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“The Mission Determines the Coalition”: The United States and Multilateral Cooperation after 9/11

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A distinctive attribute of U.S. global engagement under President George W. Bush was skepticism of the capacity of standing international institutions and alliances to confront the main threats to national and global security, particularly terrorism, rogue states, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This attitude, apparent from the first days of the Bush administration, was accentuated by the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

Although this sentiment was sometimes expressed through unilateral action, including decisions to act alone in pursuit of national objectives or to opt out of international agreements endorsed by the vast majority of other states, the more typical pattern was for the United States to turn to a more flexible form of multilateralism, by championing ad hoc and in some cases temporary coalitions of the willing that coalesced to address new issues. Such informal groupings of like-minded countries under American leadership – beyond avoiding the pathologies of formal multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN) – promised to expand U.S. policy autonomy and freedom of action and provide greater control over the goals of collective action. The potential costs of this approach, in terms of squandered international legitimacy for U.S. actions and lost opportunities for sharing burdens – to say nothing of the eroded institutional foundations of world order – were only dimly appreciated, particularly during the first term of the Bush administration.

Of course, the United States has long had an ambivalent and selective attitude toward multilateral engagement, a function of its tremendous might, distinctive political culture, and constitutional separation of powers.<sup>1</sup> No American president, moreover, has ever placed the fate of the United States in the hands of universal collective security, nor has any administration defined multilateral cooperation as

<sup>1</sup> Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

being limited to action through the UN (or indeed any other standing organization like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]). And yet from the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt to that of Bill Clinton, a recurrent feature of U.S. foreign policy was the promotion of international institutions as foundations of U.S. global leadership and a general (though hardly consistent) posture of self-restraint in the exercise of American power. From the moment it assumed office, however, the Bush administration signaled its desire to escape these historical constraints, portending a departure from fifty-five years of U.S. diplomacy dating from World War II.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, deepened these instincts by transforming the global threat environment and by stimulating a deeply nationalist reaction within American society that the Bush administration skillfully exploited. This chapter outlines the ensuing doctrinal shifts in U.S. national security policy; examines the implications of these shifts for U.S. efforts to prosecute the “global war on terrorism,” deal with rogue regimes, and stem WMD proliferation; and assesses the impact of these dynamics on U.S. relations with NATO and the UN. It closes by offering an assessment of the relative merits and drawbacks of the Bush administration’s preference for flexible coalitions in advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives and the larger goal of world order.

#### THE WELLSPRINGS OF AMERICAN AMBIVALENCE

When it comes to multilateral cooperation, and particularly engagement with the UN, the United States has long sent the world “mixed messages.”<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, no country has done as much to promote one of the most profound global transformations of the past one hundred years: the proliferation of international institutions that today touch on virtually every aspect of world politics. In historical perspective, the U.S. turn to liberal internationalism during and after World War II (following an ill-fated effort a generation before under Woodrow Wilson) was unprecedented.<sup>3</sup> Never before had a globally dominant power chosen to organize its leadership and legitimate its power through consensual and mildly egalitarian frameworks that restricted, in some measure, its freedom of action.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, few countries during that same time span have exhibited so much discomfort with the “movement to institutions” that America’s own leadership inspired. This

<sup>2</sup> For an historical perspective, see Edward Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Politics and International Organization, 1919–1999* (New York: Century Foundation, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Stewart Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans: The Origins of American Multilateralism and the Dawn of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” in Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 3–47.

dissonance arises from several factors, most notably from America's massive power, its "exceptionalist" political culture, and its unique constitutional structure.<sup>5</sup>

### Power

All states naturally resist encroachments on their freedom of action, particularly in national security. Rule-based cooperation – based on the principles of equal treatment and self-restraint – is naturally attractive to smaller countries, because it promises to constrain and domesticate great powers and to provide the weak with diplomatic leverage lacking in conventional bilateral negotiations and frameworks. Great powers are more skeptical, having more unilateral and bilateral alternatives available. They can afford to shoulder the burdens and risks of going it alone, as well as impose their will on weaker states in unequal bilateral arrangements. Accordingly, the United States has long insisted on retaining freedom of action within international institutions.

During debate over the League of Nations, to cite an early example, Senate opponents of the draft League Covenant defended the U.S. liberty to act alone in defense of the Monroe Doctrine and refused to make any "automatic" commitment (under Article 10) to defend the security of other countries. As Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts explained in 1919,

I want to keep America as she has been – not isolated, not prevent her from joining among other nations for these great purposes – but I wish her to be master of her fate. . . . I want her left in a position to do that work and not submit her to a vote of other nations with no recourse except to break a treaty she wishes to maintain. Let her go on in her beneficial career, and I want to see her stand as she has always stood, strong, alive, triumphant, free.<sup>6</sup>

Lodge's "reservations" were intended, in his words, "to release us from obligations which might not be kept, and to preserve rights which ought not to be infringed."<sup>7</sup>

The structural transformation accompanying the end of the Cold War, which inaugurated a "unipolar moment"<sup>8</sup> less fleeting than initially predicted, reinforced U.S. sensitivity to constraints. The vast concentration of power in U.S. hands was most palpable in the security arena, where by the year 2000 the United States

<sup>5</sup> For an extended discussion see "Multilateralism and Its Discontents: The Causes and Consequences of U.S. Ambivalence," in Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 1–44.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Similarly Senator (and former Secretary of State) Philander K. Knox believed that "America's general policy" should be "to regard with concern any threat of disturbance to world peace, but at the same time we should reserve complete liberty of action either independently or in conjunction with other powers in taking steps as we determine wise for preserving the peace." Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, p. 137.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, No. 1 (Winter 1990/Spring 1991).

was spending more on defense than was the rest of the world combined.<sup>9</sup> This asymmetric disposition of military capacity coexists uneasily with unchanged rules, enshrined in the UN Charter, governing the collective legitimization of armed force<sup>10</sup> – as well as with the formally egalitarian structure of the NATO collective defense pact. Moreover, American officials on both the right and the left maintain that this unchallenged power confers special responsibilities (and corresponding privileges) that are not shared by other states, even other permanent Security Council members. The United States, in this view, is the ultimate guarantor of global order, a benevolent hegemon or – to use Madeleine Albright’s phrase, an “indispensable power.” In fulfilling this custodial role, some argue, the nation cannot afford to be subjected to constraints binding on others. Such logic was invoked in the late 1990s to justify U.S. opposition to (among other things) the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Ottawa Convention banning land mines.

### *Political Culture*

From the founding of the American republic, U.S. skepticism toward foreign “entanglements” has drawn sustenance from the nation’s political culture, and particularly from the doctrine of American exceptionalism, which holds that the United States has a special place and destiny among nations.<sup>11</sup> An outward reflection of the country’s Lockean liberal principles, expressed with the moral fervor of the nation’s founding Protestant sectarianism, the exceptionalist tradition is a recurrent touchstone of American foreign policy. Although occasionally invoked (as by Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt [FDR]) as an argument to remake the world in the U.S. image, it has frequently given ammunition to those who seek to preserve America’s unique political values, domestic institutions, and constitutional traditions from external contamination and interference, and who insist that U.S. principles must not be compromised for the sake of a misguided international consensus.

