

Soaring Eagle:

Prestige and American Empire, 1998-2003

by

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Abstract

What are the causes of the foreign policy of imperial expansion the US pursued between 1998 and 2003?

Even though since the 1890s the US has exercised continuously an informal empire— by empire meaning an indirect influence over several polities— it is foremost the 1998-2003 interval that brought the problematique of American empire to the limelight. The reason is that the US foreign policy in this interval is distinctive by its emphasis on unilateralism and use of force compared to previous instances of American expansion as well as to its political line in the early 1990s. Hence, the thesis conducts an inquiry into the reasons for this transformation in American foreign policy. By contrast to the existing literature on American foreign policy, which traces this imperial policy to America's superiority in relative power capabilities, to its ideological penchant for democratic principles, and to its interest in an open global economy, the thesis argues for an alternative hypothesis in terms of prestige-seeking on the part of the US. Despite its advantage in capabilities, the US found itself constantly unable to translate its preferences into successful outcomes in the 1990s. This discrepancy eventually created the conditions for status inconsistency, i.e. the gap between the social ranks an actor occupies in multiple social hierarchies. An actor experiencing status inconsistency will attempt to balance ranks so as to achieve eventual superiority under all categories. In world politics, prestige is a function of social ranking or status, which is itself conferred according to three dimensions: military capabilities, economic capabilities, and political performance—the ability of successfully translating one's preferences into successful outcomes. It in this latter respect that the US felt it was particularly deficient in the aftermath of the Cold War in instances such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, considering its sizable advantage over other states in military and economic capabilities.

Thus the need to conserve and enhance American prestige to match America's pretensions of being the world leader gradually led in the 1990s to an increasingly aggressive imperial policy. The result was a conscious strategy of expanding America's influence either in terms of scope or domain. Accordingly, the thesis examines in detail how the pursuit of prestige affected American foreign policy in the contexts of rejection of the ABM and the ICC treaties, the use of force without a UN Security Council authorization the bombing of Yugoslavia over Kosovo, and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The thesis concludes that prestige represents a significant and enduring influence over states' foreign policy conduct due to status inconsistency. Furthermore, the recent American policy of imperial expansion from 1998 to 2003 under the presidencies of Clinton and George W. Bush is likely to be a harbinger of things to follow, because the circumstances favoring status inconsistency and the consequent policy of prestige are still present. Finally, since prestige is a positional good, in high demand but limited supply, America's quest for additional prestige can only be realized at the expense of other states, which encourages conflict rather than cooperation between the US and the other great powers.

Acknowledgements

As the saying (and NASA's motto) goes, "per asperam, astringam": through hardships toward the stars. This is particularly appropriate for the process of thesis writing—occasionally rewarding, often bordering on painful, and almost always laborious: the equivalent of an intellectual marathon testing not only the skill and the knowledge, but also, and perhaps much more so the stamina, patience, and motivation of the student so bold, as in my case, as to undertake it without an inkling of the length or difficulty of the road ahead. Yet one is not alone in running the demanding race and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals who helped me edge towards the finish line. Let me first extend to all of you a very warm multumesc—thank you.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Awareness of America's role in the world came to Captain John Prior as his company was searching a Fedayeen suspect house in Baghdad and interrogating at gun-point the target's relatives: "we're on top... Rome fell, and Greece fell, and I thought: I like being an American. I like being on top and you don't stay on top unless there's [sic] people willing to defend it... And I thought: I don't want this to happen to me or my family, and we need to maintain superiority as the number one superpower."¹ Captain Prior's formula has the distinct merit of encapsulating at once several apparently disparate, yet relevant elements of the *problématique* of empire: the tangible reality of America's preponderant power, the cyclical rise and fall of great powers throughout history, the fear of humiliation at the hands of rival states, the pride of serving the currently most influential country in the world, and the necessity of acting forcefully in order to maintain this lofty position. All these notions are fully compatible with a growing view among students of American foreign policy: that increasingly throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s the US has behaved in an imperial manner.

Accordingly, the main question this doctoral thesis sets out to answer concerns *the causes behind America's strategy of empire in the 1998-2003 timeframe*. Between 1998 and 2008, if one were to count as a barometer only the frequency of book reviews in *Foreign Affairs*, more than thirty tomes were published on the topic of empire.² Most

¹ George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 231.

² See inter alia Amy Chua, *Day of Empire: Why Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—And Why They Fall* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Christopher Layne and Bradley

such studies are undertaken in direct reference to either the existence of an American empire or to an alleged US effort to achieve imperial dominion. The current lionization of American empire may bring to memory the coming and going in the 1960s and 1970s of the theory of American empire developed by New Left scholars in the context of the Vietnam War.³ However, this time around, empire may not be a passing fad, given the diversity of intellectual background of the scholars employing it. American empire has become a mainstream concept in the study of International Relations, though an on-going debate still grips the field on whether America constitutes an actual empire.

However, the question to ask is not whether there *is* such a thing as an American empire, but whether conceiving America as an empire is of any practical utility for the purpose of analyzing contemporary US foreign policy.⁴ The answer this thesis advances is in the affirmative, since the assumption of an American empire helps make sense of the ubiquitous nature of the present American influence in world politics as well as of the reactions of accommodation or opposition the US engenders in other states. Though analysts frequently focus on the sizable surpluses America enjoys in military and economic assets relative to other great powers, these advantages by themselves do not produce an accurate depiction of the extent of America's current preponderant role in the

Thayer, *American Empire: A Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Josef Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004); Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Penguin Books, Canada, 2003); Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001); Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of America's Empire* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000).

³ Robert Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, Washington Centre of Foreign Policy Research: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 146-7, 153-6.

⁴ Michael Cox, "Empire, Imperialism, and the Bush Doctrine," *Review of International Studies* 30 (October 2004): 585-60, 587, 591.

world. After all, America might still conserve its supremacy in terms of resources while embracing a strategy of minimal contact with the overseas world. In other words, America might be a *great power* without actively putting to use or only by employing sparingly the capabilities at its disposal.⁵ By contrast, the concept of *empire* has the merit of conveying the exercise of unequal power relations, since an empire necessarily supposes subjects over whom influence is being exerted. The questions suggested by empire therefore go beyond establishing the amount of resources a state possesses, by raising the problems of how and why the state in question has come to acquire influence over other polities, how this influence is being maintained, and why and in what ways it is resisted.⁶ Thus, it is *the actual exercise of American influence* that constitutes the central feature of current world politics.

For International Relations scholars it has become quasi-impossible to study any major issue of international concern without devoting substantial attention to the position the US is likely to adopt on the matter. America's influence is so far-reaching that even Washington's decisions not to act are bound to have profound consequences on the rest of the international system. To quote Liska: "the salience of an imperial state consists in the fact that no other state can ignore it and that all other states—consciously or half-consciously, gladly or reluctantly—assess their position, role, and prospects more in

⁵ See for a discussion on whether the concept of empire should be substituted to the one of great power Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "The Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots," *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 319-30, 321; Eliot Cohen, "History and the Hyperpower," *Foreign Affairs* 83 (July/ August 2004): 49-63; Dimitri Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (November/ December 2003): 91-100; Daniel Nexon, "What's This Then? 'Romanes Eunt Domus?'" *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 300-8.

⁶ See on this distinction Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* 4th edn. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1984), 20-3. As Dahl writes, "when we simply define influence or power as equivalent to resources... we ignore an important empirical problem—whether and how the relation of influence is to be explained by the way in which one of the actors in the relationship uses resources... We assert a relationship, but we do not investigate it, let alone try to demonstrate it."

relation to it than to closer neighbors or to local conflicts.”⁷ In this sense, for better or for worse, American empire is really the order of the day.

However, this is not the same as saying the American empire is of recent date. In fact, as the thesis will argue in Chapter Three, the origins of America’s empire may be traced as far back as the Spanish-American war of 1898.⁸ Nevertheless, it was the latest American effort at imperial expansion from 1998 to 2003 that contributed the most to bringing the subject of empire into the limelight. In effect, the rise in popularity of the concept of American empire coincides with a series of American policies aimed at gaining additional influence abroad whether in terms of scope or of geographic domain.⁹ These included the bombing of Iraq and Yugoslavia in 1998 and 1999 without a UN Security Council sanction, the rejection of treaties such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty between 1998 and 2001, and the invasion of Iraq in spring 2003. Before these developments, though the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had left the US the world’s single surviving superpower, there was a relative dearth of academic and public attention accorded to the subject of American empire. By contrast, from December 2002 to May 2003, in the months preceding and following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the phrase American empire was mentioned in news stories almost 1,000 times. Kohut and Stokes thus argue that the number of

⁷ George Liska, *Imperial America: The International Politics of Primacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 9-10.

⁸ Stephen Peter Rosen, “An Empire If You Can Keep It,” *National Interest* 71 (Spring 2003): 51-62, 52; David Lake, “The New American Empire?” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 281-9.

⁹ Folker, “Emperor Wore Cowboy Boots,” 320-1; Lake, “New American Empire?” 287.

mentions of American empire in the news and wire doubled after 1999 and reached three times the 1993 level by the time of the invasion of Iraq.¹⁰

Furthermore, the policies mentioned are often regarded as the prime culprit for the increase in anti-Americanism around the world. By implication, the main fault for the anger and discontent the US has generated lies less with America's political and cultural values, and more with America's expansionist actions on the international stage.¹¹ By 2003, the US was being routinely denounced by other powers' leaders as the *hyperpuissance* of world politics and its public global image, as Kohut and Stokes suggest, had plummeted in polls even among allies.¹² In fact, starting in 1999, the positive ratings of the US had declined worldwide, attaining alarming proportions after the invasion of Iraq. In 2003, majorities in fifteen European Union countries went so far as to identify the US as the principal cause of world instability, ahead of the alleged "axis of evil" trio of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Similarly, in 2006, a Pew poll conducted in 15 countries found that more people around the world worried about America's power than about Iran's nuclear program.¹³

Basically, the US has controlled an overseas empire for at least a hundred years, time in which this dominion expanded several times. Yet, it is the latest round of American imperial expansion from 1998 to 2003 that has particular significance. Not

¹⁰ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "American Empire Not 'If' But 'What Kind'," *New York Times*, May 10, 2003; Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes, *America against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 10-1.

¹¹ Stanley Hoffmann, "Sheriff and Missionary," in Andrew Bacevich, ed., *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of the American Empire* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2003), 172-82, 176-81; Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, "Varieties of Anti-Americanism: A Framework for Analysis," in Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9-38; Kohut and Stokes, *America Against the World*, 36-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25-8; Joffe, *Überpower*, 56-7, 62-3.

¹³ Carroll Doherty, the associate director of the Pew Center, the organism that conducted the poll argued that "it's all [because] of Iraq." See Ewen MacAskill, "US Seen as a Bigger Threat to Peace than Iran, Worldwide Poll Suggests," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2006.

only were commentators and the public at large alerted to the fact the US resorted to the same sort of policies employed by empires throughout history, but also previously acquiescent international partners took measures to show their disapproval of America's new imperial endeavors. Even scholars who otherwise show skepticism about the idea of an American empire begrudgingly concede America's conduct of an imperialist foreign policy in the timeframe specified—so in their view the US may not have been an empire, but on the other hand, it did attempt recently to become one.¹⁴

What is it that makes the years from 1998 to 2003 remarkable by comparison with previous instances of expansion? One insightful answer is that the period's special relevance derives from the fact that “the real debate is not whether to have an empire, but what kind. Should America pursue a go-it alone strategy as it did in 1910, when the US exerted its power largely at the point of the bayonet and ignored the views of others? Or should it be the empire of 1950, when Washington embedded American power in multilateral institutions that reflected American interests but also constrained its freedom of action?”¹⁵ Indeed, from 1998 to 2003, America experimented with a peculiarly unilateral and aggressive approach to empire, which, moreover, meant a substantial change in strategy. Actually, after the end of the Cold War and up to 1998, the US followed a foreign policy emphasizing the importance of restraint and multilateralism, guided by such concepts as the new world order, assertive multilateralism, engagement, and cooperative security. By contrast, by 1998, the US came to define its international

¹⁴ Alexander Motyl, “Empire Falls,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (July/ August 2006): 190-4; Lake, “New American Empire?” 286; Hendrik Spruyt, “‘American Empire’ as an Analytical Question or a Rhetorical Move?” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 290-9, 291-2; Richard Saull, “Empire, Imperialism, and Contemporary American Power,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 309-18, 310-1; Bruce Cumings, “Is America an Imperial Power?” *Current History* 102 (November 2003): 355-60.

¹⁵ Quoted in Daalder and Lindsay, “American Empire”; also see Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower,” 62-3; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

position as the indispensable nation or as the global lone sheriff, insisting on the importance of providing the world with decisive leadership, if need be by acting with minimal international support. This new orientation resulted in increasingly unilateral and forceful policies meant to expand America's imperial authority. Hence, there is a legitimate reason to pursue an inquiry into the puzzle of what brought about this change.

The available accounts in the literature on American foreign policy belong as a rule to one of three schools of thought: structuralism, exceptionalism, and revisionism:

- Structuralism argues that the US cannot help but seek additional power—this strategy being compulsive for any state that has reached, as the US has, an unrivalled level of power capabilities vis-à-vis the other great powers in the international system.
- For exceptionalism, the US seeks to increase its influence chiefly in order to spread to other shores its cherished political values—democracy, freedom, and unrestricted economic opportunity.
- For revisionism, the question to be asked is really “cui bono?” or “who stands to profit” from expansion? The culprits are then unmistakably found in the ranks of US socio-economic interest groups.

To sum up, for structuralism, America expands as a consequence of its power; for exceptionalism, it does so in order to promote political values; for revisionism, this outgoing strategy serves the interests of particular groups in the American society.

In contrast to the above three schools of thought, this doctoral thesis proposes an alternative explanation for America's imperial action by examining America's preoccupation with its prestige. Prestige refers to the amount of deference that America

requires from other states in the system on account as the de facto international leader. Hence, by acting decisively abroad in the contexts mentioned, the US sought to protect and enhance further the prestige of a resolute American world leadership, which could not be defied or contradicted with impunity by either foe or ally. Furthermore, this thesis hypothesizes that America's imperial expansion has been the result of status inconsistency, a condition in which a given social actor experiences disequilibrium in the rankings it simultaneously holds across multiple social dimensions conferring prestige.¹⁶ For instance, prestige is conferred in a given society on the basis of income, education, occupation, age, etc., which in turn implies that a social actor may at the same time rank high under one of these dimensions, but low under other criteria. Accordingly, the actor in question will seek to balance ranks in its favor, by achieving a comparable high standing under all dimensions. However, if such efforts are thwarted by the existing social order, the actor is likely to seek to induce radical political change in the social system.¹⁷ At the international level, the multiple dimensions that confer prestige may be though to consist of possession of formidable military and economic capabilities, but also of political performance—that is in the ability of a state to translate its preferences into successful political outcomes. Essentially, US decision-makers came to the conclusion in the late 1990s that America was deficient in this latter respect.

¹⁶ Prestige is not the same thing as status but the two notions are tied in the sense that prestige is conferred upon an actor according to its social status or ranking. Barry O'Neill, *Honour, Symbols, and War* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999), 193-4; J. H. Barkow, *Darwin, Sex, and Status* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 203-4; Henry Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in William Austin and Stephen Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1979), 33-48, 37.

¹⁷ On status inconsistency in International Relations see Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Aggression," *Journal of Peace Research* 1, 2, (1964): 95-119; Michael Wallace, *War and Rank among Nations* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1970), chaps. 1-2; Manus Midlarsky, *On War: Political Violence in the International System* (New York: Free Press, 1975), chaps. 5- 6; William Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61 (January 2009): 28-57.

At first, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US registered an unprecedented success in assembling and keeping in being a worldwide coalition against Saddam Hussein's attempt to seize Kuwait and in managing to evict the Iraqi forces from the occupied emirate with astonishingly few casualties. Nevertheless, success proved inebriating as the US fell prey to three mistaken beliefs: that the US-imposed order would face little resistance, that where the US chose to lead other states would follow; and that for most practical purposes military force had come to be superseded by economic considerations in the dawning age of globalization. But as the decade progressed, these illusions simply could not be entertained any longer. Not only did the world repeatedly frustrate American expectations that it was about turn into a more peaceful place, through continual turmoil in areas such as Somalia, Bosnia, North Korea, Haiti, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Iraq, but also, as the US soon found, it could not rely on the full-hearted support of other states for its political initiatives. As a result, by the late 1990s, despite its sizable military, economic and arguably soft power superiority, US authority was frequently successfully flouted by much weaker international actors, such as Belgrade and Baghdad. This record of ambiguous international achievements in turn cast doubt on America's vaunted image as an effective international leader.

The consequence of this mounting American dissatisfaction was the launching in the late 1990s of a policy aimed at defending and augmenting prestige. The US sought to make an example of Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic by conducting large scale military operations without the seal of approval of the UN Security Council. America also claimed special treatment in the contexts of the negotiations over the ICC and the ABM treaty. When the American demands for peculiar privileges and exemptions were

rejected by the other sides involved, the US abandoned participation in the respective institutional frameworks. Finally, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the US needed to demonstrate to the world its persistent steadfastness. Iraq provided the most suitable ground for mounting such a demonstration of strength.

The importance of this doctoral thesis to the field of International Relations is twofold, both in terms of theoretical implications, and of policy-relevance. First, the thesis makes an original contribution to the growing body of literature on empire, by focusing on the topic of variables that cause states to increase their influence abroad. The question of why and how expansion occurs is one of the oldest topics of investigation in International Relations theory ever since Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War. According to Thucydides, "three very powerful motives" explain the pursuit of empire: "security, honour, and self-interest" (*deos*, *timē*, and *ophelia*, respectively).¹⁸ In this respect, as Gilpin foresaw, things have changed very little since Thucydides' day: states still seek empire out of fear, gain, or honour.¹⁹ But while a plethora of studies exist on the links between the pursuit of security and profit and empire, a dearth of research persists on the way honour or prestige might affect a state's expansion.²⁰ This doctoral thesis bridges this gap by drawing attention to the significance of prestige in causing states to

¹⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) Rex Warner trans., I.76, 80; Michael Doyle, *Empires*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 60-4, 125-6; Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 2; Steven Forde, "International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism," *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995): 141-60, 147-51.

¹⁹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 227.

²⁰ There are a few notable exceptions to this trend, but so far no systematic discussion. Münkler, *Empires*, 29-34; Elliott Abrams, ed., *Honour Among Nations: Intangible Interest and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1997); Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, chap. 3.

expand. Thus, prestige is shown as an enduring concern of states, which frequently comes to dominate the foreign policy agenda as the prevailing national interest.²¹

Second, by contrast with the existing schools of thought, this thesis interprets recent American foreign policy in terms of prestige. Why should it matter which variable affects America's decisions to expand? This is not trivial since, despite not being omnipotent, the US presently constitutes the most powerful international actor from the point of view of capabilities, hence the goals it seeks to attain have become subjects of unanimous interest (and possibly of some anxiety) for academics and policy-makers alike. This is why an investigation into the causes of America's imperial drive sheds light on whether America's recent expansion represents a correctible anomaly, or a harbinger of things to come, a debate point with crucial consequences for the future of peace.

What Is the American Empire?

Empire is defined as a *vertical pattern of determining international political influence exercised by a centre over multiple peripheral polities*.²² The definition of influence is borrowed in turn from Dahl: influence exists between two political actors

²¹ See inter alia Deborah Larson and Alexander Shevchenko, "Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Organization* 57 (Winter 2003): 77-109; William Wohlforth, "Honour as Interest in Russia's Decisions for War, 1000-1995," in Abrams, ed., *Honour Among Nations*, 21-44; Balder Raj Nayar and T. V. Paul, *India in the World Order: Searching for Major World Power Status* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²² For Doyle, empire is "a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society." Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 45. For Rosen, empire is "the rule exercised by one nation over others both to regulate their external behavior and to ensure minimally acceptable forms of internal behavior." Rosen, "Empire," 51. For Maier, empire represents "a territorially extensive structure of rule that usually subordinates diverse ethnolinguistic groups or would-be nations and reserves preponderant power for an executive authority and the elites with whom this power is shared." Maier, *Among Empires*, 31. For Howe, empire is "a large composite, multi-ethnic or multinational political unit, usually created by conquest, and divided between a dominant centre and a subordinate, sometimes far distant peripheries." See Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

when one changes the other's actions or predispositions in some way.²³ This is to say that empires exert influence in a top-down manner—they influence other polities substantially more than they are influenced by them. This characteristic helps set apart empires from multinational polities such as federations or confederations. In the latter cases, the power relation between center and periphery is horizontal; either power rests with the component states as in confederations, or power is shared between center and periphery as in federations. Hence, in confederations and federations there is no sizable disproportion in the amount of influence exerted by center (or metropole) and periphery respectively. By contrast, in the case of empires, determinant influence resides in the center. Occasionally, this trait is described as the model of a hub with multiple spokes—in which the various peripheral actors only interact with each other via the core.²⁴

Empires also exhibit another trait, which distinguishes them from mere nation-states: a multinational and multicultural foundation.²⁵ One does not have a case of empire unless the influence of the state under scrutiny is exercised in more than a single instance, otherwise any powerful state that extends its influence over its immediate neighbor could claim to be an empire, which is an occurrence far too frequent to be significant.²⁶ However, the behavior of a polity that pursues expansion on many fronts represents a distinctly imperial pattern of action, which cannot be attributed to exceptional conditions.

