

was an unstable system of competing coalitions in which the mass public swings left or right unpredictably in response to its current fears and concerns."⁵⁰ There are also times when an issue may trigger a strong semi-isolationist view among the public, such as over issues concerning jobs and the economy. Public opinion, therefore, tends to fluctuate dramatically depending on the political issues of the occasion and the success of different groups and leaders in communicating their positions.

The post-Vietnam War years of dissensus have produced a much more complex and messy political process where public opinion is much more volatile than during the cold war years of consensus. This situation is likely to grow with the end of the cold war. The fear of communism, the glue that held the cold war consensus together and has been the foundation for cold war internationalism, has declined with its collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This could usher in an era where the foreign policy views of Americans undergo substantial change: for example, the collapse of the threat of communism has produced considerable conflict among conservatives and may diminish cold war internationalism's appeal in comparison to liberal internationalism and non-internationalism. Although there exists the potential for such a political realignment in foreign policy thought, the future of world politics, nevertheless, will continue to encompass conflict where the United States will continue to occupy a major global role, as the Persian Gulf War demonstrated. In this respect, it is important to recognize that liberalism and conservatism predate the cold war and will continue in a post-cold war international environment.

The continuities and changes in the future of world politics, therefore, are likely to result more in revision than fundamental changes in the foreign policy beliefs of Americans.⁵¹ Where the end of the cold war is not likely to fundamentally affect the beliefs of liberal internationalists and non-internationalists, conservative internationalists may turn increasingly away from anticommunism; some may move more toward an emphasis on power politics and the need for international order while others may emphasize more the promotion of democracy and a liberal world order. Whatever the case, foreign policy thought is likely to remain highly diverse, especially among members of the elite public, and competitive, particularly for the support of the mass public. In this respect, the future of American political ideology and foreign policy views will be heavily affected by the nature of global developments and the role of presidential leadership in the politics of U.S. foreign policy.

The fragmentation of public ideological and foreign policy beliefs gives a president great opportunities but also creates great risks. Unlike the 1950s, presidents are no longer driven to pursue only an anticommunist containment policy. Yet, it is unclear how far a president may go in pursuing any policy before losing public support. Presidents no longer come to office with automatic majorities behind their policies. No matter what the president and his advisers believe, a substantial number of Americans—in the mass public and especially the elite public—disagree, or are open to disagreement, with presidential policy.⁵² All post-Vietnam War presidents have discovered that most Americans expect presidential promises to be fulfilled, but the dissensus of the post-Vietnam War years makes it much

more difficult for presidents to deliver. Presidents have found that, in addition to the reassertion of Congress, they face additional constraints on their ability to govern from electoral politics, groups politics, and the media and the communications process as a result of the collapse of the cold war consensus, as we will discuss in the next few chapters. All this is likely to continue in a post-cold war political environment. Therefore, differences in the ideological and foreign policy beliefs among the elite public, coupled with a pragmatic but volatile mass public, have provided a new set of domestic boundaries and possibilities for the making of U.S. foreign policy since the post-Vietnam War years.

POLITICAL CULTURE

In addition to the role of public opinion and political ideology, political culture plays a subtle but significant role in the making of U.S. foreign policy. **Political culture** refers to how people see themselves and their country relative to the rest of the world. Although American political culture includes a variety of important values, such as democracy and individualism, the focus in this section is on those cultural assumptions that Americans have about their country's role in the world.⁵³ Not only does this suggest the existence of an American "national style," but such nationalistic beliefs are particularly evident and powerful forces in the politics of U.S. foreign policy in times of crisis and war.

In considering political culture, a number of things must be kept in mind. First, we are most interested in the cultural and national values prevailing in the population; therefore, what the mass public believes plays a predominant role in determining America's national style. Second, cultural values also tend to be the most shared, "resilient," and consistent set of beliefs held by individuals. Nationalistic views and feelings, in other words, strongly resist change, for they are acquired at a very young age. Finally, political culture and national style do not influence domestic politics and the policymaking process in an immediate or direct way, but by coloring how individuals see their country and its special place in the world. Because cultural and national values are socialized and deeply held, most people—within both the mass and elite publics—have a somewhat ethnocentric view of the world, thus affecting how foreign policy is made.

American Culture and National Style

Throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s, American political culture and national style received little study, in part because of the difficulties involved in determining the key elements of a nation's cultural values or character. By the 1980s, however, numerous works had been produced highlighting the important role that American political culture and national style play in the making of U.S. foreign policy.⁵⁴ These works tend to agree that most Americans had acquired a similar cultural outlook and developed a strong sense of nationalism by the twentieth century.

Studies of American political culture typically portray Americans as a confident and optimistic people who have a special sense of destiny about the future of their country and its place in the world. In *Backfire*, for example, Loren Baritz