

Source:

George C. Herring, "From the Persian Gulf War to Iraq and Afghanistan: Confronting the Post-Cold War World" in William H. Chafe, Harvard Sitkoff, and Beth Bailey, eds., *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America* 8e (Oxford University Press, 2012), 353-368.

From the Persian Gulf War to Iraq and Afghanistan: Confronting the Post-Cold War World

George C. Herring

When the Cold War came to an end, millions of Americans believed—perhaps understandably—that foreign policy issues no longer would dominate American political discussion and decision making. For almost fifty years, a bipolar Cold War vision had shaped American foreign policy. Now the situation was dramatically different. But in many ways, the end of the Cold War simply made geopolitics and American international relations much more complex.

There was only a decade between the end of the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. That decade, as historian George Herring demonstrates in his analysis of post-Cold War foreign policy, was far from peaceful, and the foreign policy issues facing the United States were far from easy. In the following piece, Herring moves beyond the complexities of post-Cold War foreign policy to analyze the post-9/11 Bush doctrine (which he characterizes as "a radically new national security doctrine"). Offering a grim assessment of Bush's foreign policy legacy, Herring traces Barack Obama's efforts to "change U.S. foreign policy in style and substance" while at the same time escalating the war in Afghanistan. Having read Herring's analysis, do you think that the world was more stable at the height of the Cold War or in the first decade of the twenty-first century?

For a fleeting moment in the early 1990s, peace and world order seemed within reach. The end of the Cold War and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union removed a major cause of international friction for the past half century and eased, if they did not eliminate altogether, the dreadful threat of a nuclear holocaust. The emergence of democracies and market economies in the former Soviet satellites, Latin America, and even in South Africa, offered the hope of a new age of global prosperity. The smashing victory over Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War by a powerful allied coalition, headed by the United States and working under the aegis of the United Nations, seemed to hail the triumph of Woodrow

Wilson's dreams of collective security where peace would be maintained and aggression repelled by international collaboration. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush proclaimed the birth of a new world order under American leadership. State Department official Francis Fukuyama went further, hailing the "end of history," the triumph of capitalism and democracy over fascism and communism and the emergence of a peaceful world made up of stable and prosperous democracies in which geopolitics would be a thing of the past.

It did not take long for such prophecies to be exposed as wishful thinking. The Cold War had imposed a crude form of order on inherently unstable regions of the world, and its end unleashed powerful forces that had been held in check for years. Especially in Central Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, national loyalties gave way to explosive ethnic rivalries and secessionist movements. Most prominent were the brutal wars between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia and the conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims and Kurds in the Middle East, but *The New York Times* counted in early 1993 forty-eight such conflicts scattered across the globe. Wilson's idea of self-determination seemed to have been resurrected with a vengeance, threatening to tear the world apart rather than bring it together.

Some commentators predicted even more gloomy scenarios, warning of a struggle between North and South, the haves and have-nots of the world, the "West and the rest." Runaway population growth in the developing countries portended a possibly disastrous drain on already scarce resources, enormous environmental crises that could afflict the entire globe, and rampant spread of crime, disease and war. Pessimists warned that international migration could be the greatest problem of the twenty-first century and foresaw an assault on the borders of the developed nations through massive emigration. Others predicted that the anarchy already gripping Africa would spread across the globe, the chaos in less-developed countries eventually contaminating the developed ones. Although such predictions appeared excessively gloomy and even reflected a false nostalgia for the "order" of the Cold War, it seemed clear that the end of history was not in view. Conflict and disorder would characterize the post-Cold War era.

The United States' position in this new world order was paradoxical. During the 1990s, America enjoyed a preponderance of power unprecedented in world history. Its economy was 40 percent larger than that of the second-ranked nation, its defense spending six times that of the next six nations combined. Pundits without exaggeration spoke of a "unipolar moment," a time when one nation stood above all others without any rival. Because of its wealth and power, the United States seemed to have complete freedom of action. Ironically, however, the nation seemed less threatened by the world and was therefore less disposed to act. The "central paradox of unipolarity," according to political scientist Stephen Walt, was that the United States "enjoys enormous influence but has little idea what to do with its power or even how much effort it should expend." These peculiar conditions caused an always fickle American public to lose interest in the world.

Both reflecting and shaping public opinion, the media drastically reduced its coverage of events abroad and Congress slashed the foreign affairs budget.

Not surprisingly, the United States responded uncertainly to the new world order. The absence of any obvious threat to its security removed any compulsion to take the lead in solving world problems. Americans recognized that there could be no return to isolationism in a world shrunken by technology and bound by economic interdependence, but after forty years of international commitment and massive Cold War expenditures they yearned for normalcy and relief from the burdens of world leadership. As in the aftermath of earlier wars, they preferred to focus on domestic problems. Support for foreign policy ventures waned. Bitter memories of the Vietnam debacle continued to haunt the nation a quarter century after its end, adding yet another impediment to global involvement.