²³ Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 23; Doyle, *Empires*, 34-5.

²⁴ Alexander Motyl, "Is Everything Empire? Is Empire Everything?" *Comparative Politics* 39 (January 2006): 229-49; Yale Ferguson, "Approaches to Defining 'Empire' and Characterizing United States Influence in the Contemporary World," *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (August 2008): 272-80, 275; Spruyt, "'American Empire,'" 293.

²⁵ Maurice Duverger, "Le concept d'empire," Maurice Duverger, ed., *Le concept d'empire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), 10-1.

²⁶ See on the difference between empire and powerful state Rosen, "Empire If You Can Keep It," 51-2; Howe, *Empire*, 14-5, 18. Also see Aron who argues that every great power tends toward empire. Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic: The United States and the World, 1945-1973* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 256-7.

Even though most of the existing two hundred-odd nation-states are actually multinational, containing several nations and cultures inside their borders, with only a handful of exceptions such as Norway or Japan, it is very rare that ethnic groups within nation-states are extended open recognition as fully fledged nations. Instead, they are referred to as minorities or ethnic groups, terms that convey subordination to a majoritarian national body. By contrast, empires do not bother with such fine distinctions: they are candidly multinational and multicultural.²⁷ Empires do not claim the fiction that they represent a monolithic nation, i.e., a unitary community based on identical genetic descent. Of course, in case such an effort at homogenization were to be made and succeed, the budding empire would become a standard nation-state, as happened in the “national unification” of Germany or of Italy in the nineteenth century. To quote Spruyt, very often “today’s nation is yesterday’s empire that has successfully covered its own tracks.”²⁸ Yet not all empires are interested in undergoing such a transition. This is why it could be argued that the essential distinction between nation-state and empire consists in the latter’s full acceptance of the diversity of its ethnic and cultural background.²⁹

The above definition of empire encompasses formal and informal empire. The difference between the two is that in the case of formal empire the center holds direct administrative control over the periphery. Conversely, in an informal empire the periphery is administered by local elites rather than by central representatives.³⁰ Of course, in formal empires, the sovereignty of peripheral entities is non-existent—they

²⁷ Howe, *Empire*, 14-5, 52.

²⁸ Spruyt, “American Empire,” 294; Aron, *Imperial Republic*, 254.

²⁹ Chua, *Day of Empire*; Duverger, “Concept d’empire,” 10-1; Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower,” 50.

³⁰ Doyle, *Empires*, 32-4, 37-8; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* 6 (August 1953): 1-15; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 8-11; Maier, *Among Empires*, 6-7, 23-4.

only represent provinces, i.e. subordinate administrative units in a larger polity. In the case of informal empire, however, the peripheral polities conserve nominal sovereignty and often a large degree of autonomy. Yet the center exerts a determining political (and according to some authors, economic) influence over the peripheral states' foreign policy and possibly over their domestic political structures and processes as well. Hence, given the definition of informal empire as rule through the collaboration of local rulers who are legally independent but political dependent on the metropole, the American empire should be classified as an informal, rather than formal imperial polity.³¹

Surprisingly, the literature on American empire, regardless of whether it pronounces itself for or against the existence of such an entity, contains relatively little rigorous discussion of the crucial matters of domain and of scope of the US imperial influence. However, the assumption of the existence of an American empire would mean little, unless it is specified which states are included in the empire, which are excluded, and over which particular issue areas the US exerts its influence. As Dahl argues, "any statement about influence that does not clearly indicate the domain and the scope it refers to verges on being meaningless... When one hears that A is highly influential, the proper question is: Influential over what actors with respect to what matters?"³²

Currently, analysts offer varying assessments of the geographical domain of the American empire. Thus, for Mearsheimer and Lake, the US is only dominant in the Western Hemisphere, while in Johnson's earlier work the American empire only exists in Latin America and Far East Asia. Layne, however, also includes Western Europe in the

³¹ Doyle, *Empires*, 130, 135. Thus the participants in the forum on American empire reproduced by *International Studies Perspectives* rejected unanimously the existence of an American *formal* empire.

³² Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 27; David Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 29-30, 36, 166-7; Doyle, *Empires*, 36-7.

American empire; O'Reilly and Renfro incorporate the Middle East emirates; while Rosen argues that all the above mentioned areas are part of the American empire. Finally, in Johnson's later writings and in those accounts that define empire as economic influence, the American empire is in effect global in dimensions.³³

The extent of the domain of America's empire could be determined by applying either one of three criteria. First, the empire includes those states which openly harbor American military bases of more than 10,000 soldiers; second, those states that have concluded a formal security arrangement, whether multilateral such as NATO, or bilateral such as the American-Japanese security treaty, with Washington; third, those states that receive sustained diplomatic endorsement and military aid from the US. Accordingly, the American empire comprises the Western Hemisphere (the Americas and the Caribbean with the current exceptions of Cuba and Venezuela), most of the region known as Asia-Pacific (the Pacific archipelagoes, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea), the European states that are NATO members stretching from Spain in the West to Romania in the East and from Norway in the North to Turkey in the South, as well as parts of the Middle East (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the oil monarchies of the Gulf). Outside the American empire still lie China, Russia, most of the ex-Russian/Soviet empire space (with the exception of the Baltic states), Iran, the Indian subcontinent, most of South East Asia (with the exception of Thailand and the Philippines), and the largest part of Africa.³⁴ In essence, this imperial domain is a good illustration of the hub and

³³ See Rosen, "Empire If You Can Keep It," 52; John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 41-2, 236-44; Lake, "New American Empire?" 284-7; Johnson, *Blowback*, 19-21; Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, 3, 8, 37-8; Marc O' Reilly and Wesley Renfro, "Evolving Empire: America's 'Emirate' Strategy in the Persian Gulf," *International Studies Perspectives* 8 (May 2007): 137-51, 143-7; Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 4, 188-99; for a neo-Marxist global empire view see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁴ See for a map showcasing the rough outlines of the American empire Münkler, *Empires*, 188-9.

spokes model because its component regions (Europe, Latin America, Asia Pacific, and the Middle East) generally have fewer connections, in terms of security and economic ties between themselves than they have with the US. To put this situation into geopolitical perspective, the US controls most of the globe's coastal areas, but not the inner part of the continents, in particular not the large landmass of Eurasia.³⁵ The Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, South East Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Iraq thus represent the borders between the American empire and the rest of the world: not surprisingly, these are the foremost areas of violent conflict in today's world politics, the frontlines of the battle over the further expansion of America's empire.³⁶

The scope of empire refers to quote Doyle to "the political processes and the political outcomes controlled by the metropole."³⁷ Obviously, in the case of an informal empire such as the one controlled by the US, the degree of influence and of leverage the imperial centre exercises over the periphery will vary considerably from one area to another, such as for instance Latin America versus Western Europe.³⁸ But, on the other hand, the presence of American influence is unmistakable.³⁹ Being a member of the American empire constrains a state to perform usually the following tasks: to lend support to American diplomatic initiatives; to grant, if required, the use of its territory for use as bases, staging or transit areas for American military operations; to provide when needed aid to the US endeavors in form of financial, logistical, or military contributions;

³⁵ Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 3-7.

³⁶ Michael Klare, "The Empire's New Frontiers," *Current History* 102 (November 2003): 383-7.

³⁷ Doyle, *Empires*, 36-7.

³⁸ Lake argues that the US exercises different forms of authority by relation to different regions: for instance, the US rules over an informal empire in the Western Hemisphere, but only controls a sphere of influence in Western Europe and Northeast Asia. Lake, "New Empire?" 284-6.

³⁹ However, this does not mean the US does not affect states outside its empire—only that its influence in these areas will be considerably less in scope than in the case of states actually pertaining to its empire.

to have the same enemies and, if feasible, the same friends as America does; to pay at least nominal respect to American principles, chief being an open-market economy, free trade, and some degree of electoral process; to maintain a modicum of internal stability and order; and finally, to acknowledge America as a leader by extending Washington appropriate deference.⁴⁰ States belonging to the American empire may occasionally circumvent some of these requirements, but they cannot evade all of them permanently. For instance, the US might tolerate autocratic regimes in the Middle East in return for unflinching support against Islamic fundamentalism; or could accept Western European criticisms of its endorsement of Israel, as long as Europe remains a faithful supporter on other issues or different geographical areas. Yet, when all is said and done, empires fundamentally consist of a coercive relationship: hence a state attempting to resist constantly America's imperial requirements (and in so doing effectively attempting to leave the empire) risks punishment by the US, in the form of diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, political subversion, or even military intervention.⁴¹ From these points, it follows that America influences chiefly the external policies of subordinate states, while taking an occasional interest in their internal policies.⁴²

Therefore, the American empire should not be seen as omnipotent. America exercises indeed international influence over a substantial range of foreign policy matters of other states, and its domain is more extensive than that of any other state.⁴³ Yet the US

⁴⁰ As Rosen argues, regulating the external behavior of states also presupposes exercising influence to some degree over the internal affairs of subordinate states. Rosen, "Empire If You Can Keep It," 51-2.

⁴¹ Spruyt, "American Empire," 293; Doyle, *Empires*, 41-2; Cox, "Empire, Imperialism," 601.

⁴² Doyle, *Empires*, 40, 54-81.

⁴³ Cox, "Empire, Imperialism," 600. For examples of scholars who discount America's dominance on account of its inability to achieve desired outcomes, see Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 40-2; Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 31; David Wilkinson, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," *International Studies Review* 1 (Summer 1997): 141-72. For the opposite argument of American near-omnipotence see William Wohlforth,

is not a universal empire in contrast to some of its historical counterparts: in terms of surface controlled it ranks below the Mongol and Soviet empires. Moreover, its scope is limited as well, particularly its influence over the nature and practices of other states' domestic political regimes. Even America's ability to successfully impose its will over the resistance of other polities is constrained by the non-fungible nature of power.⁴⁴ Thus, regardless of its overall might, the US frequently does not succeed under the so-called "paradox of unrealized power" in imposing its preferences, simply because other states may be more disposed to incur costs, whether in terms of casualties, money, or domestic backlash over the matter at stake; because geographical distance dims power; because America's resources, extensive as they may be, are not infinite, which leads to prioritization of certain interests and geographical areas over others; or because voting power in international institutional fora is divided equally between the US and other international actors.

Beyond its lack of omnipotence, objections to the concept of American empire both among analysts and decision-makers hinge on two arguments: that empire can exist only in a formal sense and that a democratic state cannot possibly at the same time be an empire.⁴⁵ Frequently, only formal empire, the political arrangement that shows on the map center and periphery as a single political entity, could be regarded as empire.⁴⁶ This is really an argument to the effect that if one does not see empire on the map, then empire must not be there. For instance, Zelikow writes that: "Real imperial power... means a

"The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24 (Summer 1999): 5-41; Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power*, chap. 7.

⁴⁵ Aron, *Imperial Republic*, 253-4; Michael Cox, "Empire by Denial: The Strange Case of the United States," *International Affairs* 81 (January 2005): 15-30, 21-4; Cox, "Empire, Imperialism," 598-600.

⁴⁶ Saull, "Empire, Imperialism, and American Power," 312.

direct monopoly control over the organization and use of armed might. It means direct control over the administration of justice and the definition thereof... We must speak of American power and of respective ways to wield it; let us stop talking of an American empire, for there is and there will be no such thing.” Similarly, Krauthammer assumes that for empire to be present the center must maintain a permanent military presence in the periphery: “the use of the word ‘empire’ in the American context is ridiculous. It is absurd to apply the word to a people whose first instinct upon arriving on anyone’s soil is to demand an exit strategy.” The same goes for Kohn: “the Americans don’t have the interest, the stomach, and the perseverance to do it [empire]. A few bloody noses and they’ll want to pack it.”⁴⁷ Recently, several participants in a forum on American empire have discounted the idea of American empire, by arguing that what little empire America possesses is confined to the Virgin Islands, Guantanamo, Guam, and American Samoa.⁴⁸

The other possible objection to the presence of an informal American empire consists in the alleged antithesis between empire and democracy. This is so since empires are understood to be founded on authoritarian principles such as coercion and the denial of freedom of weaker subordinate polities, while for democracies the cardinal rules are that government is undertaken by the expressed will of those governed and that government must respect their inalienable rights.⁴⁹ This reasoning is taken further by Snyder, who argues that the absence of democratic institutions and practices encourages a

⁴⁷ Philip Zelikow, “The Transformation of National Security: Five Redefinitions,” *National Interest* 71 (Spring 2003): 17-28, 19; Charles Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute Press, 2004), 2-3; Richard Kohn quoted in Thomas Ricks, “Empire or Not? A Quiet Debate over US Role,” *Washington Post*, August 21, 2001; also Michael Mandelbaum, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World’s Government in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 1-3.

⁴⁸ Ferguson, “Approaches to Defining Empire,” 278; Lake, “New American Empire?” 285-6.

⁴⁹ See Spruyt, “American Empire,” 296-7.

state to become infatuated with empire, while their presence dampens such ambitions.⁵⁰ In this logic, given that the US represents a democratic regime internally, it cannot at the same time be an empire externally, since empire historically corresponds with the basest cases of domestic despotism. Therefore, in this view, the concept of empire acquires a distinct undemocratic ring, conjuring images of liberty denied not only abroad, but also at home. Hence, one of the chief worries of the opponents of empire is that seeking influence abroad will jeopardize freedom and personal rights at home.⁵¹ In the words of a concerned commentator, “can there be an American empire without an emperor?”⁵²

This attitude is especially prevalent among American decision-makers, even among some who might otherwise be catalogued as stalwart empire-builders. For instance, in 1999, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger argued that “we are the first global power in history that is not an imperial power.” This is also the position embraced by President George W. Bush in his 2002 West Point speech: “America has no empire to extend or utopia to establish.” Following the invasion of Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated that “we don’t seek empires. We’re not imperialistic. We have never been. I can’t imagine why you’d even ask the question.” More recently, in 2008 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrote that: “we Americans engage in foreign policy because we have to not because we want to, and this is a healthy disposition—it is that of a republic, not an empire.”⁵³ These two arguments are taken so seriously by the American

⁵⁰ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambitions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁵¹ Patrick Buchanan, *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America’s Destiny* (Washington: Regnery, 1999); Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 285-7, 291-2; Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), especially chaps. 2 and 7; Cohen, “History and the Hyperpower,” 54-5.

⁵² Martin Walker, “An Empire unlike Any Other,” in ed., Bacevich, *Imperial Tense*, 134-45, 137.

⁵³ Berger quoted in Ricks, “Empire or Not”; George W. Bush, “Address at West Point Academy,” June 1, 2002, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html; Eric Schmitt, “Rumsfeld Says US

public, that there is little wonder that there is little enthusiasm in the US to define openly America's role in world politics as imperial. As Ferguson argues, "America is the empire that dares not speak its name... The great thing about the American empire is that so many Americans disbelieve in its existence."⁵⁴

Yet, while informal empires may be more difficult to spot than formal ones on the map's surface, this does not necessarily imply that they are not present under a different guise.⁵⁵ To quote Cohen, "most people throughout history have lived under imperial rule. The current international system with nearly two hundred independent states and not a single confessed empire, is a historical anomaly."⁵⁶ However, it would be indeed odd in an age where nationalism is widespread to insist on maintaining the traditional formula of empire founded on the principles of territorial conquest and direct administrative control.⁵⁷ As Howe puts it, "the age of formal empire is clearly dead...Ever since the Second World War, the trend was towards new and less direct ways of exerting influence."⁵⁸ After all, imperial institutions have known sizable different organization patterns from Nebuchadnezzar to Stalin. Hence, if empire is understood in an informal rather than a formal sense, as the latest variation on a common imperial pattern, empires may not have vanished after all, only mutated their shape and form. In this sense, history records several examples of "conquest without a conqueror's flag": entities in which

Will Cut Forces in Gulf," *New York Times*, April 29, 2003; Condoleezza Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 87 (July/ August 2008): 2-26, 25.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Maureen Dowd, "Hypocrisy and Apple Pie," *New York Times*, April 30, 2003. Also see Robert Kaplan, "Supremacy by Stealth," *Atlantic Monthly* (July / August 2003): 67-83.

⁵⁵ As Spruyt has convincingly argued the current emphasis on sovereign states clearly defined in terms of territory and borders was not a constant feature throughout history. Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap.3 and 158-78.

⁵⁶ Cohen, "History and the Hyperpower," 50.

⁵⁷ Gilpin argues that in the last centuries the drive for actual control of land was replaced by the desire for political and economic influence due to advances in military and industrial technologies. Gilpin, *War and Change*, 23-5, 138-41. Also see T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in an Age of US Primacy," *International Security* 30 (Summer 2005): 46-71, 54-5.

⁵⁸ Howe, *Empire*, 114.

administrative functions were exercised indirectly by means of local potentates, and nevertheless defined themselves as empires. The classic case is Great Britain, which frequently left local elites in charge, and even included in its empire polities that were still official part of other states, such as Egypt, nominally a province of Ottoman Turkey, and princely India, formally still the property of Indian maharajas.⁵⁹

Furthermore, only a handful of polities to which the label of empire was attached actually employed it themselves—prominent among those that were designated as empires only post facto are dynastic China, the Arab Caliphate, the Mongol Khanate, the Ottoman Sultanate, the Spain of Charles V, the France of Louis XIV, and the Soviet Union. The reasons why these states preferred other labels to that of empire to describe their rule over other polities varied considerably—from religion to pretensions at universal domination, and from the conviction that empire was only appropriate for designating the Roman Empire to propaganda—but this suggests that imperial denial is not in any way new.⁶⁰ This is why the failure of recent attempts to determine the US government and public to openly acknowledge America’s imperial role cannot be seen as reliable proof against the actual existence of an American empire.⁶¹ As Ferguson puts it “from a political point of view, of course I’m not advocating the explicit use of the word ‘empire’ by President Bush and by anyone else in the administration and I applaud their ability to disclaim imperial ambitions in their public pronouncements. That is precisely the right way to play it. The United States should constantly deny it’s an empire, should

⁵⁹ Doyle, *Empires*, 33.

⁶⁰ Duverger, ed., *Le concept d’empire*, 5-6, 16-20, 219-22, 233-4, 397-8, 420-1; Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 36-60; F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 168-9; Cox, “Empire, Imperialism, and Bush Doctrine,” 589-92.

⁶¹ Tom Donnelly quoted in Ricks, “Empire or Not”; William Kristol quoted in Dowd, “Hypocrisy and Apple Pie”; Max Boot, “The Case for the American Empire,” *Weekly Standard*, October 15, 2001.

constantly promise that its troops will be withdrawn...The key is not to mean these things.”⁶² America’s reticence to admit to possessing an empire may therefore be traced to the political contingency of minimizing both the nationalist backlash in the subordinate states and the uneasiness of a system suffused by a liberal democratic ideology in embracing what in effect is the exercise of autocratic power on the international stage.⁶³

The question concerning the compatibility of democracy and empire is misplaced, since the problem at hand is not to determine the effects, positive or negative, empire has over a state’s political regime in the long run, but to establish whether democracies are capable of seeking and maintaining imperial influence over other polities. History provide the example of several democratic empires, from Athens and Republican Rome in the ancient world, to the colonial holdings of Great Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands (and arguably of Germany, Italy, and the US as well.) Even Snyder admits that, though embedded democratic practices eventually might put an end to the pursuit of empire, democracies may engage in imperialism in the short run.⁶⁴

Whether America’s present international role should be described as imperial or as hegemonic is a frequent topic of debate. According to Ferguson, hegemony and empire represent the same thing—hegemony being “a euphemism for empire” that can be entirely dispensed with.⁶⁵ By contrast, for Doyle and for Münkler, the concept of empire applies to influence exercised both over the foreign policy and the domestic politics of the periphery, while hegemony refers solely to the control of its foreign policy. In this

⁶² Niall Ferguson and Robert Kagan, “The United States Is and Should Be an Empire: A New Atlantic Initiative Debate, July 17, 2003” transcript available at aei.org/events/eventide.428/event_detail.asp.

⁶³ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955).

⁶⁴ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 309-12; Jack Snyder, “Imperial Temptations,” *National Interest* 71 (Spring 2003): 29-40.

⁶⁵ Ferguson, *Colossus*, 7-13; Niall Ferguson, “Hegemony or Empire?” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (September-October 2003): 154-61. The same point can be found in Aron, *Imperial Republic*, 253-8.

sense, Thucydides' Athens was an empire, but Sparta was just a hegemon.⁶⁶ Gilpin writes that both hegemony and empire are consonant with unipolarity, but argues that empire represents territorial conquest while hegemony consists in the exercise of influence.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, for Mearsheimer, for Wilkinson, and for Goldstein, hegemony is akin to world dictatorship: "political hegemony means being able to dominate the world militarily."⁶⁸ For Keohane, hegemony provides the equivalent of international public goods: peace, order, an accepted universal currency, and economic openness.⁶⁹ Finally, Hunt contends that empire, while an appropriate term to describe ancient Rome or dynastic China, fails to capture the unprecedented extent of American dominance, and concludes that "the fitting term for a state-wielding power and influence on such a broad scale is not 'empire' but 'hegemon.'"⁷⁰ To sum up these ideas: either hegemony and empire are the same thing; or hegemony represents a stronger influence than the one exercised by empire; or, conversely, it is empire that refers to an oppressive form of domination, while hegemony depicts a more legitimate type of authority.

