response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the current War in Afghanistan. These cases represent various combinations of interests, accessibility and great power involvement, and emphasize the limitations that geography poses on the ability to realize political incentives by force. The findings support the theoretical argument, especially concerning the centrality of accessibility to American decision-making. American foreign policy goals, therefore, do not exceed the military's ability to realize them.

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Introduction

In 1898, the United States Navy won a decisive victory over the Spanish fleet in the Caribbean Basin and in the Philippines, turning the U.S. into a great power with its own sphere of influence. Since then, the U.S. was always in the forefront of world powers. This makes the U.S. a unique case study of great- and superpower use of force in a variety of circumstances and conditions. This study argues that American policy on the use of force has a coherent rationale, namely, that geopolitical factors determine whether the U.S. would use force in a given situation. To be more explicit, a balance of geopolitical interests and accessibility to the scene of events determines the extent of force the U.S. would use, with involvement of other great powers as an intervening variable reflecting the polarity of the international system.¹

This study follows the logic of the Realist paradigm in International Relations, focusing on materialistic factors rather than ideational ones, emphasizing **capabilities** rather than **intentions**. The study concentrates on the structure of American forces and on its corollary limitations, which incorporate the geopolitical factors. Albeit American forces can technically reach anywhere on earth, this might be very costly and under certain circumstances this may prevent military action from taking place. Even though the seas allow the U.S. to transport forces around the world, in many cases mere show of force (such as "gunboat diplomacy") is insufficient and further deployment including, in many instances, actual fighting on the ground is also

¹ Definitions of variables:

Interests: The vital interests of the U.S. are defined in materialistic (i.e., geopolitical) terms as *defense of the homeland*, *securing access to vital natural resources*, *keeping all naval routes open* because the U.S. is a naval trade nation, and *prevention of hostile takeover of the Eurasian Heartland*. The interests are scaled by level of importance to the U.S.: Vital (the abovementioned); important (other interests such as democracy promotion; or vital interests of American allies); and marginal. This scaling is based on Donald E. Nuechterlein, "The Concept of 'National Interest': A Time for New Approaches," *Orbis*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 73-92.

Accessibility of the crisis: This variable has two complementary components. The first is the *physical* access to the scene. For the U.S., any littoral location is considered accessible while any landlocked location is not. Other important aspects are the topography of the target country, the ability to station sufficient forces to fulfill the mission, the ability to supply those forces and the ability to safely ensure their exit. Kevin C.M. Benson and Christopher B. Thrash, "Declaring Victory: Planning Exit Strategies for Peace Operations," *Parameters*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1996), pp. 69-80. The second component is *political*. There are 194 sovereign countries (excluding Kosovo whose independence is not yet acknowledged enough), from which 43 (22 percent) are landlocked. Getting access to a landlocked country costs political currency the U.S. does not like paying.

Other great power involvement: When a friendly power is involved, the U.S. may stay aloof but alert in case rescue is needed; when an enemy power is involved, the cost of overcoming it is very high; when both friends and foes are involved the U.S. may intervene to protect its interests; and when no other power is involved, the liability on its consideration is the least.

Use of force: Six options stand out in this research: (1) War and unilateral intervention – the utmost use of force with American full resolve; (2) multilateral intervention – sharing the burden; (3) semi-military – delivery of arms, gunboat diplomacy – or proxy intervention; (4) humanitarian intervention – use of armed forces to secure the supply and supply humanitarian aid in unnatural crisis (therefore excluding natural catastrophes like earthquakes and tsunamis which are not caused by human beings); (5) non-military intervention – economic or diplomatic measures; (6) non-intervention.

required. Reaching landlocked countries is America's greatest problem of power projection. Thus, the basic argument is that geographical conditions limit the choice of American military actions.²

Offensive Realism argues that great powers pursue global dominance in order to maximize their relative power. John Mearsheimer's canonical version of offensive realism argues that bodies of water prevent this from happening, labeling it "the stopping power of water".³ The rationale suggested here contradicts this explanation for great power inability to conquer the world, arguing that it is erroneous. I argue that while Mearsheimer's rule is adequate with regard to land-powers, it does not apply to sea-powers such as the U.S. (and perhaps Great Britain in the past), because water is their vehicle, whereas land hinders them.

Because of its unique position in the international system as an offshore power (compared to the other great powers that are all Eurasian), American world preponderance is based on its naval power. The Navy is a strong branch of the military, capable of maintaining offshore balancing, but it has significant problems in projecting American power into landlocked countries.

Placing geopolitical components at the center of the explanation of American use of force does not necessarily mean that geopolitics alone explains the phenomenon. This study argues that decisions on using force are made only within specific geopolitical conditions, but that does not necessarily mean that only geopolitical incentives will be weighed.

The theory outlined in the following pages is tested qualitatively on three case studies, using the structured, focused comparison and decision-making process tracing methods. The cases are the intervention in the Russian Civil War in Siberia (1918-1920); the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979); and the War in Afghanistan (2001-). They represent three different eras in American position in the international system in order to demonstrate similarities and differences in American conduct of the military aspect of foreign policy, but they all have a common character: accessibility was difficult in all three cases.⁴ These cases will emphasize the role of accessibility in different times and in balance with different interests, thus are critical cases for the theory.

Literature review

The literature concerning American use of force and military intervention is a major section in the literature on international security. However, the various studies in the field do not contain an adequately focused observation on the use of force, and fundamentally ask "what *should* be done?"⁵ This study inquires "what *can* be done?"

² Robert Jervis had already made a claim for geographical limitations on using force. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, vol. 30, no. 2 (January 1978), pp. 194-196.

³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 114-128.

⁴ The fact that all three crises occurred in Asia is a coincidence.

⁵ E.g., Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 5-48; Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain'? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995), pp. 94-117; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategies from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, vol. 21, no. 3, (Winter 1996/97), pp. 5-53; Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off-Balance': Self-

In a nutshell, there are three main prototypes to explain American foreign policy. The first is quite similar to the logic proposed here and focuses on economic or political interests, for instance opening markets for trade, securing necessary natural resources, removing potential or real political rivals, and securing spheres of influence.⁶ But the proposed logic explores the geopolitics of this type of explanation, which is a more elementary layer of the Realist paradigm. As a result, the logic proposed here is expected to explain more American actions than the existing accounts.

The second type of explanation is based on the promotion of state ideology (in the American case, promotion of democracy and human rights),⁷ while the third is founded on domestic politics (such as bureaucratic politics, President-Congress relations, interest groups and public opinion).⁸ None of these explanations seem satisfying in an attempt to understand the American response to the various crises in the entire era of the U.S. as a great power. Each may explain particular cases or several together, but not the entire body of cases. The logic proposed in this study does not disprove any of these explanations categorically, but rather offers the infrastructure on which they can be examined more properly, without which they would have no chance to ignite a forceful action.

Within the Realist paradigm, the defensive strategies seem most suitable for the U.S., given its geopolitical location and position. This does not necessarily imply that offensive strategies are misused. Focusing on geopolitics' influence on American foreign policy seeks to identify the circumstances under which each strategy seems more plausible to endorse. The fundamental rationale of realist theories asserts that the U.S. should only intervene in Eurasia whenever a continental great power threatens to become hegemonic. The many American interventions in Eurasia throughout the years imply that these theories are flawed. Unlike the theories that tend to be prescriptive and to highlight inconsistency in American actions, this study sets out to explain past and current American actions (within the current technological

Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 121-154.