The halting response of the George H. W. Bush administration to the new order it had once proclaimed foreshadowed the difficulties of the new era. After its forceful leadership in the Persian Gulf War, it did little to address longer-range but still pressing problems in the Middle East. Its response to a mounting crisis in Bosnia in the Balkans suggested its hesitancy. Despite warnings of a new holocaust and its own bold rhetoric, it did nothing to halt Serbia's vicious "ethnic cleansing" of its predominantly Muslim neighbor. "We don't have a dog in that fight," Secretary of State James Baker curtly asserted. In his last days in office, President Bush authorized a humanitarian rescue mission in strife-torn Somalia in East Africa, sending troops to prevent rivalries among local warlords from causing mass starvation. But the administration never appears to have decided whether it was really committed to a new world order, or, because of domestic constraints, it preferred retrenchment and retreat.

Even more than its predecessor, the administration of William Jefferson Clinton found adjustment to the post-Cold War world vexing and difficult. Clinton's aides had run their successful campaign on the slogan "It's the economy, stupid," and in many ways the administration seemed more attuned to the new era, making clear its preeminent concern with domestic issues. Having spent his entire career in state politics, the former governor of Arkansas was plainly less interested in, experienced with, and informed on foreign policy. At least at the outset, he appeared to hope that his team could hold the world at bay while he implemented an ambitious domestic agenda. His few campaign pronouncements on foreign policy seemed to promise more forthright U.S. leadership and a more active role in volatile areas such as Bosnia. Yet his foreign policy advisers came out of the liberal Democratic mold—burned by Vietnam, nervous about unilateral interventions, and committed to working through the United Nations and persuading allies to share the burden of world leadership.

The Clinton administration was deeply committed to promoting domestic prosperity through the expansion of foreign trade. The president himself was an unabashed enthusiast for globalization, seeing trade as the engine through which to promote free markets, democracy, and eventually peace and prosperity. "Since we don't have geopolitics any more," one Clinton adviser pronounced, "trade is the

name of the game." In embassies across the world, diplomats turned their attention to economics. Clinton cashed in all his political chips to secure Congressional passage in 1993 of the North American Free-Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He vigorously promoted the Asia-Pacific Economic Community as a modern economic NATO and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The Clinton administration presided over the greatest expansion of foreign trade in U.S. history, helping to fuel the nation's most prolonged period of economic growth.

Promoting economic expansion raised numerous complex problems. Whatever its long-term benefits, it also brought short-term tradeoffs and costly job displacement. NAFTA contributed significantly to the prosperity of the 1990s, but it also eliminated thousands of jobs in the nation's already moribund manufacturing sector. In the new world economy, promotion of trade often brought unprecedented and unwelcome intrusion into the internal politics of other countries, and globalization, which to many other peoples meant Americanization, provoked a growing backlash abroad.

Committed to promoting human rights abroad as well as expanding trade, the Clinton administration quickly realized that the two might not always be compatible. Exports were increasingly important to domestic prosperity. In the most prominent cases, the administration therefore bowed to expediency without totally abandoning its principles. Two hundred thousand Americans were employed in the sale of some \$9 billion worth of exports to China, for example, yet that country's abuses of human rights offended the sensibilities of pressure groups and some Washington officials. After much agonizing, the administration normalized trade relations with China, accepting at face value that nation's promise to improve its human rights record.

Clinton also quickly discovered the painful truth that in foreign policy American presidents do not have to look for trouble, it finds them. The administration was even less surefooted on the increasingly difficult questions posed by international peacekeeping and what came to be called humanitarian interventions to prevent human suffering in areas torn by ethnic or religious conflict. In the 1992 campaign and in its early days in office, it sounded mildly interventionist. Clinton scored Bush's inaction on Bosnia and affirmed that "no national security issue is more urgent than securing democracy's triumph around the world." Before the end of its first year in office, however, the administration had beaten a hasty retreat. Unable to persuade its European allies to lift an arms embargo to help Bosnia defend itself, it would go no further than endorse harmless NATO air strikes to protect embattled UN peacekeepers. It went along with expansion of the UN mission in Somalia, but when eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed in bloody fighting in Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, it scaled back the United States's role and promised an alarmed Congress and public that all Americans would be out of Somalia in six months. A week later, closer to home, and even more humiliating, a shipload of American soldiers and technicians dispatched to troubled Haiti as part of a larger effort to unseat a cruel military government turned back in the face of armed and jeering mobs on the docks at Port-au-Prince.

