



HIGHER EDUCATION IN A GLOBAL ERA

Challenges and Prospects

For decades following World War II, the United States pursued a widely accepted Cold War strategy focused on containing communism and deterring nuclear war with Russia. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, no national strategy has emerged to take the place of the Cold War doctrine. Wesley Clark, retired four-star general in the U.S. Army and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, emphasizes the need for a vision of where the United States fits on the world stage and for an overarching, organizing principle to take the place of the Cold War strategy. The United States is in a major transition, both in terms of how we approach the rest of the world and in how we are viewed by other nations. Clark notes that to fully understand where our country is today—and the vital role higher education can play in moving us in the direction we should be going—we first need to look back at how we got here.



MISSION CONTROL

- ✘ Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, no national strategy has emerged to take the place of the Cold War doctrine. Today there is nothing comparable to the idea of deterrence and containment that motivated America then. There is nothing that ordinary Americans can understand, sign up for, work for, and believe in.
- ✘ The biggest challenge the United States faces today is not the war on terror. The real challenge we're facing is that for the first time in American history, we're up against two economic supergiants—China and India. China could change the very nature of America as we know it, just by virtue of its sheer scale.
- ✘ It is essential that leaders in higher education participate in crafting a new strategy for America. They must consider the larger context of their decisions and actions, both at home and abroad.
- ✘ American power is the power of knowledge and freedom. How, in an age of global competition, do we optimize our activities and international relationships so they are good for universities, good for students, and good for the country?



The Cold War and the Boon to Higher Education

Shortly after World War II, U.S. leaders recognized that our WWII ally, Russia, would become a major challenge to the postwar international order. What came to be known as the Cold War demanded from the United States a national security strategy that ultimately became an organizing force in almost every aspect of American life, including education. In 1957, when Russia launched the first satellite, *Sputnik*, America was in shock. But the United States was quick to respond and did so on many fronts, including science, education, business, and, of course, the military. Research and development programs were enhanced, the National Defense Education Act was adopted, new weapons initiatives were begun, and greater emphasis was placed on math and science at all levels. For three decades, we moved as a nation that was more or less in agreement with the strategy of deterring an attack by the Soviet Union and acting to contain Soviet and Communist expansion. My friends and I, growing up then in the Army, thought that the Cold War would never end, that it would be an eternal condition. Then, suddenly, it was over.

The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, and Germany was unified in short order. Soviet troops pulled out of East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Within two years, the Soviet Union itself had disintegrated. There was no more Soviet threat. We had won. But without our old adversary, we had also lost—lost our sense of direction, lost our strategy, and lost a key element behind America's international appeal. We became enmeshed in other foreign affairs and conflicts in the Balkans, Korea, Haiti, and Africa. When our embassies were attacked in the summer of 1998, we went through plan after plan to stop Osama bin Laden. None of this had anything to do with the Soviet Union, yet there was no overarching organizing principle to take the place of the Cold War strategy and no vision of where the United States fits on the world stage.

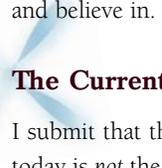


The Global Opportunity the United States Embraced and Squandered

A global opening presented itself with the fall of the Iron Curtain, the entry of China into modern economic relations, the creation of the World Trade Organization, the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the explosion of telecommunications, and the creation of the Internet. For the next decade or so, we took advantage of it all and enjoyed an extraordinarily dynamic period of the American economy. By the year 2000, there was no question that the United States was dominant in the world, both militarily and economically. But then September 11, 2001 ended America's innocence.

The world crashed into us. At that point, it became clear that we didn't comprehend the risks associated with dominance. We hadn't grasped what had been happening in other parts of the world. We didn't know how to protect ourselves. So our president took us to Afghanistan to remove Al Qaeda's base, as he should have. But then we went to war in Iraq on a pre-emptive doctrine. Now we are mired down there, creating more enemies and being distracted from the actions and policies necessary to succeed in the war against Islamic terrorists.

The tragedy is that we *still* have no national strategy, no set of organizing principles that can help us deal with the world we currently face. Today, there is nothing comparable to the idea of deterrence and containment that motivated America during the Cold War. There is nothing that ordinary Americans can understand, sign up for, work for, and believe in.