A way out of this dilemma is to notice that usually the concept of hegemon applies to a state that ranks *first* among the states of the system in terms of capabilities *and* political performance: what Galtung describes as a complete top dog, dominant in

⁶⁶ Doyle, *Empires*, 40, 54-81, 129-30; Münkler, *Empires*, 6-7, 40-6.

⁶⁷ Gilpin, *War and Change*, 29-30, 110-5, 144-5. This point is also made by Cumings, "Is America an Imperial Power?" 356-9.

⁶⁸ Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 34, 40-1, 415; Wilkinson, "Unipolarity without Hegemony," 143-4; Joshua Goldstein, *Long Cycles: Prosperity and War in the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 281.

⁶⁹ Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 32-35.

⁷⁰ Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 308-14, 313.

every dimension.⁷¹ But if so, it makes no sense to talk about several hegemons existing simultaneously on the international scene: the international system can contain at a given time only *one* authentic hegemon, a state topping all the rest in regards to both resources and achievements. Conversely, empire could be understood as capturing only the strict exercise of international influence without carrying the connotation of absolute international superiority and dominance. Hence, several empires can coexist at the same time in a given international system, each reigning over a different geographical area—for instance the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁷² By implication, all hegemons throughout history have been empires, but not all empires have also been hegemons.⁷³ Thus, the proper relation between hegemony and an empire can be captured by the image of two concentric circles, the larger one standing for empire. In this sense, since the scope and domain of power of a hegemon exceed those of a mere empire, America is presently only an empire, yet one with aspirations on eventually becoming the international hegemon or the complete top-dog as well.

If empire stands for a relation of influence, it then follows that imperial expansion will occur whenever this influence increases in terms of domain or of scope.⁷⁴ To this extent, any sustained effort at increasing either or both the geographical realm of American influence and the range of political issues under the US control, whether it is

⁷¹ See Galtung, “Structural Theory of Aggression,” 97. Nye comes closest to this sense of the term, as he defines hegemony as the predominance of a state over all others not only in terms of economic capabilities, but also in military geopolitical capabilities and soft power. Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 38-40, 87-90. This understanding of hegemony differs from Mearsheimer’s or Wilkinson’s because the hegemon’s position is based on supremacy in multiple areas, including performance, not solely in terms of military capabilities.

⁷² On the coexistence of several empires see Münkler, *Empires*, 12-3.

⁷³ The clearest cases of hegemony are Rome and dynastic China. For a related approach that distinguishes between great power and hyperpower see Chua, *Day of Empire*. Of course, there might be prolonged periods of time where no hegemon emerges in an international system.

⁷⁴ Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 26-30.

successful or not, can be seen as a form of imperial expansion. However, not every measure that results in an increase in international influence should be seen as imperial. For imperial expansion to be present expansion should amount to a pattern, where influence is sought over multiple polities and over the outcomes of manifold political decisions. These conditions are met by America's strategy at the cusp of the new millennium. The bombing campaigns the US conducted against Yugoslavia and Iraq, as well as the quest for regime change in the case of the Saddam Hussein government represented actions that sought to expand America's imperial domain in the Balkans and the Gulf respectively. Alternately, America's unilateralist policies in regard to the ICC, the ABM treaty, and the UN Security Council were aimed at increasing the scope of American empire. America's behavior from 1998 to 2003 suggests that empire constituted a coherent strategy, rather than a singular occurrence.

What Is International Prestige?

*Prestige refers to the extraordinary amount of deference and corresponding privileges conferred by any social group upon a member on account of an exceptional quality or accomplishment.*⁷⁵ Deference, as defined by Goffman, represents "that

⁷⁵ This definition draws on Max Weber, who defines status situation as "every typical component of the life fate of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honour*." Talcott Parsons in turn defines status as "a position within the social structure, by which an individual... is evaluated by reference to prestige or honor." Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 180-95, 186-7; Talcott Parsons, "Equality and Inequality in Modern Society, or Social Stratification Revisited," in E. O. Laumann, ed., *Social Stratification: Research and Theory for the 70s* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1970), 13-71; Brian Turner, *Status* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 1-8. Also see Barry O'Neill, *Honor, Symbols and War* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1999), 193-4; Daniel Markey, "Prestige and the Origins of War: Returning to Realism's Roots," *Security Studies* 8 (Summer 1999): 126-73, 156; Robert McGinn, "Prestige and the Logic of Political Argument," *The Monist* 56 (January 1972): 100-16, 105; Kim Yungho, *Power and Military Prestige: Explaining American Intervention in the Korean War*, unpublished PHD dissertation, University of Virginia, May 1996, 60-1.

component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed *to* a recipient *of* this recipient or of something of which this recipient is taken as a symbol, extension, or agent.”⁷⁶

Prestige has thus two defining features: social character and hierarchy. A social actor cannot confer upon itself prestige according to how worthy of deference it views its own conduct and abilities.⁷⁷ As sociologists contend: “prestige is a social-psychological category; an individual or social group cannot enjoy it unless their prestige claims are recognized by others willing to give them deference.”⁷⁸ This is so because prestige implies a particularly deferential behavior on the part of the other actors in a social group in the form of granting priorities, privileges, and exemptions from common obligations. Accordingly, such deferential behavior may be manifest in ceremonial duties as allowing an actor precedence of passage, seating, or speech; addressing it by honorific formulas in communications spoken or written; allowing it exclusive access to a specific life-style (food, dress, housing, means of transportation, marriage, education, and entertainment); conferring it unique rights (such as the right to bear weapons or to vote on certain issues); excluding it from common duties or punishments; and extending it a larger share in decision-making.⁷⁹ This is why prestige cannot exist in isolation: others have to be

⁷⁶ Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face- to- Face Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 56-7.

⁷⁷ Prestige should be differentiated from honour understood as “a person’s estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but... also the acknowledgement of this claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride.” Only the second part of this definition applies to prestige (or social honours.) Julian Pitt-Rivers, “Honour and Social Status,” in J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21; Frank Stewart, *Honour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, 66-7.

⁷⁸ K. B. Mayer, *Class and Society* (New York: Random House, 1955), 66, quoted in Turner, *Status*, 5.

⁷⁹ Weber, “Class, Status, Party,” 190-1; O’Neill, *Honor, Symbols, and War*, 193; Turner, *Status*, 5-8. Goffman argues that deference supposes *avoidance and presentation rituals*, where avoidance and presentation stand for proscription and prescription of specific actions. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 70-1.

willing to acknowledge it for it to be present. Therefore, prestige is fundamentally social in nature.⁸⁰

On the other hand, as a disproportionate amount of respect, prestige cannot be enjoyed simultaneously by every social actor.⁸¹ This view is entirely consonant with Hirsh's and Schweller's understanding of prestige as a positional good in short supply but high demand, which cannot be shared by every actor, since the more actors enjoy it, the less meaningful it becomes.⁸² This is to say that prestige suffers from the problem of social crowding—its value depreciates the more states lay claim to it, and, as a result a polity can improve its prestige only at the expense of other entities in the international system. As Hirsch puts it: “positional competition is a zero-sum game; what winners win, losers lose.”⁸³ The distribution of prestige in any given social group is necessarily hierarchical, with the social actors occupying the superior rungs claiming prestige in

⁸⁰ The roots of the drive for prestige and higher status may be not only social, but also embedded in psychology, if not biology as an evolutionary instinct which helped create a pecking order and thus reduce violence over the distribution of resources. See Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), chap. 3; Barkow, *Darwin, Sex, and Status*, 181-8; Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Biology and Everyday Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 239-46; Christopher Loch et al., “The Fight for the Alpha Position: Channeling Status Competition in Organizations,” *European Management Journal* 19, 1 (2001): 16-25.

⁸¹ Prestige should be differentiated from the amount of respect that society allows to each of its members in equal proportion. O'Neill refers to the latter as honour. The same distinction is employed by anthropologists to tell apart two aspects of the Chinese concept of “face”: *lien*, similar to O'Neill's concept of honour, and *mien-tzu*, which is the equivalent of prestige. O'Neill, *Honour, Symbols and War*, 139-40; Barkow, *Darwin, Sex, and Status*, 196-7; McGinn, “Logic of Prestige,” 104-6, 109-12; Robert McGinn, “About Face,” *Social Theory and Practice* 1 (Spring 1971): 87-96, 88; Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 5-14; Hsien Chin Hu, “The Chinese Concepts of Face,” *American Anthropologist* 46 (January 1944): 45-64, 61-2; David Yan Fai Ho, “The Concept of Face,” *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (January 1976): 867-84.

⁸² Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 27-31, 36-41, 52; Randall Schweller, “Realism and the Present Great Power System: Growth and Possible Conflict over Scarce Resources,” in Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and the State Strategy after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28-30, 48-9; Wallace, *War and Rank*, 113-4. However, for biologists obtaining prestige creates a feeling of pleasure separate from considerations of the scarcity of the good in question. Rosen, *War and Human Nature*, 92-3.

⁸³ Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, 52; Robert Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond: Human Behavior and the Quest for Status* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7-9.

excess of the lower ranks.⁸⁴ This point has been well established in sociology ever since Weber, who understood prestige as the fundamental criterion according to which society is organized, by contrast with Marx's concept of class. To quote Weber: "the way social honour [or prestige] is distributed in a community between typical groups participating in this distribution we may call the 'social order.'"⁸⁵

Prestige can be conferred on a given social actor, be it an individual or a group, on account of extraordinary qualities or achievements that allow the actor to be ranked above others and to be entitled to additional respect. Hence, according to disciples of Weber, prestige is a function of status or social ranking, which is itself awarded across multiple possible dimensions: income, education, occupation, age, ethnicity, and gender to mention the most common ones.⁸⁶ Some of these categories, such as age or gender are rigid or "ascribed" in the sense an actor cannot improve its ranking; while others are susceptible to change or "achieved."⁸⁷ Hence, for Weberian sociologists, social stratification is far more complex than for Marxists, who argue that the only basis for social ranking consists in control over capital. Indeed, status groups, unlike classes, which are categorized either as high, middle, or low, may rank simultaneously high in some status dimensions, but low under other criteria, for instance high in terms of education, but low in terms of income or ethnicity.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Roger Gould, *Collision of Wills: How Ambiguity About Social Rank Breeds Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 42-9.

⁸⁵ Weber, "Class, Status, Party," in Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*, 180-1.

⁸⁶ Turner, *Status*, 3; Gerhard Lenski, "Status Crystallization: A Non-Vertical Dimension for Social Status," *American Sociological Review* 19 (August 1954): 405-13; Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), 74-5, 78-80; Emile Benoit-Smullyan, "Status, Status Types, and Status Interrelations," *American Sociological Review* 9 (April 1944): 151-61; Wallace, *War and Rank*, 5-6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-5; Midlarsky, *On War*, 93, 113-7.

⁸⁸ Turner, *Status*, 5-8, 45-50; Norbert Wiley, ed., *The Marx-Weber Debate* (London: Sage, 1987), 16-21.

The consequence is a condition of status inconsistency, in which social actors experience a disparity between the social rankings they occupy under diverse hierarchies. Typically, such actors would seek to rebalance rankings in their favor by demanding an improvement in their overall social condition and in the process laying claim to a proportionally higher degree of prestige. This is so because actors experiencing status inconsistency have been shown to take higher-ranking groups or individuals as the reference point for evaluating their social standing. To quote Lenski, “an individual with inconsistent statuses or ranks has a natural tendency to think of himself in terms of that status or rank which is highest, and to expect others to do the same. Meanwhile others, who come into contact with him, have a vested interest in doing just the opposite, that is, in treating him in terms of his lowest status or rank.”⁸⁹ As a result, a social actor enjoying high ranking under one criterion conferring prestige, will feel entitled not only to conserve its existing standing, but also to demand an equivalent high position under other dimensions. Such claim could then result in two alternative outcomes: either it is accepted as legitimate by the rest of society, or it is dismissed as unfounded. In this latter case, the actor will become frustrated, and is more likely to support political radicalism and violence. Accordingly, the roots of social conflict and discontent should not be located in the ranks of the absolutely deprived, but rather in those of the near-to-do-wells, whose ambitions at further advancement and prestige are being blocked.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 87. On the tendency of choosing referent status points in one's own group see Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond*, 30-5, chap. 2; Tajfel and Turner, “Integrative Theory,” 35-8; for the argument that an individual's sense of personal worth depends on the status of his/her group compared to other groups see Henri Tajfel, “The Psychological Structure of Intergroup Relations,” in Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation between Social Groups* (London: Academic Press, 1978), chaps. 3- 4; for an argument linking ethnic conflict to the need to prove one group's worth relative to other groups Don Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 143-5.

⁹⁰ Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 88; Galtung, “Structural Theory of Aggression,” 99; Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Irwin Goffman, “Status Consistency and

If so, status inconsistency can be understood as a form of relative deprivation—the discrepancy between actors’ expectations (or the goods and conditions of life to which an actor feels entitled) and its value capabilities (the goods and conditions it thinks it is capable of getting and keeping.)⁹¹ As such, status inconsistency has been understood as a root cause of conflict since the days of Aristotle, who attributed the main cause for revolution precisely to “a desire of equality when men think that they are equal to others who have more than themselves, or again [to] the desire of inequality and superiority, when conceiving themselves to be superior, they think that they have not more but the same or less than their inferiors.”⁹² Hence, status inconsistency can affect social actors in two ways: it causes those who manage to improve their standing in one dimension to seek to repeat their feat in other areas as well, in the process demanding further prestige; and it causes those actors who are already top-ranking in multiple areas to achieve complete domination all across the social spectrum. These impulses provoke in turn conflict because additional prestige can only be obtained by depriving other actors of theirs, due to the positional nature of prestige. While the numbers of actors affected by status inconsistency in any given society is going to be limited because of their relative high position in at least one hierarchy, status inconsistency itself represents a frequent problem in social arrangements.⁹³ This is so because status crystallization or the situation where

Preference for Change in Power Distribution,” *American Sociological Review* 22 (June 1957): 275-81, 275-6, 279-81; James Davies, “Towards a Theory of Revolution,” *American Sociological Review* 27 (February 1962): 5-19; James Geschwender, “Social Structure and the Negro Revolt: An Examination of Some Hypotheses,” *Social Forces* 43 (December 1964): 248-56. For a study arguing that disputes over the distribution of status are conducive to homicidal violence even among individuals see Roger Gould, *Collision of Wills*, esp. chap. 3.

⁹¹ Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 24-5; Walter Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 9-35.

⁹² Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 37-40, 109-13; Aristotle, *Politics* VI. 2. (New York: Random House, 1943) Benjamin Jowett, trans, 212-3.

⁹³ Wallace, *War and Rank*, 8-9; Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 408-9.

actors achieve perfectly comparable high rankings in all dimensions is encountered only in those cases of social polarization between a “complete top-dog”, an actor dominant in all respects, and a “complete underdog,” an actor similarly confined to low ranks in all dimensions.⁹⁴ Only under such conditions will status inconsistency be muted, because the complete top dog will be satisfied with the amount of prestige it already possesses, and the complete underdog will accept its low position as the natural condition of things.⁹⁵

This does not imply that conflict will prevail in every society or that every such conflict will result in violence.⁹⁶ Societies may employ several tactics in minimizing the effects of status inconsistency: either by achieving complete social polarization; by allowing a degree of upward social mobility, which enables the continual rebalancing of rankings; or by devising new dimensions under which prestige might be achieved.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the absence of visible social conflict may be also due to the countervailing influence of other political factors. Social movement theory considers several variables that can produce or inhibit the development of political radical movements: these are grievances, infrastructure resources allowing mobilization such as means of communication, entrepreneurship, cultural framing, and opportunity in terms of the degree of repression. Status inconsistency will only point to the presence of grievances in

⁹⁴ Ibid., chaps. 8-9; Galtung, “Structural Theory of Aggression,” 96-7; Davies, “Towards a Theory,” 6-8.

⁹⁵ Galtung, “Structural Theory of Aggression,” 98-9; Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 24; Elton Jackson, “Status Consistency and Symptoms of Stress,” *American Sociological Review* 27 (August 1962): 469-80, 476-7; Maurice East, “Status Discrepancy and Violence in the International System: An Empirical Analysis,” in James Rosenau et al., eds., *The Analysis of International Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 299-319, 303; Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status,” 37-9. Also see the point that the absence or controversies about a hierarchy breeds violence Gould, *Collision of Wills*, 54-66.

⁹⁶ There is the counter-argument that the more cross-cutting cleavages exist across groups in terms of language, religion, ethnicity, class etc the more the society will be “sown together” by an individual’s multiple loyalties. See Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Principles of Sociology* (New York: The Century Company, 1920), 164-5; Lewis Coser, *The Function of Social Conflict* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 76-8. However, Wallace argues that the crosscutting cleavages Coser refers to do not represent ranks and that the conflict-inducing effect of status inconsistency will be stronger the more visible the contrast between ranks. Wallace, *War and Rank*, 8-11.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 7, 113-8; Benoit-Smullyan, “Status,” 160; Tajfel and Turner, “Integrative Theory,” 43-4.

terms of unsatisfied status demands and to entrepreneurship concerning a relatively deprived group that can assume leadership of the movement.⁹⁸

How does status inconsistency influence the conduct of a state's foreign policy? Status inconsistency is relevant to the study of international relations because if the point regarding the social nature of prestige is accepted, it then ensues that the bestowal of prestige in world politics supposes the existence of a social group composed of the states in the international system.⁹⁹ Hence, world politics can be understood as assuming features typical of any human society, including the social distribution of prestige across multiple dimensions. From here it follows that a state's international prestige depends on its qualities and achievements across several dimensions, which opens up the possibility of discrepancy in its rankings.

To be sure, International Relations theory has long held, with a few exceptions, the firm view that prestige is conferred according to a single overriding criterion: power.¹⁰⁰ As Secretary of State Dean Acheson put it: "by prestige I mean the shadow cast by power, which is of great deterrent importance."¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the larger the

⁹⁸Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, "Towards an Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution," in Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 142-73. For an illustration see Carrie Wickham Rosefsky, *Mobilizing Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁹⁹ Presuming the existence of minimal commonly accepted norms of conduct among states, whether written or tacit, the international system could be understood as a loose or primitive form of social grouping. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 13-5, 41-52; Roger Masters, "World Politics as a Primitive Political System," *World Politics* 16 (July 1964): 595-619.

¹⁰⁰ Prestige is traditionally approached by International Relations theory either as a consequence of power, or, more frequently, as a factor adding to the power capabilities of a state in a deterrent or compellant capacity. Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), chap. 2, 124; Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 69-70, 75-6; For recent dissenting arguments see Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Darryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1, 6-7, 159-60; Shiping Tang, "Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Scholarship," *Security Studies* 14 (January/March 2005): 34-62. Also see Lebow, *Cultural Theory*, 21-5.

¹⁰¹ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 528.

capabilities a state possesses, the higher its international ranking and conversely, a state suffering a decline in power resources will also register an corresponding tumble in its prestige. For instance, for Morgenthau, prestige is but an instrument designed “to demonstrate... power...either for the purpose of maintaining or increasing it.” As such, prestige constitutes “at most the pleasant by-product of foreign policies whose ultimate objectives are not the reputation but the substance of power.” In other words, prestige represents a symbolical reflection of existing power relations: a seemingly trivial dispute thus “becomes a test case in which claim and counterclaim represent and symbolize the respective power positions of the nations... each nation will fight on a matter of procedure or of prestige with uncompromising tenacity, as though the national existence itself were at stake. And in a symbolic sense it actually is.” Hence, sweep away the veneer of prestige, and one will be left with the raw substance of power politics. Similarly, Gilpin defines prestige as “the reputation for power, and military power in particular” and insists that “ultimately... the hierarchy of prestige in an international system rests on economic and military power.” The same principle is hinted at by Waltz, who argues that a state should be recognized as a great power solely on the basis of its aggregate capabilities: “the economic, military, and other capabilities of nations cannot be sectorized and separately weighed. States are not placed in the top rank because they excel in one way or another.”¹⁰²

Yet such statements are counterintuitive because they are contradicted by the disparities of prestige among states, which frequently have to do not with capabilities per se but with successful performance in either peace or war. In fact, it could be argued that

¹⁰² Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 36-7 75-6, 414; Gilpin, *War and Change*, 30-1; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison Wesley, 1979), 129-31; Yungho, *Power*, 53-83.

prestige rather than being the shadow of power, should be more accurately seen as “power plus.” The point here is that based on its excellence in any of these dimensions, a state may feel entitled to claim prestige from other states, regardless of its low standing in other respects. For the sake of parsimony, it is useful to assume three basic hierarchies conferring a state international prestige in terms of military capabilities, economic capabilities, and political performance.¹⁰³ High ranking in these three categories has the merit of being traditionally associated with international prestige, yet the ranks politics occupy under the three criteria will be contradictory.