While instability wracked the globe, the Clinton administration developed guidelines for intervention some critics dismissed as "self-containment." The United States would only intervene in cases where international security was gravely threatened, a major disaster required urgent relief, or gross violations of human rights had occurred. Other nations would have to share the costs, but American troops would participate only under U.S. command. In response to proliferating UN commitments, the administration in May 1994 spelled out even more restrictive guidelines for support of peacekeeping operations. Making clear in the aftermath of the Somalian debacle its lack of enthusiasm for UN enterprises, it vowed it would commit troops only in cases where vital U.S. interests were threatened. Congress would have to approve the mission, and funds would have to be available. Such missions must have clearly stated objectives, a reasonable assurance of success, and a strategy for completing the task. They must pose a major threat to international peace and security or involve gross violations of human rights. Clinton also urged the UN to scale back its own ambitions. "If the American people are to say yes to UN peacekeeping, the United Nations must know when to say no." Parodying the soaring rhetoric of John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address, critics claimed that in a troubled world Clinton's United States was willing to "pay only some prices, fight only some foes, and bear only some burdens in defense of freedom." It was all but admitting to potential adversaries that when the going got tough, the United States would go home.

Not surprisingly in view of these guidelines, the United States and the rest of the world looked the other way in 1994 when ethnic rivalries in Rwanda in central Africa produced what one observer called the "fastest, most efficient killing spree of the twentieth century." While the world did nothing, a revenge-bent Hutu tribe murdered an estimated 800,000 rival Tutsis, some of them with machetes. In a case where a relatively small intervention might have made a difference, the world chose to do nothing. Paralyzed by memories of Somalia and Haiti, the Clinton administration did not even discuss the possibility of intervention. As if to insulate themselves from guilt and responsibility, U.S. officials refused even to use what was called the "g-word," resorting instead to the euphemistic "acts of genocide" to describe what was happening. Their main concern was to get Americans out of Rwanda as quickly as possible.

The Clinton administration began to change course in the fall of 1994. After months of soul-searching, sanctions that hurt victims more than oppressors, and warnings that were ignored, it employed the threat of a full-scale invasion of Haiti to remove a brutal military dictatorship and restore to power the erratic—but elected—president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Clinton justified the move as necessary to "restore democracy" and, more pragmatically, to prevent a massive flight of Haitians to U.S. shores. To the shock of some observers, this time U.S. troops met a warm reception. After tense negotiations, the military government agreed to leave. The intervention did not bring democracy to Haiti or lead to a new policy toward humanitarian interventions, but it spared some suffering in that troubled land and helped burnish a badly damaged Clinton image.

After years of hesitation, the United States in the summer of 1995 finally made its weight felt in the former Yugoslavia. The Serb massacre of a Bosnian Muslim enclave in the village of Srebrenica, after three years of shelling with artillery, aroused anger throughout the world. In the United States, a new coalition of liberal and neo-conservative interventionists pushed for action. Humiliated by Somalia and Haiti, three years of inaction in the Balkans, and the blatant defiance of Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic, the president himself was moved to exclaim that "the United States cannot be a punching bag in the world any more." In August 1995, with full U.S. backing, NATO began intensive bombing of Serb positions using the most modern technology and eventually taking out Milosevic's communications center. This decisive action forced the warring parties to the conference table at Dayton, Ohio, where U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke brokered "an imperfect peace to a very imperfect part of the world after an unusually cruel war." Clinton followed by sending U.S. troops to participate in a Bosnian peacekeeping mission, to cover his political flanks by limiting the commitment to twelve months (subsequently extended).

Clinton was reelected by a substantial margin in 1996, but foreign policy played an insignificant role in the campaign, and the election victory did not bring a firmer hand to the foreign policy wheel. In the absence of any clear threat and with the nation more prosperous than at any time in the twentieth century, there was little incentive for engagement. The result on the part of the public was a form of apathetic internationalism. At one extreme, a band of highly nationalistic Republicans flaunted their contempt for the outside world, boasting of not having passports. Republican House of Representatives' leader Richard Armitage of Texas even claimed that he did not need to go to Europe because he had been there once. Network news increasingly focused on entertainment and trivia and further slashed its foreign coverage. After January 1998, moreover, Clinton was increasingly crippled when he first denied and then, faced with incontrovertible evidence, admitted an affair with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, prompting his foes in Congress to initiate impeachment proceedings.

While the administration was preoccupied with its own survival, the Balkans continued to seethe with violence. This time it was Kosovo, the most volatile part of a singularly explosive region, with its own long and bitter history of ethnic hatreds. Populated predominantly by Kosovar Albanians who were also Muslims, Kosovo was also viewed as sacred turf by Serbs. Left out of the Dayton discussions, it exploded in crisis shortly after. In 1997, Kosovars began to form a Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and launched guerrilla warfare against local Serbs. The Serbs struck back with a vengeance, burning villages and murdering those Kosovars they could get their hands on. At first, they moved slowly—"a village a day keeps NATO away" was their sardonic slogan. Their intent was nevertheless unmistakable, and the results were devastating. An especially bloody massacre at the village of Racak in late 1998 again provoked cries for international action.