The Current Threat

I submit that the biggest challenge the United States faces today is *not* the war on terror. We will eventually get out of Iraq—it's just a question of how soon and how successfully. It may take 15 or 20 years, but the insurgents are not going to destroy America.

The *real* challenge we're facing is that for the first time in American history, we're up against two economic supergiants—China and India. China, especially, can substantially affect the United States in an adverse way over the next 40 to 50 years. China may eventually constrain our freedom of action internationally. It could threaten the livelihood, economic security, and living standards of ordinary Americans. China could change the very nature of America as we know it, just by virtue of its sheer scale. The Chinese have at least the normal shaped distribution curve of intelligence, which means that at least four times more geniuses will be born in China every year than in the United States, simply because they have four times as many people. China is not yet developing all that talent, but the country is working on it. With China's astounding scale and market size come capital accumulation, great universities, great technology, and, ultimately, great weaponry—all of which could some day come back to constrain American freedom of action.

When we think about China, we must remember what we are dealing with. China is still a Communist country, not a democracy; to a large degree, the government can turn off freedom of information. It may not be able to do so in 10 years, but right now, it still can. China is filtering the Internet and arresting people who resist state control of it. China is a nation in transition, and we don't know which direction it will take in the future.

We must be careful not to be so distracted by concerns about terrorism that we neglect the fundamental challenges to the United States posed by the rise of this market four times our own size. It is clear that the United States is no longer the world's dominant market. We must figure out how to live with the elephant on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. What will China's development mean to us? What does it mean to higher education?

Needed: A New Approach to Global Diplomacy

We need a new American strategy. We ought to call it "American leadership," because we should be devoting the next 30 or 40 years to integrating China—and, to a lesser extent, India—into the world economic, political, cultural, and diplomatic networks in ways that are congruent with our values and that serve our own interests. This strategy will protect us, our values, and our freedom of action.

The United States hasn't begun to consider what this new strategy would entail. On a diplomatic level, it requires us to go back and strengthen our ties with Europe. In all the world, Europe resembles us the most in terms of culture, values, and law. Europe is also the most economically integrated with the United States, and Europe and the United States still have three of the five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council. Together with Europe, we can move the diplomatic world. When we work with Europe, we can affect China.

We must also strengthen international institutions. Forty years from now, if China continues to grow at its present rate, no country is going to be able to tell China what to do. We want China to be constrained by laws, rules of procedure, and international obligations in the same way the United States normally feels constrained. We want to end 19th-century "balance of power" politics, which are a product of the force and wealth of nations. We must move into the 21st century. That should be our task. To accomplish it, we must work seriously with the United Nations. It is vitally important to reform the United Nations, because we need effective international institutions. These institutions deflect both explicit and implicit antagonistic actions directed toward the United States, and they defuse the sort of imperial impetus that we have a tendency to exude. We must build and support such institutions now, while we have the strength, and use them to integrate China into the world's economic, cultural, political, and diplomatic networks.

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The United States must also work with India. This should be easier than working with China, because India, the world's largest democracy, does not have an imperial culture. Thus, we likely have fewer conflicting interests with India. Unlike China, India was never the center of the world; it has always been an accumulation of small states. In addition, India has 300 years of experience with British bureaucracy and the civil service; English is spoken there. India is well on its way to becoming a great nation and can become a significant U.S. trading partner. As such, it can provide an enormous strategic counterweight to China. We can balance between the two countries and find, in that balance, our own freedom of action and protection of values. Thus, we need to elevate India both in our national dialogue and in our diplomatic efforts.

Roles for Higher Education in a New American Leadership Strategy

Much needs to be done. In addition to diplomacy, a series of measures need to be taken across U.S. domestic society if we are to effectively compete in the world economy and become stronger at home. During the late 1950s, we looked at the output of science and engineering students in Soviet universities and knew we had to dramatically improve American capabilities in those areas. And we did. In turn, the research community created what our government needed. Current leaders in higher education should think about how to participate in crafting a new strategy for America and how to help promote this country abroad. Universities today reach out for students from all over the world and have well-established exchange programs. Universities are open institutions because educators believe that scientific knowledge and learning are best promoted by open dialogue. Indeed, we used that approach to our enormous advantage during the Cold War. Universities today need to consider their relationships with our country; that is, higher education's leaders must consider the larger context of their decisions and actions, both at home and abroad.