Economic powerhouses such as Japan and Germany have been known to voluntarily place limits on the development of their armed forces—in the case of Japan this principle is even enshrined in Article IX of its 1947 constitution.¹⁰⁴ The European Union’s GDP presently exceeds that of the US—yet the European institutions do not command any armed forces of their own, being in the words of an inspired observer at once, “an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military earthworm.”¹⁰⁵ Conversely, states excelling from the point of view of military forces fielded may fail to achieve or maintain a corresponding leading position in economic terms (though a modicum of

¹⁰³ This approach is much closer to Galtung and differs from Wallace or East who prefer to employ in their quantitative models only two dimensions: capability status (a sum of demographic, economic and military resources) and prestige itself (or reputational status) measured by the number of accredited diplomatic missions in a state’s capital. In the present model, status inconsistency does not simply mean that capabilities and prestige are out of synch either on the side of capabilities or the side of prestige, which would be an argument all-too-familiar to authors stressing power as the unique status dimension, such as Morgenthau or Gilpin. Instead, status inconsistency occurs when a state occupies different rankings in multiple social hierarchies and is pressed at the same time to balance its status and to strive for prestige. Prestige is therefore understood as derived from a state’s overall standing in all these dimensions. Galtung, “Structural Theory of Aggression,” 96-9; Wallace, *War and Rank*, 32-41; East, “Status Discrepancy,” 304-5; Gilpin, *War and Change*, 33; Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 78-82.

¹⁰⁴ Hans Maull, “Germany and Japan: The New Civilian Powers,” *Foreign Affairs* 69 (Winter 1990): 91-106; Thomas Berger, “Norms, Identity and National Security in Germany and Japan,” in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 317-356.

¹⁰⁵ The speaker is the Belgian Foreign Minister Mark Eyskens quoted in Craig Withney, “Gulf Fighting Shatters Europeans’ Fragile Unity,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1991.

economic power is still needed in modern times to field an effective military machine.)¹⁰⁶ Some of these states may in fact experience trouble in ensuring a decent level of living to their population. This has been the case of Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and Maoist China, who maintained strong armed forces at the expense of their citizens' well-being. In recent years, North Korea has provided due to its nuclear program the example of a state negligible in economic terms, and whose population was even exposed to the risk mass starvation, but which, at the same time, was granted considerable international attention.¹⁰⁷ However, this does not mean that over the long run strong economic performers will not attempt to develop their military capabilities, or conversely, that military powers will decline to build or seize their own economic dominium.¹⁰⁸ In fact, status inconsistency will encourage precisely such a course of action, because the better a state performs under one criterion, the higher its motivation to better its position in other dimensions as well. As a result, a state registering consistent growth in economic terms is likely to seek to become a military power as well, and vice versa. Nor does status inconsistency imply that every single state should be subjected equally to it: instead, its effects are going to be much stronger for the states occupying high rankings in international hierarchies—which suggests that status inconsistency will be prominent in

¹⁰⁶ In pre-modern times, however, the contrast between economy and military power was taken for granted, in the sense that it was believed that frugality resulted in better troops and hence in military success, while wealth led to luxury and corruption. This conviction is still lingering in the belief that relatively poorer actors might nevertheless have stronger morale. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 253-6; Gilpin, *War and Change*, 123-5, 162-5; William McNeill, *The Shape of European History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹⁰⁷ On the connection between nuclear weapons and status see Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996): 54-86, 73-80.

¹⁰⁸ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993): 5-51; Jacob Viner, "Power versus Plenty as Objectives of Foreign Policy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *World Politics* 1 (October 1948), 1-29.

the case of great powers, particularly of those experiencing a rise or a resurgence in any of the three areas mentioned.

Therefore, since international rankings often do not coincide in the three dimensions, world politics are not often characterized by status crystallization. In contemporary international relations there is no equivalent to the positions of complete top dog or complete underdog and, as a result, status inconsistency will be a constant problem for states in the international system.¹⁰⁹ This is so even in the case of a state that enjoys a commensurate high standing in both the military and economic spheres, such as the US has since the aftermath of World War Two, since this superiority does not ensure a similar success at the level of political performance. This contradicts the recent conclusions of Wohlforth, who argues that the US has already attained a position similar to the complete top-dog under unipolarity. Thus, Wohlforth is right when writing that “dissatisfaction arises not from dominance itself but from a dominance that appears to rest on ambiguous foundations,” and that “status competition is unlikely in cases of clear hierarchies” dominated unambiguously by one actor, but he fails to demonstrate that the US has succeeded in establishing such a hierarchy.¹¹⁰

Political performance designates the ability of a state to translate its preferences into outcomes against the resistance of other states. The capacity to impose one’s will has been in fact usually seen as the real measuring stick allowing a state to be recognized as a great power. Historically, a great power was revealed by surviving the test of war against an (assumedly) militarily superior adversary. As Taylor put it “the great powers were as their name implies, organizations for power, that is, in the last resort for war... the basic

¹⁰⁹ However, achieving status crystallization might be conceivable in international relations as seen from the examples of the Roman or Chinese empires. See Chua, *Day of Empire*.

¹¹⁰ Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status,” 38-40.

test for them was war.”¹¹¹ Military victory, or at any rate, escaping defeat at the hands of an established great power was seen as the precondition for a state being granted itself great power status. Cases in point are Peter the Great’s Russia, Frederick the Great’s Prussia, Meiji Japan following the Russo-Japanese War, and arguably Mao’s China after the Korean War. Even in the absence of the resources that warrant inclusion in the great power category, a state or political group that manages to avoid defeat when pitted against an opponent seen as far superior in military strength is still awarded prestige, as seen in the cases of Nasser’s Egypt post Suez, of North Vietnam, of the mujihadeen in Afghanistan, and of the Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982 and 2006. The enduring appeal of this view can also be seen in the customary definition of prestige as reputation for military strength: here military strength should be understood as the successful use of military force, instead of the simple ownership of extensive military resources.¹¹² Prestige, however, is generated also by success off the battlefield—in those instances in which a state manages to compel another polity, impose its point of view in a debate, secure a diplomatic outcome that serves its preferences, or deter other states from pursuing policies harmful to its interests.

The successful political performance of a state is measured according to how closely outcomes mirror the state’s preferences. As a result, a state’s prestige will be bolstered by success in its endeavors, and similarly lowered by failure. In this respect, the perception of success and failure by other actors is itself of considerable significance,

¹¹¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), XXIV. For a review of the literature see Jack Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 10-3. The origins of this argument are to be found in Leopold von Ranke: “one could establish a definition of a great power that it must be able to maintain itself against all others, even when united.” Leopold von Ranke, “The Great Powers,” in Theodore von Laue, *Leopold Ranke: The Formative Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 181-218, 202-3.

¹¹² See in particular Ralph Hawtrey, *Economic Aspects of Sovereignty* (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), 64-5. This represents the main inspiration for Gilpin’s argument on prestige. Gilpin, *War and Change*, 32.

which accounts both for the efforts of states to portray their actions in the best light possible as unmitigated triumphs, and for their reluctance to admit defeat publicly or to recognize its relevance.¹¹³ Of course, the best indicator of success is genuine achievement—and to this extent states will face a constant requirement of delivering victory in order to maintain and improve their standing. As Napoleon argued: “my power depends on my glory and my glories on the victories I have won. My power will fail if I do not feed it on new glories and new victories. Conquest has made me what I am, and only conquest can enable me to hold my position.”¹¹⁴

To this extent, prestige does not represent a constant amount of respect, which at any given time states either enjoy fully or lack absolutely. Instead, the prestige of a state can be increased, preserved, or diminished in conformity with the evolution of its political performance.¹¹⁵ This is why a military defeat or diplomatic setback, while lowering a state’s prestige, will not completely obliterate it.¹¹⁶ A state that sees its prestige diminished could therefore count on compensating the loss by achieving victory in a different context. As Kissinger argued in insisting that the US take a strong stance on the seizure of the merchant ship *The Mayaguez* by the Khmer Rouge in 1975: it was precisely because South Vietnam had collapsed two weeks before that “the United States must carry out some act somewhere in the world which shows its determination to

¹¹³ See O’Neill, *Honour, Symbols, and War*, 89-90; McGinn, “Logic of Prestige,” 114-5; Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 155-8, 182-205; Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 186-92. Also see on perception Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), 133; Randall Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security* 19 (Summer 1994): 72-107, 73.

¹¹⁵ McGinn, “Logic of Prestige,” 106-7; McGinn, “About Face,” 88. Of course, prestige will depend on the state’s achievements in the military and economic capabilities as well.

¹¹⁶ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 79. Morgenthau argues that “the prestige of a nation is very much like the credit of a bank. A bank with large, proven resources and a record of successes can afford... to make a mistake or suffer a setback.”

continue to be a world power.”¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, both gains and losses in prestige are understood as cumulative—which explains why a state cannot afford to suffer a suite of failures that would substantially reduce its standing. This consideration may be seen at work in President Kennedy’s concern for keeping South Vietnam out of Communist hands: “there are limits to the amount of defeats I can accept within a twelve-month period. I’ve had the Bay of Pigs, and pulling out of Laos, I cannot accept a third.”¹¹⁸

Due to its advantage in military and economic rankings compared to other great powers, the US felt throughout the 1990s that its level of political performance was not up to par. America was challenged continuously by much weaker actors, which nevertheless managed to live to tell the tale: not only the governments of Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Yugoslavia, but also non-state actors such as the Habr Gedir subclan in Somalia, the Bosnian Serbs, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the US faced steep international resistance to seeing its preferences enacted whether in the case of the ICC, the revision of the ABM treaty, or the sanction by the Security Council of the use of force against Baghdad and Belgrade. Status inconsistency was at work here: high ranking in capabilities represented for the US an entitlement to additional prestige, which, because it went unacknowledged by other states, eventually led to the US search for an even more dominant position. A state as powerful as the US in the aftermath of the Cold War and which publicly entertains the idea of its role as world leader is expected and expects itself to be able not only to succeed in its initiatives, but also to do so in a suitably

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Jervis, *Meaning*, 198, 193-200; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 551-3; 574-5.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Arthur Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 705.

¹¹⁹ On the topic of challenges, or insults, see O’Neill, *Honour, Symbols and War*, 87-8; 101-24. Rosen argues that responding to challenges to status may be a biological built-in impulse not only in humans but also in primates. Rosen, *War and Human Nature*, 83-7.

impressive and effortless fashion. To quote Münkler, “empires unlike states are under an informal pressure to assume primacy in every sphere in which power, prestige, and performance can be measured and compared.”¹²⁰

Hence, it is this very disparity between accomplishments and ambitions that prompted American imperial expansion in the 1998 to 2003 timeframe by contrast to previous instances of American expansion, discussed in Chapter Three. The US attempted to achieve supremacy all across the spectrum of dimensions conferring prestige as the complete top dog, thus demanding prestige in excess of any other state in the system. For an aspiring hegemon, *everyone else* has to be demoted to an inferior standing, including those political entities that would otherwise qualify as empires or great powers.¹²¹ This is the looming condition of a nascent hyperpower. To quote the former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine: “the United States of America dominates all arenas: the economic, technological, military, monetary, linguistic or cultural... This situation is unprecedented. What previous empire subjugated the entire world including its adversaries?”¹²²

Methodology

The thesis relies on qualitative methods to assess US foreign policy from 1998 to 2003. The choice of method is dictated by the nature of the research subject. Presently,

¹²⁰ Münkler, *Empires*, 31. Also see Aron who argues that the defining feature of the dominant state is “the virtual ability... to impose its will whenever it needs to.” Aron, *Imperial Republic*, 253.

¹²¹ As Münkler argues this feature represents the very nature of an imperial entity. “Empires have no neighbors which they recognize as equals, that is as possessing *equal rights*.” Münkler, *Empires*, 5, 32-3.

¹²² Hubert Védrine with Dominique Moïsi, *France in an Age of Globalization* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2001), 2, 44. Védrine’s adds that “America is much more than the British Empire and closer to what the Roman Empire was compared to the rest of the world in that era. Maybe not in terms of duration, but surely in terms of universality and influence.” Also see Paul Kennedy, “The Eagle Has Landed: The New US Global Military Position,” *Financial Times*, February 22, 2002, 1.

the available literature on American empire is hampered by a disconnection between accounts seeking the confirmation of generalizable theories and works that delve into the minutiae of US foreign-policy making. While few theoretical analyses concern themselves with investigating contemporary US foreign policy in-depth, one encounters an equal shortage of theoretical insights throughout historical studies. This thesis aims at bridging this divide, by conducting an examination both theoretically-conscientious and informed by case studies analyses. In so doing, it deliberately adopts a competing theories testing approach, in which the hypotheses of the main schools of thought on American empire are juxtaposed next to the alternative argument based on prestige, and confronted with the record of actual political developments. The thesis' findings are based on investigation of primary and secondary sources on American foreign policy in the period under scrutiny, as well as on the use of historical counterfactuals. Though many primary sources are still classified, there is a sizable amount of available declassified documents on American foreign policy in between 1989 and 2003, particularly due to the unprecedented access by the media to governmental decisions.¹²³

Of course, a question mark is left hanging on the “real intentions” of decision-makers. However in the absence of a “smoking gun,” which would constitute irrefutable proof as to the motivation behind a given policy, scholars are constrained to rely on counterfactuals.¹²⁴ Counterfactuals are alternative scenarios based on the actions a rational actor would have to perform in order to meet a given goal and on the differences

¹²³This wealth of information has enabled the publication of major historical accounts on the Post Cold War. Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008); Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

¹²⁴ As Van Evera contends “smoking guns” are preciously few in political science research. Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Political Science Students* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

existing between such hypothetical behavior and the policy record. Hence, a counterfactual reasoning follows the logical formula of “if A were present, one could reasonably expect B to occur”. However, if B is not found, or if evidence of C is found instead, then the likelihood of A being involved decreases in turn. As Fearon argues: “counterfactuals are most likely to be found performing confirmatory work in case studies where the analyst is explicitly concerned with giving a causal explanation for some event or phenomenon.”¹²⁵

Admittedly, this method is grounded in the assumptions of the rational actor model, which postulates that actors choose consistently the optimal means for achieving given ends. As Harsanyi argues, “the concept of rational behavior is closely related to the concept of goal-directed behavior. It is almost the same thing.” Thus, rational actors will choose the most appropriate avenues to accomplish their goals under the effect of various combinations of opportunities and constraints presented by a given situation; presuming that their preferences remain constant under similar circumstances; and that these goals are compatible with each other. To quote Harsanyi: “when we say that Napoleon’s strategy in a particular battle was rational, this means that his strategy choice can be explained essentially by pointing out that this was the best strategy for him to choose in terms of his military objectives at the time.”¹²⁶ Hence, it follows that the goal most advanced by the policy under scrutiny, considering the whole gamut of political forces in

¹²⁵ James Fearon, “Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science,” *World Politics* 43 (January 1991): 169-195, 178, 180. As Fearon puts it: “arguments about the relative importance of possible causes become arguments about the relative plausibility of different counterfactual scenarios.”

¹²⁶ John Harsanyi in “First Session: The Concept of Rationality,” in Kathleen Archibald et al., eds., *Strategic Interaction and Conflict: Original Papers and Discussion* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1966), 118- 57, 118-9; Herbert Simon, “Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science,” *American Political Science Review* 79 (June 1985): 293-304, 294; Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edn. (New York: Addison Wesley, 1999), 13-75.

play, gives the key to the state's behavior. To be sure, the use of the rational actor model carries the risk of causing the analysis to degenerate into tautology similar to the formula "he did it because he wanted to," with the only evidence for the presence of a particular motivation being the action it has supposedly generated.¹²⁷ Yet, the "thicker" the model gets, through the inclusion of information regarding the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action as well as the decision-makers' actual calculations, the more explanatory power it acquires and the more this risks is minimized.¹²⁸

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter Two surveys the literature on the causes of American imperial expansion. Chapter Three debates whether based on the historical record America already is an empire or just an imperialist state. Chapter Four discusses the background for America's imperial strategy: the years of illusions that followed the end of the Cold War. Chapters Five through Seven are concerned with examining America's imperial actions from 1998 to 2003 by conducting in-depth case studies investigations of the US intervention over Kosovo; of select unilateral measures (the rejection of the ICC and ABM Treaty, and the decisions to use force in between 1998-2003 without Security Council authorization); and of the invasion of Iraq, respectively. Chapter Eight sums up the conclusions of the thesis in terms of the confirmation or refutation of the initial hypothesis concerning the role of prestige and of the findings' implications for the future of American foreign policy.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 49-50. Also see Schelling in "First Session," 150.

¹²⁸ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 52-4; Harsanyi, "First Session," 151-2.

Chapter Two

Theories of American Empire

What caused America's foreign policy of empire from 1998 to 2003? This question is related both to the general topic of why states throughout history have pursued empire, and to the specific one of why the US sought imperial expansion in the timeframe under scrutiny. For this reason, both analyses of the general causes of empire and of American foreign policy record are pertinent to the question's subject matter. Hence, a convenient starting point for a rigorous inquiry into the causes of any imperial expansion can be found in the classification scheme of empire devised by Doyle, which counts three theoretical types: theories relevant to the imperial centre or *metrocentric*, theories relevant to the imperial periphery or *pericentric*, and, finally, *systemic* theories that encompass both centre and periphery.¹ Therefore, by employing Doyle's typology, analysts are in a position where they can situate a particular theory of empire in the wider literature and at the same time stress the differences and similarities between diverse accounts of imperial expansion.

Metrocentric theories focus on the disposition of the metropole that determines it to pursue expansion. According to Doyle, the best example of metrocentrism can be found in the theories of Hobson, Lenin, and Schumpeter, who link the propensity to seek empire to the disposition of particular socio-economic groups within the metropole to maximize their wealth and perpetuate their position as the dominant class.² By contrast,

¹ Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 23-6, 51-2.

² John Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1965); Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publication House, 1964); Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1951).

pericentric theories refer to the fundamental debility of the periphery in terms of lack of both political stability and social and economic cohesion. These impediments provide an appropriately inviting ground for expansion, because they generate a politically chaotic situation, which requires in turn the intervention of the metropole to help restore order. Examples of pericentric theories are arguments such as “the imperialism of free trade”, the “turbulent frontier,” and, arguably, the studies concerning “failed states.”³ Lastly, systemic theories are concerned with an imbalance in terms of power capabilities between the centre and the periphery. Consequently, for systemic theories, the metropole will naturally lord it over the periphery, simply because it is the much stronger entity and, as such, is likely to emerge the victor in any direct contest of military force. The best such example is Waltz’s theory of international politics.⁴

How do the three schools of thought on American empire, structuralism, exceptionalism, and revisionism fit in Doyle’s wider model?

Metrocentric theories of expansion	Pericentric theories of expansion	Systemic theories of expansion
Revisionism Exceptionalism		Structuralism

In a first cut assessment illustrated above, structuralism is catalogued as purely systemic, since it accounts for America’s imperial strategy by reference to a disproportionate US

³ See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* 6 (August 1953): 1-15; John S. Galbraith, “The ‘Turbulent Frontier’ as a Factor in British Expansion,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (January 1960): 150-68; Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States, Sovereignty, IR, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner, “Saving Failed States,” *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1992): 3-20.

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1979); Doyle, *Empires*, 26-7.

advantage in relative power capabilities. Hence, structuralism is interested in the imbalance of power capabilities between metropole and periphery, not in the motives of the metropole per se. Conversely, exceptionalism and revisionism fall within the category of metrocentric theories, since both explain imperial expansion by examining America's motivation in the imperial enterprise. While exceptionalism interprets the drive for further imperial influence through the lens of America's particular propensity for propagating liberal democratic ideology, revisionism traces it to the socio-economic desiderata of America's domestic interest groups. Once here, the next step is to proceed to examine in more detail the hypotheses of each theory, before discussing their connection with an alternative theory of empire based on prestige.

Power, Ideology, and Domestic Interests

For structuralism, unlike in the popular *Spiderman* movies, with great power may not come great responsibility, but rather the appetite to acquire yet more power. When applied to US foreign policy, this rule of thumb leads to what Jervis calls "the compulsive empire."⁵ Basically, for structuralism, imperial expansion constitutes the natural outgrowth of a situation of power imbalance, in which one state is left, however temporarily, with substantially more capabilities than the others, and decides to make the most of its advantage. This disproportion in relative power capabilities does not only apply to relations between metropole and periphery, but also to those between great powers. Hence, structuralism posits that America's recent imperial expansion is the

⁵ Robert Jervis, "The Compulsive Empire," *Foreign Policy* 137 (July 2003): 82-7.

consequence of a current excess of power capabilities available to the US by comparison with other states in the international system, and foremost with the other great powers.

The international system, the main direct variable in structuralist theory, affects states in two main ways. First, the condition of the international system is anarchic—implying that, in the absence of the protection provided by world government, there is nothing to prevent war from breaking up at any time. Thus, the international system constrains states to put their security ahead of any other objective and to embrace caution and restraint in their foreign policy, lest resources crucial to ensuring security be irreparably lost.⁶ To quote Waltz: “in anarchy... security is the highest end... The goal that the system encourages them [states] to seek is security.”⁷ And herein at least apparently lies a puzzle, because, if this is the case, how could structuralism explain the phenomenon of imperial expansion?