⁶ Realist theories use this logic. See, for instance, Benjamin Miller, “The Logic of US Military Interventions in the post-Cold War Era,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 19, no. 3 (December 1998), pp. 72-109; Benjamin O. Fordham, “Power or Plenty? Economic Interests, Security Concerns, and American Intervention,” *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 4 (December 2008), pp. 737-758; James David Meernik, *The Political Use of Military Force in US Foreign Policy* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004).

⁷ *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, eds. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Constance G. Anthony, “American Democratic Interventionism: Romancing the Iconic Woodrow Wilson,” *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 9, no. 3 (August 2008), pp. 239-253; Bruce Bueno De Mesquita and George W. Downs, “Intervention and Democracy,” *International Organization*, vol. 60, no. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 627-649; David Rieff, *At the Point of a Gun: Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

⁸ Liberal/Ideational theories use this logic. See Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles: American Civil-Military Relations and the Use of Force* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Charles W. Ostrom Jr. and Brian L. Job, “The President and the Political Use of Force,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 80, no. 2 (June 1986), pp. 541-566; Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gerald Astor, *Presidents at War: From Truman to Bush, the Gathering of Military Power to Our Commanders of Chief* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006); Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

environment), not to prescribe strategies. Moreover, in order to avoid misguided judgment, this study starts from one of the basic elements of national strategy, geography, and its theoretical outcome, geopolitics.

Very few studies directly link geography with the use of force, American or other, perhaps because geography seems to be constant, apparently making it futile to study.⁹ Contrary to this line of thought, I argue that the fact that geography is constant makes it exceptionally valuable to study its effect over time, while other components of grand strategy (such as the structure of the international system) change. In short, the proposed explanation looks at the most fundamental constituent of national security policy – geopolitics – permitting a durable view with the same elements.

One recent attempt to draw a map of intervention using geography is Thomas Barnett's *The Pentagon's New Map*, in which he specifies three types of countries, "Functioning Core," "Non-Integrated Gap," and "Seam States". He claims that the U.S. would act militarily only in the "Gap" region, which is most of Africa, the Middle East (Israel excluded), Central-East Europe, the Caucasus and parts of Asia.¹⁰ The problem with Barnett's map is that it does not consider the "technical" aspect of power projection, which is essentially geographical. The present study attempts to sharpen Barnett's view by adding the military limits that geography coerces.

In sum, the literature rarely discusses the **ability** to intervene, perhaps assuming that the U.S. is omnipotent and can reach anywhere. Technically, this is true, but the price of reaching any scene of action, and especially "the day after", is an expensive burden. This study illuminates the price using classical geopolitical theories to present the problem and its resolution.

Geopolitics and American foreign policy

The sea was always considered essential for transforming a state into a world power. Thus, all great powers used the seas to expand their control. The U.S. did not escape this principle. Its desire for global trade led it to develop a large merchant fleet, which eventually overshadowed its European competitors. However, a concise overview of its military history demonstrates that since its independence, the U.S. rightly feared the European powers, and mostly Great Britain, especially after the War of 1812.

A geopolitical analysis first focuses on the fact that the American continent is isolated from the rest of the world by two oceans. The physical distance from the other powers became the salient dimension of the U.S. worldview.¹¹ During the latter half of the 19th century central geopolitical perceptions evolved in Europe, and made their way to America, where they were given local perspectives.¹² As mentioned

⁹ Jan Nijman, *The Geopolitics of Power & Conflict: Superpowers in the International System 1945-1992* (London: Belhaven Press, 1993), 30; Walter A. McDougall, "Why Geography Matters... But Is So Little Learned," *Orbis*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 217-233.

¹⁰ Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2004) and idem, *Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2005).

¹¹ Alan K. Henrikson, "Mental Maps," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, eds. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 182-184.

¹² For various views of American foreign policy see Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changes the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Michael Dunne, "'The Terms of Connection': Geopolitics, Ideology and Synchronicity in the History of US Foreign Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 3 (October 2003), pp. 463-481; James Kurth, "Partition Versus Union: Competing Traditions in American Foreign Policy," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2004), pp. 809-831.

before, Defensive Realism suits the U.S. nicely thanks to its location, thus theories that call for offshore balancing or selective engagement seem most fit. Accordingly, the superpower status was perhaps counterproductive for the U.S. since it raised the temptation to employ more offensive strategies and to some extent forced the U.S. to neglect offshore balancing moves, which perhaps served its interests better.

By the end of the 19th Century, based mostly on Alfred Mahan's prominent theory on the influence of sea-power on history,¹³ the U.S. developed its strong and modern Navy, which defeated the Spanish Armada and gained a sphere of influence for the U.S. in the Caribbean Basin and in South-East Asia. Mahan advocated for a joint use of offshore powers' fleets to gain control over the seas in order to block the rise of continental powers.¹⁴ The U.S. Navy was built to fulfill this mission.¹⁵ As the Navy became stronger, the U.S. became more influential among the great powers. Soon it assumed the role of balancer in the international system that it held up to World War II, which, in turn, signaled the transition from British rule of the seas to American dominance.¹⁶

At the end of World War II, the U.S. adopted a global perspective which fit nicely with two other geopolitical theories. Perhaps the most prominent one was offered in 1904 by Sir Halford Mackinder on the Heartland.¹⁷ His initial assumption was that power is located in the World Island (Asia, Europe and Africa), while the rest of the world is marginal; hence, all great powers aspired to control the Heartland. The geographical location of the Heartland changed since it was first defined in 1904, but its center was always in European Russia, the Caucasus and western Siberia. At first, the Heartland theory reflected Mackinder's fear of Germany, but in 1943 it reflected his fear of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ An American geopolitician, Nicholas Spykman, argued towards the end of World War II that the area surrounding the Heartland, the Rimland, was actually more important than the Heartland itself, since it was the scene of struggle between the land-powers and the sea-powers.¹⁹

Hence, during the Cold War the U.S., the major sea-power, used the Navy to stop the Soviet Union, the major land-power, from sowing Communism by military means. The U.S. overcame its absence from the Euro-Asian mainland by establishing

¹³ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Seapower Upon History: 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1890).

¹⁴ Jon Sumida, "Alfred Thayer Mahan, Geopolitician", in *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 39-61; James R. Holmes, "Mahan, a 'Place in the Sun', and Germany's Quest for Sea Power," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2004), pp. 27-61.

¹⁵ James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, with a New Introduction* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2006), pp. 323-334.

¹⁷ Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 4 (April 1904), pp. 421-444; idem, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: a Study in the Study of Reconstruction* (London: Constable, 1919). See also Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, pp. 183-202; and more recent debates on Mackinder's ideas in Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now", in *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 15-38; Colin S. Gray, "In Defence of the Heartland: Sir Halford Mackinder and His Critics a Hundred Years On," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2004), pp. 9-25; Gerry Kearns. *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

¹⁸ Halford J. Mackinder, "The Round World and the Winning of the Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 4 (July 1943), pp. 595-605.

¹⁹ Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of Peace* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1944 [1969]).

strong alliances in the Rimland and by crossing over from the sea. This was the core practice of the Containment policy.