The numbers of foreign students choosing to come to the United States to study, especially from China and India, has been in decline since 9/11 for a number of reasons. This is unfortunate and a setback I hope we can fix. If there is any silver lining to this cloud, it is that it presents an opportunity to refocus on attracting our own American student population.

We must seriously ask why many young people in this country are not motivated to the same extent as their foreign counterparts to study science and engi-

neering. We have great young people—hardworking, smart, ambitious, but not into hard science. Why can't we motivate more of these young people to apply to science and engineering the same energy they bring to the study of law, politics, and business? We built this world on science and technology, and yet we are dealing with a student population that is increasingly illiterate in the very science and technology forces that have made the world what it is today. What is our responsibility for this situation, and how do we address it? I hope educators ask themselves, How do you take young people with 750 SATs in mathematics, keep them interested in science and technology, and then ensure that there will be a suitable career waiting for them upon graduation? A young university student came up to me when I was campaigning in 2003 and said, "I don't know why you're talking about science and technology. There's no point in me studying science and technology to become an engineer, because the engineers in the Czech Republic study the same books I do, and they get paid \$6,000 a year. I can't command \$60,000 for the same knowledge in a global market. So I have to go into investment banking." What's the answer to that? More broadly, why is it that roughly half of the students who enroll in our nation's colleges and universities don't graduate—in any field?

I hope universities will work more closely with secondary schools and help them feed well-educated students to their institutions. We all know what the formulas are: We need better teacher pay and better teachers. In general, teachers are drawn from the bottom third of college classes. We need teachers who are more interesting and more qualified, who understand technology and are dedicated to their fields. We need to understand that teaching to tests, feeding students the "right answers" so our schools do not get penalized in their funding, is *not* the way to generate creative, insightful, critical thinkers who can move beyond what is already known in order to ponder what could be. Universities can make an enormous contribution to public education by reaching out in their own geographical areas.

Again, we need to appreciate the sheer scale of the challenges we face. Since 2000, China has created 500 new universities. Since 1993, the number of undergraduates in Chinese institutions has risen from 3 million to 13 million. The number of graduate students enrolled has increased from 400,000 in 2001 to 8 million today. Although China is still educating only 15 percent of its college-age population, the growth rate in Chinese higher education is not slowing. Furthermore, the largest number of graduate students in science and engineering in the United States are Chinese. Fortunately, American higher education is under-

taking promising initiatives with Chinese universities that will benefit both countries.

American power is the power of knowledge and freedom. And American universities are a great part of what has made America the powerful nation it still is today. My vision is that we work together to make America the best country in the world for every bright young person who wants to work or start a business and a life here. How, in an age of global competition, do we optimize our activities and international relationships so they are good for universities, good for students, and good for the country?

Conclusion

The United States must get past Iraq, bring our military home, and deal with the war on terror. Sadly enough, when we finally do pull out of Iraq, five years later it will be remembered only by the ribbons on people's chest and the ache in mothers' hearts for sons and daughters who were killed there. Our competition with China, on the other hand, will be a day-to-day factor in all of our lives. Without a better strategy, we may never be able to raise ordinary Americans' real wages. American workers may lose their retirement security. And we could eventually see the erosion of the great American universities, because China will be able to offer the finest facilities and endow chairs for the best professors.

Here in America, we need to develop a clear, symbiotic strategy for universities and for America. Higher education can play a key role in achieving this essential objective, because leadership doesn't come from the top. Rather, it comes from people seized with a common problem who work together to promote ideas that can become a great strategy. Harry Truman didn't create deterrence and containment all by himself. That strategy resulted from a convergence of ideas flowing from many sources. We need dialogue throughout the higher education community so we can come together and recognize that what educators and administrators are doing individually can have a tremendous collective impact. We need to gauge that impact, understand it, and shape it to promote the individual efforts of students, colleges, and universities, as well as the collective interests of our great nation.

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