

The Bush Revolution: The Remaking of America's Foreign Policy

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President George W. Bush is leading a revolution in American foreign policy. For a half century after World War II, successive administrations believed that the United States could make the most of its vast power by working closely with allies and through multilateral organizations such as the UN and NATO. This conviction hinged on the belief that cooperation—even at the cost of accepting constraints on the freedom to act—reassured others about Washington's intentions and ultimately extended the reach of American power.

Galvanized by the terrorist attacks of September 11, Bush has abandoned this approach to how America should engage in the world. With terrorists, tyrants, and technologies of mass destruction posing a grave and growing danger, he believes that the best—if not the only way—to ensure America's security is to jettison the constraints imposed by friends, allies, and international institutions. The United States will act as it sees fit to protect itself and its interests. Other countries will either follow or get out of the way.

Bush is, in many ways, a surprising foreign policy revolutionary. During the 2000 presidential campaign many doubted he had the background or the inclination to make a mark on international affairs. He was widely depicted as ill informed and uninterested about the world beyond America's borders. Most observers suspected that he would be guided—if not held captive—by his far more experienced advisers. His insistence during the campaign that Bill Clinton had overextended the United States abroad fueled suspicion that his presidency would drift toward isolationism.

This conventional wisdom proved wildly off the mark. Bush, who came to the presidency with an insider's view of the White House, had a clear understanding of how presidents must lead. Early on in his presidency he established that he was not the pawn of his advisers but rather their leader. Moreover, he came to office believing that a confident and unilateral exercise of American power was the best way to promote America's national interests. The logic of that belief was evident in the first months of his presidency, when he withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol and the ABM Treaty, and ended America's participation in a range of other multilateral efforts.

Rather than transforming Bush's beliefs about the world and America's place in it, September 11 confirmed them. He suddenly had both the motive and the opportunity to act on those beliefs and develop them in full. Foreign policy became not just the priority of his administration but its mission. He dispatched U.S. forces to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein from Iraq. He also made clear that America would confront potential adversaries before they acted against the United States. Terrorists would be brought to justice, tyrannical regimes overthrown, and weapons of mass destruction kept out of the hands of states and groups that would do America harm.

Bush's foreign policy revolution has profound consequences for American security and international affairs. An America that acts as it sees fit may be able to remake the world—for the better. But an America unbound also may be seen by others as arrogant rather than principled. Its friends and allies could balk at following its lead, and some might actively oppose its chosen course. The result could be that America finds itself less able to use its immense power to shape world affairs in ways conducive to its interests.

The Campaign

Presidential campaigns do not reveal everything about how a candidate might govern, but they almost always reveal something. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign was no exception. The impression that most people gleaned was that he was uncomfortable discussing foreign policy and dependent on his advisers. Yet anyone listening closely to what Bush and his advisers said could discern something else. The Texas governor had clear views on how to run the White House, how to exercise American power abroad, and how to balance the relative priority of domestic and foreign policy.

The Candidate

It is ironic that foreign policy came to define the Bush presidency. Throughout the campaign, doubters openly questioned whether he was smart enough to be commander in chief. Although he grew up in affluence and was the son of a president and the grandson of a senator, he had traveled little outside the United States. Aside from frequent visits to Mexico during his governorship, his international travel had consisted of a six-week trip to China in 1975, a short visit to the Gambia in 1990 as part of an official U.S. delegation, a trip to the Middle East in 1998, and a few trips to Europe in 1990s with a group for corporate executives. By his own admission, Bush knew little about foreign affairs when he decided to run for the presidency. "Nobody needs to tell me what to believe," he said on the campaign trail. "But I *do* need somebody to tell me where Kosovo is."¹

To help him locate Kosovo, Bush assembled a group of eight Republican experts, nicknamed the Vulcans, to tutor him on world affairs. The group was led by Condoleezza Rice, the provost at Stanford University and previously his father's White House adviser on the Soviet Union,

and Paul Wolfowitz, the dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Undersecretary for Defense Policy in the first Bush administration. The other Vulcans were Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Reagan administration; Robert Blackwill, White House adviser on European and Soviet affairs in the first Bush administration; Stephen J. Hadley, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy in the first Bush administration; Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy during the Reagan administration; Dov Zakheim, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Planning and Resources in the Reagan administration; and Robert Zoellick, Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs and White House Deputy Chief of Staff during the first Bush administration.

Bush's choice of these eight advisers was significant because it signaled his own foreign policy predispositions. In the mid-1990s, the congressional wing of the Republican Party had been captured by what might be called the "sovereignists." Led by polarizing figures such as Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), they were deeply suspicious of engagement abroad and saw most international institutions, whether political or economic in nature, as eroding American sovereignty. They favored a mix of isolationism and protectionism. The Vulcans, by contrast, supported international engagement and free trade. Still, they hardly represented the views of all internationalist Republicans. They were instead "intelligent hard-liners."² Missing from the foreign policy team were any of the moderate Republicans from the Reagan and first Bush administrations.

Bush made no attempt to hide his lack of knowledge of the world or his reliance on his advisers. Still, his penchant for confusing Slovakia with Slovenia or referring reporters' questions to Rice did not mean he had no idea how to be president. To the contrary, his views were well-developed. They drew in part from his Harvard Business School education and running a company. They also drew from watching his father's triumphs and failures. In 1988, he worked to keep his

father's campaign staff in line. After the election, he occasionally returned to Washington to play the heavy in intra-White House politics, most notably, in firing John Sununu as chief of staff.

Unlike most presidential candidates, then, he had first-hand experience in the White House. And unlike vice presidents who have run for the country's highest office, he had watched a president operate from both a staff and a unique personal perspective.

During the 2000 campaign, Bush described how he viewed the presidency—it was the country's chief executive officer. That job description entailed three things. “The first challenge of leadership,” he wrote in his campaign autobiography, “is to outline a clear vision and agenda.”³ A belief in the need for clear objectives is not surprising for a man whose father's reelection campaign had foundered over “the vision thing.” He pushed the point further in his first major foreign policy address as a candidate: “Unless a president sets his own priorities, his priorities will be set by others—by adversaries, or the crisis of the moment, live on CNN.”⁴ Moreover, Bush believed that top priorities had to be bold. Leaders did not merely tinker at the margins. As he said about becoming governor: “I wanted to spend my capital on something profound. I didn't come to Austin just to put my name in a placecard holder at the table of Texas governors.”⁵ His presidential campaign platform—a \$1.6 trillion dollar tax cut, Social Security privatization, and ambitious missile defense—attested to his desire not to spend his political capital on small things.

“The next challenge” of leadership, according to Bush, is “to build a strong team of effective people to implement my agenda.”⁶ Many of his critics, and more than a few of his supporters, depicted his willingness to rely on others as a sign of weakness. He saw it as a sign of strength. He repeatedly reminded voters, “I've assembled a team of very strong, smart people. And I look forward to hearing their advice.”⁷ He used his advisers's foreign policy qualifications to deflect questions about his own. “I may not be able to tell you exactly the nuances of the East Timorian situation but I'll ask Condi Rice or I'll ask Paul Wolfowitz or I'll ask Dick Cheney. I'll ask people

who've had experience.”⁸ His job, then, was to be decisive—to pick among the options his advisers presented. “There's going to be disagreements. I hope there is disagreement, because I know that disagreement will be based upon solid thought. And what you need to know is that if there is disagreement, I'll be prepared to make the decision necessary for the good of the country.”⁹

Third, Bush would stick to his positions even if that day's polling data moved the other way. His campaign mantra was: “We have too much polling and focus groups going on in Washington today. We need decisions made on sound principle.”¹⁰ This insistence on standing firm no doubt made for good politics. However, Bush's sentiment, particularly if it is understood as skepticism of conventional wisdom, probably also reflected his true feelings. His personal history demonstrates that experts are often wrong and opinions change. Few took him seriously when he decided to run for governor. Pundits criticized his rote repetition of his four campaign themes and his refusal to go “off message.” He proved the skeptics wrong and defeated the popular Ann Richards. Once in office, he succeeded in enacting some of his priorities and failed in others. Still, his governing style was in keeping with his philosophy: “I believe you have to spend political capital or it withers and dies.”¹¹

Underlying this approach to presidential leadership was tremendous self-confidence. Bush never confronted the obvious question: How would someone who knew little about the world know what the right foreign policy priorities were, decide whom to listen to when his seasoned advisers disagreed on what to do, know when his advisers reached a flawed consensus, or recognize when the conventional wisdom was actually right. Then again, Bush had reason to be self-confident. As Cheney explained it:

Well, but think of what he's done. He's the guy who went out and put his name on the ballot, got into the arena, captured the Republican nomination, devised a strategy to beat an incumbent vice president at a time of considerable prosperity in the country. None of the rest of us did that. And that's the test.¹²

Indeed, how many Americans who at the age of forty were running a failing business and drinking too much turned their lives around so completely that within a dozen years they became not just a two-time governor of the nation's second-most populous state but also a serious contender for the White House?

The Worldview

Bush's lack of foreign policy experience also did not mean that he lacked beliefs. He didn't. He sometimes describes himself as a "gut" player rather than an intellectual.¹³ But during the campaign he outlined, at times faintly, a coherent foreign policy philosophy. It was visible first in what he said on the campaign trail. But it was also visible in a deeper way in the writings and statements of the people he chose to advise him on foreign policy. These views, while not always identical or consistent, differed significantly from both the policies of the Clinton administration as well as those of previous Republican administrations.

At the level of broad goals, Bush outlined a foreign policy hardly distinguishable from Bill Clinton's. Like virtually every major presidential candidates since World War II, Bush's foreign policy aspirations were Wilsonian. The United States, he argued, had a "great and guiding goal: to turn this time of American influence into generations of democratic peace." In an implicit rebuke to the sovereigntist wing of the Republican Party, he warned that giving into the temptation "to build a proud tower of protectionism and isolation" would "invite challenges to our power" and result in "a stagnant America and a savage world."¹⁴ He did criticize what he said was Clinton's excessive use of American military forces overseas, thus prompting suggestions he was peddling a brand of soft isolationism. But, when pressed to name a military intervention he opposed, he mentioned only Haiti.¹⁵

On another level, Bush's foreign policy outlook could be summarized as ABC—Anything But Clinton. His speeches dripped with disdain for the forty-second president. In Bush's judgment, Clinton had committed the cardinal sin of leadership—he had failed to set priorities. Bush clearly had Clinton in mind when he declared that presidents would always be tempted to let the nation “move from crisis to crisis like a cork in a current.” The result was that Clinton had given the United States “action without vision, activity without priority, and missions without end—an approach that squanders American will and drains American energy.”¹⁶ Clinton's mistake, then, wasn't that he actively involved America in world affairs. It was that he expended America's power on matters of secondary importance.