In order to escape this conundrum structuralists invoke the second avenue that the system employs to influence states: the distribution of power capabilities among states. If the US and its nearest great power competitors each disposed of an approximately even level of capabilities, under a bipolar or multipolar distribution of power, a condition of precarious equilibrium would ensue. America’s bid for expansion would not be likely to succeed, because its rivals, following the dictates of balance of power, would join forces to block its efforts.⁸ However, under a unipolar distribution of

⁶ However, Mearsheimer extracts from this premise a different conclusion—namely, that if anarchy constrains state to pursue security, the most effective way to achieve this objective would be by means of gaining additional power. See John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 2-5, 30-5. Even so, Mearsheimer also agrees that only great powers will be able to successfully achieve an increase in influence.

⁷ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 126.

⁸ See inter alia *ibid.*, chap. 6; Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley, 1964), 22-6; Inis Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), chaps. 2-4; Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University

power where one state enjoys an unassailable lead in power resources, the ability of other great powers to oppose imperial expansion suffers a noticeable decline. With no single power, or even combination of powers able to oppose it, the US cannot avoid turning expansionist, a trend that in due course found its apex in the 1998-2003 interval. For structuralism, imperial expansion is the product of an *opportunity* created by the international distribution of power. It is just as if at a standing-room-only horse race, a seat suddenly became open in the front row.⁹ Just like spectators scrambling to reach a front-row seat, states will seek to actively take advantage of any favorable occasion for expansion that happens to come their way. To quote Waltz, “where gross imbalances of power exist... the more capable naturally exert a considerable influence over those less able to produce surpluses.”¹⁰ As a result, “for a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly... Countries with great-power economies have become great powers, whether or not reluctantly.”¹¹

These shifts may be produced by the economic and/or military growth of a great power compared to its rivals, through such means as tapping previously unexploited natural resources, increases in GDP and trade, technological innovation, superior management, a growing population, and the development of larger, better equipped, and better trained armed forces.¹² Conversely, the same end result may be due to the waning

Press, 1955); Stephen Walt, *Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); T. V. Paul et al., eds., *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁹ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays in International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1962), 14.

¹⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 26.

¹¹ Kenneth Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993): 45-73, 64.

¹² As Waltz puts it, “where one finds empires, one notices that they are built by those who have organized themselves and exploited their resources most effectively.” Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 26-7.

of rival powers, through military defeat, relative stagnation, or absolute socio-economic decline. The last two such instances were the aftermath of World War Two, when with the exception of the US and the Soviet Union, every other great power had been weakened in the conflict, and the end of the Cold War, in which the forfeit of the Kremlin left America supreme. In both scenarios, shifts automatically propelled great powers into a position conducive to expansion.

Waltz wrote at length about “the imperialism of great power,” meaning that “it would be odd for states affecting others more than they are affected by them not to engage in outwardly imperialist activity” and that, this being the case, “the absence of imperialism in the face of imbalanced power would sorely require explanation.”¹³ This is why, for Waltz, America’s expansionist efforts thirty years down the road constitute no mystery. “The winner of the Cold War and the sole remaining great power has behaved,” he writes in 2000, only one year following the bombing of Kosovo, “as unchecked powers have always done.”¹⁴ Drawing on Waltz’s earlier writings, Cohen reaches similar conclusions: “the real taproot of imperialism”, he writes, is to be found in “the anarchic organization of the international system of states. Nations yield to the temptations of domination because they are driven to maximize their individual power position.” Only states in command of significant levels of power capabilities could afford to follow a foreign policy of imperialism.¹⁵ Similarly, Gilpin argues that “a state will seek to change

Gilpin discusses this trend as the “law of uneven growth.” Also see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 94-5; Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why Great Powers Will Rise,” *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993): 5-51, 8-11.

¹³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 26-7.

¹⁴ Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000): 5-41, 24. Also see Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 1-11, 31-9.

¹⁵ Benjamin Cohen, *The Question of Imperialism: The Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 245. Also see 231-4, 241-2.

the international system through territorial, political, and economic expansion until the marginal costs of further change are equal to or greater than the marginal benefit” and hence, that “as the power of a state increases, it seeks to extend its territorial control, its political influence, and/or its domination of the international economy.”¹⁶ For Zakaria as well, America’s recent international conduct reflects the systemic rule according to which a state registering an increase in its power capabilities—particularly economic—will naturally seek sooner or later to expand its political influence as well. “As a state’s relative power increases,” Zakaria writes, “it attempts to expand its interests and influence abroad. Part of this process is almost involuntary; a growing state acquires more and more economic and political interests in the outside world, often bumping against the interests of other states.”¹⁷

A succinct overview of the available statistics for the 1990s and early 2000s confirms a pronounced American dominance over the rest of the great powers in terms of military and economic power capabilities. If in 1989, the US and the Soviet Union were neck and neck with military budgets approximating \$ 280 billion, a decade later the US slightly lower military budget of \$ 267.2 billion exceeded the combined defense expenses of the next in line ten powers, a list including Japan, France, the UK, Germany and China. In particular, the US remained throughout the Post Cold War the only state truly capable of projecting its power worldwide by rapidly deploying tens of thousands of troops over thousands of kilometers in multiple regions of the globe (Iraq, Somalia, Saudi

¹⁶ Gilpin, *War and Change*, 10, 106-7.

¹⁷ Though Zakaria chiefly examines the causes of exceptions to this rule—the so-called Dutch disease, in which an economically powerful state fails to exploit its superiority by seeking an advantage in military and political matters as well—he that eventually the system constrains such states to seek expansion, however reluctantly. See Fareed Zakaria, “Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay,” *International Security* 17 (Summer 1992): 177-98, 192-6; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 30, 38-9, 182-5.

Arabia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan), as well as by ensuring them the required logistics in terms of food, shelter, medical care, and communications. In economic terms, if in the late 1980s, the US was facing stiff competition from the growing economies of Germany and Japan, to the point many pronounced it a power in decline, by contrast, in 2000, America's GDP of \$ 9.25 trillion put it well ahead of Japan's \$ 2.95 trillion, China's \$ 4.8 trillion, and Germany's \$ 1.3 trillion. Furthermore, America also maintained a lead in high technology manufacturing and its 1997 budget devoted to research and development was close to the combined total of the other six G-7 countries. Only in demographics, the US took second place among the existing great powers to China.¹⁸

To be sure, not all structuralists argue that imperial expansion is the exclusive product of structural factors.¹⁹ A great deal of dissent exists among structuralists as to the exact mechanism through which structural pressures and incentives are translated into actual imperial expansion.²⁰ Based on the previously mentioned point according to which all states' chief concern should be their security, some partisans of structuralism come to regard expansion as an anomaly—dictated in large part by the interference of non-

¹⁸ These figures are available at the data banks of the CIA and of the Stockholm Peace Research Institute. See CIA World Fact Book, www.cia.gov/library/publication/the-world-factbook; www.sipri.org. Also see William Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* (Summer 1999): 5-41.

¹⁹ A clear distinction cannot be made on this point between so called offensive and defensive realists, since some acknowledged offensive realists, notably Mearsheimer, consider America's expansion as anomalous, given the stopping power of water that should prevent it from such endeavors. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambitions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 12-3; Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 114-127, 140-1; Jeffrey Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25 (Winter 2000): 128-61, 134-44.

²⁰ This is a particular valid conclusion for neoclassical realists who include in their analyses besides structural variables, data pertaining to decision-makers' perceptions or to domestic politics. Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51 (October 1998): 41-72; Randall Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 311-48; Steve Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

systemic factors. True enough, these structuralists contend, a state may be left with a temporary opportunity to expand unhindered. But, in their view, this does not explain fully why the state will decide to follow it through. The opportunity cannot fail to vanish, as the system seeks to regain balance, thus preventing a change from an anarchical to a hierarchical structure. To quote Layne, “one of history’s few incontestable lessons is that the pursuit of hegemony invariably is self-defeating.” This is why for a state to disregard the signals of the system by choosing imperial expansion over the long run represents an enterprise fraught with peril, or as Snyder puts it, “states should expect that expansion will reduce their security.”²¹

Yet these analyses are not necessarily incompatible with structuralist accounts that trace expansion solely to the uneven distribution of power. Even assuming that power imbalances will not withstand the test of time, structuralists of all persuasions still see them as much too tantalizing for a state to oppose successfully in the short term. To quote Waltz, “a state that is stronger than any other can decide for itself whether to conform its policies to structural pressures and whether to avail itself of the opportunities that structural change offers, with little fears of adverse effects in the short run.”²² In so doing, writes Waltz, US decision-makers may be judged guilty of folly over the long run, but, on the other hand, to wager that they can realistically fight off the lure of imperial expansion offered by unbridled power is likely to prove a losing bet for the immediate

²¹ Waltz, “Emergence,” 77; Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 6; Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 14-9, 21-2, 31-49; Jack Snyder, “Imperial Temptations,” *National Interest* 71 (Spring 2003): 29-40, 31-9.

²² Kenneth Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25 (Summer 2000): 5-41, 24. For a stronger argument stating that “powerful states may not respond to the international environment because their power makes them immune to its threat” see Wohlforth, “Stability of a Unipolar World,”⁴⁰. The difference here between structuralists is on the emphasis they place on structural factors as either a sufficient or merely a necessary cause of imperialism.

future.²³ Consequently, while for some structuralist scholars structural opportunity is not the entire story behind America's empire, it remains nevertheless the most consistent part of it. Thus, in a last instance, for structuralism the US cannot "help it"—it cannot help seeking to expand its influence abroad foremost because it finds itself in command of resources so formidable as to allow it to do so.

By contrast, for exceptionalism, the US quest for empire is driven primarily by American ideology, more specifically by an enduring American faith in having been entrusted a mission on behalf of the cause of global liberal-democracy.²⁴ "We Americans are the peculiar chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of Liberties of the world," wrote Hermann Melville, and Woodrow Wilson assented when proclaiming that the US "is chosen and prominently chosen to show the way to the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty."²⁵ Though this emphasis on being chosen is not uncommon in the history of empire-building, the US nevertheless stands out because of the special emphasis it places on the dissemination of liberal democratic principles.²⁶

In its most basic form exceptionalism argues that America's view of the world center around the profound belief that the US was chosen, "whether by God, 'Destiny,'"

²³ See in particular Waltz, "Emerging Structure," 77; also see Waltz, "Structural Realism," 24-5.

²⁴ The term is derived from Lerner's argument that some analysts tend to see the US "as immune from the forces of history and the laws of life." Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 64-6.

²⁵ Hermann Melville, *White Jacket*, quoted in Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 156-7; also see Edward McNall Burns, *The American Idea of Mission: Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1957); Loren Baritz, *City on a Hill: A History of Ideas and Myths in America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), 285-8; Woodrow Wilson, "Democratic Presidential Nomination Speech, May 26, 1912" quoted in Thomas Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

²⁶ See Burns, *Idea of Mission*, chap. 4. Burns also discusses several other potential sources for the belief of being chosen including Anglo-Saxon descentance, Puritan character, and the geographical peculiarities of America as the "promised land." See chaps. 2 and 3. For other empires' claims of fulfilling missions see Herfried Münkler, *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 85-93.

or ‘History’” to embody “the greatest, most successful, oldest, and most developed form of democracy.”²⁷ This opinion rests in turn on the American conviction that its own particular brand of democracy represents the best form of government that was or could ever be devised. American liberal-democracy is understood to rest on a set of perfect political principles—liberty, equality, individualism, and free markets—which are pervasive throughout American institutions and practices.²⁸ These principles form a basic creed that commands absolute loyalty on the part of Americans in terms more akin to religious faith than to rational persuasion. From here derives both a strict adherence of American society to “a fixed, dogmatic... liberal way of life” and a definition of American-ness as commitment to the creed. As Lipset puts it, “being an American is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American.” Hence, in this exceptionalist sense, to quote Ikenberry, America is “doomed” (though in a positive meaning) “to pursue a liberal grand strategy.”²⁹ This is why, for exceptionalism, the American empire cannot escape this liberal pattern that suffuses all American political life.

The belief of being chosen comports, according to exceptionalist accounts, three fundamental implications for the American empire. First, Americans enjoy the preeminent place among other nations as the defenders or champions of democracy. In the words of Weinberg, the US is convinced of having “a preeminent worth, a distinctive

²⁷ Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32; Burns, *Idea of Mission*, 11-6.

²⁸ For the best overview of the US liberal-democratic creed see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955); Burns, *Idea of Mission*, chaps. 5-6; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 31-2; Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 49-50.

²⁹ Hartz, *Liberal Tradition*, 9-11; Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 31; G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Liberal Grand Strategy,” in Michael Cox et al., eds. *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103-26; Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 48-9.

lofty mission, consequently unique rights in applying moral principles” throughout the world.³⁰ Being in the words of John Winthrop a city upon a hill, set high above all other polities, the US cannot be held hostage to the same restrictive standards of international behavior when it comes to expanding or exercising its influence.³¹ This means that America represents a qualitatively different empire from its predecessors precisely because its imperial efforts are pursued in service of a providential mission, not for the satisfaction of private ambitions. Consequently, America’s imperial activities should not generate as much uneasiness and opposition as they would, had they been performed by any another state. As Ignatieff puts it, “America’s empire is not like the empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest, or the white man’s burden... The 21st century imperium is a new invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights, and democracy.” Or in the words of Wattenberg: “the American empire is not like earlier European imperialisms. We have sought neither wealth nor territory. Ours is an imperium of values.”³²

By the same criterion, the US should enjoy an unimpeded freedom of action in expanding and administering its empire—it simply cannot be burdened with the sort of obligations and restrictions that apply to ordinary states that do not share its momentous task. As will be shown in Chapter Six, this point gains particular importance in exceptionalism’s interpretation of America’s continual soft spot for unilateralist foreign policies, because it claims an American propensity to act with minimal partners, in order

³⁰ Albert Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 8.

³¹ Baritz, *City on a Hill*, 16-7.

³² Michael Ignatieff, “The Burden,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 5, 2003, 22; Ben Wattenberg, *The First Universal Nation: Leading Indicators and Ideas about the Surge of America in the 1990s* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 188-9; Josef Joffe, “Who’s Afraid of Mr. Big?” *National Interest* 69 (Summer 2001), 43-52, 49; Max Boot, “Neither New, Nor Nefarious: The Liberal Empire Strikes Back,” *Current History* (November 2003): 361-6, 361.

to suffer no hindrances in the way it carries its imperial mission. Furthermore, since the US acts as the rightful agent of providence in its mission on behalf of democracy, it also believes that its endeavors should not be met with opposition, but instead should be enthusiastically supported, if not actually requested by other nations. As Boot puts it: “from Kosovo to Afghanistan and even to most parts of Iraq... GIs are seen as liberators, not oppressors. Many inhabitants of these war-torn lands want American troops to stay as long as possible.” Furthermore, “while some countries want the Yankees out, many more want us in.”³³ Because of this assumption, any concrete manifestation of opposition to the US is seen not only as unwarranted, but also illegitimate since it challenges what is held to be an evidently valid American mandate on behalf of global democracy.³⁴

Finally, a related idea is that an empire managed by the US should be inherently preferable to any of the alternatives provided by the other great powers, because of America’s special mission. Accordingly, if a state were to choose which great power to entrust with imperial overlordship, most would elect to submit to the benevolent and liberal authority of the US. To quote Joffe: “the rest of the world might chafe under the weight of America’s might, but it is a safe bet that it would rather have a voice in Washington than entrust the world to China, Russia, India, Japan, or France, or a combination thereof.” The same opinion is endorsed by Thayer: “a world dominated by the United States... is far superior for the world’s population than a world controlled by

³³ Ibid., 366; Max Boot, “Does America Need an Empire?” Chester Nimitz Memorial Lecture at the University of California at Berkeley, March 12, 2003, berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2003/03.19_boot-transcript.html.

³⁴ Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 46.

the Communist Chinese... emotionally and instinctually, each of us knows that, should any country be dominant, the United States is the best choice to exercise such power.”³⁵

Second, the US is deeply persuaded that the best interests of the world and its own naturally go hand in hand. This symbiotic relation is a common theme in the thought on American foreign policy through the ages from Thomas Paine’s view that “the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind” and Melville’s conviction that “national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy for we cannot do a good to America, but give alms to the world,” to Muravchik’s two basic truths (“First, America is a great force for good in the world...Second, what is good for democracy is good for America”) and to Thayer’s belief that “ a great good comes from American dominance” and that “when the sun sets down on the American Empire, we will acknowledge that the world was better for having it.”³⁶ For this reason, exceptionalism argues that empire is conceived as a special moral imperative— a vehicle for the propagation of America’s political values.³⁷ Hence, the more states are cajoled or pressured by means of empire to adopt the American liberal-democratic model, the better off the whole of humankind will be. Besides, this outcome will also be highly beneficial for the US itself, in light of the hypotheses of democratic peace theory, which states that liberal democratic regimes will rarely, if ever go to war with one another.³⁸ In this manner, by actively proselytizing

³⁵ Josef Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 219; Bradley Thayer, “Reply to Christopher Layne,” in Christopher Layne and Bradley Thayer, *The American Empire: A Debate*, 118, 117-8.

³⁶ Baritz, *City on a Hill*, 286-7; Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Destiny* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1991), 222; Bradley Thayer, “The Case for American Empire,” in Layne and Thayer, *American Empire*, 41, 47, 42-3; Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 34-5.

³⁷ Burns, *Idea of Mission*, 266-78.

³⁸ On democratic peace theory see inter alia Bruce Russett, ed., *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michael Brown et al., eds., *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996); John Oneal and Bruce Russett, “The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950-1985,” *International Studies*

democracy's virtues overseas, the US is simultaneously increasing its own security and serving the cause of lasting world peace.³⁹

Third, America's mission comports carrying out of particular duties. These consist in two conflicting strategies ever present in the history of American foreign policy. The first involves ensuring the preservation of uncorrupted freedom in America itself and in the process providing the world with an example to follow, while the second favors propagating liberal democratic values worldwide. The US could act either the part of the covenanted people, or that of the crusader in arms.⁴⁰ Each international role has its champions and prophets. Accordingly, John Quincy Adams defended the covenanted approach, by warning against an energetic foreign policy on behalf of democracy, which risked jeopardizing liberty at home, either through neglect, or through inadvertently turning America into "the dictatress of the world": "wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her [America's] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion only of her own."⁴¹ Meantime, Woodrow Wilson best exposed the crusader agenda: "the world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the

Quarterly 41 (June 1997): 267-93; Zeev Maoz, "The Controversy over the Democratic Peace: Rearguard Actions or Cracks in the Wall?," *International Security* 22 (Summer 1997): 162-98; Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace* (New York: Norton, 2001).

³⁹ Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy*, 6, 8.

⁴⁰ For this distinction see Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48-9. Smith adds the missionary version is by far the most common form in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. Also see Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Burns, *Idea of Mission*, chap. 10; Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 4-6; Baritz, *City on a Hill*, chap. 1.

⁴¹ John Quincy Adams, "July 4, 1821 Address," reproduced in Walter LaFeber, ed., *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire: Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 42-6, 45. The same argument can also be found in Washington's Farewell Address of 1796. See George Washington, "Farewell Address," in Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 144-7.

tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion...We are but the champions of the rights of mankind.”⁴² Exceptionalism identifies the roots of America’s recent episode of imperial expansion precisely in this latter American tendency to engage in crusades on behalf of liberal-democratic principles either for the purposes of protecting or spreading them to the farthest parts of the world.⁴³

In this respect, the 1990s and early 2000s were undoubtedly a particularly congenial period for the propagation of liberal democratic values, as evidenced by a flurry of enthusiastic endorsements. During the first term of the Clinton administration democracy promotion was enshrined under the concept of enlargement in the official National Security Strategy of the US: “we believe that our goals of enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity, and promoting democracy are mutually supportive...democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with the US.” Similarly, the National Security Strategy of the US published in the fall of 2002 by the George W. Bush administration opens with a passage proclaiming that the ideological struggles of the twentieth century had ended “with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise.”⁴⁴

⁴² Woodrow Wilson, “Address to Joint Chamber of Congress, April 2, 1917” quoted in Knock, *To End All Wars*, 121-2.

⁴³ See in particular Burns, *Idea of Mission*; Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ See White House, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, February 1996,” accessible at www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm; White House, “National Security of the United States of America,” September 2002, www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf.

Nevertheless, exceptionalists are careful to point out that the victory of the crusading model over that of the covenant is not definitive.⁴⁵ As seen from the critique of the notion of American empire mentioned in Chapter One, many of the points raised against America's imperial expansion are based precisely on the surviving argument that it represents a betrayal of America's democratic tradition. It is therefore entirely compatible to be a firm supporter of exceptionalism and at the same time to be a staunch opponent of empire and US imperial expansionism. For this reason, a sizable number of exceptionalist scholars depict America's ideological drive toward empire both as dangerously seductive and as self-defeating. For instance, McDougall denounces the ideological drive to go about "in search of monsters to destroy" with arguments very reminiscent of John Quincy Adams: "if you go abroad in search of monsters, you will invariably find them even if you have to create them. You will then have to fight them, whether or not you need to, and you will either come home defeated, or else so bloodied that the American people will lose their tolerance for engagement altogether, or else so victorious and full of yourself that the rest of the world will hate you and fear that you'll name them the next monster." In a similar vein, Lieven and Hulsman call on "sensible and moderate people from both parties to work together to oppose the currently dominant mixture of ignorant utopianism and megalomaniacal ambition, a program that, if it is not stopped, will inevitably lead America to overreach itself, suffer defeat and decline."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Burns, *Idea of Mission*; McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*.