Translated to the realm of international cooperation, American exceptionalism implies a vigorous defense of U.S. national sovereignty, conceived in terms not only of external freedom of action but also of domestic liberty. The emphasis is on protecting the U.S. Constitution from the growing reach of international law and restricting membership in any global body that could undermine democratic accountability.<sup>12</sup> Warren Harding raised such concerns in 1921, when he declared, “In the existing League of Nations, world-governing with super-powers, this republic

<sup>9</sup> Larry Korb, “Force Is the Issue,” *Govexec.com* (January 1, 2000), <http://www.govexec.com/features/0100/0100s6.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Wedgwood, “Unilateral Action in a Multilateral World,” in Patrick and Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 167–89.

<sup>11</sup> The classic treatment remains Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*. See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, new edition (New York: Norton, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Spiro, “The New Sovereignists,” *Foreign Affairs* 79, No. 6 (November/December 2000).

will have no part.”<sup>13</sup> Nearly eighty years later, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) echoed this theme in an extraordinary audience in New York before the UN Security Council, warning: “a United Nations that seeks to impose its presumed authority on the American people without their consent begs for confrontation and, I want to be candid with you, eventual withdrawal.”<sup>14</sup>

### *The Separation of Powers*

A third enduring source of U.S. ambivalence toward multilateral cooperation, particularly when it comes to formal international institutions and treaties, is the separation of powers enshrined in the country’s constitution, which makes the legislative branch (in principle if not always practice) coequal with the executive branch in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy. From the Senate’s failure to pass the Treaty of Versailles (including the League Covenant) to its rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty eighty years later, one finds multiple instances in which Congress has exercised its veto prerogatives by declining to assume obligations favored by the White House. These dynamics are particularly common in highly charged partisan environments, when different parties control the two branches of government. Although the competition between executive and legislature often provides a creative tension, it can also complicate the U.S. commitment to credible multilateralism.

All three of these dynamics were on display during the 1990s, an era that began with high hopes – even euphoria – for multilateral cooperation after four decades of geopolitical and ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the U.S.-led victory in the Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush articulated a vision of a “new world order,” based on principles of collective security, the rule of law, democratic governance, and expanding trade.<sup>15</sup> His Democratic successor, Bill Clinton, likewise committed the United States to a path of “assertive multilateralism,” in which alliances and international organizations would advance a new grand strategy, the “enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies.”<sup>16</sup>

The dawn of multilateralism proved to be a false – or at least cloudy – one. The Clinton administration quickly discovered that implementing multilateralism was more difficult in practice than in theory, particularly when it came to the use of American military power. Following setbacks in Somalia and Bosnia, the administration faced a growing revolt from the Republican-led Congress and outside critics who charged it, in the words of Henry Kissinger, with “trying to submerge the

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, p. 395.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Crossette, “Helms, in Visit to UN, Offers a Harsh Message,” *New York Times*, January 21, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley R. Sloan, “The U.S. Role in a New World Order: Prospects for George Bush’s Global Vision” (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 29, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Brinkley, “The Clinton Doctrine,” *Foreign Policy* 106 (Spring 1997) pp. 111–27.

national interest in multilateral ventures.”<sup>17</sup> The administration quickly retreated to a more pragmatic internationalism, embodied in the phrase, “multilateral when we can, unilateral when we must.” Following the Republican takeover of Congress in late 1994, the legislative branch opposed President Clinton’s endorsement of a range of international treaty commitments, ranging from the Kyoto Protocol to combat global warming to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.<sup>18</sup> Still, if the resulting U.S. posture was often feckless and episodic, the Clinton administration continued to see value in multilateral security institutions.

#### GEORGE W. BUSH: THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS

The ascent of George W. Bush to the presidency in January 2001 sharpened this long-standing U.S. ambivalence toward multilateral cooperation into something resembling antipathy. The President’s most influential foreign policy advisers, with the exception of Colin Powell, represented wings of the Republican Party skeptical of the value and sensitive to the constraints of standing international institutions and alliances. In contrast to the pragmatic internationalists who had dominated his fathers’ administration, they were more apt to insist on the forthright and unapologetic use of the country’s unmatched power in the service of American interests and values, heedless of the impact of unsettling long-standing institutional arrangements.

The new administration wasted no time in signaling a new course and tone, in a now-familiar litany of actions. In its first months in office, the White House abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia, “unsigned” the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, repudiated the Kyoto Protocol, blocked a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, opposed a draft UN convention to reduce illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, and reaffirmed the Senate’s 1999 rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Regardless of the merits of any particular case, Bush administration officials took to this task with a relish that signaled disdain for international institutions and constraints. This was not simply an assertion that unique power gave the United States unique interests, but also that there would be little compromise in the pursuit of those interests, even in return for legitimacy, to reach common ground with others.<sup>19</sup>

This was a significant departure in U.S. foreign policy. Since World War II, leaders of the two main U.S. political parties had often invoked the notion that the United States was somehow different among nations. And yet they had also sought to reassure partners that the United States would act alone or opt out of multilateral cooperation

<sup>17</sup> Henry Kissinger, “Foreign Policy Is about the National Interest,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 25, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Schmitt, “Senate Kills Test Ban Treaty in Crushing Loss for Clinton: Evokes Versailles Defeat,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart Patrick, “Don’t Fence Me In: The Perils of Going it Alone,” *World Policy Journal* 18, No. 3 (Fall 2001), pp. 2–14.

only on an “exceptional” basis: that is, that there were limits to U.S. unilateralism. The United States had voluntarily accepted modest but real restraints on its national sovereignty and freedom of action within international institutions. This orientation required devoting significant time and energy to building diplomatic consensus, in return for the promise of greater international legitimacy and the prospect of real burden sharing.

This commitment to self-restraint appeared to diminish with the arrival of George W. Bush, whose administration chafed under the requirements of institutionalized multilateral cooperation. It was replaced by the robust pursuit of American primacy (a grand strategy that had been explicitly rejected during the tenure of the president’s father<sup>20</sup>).