What Bush promised in contrast was clear priorities based on a hard-nosed assessment of America's national interests.

These are my priorities. An American president should work with our strong democratic allies in Europe and Asia to extend the peace. He should promote a fully democratic Western Hemisphere, bound together by free trade. He should defend America's interests in the Persian Gulf and advance peace in the Middle East, based upon a secure Israel. He must check the contagious spread of weapons of mass destruction, and the means to deliver them. He must lead toward a world that trades in freedom.¹⁷

To read this pledge is to recognize how conventional Bush's foreign policy goals were.

Bush's stands on the two foreign policy issues that would come to define his presidency—terrorism and Iraq—were equally conventional. He vowed in his first campaign speech to “put a high priority on detecting and responding to terrorism on our soil.”¹⁸ For the most part, however, he, like Al Gore, seldom mentioned terrorism during the campaign. He did not raise the subject of terrorism in any of the three presidential debates, even though the third debate came just days after the bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole*.

Bush's comments on Iraq were scrutinized throughout the campaign. Asked how he would respond if president to the discovery that Iraq had resumed manufacturing weapons of mass

destruction, he appeared to say he would “take him out.” When the moderator immediately followed up this answer, Bush said he would “take out his weapons of mass destruction.” The next day he said his original answer was “take ‘em out,” which people had misinterpreted because of his Texas drawl. “My intent was the weapons—they, not him.”¹⁹ His standard line subsequently became that there would be “consequences” if Iraq developed weapons of mass destruction, though he studiously avoided saying what those consequences might be. He never pledged to use the U.S. military to unseat Saddam Hussein. Instead, like Gore, he supported the Iraq Liberation Act, which provided funds for Iraqi exile groups dedicated to toppling Hussein’s government. Bush also agreed with Gore that the policy of containing Iraq with sanctions should continue, insisting that “I want them to be tougher.”²⁰

What made Bush’s beliefs distinctive—and even radical—was the underlying logic about how America should act in the world. This logic, which was more visible in the writings of Bush’s advisers than in his speeches—the man from Midland took pride, after all, in being a doer rather than a thinker—has its roots in a strain of realist political thinking best labeled as hegemonist.²¹ At its most basic, this perspective argues that American primacy in the world is the key to securing America’s interests—and that it is both possible and desirable to extend the unipolar moment of the 1990s into a unipolar era. The intellectual predicate for this worldview was laid in a 1992 Pentagon study prepared for Dick Cheney and Wolfowitz.²² That study, according to a draft leaked to the *New York Times*, maintained that U.S. national security policy after the cold war should seek to preclude “the emergence of any potential future global competitor.”²³

The hegemonist view rests on five propositions—four of which are familiar to anyone steeped in the realist tradition of world politics. First, the United States lives in a dangerous world, one closer to Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature than Immanuel Kant’s perpetual peace. “This is,” Bush wrote, “still a world of terror and missiles and madmen.”²⁴ Peril to the United States—from

China, Russia, Iraq, North Korea, terrorists—was a staple of Cheney’s worldview, laid bare in numerous speeches and conversations.²⁵

The second element of the hegemonist worldview is that self-interested nation-states are the key actors in world politics. The 1990s witnessed much talk about how globalization—growing interconnected among states—was undercutting national governments, empowering non-state actors, and reordering the structure of world politics. Bush and his advisers would have none of it. Aside from trade, they rarely mentioned globalization when discussing foreign policy. Whenever they mentioned terrorism, they almost always linked the subject back to the threat of rogue regimes and hostile powers. To them, world politics looked no different at the beginning of the twenty-first century than it had to Cardinal Richelieu or Prince von Metternich. States sought to advance their own narrow interests, not to create what Rice called “an illusory international community.”²⁶

Third, hegemonists see power, and especially military power, as the coin of the realm even in a globalized world. “Power matters,” Rice wrote, “both the exercise of power by the United States and the ability of others to exercise it.” In this contest with others, Bush argued, the United States enjoyed “unrivalled military power, economic promise, and cultural influence.”²⁷ But power is about more than just capability. It is also about will. Here Bush and his advisers scorned what they saw as Clinton’s hesitance to flex America’s military muscles in defense of core national interests. “There are limits to the smiles and scowls of diplomacy,” Bush argued. “Armies and missiles are not stopped by stiff notes of condemnation. They are held in check by strength and purpose and the promise of swift punishment.”²⁸

Bush and his advisers had a decidedly unsentimental view about how to exercise power. Washington should not be afraid of throwing its weight around. The lesson of America’s “remarkable record” of building coalitions during the cold war, Wolfowitz wrote, is that leadership consists of “demonstrating that your friends will be protected and taken care of, that your enemies

will be punished, and that those who refuse to support you will live to regret having done so.”²⁹ The demonstration of resolve was as crucial for friends as for adversaries. They needed to be convinced that the United States meant what it said. Wolfowitz told the story of how Saudi Arabia rejected the elder President Bush’s offer immediately following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to send a fighter squadron to help defend the desert kingdom. Only after then Defense Secretary Cheney traveled to Riyadh and assured King Fahd that the administration would send hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops did the Saudis conclude that Washington was committed to “finish the job.”³⁰ The lesson was clear: If America leads, others will follow.

The fourth basic proposition of the hegemonist worldview is that multilateral institutions and agreements are neither essential nor necessarily conducive to American interests. Bush did not flatly rule out working through international institutions. To the contrary, he occasionally spoke of working to strengthen organizations such as NATO and the United Nations. However, he articulated a distinctively instrumental view of formal multilateral efforts—they were fine if they served immediate, concrete American interests.³¹ As a practical matter, they would usually be found wanting. That would force Washington to look first at forming “coalitions of the willing,” an idea that the 1992 draft Pentagon planning document had endorsed. To borrow a metaphor popularized by one prominent Republican foreign policy thinker, the idea was that United States would be the “sheriff” that organized the townspeople into a posse.³² If the townspeople didn’t want to ride out to meet the bad guys, Washington would happily take on the role of Gary Cooper in *High Noon* and face the bad guys alone.

The Bush team was equally worried that many cold-war agreements, most notably the 1972 Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, had outlived their usefulness. The broader argument, however, was multilateral agreements had ceased to be a means of achieving American interests and become an end in themselves. Bush and his advisers rejected the notion, popular with many in the Clinton

administration and in Europe, that committing good words to paper would create international norms able to shape state behavior. In Bush's view, such agreements constrained only the United States and other law-abiding countries, not rogue states bent on harming American interests. Given this reality, Washington would be better able to maximize its own security by minimizing the constraints on its freedom of action.³³ This policy of the free hand, which had its intellectual roots in the criticisms Senator Henry Cabot Lodge leveled against the Treaty of Versailles, rested on an important assumption: The benefits of flexibility far outweigh the diplomatic costs of declining to participate in international agreements popular with others.

Washington could get away with disappointing its allies because of the fifth tenet of the hegemonist faith: The United States is a unique great power and others see it so. This is the one proposition alien to the realist worldview, which treats the internal make-up and character of states as irrelevant. But it is a proposition most Americans take as self-evident. "America has never been an empire," Bush argued in 1999. "We may be the only great power in history that had the chance, and refused—preferring greatness to power and justice to glory."³⁴ The purity of American motives was crucial because it meant exercising American power should only threaten those opposed to the spread of freedom and free markets. What Washington wanted was what everyone wanted, if they were freed from despotic rule.

Most of Bush's advisers accepted this billiard ball view of the world, where the United States was the biggest (and most virtuous) ball on the table and could move every other ball when and where it wished. The one exception was Colin Powell, who Bush tapped as an adviser more for his biography than his philosophy. Powell was not a Vulcan, seldom appeared publicly with Bush during the campaign, and did not form a deep bond with the Texan.³⁵ Powell was a traditional internationalist who understood the importance of power but worried about flexing America's muscles too freely and alienating other countries. He saw more virtue in multilateral efforts and

agreements; he was the only member of the Bush team to have endorsed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In accepting the nomination to be secretary of state, he implicitly rejected the president-elect's insistence that the White House would set the policy agenda. The former national security adviser and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned Bush: "During your administration you'll be faced with many challenges, and crises that we don't know anything about right now will come along." Many of Bush's other foreign policy advisers dismissed Powell's caution as timidity. When Wolfowitz was asked why he had agreed to become deputy secretary of defense, he reportedly gave a one-word answer: "Powell."³⁶

While the hegemonists in the Bush campaign were united in their dislike for Powell's worldview, they disagreed among themselves over a key question: To what extent should the United States use its power to promote America's ideals? A minority was made up of democratic imperialists. Led by Wolfowitz, they argued that the United States should actively deploy its overwhelming military, economic, and political might to remake the world in its image—and that doing so would serve the interests of other countries as well as the United States.³⁷ Most of Bush's advisers, though, were assertive nationalists deeply skeptical that American power could create what others were unable to build for themselves. Led by Cheney and Rumsfeld, they saw the purpose of American power as more limited—to deter and defeat potential threats to the nation's security.³⁸ Because these threats also threaten others, America's willingness to stare them down enhances not only U.S. security but international security as well. Or, as the controversial 1992 Pentagon study put it, "the world order is ultimately backed by the U.S."³⁹

The Politics

Bush said throughout the campaign that the United States needed clear foreign policy priorities. He did not say, however, that foreign policy was his top priority. His top two priorities

were instead domestic initiatives—a \$1.6 trillion tax cut and education reform. While Bush provided detailed plans on how he intended to achieve these two objectives, his discussion of foreign policy initiatives—whether it was military readiness, missile defense, or better relations with Mexico—never went beyond listing aspirations.

Bush’s decision to relegate foreign policy to a secondary place in his campaign reflected his own background and political vulnerabilities. Candidates taking remedial courses in world affairs are poorly positioned to tell the country to look overseas. Another factor was that foreign policy was not important to most voters. Polls throughout the 1990s found that fewer than 10 percent of Americans—and often less than 5 percent—named any defense or national security issue as the most important problem facing the United States. Even when people were pressed to name a foreign policy problem, the most common response polls turned up was “Don’t Know.”⁴⁰

What the campaign suggested was that for Bush foreign policy was a not matter of passion. He had to speak about world affairs to demonstrate his political credibility. He attempted to do so in a ways that maximized his appeal to voters. On a few issues, most notably better relations with Mexico, he showed genuine enthusiasm and comfort, though here the domestic political benefits given America’s rapidly growing Latino population were obvious. But the main message he sent to the American electorate was that his would not be a foreign policy presidency.

