

# Defining Engagement

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While the term “engagement” enjoys great consistency and clarity of meaning in the discourse of romantic love, it enjoys neither in the discourse of statecraft. Currently, practitioners and scholars of American foreign policy are vigorously debating the merits of engagement as a strategy for modifying the behavior of unsavory regimes. The quality of this debate, however, is diminished by the persistent inability of the US foreign policy establishment to advance a coherent and analytically rigorous conceptualization of engagement. In this essay, I begin with a brief survey of the conceptual fog that surrounds engagement and then attempt to give a more refined definition. I will use this definition as the basis for drawing a sharp distinction between engagement and alternative policy approaches, especially appeasement, isolation and containment.

In the contemporary lexicon of United States foreign policy, few terms have been as frequently or as confusingly invoked as that of engagement.<sup>1</sup> A growing consensus extols the virtues of engagement as the most promising policy for managing the threats posed to the US by foreign adversaries. In recent years, engagement constituted the Clinton administration’s declared approach in the conduct of bilateral relations with such countries as China, Russia, North Korea and Vietnam.

Robert Suettinger, a onetime member of the Clinton administration’s National Security Council, remarked that the word engagement has “been overused and poorly defined by a

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<sup>1</sup> According to Victor Cha, engagement is “one of the most overused and understudied terms in post-cold war international relations.” This quote is from his review of Leon D. Sigal, *Disarming Strangers: Nuclear Diplomacy with North Korea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) in *Political Science Quarterly*, 114 (Spring 1999) p. 149.

variety of policymakers and speechwriters” and has “become shopworn to the point that there is little agreement on what it actually means.”<sup>2</sup> The Clinton foreign policy team attributed five distinct meanings to engagement:<sup>3</sup>

1) *A broad-based grand strategic orientation:* In this sense, engagement is considered synonymous with American internationalism and global leadership. For example, in a 1993 speech, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake observed that American public opinion was divided into two rival camps: “On the one side is protectionism and limited foreign engagement; on the other is active American engagement abroad on behalf of democracy and expanded trade.”<sup>4</sup>

2) *A specific approach to managing bilateral relations with a target state through the unconditional provision of continuous concessions to that state:* During the 1992 presidential campaign, candidate Bill Clinton criticized the Bush administration’s “ill-advised and failed” policy of “constructive engagement” toward China as one that “coddled the dictators and pleaded for progress, but refused to impose penalties for intransigence.”<sup>5</sup>

3) *A bilateral policy characterized by the conditional provision of concessions to a target state:* The Clinton administration announced in May 1993 that the future extension of Most Favored Nation trading status to China would be conditional on improvements in the Chinese government’s domestic human rights record.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Suettinger, “The United States and China: Tough Engagement,” in Richard N. Haass and Meghan L. O’Sullivan, *Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000) pp. 18, 27.

<sup>3</sup> This is in contrast to Suettinger, who discerns three distinct meanings, and Stephen Rock, who discerns two. See Suettinger, pp. 17-20, and Stephen Rock, *Appeasement in International Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) pp. 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> “National Security Advisor Anthony Lake’s Speech at the Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 1993,” *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 4 (November-December 1993) p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> “Statement on Most-Favored Nation Status for China, September 14, 1992,” *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 3 (September-October 1992) p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> “President Announces Renewal of MFN Status for China with Conditions for Renewal Next Year. President’s Announcement, May 28, 1993,” *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 4 (September-October 1993) pp. 44-47.

Likewise, in the Agreed Framework signed by the US and North Korea in October 1994, the US agreed to provide North Korea with heavy oil, new light-water nuclear reactors and eventual diplomatic and economic normalization in exchange for a freeze in the North's nuclear weapons program.<sup>7</sup>

4) *A bilateral policy characterized by the broadening of contacts in areas of mutual interest with a target state:* Key to this notion of engagement is the idea that areas of dialogue and fruitful cooperation should be broadened and not be held hostage through linkage to areas of continuing disagreement and friction. The Clinton administration inaugurated such a policy toward China in May 1994 by declaring that it would not tie the annual MFN decision to the Chinese government's human rights record.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the administration's foreign policy toward the Russian Federation has largely been one of engagement and described as an effort to "build areas of agreement and...develop policies to manage our differences."<sup>9</sup>

5) *A bilateral policy characterized by the provision of technical assistance to facilitate economic and political liberalization in a target state:* In its 1999 national security report, the White House proclaimed that its "strategy of engagement with each of the NIS [Newly Independent States]" consisted of "working with grassroots organizations, independent media, and emerging entrepreneurs" to "improve electoral processes and help strengthen civil society," and to help the governments of the NIS to "build the laws, institutions and skills needed for a market democracy, to fight crime and corruption [and] to advance human rights and the rule of law."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sigal, *Disarming Strangers*.