⁴⁶ Walter McDougall, "Editor's Column," *Orbis* 42 (Winter 1998): 3-6, 6; Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World* (New York Pantheon Books, 2006).; Also see inter alia for similar points, McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*, 11-2, 145-6, 195-8, 208, 213-4; G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (September-October 2002): 44-60; Lieven, *America Right or Wrong*, 81-2; Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 270-307.

This is not, however, to say that exceptionalist analysts unanimously reject empire as the means of promoting liberal-democratic values to other shores. As seen from the above, there are in fact many, whether neoconservatives or liberal hawks, who enthusiastically advocate precisely such a course of action.

For revisionism, America's pursuit of imperial expansion can be traced to the interests of particular domestic groups set to achieve or consolidate political and economic gains through the imperial enterprise. The revisionist claim links therefore empire and parochial interests in America's domestic politics that result in a suboptimal foreign policy from the point of view of the interests and values of the US as a whole. Revisionists, however, are not pure neo-Marxists. Their approach is better seen as a distillation of the conclusions of Marx, Charles Beard, and Frederick Jackson Turner, and present day revisionists such as Bacevich and Johnson owe more to moderate liberals such as Hobson and Schumpeter than to Marx.⁴⁷ For revisionism, imperialism is not a project that pits an essentially transnational capitalist class against an exploited global proletariat—instead imperialism should be understood in terms of the particular requirements of the American society.⁴⁸

Approached from a revisionist perspective, American foreign policy is striking mainly by its obsession with imperial expansion since at least the 1890s.⁴⁹ It is in fact revisionism that has contributed the most toward popularizing the concept of American empire in the 1960s and 1970s. By contrast to other schools of thought, however, for

⁴⁷ For relevant works see Charles Beard, *The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962).

⁴⁸ See for such a neo-Marxist-Leninist discussion of empire Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Robert Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, The Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 30-1, 40-3, 84-5.

revisionism expansion applies to *economic* penetration rather than exclusively to the extension of *political* influence. In this revisionist sense, empire is both informal, and fundamentally organized around the extension and perpetuation of economic ties. For revisionism, this is precisely why the US spurns the complications of a formal political dominium: a simple economic connection suffices to secure a position of privilege for American elites without presenting them with the burden of actually administering a subject territory. In this sense, America's empire does not rely excessively on coercion, at least as long the validity of the principle of unimpeded access to world markets and capital outlets is not in question. But on the other hand, it remains an empire that restricts and hampers the possibilities of development of other nations. To quote Williams: "When an advanced industrial nation plays, or tries to play, a controlling and one-sided role in the development of a weaker economy, then the policy of the more powerful country can with accuracy and candor only be described by imperial. The empire that results may well be informal in the sense that the weaker country is not ruled on a day-to-day basis by resident administrators... but it is nevertheless an empire. The poorer and weaker nation makes its choices within limits set, either directly or indirectly, by the powerful society." Or as McCormick put it, the formula of American empire could be summed up as "instead of closed doors, open markets; instead of political dominance, economic hegemony; instead of large scale colonialism, informal empire. In short a most interesting hybrid of anti-colonialism and economic imperialism."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 55-7; Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 128, 131-6, 184-6. For the economic roots of America's empire see Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

The sources of US imperial expansion in the acceptance of revisionism have to do with social elites who stand to gain from increasing American economic interaction with the world. These gains do not necessarily consist in brute economic profit, but more importantly, in the preservation of political dominance over American society. For revisionism, imperialism does not always succeed in delivering the economic bounty it promises, but on the other hand, American decision-makers are socialized in the conviction that America's prosperity and survival depend on the continual export of American goods, services, and capital.⁵¹ The defining principle of American foreign policy in terms of ensuring the unimpeded access of American products and capital to foreign economic outlets came thus to be defined by the so-called Open Door notes of Secretary of State John Hay in 1899 and 1900. Accordingly, revisionism argues that the US has pursued ever since an international political strategy aimed at spreading and maintaining the Open Door abroad.

While apparently moderate in its ambitions, the Open Door policy de facto represents a demand for permanent American political supremacy. Since the success of any opposed principle, such as Germany's concept of *Mitteleuropa*, Nazi ideology, Soviet Communism, or Third World nationalism would have resulted in a protectionist world, closed to American goods and dollars, the US could not rest comfortably unless it enjoyed a heavily one-sided preponderance of power. This was particularly understood by revisionists as having been the case at the onset of the Cold War provoked by American intransigence in demanding the worldwide application of the Open Door

⁵¹ Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, chap. 2, especially 54-7.

(particularly in the form of the Marshall Plan), rather than by Soviet aggressive designs.⁵² By the same logic, the Open Door accounts as well for America's Cold War interventions in Korea, Guatemala, Cuba, Vietnam, and Chile. For revisionism the real stakes in these interventions did not involve the security of the US per se, but rather the defense of the principle of the Open Door from the challenges of nationalism and communism.⁵³

Essentially, current day revisionism updates the original accounts of Williams and LaFeber regarding imperial expansion for the post Cold War world.⁵⁴ According to Bacevich, the Open Door has gone global in the 1990s, thanks to the boom in means of communication, transfer of information, financial transactions, and trade exchanges that link together the various parts of the world into a single global economy with the US at its helm.⁵⁵ Accordingly, the main preoccupation of US decision-makers in the Post Cold War, irrespective of administration, is to ensure the definitive triumph of globalization through dismantling the last remaining obstacles to American trade and capital.⁵⁶ To quote Bacevich, "the Big Idea guiding US strategy is openness: the removal of barriers to the movements of goods, capital, people, and ideas, thereby fostering an integrated international order conducive to American interests, governed by American norms, regulated by American power, and, above all, satisfying the expectations of the American people for ever-greater abundance."⁵⁷ As in traditional revisionist theory, openness is

⁵² Ibid., 50-7, 207-10, 229-36, 243-8, 266-75. Also see Richard Barnet, *Roots of War* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 152-4.

⁵³ Ibid., 5-8, 138-51, 155-63, 176-205, 266-7, 337-41; Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 10-26, 78-87, 119-26; Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 291-2; 300-4.

⁵⁴ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 79, 85. Bacevich's emphasis on the Open Door qualifies him as a revisionist, not as exceptionalist.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 34-43, 72-4, 200-4, 214-23..

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

predicated both on the necessity of continual economic growth to stem demands for political reform, and on the dogmatic belief that America's internal market is unable to support such economic growth. Furthermore, as in the studies of Williams and LaFeber, openness imposes the maintenance of American predominance so as "to consolidate and even enlarge a particular conception of global order," favoring the US.⁵⁸

However, a key difference between the original revisionists and the present day practitioners lies in the degree of importance the latter attach to the threat and the actual use of military force by the US in order to safeguard openness. For Williams especially, the use of force was episodic and understood as a last-resort instrument. Not so for Bacevich, for whom the US has become much more trigger-happy. Globalization, he writes, imposes an "imperative of military supremacy, maintained in perpetuity, and projected globally."⁵⁹ The more openness the US promotes, the more threats to the unimpeded functioning of the Open Door System are identified. Accordingly, in order to address them, the current American empire has become militarized, with substantial authority devolved to the Pentagon and to regional military commanders in chief (CINCs) who act as a modern counterpart of Roman proconsuls, the supreme decision-makers on political and military matters alike.⁶⁰

This argument is even more prominent in the research of Johnson, in which the US began as a trade empire, but underwent since World War Two a transition toward a militarized empire. Hence, a particular class stands to profit out of the imperial enterprise: this is constituted of a motley group of professional soldiers, multinational

⁵⁸ Ibid., 79-88, 86.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 122-8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 121, 123-8, 174-80 ; Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: the Costs and Consequences of the American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000), 93, 84-94; Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004), 5.

corporation bureaucrats, petroleum industrialists, hedge fund speculators, intellectuals supporting globalization, and businessmen catering to the sustenance and entertainment of the US bases around the world. This group, reuniting people who anticipate “profitable business and lucrative employment” in the service of American empire, represents for Johnson the equivalent of Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex. The complex has managed to successfully gain control over the foreign policy of the US to the point where America no longer can be seen as a republic, but as an oligarchic military empire.⁶¹

Therefore the point of empire is not to benefit the US, but instead to preserve the political power and resulting privileges of the oligarchic group. Resources are accordingly spent on military and intelligence-gathering bases akin to colonies as well as on the acquisition of new weapons and military technology the US does not require to ensure its physical security, but which contribute to the overall influence and wealth of the military establishment and its industrial arm.⁶² For Johnson, the military-industrial complex is also the main force behind the US obsession with creating and preserving an international economic environment hospitable to the unimpeded transfer of goods and of capital. This desideratum is satisfied through the twin instruments of neoclassical economics that provides the ideology of the day, and the IMF, which, for Johnson, can for all intents and purposes be seen as “a covert arm of the US Treasury.”⁶³ Yet, for revisionism, regardless of the magnitude of America’s imperial trespasses, the American people are in general not fond of overseas imperial expansion. The strategy of expansion, ingenious as it may be, will be ultimately rejected, since the opposition it will not fail to

⁶¹ Ibid., 2-3, 23, 26-8, 187-205.

⁶² Ibid., 23-5, 35-6, 63-5, 151-2; Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2006), 138, 142, 149-52.

⁶³ Johnson, *Blowback*, 210; 176-7, 180-1, 200-8, 210-2.

generate abroad will eventually bring home the message of the absolute need for long postponed political reforms. In particular, terrorism represents the most radical form of anti-American resistance, in turn provoking the US into overblown reactions—the results of which were seen in the invasion of Iraq.⁶⁴

Accounting for American Imperial Expansion

In foreign policy analysis, a “mosaic” model is frequently seen as superior to the one resulting from the consideration of only a single overriding factor. So it is with theories of empire. Thus, for Doyle, imperial expansion is the complex result of the mix between the metropole’s political cohesion, the periphery’s lack thereof, the systemic imbalance between the capabilities of the two, and the “transnational extension” of the metropole.⁶⁵ This is to say that a synthetic model presents an analyst of imperial expansion with an array of distinct and seductive advantages. Indeed, the answer to the puzzle of recent American expansion would have to combine elements of all three schools of thought on empire: the international distribution of power capabilities, America’s pervasive liberal democratic political culture, and America’s domestic politics.

The US could not have succeeded in pursuing imperial expansion without enjoying an appropriate lead in power capabilities over states such as Yugoslavia and Iraq, and over the other members of the great power club, China and Russia. The

⁶⁴ Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008); Bacevich, *American Empire*, 226, 229-31; Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, chap. 8.

⁶⁵ By “extension” Doyle means the metropole cultural, economic, and political involvement in the periphery, which in turn generates interests that need protection Doyle, *Empires*, 128-35; Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 88. An excellent illustration of this principle has also been provided by Dueck, who, in order to account for America’s grand strategy, has resorted to an equation consisting of international politics, American clashing strategic subcultures, and US domestic politics. Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

international environment in between 1998 and 2003 was thus a permissive context for America's imperial efforts. By the same token, the strategy imperial expansion had to be compatible, at least in the respect of public rhetoric, with America's liberal democratic creed, which pervade America's political life. Finally, imperial expansion could not have become the top priority on the foreign policy agenda of the US without people in positions of power, who endorsed it for reasons of conviction or private interest.

But where does a theory of empire based on prestige figure in Doyle's typology? Considered in depth, Doyle's scheme leaves sufficient room to accommodate additional models. This applies in the case of pericentric theories of empire, where there is no correspondent school of thought on American foreign policy, but also, and more significantly, this is true of metrocentric theories.⁶⁶ Notwithstanding Doyle's contention that scholars have to combine equally metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic variables to adequately account for empire, in the end it is metrocentric factors that seem to emerge as the real linchpin of any such analysis.⁶⁷ To quote Wolfers, "in the last analysis, it is the goals pursued by the actors and the way they go about pursuing them that determine whether and to what extent the potentialities for power struggle and war are realized."⁶⁸ One simply cannot have imperialism without an imperialist polity or a reason for it to seek empire. As Harcourt writes: "by its very nature... imperialism implies that the motive force must come from the center of power not from the periphery."⁶⁹ Therefore, in a last instance, states' goals are essential to determining why imperial expansion takes

⁶⁶ The exceptions are Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003); Sebastian Mallaby, "Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire," *Foreign Affairs* (March/ April 2002): 2-7.

⁶⁷ Doyle, *Empires*, 46, 123-30.

⁶⁸ Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, 67.

⁶⁹ Freda Harcourt, "Disraeli's Imperialism," *Historical Journal* 23, 1 (1980) quoted in Doyle, *Empires*, 127.

place or is avoided. Even structuralism, which otherwise qualifies as systemic could be seen as including an unacknowledged metrocentric dimension.⁷⁰ For instance, a structuralist analysis of the US behavior in the case of Kosovo, would not simply emphasize that the US was much stronger than Yugoslavia, but would also justify the decision to intervene by reference to the destabilizing effects of a conflict in the Balkans on the security of US regional allies. Thus structuralism argues that the system affects states by presenting them with constraints to pursue power or security.⁷¹

In this sense, Doyle's scheme warrants a further proviso: it fails to discriminate among the various theories that collectively could qualify as metrocentric. Accordingly, Doyle groups together theories such as Lenin's or Hobson's that trace the origin of empire to the domestic politics of the metropole and theories referring to autonomous goals that the imperial centre seeks to accomplish in the international arena. This constitutes a sizable oversight, since the criticisms Doyle then proceeds to hurl at metrocentrism are based exclusively on the domestic politics interpretation. For instance, Doyle reproaches metrocentrism its indiscriminate explanation of empire through factors, such as the need for capital outlets, which are clear historical anachronisms in the cases of premodern empires.⁷² Nevertheless, a profound difference is at work here. The domestic politics model is predicated on the assumption of an atomized political system,

⁷⁰As Brooks puts it: "ironically, although neorealists are leading critics of classical realist explanations of international behavior predicated on particular conceptions of human nature, the internal coherence of the neorealist framework itself depends fundamentally on the psychological assumption that actors are characteristically highly fearful." Stephen Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization* 51 (Summer 1997): 445-77, 448-9; also see Randall Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?," Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Realism: Restatement and Renewal* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 90-121, 100-21; Doyle, *Empires*, 125-9.

⁷¹ Dueck similarly argues that relative capabilities represent only a permissive cause of intervention—for intervention to occur the intervener state must experience the actual perception of a threat to its security. Colin Dueck, "Neoclassical Realism and the National Interest: Presidents, Domestic Politics and Major Military Interventions," in Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism*, 139-69, 149-50.

⁷² Doyle, *Empires*, 22-4, 60-1, 125 123-4.

in which subgroups compete in order to gain control over the state's foreign policy agenda. Therefore the resulting foreign policy may come to reflect the interests of the group that emerges victorious. Conversely, if the groups are caught in deadlock, the policy will represent a compromise falling short of the preferences of domestic actors.

Meantime, the latter autonomous goals model, found in Thucydides' analysis of the Athenian empire, is built on the premise of the metropole as a unitary actor engaged in the pursuit of the national interest. In this sense, Thucydides' account of empire should be seen as unambiguous metrocentric theory. In order to explain a given policy, Thucydides examines the motivation of the actor that has undertaken it: "we [the Athenians] have done nothing extraordinary, nothing contrary to human nature in accepting our empire when it was given to us and then in refusing to give it up. Three very powerful motives prevent us from doing so: security, honor, and self-interest."⁷³ The puzzle of America's recent imperial expansion could likewise be accounted for through an analysis of the objectives that the US as an autonomous political actor, sought to achieve.⁷⁴ A revised version of Doyle's scheme shows that some of the existing theories of American empire correspond to autonomous goals for imperial expansion: power, security, and idea.⁷⁵

⁷³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) Rex Warner trans., I.76, 80; I.75, 80. Also see Doyle, *Empires*, 60-5, 125.

⁷⁴ This approach is informed by statism. Statism believes that the government represents more than just the lump sum of the competing agendas and perspectives of societal actors, but could be regarded as a political actor in its own right, endowed with its own set of preferences, obligations, and objectives. See Stephen Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investment and US Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 10-3.

⁷⁵ In Aron's revision of Thucydides' classification states pursue *four* basic goals: the first three, power, security, and glory, corresponding to Thucydides categories; and the fourth being idea, in the sense of a state that seeks to spread worldwide its ideology. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), 72-3

Metrocentric theories of expansion		Pericentric theories of expansion	Systemic theories of expansion
Domestic politics	Autonomous goals	Failed states	Structuralism
Revisionism	Power and security		
	Structuralism		
	Idea		
	Exceptionalism		
	Prestige		

The variable of idea is represented in the scheme by exceptionalism, which ties America's pursuit of expansion with the dissemination of its political values. The pursuit of power and of security are represented by structuralism.⁷⁶ This leaves unexplored precisely the avenue of inquiry based on the pursuit of prestige. To quote Allison and Zelikow: "the need for all three lenses [Allison's three models] is evident when one considers the causal bottom line. The painful 'but for which' test demands that one identify major factors, *but for which* the outcome would not have occurred, or would have been materially different."⁷⁷ This is why analysts have to bring prestige considerations as well into the picture. Necessary as they undoubtedly are for understanding America's imperial expansion from 1998 to 2003, power capabilities, ideology, and domestic interests are not at the same time sufficient.

⁷⁶ Because of its dual systemic and (unacknowledged) metrocentric dimensions structuralism figures in both columns.

⁷⁷ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edn. (New York: Addison Wesley, 1999), 383.

Chapter Three

America: Empire or Imperialist?

Pondering the origins of America's imperial expansion may bring to memory Shakespeare: some are born great, some become great, and some have greatness thrust upon them.¹ Yet the key question of whether the US should be seen in the aftermath of the Cold War as a fully fledged empire or whether it only began to warm up towards imperial expansion in the late 1990s is often neglected by recent studies of American empire.² Nevertheless, if the US is an empire, when and how exactly did it become one?³ This is more than just a matter of indulging historical curiosity because if the US sought an empire, whether formal or informal, only in two isolated timeframes a century apart (1898 and 1998) empire-building represents an anomaly in the course of US foreign policy. By contrast, if the US has been throughout most of its history an empire, any analysis of America's recent imperial policy has to include the aspect of continuity, i.e. establishing what makes this latest bout similar or distinct by reference to past instances.

This chapter argues in favor of the latter point of view. The US has been an informal empire for more than a hundred years since the Spanish-American war of 1898. To paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt, America's modern history may be read essentially as the history of unabashed and continual expansion, yet, America's expansion is as well "of

¹ Quoted in Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and the World, 1961), 270.

² See Joshua Micah Marshall, "Power Rangers: Did the Bush Administration Create a New American Empire or Weaken the Old One?" *New Yorker*, February 2, 2004.

³ A related point might be the historical debate on the exact moment when the US became a great power. The conventional view indicates 1898, as for instance in *ibid.*, 263-70. For a dissenting view that the US has been a great power since its founding see Thomas Bailey, "America's Emergence as a World Power: The Myth and the Verity," *Pacific Historical Review* 50 (February 1961): 1-16.

different kinds at different times.”⁴ In fact, America’s ascension from the 1776 motley assembly of thirteen colonies on the shores of the Atlantic to the multi-continental empire of today took place in five basic successive phases, each determined by the pursuit of distinct overriding objectives.⁵

America has been undergoing since 1989 a fifth phase of expansion, where the chief areas of interest are the regions bordering the American empire: Eastern Europe, the Gulf, and the Balkans. This resulted in the expansion of NATO, as well as in the creation of security ties and the emplacement of troops on a permanent basis in some of the Gulf oil monarchies. However, toward the end of the 1990s, the rationale of reassurance was superseded eventually by mounting concerns for US prestige, which dictated a far more unilateral and aggressive approach to empire.

When America Was Not an Empire

Empire figures prominently in the political vision of America’s Founding Fathers. For instance, John Adams recalled that “there is nothing... more ancient in my memory that the observation that arts, sciences, and empire had traveled westward; and in conversation it was always added since I was a child that their next leap would be over the Atlantic into America.” Thomas Jefferson spoke as well about an “empire for liberty”

⁴ Quoted in David Healy, *US Expansionism: The Imperial Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), 34-5.

⁵ See inter alia for historical accounts emphasizing expansion as a constant drive in US foreign policy Albert Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study in Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, reprint 1935); Richard Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965); Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic: The United States and the World, 1945-1973* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), XXIV- XXXVIII; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984); Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

that would emerge “when our rapid multiplication will expand itself... and cover the whole northern, if not southern continent, with a people speaking in the same language, governed in similar form, and by the same laws.” John Quincy Adams voiced the opinion that “the world shall be familiarized with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America.”⁶ It is hence all too tempting to see America’s propensity toward empire to be as old, if not older than the US itself.⁷

However, this view should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. As Koebner has demonstrated, the eighteenth century use of the term empire could cover any powerful state, without necessarily implying the presence of subjects over which the imperial influence was exercised—as seen for instance in expressions such as “empire of the sea.”⁸ Hence, the above quotes actually reflect the wish for the US to become a powerful state, akin to Great Britain or France and do not indicate America’s desire to rule over other nations. Jefferson, in fact went as far as contemplating the possibility of several empires for liberty of American extraction co-existing independent of the US proper on both American continents.⁹ Thus, much as it is depicted as being conducive to a budding empire, America’s expansion prior to the 1890s was not designed to produce a proper multinational empire, but rather to pursue an on-going national project.¹⁰

⁶ Quoted in Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 21, 61; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 86-7, 92-3.