The Early Months

World affairs might not have been at the top of George Bush’s priority list in January 2001, but many Republicans hoped he would act decisively on foreign policy. The White House’s actions in the spring and summer of 2001 gave them reason to be both discouraged and pleased. Although Bush did not launch any major new initiatives, he began undoing many of Bill Clinton’s. In doing

so, Bush showed a keen sensitivity to American domestic politics and almost none at all to politics abroad. He also turned a deaf ear to warnings that Al Qaeda represented a clear and present danger to the United States.

Leaving the Gate Slowly

Many of Bush's supporters expected him to move immediately to overhaul U.S. defense and foreign policy. Hawks expected a massive defense spending increase. Missile defense enthusiasts predicted a rapid U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and a new Manhattan Project to build a national missile defense. Beijing haters anticipated a push to redirect the U.S. military to counter a rising China, a blunt declaration of the administration's intent to defend Taiwan, and massive arms sales to Taipei. Isolationists on Capitol Hill looked forward to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Bosnia and Kosovo. Free traders looked forward to a revival of talks on a Free Trade Agreement for the Americas and a new round of world trade negotiations. Saddam-haters looked forward to aggressive efforts to produce regime change in Iraq.

Bush disappointed these expectations during his first eight months in office. In February, he announced that he would not seek to add more funds to the 2001 budget and that he would let the Clinton administration's proposed 2002 defense budget request of \$310 billion stand. He did not immediately withdraw from the ABM Treaty or launch a crash project on missile defense. When Bush finally gave a speech on missile defense in May, he emphasized that he intended to prepare the diplomatic ground for a U.S. withdrawal rather than present the world with a *fait accompli*. A month later, he met Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time at a summit in Slovenia, got "a sense of his soul," and declared that Russia "can be a strong partner and friend."⁴¹

Relations with China were more contentious, but the administration sought to restrain tempters. A Chinese fighter jet collided with a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft on April 1, 2001,

destroying the Chinese fighter and forcing the American plane to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island. Rather than escalate the crisis, the administration quietly negotiated with Beijing. That caution continued even after China released the American crew. In late April, the administration broke with past practice and announced it had authorized the sale of eight diesel submarines to Taiwan. In what administration officials acknowledged was a clear nod to Beijing's concerns, however, the White House decided against selling Taipei destroyers equipped with the advanced Aegis radar defense system.⁴² Two days after the arms sales announcement, Bush told ABC-TV's *Good Morning, America* that the United States would do "whatever it took to help Taiwan defend herself."⁴³ Within hours the president backtracked, saying he had not changed long-standing U.S. policy toward Beijing. His advisers confirmed that statement publicly and privately. A little more than a month later, Bush extended normal trade relations status for China for another year.

Bush's initial reluctance to undertake major new foreign policy initiatives was evident on other prominent campaign issues. Powell announced in February that the United States would not remove its troops from Bosnia or Kosovo without the agreement of NATO allies, saying: "The simple proposition is: We went in together, we will come out together."⁴⁴ Bush made a point of taking his first foreign trip to Mexico, and he declared (just days before September 11) that "the United States has no more important relationship in the world than our relationship with Mexico."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, he offered no concrete plans for resolving the outstanding issues in U.S.-Mexican relations. The administration's trade policy remained stuck in the inter-agency process.⁴⁶ Finally, Bush made no moves to unseat Saddam Hussein, either through direct U.S. action or by empowering Iraqi exile groups to do so on America's behalf. Instead, the administration opted to seek to replace the existing Iraqi sanctions with smarter ones.

Rather than unveiling new initiatives, Bush focused during his first eight months in office on extracting the United States from existing ones. In March, Bush abandoned his campaign pledge to curtail emissions of carbon dioxide from power plants. Rice subsequently told European Union ambassadors at a private lunch that the Kyoto Treaty on global warming was “dead.”⁴⁷ Thereafter the administration declared its determined opposition to a string of international agreements: a pact to control the trafficking in small arms, a new protocol to the Biological Weapons convention, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the International Criminal Court.

This “Just-Say-No” foreign policy extended beyond international agreements. Bush reined in a variety of U.S. efforts to broker peace around the world. At the top of the list was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which administration officials saw as the black hole of U.S. diplomacy. In a break with Clinton, who had enmeshed himself in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, Bush put U.S. engagement in the Middle East peace process on hold. He declined to send an envoy to the last-ditch Israeli-Palestinian peace talks at Taba, Egypt, in late January 2001. The White House eliminated the post of special Middle East envoy, and in May the National Security Council still did not have a senior director for Middle East affairs.⁴⁸ The reason for this inaction, as Powell repeatedly said, was that “in the end, we cannot want peace more than the parties themselves.”⁴⁹

Bush took a similar approach to North Korea. He abandoned the Clinton administration’s efforts to strike a deal freezing the North Korean missile program in exchange for food aid, and he signaled that he had no intention of supporting South Korean President Kim Dae Jung’s “sunshine policy” toward Pyongyang. Bush’s hands-off approach carried over to mediating the conflict in Northern Ireland. Whereas Clinton repeatedly played the role of peace broker, Bush said “I am going to wait to be asked by the prime minister” of Great Britain. Tony Blair politely acknowledged the White House’s withdrawal by saying, “It’s difficult to perceive the exact circumstances in which I might pick up the phone and ask the president to help.”⁵⁰ Bush also declined Colombian President

Andres Pastrana's request for the United States to do more to help end Colombia's long-running civil war.⁵¹

In short, Bush delivered in his first months in office precisely the presidency he had promised. He had focused on a few key priorities and worked them hard. Those priorities just happened to involve domestic, not foreign, policy. The key legislative initiative was the \$1.6 trillion tax cut. The administration's standard response to questions about why it did not seem to have a proactive agenda was that it was conducting a thorough review of American foreign policy.

Politics at Home and Abroad

The steps that Bush did take in foreign policy, however, reflected domestic politics, and especially the demands of core Republican constituencies. On his third day in office, Bush reinstated the "Mexico City Policy," the executive order that Ronald Reagan had imposed and Bill Clinton repealed mandating that NGOs receiving federal funds agree to neither perform nor promote abortion as a method of family planning in other nations. The practical importance of the decision was questionable, but the symbolic importance was not—pro-life groups had demanded the policy's reinstatement. With the stroke of a pen Bush shored up his support with the Republican base, which had previously doubted his conservative credentials. The decision to proceed deliberately on missile defense was calculated at least in part to deny Democrats a political issue. They believed they had scored significant political points in the 1980s attacking Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" missile defense, and they hoped to repeat those successes by accusing the Bush White House of endangering the "cornerstone" of international stability. In contrast, by proceeding deliberately on missile defense and publicly reaching out to Russia, the White House looked to minimize the chances that its policy could be labeled reckless.

Domestic politics figured prominently in other Bush decisions. He based his decision to withdraw the United States from the Kyoto Treaty solely on domestic considerations, arguing that “idea of placing caps on CO₂ does not make economic sense for America.”⁵² Powell later admitted the decision had been handled badly, arguing that when the international “blowback came I think it was a sobering experience that everything the American president does has international repercussions.”⁵³ The decision to delay action on a major trade initiative reflected a desire not to complicate work on other, higher presidential priorities.⁵⁴ Bush also showed he was not above reversing course to accommodate domestic political realities. His decision to stick with Clinton’s defense budget proposals infuriated defense hawks on Capitol Hill. They quickly moved to open the spending tap. Rather than being trumped by Congress, the White House changed its tune. By August 2001, Bush had submitted a 2001 defense appropriation supplemental request and raised the 2002 defense budget request to \$343.3 billion.

The flip side to Bush’s sensitivity to American domestic politics was his insensitivity to foreign reactions. During President Kim’s visit to Washington in March, Bush angered the South Koreans when he used a joint public appearance to express his “skepticism” that the North Koreans could be trusted to keep their word.⁵⁵ The abrupt announcement of the decision to abandon Kyoto set the tone for a world already primed to believe Bush had no interest in the views of other countries. As complaints abroad about American unilateralism grew in the spring of 2001, Bush did not back down. On the eve of his first trip to Europe in June 2001, he reiterated his opposition to Kyoto. While admitting that the surface temperature of the earth is warming and that human activity looked to be a contributing factor, he offered only to fund programs to study the problem, not as his opponents demanded, action to reduce the emission of heat-trapping gases. As White House speechwriter David Frum later wrote, with only some hyperbole, “Bush was extraordinarily

responsive to international criticism—but his response was to tuck back his ears and repeat his offense.”⁵⁶

Bush’s willingness to step on diplomatic toes surprised many observers, who pointed to his campaign pledge to strengthen America’s alliances. Nonetheless, his unsentimental diplomacy flowed directly from his core beliefs. If all states pursue their self-interest, if power matters above all else, and if American virtue is unquestioned, then U.S. foreign policy should not be about searching for common policies. Rather it should be about pushing the world in the direction Washington wants it to go, even if others initially resist. As Powell told European journalists, Bush “makes sure people know what he believes in. And then he tries to persuade others that is the correct position. When it does not work, then we will take the position we believe is correct, and I hope the Europeans are left with a better understanding of the way in which we want to do business.”⁵⁷ Nor did Bush miss the fact that the allies did not match their harsh words with equivalent deeds. The attitude Bush took to challenges to his domestic initiatives applied here as well: “We aren’t going to negotiate with ourselves.”⁵⁸

Two other factors encouraged the administration’s conclusion that it could ignore foreign capitals. One was the firm belief that Bush was being criticized because countries had grown accustomed to Clinton’s eagerness to do what pleased them rather than do what was right. Persuading countries that Washington would be doing business in a new way required a dose of “tough love” that would produce vocal complaints, at least for a time. Nonetheless, most officials in the Bush administration believed that if they stuck to their guns, the complaints would faded away as the allies adjusted to the new style of American leadership.

The other factor reinforcing Bush’s willingness to ruffle diplomatic feathers was his firm belief that chief executives do not change simply because they get bad reviews. After returning from his first state visit to Europe, he commented:

I think Ronald Reagan would have been proud of how I conducted myself. I went to Europe a humble leader of a great country, and stood my ground. I wasn't going to yield. I listened, but I made my point. And I went to dinner, as Karen [Hughes] would tell you, with 15 leaders of the EU, and patiently sat there as all 15 in one form or another told me how wrong I was [about the Kyoto Accords]. And at the end I said, "I appreciate your point of view, but this is the American position because it's right for America."⁵⁹

Bush's description sounded more fitting of a cold war summit with Soviet leaders than a meeting with America's closest allies in peacetime. Nevertheless, he was supremely confident in the goals he had set or the U.S. policy, and he was willing to exercise patience in his effort to achieve them.