<sup>8</sup> "President Renews China's MFN Trade Status; Ends Linkage with Human Rights. President's Press Conference, May 26, 1994," *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 5 (July-August 1994) pp. 41-43.

<sup>9</sup> "Policy and Principles: The Approach of the Clinton Administration. Address by Secretary of State Christopher, January 18, 1996," *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, 7 (March-April 1996) p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: December, 1999) p. 32.

Unfortunately, scholars have not fared better than policymakers in the effort to conceptualize engagement because they often make at least one of the following critical errors: (1) treating engagement as a synonym for appeasement; (2) defining engagement so expansively that it essentially constitutes any policy relying on positive sanctions; (3) defining engagement in an unnecessarily restrictive manner.

### CONFLATING ENGAGEMENT AND APPEASEMENT

One serious flaw in scholarly conceptualizations of engagement is the tendency to view engagement as simply a synonym for appeasement, a policy approach that has fallen into disrepute since the late 1930s. In their book, *Force and Statecraft*, Gordon Craig and Alexander George make the following case: "constructive engagement...is essentially a policy of appeasement, though the term itself cannot be used."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in a recently published article, Randall Schweller and William Wohlforth refer to engagement as "simply a new, 'more acceptable' term for an old policy that used to be called appeasement."<sup>12</sup> Another scholar, Victor Cha, does try to differentiate appeasement from engagement, though he does so in a manner that nevertheless renders the two policies indistinguishable. Cha claims that engagement occurs when "non-coercive and non-punitive" means are employed by a strong country toward a weak country, while appeasement is the use of the very same means by a weak country against a strong country.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that only the strong can engage and

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp.156-157. See also Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993) p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War," *Security Studies*, 9 (Spring 2000) p. 81. In another essay, Schweller intertwines the two concepts so closely that he even refers to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's "engagement policy toward [Hitler's] Germany." See Randall L. Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers: History and Theory," in Alastair I. Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Victor D. Cha, "Engaging North Korea Credibly," *Survival*, 42 (Summer 2000) p. 149.

only the weak can appease, though the actual means deployed are virtually identical in both cases.

## DEFINING ENGAGEMENT TOO BROADLY

A second problem associated with various scholarly treatments of engagement is the tendency to define the concept too broadly to be of much help to the analyst. For instance, Cha's definition of engagement as any policy whose means are "non-coercive and non-punitive" is so vague that essentially any positive sanction could be considered engagement. The definition put forth by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert Ross in their edited volume, *Engaging China*, is equally nebulous. According to Johnston and Ross, engagement constitutes "the use of non-coercive methods to ameliorate the non-status quo elements of a rising power's behavior."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in his work, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, Robert Litwak defines engagement as "positive sanctions."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in their edited volume, *Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy*, Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan define engagement as "a foreign policy strategy that depends to a significant degree on positive incentives to achieve its objectives."<sup>16</sup>

As policymakers possess a highly differentiated typology of alternative options in the realm of negative sanctions from which to choose—including covert action, deterrence, coercive diplomacy, containment, limited war and total war—it is only reasonable to expect that they should have a similar menu of options in the realm of positive sanctions than simply engagement. Equating engagement with positive sanctions risks lumping together a variety of discrete actions that could be analyzed by distinguishing among them and comparing them as separate policies.

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<sup>14</sup> Johnston and Ross, eds., p. xiv.

<sup>15</sup> Robert S. Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000) p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> Haass and O'Sullivan, p. 2.

## DEFINING ENGAGEMENT TOO NARROWLY

The third trap that has ensnared numerous scholars is the tendency to needlessly circumscribe the parameters of engagement. This results from attempts to: define engagement as ends rather than means; stipulate the types of states that can engage or be engaged; restrict the types of behaviors that comprise engagement; and limit the types of behaviors that can be modified through engagement. Each of these restrictions hampers the task of evaluating the utility of engagement relative to other policies objectively accurately.