It seems that American foreign policy during the Cold War combined the theories of Mahan, Mackinder and Spykman, aimed at containing the USSR (see table 1). The Navy was instructed to enforce Containment by transporting soldiers to relevant fronts and by approaching the mainland for deterrence. The U.S. formed alliances across the Rimland, and virtually encircled the Soviet Union, leaving only East Europe as its direct and unequivocal sphere of influence.

Table 1: The influence of the leading geopolitical theories on U.S. policy

Scholar	Year of publication	Theoretical spotlight	Speed of influence	Implementing President	Actual expression
Mahan	1890	sea	immediate	Theodore Roosevelt ²⁰	enlargement of the Navy
Mackinder	1904, 1919, 1943	Heartland	quite late	Harry Truman (and all successors)	Containment theory as the central devise in Cold War policy
Spykman	1942	Rimland	quite quick	all Cold War presidents	alliances surrounding USSR

Stephen Van Evera stated that between 1917 and 1991 the U.S. national security policy was aimed at one goal: keeping industrial Eurasia divided, i.e., preventing any of the land-powers from gaining control over the entire continent. He proclaimed that the geopolitical danger of a Eurasian hegemon that might threaten the U.S. had disintegrated with the Soviet Union. The danger of Eurasian hegemony by any of the continent's great powers had also declined, mostly because nuclear weapons made the great powers "virtually unconquerable".²¹

The Cold War ended with the U.S. as a single superpower with a new global set of interests. Still, the Heartland is very important in the outline of American interests. In fact, since the Soviet Union collapsed, the Heartland became even more important, because its instability attracts enemies to use it to endanger the U.S. and its allies. The Soviet implosion in the early 1990s allowed the U.S. to act quite freely, but the U.S. did not gain world domination, not only due to lack of motivation,²² but also because of an apparently technical reason: the Navy, which is America's primary force for dealing with crises,²³ has limited capabilities.

Although it controls the sea, the Navy allows only limited power projection into the continent. The Navy doctrine evolved along this line of thought. On the sea, the end of the Cold War brought the Navy to somewhat change its concept. Instead of fighting *on* the sea, it spoke of fighting *from* the sea, as reflected in the evolving naval

²⁰ Harold & Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1966), pp. 205-213. Roosevelt was especially influenced while in office. He ordered to build the Great White Fleet, and sent it for a worldwide tour to demonstrate U.S. power. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*.

²¹ Stephen Van Evera, "A Farewell to Geopolitics," in *To Lead the World: American Strategy After the Bush Doctrine*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 12-14.

²² About this see Miller, "The Logic of US Military Interventions".

²³ "When word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it's no accident that the first question that comes to everyone's lips is: 'Where's the nearest carrier?'" President Bill Clinton, March 12, 1993, aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt. Quote from "Where are the Carriers? – Navy Ships" <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ship/where.htm> (31.1.2009)

strategies.²⁴ Moreover, the system of continental bases that the U.S. built during the Cold War on the Eurasian continent was not deserted after the Soviet Union imploded. On the contrary, the U.S. deepened its penetration into the mainland, established new alliances (in Eastern Europe through NATO, as well as in the Caucasus) and with them new bases were constructed (some were dismantled in recent years), easing American access to trouble spots, mostly in Central Asia.²⁵ This move not only displayed Russia's weakness, but also delimited it within its new, shorter borders.

A geopolitical rationale of using force

Theoretical argument and propositions

The structure of the American military forces and the subsequent operational limitations leave the U.S. with a rather short list of practical military options. The military is well aware of these considerations, and advises the president accordingly. The Weinberger-Powell Doctrine is the most characteristic expression of this awareness. It fixed the principle that the forces sent to a mission must be decisive in order to ensure their triumph, but since Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, it seems obsolete.²⁶

The following propositions emerge from geopolitical theory and its policy implementation (see also figure 1). The geopolitical interests provide the incentive for using force, whereas accessibility is the constraint. Overall, when the motives are high only extremely high costs will prevent the use of force, or at least change its characteristics. When the motives are low, the U.S. will probably not use force.

1. *Vital interests and easy access will likely ignite maximum use of force (unilateral intervention or war).*

²⁴ George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 451; Sean O'Keefe (Secretary of the Navy), *...From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century*, September 1992. <http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/policy/fromsea/fromsea.txt> (28.9.2004); Department of the Navy, *Forward... From the Sea*. www.dtic.mil/jointvision/b014.pdf (26.9.2004); Headquarters Marine Corps. *Operational Maneuver from the Sea: A Concept for the Projection of Naval Power Ashore*. 1996. Available online at: <http://www.dtic.mil/jv2010/usmc/omfts.pdf> (6.2.2010); Edward Rhodes, "...From the Sea' and Back Again: Naval Power in the Second American Century," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1999), pp. 13-55; Vern Clark, *Sea Power 21: Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities*. www.c3f.navy.mil/seapower21.html (11.9.2004). All documents emphasize the importance of combined operation of the military branches and all consider the sea as a front-base. Other possibilities for utilization of the Navy after the Cold War according to the changing concept of its function are presented in Jeremy Stocker, "Nonintervention: Limited Operations in the Littoral Environment," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 42-62.

²⁵ On American military presence around the world see Anni P. Baker, *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004); C.T. Sanders, *America's Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a historical and geopolitical view of the military presence of great power beyond their borders see Robert E. Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases: The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).

²⁶ Caspar W. Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power", in *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Richard N. Haass (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), pp. 173-181; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House: 1995), pp. 558, 576; George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), pp. 649-652; Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, Third Revised and Expanded Edition (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 307-326; Walter LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 124, no. 1 (2009), pp. 71-93.

2. *Vital interests and difficult access will likely ignite medium use of force (unilateral or multilateral intervention).*
3. *Important interests and easy access will likely ignite medium use of force (multilateral intervention).*
4. *Important interests and difficult access will likely ignite minimal use of force (semi-military or proxy intervention).*
5. *Marginal interests and easy access will likely ignite minimal use of force (non-military or humanitarian intervention).*
6. *Marginal interests and difficult access will result in non-intervention.*

Figure 1: Geopolitical interests, Accessibility to the crisis scene, and the expected type of intervention

		Geopolitical Interests		
		Vital	Important	Marginal
Accessibility	Easy	Maximum use of force: war or unilateral intervention	Multilateral intervention preferable	Non-military or humanitarian intervention
	Difficult	Unilateral or multilateral intervention	Semi-military or proxy intervention	Non-intervention

Involvement of great powers in a crisis is an intervening variable to this balance. Direct military involvement of a third party – friend or foe – adds to the burden (i.e., costs) on any forceful action, therefore it would be less probable. If the given great power is a rival, its involvement would push for American use of force only if vital American interests are jeopardized, but if the concerned involvement is by an ally, the U.S. would stay aloof unless necessary to assist it. The influence of involvement of other great powers on U.S. considerations depends heavily on the given polarity of the system at any given time. For instance, even though Russia under American unipolarity possesses the same military power as the Soviet Union had during bipolarity, its involvement in a crisis is much less challenging for the U.S.