#### *The New Approach Rested on Several Convictions*

First, the administration insisted that *multilateralism must be a means to concrete foreign policy ends, rather than an end in itself*. During the preceding presidential campaign of 2000, the Bush camp had accused the Clinton administration of making a fetish of multilateral cooperation, or, in Condoleezza Rice’s words, of holding “the belief that the support of many states – or even better, of institutions like the United Nations – is essential to the legitimate exercise of power.”<sup>21</sup> The Bush administration promised a more discriminating approach that would assess proposed treaties and organizations on a hard-headed, case-by-case basis. And as Republican adviser Robert Zoellick added, “Every issue need not be dealt with multilaterally.”<sup>22</sup>

Second, the new administration believed that many *standing international institutions, including the UN, were hopelessly dysfunctional, sclerotic, or obsolete*. By their very nature, they tended to diffuse responsibility and accountability and to encourage free-riding and buck-passing. Instead of focusing on concrete actions and results, such entities were preoccupied with the promulgation of high-sounding principles and norms divorced from reality (or incapable of being enforced), as well as with the generation of lowest-common-denominator decisions that diluted or departed from U.S. objectives. This was particularly true of universal bodies like the UN General Assembly or large groupings like the Commission on Human Rights, many of whose members did not appear to share a commitment to the principles on which the organizations were founded and, indeed, often tried to thwart their achievement. As

<sup>20</sup> The ascendancy under George W. Bush of advocates of primacy echoed the viewpoint expressed in an early Draft of the U.S. Defense Planning Guidance for 1994–1999, leaked in March 1992. Drafted by Paul Wolfowitz and others, it recommended a vigorous effort to prevent the emergence of a new rival. Patrick E. Tyler, “U.S. Strategy Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop,” *New York Times* (March 8, 1992). Following an international outcry, the administration revised the document to give it a more multilateral thrust.

<sup>21</sup> Condoleezza Rice, “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest” (January/February 2000), pp. 45–62.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Zoellick, “Campaign 2000-A Republican Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 79, No. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 63–78.

Robert Dole, the GOP candidate in 1996, complained, international organizations too often produced “a consensus that opposes America’s interests or does not reflect American principles and ideals.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, *the expanding reach of international law posed a growing threat to the domestic American sovereignty*, by undermining the supremacy of the Constitution and the democratic accountability of international organizations. The Bush administration took office alarmed at the expanding frontiers of international law and aware that many countries, particularly in the European Union (EU), were delegating powers to supranational institutions.<sup>24</sup> The administration made it clear that in the U.S. conception, the legitimacy of international institutions and of international law would continue to derive from domestic sources of political authority, not from the preferences of unaccountable international civil servants. To this end, it would resist the creation of any institutions (such as the International Criminal Court [ICC]) whose officials were given authority over member states.<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, growing asymmetries in military and technological capabilities between the United States and its traditional allies, as well as the transaction costs of multilateral alliance management, made the Bush administration *question the continued relevance of multilateral alliances, notably NATO, as a primary foundation for American national security policy*. Beyond criticizing the “war by committee” that the alliance had fought over Kosovo in 1999, Bush administration officials were dismissive of Europe’s modest military spending, convinced that inadequate burden sharing undermined European claims to “decision sharing,” and that accepting codetermination of alliance policy would undermine U.S. freedom without any appreciable benefit.

Fifth, the administration argued that *multilateralism comes in many forms and is most successful when it reflects a real convergence of interests and values*. Accordingly, rather than relying on standing alliances and formal institutions in a “one-size-fits-all” manner, the United States should *make greater use of flexible, ad hoc “coalitions of the willing”* that could be tailored to the specific challenge at hand. Such an “à la carte” approach would permit the United States to assemble individual countries for discrete tasks, on the basis of common principles and purposes.<sup>26</sup> Because such arrangements were selective, they could be restricted to like-minded countries with something to contribute, while excluding potential spoilers that did not share (and indeed hoped to subvert) collective objectives. Such exclusive coalitions promised prompt action, unlike large bodies that avoided hard decisions and took refuge in neutrality.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Dole, “Shaping America’s Global Future,” *Foreign Policy* No. 98 (Spring 1995), 29–43, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Rabkin, “Is EU Policy Eroding the Sovereignty of Non Member States?,” *Chicago Journal of International Law* 1, No. 2 (Fall 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Bartram Brown, “Unilateralism, Multilateralism and the International Criminal Court,” in Patrick and Forman, *Multilateralism Matters*, pp. 323–44.

<sup>26</sup> The notion of “à la carte” multilateralism was advanced publicly for the first time by Richard Haass, director of policy planning under Secretary of State Colin Powell. Thom Shanker, “White House Says the U.S. Is Not a Loner, Just Choosy,” *New York Times*, July 31, 2001. See also Andrew F. Cooper, “Stretching the Model of ‘Coalitions of the Willing,’” CIGI working paper number 1, October 2005.

Finally, beyond seeking new, more flexible forms of multilateral action, the new Bush administration was convinced that *unilateralism – or its threat – could in some circumstances be an essential catalyst for effective multilateral action.*<sup>27</sup> Given incentives toward institutional inertia, the only way to jump-start collective action might sometimes be a credible threat to go it alone if others bow out, a stance that Adam Garfinkle labels “uni-multilateralism.” As he explains,

In a unipolar world, the choice for the United States may come down to acting unilaterally in pursuit of its preferred goal, with fewer constraints but at considerable risk to itself; acting multilaterally, with the risk of getting constrained in exercise of power and achievement of ends; or threatening to act unilaterally to secure a multilateral outcome on its terms.<sup>28</sup>

Despite general agreement on the preceding points, one could detect two competing strains among the Bush administration’s leading foreign policy voices. On the one hand were “neoconservatives,” like Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, the Chair of the Defense Policy Board, who believed that the United States should employ its overwhelming power to transform foreign societies in its own image, in the service of a worldwide democratic revolution. On the other were “assertive nationalists,” including Vice President Dick Cheney and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, resistant to entanglements in the internal affairs of other countries and particularly dismissive of nation-building exercises.<sup>29</sup>

These tendencies would compete for the first eight months of the Bush presidency, until 9/11 persuaded the White House that the neoconservatives were right: the security of the United States depended on U.S. willingness to use its might to transform the stagnant societies and failing states, particularly in the Muslim world, that had produced such evil. As an ideology of foreign policy, “neoconservatism” combined a moralizing belief in the special virtues and destiny of the United States with a resistance to any restraints on the use of U.S. power in realizing its global purposes. It was, in effect, Wilsonianism without international institutions. In embracing this ideology, the Bush administration transformed the United States from a status quo power into a revolutionary one.

#### THE IMPACT OF 9/11

In the absence of the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, it is conceivable that the Bush administration might have reverted gradually to a more traditional posture of ambivalence and selectivity toward multilateral cooperation. Instead, the catastrophic events of 9/11 accentuated the unilateralist thrust of its

<sup>27</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* (1990–1).

<sup>28</sup> Adam Garfinkle, “Alone in a Crowd,” *The American Interest* 1, No. 3 (Spring 2006), pp. 132–40.

<sup>29</sup> Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003). The pragmatic internationalism advocated by Colin Powell’s State Department could be considered a third vision.

foreign policy. Although the United States would occasionally turn to international institutions, and notably the UN, to achieve its national security objectives, it would brook little interference in the definition or pursuit of these goals.

The attacks reinforced the administration's skepticism of multilateral institutions in several ways. First, they redoubled the U.S. insistence on freedom of action, by persuading the White House that it confronted a new era of catastrophic threats, in which other countries and international organizations could not be permitted to limit the use of America's awesome power. For the Bush administration, the rise of mass-casualty terrorism and the proliferation of WMD meant that massive dangers could arise with little or no warning, erasing comforts previously afforded by time and distance. In an age of transnational, networked threats, the United States could no longer place its faith in deterrence, tolerate time-consuming multilateral diplomacy, and accept the constraints of international legitimization. The emphasis must be on anticipation, speed, and flexibility. The fact that few of America's closest allies and partners shared this threat perception and its attendant obsession with terrorism and WMD complicated U.S. efforts to reach common ground on appropriate responses – with allies often favoring an approach based more on a model of law enforcement than on military action.