Some scholars have excessively narrowed the definition of engagement by defining it according to the ends sought rather than the means employed. For example, Schweller and Wohlforth assert that if any distinction can be drawn between engagement and appeasement, "it is that the goal of engagement is not simply tension-reduction and the avoidance of war but also an attempt to socialize [a] dissatisfied power into acceptance of the established order."<sup>17</sup> Such ends-based definitions hinder the study of engagement in two ways. First, because the act of policymaking consists of selecting from a variety of alternative means in the pursuit of a given end(s), it stands to reason that policy instruments are more effectively conceptualized in terms of means rather than ends. When defined as different means, policies can be more easily compared with one another across a whole spectrum of discrete ends, in order to gauge more accurately the circumstances under which each policy is relatively more or less effective.<sup>18</sup>

Second, scholars who define engagement as the end of peaceful socialization inevitably create a bias for future empirical research on engagement outcomes. This is because it is difficult to imagine a more ambitious foreign policy objective than the peaceable transformation of a revisionist state that rejects the

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<sup>17</sup> Schweller and Wohlforth, p. 81. See also David Shambaugh, "Containment or Engagement of China? Calculating Beijing's Responses," *International Security*, 21 (Fall 1996) p. 182.

<sup>18</sup> David A. Baldwin, "Correspondence: Evaluating Economic Sanctions," *International Security*, 23 (Fall 1998) p. 189.

dominant norms and practices of the international system into a status-quo state that embodies those same norms and practices. The equation of engagement with socialization alone forecloses the possibility that engagement could be employed to accomplish more modest goals such as tension-reduction. Therefore, all else being equal, scholars using this loaded definition will be predisposed to conclude from examination only of the hardest cases of attempted socialization that the policy is ineffective.<sup>19</sup> Considering engagement as a set of means would enable analysts to more fairly assess the effectiveness of engagement relative to other policies in achieving an array of ends.

Scholars have also inappropriately narrowed the scope of engagement by unnecessarily limiting the types of states that can pursue engagement or the types of target states that can be engaged. Cha's conceptualization posits that only powerful states can engage and that only weak ones can be engaged. This forecloses alternative examples of weak states' initiating engagement and strong states' being engaged. As a result, Cha's interpretation risks biasing subsequent empirical studies of engagement, as one would typically expect powerful states to engage more successfully than weak states, and for weak states to be engaged more successfully than strong states. On the other side of the coin, Johnston and Ross define engagement as the effort to ameliorate the revisionist elements of "a rising major power's behavior." This conceptualization is equally biased; rising great powers are probably the hardest types of states to socialize as opposed to declining great powers or smaller regional powers.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Conversely, by conceptualizing appeasement in terms of the far less ambitious goals of tension reduction and war avoidance, Wohlforth and Schweller bias future empirical studies of appeasement in an opposite direction. For more on the difficulty of peaceful socialization, see G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," *International Organization*, 44 (Summer 1990) pp.283-316.

<sup>20</sup> Wohlforth and Schweller appreciate this and argue for the inclusion of defeated and/or declining great powers or regional challengers within the context of engagement. However, they do not broaden the scope widely enough because they insist that engagement is only a relevant policy when the "international or regional balance of power undergoes fundamental and rapid change"(p. 84). Once again, such situations are probably the least auspicious for engagement, as opposed to situations in which an engager seeks to modify the behavior of a small, isolated state (e.g., Myanmar or Cuba) that does not necessarily present an immediate and significant challenge to the regional order.

Scholars have limited the concept of engagement in a third way by unnecessarily restricting the scope of the policy. In their evaluation of post-Cold War US engagement of China, Paul Papayoanou and Scott Kastner define engagement as the attempt to integrate a target country into the international order through promoting “increased trade and financial transactions.”<sup>21</sup> However, limiting engagement policy to the increasing of economic interdependence leaves out many other issue areas that were an integral part of the Clinton administration’s China policy, including those in the diplomatic, military and cultural arenas. Similarly, the US engagement of North Korea, as epitomized by the 1994 Agreed Framework pact, promises eventual normalization of economic relations and the gradual normalization of diplomatic relations.<sup>22</sup> Equating engagement with economic contacts alone risks neglecting the importance and potential effectiveness of contacts in non-economic issue areas.