As long as American power is sea-based, it is unlikely for the U.S. to act differently than it has so far. Great Britain acted likewise as ruler of the seas,²⁷ and it is reasonable to assume that any sea-power would behave similarly. The U.S. operates in littoral places, where using force is not too costly. However, in landlocked areas the American calculations change. Whenever the U.S. plays an initial role in a landlocked crisis, the geographical limitations are merely a challenge – problematic as they may be – that the military must overcome. Nevertheless, whenever the U.S. acts as a third party, and even if there are important interests involved, the same geographical limitations will become politically more difficult to overcome, and will force the U.S. to adopt strategies in which it will act to a less extent, and it may even decide not to act at all. Whenever there are no important interests involved, the U.S. would probably not act, except for humanitarian intervention. To summarize the point, it can be argued that geographical limitations might **prevent** American use of force only when the U.S. is a third party. To support this argument, the next section will present findings from three cases with different balances of interests, accessibility and great power involvement.

²⁷ Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).

Case studies

The mass majority of crises have occurred in easily accessible locations from a naval perspective, given that about eighty percent of the countries are littoral. However, in the following analysis, the spotlight is turned to the 'difficult access' option, since theoretically it should pose major obstacles on American use of force.

1. The Russian Civil War, 1918-1920

Following the October Revolution, and during the subsequent civil war, the Bolsheviks discussed a separate peace with Germany, an act that seriously damaged the other Entente Powers' (Great Britain, France, the U.S. and Japan) war efforts against the Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire).²⁸ The negotiations succeeded only after several months, during which Germany invaded Russia and Ukraine and captured land that might have helped it win the Great War.²⁹ Once the treaty was signed in February 1918, Russia broke away from its allies, terminating the eastern front of World War I. This allowed Germany to concentrate its military power against the Western allies. There was great fear that this would break the Allies' back and win the war for Germany.

The Civil War in Russia had two major fronts, European Russia and Siberia, of which the former was much more intense.³⁰ Most of Siberia and part of the Caucasus were not yet under Bolshevik control in mid-1918. Entente Powers' military supplies that were stockpiled in northern Russia (in Murmansk and Archangel) could have fallen into German or Bolshevik hands. The Allies needed this material for their war efforts; therefore Great Britain and France decided to invade Russia. On the Far East, Japan was eager to capture parts of Siberia to secure its control over Manchuria.³¹

But the allies' greatest concern in the Russian Civil War was the fate of the Czechoslovak Legion,³² which fought with them against the Germans. Once the peace treaty between Russia and Germany was signed, they could no longer fight from within Russia. The legion of approximately 70,000 troops attempted to cross Siberia eastward in order to be transferred back to Europe by sea and join the western front. They had fought against the Bolsheviks along the Trans-Siberian Railway, and near Irkutsk they were also confronted by a large group of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who were released by the Russians, and blocked the vital railway.³³ The Allies, desperate for these devoted soldiers on the western front, were eager to assist the Czechoslovak Legion that meanwhile captured Vladivostok on June 29.³⁴

²⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), pp. 57-86; John Silverlight, *The Victors' Dilemma: Allied Intervention in the Russian Civil War* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), pp. 1-43.

²⁹ Silverlight, *ibid*, p. xii.

³⁰ See the map of "Red" Russia in November 1918 in Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. xx-xxi.

³¹ James William Morley, *The Japanese Thrust into Siberia, 1918* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972 [1954]).

³² This army was formed by former prisoners of war and deserters from the Austrian Army.

³³ On the German and Austrian prisoners of war see John Bradley, *Allied Intervention in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 48-64.

³⁴ Betty Miller Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition, 1918-1920: A Study of National Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969 [1956]), pp. 54-57; *idem*, *The United States, Revolutionary*

Siberia was a secondary front to the World War, and the efforts that would have been put into the intervention there would be drawn off the effort in Europe.³⁵ However, the need to intervene in Siberia was clear: well-trained, efficient and highly-motivated manpower that the Allies needed was stuck there; Germany took advantage of Russia's weakness to gain assets that could win the war in the west; and most important from a geopolitical perspective, Germany was able to easily capture the trans-Siberian Railway, which would practically secure German control over Siberia, making it the greatest power of the time. Hence, the interests in intervening in Siberia were obvious. But so were the physical limitations.

Great Britain and France appealed numerous times during the first half of 1918 to President Woodrow Wilson for help for the Czechoslovak Legion, but to no avail.³⁶ While they tried to convince the U.S. that a successful intervention was in reach, the administration rejected their pressure on practical military grounds. For instance, on May 28 Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, wrote to the American Military Representative at the Supreme War Council (SWC), General Tasker H. Bliss, that the British-French scheme of intervening in Russia through Vladivostok "is deemed impracticable because of the vast distances involved and the size of the force necessary to be effective. The expedition could serve no military purpose..."³⁷ And according to Secretary of State Robert Lansing's diary on June 12, 1918, he "was forced to conclude that in many respects [the question of intervention] rested primarily upon the ability to transport troops."³⁸ The long distances that intervention would require were the greatest concern in Washington.

With this background, the Czechoslovak Legion's moves in Siberia altered the picture for Washington and tilted the scales in favor of intervention. While a large portion of the Legion remained in Vladivostok, another large group turned back to western Siberia, where they defeated the Bolsheviks. Lansing sensed that the Czechoslovak success created a new condition and argued before Wilson that the U.S. must come to the Czechs' aid because of their loyalty to the Allies' cause and the Soviet injustice to them. But more importantly, given the reports on the Legion's latest successes, Lansing asked whether the Czech Legion could be "a nucleus for military occupation of the Siberian Railway."³⁹ The railway was definitely a strategic line, but more importantly from the American perspective, occupying it would have prohibited a hostile German takeover of Siberia, i.e., the Heartland. Possessing the Siberian Railway would have brought Germany's influence to the Far East easily. Prohibiting this scenario from evolving was critical for the Allies in order to win the war, but it was also important in the longer run, since the Allies feared that Germany was about to take the internally-torn Russia under its influence.

Influenced by the news of the Czech success, Wilson changed his mind about intervention in Russia. Yet, the military advisers opposed intervention in Siberia for the purpose of reestablishing an eastern front against Germany, which was the strategic goal of such an invasion. On June 17, 1918, Wilson instructed General

Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 133-215.

³⁵ Peyton C. March, *The Nation at War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, inc., 1932), pp. 116-120.

³⁶ Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, pp. 21-66.

³⁷ Originally in Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1931), vol. 2, p. 314 (quoted in George F. Kennan, *The Decision to Intervene* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 381.)

³⁸ Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia*, p. 219.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 226.

Peyton March, Chief of U.S. General Staff, to plan an intervention of 10-15 thousand soldiers from the U.S., Britain, France and Italy. March opposed this option and warned Wilson on June 24, 1918, that such an intervention would end with Japan possessing a portion of Siberia; that capturing the eastern region of Siberia with such a small force would not affect the war in Europe since Germany would not feel compelled to move a single division eastward to face such a challenge, and the U.S. itself did not have enough power to place in Siberia to force Germany to divert forces to the east. March wrote that the scheme that Wilson discussed was "neither practical nor practicable," and that giving Japan a free hand in Siberia would not help Russia, but rather push it into German hands.⁴⁰

On July 2, 1918, the Allies SWC held a momentous meeting. The largest section in the summary telegram to Washington regarded the Czechoslovak Legion, described as "a force of 50,000 troops, of Slav nationality, totally disinterested in the internal politics of Russia...", which controlled the western Siberia railway. However, the Czechs were in "grave danger" of being cut off by German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war at Irkutsk. The SWC considered an operation of reaching Irkutsk a simple matter if it was done immediately. The SWC also reported that the Bolsheviks were weakening across Russia, and that the democratic forces were beginning to make contact with each other, probably fearing German domination over Russia, given the Bolshevik weakness. Allied intervention seemed crucial to prevent German domination over Russia. The SWC added that intervention was necessary for winning the Great War. It was necessary to force Germany to transfer a considerable amount of its force to the east in order for the Western Allies to win on their front. The SWC claimed that if action was taken at once, the Allied expedition may be able to arrive at the Urals within few weeks. If there would be no intervention, the SWC warned, Russia would not become democratic, Germany would gain all the supplies it needed, the Allies would definitely not win during 1919, and the Czechoslovak Legion would be abandoned to the mercy of Germany.⁴¹ This report included all possible reasons for intervention, but it highlighted the worrying situation of the Czechoslovaks. General March's memo to Wilson from June 24 contradicted the SWC arguments, and Wilson had to take sides.