Second, the events of 9/11 aroused within the American body politic an outburst of nationalism reflecting what Walter Russell Mead calls the “Jacksonian” strain in U.S. political culture.<sup>30</sup> This is the tendency of America's largely inward-looking society to lash outward with “don't tread on me” ferocity in the aftermath of attack. In the dark days after the terrorist events, the Bush administration drew sustenance from – and skillfully exploited – the fear and grievous sense of injury of an American public united in a righteous quest for vengeance. The president, a religious and moralistic man, framed the “global war on terrorism” in Manichean terms as one pitting good versus evil, a formulation that resonated with broad swaths of American society while alienating many constituencies abroad. This framing helped erase the distinction (common in traditional Republican Party realism) between a foreign policy based on the sober pursuit of concrete interests and one based on the spread of American ideals. The resulting strategy envisioned the use of U.S. power in the service of universal values, *as defined and articulated by the United States*.

Third, besides emboldening U.S. insistence on freedom of action and deepening the ideological justifications for acting alone, the attacks of 9/11 effectively removed any legislative limits on the administration's conduct of its revolutionary foreign policy. In previous decades, the U.S. Congress had provided a cushion against any large deviations in U.S. policy toward multilateral institutions, ensuring that expressions of ambivalence and selectivity fell within a predictable range. After 9/11, the Republican-dominated legislature ceded the field to the president, abandoning its constitutional responsibilities of oversight. If America was truly “unbound”<sup>31</sup> in

<sup>30</sup> Walter Russell Mead, “The Jacksonian Tradition,” *The National Interest* (Winter 1999/2000).

<sup>31</sup> Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*.

the Bush administration's first term, this was particularly true at the domestic level, as Congress gave the president a blank check and rubber-stamped the administration's major initiatives.

#### AVOIDING CARICATURE

Of the many epithets lobbed at the Bush administration, "unilateralist" has come closest to sticking. As a blanket indictment it is arguably unfair, however. Certainly, Washington assiduously resisted encroachments on its power after 9/11. But it also turned repeatedly to international partnerships in pursuit of the majority of its national security and foreign policy goals. The typical choice the administration confronted, in other words, was rarely between acting alone and acting with others, but between alternative forms of multilateral cooperation.

What was most problematic for champions of a UN-centered world order was the administration's apparent downgrading of standing organizations and formal international treaties and its greater reliance on ad hoc, flexible arrangements. The United States adopted a "horses for courses" approach to global challenges, mixing and matching among multilateral vehicles – some formal, some ad hoc; some global, some regional; some permanent, some transitory – to secure its goals. These frameworks ranged from the UN to NATO, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the African Union (in Darfur), the Economic Community of West African States (in Liberia), the G8, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the "6 plus 2" framework for Afghanistan, the six-party talks on North Korea, the Financial Action Task Force, the "Quartet" in the Middle East, the Community of Democracies, and the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, among others. In this scheme, the UN became just one – and not necessarily the most important – arrow in Washington's foreign policy quiver.

Moreover, the United States approached the UN Security Council at key junctures to seek diplomatic support for its purposes. These included Resolution 1373, obliging member states to cut off terrorist financing; Bush's appeal to the UN in September 12, 2002, to enforce sixteen of its own resolutions on Iraq; Resolution 1441, of November 2002, offering Iraq "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations"; the pursuit of a second Iraq resolution in early 2003; Resolution 1483, in May 2003, lifting sanctions on Iraq; Resolution 1500 of August 2003, recognizing the Iraqi Governing Council and authorizing UN assistance for Iraqi elections; and Resolution 1540, designed to prevent WMD from falling into the hands of terrorists.<sup>32</sup>

And yet it was on several pivotal issues – including in declaring and prosecuting a "global war on terrorism" defined in Washington, in propounding a new doctrine

<sup>32</sup> Colin Powell, "A Strategy of Partnerships," *Foreign Affairs* 83, No. 1 (January/February 2004).

of preemption, and particularly in going to war in Iraq without an explicit Security Council mandate – that the U.S. penchant for unilateral action seemed most troubling.

#### DECLARING AND WAGING THE “GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM”

Two core foundations of America’s Cold War leadership, beyond the military capacity to deter Soviet aggression against U.S. allies, had been the commitment of successive generations of U.S. administrations to a positive, broadly shared vision of world order and a generalized willingness to exercise restraint in the pursuit of U.S. national interests. The genius of America’s containment policy had been to organize the country’s free world leadership through consensual institutions, including the NATO alliance, the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Despite periodic accusations of U.S. “unilateralism” and occasional fissures in the Atlantic alliance, the United States and its major Cold War partners possessed common threat perceptions, interests, and ideals.

This sense of common purpose, which had begun to crumble during the 1990s in the absence of a common enemy, was placed under further stress by the advent of George W. Bush to the presidency. But it was the U.S. response to 9/11, and particularly the White House’s decision to pivot from Afghanistan to deposing Saddam Hussein that marked a break point in the U.S. role in the world. The Bush administration’s declaration of a “global war on terror” and its insistence on waging this struggle unencumbered by the requirements of multilateral consensus would shake the normative foundations of America’s international legitimacy.

In the days immediately following 9/11, the new course of U.S. policy was temporarily obscured by the outpouring of global solidarity for the United States, as well as a number of U.S. actions that seemed to portend a more multilateral orientation. Washington worked to build a broad coalition to defeat the Taliban, to root al Qaeda out of Afghanistan, and to deal with the terrorist threat globally. The United States paid its outstanding arrears to the UN, took a more constructive approach to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) efforts to regulate offshore banking centers, worked within the UN to win broad support for resolutions designed to combat the terrorist threat, and committed itself to assist postconflict reconstruction and political stability in Afghanistan. Early press commentary remarked on this apparent U.S. return to multilateralism.<sup>33</sup>

On September 12, 2001, the UN Security Council met in emergency session and, invoking the UN Charter’s inherent right of “individual or collective self-defense,” passed Resolution 1368 authorizing “all necessary steps” against the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of these acts. The same day the North Atlantic Council

<sup>33</sup> William Drozdiak, “Crisis Forces Shift in Policy as Bush Assembles Coalition,” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2001, p. A9.

invoked for the first time the collective defense provisions of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, promising material support for the United States. The administration returned to the Security Council to win Resolution 1373 of September 28, 2001, mandating that all member states take concrete steps to eliminate sources of terrorist financing, including providing regular reports on progress to a new UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC).