⁷ See Bradley Thayer, “The Case for American Empire” in Christopher Layne and Bradley Thayer, *American Empire: A Debate* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7-12; Van Alstyne, *Rising American Empire*, 2-3, 6-10; Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Fred Anderson and Andrew Caynton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking, 2005), especially XIX-XX.

⁸ Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 61-104. For a similar point see Robert Tucker, *Nation or Empire? The Debate Over American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 40-1.

⁹ See Van Alstyne, *Rising American Empire*, 87-8.

¹⁰ See Bradford Perkins, *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865*, Warren Cohen, ed., *Cambridge History of America’s Foreign Relations I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170-2.

Accordingly, the US was guided by the fundamental principles that “a people not capable of rising to statehood should never be annexed,” and that “any hurried admission to the temple of freedom would be unwise; any forced admission would be a contradiction in terms, unthinkable, revolting.”¹¹ These principles came with important provisos attached: America was only interested in areas susceptible of being integrated at a later date into the US proper as states, and this meant that the areas in question should have been for the most part empty of population and thus ready to be colonized by Anglo-Saxons. The words that Lewis Cass, the Democrat Senator of Michigan, candidly used to describe America’s intentions toward Mexico could be therefore employed to provide an accurate depiction of the orientation of American policy throughout the period: “all we want is a portion of territory... generally uninhabited, or, where inhabited at all, sparsely so, and with a population which would soon recede, or identify itself with ours.”¹² In fact, the only non-Anglo-Saxon state that ever applied to be included in the “temple of freedom”—the Dominican Republic in 1869—was turned down. By all means, the US was interested in acquiring ownership over the land itself, not in imposing its dominance over its Indian or Mexican inhabitants. These America sought, as Cass had suggested, either to absorb, or failing this, simply to expel.¹³

To this extent, America’s march into the West was understood to be a nationalist, not imperialist policy.¹⁴ As Gellner has defined it, nationalism is the political principle that holds that nation and state should coincide, hence that the borders that they occupy should be coterminous. But in the case of the US, this principle took a distinct form from

¹¹ Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 24-5, 256-7.

¹² Quoted in Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 168; also see Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, chaps. 7-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 106-9, 112-5, 190-9; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, chap. 3.

¹⁴ As Weinberg put it, annexation could only take place after thorough Americanization. *Ibid.*, 125.

its classic expression in Europe. By contrast to the European case, typically represented by Germany, where the national state was meant to encompass all areas *already* heavily inhabited by German-speaking people, for the nineteenth century US, nationalism meant laying claim primarily to those areas susceptible of being settled by Americans.¹⁵ In this line of thought, the Manifest Destiny slogan expressed the belief that the US was fulfilling its national aspirations by taking possession of an empty and vast space, which Providence itself had reserved for its exclusive use.¹⁶ As *The New York Evening Post* argued in January 1801: “It belongs *of right* to the United States to regulate the future destiny of *North America*. The country is *ours*; ours is the right to its rivers and to all the sources of future opulence, power and happiness, which lay scattered at our feet.”¹⁷

A summary overview of America’s growth between 1776 and 1867 supports this view. Most of the formidable territorial expanse between the Alleghenies and the Pacific was barely inhabited. With the exceptions of Vermont and Texas, no independent republic joined the Union—all other states being in effect settler projects.¹⁸ Furthermore, sizable time intervals occurred between the actual annexation and the achievement of statehood, simply because time was needed for actual settlement to take place. This was so since, under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, no state could be allowed to join the US until its population numbered at least 60,000 residents. In some cases, statehood was a considerably drawn-out affair: Oklahoma attained this status only in 1907, while Arizona and New Mexico had to wait until 1912. To sum up, the US hurried to take

¹⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 3. See on settler nationalism Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chap.6.

¹⁶ For John O’ Sullivan, the term’s originator in the pages of *Democratic Review* of July 1845, Manifest Destiny referred to America’s destiny “to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” Quoted in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 112.

¹⁷ Quoted in Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 31.

¹⁸ One should also make allowance for the short-lived Bear Flag republic in California.

control over the land without being too worried about either having the necessary population to fill it or about the fate awaiting the land's previous inhabitants.

On the other hand, every time the US contemplated seizing largely populated areas, the argument of race surfaced to prevent any such aggrandizement.¹⁹ The assumption was that only certain races were fit for democratic institutions, and that, by implication, America's inclusion or annexation of peoples considered incapable of living under a free government could only lead to failure.²⁰ In the words of Representative Alexander Duncan of Ohio in the 1840s: "There seems to be something in our laws and institutions, peculiarly adapted to our Anglo-Saxon American race, under which they will thrive and prosper, but under which all others wilt and die." Senator John Calhoun of South Carolina went even further: "we have never dreamt of incorporating into the Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race. To incorporate Mexico would be the first instance of the kind... Are they fit to be connected with us? Are they fit for self-government and for governing you?"²¹ Under such circumstances, building an American empire was out of the question, since empire, by definition, has to be multinational.²²

However, if the US was not an empire prior to 1898, this did not imply a dearth of plans to become one. Alexander Hamilton sought in the 1790s to emulate Britain's naval

¹⁹ This was certainly not the only argument against expansion. Other considerations at stake were the question of slavery in the areas likely to be annexed, the risks to the preservation of liberty at home, and the inability of the Presidency to impose its will against the resistance of Congress. See Merck, *Manifest Destiny*, chaps. 6-7; Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997); H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

²⁰ This explains why the US was less than sanguine about the prospects of Latin American revolutions to put into place viable democratic regimes. See Perkins, *Creation of a Republican Empire*, 157-8.

²¹ Quoted in Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 163; also see Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 242, 245-6; Merck, *Manifest Destiny*, 157-66; Michael Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), chap. 3.

²² Maurice Duverger, ed., *Le Concept d'Empire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980); Amy Chua, *Day of Empire* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

strategy by building a conventional insular empire in the Caribbean out of the French colonial possessions.²³ A strong case for the retention of all Mexico in the aftermath of the 1846-8 war for the purpose of “regenerating” it was passionately argued by the media.²⁴ In between 1849 and 1860, private adventurers known as the filibusters sought to pose the foundations of an empire congenial to Southern slavery in Central America. Narciso Lopez, a former Spanish officer, thus sought on three occasions to seize Cuba and then join it to the US; and William Walker, a Tennessee-born adventurer, led no fewer than ten expeditions against Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua, where, for a brief stint, he styled himself president.²⁵ President James K. Polk, President Franklin Pierce and President James Buchanan sought repeatedly to annex Cuba in 1848, 1854, and 1858-1860, by arm-twisting the Spanish government to sell the US the island for a sum evolving around \$ 120 million. The Pierce administration also made the first of many US attempts to secure an annexation treaty with Hawaii.²⁶

Secretary of State William Henry Seward’s projects evoked an imagery that would have certainly been familiar to Philip II of Spain: the US borders “shall be extended so that it will greet the sun when he touches the tropics and when he sends his gleaming rays toward the polar circle, and shall include even distant islands in either ocean.” In addition to being the determinant voice in the purchase of Alaska, Seward also advocated the creation of an extensive American empire in the Caribbean and the Pacific,

²³ Gerald Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 192-201; John Lamberton Harper, *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of US Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chaps. 17-9.

²⁴ Merck, *Manifest Destiny*, 119-24; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 165-80; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 236-46.

²⁵ Robert May, *Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 25-30, 78-135; 77-8, 84-8; William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860* (New York: Wiley, 1966) 77-8, 84-8.

²⁶ May, *Southern Dream*, chaps. 4, 7; Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Foreign Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

comprising Hawaii, the Danish West Indies (the actual Virgin Islands), Santo Domingo, and St. Bartholomew. Seward also did not recoil from envisaging an American center towards which eventually Latin America, Asia, and Canada would gravitate and the future of a US that would share a common border with Russia “in the region where civilization first began,” an expression designating China.²⁷ In 1869, President Ulysses Grant concocted a plan for seizing control over Santo Domingo. Through the means of personal envoys, Grant proposed the Dominican government, at the time involved in a war with neighboring Haiti, to accept annexation. He then intended to present the US Congress with this *fait accompli*. The US actually signed two treaties of annexation—the first covering the entire Dominican territory, the second promising to buy Samana Bay from the Dominicans in case the Senate scuttled the first treaty. Grant went so far as to dispatch a US naval squadron ready to take possession of Santo Domingo and his agents enthusiastically hoisted up the Stars and Stripes. Further attempts at expansion under Grant concerned annexing Cuba, and attempts to obtain naval bases in Hawaii and Samoa.²⁸ Finally, in 1893, American businessmen in Hawaii staged a coup d’état that toppled Queen Liliuokalani, with the complicit blessing of the American minister in Honolulu—and speedily proceeded to demand annexation.²⁹

Nevertheless, the collective record of these stabs at empire was dismal. Hamilton’s designs were thwarted by the opposition of President John Adams, who delighted in denying him the funds for building a viable army. The most the media

²⁷ Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 57-67; Robert Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900* (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1975), 44-8; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 242; Van Alstyne, *Rising American Empire*, 146, 176-7.

²⁸ Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 67-75; Beisner, *From the Old Diplomacy to the New*, 48-52.

²⁹ Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006), chap. 1.

supporters of all Mexico obtained was an open-ended commitment by Polk regarding the possible territorial indemnities to be obtained from Mexico. The filibusters acted on an ad-hoc basis and found themselves frequently sabotaged and even put on trial by the US government. Both Lopez and Walker ended their career ignominiously by garrote and firing squad respectively. All attempts to annex Cuba by persuading or coercing the Spanish to sell the island were met with unequivocal rejections from Madrid, and with outcries from the US Congress. Seward's schemes for aggrandizement fizzled out in the face of domestic opposition. President Grant's maneuvers could not secure the acceptance of either treaty on Santo Domingo by the US Congress led by the Chairman of the Senate Committee for Foreign Relations Charles Sumner. President Grover Cleveland inaugurated his second term in office by withdrawing the treaty with Hawaii from ratification by Congress. The results of the drive for empire prior to 1898 were hence meager: they consisted in uninhabited Alaska, and in two bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and Pago Pago in Samoa. Americans might have throughout most of the nineteenth century dreamed of empire, but they shied away from actually seizing it.

The Origins of Informal Empire

In a geographical sense, the second phase represented a profound revolution in American foreign affairs. Starting in the 1890s, the US began to gravitate toward expansion beyond the confines of the North American continent, which eventually led in 1898 to the acquisition of empire both in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, through the occupation of Cuba and of the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii. Yet this was a revolution in a second sense as well. While in the first phase the US sought to include its newest

possessions in the Union itself by a formal process of annexation, in subsequent phases it eventually settled on the indirect exercise of influence by philo-American governments.

The factors that prompted the US to seek empire in the last decade of the nineteenth century consisted in the so-called Dual Mandate.³⁰ In part, America was motivated by a desire for gaining strategic and commercial control points. These two desiderata were by all means mutually supportive. Trade was seen not only in the US, but around the world at the time as one of the main avenues of achieving and maintaining power in international affairs. Conversely, the pursuit of trade opportunities necessitated a sizable logistical array of harbors, fueling stations, merchant marine, navy, and military bases to protect one's trade outposts. Therefore, which power held sway over areas such as straits, canals, islands and peninsulas from which one could at will allow or forbid passage—increasingly became a chief concern of every great power.

On these matters, the US supplied the world's leading authority in the person of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan's argument in favor of expansion was that without overseas possessions there could be no American naval bases, hence no sustainable American sea power. American ships would have been like land birds unable to fly too far away from American shores. Consequently, the US would have been bested in any contest at sea against rivals, and thus could have faced the prospect of a blockade of New York, Boston, and New Orleans, which would have crippled the US economy. The acquisition of the Philippines, Hawaii and later of the Panama Canal was hence a direct result of this new strategic conception: the Philippines represented the base enabling lucrative trade with China; Hawaii became a necessary station to supply and defend

³⁰ Healy, *US Expansionism*, 16-7. For the revisionist alternative see Williams, *Tragedy*, 28-44; Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 150-86, 370-406.

America's position in Manila; and the Panama Canal was a decisive chokepoint, ensuring fast traffic between the Atlantic and the Pacific.³¹

The other component of the Dual Mandate consisted of the belief that empire represented the choice instrument for the advancement of civilization around the world. Consequently, "the age of Empire" meant that empires had to perform a distinctive civilizational mission on behalf of humanity by lifting up non-European-stock populations from their perceived technological, cultural, and institutional backwardness.³² Kipling gave this mission the name of "white man's burden"—though the immediate inspiration for his eponymous poem was not Great Britain, but America's decision to occupy the Philippines and the resulting insurgency.³³ As such, the "white man's burden" was predicated on a racist conviction substantially different from the one that had been dominant in American thought during the first phase. Indeed, US Presidents from McKinley to Wilson, as well as the main partisans of expansion were progressive imperialists: they rejected the assumption that any race was so wretched or wicked as to be completely beyond redemption. For progressive imperialists, the more advanced states had a moral duty to educate and lead those less fortunate, whether the latter were willing or not to follow the path towards civilization.³⁴ To quote Theodore Roosevelt, the US possessed "a mandate from civilization to effect an object the

³¹ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon World History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1898), 82-9.

³² Healy, *US Expansionism*, 12-7, chap. 7.

³³ See *ibid.*, 127-34; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 301-5; Ernest May, *American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 228-30.

³⁴ May does not rule out that the US penchant for spreading civilization might have been connected with the desire for status, in the sense of imitating the colonialist behavior of fully fledged great powers. See *ibid.*, 194-5. In the same vein Hobsbawm writes that spearheading the cause of civilization was intimately connected with the status of being a great power: "Once the status of a great power... became associated with raising its flag over some palm-fringed beach (or more likely over patches of dry scrub), the acquisition of colonies became a status symbol, irrespective of their value." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 67.

accomplishment of which was demanded in the interests of mankind.” Similarly, for Secretary of State Richard Olney membership in the great power club imposed responsibilities: “the mission of this country is not merely to pose but to act and... to forgo no fitting opportunity to further the progress of civilization.”³⁵

However, the US eventually opted for an informal mode of imperial organization.³⁶ This choice was determined by three considerations. First, the acquisition of directly administered colonies would have resulted in a political tug-of-war regarding the competition between their products, foodstuffs, and raw materials and those produced by the US, which might have been resolved to the disadvantage of the American states. Second, confronted by a vocal anti-imperialist movement, and with an election on the way in 1900, many of the partisans of expansion had toned down their earlier advocacy of open colonization in Cuba and the Philippines or of further insular possessions. Third, and the most important factor, was the armed resistance the US encountered in its single attempt to actually rule a colony in the Philippines.³⁷

Seized at the same time as Cuba as a result of the Spanish-American war of 1898, despite the fact that they had formally declared their independence and that their ownership had not been an American war objective, the islands took only six months to rebel against the US occupiers and start an insurrection that lasted four years and claimed six thousand Americans and tens of thousands of Filipino dead. The insurgence took by surprise the US decision-makers, who had expected genuinely grateful obeisance on the

³⁵ May, *American Imperialism*, 184-5; Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 292, 313, 342; Healy, *US Expansionism*, 33.

³⁶ May, *American Imperialism*, chaps. 6 - 7; Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire*, 62-73.

³⁷ Essentially this is May’s interpretation of the end of American colonialism. Revisionism, however, argues that informal empire was dictated by Open Door considerations. See May, *American Imperialism*, 210-7; Williams, *Tragedy*, 55-7.

part of the Filipinos and had minimized the risks and magnitude of the opposition. Furthermore it exposed them to the costly and ugly reality of a repressive colonial war. By 1901, even Theodore Roosevelt, was in doubt as to the real usefulness of the acquisition of the Philippines (this conception eventually matured into his assertion that the islands represented America's heel of Achilles in Asia).³⁸ Furthermore, the likelihood of the repetition of the Filipino scenario in different contexts was certainly not ruled out, as Britain was experiencing even more daunting difficulties in the concurrent Boer War, and American decision-makers fretted about the potential for a similar uprising in Cuba.³⁹

Therefore, in the aftermath of the Filipino insurgency, a chastened US chose the formula of indirect control over that of a classic colonial empire. This *modus operandi* fulfilled several requirements at once: it reduced the risk of goading nationalist sentiments abroad; it avoided generating political backlash at home against empire; it reduced imperial costs; and gave credibility to America's profession of not being an imperialist on par with the European powers or Japan. At the same time, however, this course of action allowed the US to play a determinant part in the foreign and domestic policies of its subjects. The first testing ground of the informal empire formula was Cuba.⁴⁰ By the Platt Amendment of 1901, Cuba, though nominally set to become independent and ruled by a Cuban government in 1902, was nevertheless constrained to accept a number of severely limiting conditions—chief being the interdiction to conclude

³⁸ See Leon Wolff, *Little Brown Brother: How the United States Purchased and Pacified the Philippines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); David Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Kinzer, *Overthrow*, chap.2.

³⁹ Secretary of War Elihu Root, who was in charge of the occupation policy, worried that the US was "on the verge daily of the same sort of thing that happened to us in the Philippines." See David Healy, *The United States in Cuba, 1898-1902: Generals, Politicians, and the Search for Policy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 120.

⁴⁰ The drafting of the Platt Amendment and the role played in it by Elihu Root are discussed in Healy, *United States in Cuba*, 154-7, 162-4. In fact Root expressly modeled the American informal empire formula on British informal empire in the sense of a continual British right of intervention in Egypt.

any treaty with another state that might jeopardize “the freedom of its government” and the duty to ensure a peaceful and orderly climate, under penalty of American intervention.⁴¹ Thus, on the one hand, the client government was forbidden to switch allegiances from the US to a different international side, lest it suffer American wrath. On the other hand, while internal affairs fell mostly in the client government’s responsibility area, the client was answerable to the US for its overall performance. As Senator Orville Platt of Connecticut put it: “the United States will always... be in a position to straighten out things if they got seriously bad.”⁴² The best summary of the policy was provided by the military governor of the islands General Leonard Wood: “there is of course little or no independence left to Cuba under the Platt Amendment.”⁴³

Accordingly, the most significant proclamation of America’s informal empire is *not* the Open Door notes of 1900, but rather Theodore Roosevelt’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine of December 1904.⁴⁴ In his annual message of 1904 Roosevelt announced to the world that any states in the Western Hemisphere guilty of “chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may, in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.” Roosevelt’s

⁴¹ These provisions effectively circumvented the Teller Amendment that had preceded the Spanish-American war, through which the US disclaimed any intention of annexing Cuba.

⁴² Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 148-51.

⁴³ Healy, *United States in Cuba*, 178.

⁴⁴ The first such proclamation was Olney’s 1895 message to Lord Salisbury in the context of the Venezuela crisis, which asserted that “to-day the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.” See Healy, *US Expansionism*, 24-8; May, *Imperial Democracy*, chaps. 4-6; Dexter Perkins, *A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963), 176-91.

message was accompanied by a declaration renouncing any intention of creating a formal empire: “It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any project as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous.”⁴⁵ Therefore, while the US rejected assuming the direct administration of Latin America and the Caribbean, it nonetheless claimed exclusive decisive authority over politics in these areas. The *Providence Journal* was not far off the mark when commenting that Roosevelt’s speech meant an “essential suzerainty, latent if not always active, of the United States over all the countries to the south of us.”⁴⁶

Consequently, while in the aftermath of the Spanish-American war, the top US decision-makers had openly entertained plans of an indefinite protectorate of Cuba, of colonialism in the Philippines and hinted further acquisitions in the Danish West Indies and even China, following the insurgency these plans were dismissed. When in 1904-5 the Dominican Republic asked to be annexed, the project was denounced in no uncertain terms by Roosevelt: “I want to do nothing but what a policeman has to do in Santo Domingo...I have about the same desire to annex it as a gorged boa constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end to.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the lack of annexation did not imply the absence of empire. Between 1902 and 1924 the US conducted twelve military interventions to ensure order and financial viability in Latin America: three times each in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, twice each in Mexico and Nicaragua, and once each in Honduras and Haiti.⁴⁸ The American empire was there to stay.

⁴⁵ Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, 183, 192, 198, 200-1.

⁴⁶ See Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny*, 427-9; Perkins, *History of the Monroe Doctrine*, 192-3, 228-42.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 214.

⁴⁸ Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, chaps 10-12.