On July 6, 1918, Wilson held a decisive meeting with Lansing, the Secretaries of War (Baker) and Navy (Josephus Daniels), General March and Admiral Benson. They decided that "the establishment of an eastern front through a military expedition, even if it was wise to employ a large Japanese force, is *physically impossible* though the front was established east of the Ural Mountains; that under present conditions any advance westward of Irkutsk *does not seem possible* and *needs no further consideration...*"⁴² American refusal to help reestablish an eastern front against

⁴⁰ Richard Goldhurst, *The Midnight War: The American Intervention in Russia, 1918-1920* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), pp. 19-20, partly quoting from March, *The Nation at War*, pp. 116-120; Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia*, p. 226. Nevertheless, on June 27, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William S. Benson, received a memorandum saying that the American policy was to protect Allied property and munitions in Vladivostok and Murmansk; not to engage against any force on Russian soil unless invited to do so by a recognized authority; and to transport the Czechs to France if they wished to. Ibid, p. 232.

⁴¹ "The Diplomatic Liaison Officer, Supreme War Council (Frazier, to the Secretary of State", July 2, 1918, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 241-246.

⁴² "Memorandum of the Secretary of State of a Conference at the White House in Situation," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 262-263. [Italics added]

Germany contradicted the strategic logic of the SWC appeal and sterilized it, but accessibility, underscored all along the operational sections of this decision, was the reason. Wilson decided to coordinate it only with Japan (to restrain Japan's moves in Siberia), leaving Britain and France out of the picture.⁴³

In essence, the U.S. agreed that the situation required Allied assistance in reconnecting the Czechs already in Vladivostok to their compatriots in western Siberia. It suggested sending a small American and Japanese force (7,000 troops from each) "to guard the line of communication of the Czechoslovaks proceeding toward Irkutsk," and also decided that the Japanese should rearm the Czechs, while all of the Allies finance this rearmament. The U.S. insisted on announcing that the intention of the operation was only to aid the Czechs against the German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners, and was not aimed at intervening in the "internal affairs of Russia, and ... guarantee not to impair the political or territorial sovereignty of Russia."⁴⁴ The U.S. sent 7,000 troops to Siberia as agreed, but Japan, as March expected, took advantage of the situation, and sent 72,000 troops.

On July 17, 1918, Wilson issued an Aide Memoir signed by the State Department.⁴⁵ This was the only directive issued for the intervening forces during their stay in Siberia. The document referred to the problem of distance: "... [The U.S.] cannot, so long as the military situation on the western front remains critical, consent to break or slacken the force of its present effort by diverting any part of its military force to other points or objectives. The United States is at a great distance from the field of action on the western front; it is at a much greater distance from any other field of action..."⁴⁶ And on September 26 Wilson informed Great Britain and Japan that "it is the unqualified judgment of our military authorities that to attempt military activities west of the Urals is to attempt the impossible."⁴⁷

Theoretically speaking, the vital interest to prevent a German takeover of the Heartland collided with the inaccessibility of the Urals, where a blockade could have been set up. The result was a multilateral intervention within which the U.S. took the backseat. It could not prevent Japan from expanding its part of the intervention to fit its own interests, though the U.S. objected to them, and eventually achieved much less than the SWC planned or expected.

2. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979

Afghanistan is located in the Asian Heartland, landlocked between great regional powers which for centuries struggled for influence over Afghanistan, while preventing other powers from gaining such influence. Preceding the Soviet invasion, Great Britain, ruler of India and Pakistan until 1947, fought three wars in Afghanistan

⁴³ Gaddis, *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, 75; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and World War I," in *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, ed. Robert D. Schulzinger (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 155-156; Unterberger, *America's Siberian Expedition*, pp. 67-88.

⁴⁴ "Memorandum of the Secretary of State," *ibid.*

⁴⁵ "The Secretary of State to the Allied Ambassadors," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918, Russia vol. II* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 287-290. This Aide Memoire was handed to Major General William Graves as the president's instructions for his mission in Siberia by Secretary of War Baker. William S. Graves, *America's Siberian Adventure, 1918-1920* (New York: Peter Smith Publishers, 1941 reprint), pp. 7-10.

⁴⁶ "The Secretary of State to the Allied Ambassadors," pp. 287-288.

⁴⁷ Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, the Papers of Peyton C. March, container no. 6, folder Apr. 6, 1934 Lecture, "Reminiscences", by P. C. March at Army War College, Washington, D.C., p. 15.

and could not occupy it. Afghanistan is a classical buffer-state.⁴⁸ It was a buffer-state between the Soviet Union and Pakistan and Iran, two very important countries from the American perspective, which provide access to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, respectively. But without significant natural resources, Afghanistan had no strategic importance to the U.S. besides this role.⁴⁹

The mountainous landscape of Afghanistan creates a physical barrier, according to contemporary American analysis.⁵⁰ The fact that Afghanistan is thousands of miles away from the sea, with an arid climate and such extreme topography, makes Afghanistan one of the world's most difficult terrains, at least in military terms.

The Soviet invasion on Christmas Day 1979 caught the U.S. unprepared, although there were signs that something was about to happen. Administration officials admitted to their superiors that they could not guess what it was the Soviets were doing.⁵¹

Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security advisor, wrote a memo on the day after the Soviet invasion, saying that if the Soviets succeeded in occupying Afghanistan and Pakistan accepted it, the Soviets would gain access to the Indian Ocean, fulfilling their perpetual dream.⁵² He estimated that the probability for direct confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union increased and the SALT agreements might be cancelled.⁵³ Brzezinski suggested not "to sanguine that Afghanistan would become a Soviet Vietnam," because the Mujahidin were much less equipped and organized than the Vietcong had been. He suggested rearming and financing the Mujahidin via Pakistan, but this could be done only if the Carter Administration changed policy and internalized that its policy cannot be dictated by the nuclear non-proliferation policy.⁵⁴ On December 28, Brzezinski said in a Special Coordination Committee meeting that the U.S. had to accept that besides condemning the Soviet move, there was virtually nothing else it could do in response.⁵⁵

The U.S. could not reach Afghanistan directly. Iran, after the Islamic Revolution, was very hostile and the Chinese border of Afghanistan was sealed by the

⁴⁸ Keith McLachlan, "Afghanistan: The Geopolitics of a Buffer State," *Geopolitics* 2, no. 1 (1997): pp. 82-96.