Yet the Bush administration quickly made it apparent that Washington alone would define the nature of the new struggle and brook no interference in its prosecution. The president alarmed many allies by declaring a “global war on terrorism” – emphasizing the military dimensions of the struggle while downplaying its political, law enforcement, and socioeconomic components – and by painting it as a stark choice of good versus evil. As he told a joint session of Congress: “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the broad antiterrorist coalition was less a genuinely multilateral undertaking – in which members accepted reciprocal obligations – than a classic “hub and spoke” arrangement, founded on bilateral deals between the United States and a large and heterogeneous group of countries, in which an American “sheriff” largely determined the actions of members of its “posse.” From the administration’s perspective, a flexible framework permitted the United States to deploy (others’) assets in a manner that reflected immediate U.S. priorities and the perceived capabilities of its partners, rather than strain to reach consensus on a common strategy among numerous parties, or find its policy options constrained.<sup>35</sup>

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld captured this ethos in an interview with Larry King on December 5, 2001. As he explained, “Dozens and dozens of countries are helping with over-flight rights, with landing rights, with intelligence gathering, with law enforcement, with freezing bank accounts, with supplying troops in some cases and supplying aircraft and ships in other places. . . . Asked whether it was critical that “the coalition hold” together, Rumsfeld tellingly responded “No.”

There is no coalition. There are multiple coalitions. . . . Countries do what they can do. Countries help in the way they want to help. . . . And that’s the way it ought to work. I’ll tell you why. The worst thing you can do is to allow a coalition to determine what your mission is. The mission has to be to root out the terrorists. It’s the mission that determines the coalition.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The White House, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People,” September 20, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> As Colin Powell reassured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 25, 2001, “There are no arrangements within this coalition which in any way, shape, fashion or form constrain the President in the exercise of his constitutional responsibilities to defend the United States of America and to defend the people of the United States.” “The Campaign Against Terrorism,” testimony to SFRC, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/5751.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld interview with Larry King, CNN, December 5, 2001, [http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2001/t12062001\\_t1205sd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2001/t12062001_t1205sd.html).

As Colin Powell added several months later, the administration understood that the global war on terrorism would be prosecuted by “a fluid coalition” – a “coalition of coalitions that are constantly . . . shifting and changing as the needs shifted and changed.”<sup>37</sup> The floating nature of this arrangement implied that reliance on standing multilateral organizations to fight the war on terrorism might be unwarranted, even counterproductive.

#### DOWNGRADING NATO

During the 1990s, a constant refrain among Atlanticists was that the NATO alliance must go “out of area or out of business,” by expanding its membership and proving its relevance to post–Cold War security threats. The alliance made progress on both fronts, spreading eastward even to the borders of Russia, assisting the stabilization of the Balkans following the wars of Yugoslavia’s dissolution, and, most dramatically, intervening to stop Serb ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

Despite NATO’s invocation of Article 5 treaty obligations after 9/11, the Bush administration – recalling the cumbersome Kosovo arrangements, being skeptical of the value added of European military contributions, and reluctant to grant allies a fundamental say in its prosecution of the campaign – rebuffed any formal NATO role in toppling the Taliban and pursuing al Qaeda. The rapid triumph of technologically advanced U.S. troops and local Afghan allies appeared to validate this instinct. Subsequently, Washington rejected allied suggestions to create a countrywide multinational peacekeeping force, out of a general aversion for nation building and a fear of complicating the pursuit of terrorists. The administration insisted on restricting the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Kabul and its immediate environs.

It was not until September 2003 that Washington agreed to place ISAF under NATO and to permit its gradual expansion outside Kabul, including command of Provincial Reconstruction Teams involved in stability operations. From Washington’s perspective, this enhanced NATO role remained a mixed blessing, requiring laborious negotiations with resource-strapped and casualty-averse allied governments that found it difficult to generate even modest forces, funds, and materiel; insisted on restrictive rules of engagement; and placed “national caveats” on the use of troops.<sup>38</sup>

American skepticism about NATO would only increase during the transatlantic crisis over Iraq, which made Washington doubt the Western alliance as an effective instrument of U.S. security policy. Although NATO would play a modest postwar role in training Iraqi security forces outside the country, the crisis suggested that the

<sup>37</sup> Frontline interview with Secretary of State Colin Powell, June 2, 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/campaign/interviews/powell.html>.

<sup>38</sup> In one egregious instance, the alliance spent several months trying to get Luxembourg to come up with several hundred thousand dollars to transport Turkish helicopters to Afghanistan.

United States would henceforth rely on like-minded coalitions for both war-fighting and postconflict stabilization. Rather than attempt to revitalize NATO, one senior State Department official predicted in early 2006 that the United States would seek to create a regular process for bringing informal groupings together and generating the forces required for unique contingencies. “We’d ‘ad hoc’ our way through coalitions of the willing. That’s the future,” he explained. “We are focusing on the enduring dynamics of coalition warfare.”<sup>39</sup>

#### THE AXIS OF EVIL

On the evening of January 29, 2002, George W. Bush delivered his first State of the Union address, in which he identified Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” that had to be confronted. “By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and gathering danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States.”<sup>40</sup>

By early 2002 it was clear to outside observers that the administration was determined to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. In February the European Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Patten, worried publicly that the United States was moving into “unilateralist overdrive.”<sup>41</sup> Within the administration, debates erupted over whether even to pursue UN authorization before carrying out regime change in Iraq. On the one hand, there was Vice President Dick Cheney, who pointed to a decade of UN failure to enforce its own resolutions to ensure the verifiable disarmament of Iraq and kept up a steady drumbeat for war, with increasingly dire warnings about the degree to which Saddam had reconstituted WMD capability. On the other hand, there was Secretary of State Colin Powell, who advocated U.S. pursuit of consensus within the Security Council before taking any military action.

The crisis over Iraq came to the fore on September 12, 2002, when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and President Bush both spoke before the General Assembly. Annan, clearly speaking to the United States, implored member states that “choosing to follow or reject the multilateral path must not be a simple matter of convenience.” Bush, for his part, threw down an ultimatum. “Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding, or will it become irrelevant? . . . The Security Council resolutions will be enforced . . . or action will be unavoidable.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Guy Dinmore, “U.S. Sees Coalitions of the Willing as Best Ally,” *Financial Times*, January 4, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> It is noteworthy that Bush delivered his entire speech without mentioning the NATO alliance, even perfunctorily.

<sup>41</sup> Steven Erlanger, “Europe Seethes as the U.S. Flies Solo in World Affairs,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2002.

<sup>42</sup> President Bush address to UN General Assembly, September 12, 2002.

DOCTRINAL INNOVATION: THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF 2002

The Bush administration codified a new post-9/11 approach to international security in September 2002, one year after the attacks, releasing its National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS). The two most distinctive innovations of this document, compared to previous installments, were an explicit enunciation of a right to preemption to forestall catastrophic threats and a defense of unilateralism in advancing U.S. national security. These twin themes were joined in a single sentence: “While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right to self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country.”<sup>43</sup> The president had foreshadowed such arguments in June 2002, in a graduation speech to West Point cadets, when he argued that rogue states that could not be contained or deterred might have to be destroyed.<sup>44</sup> “Our security will require all Americans to be forward looking and resolute, to be ready for pre-emptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives.”