Once more in early 1999, a reluctant United States was moved to do something. The Senate finally acquitted Clinton of impeachment charges in February 1999, freeing his hands. Still smarting from Vietnam and uneasy to get entangled in a Balkans' quagmire, the military stubbornly resisted calls for intervention. Within and outside the government, however, pressures mounted. Some advocates of intervention compared the Serbs' ethnic cleansing to the Holocaust. The new secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, who had grown up in pre-World War II Czechoslovakia and had labeled the United States the "indispensable nation," fervently warned of another Munich and ridiculed the military's caution. Why do you insist on having all those modern forces if you are unwilling to use them, she once asked Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Colin Powell. So important was her role that when war came it was called "Madeleine's War."

In March 1999, the administration finally went to war. If memories of World War II pushed the United States to do something, more recent memories of Vietnam dictated the way it would fight. Clinton hoped to replicate the Bosnian experience where a modest effort had forced Milosevic to the conference table. To assuage fears in Congress and among the European allies, the administration relied exclusively on air power. In what turned out to be a huge miscalculation, the president even publicly vowed: "I do not intend to put ground troops into Kosovo to fight a war."

As is usually the case, the war in Kosovo turned out to be much more complicated than expected. The air war was implemented gradually and the Serbs stubbornly resisted, evoking memories among some Americans of Vietnam. As the war dragged on, Clinton and the NATO allies drastically escalated the bombing. It was a new kind of high-tech war, virtual war, it seemed, fought by professional forces, waged largely by bombers from 50,000 feet, with no sacrifice required of the American people and no intrusion upon their lives. Using precision-guided weapons, U.S. aircraft attacked Serb airfields and ground forces and eventually the capital city of Belgrade itself, causing troops to mutiny and political opposition to form. To increase the pressure, Clinton reneged on his promise not to use ground forces, warning the Serbs that "all options are on the table." Milosevic conceded in June.

The conflict in Kosovo produced tragic unintended consequences. The always clever Milosevic exploited the onset of war to drive the Kosovars out of their country, inflicting a great deal more human suffering and creating a million new refugees. A war fought to minimize *Western* military losses resulted in the death of an estimated 10,000 people, many of them civilians. As the war ended, the KLA seized the opportunity to drive the remaining Serbs out of Kosovo, ensuring further conflict. The best that can be said is that the war resolved the immediate problem without providing a long-term solution. Ultimately, it led to the removal of Milosevic and his trial before an international tribunal of justice.

Like the war in Kosovo, the Clinton legacy in foreign affairs was mixed. The administration cooperated with Russia to reduce the huge nuclear inventories left over from the Cold War. It used U.S. influence with some short-term success to

settle long-standing disputes in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. It made peace with Vietnam by ending a trade embargo and opening diplomatic relations. A timely bailout loan helped avoid economic disaster in Mexico in 1997, and the United States acted decisively to contain an economic meltdown in Asia. It enlarged NATO to include some of the former Soviet Union's satellites in Eastern and Central Europe, a move that was both costly financially and unnecessarily antagonized Russia.

Clinton's administration was the first to deal systematically with the emerging threat posed by international terrorism, a sign of things to come. Activist First Lady Hillary Clinton traveled widely to promote the then radical notion that women's rights had a place on the international agenda. Although it never developed a clearcut doctrine for humanitarian interventions, the Clinton administration employed military forces eighty-four times in eight years.

The American mood in the aftermath of the Cold War was one of triumphalism and smug, insular complacency. In a 1998 poll, Americans did not list foreign policy among the nation's most serious problems. On college campuses, the teaching of foreign languages and area studies declined sharply. Support for foreign aid and the United Nations plummeted. Foreign policy played no more than a peripheral role in the 2000 presidential campaign. Self-indulgent Americans revelled in their prosperity, a minority of the world's population recklessly consuming a huge proportion of the world's resources.

Much would soon change. After a period of stumbling and uncertainty, the new Republican administration of George W. Bush would use the opportunity created by devastating September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States to effect the most revolutionary foreign policy changes since the Truman years.

Narrowly elevated to the presidency in a hotly contested election settled by a 5 to 4 vote of the Supreme Court, the younger Bush gave little hint in the campaign of what was to come. Compared to his internationalist father, his experience and mindset were notably parochial. A graduate of Yale University and the Harvard Business School, he had traveled little, worked mostly in business, and served only as governor of Texas. In the campaign, he distanced himself from the Wilsonian label he sought to pin on Clinton and on his electoral foe, Vice-President Al Gore, expressing skepticism about humanitarian interventions and disdain for nation-building. Bush sought to make up for his own lack of experience by naming a veteran foreign policy team. Appointment of the immensely popular Colin Powell as secretary of state, the first African-American to hold that position, cheered internationalists. But the real center of power rested with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice-President Dick Cheney. The two had worked closely since the Nixon years. Aggressive nationalists, they had been deeply disturbed by America's failure in Vietnam, the denouement of which they had witnessed first-hand from the Gerald Ford White House. They believed that the United States must maintain absolute military supremacy and use its power to vigorously promote its own interests, not permitting the scruples of allies or the niceties of diplomacy to stand in the way. Less noticed at the outset but equally

important was the presence in key second-level positions of Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, John Bolton, and other neo-conservatives, former liberals who fervently believed that the nation's preeminent power must be used to reshape the world in its own image.