Bush's vision of the president-as-CEO showed itself in another way—he made clear to everyone that he was in charge. Unlike Reagan, who often could not decide between his oft-feuding friends, or Clinton, who always saw every side to an argument, Bush quickly earned a reputation among his advisers for decisiveness. Contrary to suggestions that he would be a pawn of his more seasoned cabinet secretaries, he dominated them, overturning their decisions or spurning their recommendations. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was the first victim. His public commitment in February to seek a supplemental defense appropriations bill was quickly countermanded by the White House. In March, Powell had to retract his statement that the Bush administration would “pick up where the Clinton administration left off” in dealing with North Korea—“I got a little far forward on my skis” he later told reporters.⁶⁰ When Powell told Europeans in July that the administration would have a plan for combating climate change by fall, Rice followed by saying that there was no deadline and no plan. Environmental and Protection Agency Director Christine Whitman and Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill saw their recommendation for action to combat global warming rejected. In short, Bush left no question as to who was in charge.

In putting his mark on his administration, however, Bush failed to push his advisers to tackle the issue that would dominate his presidency—terrorism in general and Al Qaeda in particular. He seldom mentioned terrorism publicly during his first months in office. In early May, he announced a new Office of National Preparedness for terrorism at the Federal Emergency Management Agency but gave it no new resources. Except on the handful of occasions in which he justified abandoning the ABM Treaty because of the “terrorist threats that face us,” he did not mention the subject of terrorism again publicly before September 11.⁶¹ By all accounts, things were not much different in private. None of this is surprising. Bush and his advisers had always emphasized that America was threatened by states—whether great powers or rogue nations—not stateless actors.

The outgoing Clinton administration—whose own handling of the Al Qaeda threat could be criticized—had tried hard to challenge that assumption. Before Bush took office, Rice met with the man she was replacing as national security adviser, Samuel R. “Sandy” Berger. He told her, “You’re going to spend more time during your four years on terrorism generally and Al Qaeda specifically than any other issue.”⁶² Other Clinton administration officials repeated the same message just as bluntly. About a week before the inauguration, George Tenet, who stayed on as director of central intelligence, met with Bush, Cheney, and Rice. He told them that Al Qaeda was one of the three gravest threats facing the United States and that this “tremendous threat” was “immediate.”⁶³ Brian Sheridan, the outgoing assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low intensity conflict, says he told Rice that terrorism is “serious stuff, these guys are not going away. I just remember her listening and not asking much.” Lt. Gen. Don Kerrick, an outgoing deputy national security adviser, sent the NSC front office a memo on “things you need to pay attention to.” About Al Qaeda it said: “We are going to be struck again.” During Bush’s first week in office, Richard Clarke, the top NSC staffer during the Clinton years on terrorism held over by the Bush administration, handed Rice an action plan that said a high-level meeting on Al Qaeda was “urgently needed.” A

subsequent memo argued: “We would make a major error if we underestimated the challenge al-Qaeda poses.”⁶⁴

These efforts did not convince the Bush team to make counterterrorism a top priority. Rice did not schedule the high-level meeting that Clarke had requested. Instead she reorganized the NSC’s handling of counterterrorism and effectively demoted Clarke. Kerrick, who stayed through the first four months of the Bush administration, said “candidly speaking, I didn’t detect” a strong focus on terrorism. “That’s not being derogatory. It’s just a fact.”⁶⁵ Gen. Hugh Shelton, whose term as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff ended shortly after September 11, concurred. In his view, the Bush administration moved terrorism “farther to the back burner.”⁶⁶

Bush administration officials later argued that they had worked throughout the summer 2001 to prevent a possible Al Qaeda attack. The intelligence community had picked up “chatter” in late spring indicating greater terrorist activity. These concerns did not, however, prompt more aggressive action. Nor did they revive the Clinton administration’s practice of keeping covert military assets on alert near Afghanistan to strike if the intelligence community located Osama bin Laden. Secretary of the Treasury O’Neill actually suspended U.S. participation in multilateral efforts to track terrorist money flows.⁶⁷ Clarke’s plan to go after Al Qaeda wound its way slowly through the bureaucracy. Bush’s senior advisers met for the first time to discuss the plan—which was dedicated to “rolling back” Al Qaeda—on September 4.

Administration officials insisted after September 11 that President Bush had pushed them throughout the spring and summer of 2001 to move faster in confronting Al Qaeda. “I’m tired of swatting flies,” he reportedly said. “I’m tired of playing defense. I want to play offense. I want to take the fight to the terrorists.”⁶⁸ Bush’s own assessment of how he handled the Al Qaeda threat was far less flattering:

There was a significant difference in my attitude after September 11. I was not on point, but I knew he was a menace, and I knew he was a problem. I knew he was

responsible, for the [previous] bombings that killed Americans. I was prepared to look at a plan that would be a thoughtful plan that would bring him to justice, and would have given an order to do that. I have no hesitancy about going after him. But I didn't feel that sense of urgency, and my blood was not nearly as boiling.⁶⁹

Bush had done what he promised during the campaign. He had stuck to his agenda. Counterterrorism just happened not to be prominent on it. He would later discover the truth of Secretary-designate Powell's warning: Events abroad do not always observe the priorities and schedules of even the most disciplined of presidents.

A Worldview Confirmed

September 11, 2001 shook the president, the nation, indeed, the world. The differences that had divided the United States from its friends and allies before the attacks gave way to solidarity and support. "*Nous sommes tous Américains*," declared the left-leaning French daily *Le Monde*. Germany's Chancellor Gerhard Schröder offered "unlimited solidarity."⁷⁰ All over the world people stood as one with the United States.

With the global shock and sympathy came an expectation that September 11 would compel President Bush to alter his approach to foreign policy. Many people at home and abroad assumed that the unilateralism of the first seven months was dead, replaced by a firm embrace of multilateral cooperation. It was an expectation shared even by Bush's father, who three days after the attack predicted that: "Just as Pearl Harbor awakened this country from the notion that we could somehow avoid the call to duty and to defend freedom in Europe and Asia in World War II, so, too, should this most recent surprise attack erase the concept in some quarters that America can somehow go it alone in the fight against terrorism or in anything else for that matter."⁷¹ Rather, international cooperation was assumed to be the only effective way to combat what many saw as the dark side of globalization.

President Bush took several steps within hours of the attacks that seemingly corroborated expectations of a new, more multilateral U.S. foreign policy. Washington turned to the United Nations, which on September 12 passed a resolution condemning those responsible for the attacks, holding accountable “those responsible for aiding, supporting or harboring the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these acts,” and authorizing “all necessary steps” to respond to the attacks.⁷² The administration also turned to Europe, where for the first time in its history, the Atlantic Alliance invoked its solemn obligation under Article V of the NATO Treaty to come to the defense of a fellow member under attack. Instead of lashing out alone, Bush appeared set to assemble a broad coalition to fight the war on terrorism.

However, the expectation that September 11 would produce a new Bush foreign policy was soon proven wrong. The decisions to go to the United Nations and accept NATO’s invocation of Article V were tactical responses to the attacks, not a strategic conversion to the multilateralist creed. In fact, rather than seeing the terrorists attacks as repudiating their worldview, Bush and his advisers saw them as confirmation. They had argued throughout the euphoria of the 1990s—a time George Will has called a “holiday from history”—that the world remained a dangerous place.⁷³ As Bush told the nation nine days after the attacks, September 11 had awakened America to danger. “We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”⁷⁴

The reason terrorists had struck the United States was simple—American weakness had invited it. According to many in the administration, the dead at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the field in rural Pennsylvania had paid the price for Washington’s failure to respond forcefully to a long litany of attacks that began with the Beirut embassy bombing in 1983 and ran through the bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole* in 2000. “Weakness, vacillation, and unwillingness of the

United States to stand with our friends — that is provocative,” argued Vice President Cheney. It’s encouraged people like Osama bin Laden ... to launch repeated strikes against the United States, our people overseas and here at home, with the view that he could, in fact, do so with impunity.”⁷⁵ By implication, the best way to defeat terrorists was to make it clear to all that the United States would respond decisively to any attack.

The Bush administration recognized that defeating Al Qaeda also required better homeland security within the United States and increased intelligence and law enforcement cooperation with other countries. It moved quickly to double homeland security spending and make counterterrorism priority number one at the CIA and the FBI. Still, the focus of the administration’s response was on taking the battle to the terrorists.⁷⁶ Bush made clear that meant targeting the states that harbored and aided them. “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them,” the president declared the night of the attacks, in a statement now remembered as enunciating a new Bush doctrine.⁷⁷ Days later, Wolfowitz pledged that the United States would focus on “removing the sanctuaries, removing the support systems, ending states who sponsor terrorism.”⁷⁸ The link between terrorist organizations and state sponsors became the “principal strategic thought underlying our strategy in the war on terrorism,” according to Douglas Feith, the number three official in the Pentagon. “Terrorist organizations cannot be effective in sustaining themselves over long periods of time to do large-scale operations if they don’t have support from states.”⁷⁹

Bush also made clear that he viewed the war on terrorism as a fight in which there was no room for neutrality. “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” he declared.⁸⁰ He saw the way other countries put aside their grudges about Kyoto and the ABM Treaty to rally to Washington’s side as confirming his belief that the rest of the world viewed America as a great power with a unique moral purpose. His task was to

provide a clear lead for them to follow. “The best way we hold this coalition together is to be clear on our objectives and to be clear that we are determined to achieve them. You hold a coalition together by strong leadership and that’s what we intend to provide.”⁸¹

September 11 did not, however, leave the administration’s thinking entirely untouched. One thing it changed was the once firm belief that great power competition constituted the primary threat to U.S. security. That distinction now belonged to terrorists and rogue states armed with weapons of mass destruction. Given that both Russia and China endorsed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, America’s war on terrorism, the White House even suggested that a fundamental strategic realignment among the great powers might be underway. “Today,” Bush declared, “the international community has the best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century to build a world where great powers compete in peace instead of continually prepare for war. Today, the world’s great powers find ourselves on the same side—united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos.”⁸² With the great powers united by a common cause, the United States would have greater freedom to pursue terrorists and tyrants.

September 11 also made foreign policy not just the administration’s top priority, but Bush’s personal mission. “I’m here for a reason,” Bush had told his chief political aide Karl Rove shortly after the attacks, “and this is going to be how we’re going to be judged.”⁸³ The president’s friends and advisers described the impact of September 11 on his thinking in similar terms. “I think, in his frame, this is what God has asked him to do,” said one close friend.⁸⁴ According to a senior administration official, Bush “really believes he was placed here to do this as part of a divine plan.”⁸⁵ Once the world is delivered from evil the good people everywhere will be able to get on with their lives free of fear. America’s mission—George Bush’s mission—is to make this vision come true.