⁴⁹ Jeffery J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), pp. ix-x.

⁵⁰ National Foreign Assessment Center. *Afghanistan: Ethnic Diversity and Dissidence, a Research Paper*. GC79-10075, June 1979, p. 1. Presidential Papers of Jimmy Carter; National Security Affairs; Brzezinski Material; County File; Afghanistan 1/77-3/79 through Afghanistan 3-4/80; box 1, Afghanistan 4-12/79.

⁵¹ Thomas Thornton to Zbigniew Brzezinski, memo "What are the Soviets doing in Afghanistan?" September 17, 1979. Presidential Papers of Jimmy Carter; National Security Affairs; Brzezinski Material; County File; Afghanistan 1/77-3/79 through Afghanistan 3-4/80; box 1, Afghanistan 4-12/79.

⁵² On this concept of Russia's aspirations see William C. Green, "The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth," *Naval War College Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1993), pp. 80-102.

⁵³ They were brought before the Senate for ratification, and were under major criticism even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

⁵⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President, memo, "Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan", December 26, 1979. Presidential Papers of Jimmy Carter; National Security Affairs; Brzezinski Material; County File; Afghanistan 1/77-3/79 through Afghanistan 3-4/80; box 1, Afghanistan 4-12/79.

⁵⁵ Special Coordination Committee Meeting, December 28, 1979, "Iran and Afghanistan", p. 3. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Meetings – SCC 202: 11/14/79 through Meetings SCC 250: 1/14/80, box 31, folder Meetings – SCC 240.

Soviets, leaving only Pakistan as a potential route into Afghanistan.⁵⁶ The negotiations between the U.S. and Pakistan continued throughout 1980, with the U.S. offering an economic assistance package and security guarantees against external attacks, which Pakistan rejected as insufficient, since they excluded India as the source of such external attack.⁵⁷

During early January 1980, the administration discussed the measures it should take against the Soviet Union. Most of the measures were economic and diplomatic (most memorable was the eventual decision to boycott the Moscow Olympic Games in summer 1980), none was unilaterally military. The only military move suggested was increasing the permanent presence of naval forces in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.⁵⁸ This last move was not intended to roll the Soviets back from Afghanistan, but to deter them from continuing their military move into either Iran or Pakistan.

In mid-January 1980 General David Jones, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stressed that the Soviet invasion increased dramatically the dangers posed against American allies in the Persian Gulf. The Hormuz Straits would now be in range of Soviet jets, and assuming the resistance would be weak, Soviet land forces could reach the Gulf and the Kuwait oil fields within two weeks. The U.S. could place only one aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia may serve as forward bases for aircrafts.⁵⁹ In a discussion paper titled "Elements of a US Strategy for Security and Orderly Development in the Near East and Southwestern Asia" the Soviet invasion was identified as a threat to access to America's vital interest in the region, oil.⁶⁰ In his memoirs, Brzezinski summed his strategic planning and identified three elements in the U.S. response to the Soviet invasion: (1) direct sanctions on the Soviet Union; (2) forming a doctrine to connect the security of the Gulf and South Asia to American security and attempting at forming a regional security framework; (3) rapid strategic renewal.⁶¹

In sum, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was a strategic problem for the U.S. for two reasons: first, since the Soviet Union was the occupier, any American intervention would have ignited a direct confrontation between the superpowers which might have easily spilled over to other regions, and perhaps become global. Second, Afghanistan's location caused a major difficulty for the U.S. even to supply

⁵⁶ Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective; Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1985), p. 137.

⁵⁷ Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Md.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, and the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 249-255.

⁵⁸ Peter Tarnoff (Executive Secretary, Department of State) to Zbigniew Brzezinski, memorandum, "U.S. Soviet Relations and Afghanistan", December 31, 1979, in "SCC Meeting, January 2, 1980, Afghanistan: Harold Brown's Trip to China", pp. 17-20. Presidential Papers of Jimmy Carter, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Afghanistan 1/77-3/79 through Afghanistan 3-4/80, box 1, folder Afghanistan 1/1-8/80.

⁵⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President, memorandum, "SCC on Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf", January 15, 1980, pp. 4-6. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Meetings – SCC 202: 11/14/79 through Meetings – SCC 250: 1/14/80, box 31, folder Meetings – SCC 250: 1/14/80.

⁶⁰ Discussion paper: Elements of a U.S. Strategy for Security and Orderly Development in the Near East and Southwestern Asia"; in Tom Thornton memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski, January 14, 1980, subject: Monday SCC meeting – Regional commitments. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Donated Historical Material; Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection; Subject File; Meetings – SCC 202: 11/14/79 through Meetings – SCC 250: 1/14/80; Box 31, SCC 250.

⁶¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 430.

the Mujahidin in order to preserve their resistance capabilities. In fact, Afghanistan was practically inaccessible. Hence, the U.S. had to reverse the hostile policy it held toward Pakistan due to its nuclear policy, so that the latter would be willing to provide supplies to the Mujahidin. The American fear was that Pakistan might fall into the Soviets' hands without American backing, but given Carter's hostility until the Soviet invasion, trust was lacking in their mutual relations. Eventually (more in the Reagan administration), Pakistan accepted the U.S. offers and supplied the Mujahidin for nearly a decade, until the Soviets retreated.

The administration's deliberations after the invasion demonstrate that it could not do much militarily to change the situation. The nature of the steps it took was of containment, not rollback, and the reason was that the U.S. had no capabilities to do more than that with its given military structure.

3. The War in Afghanistan, 2001-

The American War in Afghanistan started on October 7, 2001, in response to the September 11 terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It started with missiles launched against the Taliban-controlled Afghan central government facilities, which was followed by an attack on Kabul by soldiers of the Northern Alliance of tribes with the assistance of American intelligence servicemen.⁶²

Given Afghanistan's location in the Asian heartland, the theory predicts that the U.S. would not have invaded without the most vital interest (homeland security) involved. The reason for the American strike against Afghanistan was that the Taliban hosted and provided safe haven to Al-Qaeda, and refused to surrender its members to the Americans or to any international court to be put on trial for the 9/11 attacks. The American strike was justified as a legitimate act of self defense under the articles of the UN Charter.

Although the U.S. had global and regional support for its intent to invade Afghanistan,⁶³ it still had to gain access. General Wesley Clark's remark on the necessity of access to Afghanistan (in the introduction to his book on the Kosovo War, *Waging Modern War*) reflects this need:

Even the greatest power in the world has to have, at least, access to the theatre of operations – Afghanistan, in this case – as well as support from facilities in nearby countries and friends on the ground.⁶⁴

Even though the countries surrounding Afghanistan supported the removal of the Taliban from power, none was considered a safe passage. However, Pakistan was an old ally of the U.S. since the early days of the Cold War. Its border with Afghanistan is the latter's longest and most challenging. The U.S. needed Pakistan as a ground route to Afghanistan, but the ethnic identity on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and the fact that the military regime in Islamabad was standing on shaky ground made it an insecure route. Pakistan, for its part, was reluctant to approve passage through its territory. Eventually, the approval came, apparently, after the U.S.

⁶² Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Keeping Peace with America's Military* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), pp. 141-174.

⁶³ At least forty countries from the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia allowed passage and landing. Many countries shared intelligence with the U.S. Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth*, p. 194.