In its first months, the administration took a decidedly unilateralist approach. It gave top priority to developing a missile defense system designed to make the United States invulnerable that also violated treaties with the former Soviet Union. Without any consultation, it withdrew from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on global warming and suspended talks aimed at stopping North Korea's development of long-range missiles. State Department spokesperson Richard Haass labeled the new approach "a la carte multilateralism," but critics at home and abroad denounced the administration's sometimes rude manners and go-it-alone approach as a new form of isolationism.

Early in the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen Arab terrorists operating under the orders of Saudi Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda organization hijacked four commercial airliners and used them as missiles to attack New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A third attack—presumably on the Capitol or White House—was aborted when a revolt of courageous passengers forced the crash landing of another airliner on Pennsylvania farmland. After two enormous explosions, Manhattan's landmark twin towers crumbled into a massive pile of rubble at what became known as Ground Zero. The attack caused major damage at the Pentagon. Almost three thousand people were killed.

Nine-eleven, as it came to be called, worked dramatic short-term changes in American life. For the first time since 1814, the continental United States had come under brutal attack, and in one fiery moment the intellectual and emotional baggage left from Vietnam seemed swept aside in a surge of fear and anger. An already sluggish economy descended into what economists finally admitted was a recession. Congress granted the president sweeping authorization to use U.S. military forces to combat terrorism, and through the so-called Patriot Act vastly expanded powers that would be used in ways that infringed on traditional civil liberties. The terrorist attacks worked a sea change in the mindset shaped by Vietnam and Watergate.

An administration that had appeared to be floundering suddenly found purpose and with broad popular support launched an all-out war against international terrorism. Seemingly confounding those who had dismissed him as a lightweight, Bush gave a powerful address before a joint session of Congress, rallying the nation behind the war. September 11 evoked an outpouring of sympathy and support from abroad. Under Powell's leadership, an administration that had only recently shunned multilateralism began cobbling together an unwieldy coalition composed of old allies such as Britain and France, former enemies like Russia and China, and pariah states such as Pakistan to attack in different ways and on a variety of fronts a new kind of non-state foe and its sources of support, hinting, mistakenly as it turned out, that the summer's unilateralism was a thing of the

past. The president's stark warning that "those who are not with us are against us" reflected more accurately the direction his administration would take.

The first phase of the war shocked many experts. The United States mobilized forces to strike at the immediate source of the threat, bin Laden's al Qaeda and the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban regime that sheltered them in Afghanistan. In the parlance of the old West, Bush vowed to bring back "the evil one" dead or alive. Applying on a much larger scale the new high-tech methods of warfare used in the Balkans, the United States eliminated in less than four months the despised and surprisingly weak Taliban and destroyed bin Laden's training camps. In December 2001, it installed a new interim government in Kabul headed by Hamid Karzai. Administration backers cheered the victory and sneered at those skeptics who had warned that the United States would get bogged down in Afghanistan as the Soviet Union had in the 1980s.

In fact, the United States made crucial errors that turned smashing tactical success into disastrous strategic failure. Understandably worried about prolonged fighting in Afghanistan and determined to convert the armed forces to a new form of warfare, Rumsfeld relied on air power and local proxies to do what might have required large numbers of U.S. troops. Bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar, along with numerous of their followers, paid off or eluded Afghan soldiers and escaped into the impenetrable mountains along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to continue the fight. In time, they mounted an insurgency that would threaten security in key parts of Afghanistan. Never enthusiastic about the job of reconstruction, the Bush administration undertook in Afghanistan what critics called "nation building lite," making inadequate preparations and providing insufficient funds for a huge task. Local warlords controlled large parts of the country. Opium recaptured its accustomed place as the nation's major cash crop. Afghanistan soon disappeared from the front pages. An administration that had vowed to kill or capture the "evil one" stopped using bin Laden's name in public statements.

While the war in Afghanistan lagged amidst claims of victory, the White House in September 2002 unveiled a radically new national security doctrine. Written at Bush's instruction in words the "boys in Lubbock (Texas)" could understand, the national security strategy paper used 9/11 and the war on terrorism to implement ideas conservatives and neo-conservatives had been tossing about for years. It reflected a born-again president's taste for moral absolutes. It manifested the influence of Wolfowitz and the neo-cons who wished to use American power to promote democracy abroad. It combined ringing affirmation of Wilsonian ideals with hard-nosed statements about the uses of American power. Admitting to only one "sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise," it vowed to "use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe." It insisted that the United States must maintain its military preeminence. It paid lip service to multilateralism, but made clear that the United States would "act apart when our interests and unique responsibility require." The nation could not wait until it had "absolute proof" of danger from

weapons of mass destruction. Threats must be stopped before they reached U.S. shores. The principles of military preeminence, unilateralism, and preemptive or even preventive war departed sharply from the ideas of containment and deterrence that had guided Cold War strategies. Praised by conservatives, what came to be called the Bush Doctrine was denounced by critics as striking a tone of arrogance worthy of the Roman Empire.