Finally, some scholars risk gleaning only a partial and distorted insight into engagement by restrictively evaluating its effectiveness in achieving only some of its professed objectives. Papayoanou and Kastner deny that they seek merely to examine the “security implications” of the US engagement of China, though in a footnote, they admit that “[m]uch of the debate [over US policy toward the PRC] centers around the effects of engagement versus containment on human rights in China.”<sup>23</sup> This approach violates a cardinal tenet of statecraft analysis: the need to acknowledge multiple objectives in virtually all attempts to exercise inter-state influence.<sup>24</sup> Absent a comprehensive survey of the multiplicity of goals involved in any such attempt,

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<sup>21</sup> Paul A. Papayoanou and Scott L. Kastner, “Sleeping With the (Potential) Enemy: Assessing the US Policy of Engagement with China,” in Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, Edward D. Mansfield, and Norrin M. Ripsman, eds., *Power and the Purse: Economic Statecraft, Interdependence, and National Security* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000) p. 158. For a similar conceptualization, see Gerald Segal, “East Asia and the ‘Constraintment’ of China,” *International Security*, 20 (Spring 1996) p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> “The Agreed Framework of October 21, 1994,” reprinted in Sigal, pp. 262-264.

<sup>23</sup> Papayoanou and Kastner, p. 159, fn #7.

<sup>24</sup> David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985) pp. 18, 149.



it would be naïve to accept any verdict rendered concerning its overall merits.

## A REFINED DEFINITION OF ENGAGEMENT

In order to establish a more effective framework for dealing with unsavory regimes, I propose that we define engagement as *the attempt to influence the political behavior of a target state through the comprehensive establishment and enhancement of contacts with that state across multiple issue-areas (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, cultural)*. The following is a brief list of the specific forms that such contacts might include:

### DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS

- Extension of diplomatic recognition; normalization of diplomatic relations
- Promotion of target-state membership in international institutions and regimes
- Summit meetings and other visits by the head of state and other senior government officials of sender state to target state and vice-versa

### MILITARY CONTACTS

- Visits of senior military officials of the sender state to the target state and vice-versa
- Arms transfers
- Military aid and cooperation
- Military exchange and training programs
- Confidence and security-building measures
- Intelligence sharing

### ECONOMIC CONTACTS

- Trade agreements and promotion
- Foreign economic and humanitarian aid in the form of loans and/or grants

## CULTURAL CONTACTS

- Cultural treaties
- Inauguration of travel and tourism links
- Sport, artistic and academic exchanges<sup>25</sup>

Engagement is an iterated process in which the sender and target state develop a relationship of increasing interdependence, culminating in the endpoint of “normalized relations” characterized by a high level of interactions across multiple domains. Engagement is a quintessential exchange relationship: the target state wants the prestige and material resources that would accrue to it from increased contacts with the sender state, while the sender state seeks to modify the domestic and/or foreign policy behavior of the target state. This deductive logic could adopt a number of different forms or strategies when deployed in practice.<sup>26</sup> For instance, individual contacts can be established by the sender state at either a low or a high level of conditionality.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the sender state can achieve its objectives using engagement through any one of the following causal processes: by directly modifying the behavior of the target regime; by manipulating or reinforcing the target states’ domestic balance of political power between competing factions that advocate divergent policies; or by shifting preferences at the grassroots level in the hope that this will precipitate political change from below within the target state.

This definition implies that three necessary conditions must hold for engagement to constitute an effective foreign policy instrument. First, the overall magnitude of contacts between the sender and target states must initially be low. If two states are already bound by dense contacts in multiple domains (i.e., are

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<sup>25</sup> The components of this list have been adapted from a larger set of indicators used by Deon Geldenhuys to measure the extent to which various states have been isolated from the international community. Many of these indicators can also serve the purpose of measuring bilateral engagement. For the complete list of indicators, see Deon Geldenhuys, *Isolated States: A Comparative Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> For more on how the deductive model of a policy can be translated into more specific strategies for executing that policy, see George, *Bridging the Gap*, pp. 117-134.

<sup>27</sup> See Haass and O’Sullivan, “Introduction,” in Haass and O’Sullivan, eds., pp. 4-5.

already in a highly interdependent relationship), engagement loses its impact as an effective policy tool. Hence, one could not reasonably invoke the possibility of the US engaging Canada or Japan in order to effect a change in either country's political behavior. Second, the material or prestige needs of the target state must be significant, as engagement derives its power from the promise that it can fulfill those needs. The greater the needs of the target state, the more amenable to engagement it is likely to be. For example, North Korea's receptivity to engagement by the US dramatically increased in the wake of the demise of its chief patron, the Soviet Union, and the near-total collapse of its national economy.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the target state must perceive the engager and the international order it represents as a potential source of the material or prestige resources it desires. This means that autarkic, revolutionary and unlimited regimes which eschew the norms and institutions of the prevailing order, such as Stalin's Soviet Union or Hitler's Germany, will not be seduced by the potential benefits of engagement.

