

### AMERICAN LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM *Continued*

more clarity and understanding of these ideological positions. For example, it should be clear that the popular distinction that most Americans make between liberals as “pro-big government” and conservatives as “anti-big government” is inaccurate, for this difference depends on the issue and the times. For example, liberals usually prefer greater government involvement in the economy and conservatives less government intervention; however, conservatives usually prefer more government defense spending in support of national security, while liberals prefer less. Likewise, in the area of social policy, liberals emphasize active government in support of the rights of individuals, such as to prevent child abuse, while conservatives emphasize active government to promote certain moral standards, such as school prayer or the prevention of abortion. Regardless of the particular issue and the differences between liberalism and conservatism, however, most Americans have been part of a long (classical) liberal tradition throughout American history.

*Sources:* Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1955); Lawrence J. R. Herson, *The Politics of Ideas: Political Theory and American Public Policy* (Prospect IL: Waveland Press, 1984); Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Bernard K. Johnpoll with Lillian Johnpoll, *The Impossible Dream: The Rise and Demise of the American Left* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); William S. Maddox and Stuart A. Lilie, *Beyond Liberal and Conservative: Reassessing the Political Spectrum* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1984); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage, 1945); and Gary Wills, *Nixon Agonistes* (New York: Signet, 1976).

and semi-isolationism.<sup>45</sup> These three schools are similar to the ones advanced by political analyst William Schneider, although he uses different labels which indicate their ideological home: conservative internationalism, liberal internationalism, and non-internationalism.<sup>46</sup> To understand the complex politics of U.S. foreign policy in the post-Vietnam War period, it is important to know the general orientation of these three schools of thought. At the same time, it is important to recognize that important differences or variants exist within each of these foreign policy orientations that reflect the broader ideological spectrum throughout

American society.<sup>47</sup> Finally, it is also important to keep in mind that some of the foreign policy beliefs held by Americans may be in a process of undergoing change in light of the end of the cold war.

Many Americans, especially conservatives and those on the political Right, have continued to believe in **conservative internationalism** (or cold war internationalism) since Vietnam, especially throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, they felt that the major global threat to the security of the United States and global order was communism directed by the Soviet Union, requiring a strong American military presence throughout much of the world. Yet, disagreement among conservatives existed concerning the severity of the Soviet threat and the appropriate foreign policy strategy. More extreme conservatives tended to see communism as monolithic, favoring massive rearmament at home and a policy of aggressive rollback abroad—reminiscent of the policies advocated by McCarthy and the far right during the 1950s. Most conservatives, recognizing that communism was no longer monolithic, focused on containing Soviet communism through a defense buildup and a containment strategy—reminiscent of government policy during the cold war years and the Reagan years. Finally, more moderate conservatives did not emphasize Soviet communism, but stressed the threat of the Soviet Union as a great power to global stability and argued for a realpolitik or power politics strategy of selective containment—a position promoted by Henry Kissinger under Presidents Nixon and Ford. With the end of the cold war and the decline of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, some of the beliefs within these conservative internationalist orientations—especially the intensity and significance of anticommunism—are likely to undergo some change during the 1990s.

Other Americans, especially liberals and those on the political Left, saw a much more complex and interdependent world, composed of many important countries, global actors, and issues—a position that Schneider refers to as **liberal internationalism** (and Holsti and Rosenau refer to as post-cold war internationalism). In contrast to conservatives, liberals believed it was important to address not only the East-West conflict, but West-West issues, involving relations between the U.S. and its allies, and North-South issues, focusing on the relationship between industrialized nations and the Third World. Although there is no complete consensus among the liberal Left, they generally agreed that the cold war preoccupation with the Soviet threat and the use of force must be downplayed in order to promote global stability, peace, and prosperity. Most liberals tended to focus on promoting stability in U.S.-Soviet relations, advocate arms control and other confidence-building measures, while emphasizing the need for cooperative economic relations between Europe, North America, and Asia to develop a liberal economic world order. They also tended to emphasize the importance of human rights, democracy, and the role of diplomacy in resolving disputes and conflict. More extreme views on the political Left advocated greater arms control and global disarmament, supported greater efforts to redress third-world poverty and violence, and were concerned with overcoming international environmental destruction. Given their inclination to downplay the importance and threat of