Even before it set forth the new doctrine, the administration had initiated plans to implement it through a war to force regime change in Iraq. Dictator Saddam Hussein had somehow survived the crushing defeat of 1991 and a decade of UN sanctions. Immediately after 9/11, U.S. officials strained to link him to something for which he had no responsibility. Once the Afghan war appeared won, Iraq immediately moved to center stage. Persuaded that Saddam was near getting weapons of mass destruction and might give them to terrorists, they decided by the summer of 2002 to go to war, without searching internal debate or close examination of alternatives.

"Why Iraq, why now?" was a question asked often in the days ahead, and it will likely be asked for years to come. The easy response, of course, was oil, but Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld appear to have been less worried about Iraqi oil for its own sake than about the threat that an Iraq armed with weapons of mass destruction might pose to an oil-rich region. Cheney and Rumsfeld saw an opportunity to complete the unfinished business of 1991, eliminate a perceived nuisance and potential threat, and put America's vast military might on full display. For the neo-cons, war satisfied deep philosophical convictions as well as immediate practical concerns. They believed that the United States had a moral duty to oppose tyranny, spread democracy, and impose a "benign hegemony" across the world. They had close ties to Israel, and felt that the overthrow of Saddam and democratization of Iraq would promote that ally's security. They fantasized that through a sort of reverse domino theory, democracy would extend from Iraq through the Middle East.

Advocates of war found a receptive audience in the White House. Toppling Saddam would permit the president to succeed where his father had failed in 1991 and would avenge the Iraqi dictator's 1993 attempt on his father's life. Bush combined the cowboy mentality of his native Texas with the missionary spirit of evangelical Christianity. Neither a deep thinker nor particularly curious, he abjured complexity—"I don't do nuance," he once snapped. He saw the world in terms of good and evil and passionately believed that he had been "called" to defend the United States and extend "God's gift of liberty" to "every human being in the world." In Bush's worldview, a war with Iraq would protect U.S. security, eliminate a force of evil, and expand freedom.

In a strange, almost surreal way, the Bush administration drove the nation toward its first preventive war with remarkably little debate. Exploiting still fresh memories of 9/11, it ran roughshod over all opposition. Employing evidence that turned out to be exaggerated or just plain wrong, it constantly reiterated ominous warnings that Saddam had or soon would have weapons of mass destruction

and would share them with terrorists. In the oft-quoted words of national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud." Divided among themselves, nervous about dissenting in wartime, and with mid term elections approaching, Democrats failed to muster effective opposition. Even as U.S. troops poured into the Persian Gulf region, Congress in October 2002 overwhelmingly passed a resolution authorizing the president to "use the armed forces of the United States as he determines necessary and appropriate...against the continuing threat posed by Iraq."

The United States failed to muster support abroad. Powell persuaded a reluctant White House to take the issue to the United Nations, but among leading nations only Britain went along. France and Germany actively opposed the United States. After months of decidedly undiplomatic bullying and a much ballyhooed Powell speech at the United Nations failed to produce a UN resolution endorsing military action, the administration plunged ahead on its own. Gathering a ramshackle "coalition of the willing" composed of Britain and twenty-five smaller nations, most of whom provided token contingents in exchange for handsome inducements, the Bush administration in March 2003 launched Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Much like Afghanistan, the war against Iraq was a huge, short-term success, an enormously costly long-term disaster. A massive "shock and awe" bombing campaign knocked out Iraqi communications and destroyed crucial military installations at the outset. In one of the most rapid military advances in history, U.S. forces drove from Kuwait to Baghdad in less than three weeks. Although Saddam remained at large, the toppling of his statue in Baghdad on April 11 symbolized the fall of his regime. The United States suffered only 109 casualties in this phase of the war. On May 10, a jubilant Bush landed in full flight regalia on the deck of the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* in San Diego Bay. Standing below a huge banner proclaiming "Mission Accomplished," the commander-in-chief hailed the success of his troops.

Within a very short time, the excitement of victory turned into haunting fears of a Vietnam-like quagmire. Largely because of decisions made by Rumsfeld, the coalition had ample forces to win the war, but not enough to secure the peace. In an act of remarkable fecklessness, the Defense Department made few preparations for the postwar period and rejected plans devised by other agencies. The result was an eruption of lawlessness, violence, and looting, including the theft or destruction of priceless artifacts from the national museum. Rumsfeld's flippancy remarks that "stuff happens" and freedom was "messy" seemed to underscore the administrator's callousness. Top officials had foolishly predicted that Americans would be welcomed as liberators, but the lawlessness and the inability of the victors to put a shattered infrastructure back together increased the rage. Anarchy quickly evolved into violent and sustained guerrilla opposition to what most Iraqis came to view as a foreign occupation.

In the years that followed, the insurgency grew in strength and the war dragged on.