In providing Bush with a motive to act abroad, September 11 also gave him the opportunity to act without fear of being challenged at home. In a replay of a phenomenon that has occurred

repeatedly over the course of U.S. history, the attacks immediately shifted the pendulum of power in Washington away from Congress and toward the White House. Three days after the attack, a near unanimous Congress gave the president a blank check to retaliate against the terrorists, authorizing him “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons.”⁸⁶ On issues ranging from missile defense to the payment of U.S. back dues to the United Nations to sanctions on Pakistan, Congress checked its previous defiance and deferred to the White House.

The depth of Congress’s deference partly reflected the enormity of the attacks and a principled belief that lawmakers should defer to strong presidential leadership in times of national crisis. But it also reflected the Democratic Party’s lack of credibility with the American public on foreign policy. For years Americans had told pollsters they had far more confidence in the ability of Republicans than Democrats to handle national security issues. Now Democrats found themselves in a position where their criticisms of Bush’s decisions would either not be believed or sound unpatriotic. Most Democratic lawmakers who would have preferred to challenge the White House opted for silence.⁸⁷ President Bush and his advisers—all of who already had expansive views of presidential authority—happily seized on the chance to act without having to clear their decisions with 535 secretaries of state.

The White House also worked hard to keep Congress, and especially congressional Democrats, on the defensive. In a January 2002 speech to the Republican National Committee, Karl Rove, Bush’s chief political adviser, urged Republicans to use the war on terrorism as a campaign issue against Democrats. Such political calculations appear to have influenced the decision to propose creating a new Department of Homeland Security. Although Democrats had initially championed the idea and the White House had opposed it, Bush succeeded in turning the

issue to his favor. At one point, he went as far as to suggest that Senate Democrats were “more interested in special interest in Washington and not interested in the security of the American people.”⁸⁸ The keen sensitivity to domestic politics that Bush displayed during his first months in office continued as well. His March 2002 decision to impose new tariffs on imported steel was motivated in good part by a desire to shore up his support in the key battleground states of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. In short, September 11 did nothing to neuter Bush’s political instincts.

The war on terrorism and its main initial components—the war in Afghanistan and dealing with what Bush would call the “axis of evil”—represented the logical outcome of the Bush worldview following the terrorist attacks of September 11. The world did not change that day, but the threat Bush intended to confront, the relative priority of foreign policy on his agenda, and his political freedom to act on his beliefs, clearly did.

Afghanistan

No one doubted the United States would respond to the September 11 attacks. “Terrorism against our nation will not stand,” Bush declared moments after the second jet slammed into the south tower of the World Trade Center.⁸⁹ The question was how to respond. Administration officials concluded almost immediately that Osama bin Laden had masterminded the attacks. He and his Al Qaeda network had settled in Afghanistan, with the full support of the Taliban, an Islamist regime that had taken power in 1996.

So Afghanistan became the immediate target for any potential military response. On September 17, Bush signed a “top secret” memorandum outlining plans for war against the landlocked Central Asian country.⁹⁰ Unfortunately the Pentagon, which has battle plans for almost every

conceivable contingency, had no detailed plans for Afghanistan. It had fired cruise missiles at several Al Qaeda camps in response to the 1998 embassy bombings, and U.S. naval vessels were stationed in the Arabian Sea during the later years of the Clinton presidency, ready to launch cruise missiles in the event bin Laden's was located.⁹¹ But aside from these minor contingencies, there was “nothing on the shelf for this kind of war” according to Rice.⁹²

The absence of detailed military options became apparent in the NSC meetings convened during the first week after the attacks. Rumsfeld asked probing questions and wondered whether other countries (including Iraq) needed to be targeted, but otherwise provided little advice on how the United States should respond. Shelton presented generic military options—attacking with cruise missiles only, adding long-range bombers, and putting boots on the ground alongside air power—that lacked much detail. CIA Director Tenet and his team presented the most developed military option. Armed with a colorful set of PowerPoint briefing slides titled “Going to War” (each slide was illustrated with a picture of bin Laden inside a slashed red circle), Tenet proposed that CIA and Special Operations forces provide direct support (including directing air strikes) to the main Northern Alliance opposition forces seeking to overthrow the Taliban regime.⁹³

On September 17, Bush met with his advisers and told them what to they had to do. Powell would issue an ultimatum to the Taliban—hand over bin Laden or be overthrown. Tenet would have full authority to pursue Al Qaeda members in any way the CIA deemed necessary. CIA agents also were directed to begin providing full support to Afghan opposition forces. Shelton was told to draw up detailed plans for an attack using missiles, bombers, and ground troops. “Let’s hit them hard,” Bush said. “We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their view.” For now, Afghanistan would remain the focus. Bush authorized the Pentagon to accelerate planning for possible military action against Iraq, but he said his was a “first-things-first administration,” and Afghanistan would come first.⁹⁴

Three days later, Bush told Congress and the world how he intended to respond. “The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.”⁹⁵ Despite intense diplomatic pressure, both from the United States and its neighbors, the Taliban rejected Bush’s demands. On October 7, U.S. and British air strikes struck targets in Afghanistan. The campaign had three goals: to capture or kill top Al Qaeda leaders, destroy the terrorist infrastructure within Afghanistan, and remove the Taliban from power.

The Afghan war went through three distinct phases.⁹⁶ During the first phase, U.S. bombers and fighters attacked Taliban leadership sites, military installations, and other fixed targets as well as the terrorist infrastructure throughout Afghanistan. CIA operatives, meanwhile, recruited Afghan warlords with offers of money and weapons. Special Operations Forces prepared to join the Northern Alliance and other opposition forces in an assault on the Taliban forces around Kabul and other major cities. In the second phase, U.S. forces guided massive air power against Taliban forces on the battlefield, enabling the opposition to break through the government’s defensive lines. Within weeks, the Taliban were routed and opposition forces took control of all of Afghanistan’s major cities. The final phase, which continued into 2003, consisted of U.S. and allied forces, often with support of local Afghan militias, mopping up Al Qaeda and Taliban resistance. Some of the battles involved intense fighting—including major clashes in the Tora Bora mountains in December 2001 and the Shah-e-Kot valley in March 2002.

The prosecution of the Afghan war flowed from Bush’s worldview in three notable respects. First, the war not only highlighted the administration’s belief that the best defense is a good offense, but it also underscored how it viewed the terrorist threat as largely a problem of state behavior. The ultimatum to the Taliban put responsibility for dealing with Al Qaeda squarely on the shoulders of the Afghan government. Its failure to comply led to its ouster. Yet, while the war removed a crucial support structure, it did not end the threat Al Qaeda posed to the United States.

Second, the administration stuck to its instrumental view of multilateral institutions. Despite NATO's invocation of Article V, the White House decided to ignore most initial offers from NATO members of materiel and combat support. A suspicious Pentagon argued that involving the Alliance would place too many constraints on America's freedom to act. This stemmed partly from a belief that the Kosovo war had shown NATO to be cumbersome—a classic case of the “too many cooks.” But it also stemmed from Bush's insistence that other countries not be able to dictate terms for the war on terrorism. “At some point we may be the only ones left,” Bush conceded. “That's okay with me. We are America.”⁹⁷

Skeptical of the value of calling on America's primary military alliance, the administration decided instead to form a coalition of the willing. “The mission determines the coalition and we don't allow coalitions to determine the mission,” Rumsfeld repeatedly insisted.⁹⁸ The partners were largely Anglo-Saxon countries—Britain and Australia in particular. They had a demonstrated record of working well with U.S. military forces and, just as important, with the White House. Even so, the planning and execution of the war in its first phases remained essentially an American affair.

Finally, the manner in which the Afghan war was fought demonstrated that, for all the suffering that had already been inflicted on the American people, Bush remained extremely reluctant to demand much sacrifice from them. He urged Americans to get on with their daily lives, to hug their kids, to go out and shop—but he did not initially ask them to join the fight in any real sense. He also did not modify his fiscal policies to help pay for the vastly greater expenses of securing the nation against future attack. Moreover, even in war, he went to great lengths to minimize U.S. combat deaths, even to the point of jeopardizing the administration's ability to achieve its strategic objectives. In a fateful decision in December 2001, the administration decided to rely on Afghan and Pakistani forces to pursue Osama bin Laden and many of his Al Qaeda fighters in the Tora

Bora mountains rather than risk U.S. casualties. Bin Laden and many others were able to sneak past the poorly trained and motivated Afghan and Pakistani troops.⁹⁹

Overall, the first phase in the war on terrorism produced mixed results. The combination of Special Operations forces, airpower, and local opposition forces was devastating. It also helped that the Taliban was, as Gen. Wesley Clark noted, “the most incompetent adversary the United States has fought since the Barbary pirates” in the early 1800s.¹⁰⁰ But more than a year after the main fighting ended, the war’s broader objectives still had not been achieved. Few of Al Qaeda’s leaders were captured or killed during the Afghan campaign, even though Bush had said publicly that he wanted bin Laden “dead or alive” and had told his military leaders “We have to get UBL and their leadership.”¹⁰¹

Finally, the administration’s success in permanently eliminating Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations was unclear. Terrorist training camps were destroyed and terrorists were driven into the mountains or across the border into Pakistan. However, Afghanistan’s long-term political stability remained uncertain. Despite promises of a Marshall Plan-like effort, the Bush administration did relatively little to secure the peace in the war-torn country. Indeed, the White House forgot to request funding for Afghanistan’s reconstruction in its 2004 budget submission to Congress. Unless Afghanistan’s many warlords are disarmed, its economy restarted, and its government gains control of the countryside, it could again become a security problem for the United States.

The “Axis of Evil”

The Afghan war enjoyed broad international support. After initial resistance, and when for a time it looked as if the fighting might not go well, the Bush administration accepted troop

contributions from more than 25 countries. Eighteen months after the fall of Kabul, more than half the foreign military forces in Afghanistan were non-American. In August 2003, NATO even took over command of the peacekeeping force. This widespread international support reflected the legitimacy of America's cause in Afghanistan. After September 11, few countries defended Al Qaeda and its Taliban supporters.