Although the sections of the National Security Strategy (NSS) devoted to preemption and unilateralism constituted a small fraction of the entire document,<sup>45</sup> they quickly grabbed headlines around the world, just as intended. The fact that America’s closest allies were not consulted in the drafting process – nor even provided advance copies of the document – reinforced the sense that U.S. national security policy was being driven entirely by internal U.S. dynamics, without much consideration as to how these changes would play internationally.

What was controversial about the NSS was less that it asserted a right to unilateral preemption in the face of imminent threats – something previous U.S. administrations had also claimed – but that it appeared to elevate this right to a doctrine,<sup>46</sup> at the expense of the traditional expedients of containment and deterrence, while expanding the definition of “imminence” to include threats that were emerging rather than fully realized. The administration was effectively contending that the magnitude of new security threats, and the difficulty in detecting them, rendered traditional security responses wholly inadequate. In an age of “shadowy” terrorist networks, rogue states, and proliferating WMD technology, in which attacks of unparalleled devastation could come with little warning from nonstate actors, the United States could no longer rely on the deterrent force of massive retaliation. It needed the

<sup>43</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Norman Pohdoretz, “In Praise of the Bush Doctrine,” *Commentary*, September 2002.

<sup>45</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*.

<sup>46</sup> James B. Steinberg, “Force and Legitimacy in the Post-9/11 Era: What Principles Should Guide the United States?” Paper prepared for Century Foundation/Center for American Progress conference on Power and Superpower, June 6, 2006, New York, p. 18.

flexibility to respond with dispatch, on its own if necessary, rather than wait until threats had become acute, by which time it might be too late to begin gathering a coalition or responding militarily.

There was much to be said for this diagnosis. The world *did* need new international norms defining circumstances and criteria for principled preemption.<sup>47</sup> But the administration's insistence on enunciating this doctrine, rather than attempting to build such an international consensus, raised fears that the United States was seeking the unbridled exercise of American power, further marginalizing the UN Security Council's authority to legitimate the use of force, as well as lowering the bar for armed action in a manner that could be exploited by others. To many member states – even close U.S. allies – the doctrine of preemption appeared an invitation to international anarchy.

There is widespread global agreement that use of force is legitimate when a threat is imminent. What was most novel and controversial about the administration's doctrine was its premise that the definition of "imminence" must be construed more broadly in an age of terrorism, rogue states, and WMD, becoming almost synonymous with "preventive" war. What was equally controversial abroad (though historically not within the United States itself) was the contention that the U.S. judgments about imminence, and any subsequent armed response, do not require prior ratification of the UN Security Council to be legitimate.

Faced with an international outcry, administration officials sought to reassure international audiences that the United States would use preemption only in rare circumstances – notably as a last resort, when the danger was grave, and when risks of inaction outweighed the dangers of war. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice outlined these criteria on October 1, 2002. Nevertheless, it would be left to the United States to determine the evidentiary criteria for preemptive action, as well as the ultimate choice to use it.<sup>48</sup>

#### THE UNITED STATES, THE UN, AND IRAQ

The showdown within the UN Security Council over Iraq would pit the United States (supported by Great Britain) against other council members, including Russia, France, and Germany. Washington was intent on bending the UN to its will; the latter, on obstructing the United States.<sup>49</sup> Among UN member states, the opponents of authorizing military action against Iraq were troubled by the implication of

<sup>47</sup> See speech by Richard Haass, "Sovereignty: Existing Rights, Evolving Responsibilities," Georgetown University, January 14, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> The White House, "Dr. Condoleezza Rice Discusses President's National Security Strategy," Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York, October 1, 2002. Powell had previously stated, on September 6, 2002, that any such action "must be used with great care and judiciousness and with a clear understanding of the obligations that we have as a responsible member of the international community."

<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Glennon, "Why the Security Council Failed" *Foreign Affairs* 82, No. 3 (May/June 2003).

endorsing the American doctrine of preemption and at the same time alarmed at the explicit U.S. threat to act alone if necessary to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The apparent choice was between endorsing a doctrine that would undermine core charter principles or risking an abandonment of the UN by its most prominent member. During autumn 2002, one heard approving references among UN member states for a policy of “dual containment” – that is, of both Iraq and the United States. The quest for consensus was hobbled by very different perceptions of the nature and scope of the threat Iraq posed to international peace and security. To most members, there was no clear and present danger: sanctions were working, inspectors had found no unambiguous evidence of ongoing WMD programs, and deterrence, in the final analysis, remained valid.

Bush’s address to the General Assembly was a rare and temporary victory for Powell over the vice president, who perceived the UN as a trap and warned against granting it legitimacy in the exercise of American power. In the short term, the gambit paid off. On November 8, 2002, the Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1441, threatening unspecified “serious consequences” if the Iraqi government did not demonstrate that it had abandoned pursuit of WMD.

And yet the aggressive determination of the United States to employ its power alarmed even traditional allies and partners, some of which came to regard Washington (as much as terrorism) as a destabilizing global influence that had to be tamed. This was not lost on the Bush administration, which perceived much of the diplomacy in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq as designed less to ensure effective multilateral outcomes than to domesticate U.S. power. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin reinforced this perception on January 20, 2003, by declaring: “nothing would justify the use of force in Iraq.” German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder did likewise by stating soon afterward that Germany would oppose war even if the Security Council authorized it.

On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell presented to the Security Council evidence – since discredited – of Iraq’s continued pursuit of WMD and links with al Qaeda. Despite uncertain prospects, Washington launched an intense, ill-fated diplomatic campaign to win support for a second resolution authorizing force against Iraq (in large part to placate British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who required one domestically). These efforts came to naught in early March 2003. In the absence of an explicit Security Council imprimatur, the United States and its coalition partners launched Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003. The rapid fall of Hussein’s regime three weeks later engendered a short-lived wave of American triumphalism.

It is intriguing to compare the policies pursued by George W. Bush with those adopted by his father in 1990–1991, when the latter sought an explicit Security Council mandate to go to war with Iraq. In their memoir, George H. W. Bush and his National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft explain their rationale for seeking UN authorization: “We also believed that the United States should not go it alone,

that a multilateral approach was better. . . . Building an international response led us immediately to the United Nations, which could provide a cloak of acceptability to our efforts and mobilize world opinion behind the principles we wished to project.”<sup>50</sup>

One can contrast this with the response of White House spokesman Ari Fleischer on March 10, 2003, several days after it became clear that the Security Council would not authorize enforcement action against Saddam Hussein. The exchange began with a reporter’s question: “You seem to be equating an ad hoc coalition that the United States has been able to form around one issue and one task with permanent bodies, like the UN and NATO, which have charters formed by treaties, have charters and structures,” the reporter asked. “Does the President believe that international affairs can be conducted entirely through ad hoc bodies like the one he’s putting [together]?” To which Fleischer responded, “The point I’m making here is that there are many ways to form international coalitions. The United Nations Security Council is but one of them.”<sup>51</sup>

And yet it would be wrong to make too much of this contrast, for George H. W. Bush and Scowcroft also suggest that (like Bush 43) they were prepared to act outside the UN, if need be. As they describe it, “We would ask the Council to act only if we knew in advance we had the backing of most of the Arab bloc and we were fairly certain we had the necessary votes. If at any point it became clear we could not succeed, we would back away from a UN effort and cobble together an independent multinational effort built on friendly Arab and allied participation.”<sup>52</sup>

#### THE AFTERMATH: NEGOTIATING A UN ROLE IN POSTWAR IRAQ

In the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration was determined to marginalize the UN, in the interest of ensuring untrammelled U.S. control over political developments there and to avoid what administration officials presumed would be a “bloated, inefficient” UN peacekeeping operation.<sup>53</sup> The central locus of political authority during the postconflict transition phase (following the demise of the short-lived Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance) would be the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), headed by Paul Bremer, who enjoyed the power of a Roman proconsul for the duration of the occupation.