Patched together after World War I by British imperial planners, a country in name only, Iraq had a long history of religious and tribal conflict. Sunni Muslim followers of Saddam were joined in opposition to the United States by some Shites and also by al Qaeda and other militants who poured into Iraq as the insurgency took hold. What was supposed to be a bastion of democracy became a training ground for terrorists. Using car bombs and improvised explosive devices with lethal effectiveness, they took a growing toll on U.S. and coalition troops as well as Iraqi security forces hastily pressed into service and helpless Iraqi civilians. In 2004, the U.S. occupation authority turned governance over to the Iraqis and a fragile government was formed, but it was riddled with corruption and could not bring a divided nation together. After 2006, the insurgency was joined by a full-scale civil war between Sunnis and Shites.

As the fighting continued and the costs escalated, Americans increasingly soured on the war. U.S. forces found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, cutting the legs from beneath the administration's case for war. In the meantime, critics picked apart other evidence used to justify the nation's first preventive conflict. U.S. spokespersons now insisted that the deposition of Saddam had removed a bloody tyrant and made the world safer. But abuse of captives at Abu Ghraib prison by U.S. guards and the detention of other prisoners without trial raised questions about American claims to a higher morality. By 2007, six in ten Americans believed that the nation should have stayed out of Iraq. Only 23 percent approved Bush's handling of the war.

In the last years of his presidency, Bush changed course in Iraq with modest results. Following Democratic victories in the mid term elections of 2006, he replaced Rumsfeld with the more pragmatic Robert Gates. Flatly rejecting demands for withdrawal, he approved a "surge" that sent 35,000 additional troops to Iraq, along with the belated implementation of a counterinsurgency strategy. The new strategy, along with the defection of large numbers of Sunnis from the insurgency, helped to stabilize Iraq at least temporarily and quiet critics at home, but the situation remained precarious, the future anything but certain.

Meantime, the conflict in Afghanistan fattered. With the shift of emphasis to Iraq, Afghanistan had become a neglected if not forgotten war. Only 40,000 NATO and U.S. troops remained to uphold order and help with reconstruction. Karzai's government was among the most corrupt in the world. Its writ barely extended beyond Kabul. In many areas, warlords held power. More ominously, a revived and reinigorated Taliban, funded partly by the lucrative opium trade, moved from sanctuaries in Pakistan into Afghanistan's southern provinces, exploiting rising popular disaffection with the central government. The insurgents were not able to take the larger towns, but they mounted widening attacks, even in the capital. The war was by no means lost, but an opportunity to stabilize an important country seemed to have been squandered.

The Bush legacy in foreign policy could not escape the burdens of Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly four thousand Americans had been killed in Iraq by early 2008. Thousands more whose lives were spared by modern medicine suffered

lasting physical wounds and severe psychological trauma. The two wars strained the U.S. armed forces to the limit, testing the viability of the volunteer army system. Their financial costs were staggering, an estimated \$800 billion as of 2008. The addition of postwar health costs for veterans was calculated to raise the long-term price tag as high as \$3 trillion. In the last years of his second term, Bush and Powell's replacement, Condoleezza Rice, toned down U.S. rhetoric, attempted to repair relations with major allies, and sought to address long-festering world problems such as the Arab-Israeli peace process. Little was accomplished, however, and the harsh reality was that the United States of 2008 bore little resemblance to the global behemoth of the millennial year. A banking crisis in Bush's last months triggered the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It is supremely ironic that an administration bent on maintaining U.S. preeminence and using it to impose American values squandered the nation's world position by its arrogant unilateralism, its reckless misuse of United States' power, and the betrayal of its own ideals. Among the punditry, talk of a unipolar moment gave way to speculation about a nation in decline.

Bush's successor, Democrat Barack Hussein Obama, brought to the presidency a very different background and approach. Born in Hāwāii to a Kenyan father and an American mother, the Illinois senator spent part of his youth in Indonesia. His biracial and multi-continental biography gave him empathy with other peoples and cultures, and the election of an African American won for the United States widespread praise throughout the world. Obama spoke the language of American idealism and on occasion seemed to endorse the concept of American exceptionalism. But he was also a disciple of the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr who had acknowledged that evil would always exist in the world and warned of the limits of America's power to eradicate it. Obama vowed to "break free from the ideologies of an earlier era." His background bespoke sensitivity, compromise, and a pragmatic approach to problem solving. His appointment to the post of secretary of state of his bitter rival for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, and his retention of veteran Republican national security operative, Robert Gates, as secretary of defense, signified his tendency toward compromise and reconciliation.