Most countries thought that with the end of the Afghanistan war U.S. policy would turn to long-term strategies such as greater law enforcement and intelligence cooperation. President Bush, however, saw the challenge differently. Just how differently became clear in January 2002 when he used his State of the Union address to argue that the threat facing the United States extended beyond terrorists to include rogue states bent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction. States such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, "and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred." Using the most dire language heard in any presidential speech since John F. Kennedy's first State of the Union address forty-one years earlier, he declared that United States could not afford to stand still as this threat grew. "Time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."¹⁰²

Identifying the threat to the United States as terrorists, tyrants, and technologies of mass destruction represented a logical evolution of Bush's worldview. As might be expected from someone who believed that states were the primary actors in world politics, the administration argued that tyrants—and not terrorists or technology—were the key to this trinity of evils. Thus, Cheney, in making the case for going to war against Iraq, argued that "we have to be prepared now

to take the kind of bold action ... with respect to Iraq in order to ensure that we don't get hit with a devastating attack when the terrorists' organization gets married up with a rogue state that's willing to provide it with the kinds of deadly capabilities that Saddam Hussein has developed and used over the years."¹⁰³

With tyrants as the core of the post-September 11 threat, regime change became the obvious solution. Only when tyrants no longer ruled could the United States have confidence that states such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea would not seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction or make common cause with the terrorists. To prevent this from happening, the United States had to be ready to use force to topple a regime—perhaps even preemptively. As the Bush *National Security Strategy*, which was released in September 2002, concluded, “Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.”¹⁰⁴

The “axis of evil” speech and the administration's subsequent emphasis on preemption were profound strategic innovations. The Bush administration effectively abandoned a decades-long consensus that put deterrence and containment at the heart of American—and transatlantic—foreign policy. “After September the 11th, the doctrine of containment just doesn't hold any water, as far as I'm concerned,” Bush explained in early 2003.¹⁰⁵

But did the “axis of evil” speech mean that the United States would henceforth strike first militarily—that it had in effect declared war against each and every rogue state? Some abroad clearly thought so. French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine complained that U.S. foreign policy had become “simplistic,” and EU External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten criticized the White House for going into “unilateralist overdrive.”¹⁰⁶ The administration, however, responded that

military force was only one way to deal with rogue threats. Powell told Congress two weeks after the president's "axis of evil" speech that, with respect to Iran and North Korea, "there is no plan to start a war with these nations. We want to see a dialogue. We want to contain North Korea's activities with respect to proliferation, and we are going to keep the pressure on them. But there is no plan to begin a war with North Korea; nor is there a plan to begin a conflict with Iran."¹⁰⁷

Despite President Bush's dismissal of containment, the administration left open the possibility that concerted pressure along the lines of the cold war strategy of containment might gradually force regime change, perhaps aided by reform movements within rogue countries.

Iraq, however, was different. President Bush clearly targeted it as the country of greatest concern. But why? North Korea and Iran had more advanced nuclear programs. Pyongyang possessed large stocks of chemical and biological weapons and over the years had sold weapons and technology to the highest bidder. Teheran's support for terrorism was both significant and long-standing. In contrast, Iraq's nuclear program had been dismantled and its chemical and biological weapons program had been set back by UN inspectors in the 1990s. There was no evidence that Baghdad had proliferated any of its weapons or capabilities to others, and years had passed since it had been directly implicated in sponsoring terrorist attacks.

Yet, Iraq became the top priority for four complementary reasons. First, many senior administration officials came to office intent on toppling Saddam. Most had served in the elder Bush's administration, and they regarded the February 1991 decision not to march on Baghdad as a major mistake. Some (like Wolfowitz) had arrived at this belief early on; others (including Dick Cheney) only did so later.¹⁰⁸ While many of these officials wanted to take a tougher line on Iraq before September 11, Bush became receptive to their arguments only after the attacks. As Bush explained, "the strategic view of America changed after September the 11th. We must deal with threats before they hurt the American people again. And as I have said repeatedly, Saddam Hussein

would like nothing more than to use a terrorist network to attack and to kill and leave no fingerprints behind.”¹⁰⁹

Second, Bush and several of his advisers evidently believed from the start that Saddam Hussein must have had a hand in the September 11 attacks. In public the president denied suggestions of a link between Al Qaeda and Iraq. “I can’t make that claim,” he replied when asked about it.¹¹⁰ In private, though, he said otherwise. “I believe Iraq was involved,” Bush told his advisers on September 17, 2001.¹¹¹ Among Bush’s advisers, Wolfowitz pushed the Iraq connection from day one, basing his argument in part on the belief that Baghdad had been behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.¹¹² Bush apparently sympathized with Wolfowitz’s argument but decided to focus first on Afghanistan. “I’m not going to strike them [the Iraqis] now. I don’t have the evidence at this point.”¹¹³ He did, however, direct the Pentagon in the same September 17 “top secret” memorandum that outlined plans for a war with Afghanistan to begin planning options for an invasion of Iraq.¹¹⁴ The anthrax-laced letters delivered to various news organizations in October 2001 and intelligence reports suggesting that Al Qaeda might detonate a “dirty” or radiological bomb in Washington, D.C., reinforced Bush’s belief that Iraq was somehow supporting bin Laden’s efforts.¹¹⁵ Hussein had sought for years to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and he had used chemical weapons against both Iran and Iraqi Kurds.

Third, the administration believed Saddam could be ousted with relative ease. Iran, with three times the population of Iraq and a government that enjoyed broader public support, would be a major military undertaking. North Korea possibly possessed a nuclear weapon or two, and in any event, it effectively held South Korea hostage against an American attack. In contrast, Iraq’s army was believed to be much weaker following its defeat in the Gulf War and the twelve years of sanctions that followed. In the meantime, U.S. military capabilities had grown stronger, as

demonstrated in the easy victories against Serbia and Afghanistan. Moreover, Baghdad had few friends—and none that was expected to help it if the United States attacked.

Finally, regime change in Iraq would give the president what he and several of his advisers most wanted: the opportunity for a grand strategic play, the type that establishes presidential reputations. As he said publicly on the eve of war, Bush believed that liberating Iraq could transform the Middle East by ushering in democratic governments throughout the region—making it less-fertile ground for terrorists and possibly even creating stronger allies for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹¹⁶ The White House hoped that, much as Ronald Reagan is remembered as the president who won the cold war, George W. Bush would be remembered as the president who brought democracy and peace to the Middle East. Such an achievement would not only secure another term in office, but would also help secure a familial success given that Bush's father had started the confrontation with Iraq and a Middle East peace process that his son would then complete.

For all these reasons, then, Iraq became the first part of the axis of evil to which the United States turned.

The Inevitable War

President Bush appears to have made up his mind to press for Hussein's ouster by late winter 2002. "F___ Saddam. We're taking him out," Bush told Rice as he poked his head in her office as she met with three senators in March to discuss what to do about Iraq.¹¹⁷ In the months ahead, Bush repeatedly—often bluntly—made the case that only ousting Saddam would eliminate the threat Iraq presented. Many of America's closest allies disagreed, but Bush and his advisers calculated that their views were irrelevant. "The fact of the matter is for all or most of the others

who are engaged in this debate, they don't have the capability to do anything about it anyway," Cheney explained.¹¹⁸ And if confronting Iraq offended key allies and weakened international institutions, that was a price well worth paying. In the long run, Cheney argued, "a good part of the world, especially our allies will come around to our way of thinking."¹¹⁹

An Aspiration, Not a Strategy

Administration officials agreed on the need to remove Saddam from power. They disagreed, however, on how to do it. Cheney and Rumsfeld believed from the start that military force was the only option—though in the flush of the seemingly easy victory in Afghanistan they believed that the combination of precision airpower, local opposition forces, and a small number of U.S. ground troops would suffice. Powell, in contrast, believed that if Washington convinced the international community to force Saddam to choose between his weapons or his rule, he would give up his weapons. That, in Powell's view, would weaken Saddam's hold on power and enable the Iraqi people to overthrow him.

Administration officials also differed about what Saddam's ouster would accomplish. Assertive nationalists like Cheney and Rumsfeld argued that removing the Baathist regime and disarming Iraq would eliminate a significant threat to regional stability and American security. They worried less about what would happen to Iraqi society once these major security objectives were accomplished. In contrast, democratic imperialists like Wolfowitz saw the opportunity to democratize Iraq and thereby begin transforming the greater Middle East. Their view was that American security requires more than toppling evil regimes. It also requires supporting the emergence of governments that embraced America's values and principles.¹²⁰

Bush did not initially show his hand for much of this internal debate—and when he did he was as likely to side with one view as the other. The result was a considerable confusion. Most

administration officials did not realize that the president had in fact decided to seek Saddam's ouster. Richard Haass, the director of policy planning at the State Department and a close confidant of Secretary Powell, met with Rice during the first week of July as part of regular series of meetings they held to discuss world events and administration policy. Haass asked whether Iraq really should be front-and-center in the administration's foreign policy. Rice responded that the decision had in fact been made.¹²¹

This confusion over what the administration was seeking hampered efforts to develop a coherent strategy for taking the country from a statement of policy (the "axis of evil" speech) to Saddam Hussein's ouster. In the weeks following the "axis of evil" speech, the administration did nothing to turn its words into deeds. Cheney traveled to the Middle East in March in an attempt to enlist Arab support for confronting Iraq, but his meetings were dominated instead by the escalating conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. That issue preoccupied the administration throughout the spring. Internal debate on Israel-Palestinian conflict was settled only in late June when Bush announced that American involvement in the peace process would be possible only after the Palestinians chose a new leadership "not compromised by terror."¹²²

As it slowly became clear within the administration that Saddam's ouster was a top priority, the debate over how to do it intensified. Powell continued to argue that war could be avoided if Baghdad knew that its only alternative was to resume UN weapons inspections and destroy its weapons of mass destruction. As he later recalled, "there was a realistic chance that it could have worked, if [Saddam] realized the seriousness of the president's intent."¹²³ Powell made his case for coercive diplomacy in a private dinner with Bush and Rice in early August. He argued that by going to the United Nations the United States would be able to gain broad international support for the resumption of tougher inspections and, if necessary, for war.¹²⁴

The administration's assertive nationalists, made the opposite case. Not only would weapons inspections fail, Cheney argued in a major speech in late August, they "would provide false comfort that Saddam was somehow 'back in his box.'" Hussein was bent on acquiring nuclear weapons, and once he did, he "could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East, take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies, directly threaten America's friends throughout the region, and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail."¹²⁵ The conclusion was unmistakable: Saddam had to be removed before he succeeded in his ambitions. There was little time to waste.

With the administration's internal debate spilling out into public, Bush was forced to choose. This he did in early September when he essentially decided to take Powell's route to Cheney's goal. He went to the United Nations and challenged the members to stand up to Iraq and enforce the sixteen Security Council resolutions passed over the preceding twelve years. "All the world now faces a test, and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment. Are Security Council resolutions to be honored and enforced, or cast aside without consequence? Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it be irrelevant?"¹²⁶ It was a bold speech, and a bold challenge to the world community. Most countries nonetheless applauded it. They concluded that Bush had decided to work through the United Nations rather than outside it.