⁶⁴ Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), p. xxvi.

made threats.⁶⁵ Ever since, the U.S. had to worry about the stability of Pakistan because it was the only route, however insecure and dangerous, to Afghanistan.⁶⁶

The difficulty to access Afghanistan required the U.S. to commit large forces to the war, which otherwise may have been easy to conduct, given the Taliban's ineffective control over parts of the country due to Afghan society's diversity and its difficult topography. According to the memoirs of former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith, the military was prepared for striking in Afghanistan, but only against Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, not against the Taliban. President Bush learned about the plan in a meeting with the National Security Council on September 13, 2001. Chief of Staff, General Hugh Shelton, said that northern Afghanistan was not covered by the Tomahawk cruise missiles (launched from vessels in the Indian Ocean). That limitation was significant because striking there should have weakened the Taliban dramatically.⁶⁷ Northern Afghanistan was the most problematic region to access, but after intense contacts with Uzbekistan, its government permitted the American forces' transit through its territory,⁶⁸ and as a result, the strike could begin.

President Bush held another meeting with his top advisors in Camp David on September 15, 2001. General Shelton brought three general plans for striking Afghanistan. First, if speed of action was the issue, he could only suggest striking Taliban and Al Qaeda facilities with cruise missiles launched from Navy ships or Air Force planes. The problem was that such a strike would have been ineffective, since all facilities were already evacuated. Second, Shelton suggested a combined strike of cruise missiles and bombers on the same targets, which may last several days. Third, the military planners suggested a combination of cruise missiles, bombers and "boots on the ground," i.e. elite commando units of the Special Forces and perhaps the Army

⁶⁵ Reuters, "Pakistani Leader Claims U.S. Threat after 9/11", New York Times, 22 September 2006. Available online: www.nytimes.com/2006/09/22/world/asia/22pakistan.html (Accessed at 21.11.2007). The threat was presumably delivered by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Pakistan's head of Inter-Service Intelligence, Mahmoud Ahmed, who happened to be in the US when the terrorists attacked. Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Air Power against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (MG166) (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2005), pp. 31-32. Wesley Clark wrote that this approval was vital for success. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, p. xxvi.

⁶⁶ The January 2009 agreements with other neighbors of Afghanistan should have made things easier for the U.S., but the situation in Pakistan deteriorated soon afterwards, and in late May 2009 the Pakistan Army with American forces were still fighting Islamist militants in Pakistan in defense of the regime.

⁶⁷ Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008), pp. 14-15.

⁶⁸ Richard W. Stewart, *The United States Army in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2001-March 2002*, Publication CMH Pub 70-83-1 (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2004), p. 8. Actually, the US appealed to Russia soon after the 9/11 attacks for permission to ask Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for their permission to use their air bases for the planned attack. Eventually, Russia's President Vladimir Putin agreed to encourage these two former Soviet Republics of Central Asia to accept the American request, depending on whether its intentions were temporary and only related to the counter-terror attack in Afghanistan. Lambeth, *Air Power against Terror*, 27-29. Bob Woodward reports that in a NSC meeting on September 24, State and Defense Departments were still working on securing over-flight and basing rights around Afghanistan. The problem was that the referred countries wanted specific details on the operation they were asked to allow, but details were unknown as long as the operation had not started. NSC discussed Uzbekistan's costly demands in this regard (including permanent American support vis-à-vis Russia; \$50 million in loans; and support against the local Uzbek rebels). Only on October 1 could the incoming Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Richard Myers, report that the Uzbeks approved using an airfield, but with strict limitations on aircraft maintenance. This was expected to slow the war plans and delay special operations. Without the aerial coverage from the base in Uzbekistan, not all targets were covered from the carriers in the Indian Ocean. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), pp. 129, 173, 185-186.

and Marines, deployed in Afghanistan. This latter option would need at least 10-12 days to prepare for, since it included acquiring bases and over-flight rights for any possible rescue mission during combat. It is reported that Secretary of State Powell and Vice President Cheney were stunned by the fact that there was no war plan for Afghanistan. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice is reported to have looked at Afghanistan's map which "evoked every negative image: far away, mountains, landlocked, hard." Bush told his advisors he didn't mind going it alone, but Powell thought that without partners the U.S. "could not launch an effective war even in Afghanistan..."⁶⁹

The greatest fear was that chaos in Afghanistan would cross the border into Pakistan, meaning that Islamist extremists might gain access to Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Bush ordered a package of support to be prepared for Pakistan to reassure President Musharraf that it would be worthwhile to support the U.S.⁷⁰

All in all, the logistical problems that geography dictated postponed the American retaliation to the 9/11 attacks by nearly a month. As early as September 12, 2001, General Tommy Franks, commander in chief of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) told Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that it would take months to get forces in the area and draw plans for a massive military operation in Afghanistan.⁷¹ Two weeks later National Security Advisor Rice still reported to President Bush that the military had "no infrastructure in the region to speak of, no bases, weak on-the-ground intelligence at this point, scarce targets, the weather is starting to get bad. ..."⁷²

The war was masterminded in Washington and was (and still is) American. However, the U.S. invaded with a coalition of countries, essentially NATO members. The coalition was apparently established in order to provide international support to the war aims, but the decision-making process suggests another reason: Not only did the coalition help the U.S. pressure unwilling regional players, but it also shared the military burden.⁷³ The UK participated in the initial air strikes on Afghanistan,⁷⁴ and soon after the war began, the UN established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which is multinational. Since August 2003 NATO commands this force. Nevertheless, the American forces are the leaders of the international effort.

The War in Afghanistan was never conventional. The Taliban is a guerilla organization, and maintains insurgency against the American-imposed regime in Kabul and against NATO troops. Occupying Afghanistan was the easier part of the war. The important work began only afterwards, and the difficulties became concrete then.⁷⁵

The U.S. managed to overcome Afghanistan's very difficult topography, and maintains its forces there for nearly 9 years. However, a closer look indicates that since 2001 the U.S. is mostly struggling to uphold the Northern Alliance-based pro-

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 79-81.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 82. This discussion led to another option: striking elsewhere than Afghanistan to achieve quicker successful results. Paul Wolfowitz said attacking Afghanistan was uncertain, since it would bog down 100,000 American troops in mountain fighting within six months. He made the case that Iraq was much easier to break, but Bush promptly rejected the suggestion, and refocused on Afghanistan. Ibid, pp. 83-84.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁷² Ibid, pp. 157-158.

⁷³ Sarah Kreps, "When Does the Mission Determine the Coalition? The Logic of Multilateral Intervention and the Case of Afghanistan," *Security Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2008), pp. 531-567.

⁷⁴ Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth*, p. 194.

⁷⁵ Priest, *The Mission*, p. 19.

Western regime it placed in Kabul. Immediately after the invasion the Taliban seemed to be defeated totally and its remains seemed to pose no threat, but in the recent years the Taliban are once again raising their heads, and by mid-2009 regained control over approximately half of Afghanistan, if not more.⁷⁶ In late 2008 President Bush decided to transfer thousands of troops from Iraq to Afghanistan in order to re-stabilize it.⁷⁷ In late 2009, President Obama decided to increase American forces by 30,000 troops more in response to a disturbing report by General Stanley McChrystal.⁷⁸ The ground forces suffer from lack of equipment and arms because they depend on ground routes of supplies crossing through Pakistan (75% of the "non-lethal" supplies traverse Pakistan).⁷⁹ These routes are attacked constantly by militants. On January 20, 2009, General David Petraeus, head of U.S. Central Command (now commander of the American and international forces in Afghanistan), announced that he struck deals with Russia and with neighbors of Afghanistan to allow transport of supplies to American troops in Afghanistan. The need for new routes of supply was a result of the diminishing credibility of the Pakistan route, but also of the American plan to double its forces in Afghanistan to confront the Taliban insurgency more effectively.