In office, Obama set out to change U.S. foreign policy in style and substance. While reserving the right to act alone if necessary, he vowed to replace the unilateralism of the Bush years with a civil tone and by working closely with traditional allies and rising powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China to address the world's problems. He abandoned the Bush commitment to spreading democracy, and, evoking John Quincy Adams in the nineteenth century, spoke of rebuilding the United States as an example to the world. He publicly admitted that the United States had made mistakes in the past and conceded that other countries had legitimate interests that must be taken into account while also urging other nations to abandon their "reflexive anti-Americanism." To the dismay of hard-line critics, he offered the possibility of engagement to enemy states like Iran and North Korea, insisting that it "strengthens our hand to reach out to our enemies." He was even

photographed shaking the hand of the notorious Yankee-baiter Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. In a much publicized and widely applauded speech in Cairo, he offered rapprochement with Islam. He proposed a "reset" in the strained relations with Russia in an effort to reduce the arsenals of the world's two leading nuclear powers. His conciliatory demeanor and worldly view won him the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009, an award he himself admitted he had not earned through tangible accomplishments. Typical of his approach, in his acceptance speech he took a Niebuhrian line by affirming that while seeking peace the United States would also respond forcibly to threats to its vital interests.

On key national security issues, Obama sought a pragmatic and distinctly nuanced path. He continued to assign a high priority to the war against terrorism, but also emphasized the importance of such matters as climate change and the economy. He made clear that the United States was not at war with Islam but rather with extremist groups such as al Qaeda and the Taliban. He sought to balance military needs with the preservation of American values by ending torture and the harshest modes of interrogation. But he also employed Predator drones relentlessly—and effectively—against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A critic of the war in Iraq since its inception, he had promised during the campaign to get American combat forces out as quickly as possible and he did so in the summer of 2010, while leaving 35,000 troops to train Iraqi security forces. He had also pledged to fight what he called the "necessary war" in Afghanistan more vigorously and effectively. After an intensive and extended 2009 policy review that provoked nasty bureaucratic infighting and exposed serious civil-military tensions, he escalated the war by sending 30,000 additional troops—about half of what the military requested—and authorized the implementation of a counterinsurgency strategy to disrupt the enemy and win over the people. He also pointed toward the earliest possible exit from Afghanistan.

It was too soon midway through Obama's first term to evaluate with any precision his foreign policy achievements. During 2009 and much of 2010, the Great Recession dominated policymaking and politics. Obama also set an ambitious domestic agenda, and the passage of an economic stimulus package, landmark—and highly contentious—health care legislation, and a financial reform bill consumed much of his first year. An eloquent speechmaker with a keen, analytical mind, he sometimes appeared disengaged and unable to explain his policies in terms that resonated with people. He did get U.S. combat forces out of Iraq, but it remained highly uncertain whether the still shaky Iraqi government could stand up by itself or reconcile the bitter conflicts among the diverse peoples that made up the nation. The United States and NATO launched a major counterinsurgency program in Afghanistan and appeared to score some early gains. But the corrupt and incompetent Karzai government, the safe havens enjoyed by the Taliban and al Qaeda in Pakistan, and the stubborn persistence of the insurgency rendered success at best difficult. Iran and North Korea resisted offers of engagement and sanctions alike. By late 2010, Obama's efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace discussions appeared to have broken down. What the president himself labeled

a “shellacking” in the midterm elections weakened his hands in both domestic and foreign policy. The administration did, however, negotiate with Russia and secure Senate approval of an important new START treaty calling for major reductions in nuclear arsenals. The killing of Osama bin Laden in early May 2011 by CIA operatives and Navy Seals in a daring raid on his hideout in Pakistan settled an old score and gave Americans cause for some celebration. Al Qaeda remained intact, however, and the impact of bin Laden’s death on future terrorist activities remained uncertain.

Conservative critics blamed Obama’s alleged lack of toughness for his limited foreign policy success, but the causes ran much deeper. Even at the pinnacle of their strength, superpowers cannot always bend weaker nations to their will, and America by 2011 was a weakened superpower. In part this was self-inflicted. By launching a war of choice against Iraq and waging it with singular incompetence, the Bush administration contributed decisively to America’s decline from its turn-of-the-century preeminence. The United States remained the world’s leading military power, but its military was drastically weakened by Iraq and Afghanistan, and in any event the relevance of military power for dealing with many pressing international issues was open to question. The reckless speculation and banking fraud that set off the Great Recession cost America its economic preeminence and raised questions worldwide whether an unregulated free market was the best economic model. After a decade of debacles, the United States no longer led the world in most areas. Its deteriorating educational system, crumbling infrastructure, growing gap between rich and poor, soaring debt, and addiction to oil loomed as huge problems to be addressed. But a dysfunctional political system and seemingly unbreakable gridlock left questions of whether anything could be done.

Dramatic changes in the international system also contributed to America’s relative decline. While the United States was bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan, China and the European Union emerged as major economic competitors. Russia, India, Brazil and the Arab oil states developed into important second-tier powers. In terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the National Intelligence Council observed as early as 2002, “the global shift now underway—roughly from West to East—is without parallel in modern history.” Ironically, the process of globalization that the United States has pushed so vigorously has also contributed to the erosion of its power. The emergence of global markets has helped to erode America’s self-sufficiency. The integrated world of the twenty-first century has made the United States more reliant on and vulnerable to global economic forces while reducing its ability to shape events abroad.