Despite the speech's boldness, Bush had no strategy for turning his challenge to the world into a workable policy. While he had decided to seek a new Security Council resolution, he had not decided what it would say. When Iraq predictably reacted to his speech by announcing that UN inspectors could return unconditionally, the administration was caught off guard. It took weeks before it finally decided to table a new resolution, and many more weeks before it negotiated a text acceptable to all the members of the Security Council—most of which in the interim had come to doubt Washington's sincerity in seeking the peaceful disarmament of Iraq.

The unanimous passage of UN Security Council resolution 1441 on November 8, 2002, proved to be the high watermark of U.S. diplomacy. After eight weeks of intense negotiations, the administration persuaded a unanimous Council to declare Iraq in material breach of its international obligations, create a tough new inspection regime, and warn that there would be “serious consequences” if Iraq failed to comply. Yet, after having invested so much in getting the resolution passed, administration officials once again failed to anticipate the many pitfalls sure to arise with its implementation. To get agreement on the resolution, Washington had had to settle for terms that were subject to differing interpretation.¹²⁷ More important, there was no agreement within the Council on how much Iraqi cooperation would be enough to avoid war—nor on how much noncooperation would provoke it. The Bush administration itself may have been divided on this score. Whatever the reason, it had not contingency strategies in place for the moment when these different interpretations would come to the fore.

The cost of failing to think ahead became apparent early in 2003. In January, Dr. Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, surprised the Security Council by bluntly criticizing Iraq’s halting cooperation with the new weapons inspections. Despite suggestions that it move quickly to exploit the opening Blix had provided by introducing a second resolution laying out the key disarmament tasks, setting a clear deadline, and authorizing the use of force if Baghdad failed to comply, the administration hesitated.¹²⁸ While the White House debated what to do, Blix returned to the Security Council for a second time in February with a more optimistic report. The political momentum that Washington enjoyed only weeks earlier immediately swung to the bloc of member states, led by France and Germany, that opposed war. By the time the administration finally moved in early March to introduce a new resolution declaring that Iraq had failed to grasp its final opportunity to disarm under Resolution 1441, it was too late. Only three countries publicly joined the United States in supporting the new resolution.

So the United States went to war against Iraq on March 19, 2003, without the explicit backing of the UN Security Council. It is possible, perhaps even probable, that nothing the Bush administration could have done would have avoided this outcome. France, Germany, Russia, China, and Syria all adamantly opposed war. But then again, a more vigorous diplomacy and greater tactical acumen might have succeeded in winning Security Council support—or at least the support of a majority of its members. Failing that, the effort would likely have isolated those countries that were unalterably opposed to war. Instead, Bush's approach ended up isolating Washington.

The Other Evil States

Even as Iraq became Bush's priority in late 2001, Iran and North Korea—the other two members of the axis of evil—were emerging in some ways as more immediate threats. In summer 2002, the intelligence community concluded that Pyongyang had secretly embarked on an effort to enrich uranium, violating its 1994 pledge to freeze its nuclear weapons program.¹²⁹ Once it admitted to the illicit program in early October, North Korea moved swiftly to put itself on a path to a viable nuclear weapons program. In December, it ordered the three International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to leave the country, shut down cameras monitoring the nuclear complex in Yongbyon, and removed IAEA seals in nuclear facilities. In January, Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), restarted its small research reactor, and began removing spent nuclear fuel rods for likely reprocessing into weapons-grade plutonium. Once reprocessing starts, North Korea has the capacity to produce about six bombs' worth of plutonium in as many months.¹³⁰

Iran was not sitting still either. In August 2002, an opposition group revealed the existence of two secret Iranian nuclear facilities—one to produce heavy water and the other to enrich

uranium. In early 2003, Iranian authorities admitted these facilities existed and invited the IAEA to inspect them as it is required to do under its NPT obligations. Inspections confirmed that the two facilities would enable Iran to complete the nuclear fuel cycle, thus giving it an indigenous capacity to produce nuclear weapons. Given that there is no peaceful reason for Iran to possess either facility (Russia has promised to fuel its only civilian reactor indefinitely) as well as Tehran's failure to declare the facilities to the IAEA before beginning construction (as is required under its safeguards agreement with the IAEA), it is clear that Iran has embarked on a program that will enable it to produce nuclear weapons in a very few years.¹³¹

Neither development surprised the Bush administration. Yet, for all the administration's rhetoric about not permitting "the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons," it downplayed the significance of the North Korean and Iranian actions throughout 2002 and into 2003. Iraq remained the top priority. And while the administration might have hoped to use the credibility it gained from defeating Iraq to intimidate Pyongyang and Tehran, in the meantime it largely ignored the development of threats that in most ways were more dangerous, more immediate, and more challenging.

The reluctance to match deed to word was most evident in the case of North Korea. While administration officials warned about the catastrophic threat a nuclear Iraq might pose years hence, they were either silent or dismissive of the nuclear threat North Korea posed in 2003.¹³² The administration deliberately delayed announcing Pyongyang's admission to U.S. officials of its illicit enrichment program until after Congress voted in October 2002 to authorize war with Iraq. It rejected any suggestion that what was happening constituted a "crisis." It refused to draw clear red lines because, as one senior administration official told the *New York Times*, "the problem with a red line is that North Korea will walk right up to it."¹³³ It declined to engage with Pyongyang in direct negotiations, arguing that this was a "regional issue" that was best handled within multilateral

forums—ad hoc, the IAEA, or the Security Council.¹³⁴ And it even suggested that Pyongyang's nuclear threat was less significant than many thought. "You can't eat plutonium," Powell said in dismissing the threat. "Yes, they have had these couple of nuclear weapons for many years, and if they have a few more, they have a few more, and they could have them for many years."¹³⁵

The Bush administration was similarly silent about Iranian nuclear developments. This in part reflected its need for Tehran's cooperation in the war with Iraq. But the silence also reflected a belief that the United States needed a different strategy for dealing with Iran than with Iraq, or possibly even North Korea. Iran, with its large population of young people yearning to be free of from the strictures of the religious fundamentalists, offered the possibility of regime change from below. Beginning in the mid-1990s large majorities of Iranians had begun voting in favor of reformist leaders opposed to the ayatollahs who still held tightly onto the reins of power. In July 2002, the administration abandoned hope of reaching a rapprochement with reformist leaders, and instead openly sided with the people against their rulers. "We have made a conscious decision to associate with the aspirations of the Iranian people," said a senior administration official briefing on the new policy. "We will not play, if you like, the factional politics of reform versus hard-line."¹³⁶ But as with so many other aspects of its foreign policy, the Bush administration did not have a strategy for turning another worthwhile aspiration into reality.

Conclusion

George W. Bush assumed the presidency with many people openly questioning his ability to master foreign policy. By any reasonable standard of judgment, he proved his doubters wrong. Even before September 11, he demonstrated that he understood how to be an effective president. To an extent that surprised even his most ardent supporters, he was decisive, resolute, and in

command of his advisers. This is not to say that history will necessarily judge all his choices as wise. It is to say that he succeeded, especially after the terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, in persuading the country to follow his lead on foreign policy.

September 11 had a profound impact on President Bush. It did not, however, lead him to rethink his view of the world and America's role in it. Rather, he and his advisers saw the attacks as affirming their conviction that the United States can be made secure in a dangerous world only by the confident application of American power, especially its military might. In their view, it might have been possible before September 11 to debate the threats to U.S. security and America's place in the world, but not after. As a top White House official explained:

A few years ago, there were great debates about what would be the threats of the post-Cold War world, would it be the rise of another great power, would it be humanitarian needs or ethnic conflicts. And I think we now know: The threats are terrorism and national states with weapons of mass destruction and the possible union of those two forces. It's pretty clear that the United States is the single most powerful country in international relations for a very long time. . . . [It]is the only state capable of dealing with that kind of chaotic environment and providing some kind of order. I think there is an understanding that that it is America's responsibility, just like it was America standing between Nazi Germany and a takeover of all of Europe.¹³⁷

The Bush administration is right to see the trinity of terrorists, tyrants, and technologies of mass destruction as the principal threat to American security. But the strategy it has adopted for dealing with this threat—the focus on tyrants and the emphasis on regime change, forcibly if necessary—is misplaced. To believe that states are the key to problem is to ignore the vast changes that globalization has wrought in politics. No doubt, Al Qaeda and groups like it can benefit from state support. But their existence and ability to create harm do not depend on direct state support. If anything, terrorist networks thrive on the weakness and failure of states rather than on their strength—a conclusion Bush has himself acknowledged.¹³⁸ Removing tyrants, while perhaps helpful, is no guarantee that terrorists will be significantly weakened.

Similarly, the problem of weapons of mass destruction goes well beyond rogue states. Globalization has dispersed technology around the globe and with it the knowledge of how to build weapons of mass destruction. Many chemicals and biological pathogens have beneficial as well as harmful uses, so they can be openly acquired. The vast weapons hangover from the cold war—including the many thousands of tons of fissile material, chemical agents, and biological toxins stored throughout Russia, mostly with inadequate security and vulnerable to theft or diversion—compounds the problem. Changing the leadership of rogue countries provides no solution to these challenges.

Finally, the Bush administration overestimates how much the United States can accomplish on its own. No one can deny that America is powerful and that its power can be useful—even decisive. But having a big hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail—or that hitting hard may not misfire. Take weapons proliferation. If countries around the world were to abandon their export control policies, nuclear and other technologies of mass destruction would become even more widely available. Or consider the problem of terrorism—and what would happen if key allies in the fight against terrorism were to halt exchanging information or end cooperation in law enforcement. Our ability to penetrate terrorist networks and pursue many of the key leaders would be fatally undermined.

The Bush administration argues that international cooperation on terrorism, proliferation, and other crucial matters will be forthcoming even if the United States runs roughshod over the views of others. Countries act in their self-interest, and it serves everyone's interests to cooperate in the war on terrorism. But what if this calculation is wrong? Arrogance, George Bush warned during the presidential campaign, breeds resentment of the United States.

Such resentment dissipated for a time after September 11. However, once the Iraq debate heated up in summer 2002, it reemerged and intensified. Distrust of the Bush administration was a

pivotal issue in the German and South Korean elections. President Bush's subsequent failure to persuade a majority on the Security Council, let alone many of America's key allies, to support attacking Iraq resulted in a grave diplomatic defeat. The White House's strained efforts to prove that the war was being fought by a broad and diverse "coalition"—including powerhouses such as Macedonia, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands—only underscored its international isolation.¹³⁹ All of this was reflected in the precipitous drop in foreign opinion of the United States—with America's favorability rating dropping by more than a third in Britain and Poland and by more than half in France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Turkey in less than one year.¹⁴⁰

The long-term consequences of the Bush administration's arrogance in exercising American power remain to be determined. Self-interest may drive other nations to follow Washington's lead, even if the United States is not the "humble" nation Bush promised during the 2000 campaign. But, then again, Bush might have been right then and wrong now. Too often, the administration behaves as "the SUV of nations," as Mary McGrory put it. "It hogs the road and guzzles the gas and periodically has to run over something—like another country—to get to its Middle Eastern filling station."¹⁴¹ At some point, other countries may decide they have had enough and work together to resist American leadership. Some may even actively oppose its chosen course. At that point, America would stand alone—a great power shackled in the pursuit of its most important goals.