This reformulated conceptualization avoids the pitfalls of prevailing scholarly conceptions of engagement. It considers the policy as a set of means rather than ends, does not delimit the types of states that can either engage or be engaged, explicitly encompasses contacts in multiple issue-areas, allows for the existence of multiple objectives in any given instance of engagement and, as will be shown below, permits the elucidation of multiple types of positive sanctions.

## **DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND APPEASEMENT**

In contrast to many prevailing conceptions of engagement, the one proposed in this essay allows a substantive distinction to be drawn between engagement and appeasement. The standard definition of appeasement—which derives from the language of

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<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Manning, "The United States in North Korean Foreign Policy," in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 141.

classical European diplomacy, namely “a policy of attempting to reduce tension between two states by the methodical removal of the principal causes of conflict between them”<sup>29</sup>—is venerable but nevertheless inadequate.<sup>30</sup> It does not provide much guidance to the contemporary policymaker or policy analyst, because it conceives of a foreign policy approach in terms of the ends sought while never making clear the precise means involved. The principal causes of conflict between two states can be removed in a number of ways.<sup>31</sup>

A more refined definition of appeasement that not only remains loyal to the traditional connotations but also establishes a firm conceptual distinction from engagement might be: *the attempt to influence the political behavior of a target state by ceding territory and/or a geopolitical sphere of influence to that state*. Indeed, the two best-known cases of appeasement, Great Britain’s appeasement of the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, reveals that much of this appeasement adopted precisely these guises. The key elements of the British appeasement of the US—acceptance of the Monroe Doctrine—permission for the US to build and fortify a Central American canal, and acquiescence to American claims on the border between Alaska and the Yukon—consisted of explicit acknowledgement of American territorial authority.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the appeasement of the Third Reich by Great Britain was characterized by acquiescence to: Germany’s military reoccupation of the Rhineland (1936); annexation of Austria (1938); acquisition of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia as decided at the Munich Conference; and absorption of the

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<sup>29</sup> George, *Bridging the Gap*, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Historian Paul Kennedy’s definition of appeasement is not much more useful. Kennedy defines appeasement as a policy of “settling international (or for that matter, domestic) quarrels by admitting and satisfying grievances through rational negotiation and compromise, thereby avoiding the resort to an armed conflict which would be expensive, bloody, and possibly very dangerous.” This definition is not only partly ends-based but also renders appeasement tantamount to common diplomacy. Paul Kennedy, “The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939,” in Paul Kennedy, ed., *Strategy and Diplomacy 1870-1945* (London: Fontana, 1984) p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Rock, pp. 25-48.

remainder of Czechoslovakia (1939).<sup>33</sup> A more contemporary example of appeasement is the land for peace exchange that represents the centerpiece of the on-again off-again diplomatic negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority.

Thus, a rigid conceptual distinction can be drawn between engagement and appeasement. Whereas both policies are positive sanctions—insofar as they add to the power and prestige of the target state—engagement does so in a less direct and less militarized fashion than appeasement. In addition, engagement differs from appeasement by establishing an increasingly interdependent relationship between the sender and the target state. At any juncture, the sender state can, in theory, abrogate such a relationship at some (ideally prohibitive) cost to the target state.<sup>34</sup> Appeasement, on the other hand, does not involve the establishment of contacts or interdependence between the appeaser and the appeased. Territory and/or a sphere of influence are merely transferred by one party to the other either unconditionally or in exchange for certain concessions on the part of the target state.

### ENGAGEMENT VS. ISOLATION, APPEASEMENT VS. CONTAINMENT

The proposed definition of engagement helps clarify the distinctions between alternative foreign policy approaches that rely on positive sanctions and also makes understandable distinctions among some frequently mentioned alternative approaches that rely on negative sanctions. In current discussions on US foreign policy toward rogue states, and especially on US foreign policy toward China, engagement and containment are paired as antipodal policies. In fact, one recent scholarly article addressing US-P.R.C. relations decries the fact that “the media and many pundits have constructed US choices

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<sup>33</sup> Rock, pp. 49-76; R.J.Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-1939* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Obviously, the abrogation of the relationship will inevitably entail costs to the sender state as well. Therefore, the key to successful engagement involves establishing a relationship with a target state whose abrogation would entail greater costs for the target than for the sender.