Theoretically, had Afghanistan not been landlocked, and *ceteris paribus*, the U.S. probably may have acted alone and perhaps earlier. It had the highest interest and means, not to mention justification. The internationalization of the invading (and later the occupying) force was a consequence of the accessibility problem no less than of the need to show global support for the American action. Putting it differently, the War in Afghanistan proves that geopolitical limitations (most significant are that Afghanistan is landlocked and that there are few routes to access it) **did not** deprive the U.S. from acting, although as time passed, these problems became more obvious.

Discussion

The three case studies represent various possibilities of utilizing force that the U.S. employed based on the balance of interests and (physical and political) accessibility. Table 2 summarizes the three cases.

⁷⁶ Telegraph, "Taliban Control Half of Afghanistan, Says Report," 22 November, 2007. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1570232/Taliban-control-half-of-Afghanistan-says-report.html> (2.5.2009); <http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/2007/11/taliban-in-cont.html> (2.5.2009)

⁷⁷ Michael R. Gordon and Thom Shanker, "Plan Would Shift Forces from Iraq to Afghanistan," *New York Times*, September 4, 2008. Available online: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/05/world/middleeast/05military.html?_r=1&scp=5&sq=transfer%20US%20troops%20iraq%20afghanistan&st=cse (22.1.2009)

⁷⁸ Stanley McChrystal to Robert Gates, "Commander's Initial Assessment", 30 August 2009. Available online at http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf (24.9.2009); Peter Baker, "How Obama Came to Plan for 'Surge' in Afghanistan", *New York Times*, December 6, 2009. Available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/asia/06reconstruct.html?_r=1&th&emc=th (6.12.2009)

⁷⁹ Richard A. Opiel, "U.S. Secures New Supply Routes to Afghanistan," *New York Times*, 20 January, 2009. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/21/world/asia/21pstan.html?partner=rss&emc=rss> (22.1.2009)

Table 2: Case comparison

	Intervention in Siberia	Soviet invasion of Afghanistan	War in Afghanistan
Duration	1918-1920	1979-1988	2001-
American interests	Preventing a German takeover of the Heartland	Preventing the Soviet Union from gaining access to the Gulf oil and Indian Ocean	Defense of the homeland
Accessibility	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult
Involvement of other great powers	Britain, France, Japan, Germany	Soviet Union, full party	None
Type of force used	Multilateral intervention	Semi-military intervention	War

Although limited space in this paper prevented a deeper look into these and other cases, the focus on cases where the front was inaccessible to American forces allows one to come to the conclusion that the U.S. is limited by its own force structure and therefore has to alter its goals. This was especially the case in the Siberian affair, where the military experts explained that they have no possibility to realize the policy President Wilson instructed them to. In response, Wilson developed a plan that was much closer to shore line, limited the goals to what the military could achieve and abandoned the goal of reestablishing the eastern front, which was why the SWC pressed hard on the U.S. to intervene in the first place. Wilson accepted the limitations to an extent that he decided the instructions he gave on July 6, 1918, were not to be discussed again.

In the Afghanistan 1979 case, the Soviets were the invaders, and due to their parallel status as superpower, the U.S. feared direct confrontation, especially since it was inferior as a naval power confronting the major land power in its "backyard". Such confrontation was not really a realistic option, since the U.S. lacked the ability to project its power effectively into Afghanistan, ensuring that it would be defeated. Therefore, the U.S. turned to Pakistan for assistance in arming the Mujahidin secretly, while on the surface the U.S. could do nothing to rollback the Soviets, therefore it had to satisfy with condemnation and economic and cultural sanctions. It took the U.S. nearly a decade of intense assistance to the Mujahidin through Pakistan to get the Soviets to withdraw, tacitly admitting defeat. This was mostly President Reagan's persistence that made that possible, but essentially his actions were based on foundations President Carter laid. It is important to understand that there were two reasons for the American decision to arm the Mujahidin: the fear to confront the Soviets directly, and the inability to reach Afghanistan with the contemporary power the U.S. had.

In Afghanistan 2001, the Soviet Union was long gone, and Russia wasn't an adjacent neighbor. The U.S. was much freer to act, and had a good reason and solid support for doing so. The U.S. still had no easy access to the scene, since the hostility to the U.S. itself was higher than resentment to the Taliban (for instance in Iran). Again, the U.S. asked Pakistan to assist, this time as a continental bridge. The U.S. was forced to accept Pakistan's nuclear status after years of sanctions because of Islamabad's nuclear policy. But the Pakistani regime was shaky, and the U.S. also kept careful watch on it to make sure the route into Afghanistan was still functional. That led the U.S. to seek new routes and indeed they were found, in 2009, nearly eight years into the war. Afghanistan's geographical setting caused major problems to the American planners, and in fact it assisted the Taliban to raise their heads again after

several years they were considered defeated. General McChrystal's conclusion in summer 2009 that the war was on the losing track was a direct result of this setting, and the response – a dramatic increase in number of troops – is the only possible solution, which in fact revives, at least in spirit, the Powell Doctrine.

Conclusions

Geopolitics is a major branch of research in international relations and foreign policy, and is integral in the U.S. concept of foreign relations. The emerging of the U.S. into a leading position in the international arena coincided with the evolution of central geopolitical theories. The geopolitical concepts became fixated in American administrations because they outlined a practical rationale for skillful use of the growing U.S. military power. According to the concepts of Mahan and Mackinder, the U.S. crystallized its worldview and built its military power, bringing the technological capability of the U.S. and the experience of previous world powers into consideration.

The Navy, defined as the first respondent to crises, was designed to reflect American power while considering the distance it needed to bridge in order to reach “the rest of the world”. The Navy promotes American interests across the world, but its limitations dictated restrictive utilization of the Navy only for circumstances in which it could succeed. In other words, **since the Navy was accountable for responding to international crises, the U.S. had to organize its global map of interests according to the Navy’s capability to secure or attain them.** This is the reason that the U.S. relinquished the heartlands of Africa, Asia and Europe (as long as the USSR existed; and partly, even afterwards).

This study highlights the importance of military branches and their capabilities in the rationale for using force in international crises, testifying to their importance in any theory of foreign policy. Military power is an essential factor in foreign policy because it is the forceful means to gain political goals. In violent situations, the military limitations are very important in understanding the decision whether or not to intervene, and its result. Apparently, although the continuing debate about the proper relations with the world, which has clear implications for use of force, the U.S. had set for itself – unknowingly – limitations regarding military operations. This is how the “land barrier” evolved.

To conclude, geography essentially dictates the logic that the U.S. follows in using force. The U.S. has a consistent rationale for dealing with crises: since its major conventional force is the Navy (which means that the seas are the American forefront bases), it acts unilaterally only in littoral areas to which the Navy can approach easily and from which it can also depart easily.