Notes

¹ Quoted in John Young, “Quick, Bush, Give Reporters Some Other Substance to Report,” Cox News Service, August 26, 1999.

² Robert Gallucci, the dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, quoted in James Traub, “W.’s World,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 14, 2001, p. 31.

³ See George W. Bush, *A Charge to Keep* (New York; William Morrow, 1999), p. 97. For other discussions of Bush as CEO, see James Bennett, “C.E.O., U.S.A.,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 14, 2001, pp. 24-28; and Donald F. Kettl, *Team Bush: Leadership Lessons from the Bush White House* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003).

⁴ Governor George W. Bush, “A Distinctly American Internationalism,” Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, California, November 19, 1999 (www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm [accessed May 2003]).

⁵ Bush, *A Charge to Keep*, p. 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷ “Transcript of President-elect Bush’s News Conference Naming Donald Rumsfeld as His Nominee to Be Secretary of Defense,” December 28, 2000 (www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections/bushtext122800.htm [accessed May 2003]).

⁸ Quoted in Maureen Dowd, “Freudian Face-Off,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1999, p. 29.

⁹ “Bush’s News Conference Naming Donald Rumsfeld.”

¹⁰ “The First 2000 Gore-Bush Presidential Debate: October 3, 2000” (www.debates.org/pages/trans2000a.html [accessed May 2003]).

¹¹ Bush, *A Charge to Keep*, p. 123.

¹² Quoted in Bennet, “C.E.O., U.S.A.,” p. 27.

¹³ See for example, Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 137.

¹⁴ Bush, “A Distinctly American Internationalism.”

¹⁵ “The Second 2000 Gore-Bush Presidential Debate.” Bush also argued that non-intervention in Rwanda—even in hindsight—had been the right decision, and one he would again make. “Interview with George W. Bush,” ABC News *This Week with Sam Donaldson*, January 23, 2000.

¹⁶ Bush, “A Distinctly American Internationalism.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ George W. Bush, “A Period of Consequences,” The Citadel, South Carolina, September 23, 1999 (www.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html [accessed May 2003]).

¹⁹ Frank Bruni, “Bush Has Tough Words and Rough Enunciation for Iraqi Chief,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1999, p. A12.

²⁰ “The Second 2000 Gore-Bush Presidential Debate.”

²¹ For a fuller description see Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, “Power and Cooperation: American Foreign Policy in an Age of Global Politics,” in Henry E. Aaron, James M. Lindsay, and Pietro S. Nivola, eds., *Agenda for the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

²² Authorship of the 1992 defense planning document is commonly attributed to Wolfowitz. He says, however, that the paper was prepared by a member of his staff and leaked to the *Times* before he read it. “Eliminating the Threat to World Security Posed by the Iraqi Regime and Halting the Torture, Imprisonment and Execution of Innocents,” Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, D.C., March 28, 2003 (fpc.state.gov/19202.htm [accessed May 2003]); and Lynn Sweet, “Why We Hit First in Iraq,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 6, 2003, p. 16.

²³ “Excerpts from Pentagon’s Plan: ‘Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival,’” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, p. A14; and Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, p. A1. On the influence of this study on thinking in the

younger Bush's administration, see Nicolas Lemann, "The Next World Order," *New Yorker*, April 1, 2002, pp. 41-44.

²⁴ Bush, *A Charge to Keep*, p. 239.

²⁵ See for instance Nicholas Lemann, "The Quiet Man," *New Yorker*, May 7, 2001, pp. 56-71.

²⁶ Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting a National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January/February 2000): 62.

²⁷ Bush, "A Period of Consequences."

²⁸ Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism."

²⁹ Paul Wolfowitz, "Remembering the Future," *National Interest* 59 (Spring 2000): 41.

³⁰ Paul Wolfowitz, "Re-building the Anti-Saddam Coalition," *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 1997, p. A22.

³¹ See Robert Kagan, "Multilateralism, American Style," *Washington Post*, September 13, 2002, p. 39.

Richard Haass has called this approach "multilateralism à la carte." Quoted in Thom Shanker, "White House Says the U.S. Is Not a Loner, Just Choosy," *New York Times*, July 31, 2001, p. A1.

³² Richard N. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997).

³³ For unvarnished elaborations of this point of view, see John Bolton, "Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?" *Chicago Journal of International Law* 1 (Fall 2000): 205-22; and Charles Krauthammer, "Arms Control: The End of an Illusion," *Weekly Standard*, November 1, 1999, pp. 21-27.

³⁴ Bush, "A Distinctly American Internationalism."

³⁵ Powell's relationship with the younger President Bush continued to be distant as of mid-2002. See Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 330.

³⁶ Johanna McGeary, "Odd Man Out," *Time Magazine*, September 10, 2001, p. 28.

³⁷ See Robert Kagan, “The Benevolent Empire,” *Foreign Policy* 111 (Summer 1998): 28. Paul Wolfowitz expressed this sentiment thus: “The way we define our interest there’s a sort of natural compatibility between the United States and most countries in the world.” See “Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with the Los Angeles Times,” April 29, 2002 (www.defenselink.mil/news/May2002/t05092002_t0429la.html [accessed January 2003]).

³⁸ For a discussion of the divisions between democratic imperialists and assertive nationalists on the specific question of Iraq, see Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, “It’s Hawk vs. Hawk in the Bush Administration,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2002, p. B3.

³⁹ Quoted in “Excerpts from Pentagon’s Plan.”

⁴⁰ See James M. Lindsay, “The New Apathy,” *Foreign Affairs* 79 (September/October 2000): 2-8.

⁴¹ “Press Conference by President Bush and Russian Federation President Putin,” June 16, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010618.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁴² David Sanger, “Bush Is Offering Taiwan Some Arms But Not the Best,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2001, p. A1.

⁴³ Quoted in Neil King, Jr., “Bush Leaves Taiwan Policy in Confusing Straits,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2001, p. A3.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Alan Sipress, “Powell Vows to Consult Allies on Key Issues,” *Washington Post*, February 28, 2001, p. A22.

⁴⁵ “Presidents Exchange Toasts at State Dinner,” September 5, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010906-1.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁴⁶ Bruce Stokes, “OK, Who’s Got the Agenda,” *National Journal*, May 12, 2001, p. 1433; and Bruce Stokes, “On ‘Fast Track’ Bill, Action Is Unlikely Before Fall—If Then,” *National Journal*, April 25, 2001, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Jeffrey Kluger, “A Climate of Despair,” *Time*, April 9, 2001, p. 30.

⁴⁸ David Frum, *The Right Man* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 250.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Alan Sipress, "Bush Retreats From U.S. Role as Peace Broker," *Washington Post*, March 17, 2001, p. A1.

⁵⁰ "Remarks by the President and Prime Minister Blair in Joint Press Conference," February 23, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/02/20010226-1.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁵¹ Sipress, "Bush Retreats from U.S. Role as Peace Broker," p. A1.

⁵² Remarks by the President and German Chancellor Schroeder in Photo Opportunity," March 29, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010329-2.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁵³ David E. Sanger, "Leaving for Europe, Bush Draws on Hard Lessons of Diplomacy," *New York Times*, May 22, 2002, p. A1.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the various competing objectives the administration was trying to balance, see Bruce Stokes, "Flip A Coin?" *National Journal*, March 24, 2001, p. 896.

⁵⁵ "Remarks by President Bush and President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea," March 7, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/03/20010307-6.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁵⁶ Frum, *The Right Man*, p. 240.

⁵⁷ Quoted in "Old Friends and New," *Economist*, June 1, 2002, p. 28. See also Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 281.

⁵⁸ Quoted in John F. Harris and Dan Balz, "A Question of Capital," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2001, p. A1

⁵⁹ Quoted in Peggy Noonan, "A Chat in the Oval Office," *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2001, p. A18.

⁶⁰ Quoted in McGeary, "Odd Man Out," p. 30.

⁶¹ Quoted in Barton Gellman, "A Strategy's Curious Evolution," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2002, p. A16.

⁶² Quoted in Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 328; and Gellman, “A Strategy’s Curious Evolution,” p. A16.

⁶³ Quoted in Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, pp. 328, 334, 336.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Gellman, “A Strategy’s Curious Evolution,” p. A16.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 335.

⁶⁷ Adam Cohen, “Banking on Secrecy,” *Time*, October 22, 2001, p. 73; and William F. Wechsler, “Follow the Money,” *Foreign Affairs* 80 (July-August 2001): 40.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Gellman, “A Strategy’s Curious Evolution,” p. A16. See also Judith Miller, Jeff Gerth, and Don Van Natta, Jr., “Planning for Terror but Failing to Act,” *New York Times*, December 30, 2001, p. A1.

⁶⁹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ “Statement by Chancellor Schröder to the German Bundestag on the terrorist acts carried out in the United States,” *Plenarprotokoll* 14/186 (German Bundestag, September 12, 2001).

⁷¹ Quoted in Patrick Tyler and Jane Perlez, “World Leaders List Conditions on Cooperation,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2001, p. A1.

⁷² *UN Security Council Resolution 1368 (2001)*, adopted September 12, 2001.

⁷³ George F. Will, “The End of Our Holiday From History,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 2001, p. A27.

⁷⁴ George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001 (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html [April 2003]).

⁷⁵ Vice President Dick Cheney on NBC News’ *Meet the Press*, March 16, 2003. See also Marc Reuel Gerecht, “Crushing Al Qaeda Is Only a Start,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2001, p. 18.

⁷⁶ See Jonathan Chait, “9/10 President,” *New Republic*, March 10, 2003, pp. 18-23.

⁷⁷ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation," September 11, 2001

(www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html [accessed May 2003]). Bush apparently decided to make this statement without consulting Cheney, Rumsfeld, or Powell. See Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 30.

⁷⁸ "DoD News Briefing - Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz," September 13, 2001

(www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2001/t09132001_t0913dsd.html [accessed May 2003]).

⁷⁹ Quoted in Nicholas Lemann, "After Iraq," *New Yorker*, February 17 & 24, 2003, p. 72.

⁸⁰ Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001.

⁸¹ Quoted in Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 281.

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