At the same time, the Bush administration hoped to leverage the UN’s specialized capacities in certain narrowly circumscribed areas, including refugees and reconstruction, and in providing political cover for potential contributors to the U.S.-led

<sup>50</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 491.

<sup>51</sup> White House, “Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer,” March 10, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030310-4.html#7>.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Edward Luck, “The U.S., International Organization, and the Quest for Legitimacy,” in Patrick and Forman, *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> Unidentified administration official, cited in Elizabeth Becker, “U.S. Plans to Run Iraq Itself,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2003.

coalition. Washington thus welcomed Security Council Resolution 1483 of May 22, which called on the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative to Iraq, and it strongly supported UNSCR 1500, which established a UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). At the same time, the administration resisted transferring to the UN any significant authority over Iraq's political evolution.<sup>54</sup> Despite these obstacles, the UN Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello made headway in engaging leading Iraqi leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Sistani, on the country's political future. This era ended tragically on August 19, 2003, one of the darkest days in UN history, when de Mello and more than a dozen colleagues were killed in the bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad. The UN temporarily withdrew from Iraq.

Over the next few years, the Bush administration would return to the UN on several occasions, typically grudgingly, in an effort to share some of the military and financial burden and obtain a modicum of international legitimacy it needed to succeed in Iraq. As initial U.S. plans for a gradual political transition in Iraq imploded in late 2003 in the face of a swelling Sunni insurgency and deepening sectarian violence, U.S. officials enlisted the aid of Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, who skillfully negotiated with Sistani to accept the transfer of Iraqi sovereignty from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to an interim Iraqi government on June 30, 2004 (with elections to be delayed for several months). The Security Council ratified this decision on June 8, 2004. Resolution 1546 also authorized the U.S.-led multinational force to "take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq," in concurrence with the new interim government.<sup>55</sup> The UN would subsequently play a pivotal role in organizing Iraq's first post-Saddam national elections, in January 2005, as well as the preparations and holding of the October constitutional referendum and December parliamentary elections of that year. Over the next three years, the UN continued to soldier on, seeking to advance national dialogue and reconciliation in a deteriorating security environment.

#### THE UNITED STATES AND THE FUTURE OF THE UN

The collapse of Security Council diplomacy over Iraq during early 2003 had raised the question of whether the UN could serve as an effective collective security organization, capable of confronting the main threats of the twenty-first century – and whether the United States was willing to allow it to play such a role. Several years after the greatest crisis in UN history, the jury is still out. But at least three things are clear.

First, notwithstanding high-profile fallout over Iraq, the UN remains indispensable to the realization of U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives. The United States has returned to the UN and its affiliated agencies again and again to cooperate

<sup>54</sup> Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 83, No. 5 (September/October 2004), 34–56.

<sup>55</sup> S/Res/1546 (2004), [http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc\\_resolutions04.html](http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions04.html).

with other nations on the major threats to global security, stability, and welfare. This includes, among other things, working with the UN's Counter-Terrorism Committee to eliminate the sources of terrorist financing; with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to restrict the spread of fissile material; with the World Health Organization (WHO) to monitor and control potential pandemics like avian flu; with UN member states to craft a response to atrocities in Darfur; with the UN's Office of Drugs and Crime to attack illicit trafficking in drugs, goods and people; and with the UN's new Peacebuilding Commission to stabilize postconflict and failed countries. Moreover, everyday technical cooperation between U.S. and UN officials, and with officials of other UN member states, is often very good.

Second, achieving a new partnership with the UN will require the United States to adopt an attitude quite different from the one that dominated the Bush years. Washington will need to give up its destructive habit of denying the world body of support and resources while transforming it into – or allowing it to be treated as – a scapegoat for the inevitable failures of the international community,<sup>56</sup> even as it returns to the UN and its affiliated agencies to address pressing crises from Sudan to Lebanon to Iran. Washington must continue to demand accountability and performance, but it must also commit itself to sustained rather than episodic engagement and devote more vigorous attention to the requirements of multilateral diplomacy. In this regard, style will matter as much as substance. The United States will need to adopt consultation as a point of departure rather than as an afterthought and avoid the tendency to stake out maximalist positions without compromise.

Third, a more vigorous UN role in global security will also require a readiness from other UN member states to reach agreement on new norms to address today's most troubling threats. As Kofi Annan declared to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on September 23, 2003,

[I]t is not enough to denounce unilateralism, unless we also face up squarely to the concerns that make some states feel uniquely vulnerable, since it is those concerns that drive them to take unilateral action. We must show that these concerns can, and will be addressed effectively through collective action.

It was with this end in mind that Annan sponsored a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, to explore the institutional changes required for the UN to address the world's main security challenges. That process culminated at the UN High-Level Event of September 2005, in which member states considered 101 recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General. Unfortunately (as described elsewhere in this volume) the ultimate summit outcome document was a far cry from early aspirations. Rather than take a strong leadership role on critical issues such as Security Council reform, the United States remained curiously disengaged until the

<sup>56</sup> Warren Hoge, "Official of UN Says Americans Undermine it With Criticism," *New York Times*, June 7, 2006.

last moment, when it insisted on multiple changes to a painstakingly negotiated text. One result was to empower “spoiler” countries in their effort to roll back reforms on issues from terrorism to human rights.

#### NONPROLIFERATION: OPTING OUT AND AD HOC ARRANGEMENTS

The Bush administration’s preference for ad hoc security arrangements over universal institutions was nowhere more apparent than in its approach to weapons of mass destruction. Wary of protracted (and often futile) multilateral arms control negotiations and skeptical of existing nonproliferation regimes, it adopted more aggressive counterproliferation efforts undertaken through flexible coalitions.<sup>57</sup> This provoked anxiety among nonproliferation advocates and some other countries, because Washington sometimes treated these ad hoc and unilateral responses less as complements to existing treaty regimes – that is, intended to fill gaps in them – than as alternatives to them. The accompanying U.S. resistance to embracing disarmament and submitting itself to intrusive inspection regimes was particularly problematic.