as limited to 'engagement' and 'containment.'"<sup>35</sup> However, in light of the distinction I posit between engagement and appeasement, one could more intuitively construe containment to be the opposite of appeasement rather than engagement. Containment has been traditionally construed as the attempt to prevent the geopolitical expansion of a target state.<sup>36</sup> If appeasement constitutes the cession of territory and/or spheres of influence to a target state, containment might more appropriately be considered the policy of preventing a target state from expanding its territorial scope and/or sphere of geopolitical influence. Thus, whereas a sender state can expand contacts across multiple issue areas with a target state while simultaneously deterring it from committing aggression and/or expanding its geopolitical influence by allying with its neighbors (engagement plus containment), it would be impossible for a sender state to cede territory and/or a sphere of influence to a target state while simultaneously preventing that same state from expanding its territory or sphere of geopolitical influence (appeasement plus containment).

The opposite of a policy of engagement would be one in which a state comprehensively diminishes and withdraws contacts across multiple issue areas with another state. Although such a policy would be considered a negative sanction, it does not attempt to do so through direct geopolitical means, as does a containment policy. One could label such a policy as disengagement or isolation.<sup>37</sup> Thus, whereas a state can yield another state territory or an enlarged sphere of influence while simultaneously abrogating contacts with that state (appeasement plus disengagement), it is impossible for a state to expand and diminish contacts with another state across multiple issue-areas (engagement plus disengagement).

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel Byman and Roger Cliff, with Philip Saunders, "US Policy Options Toward an Emerging China," *The Pacific Review*, 12 (No. 3, 1999) p. 422.

<sup>36</sup> Schweller, "Managing the Rise of Great Powers," p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Geldenhuys labels such a policy "enforced isolation" to distinguish it from a state's own deliberate effort to isolate itself from the rest of the international community, which he calls self-isolation. See Geldenhuys, p. 6.

The distinctions drawn between engagement, appeasement, containment and isolation allow for a more focused and coherent discussion of some of the options available for dealing with rival states. For example, current US policy toward China can be depicted as engagement plus containment. Efforts in recent years to liberalize trade with China, integrate the P.R.C. into international institutions and regimes, facilitate numerous diplomatic visits and summit meetings, and conduct bilateral exchanges of senior military personnel and academics are representative of engagement. However, at the same time, the US has elected to contain rather than appease China by taking steps to prevent the P.R.C. from expanding its territory or sphere of influence in East Asia. Most important, the US has signaled that it would not stand aside if Beijing tries to absorb Taiwan by force. Toward this end, the US has continued to sell large quantities of arms to the Taiwanese government, and, in 1995 and 1996, it played high stakes gunboat diplomacy with China in the Taiwan Straits.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the United States has retained its Cold War military alliances with both South Korea and Japan and has maintained a strong troop presence in both countries.<sup>39</sup> The US has also expressed grave concern about “Chinese intrusions” into disputed island territories in the South China Sea.<sup>40</sup> Taken together, these steps exemplify Columbia University Professor A. Doak Barnett’s 1966 injunction to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that American policy toward China should constitute “containment but not isolation.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Editorial: Clinton’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy* (November–December 2000) p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Forty thousand American troops remain stationed in Japan, while 37 thousand remain in South Korea. See United States Department of Defense Almanac, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/almanac>.

<sup>40</sup> Gerald Segal, “East Asia and the ‘Constraint’ of China,” p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> “Statement of A. Doak Barnett, Professor of Government and Acting Director of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University, on China and the West,” in *US Policy with Respect to Mainland China*, Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966) p. 4.

## CONCLUSION

In matters of national security, establishing a clear definition of terms is a precondition for effective policymaking. Decision-makers who invoke critical terms in an erratic, ad hoc fashion risk alienating their constituencies. They also risk exacerbating misperceptions and hostility among those the policies target. Scholars who commit the same error undercut their ability to conduct valuable empirical research. Hence, if scholars and policymakers fail rigorously to define "engagement," they undermine the ability to build an effective foreign policy.

The refined definition I propose as a substitute for existing descriptions of engagement is different in two important ways: First, it clarifies the menu of choices available for policymakers by allowing engagement to be distinguished from related approaches such as appeasement, containment and isolation. Second, it lays the groundwork for systematic and objective research on historical cases of engagement in order to discern the conditions under which it can be used effectively. Such research will, in turn, help policymakers acquire the information necessary to better manage the rogue states of the 21st century.