U.S. DEFENSE POLICIES SINCE WORLD WAR II

Major world events and crises of the post-World War Two (WWII) period were important benchmarks in the evolution of U.S. national security policies, international security and arms control agreements, bilateral and multilateral summits, and use of military force. However, over time the correlation of these world events with U.S. defense policies and U.S. decisionmakers can become confusing and out of sequence. The chart that follows attempts to overcome this problem by providing a chronological reference to the major world events and crises which shaped U.S. national security policies.

The original chart covered the period from the end of WWII through 1984 and was used in the courses of instruction at the U.S. Army War College and U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. With the end of the Cold War symbolized by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the time was right to update the chart. It was updated through 1989 by the staff of the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare and made available in March 1990.

The Cold War had an east-west orientation with the major arena focused on Europe and the potential for a NATO-Warsaw Pact war and escalation possibly to a thermonuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. Events tended to be perceived through a common set of Cold War prisms. That period, as frightening as the prospects for mutual destruction were, is now regarded as far more ordered and predictable than the era going into the 21st century.

The world events of the post-Cold War era have extended into otherwise unfamiliar geographic areas. In place of a world war are the prospects of regional, ethnic wars where weapons of mass destruction — chemical, biological and nuclear — may come into play. U.S. military involvement in a wide range of operations — peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance as well as warfighting — is already underway, as the events recorded on the chart reflect.

This version extends the timespan of major national security events through 1993. In updating the chart, the ILW staff simplified the overall content to make it more readable and useful as a reference document.
FENSE POLICIES SINCE WORLD WAR II

FLEXIBLE RESPONSE
COUNTERFORCE ASSURED DESTRUCTION

PARITY

ViETNAMIZATION

CZECI'H INVASION
US UNITS TO RVN
PUEBLO
DOM REP
3RD MID-EST WAR

SUFFICIENCY

VIE.TNIIIZATION

US SEATS PRC [ROC OUT]
US-PRC RAPPROCHEMENT

MID-EST WAR

ESSENTIAL EQUIVALENCE

VIETNAMIZATION

US-PRC NORMALIZATION
US-PRC RAPPROCHEMENT

INVADES PAKISTAN

JOHN son

McNAMARA

RUSK

LIMITED TEST BAN TREATY WASH-MOSCOW HOT LINE

NIXON

CLIFFORD

FRENCH FORCES LEAVE NATO

LAIRD

KISSINGER

MID-EST WARS CONVENTIONAL RET

CARTER

Rumsfeld

FORCES SIZED TONKIN RESOLUTION

SALT I TALKS SALT I

SALT TALKS CONTINUE

SALT II START