These dynamics were most apparent in the nuclear field. Although the administration sought to strengthen export controls and restrictions on uranium enrichment and plutonium separation, it in practice undercut such efforts by seeking to reduce constraints on its own margin of maneuver. From the time it took office, for example, the administration sought to break the link within the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) between nonproliferation and disarmament. This contributed to the collapse of the NPT review conference in May 2005, which occurred in part because of a dispute between the United States and other nuclear states, who wanted to focus on the threats posed by Iran and North Korea, and the nonnuclear states, which sought progress on the NPT’s Article VI commitments to disarmament. The Bush administration’s apparent disavowal of U.S. commitments made at the 2000 NPT review conference – which endorsed benchmarks toward the elimination of nuclear weapons – undermined the bargain at the heart of the NPT. The ragged regime frayed even further in 2006, when Washington welcomed India into the nuclear club.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, the United States embraced an ad hoc approach, embodied most fully in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The brainchild of former Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton, PSI is an innovative partnership of like-minded countries designed to allow the United States and its allies to intercept illicit maritime and air shipments of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; and ballistic missiles and their related technologies. Although full details of the program remain classified, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

<sup>57</sup> The administration also continued working with supplier groups to strengthen export controls on dual use and missile technology, including the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia Group, which restricts the spread of chemical and biological weapons and know how.

<sup>58</sup> George Percovich, “The End of the Nonproliferation Regime?” *Current History* 105 (November 2006).

claimed in spring 2005 that the initiative had already resulted in eleven interdictions in the past nine months. The genius of PSI, to its champions, was that it permitted a nimble response to a growing menace. “Rather than rely on cumbersome treaty-based bureaucracies,” Bolton noted, “the robust use of the sovereign authorities we and our allies possess can produce real results.”<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, by 2007 senior Bush administration officials were touting PSI as a general model that might be extended to promote collective action in confronting other global threats. Unlike universal organizations, which permitted Lilliputians to gang up on Gulliver to thwart its purposes or exploit its resources, the PSI model would allow the United States to determine the agenda for collective action.<sup>60</sup> Washington would begin by issuing invitations to a small group of like-minded countries and drafting a set of principles that narrowly defined the mandate and scope of activities of the coalition. In U.S. eyes, this approach would strip the coalition of any bureaucratic capacity to reimagine itself later, for instance, by adopting a secretariat or a set of voting procedures that made the grouping something different than initially envisioned. Once a core group of critical nations had signed on to the narrow agenda and scope of activities, the United States would lead a global campaign to get others to join, on its own terms.<sup>61</sup> The Bush administration pursued a similar approach in several other issue areas, including the president’s initiative to combat nuclear terrorism; the U.S.-led coalition response to avian flu; the Asia–Pacific partnership on climate change; and the Global Health Security Action Group (focused on biosecurity).

There was also a transformational agenda at work in the administration’s calculations: as lean, functionally oriented multilateral groupings proliferated and proved their utility, states would repeatedly return to them, bypassing standing, bloated international organizations. As these frameworks attracted new members, they would gradually gain a legitimacy lacking in simple ad hoc coalitions of the willing. Over time, administration officials believed, states would increasingly come to rely on and invoke such frameworks to create legitimacy for their own actions – whether this involved boarding ships on the high seas (as in the case of PSI) or other such endeavors. Finally, in such a world of “overlapping and sometimes competitive international institutions” – or what Francis Fukuyama has termed “multi-multilateralism” – the United States would have new opportunities to engage in forum shopping, selecting the international framework or institution that responded best to the challenge at hand.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> John Bolton, “An All-Out War on Proliferation,” *Financial Times*, September 7, 2004.

<sup>60</sup> The coalition approach also reflected growing Bush administration frustration that many of the bodies that currently exist to legitimate international actions, such as the UN Security Council or IAEA, included countries (such as China and Russia) that lack democratic legitimacy in their own countries. Who are they, some Bush administration officials’ wondered, to sit in judgment on the legitimacy to U.S. actions? Personal communication with U.S. officials, late 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Scenario based on interviews with Bush administration officials, early 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The Paradox of International Action,” *The American Interest* 1, No. 3 (Spring 2006), p. 10.

STRIKING A JUDICIOUS BALANCE AMONG FORMS OF MULTILATERALISM

In an edited volume produced by the Center on International Cooperation in early 2002, I argued that the ambivalent and selective attitude of the United States toward multilateral cooperation carried potentially significant costs and risks for the United States. Among other negative consequences, I predicted, it could serve to thwart the pursuit of coherent and effective policies toward particular global problems, weaken multilateral institutions critical to U.S. national interests, slow the spread of useful international norms and regimes, undercut the credibility of the United States to lead on certain topics, hinder U.S. ability to mobilize the support of other countries, and diminish the reputation of the United States as an enlightened world leader.<sup>63</sup> The overall record of the Bush administration provided ample evidence of the costs and limitations of going it alone, on issues ranging from terrorism to Iraq, climate change to nonproliferation.

In responding to terrorism and other transnational problems that define our global age, the United States has little choice but to combine its own efforts with those of other countries and international organizations. The challenge for Washington going forward will be to strike a more judicious balance between reliance on ad hoc arrangements and formal institutions in the pursuit of its national interests. Coalitions of the willing do bring distinct advantages, including flexibility, agility, and exclusivity. It may make sense to turn to them to meet discrete contingencies when no standing international framework exists; when permanent institutions are paralyzed by internal divisions; when consensual, egalitarian norms threaten the pursuit of vital U.S. interests or values; and when standard decision-making procedures or bureaucratic inertia prevent prompt decisions and rapid responses. By contrast, standing institutions can offer advantages when there is no time or will to assume the delays and transaction costs implied with creating a new coalition out of whole cloth, when the challenge at hand requires specialized technical expertise that is available only in permanent organizations, when the challenge is an enduring one that is likely to outlive the short time-horizon and half-life of any coalition and to imply heavy burden-sharing over a protracted period, and where the requirements of international or domestic legitimacy require the use of formal frameworks to give political cover to wavering states.<sup>64</sup>

In sum, it would be a mistake for the architects of U.S. foreign policy to ignore the standing capacity, legitimacy, and legal status of formal multilateral organizations or to imagine that these can somehow be reproduced through ad hoc arrangements. By themselves, coalitions provide a thin reed for the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy goals, much less a foundation for global order. As James Traub has written, "If everybody

<sup>63</sup> Stewart Patrick, "Multilateralism and Its Discontents," pp. 22–25.

<sup>64</sup> "Pragmatic Multilateralism: Strategies for Engagement in an Age of Interdependence," Final Report of Council on Foreign Relations Term Member Roundtable, chaired by Suzanne Nossel (2002).

accepts the constraints of multilateral bodies but the United States insists on playing by its own ever-shifting sets of rules, then the ‘international order’ is a will-o’-the-wisp. Multilateralism cannot simply mean ‘acting with others’; it must also mean ‘acting through rule-based institutions.’”<sup>65</sup> The challenge for the United States is to ensure that its coalitions reinforce – rather than undermine – the institutions and alliances that it needs over the long haul.

<sup>65</sup> James Traub, *The Best of Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American World Power* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006), pp. 403–4.