Empire by Invitation

The second and third phases of American imperial expansion are seemingly divided by a “strange interlude” of nearly two decades in which the US reverted to an isolationist stance.⁴⁹ Could the US have decided to dismantle its empire in the 1930s? A more probable interpretation is that the US underwent a consolidation period following what was seen as excessive involvement in world affairs under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. Admittedly, in the 1920s and 1930s, the US resisted a security commitment to Western Europe, and reduced the scope of its informal empire in Latin America, but this did not imply an American renunciation of its empire.⁵⁰

Wilson had opened up dramatic vistas of American involvement by arguing for collective security intervention. Thus, Wilsonianism claimed in effect a global mandate to guarantee the survival of democracy in any area under threat, a policy whose success hinged on the US providing leadership through its moral example.⁵¹ The magnitude of this agenda proved, however, much too ambitious both for “irreconcilables” such as Senators William Borah of Idaho or Hiram Johnson of California, and for former expansionists such as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. Coupled with the intransigence of the leaders involved (not in the least of Wilson himself), it was this apprehension of global commitments that resulted in the inadvertent defeat of the

⁴⁹ See Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Thomas Guinsburg, *The Pursuit of Isolationism in the United States Senate from Versailles to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982).

⁵⁰ In fact the US was a key actor in world politics in the 1920s and 1930s, participating in and even hosting the disarmament conferences in Washington (1922) and London (1930); being the cornerstone of the financial architecture of Europe through the Young and the Dawes plans; and opposing Japan's advance in East Asia through the non-recognition of Manchukuo.

⁵¹ Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chap. 2, 51. As Ninkovich argues, Wilsonianism did not refer to imposing democratic regimes, but instead to the protection of democratic institutions from conquest or revolution.

Versailles treaty whether with and without reservations.⁵² This aversion to further expansion attained its apex in the 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression—by that time it became common wisdom both among public opinion and decision-makers such as the members of the Nye Committee that American involvement in World War I had been a mistake, likely caused by the machinations of greedy weapon-suppliers and financiers. The Neutrality Acts were thus a means to prevent a repetition of the events that had brought about America's entry into the Great War.⁵³

Nevertheless, these actions did not usher in a return to the strictly continental foreign policy of before 1898. The US preserved throughout the period its empire in the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific, and not simply in the strict economic sense revisionists argue, but in that of the exercise of political influence as well.⁵⁴ It is true that the US, in a public relations effort under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, decided to soften further its informal rule in Latin America, by renouncing unambiguously in 1936 its claim to policing Western Hemisphere states' internal affairs, and hence its right of intervention.⁵⁵ Words were then backed by deeds in the cases of withdrawal from Nicaragua and Haiti and of non-intervention in Mexico.⁵⁶

In this manner, the paternalistic imperialism of the second phase was supplanted by a more congenial and indirect imperial attitude that left client governments greater

⁵² Thomas Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963).

⁵³ Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 142-68; Robert Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). For instance, in an effort to prevent a repetition of the outcry of 1915 over the sinking of *The Lusitania*, the legislation prevented Americans from boarding the ships of warring parties.

⁵⁴ Williams, *Tragedy*, 110-2; Warren Cohen, *Empire without Tears: America's Foreign Relations, 1921-1933* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

⁵⁵ As the declaration of the Buenos Aires Pan-American Conference states: the parties "declare inadmissible the intervention of any one of them, directly or indirectly, and for whatever reason, in the internal or external affairs of any one of the Parties." Edward Guerant, *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1950), 11-3.

⁵⁶ The one exception was Cuba, where the US resorted to subversion, but not to directly overthrow of the Machado and the Grau San Martín governments. Irwin Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), chap. 3.

room to maneuver in their domestic politics, and hence inspired less resentment towards the US. Whether America during the days in office of Theodore Roosevelt and of Wilson had held responsible the Western Hemisphere governments on the grounds of fiscal solvability and on ensuring a “civilized” treatment of its citizens, during the third phase the US declared itself unconcerned with what was going on inside these states as long as their governments demonstrated unflinching loyalty to America in their foreign policy. The US thus became the patron of unsavory, yet dependable dictators: Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, of General Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, and of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt described Trujillo: “he may be an S.O.B., but he is our S.O.B.”⁵⁷

Thus, the American informal empire in the Western Hemisphere came to assume more the appearance of a partnership or alliance than that of a formal empire. Yet, an empire it remained, because US non-intervention was conditioned by the reaffirming of the Monroe Doctrine tenet excluding non-American powers from military and political involvement in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁸ Therefore, the Good Neighbor policy did not constitute a genuine return to the halcyon days of the nineteenth century, because for seven decades since its original proclamation in 1823 the US had lacked both the means and the willingness to actively enforce the Monroe Doctrine.⁵⁹ In other words, there was continuity between the second and third phases of expansion in the sense that in the

⁵⁷ Quoted in Robert F. Smith, *The United States and Cuba: Business and Diplomacy, 1917-1960* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1962), 184; also see Schoultz, *Beneath the United States*, chap. 13

⁵⁸ This was the precise point made in 1928 by the Clark Memorandum of Under-Secretary of State J. Reuben Clark, who sought to “relieve the Doctrine of many of the criticisms which have been aimed against it.” Thus, while it considered the Roosevelt corollary a misapplication of the Monroe doctrine, the memorandum reasserted the doctrine. Perkins, *History of the Monroe Doctrine*, 333-5, 342-3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

1930s the US still regarded the Western Hemisphere as its exclusive sphere of domination and this was a sphere it intended to protect vigorously.

It is indeed impossible to understand America's involvement in either World War Two or the subsequent Cold War without the concrete reality of an American empire in the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific that badly needed protection. The international bone of contention in both World War Two and the beginning of the Cold War consisted precisely in control over the two regions adjacent to America's imperial borders of 1898: Europe and East Asia, where an intense power struggle pitted the status-quo powers of Britain and France against voracious revisionists: first, the Axis, and since 1945 the USSR. The US did not want to join the struggle for regional domination—rather it was the prospect of a German, Japanese, or Soviet decisive victory in these areas endangering its own imperial zones that forced it to contemplate intervention.

The peril did not lie solely in a hostile power gaining access to bases that could be used to mount an attack on the American homeland, a danger that was continually evoked since the “Quarantine speech” of October 1937 by Roosevelt. Encirclement and subsequent slow economic suffocation was an equally disturbing threat—if cut off from its empire, the US would no longer be self-sufficient in terms of raw materials, and could not dare compete with Berlin, Tokyo or Moscow. As Roosevelt forewarned his advisers in May 1939 “at the end of a very short time, we should find ourselves surrounded by hostile states in this hemisphere.”⁶⁰ The same logic motivated President Harry S Truman: “if Western Europe were to fall to Soviet Russia it would double the Soviet supply of

⁶⁰ See Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 195-9, 293-9, and in particular 447-457; David Haglund, *Latin America and the Transformation of US Strategic Thought, 1936-1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), chaps. 6-11, 132-3.

coal and triple the Soviet supply of steel...And Soviet command of the free nations of Europe and Asia would confront us with military forces which we could never hope to equal.”⁶¹ Being aware of this threat, the US had to intervene in order to prevent either Western Europe or East Asia from falling into the hands of the perceived enemy and exposing the US vulnerability in Latin America and the Pacific.⁶² Furthermore, in case the peril persisted, as it did in the Cold War, America’s involvement had to assume, though unintentionally, a quasi-permanent character and eventually led to the inclusion of Western Europe and of parts of East Asia, most notably of Japan, into its empire. As Spykman put it: “Hemispheric defense is no defense at all. The Second World War will be lost or won in Europe and Asia... If our allies in the Old World are defeated we cannot hold South America, if we defeat the German-Japanese alliance abroad, our good neighbors will need no protection.”⁶³ Security became therefore the overriding rationale for expansion throughout this phase.

At first, America’s commitment to the protection of the areas limitrophe to its empire took the form of balance of power politics practiced on the cheap, i.e. not posing the risk of US military involvement in war or the costs of a permanent commitment. To quote Roosevelt: “there is far less chance of the United States getting into war if we do all we can now to support the nations defending themselves against attack by the Axis

⁶¹ Quoted in Melvin Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 12, also see 11-3.

⁶² As Kennan put in 1948 “we should select first those areas of the world which... we cannot permit... to fall into hands hostile to us, and we [should] put forward, as the first specific objective of our policy and as an irreducible minimum of national security, the maintenance of political regimes in those areas.” Kennan singled out the Western Hemisphere, Western Europe, the Middle East as well as Japan and the Philippines. Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* 2nd edtn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28-9.

⁶³ Spykman, *America’s Strategy*, 457; Walter Lippman, *US Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943).

than if we acquiesce in their defeat.”⁶⁴ This logic led both in the beginning of World War Two and of the Cold War to the adoption of measures destined to provide supplies to the countries bearing the brunt of balancing, such as the destroyers-for-bases agreement of September 1940; the Lend-Lease Bill of March 1941; the decision to escort British transports across the Atlantic Ocean; the Atlantic Charter of August 1941, and the Marshall Plan in 1947. The rationale behind these policies was that the balance of power in Europe and Asia could somehow be maintained during World War Two, or, in its aftermath, restored, by strengthening the states that had traditionally provided the counterpoise against rising German, Japanese or Russian ambitions (Britain and France in World War Two; Germany and Japan in the Cold War).⁶⁵ The most cogent statement of this initial endeavor came again from Kennan: “all in all, our policy must be directed toward restoring a balance of power in Europe and Asia” by means of “strengthening of the natural forces of resistance within the respective countries that the communists are attacking and that has been, in essence, the basis of our policy.”⁶⁶

Yet, America’s allies were simply too weak for the US to risk allowing them to support the full burden of the responsibility of fighting Germany and Japan, or of confronting the Soviets. Hence, the continual commitment of American military forces became essential to the survival of favorable regimes in Western Europe and Eastern Asia for as long as a threat persisted. The consequences were that in the early Cold War,

⁶⁴ Robert Divine, *Roosevelt and World War Two* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), chap. 2; Divine, *Illusion of Neutrality*.

⁶⁵ This policy did not exclude a degree of imperial aggrandizement in the form of the acquisition of bases in each ocean: Greenland, Iceland, Newfoundland, the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the Cape Verde in the Atlantic; Japan (including Okinawa), the Marianas, the Caroline and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 36-41, 55-65. Containment was originally meant as a limited commitment on the US part, chiefly aimed at rebuilding the war torn economies of Western Europe states so that communist subversion could be averted. George Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), 358-65; on the Marshall Plan see Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 157-65.

through the Truman Doctrine of 1947, the Washington Treaty of 1949 establishing NATO, the US-Japan security Treaty of 1952, and the creation of US military bases in these areas, both the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans were turned into American lakes.⁶⁷ The strategy of containment, while meant to prevent further expansion of Soviet power, could only achieve effectively this goal by means of the extension of America's own imperial influence in the regions under threat.⁶⁸ As William Clayton, the third ranking official at the State Department, put it: "the reins of world leadership are fast slipping from Britain's competent but now very weak hands. These reins will be picked up either by the United States or by Russia. If by Russia, there will almost certainly be war in the next decade or so, with the odds against us. If by the United States, war can almost certainly be prevented."⁶⁹

It is ironic that the two analysts who discerned best this transition from a strategy of balancing to one of empire were also among the staunchest opponents of the latter course of action. For Kennan, the US objective in the policy of containment should have been to "get us as soon as possible out of the position of abnormal political-military responsibility in Western Europe, which the war had forced upon us." While reverting to nineteenth century continentalism was no longer possible, and the US had to stand up to the Kremlin, "it was also clear that we were not fitted institutionally or temperamentally, to be an imperial power in the grand manner, and particularly not one holding the great

⁶⁷ Ibid., 57; Stephen Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 5th edtn, xiii.

⁶⁸ Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 18-9. The alternative, but not necessarily irreconcilable revisionist view, is that the US expanded its empire in order to ensure through its continued hegemony an international order congenial to Open Door principles. Williams, *Tragedy*, 206-58; Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002*, 9th edtn. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004), chaps. 2-4.

⁶⁹ See Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 142-7.

peoples of Western Europe indefinitely in some sort of political tutelage.”⁷⁰ The same considerations applied to Lippmann, for whom a gulf of difference separated the US approach in the Marshall plan from the ambitious and potentially dangerous policy advocated by the Truman Doctrine: “the Truman Doctrine treats those who are supposed to benefit by it as dependences of the United States, as instruments of the American policy of ‘containing’ Russia. The Marshall speech at Harvard treats the European governments as independent powers, whom we must help, but cannot pressure to govern, or to use as instruments of American foreign policy.”⁷¹

Yet the choice of imperial expansion was provoked not only by the concerns of American decision-makers over Soviet offensive intentions, but also and even more so by the fears of the Western Europeans. In Kennan’s words: “by asking the Europeans to go in for economic recovery before achieving military security, we were in effect asking them to walk a sort of tightrope and telling them that if they concentrated on their own steps and did not keep looking down into the chasm of their own helplessness we thought that... they would arrive safely on the other side... Now the first of the snags... has been the fact that a lot of people have not been able to refrain from looking down.”⁷² It was in fact Western Europe and Canada (itself pessimist on the chances for peace) that insisted on the creation of a formal Atlantic alliance to sanctify the US commitment to the defense of the European continent. Similarly, France and the Benelux countries were the most vocal in asking for an unambiguous American “pledge” to the defense of the continent, much stronger and closer to an automatic response than the terms of the Rio

⁷⁰ Kennan also liked to quote frequently (in relation to the Kremlin) Gibbon’s argument that “there is nothing more contrary to nature than the attempt to hold in obedience distant provinces.” Kennan, *Memoirs* 129-30, 463-4; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 46.

⁷¹ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper Row, 1972), 44-5.

⁷² Quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 72; Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, chaps. 5-6.

Pact. By contrast, the US had initially favored a European-only initiative in the form of the Brussels Treaty and was reluctant for domestic reasons to endorse an iron clad commitment to the defense of members under threat.⁷³ These different views finally resulted in the Article 5 formula of an attack against one party being seen as an attack on all, yet allowing each state to take as actions as it deemed necessary including armed force to preserve the security of the North Atlantic area.⁷⁴ In this way, the US did not seek imperial expansion in the third phase, insomuch as this was pressed upon it, both by the existing configuration of forces and by the putative imperial subjects themselves.

The reasons for which the Western Europeans governments invited the US empire to absorb them were threefold: first, the US was the single state able to provide them with much-needed financial assistance; second, American influence would have dampened radical tendencies both on the left and on the right that threatened to destabilize them; and third, the US empire would have defended them from the alternative, seen as far worse, of Soviet domination.⁷⁵ Furthermore, by contrast to the Soviet Union, the US allowed its new imperial charges a large degree of internal autonomy combined with liberal amounts of financial aid under the Marshall Plan. The Good Neighbor formula first applied to Latin America was thus reproduced in an even more congenial form to relations with Western Europe, and from the early 1950s to those with Japan. In its newly acquired areas in particular, the US was unobtrusive in peripheral domestic politics, yet

⁷³ On the formation of NATO see Escott Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope: The Making of the North Atlantic Treaty, 1947-1949* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), chaps. 4-12; Lawrence Kaplan, *The United States and NATO: The Formative Years* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), chaps. 5-6.

⁷⁴ Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope*, 144-55.

⁷⁵ Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23 (September 1986): 263-77, 263-4, 268-72.

in firm control of its members' foreign policies, by means of an array of binding alliances, security commitments and military bases.

The Obsession with Credibility

From a strategic perspective, in the first years of the Cold War the US was only interested in the protection of a handful of key areas (Western Europe, Japan, and the Middle East), whose resources, economic potential, or geopolitical position could give it an upper hand in its contest against the Soviet Union.⁷⁶ Yet in its fourth phase of expansion, the US adopted eventually a strategy of worldwide confrontation with communism.⁷⁷ This change occurred because the Cold War was understood as being fought not only over the physical control of valuable real estate, but also over the distribution of prestige in world politics.⁷⁸ As Ninkovich puts it, “at the heart of America’s complex cold war foreign policy was an abiding obsession with credibility.” Similarly, Gaddis detects throughout the Cold War a constant fear “of embarrassment, of humiliation, of appearing to be weak.” For McMahon as well, the Cold War is a unique period in American diplomacy because of its concern for the psychological underpinnings of political decisions, meaning credibility, reputation and prestige.⁷⁹

As seen from Chapter One, a state will attempt both to preserve its superior status in capabilities and in terms of political performance against the challenges of a rival

⁷⁶ See Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 26-9, 33-9, 39-40, 55-8.

⁷⁷ For Kennan and Lippman this was precisely the “aberration” or ‘strategic monstrosity’ they had warned against. Kennan, *Memoirs*, 463; Lippmann, *Cold War*, 11.

⁷⁸ Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 89-90.

⁷⁹ Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy Since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 183; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 211, 92, 238-9; Robert McMahon, “Credibility and World Power: Explaining the Psychological Dimensions in Post-War American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 15 (Fall 1991): 455-71, 458-9; also see Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 444-52, 478-80.

power seeking to overtake it, and if possible, to increase its own ranking in these dimensions even further. This is why a communist victory anywhere in the world would have had consequences far greater than the actual loss of the area in question: the failure would have exposed a shortcoming on America's part and would have meant a substantial amount of prestige lost in favor of the Kremlin. The plunge in America's credibility both in the eyes of the Soviets and in the eyes of its imperial protégés would have triggered in turn two reactions: on the one hand, emboldening the Kremlin to attempt new offensives against the West, and, on the other hand, causing a collapse of confidence among the members of its empire. Throughout the fourth phase security and prestige were thus seen by US decision-makers as mutually reinforcing: the more prestige the US empire enjoyed, the larger its security from the twin threats of Soviet aggression and West European or Japanese defection. As Schelling put it, "we lost thirty thousand dead in Korea in order to save face for the United States, not to save South Korea for the South Koreans, and it was undoubtedly worth it."⁸⁰ This argument, however, created the settings for a paradox, because in order to safeguard and increase its prestige, the US had to intervene in contexts that were not directly related to either the survival of its empire or to its own physical security. So, basically, the US "in order to buttress its credibility" had to "intervene in the least significant, least compelling, and the least rewarding cases, and its reaction should [have been] disproportionate to the immediate provocation or the immediate interest at stake."⁸¹ In order to achieve potential security in the long term, the US had to incur security-risks in the short term.

⁸⁰ On the so-called "interdependence of commitments," see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), chap. 2, 124.

⁸¹ Earl Ravenal, "Counterforce or Alliance: The Ultimate Connection," *International Security* 6 (Spring 1982): 26-43, 28.

This rationale was best expressed by NSC 68 in April 1950. Under the document, the US decision-makers accepted as axiomatic that “the assault on free institutions is worldwide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere. The shock we sustained in the destruction of Czechoslovakia was not in the measure of Czechoslovakia’s material importance to us... when the integrity of Czechoslovak institutions was destroyed, it was in the intangible scale of values that we suffered a loss more damaging than the material loss we had already suffered.” Hence the appropriate responses that NSC 68 suggested to the Soviet challenge consisted of both a sustained military build-up and of US imperial expansion: “it is not an adequate objective merely to seek to check the Kremlin design, for the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable. This fact imposes on us, in our own interests the responsibility of world leadership.”⁸²

Every Cold War president from Truman to Nixon subscribed to this new orthodoxy. According to Truman, “if South Korea was allowed to fall Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our shores... If this was allowed to go unchallenged it would mean a third world war.” Similarly, Eisenhower believed that “the danger of war does not arise from the intrinsic value to the Communists of the Korean peninsula, but rather derives from the prestige which the Communists would enjoy if they succeeded in destroying a nation... set up and maintained by the United States.” In turn, Kennedy argued that the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962 could not “be accepted by this country, if our courage and commitment are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe.” Lyndon Johnson stated that “if I left that war and let the

⁸² “NSC68 United States Objectives and Programs for National Security” accessible at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm>; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 88-93.

Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere on the entire globe.” For Nixon: “If when the chips are down, the world’s most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant... all other nations will be on notice that despite its overwhelming power, the United States when a real crisis comes will be found wanting.”⁸³

Furthermore, both security and prestige had a determinant role in America’s wars in Korea and Vietnam. In the case of Korea, the US Army’s list of seven advantages resulting from successful action in Korea was tilted towards credibility: creating universal respect for US deterrence; enhancing the prestige of American leadership; making a favorable impression upon Japan and Western Europe; and bolstering French morale in Indochina. Similar considerations were present in America’s involvement in Vietnam, as shown by the Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton’s 1965 memo, which argued that America’s goals in South Vietnam are “70% to avoid a humiliating US defeat.”⁸⁴ A concern for US credibility also helps explain America’s willingness to engage in brinksmanship to prove its resolve in a series of crises opposing it to the communist camp: over Berlin in 1958 and 1961, the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in 1954-5 and 1958, and Cuba in 1962, even though the strategic value of the prizes of these competition venues was by all means negligible per se.⁸⁵ To paraphrase

⁸³ Quotes in Harry S Truman, *Memoirs, II: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), 332-3; Ninkovich, *Wilsonian Century*, 178, 211; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 211-2; McMahon, “Credibility and World Power,” 467.

⁸⁴ William Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 188; John Mc Naughton, “Annex-Plan of Action for South Vietnam,” *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), III, 694-702, 695.

⁸⁵ On the consecutive US-Soviet crises see Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles when referring to Indochina, “these countries are not really of great significance to us, other than from the point of view of prestige.”⁸⁶

Prestige and security thus caused in the fourth phase an unprecedented degree of US involvement in the affairs of the Third World. By the 1960s the US was participating in no fewer than five regional security arrangements (the Rio Pact, SEATO, CENTO, NATO, and ANZUS), had mutual defense treaties with forty two countries, and was extending military or economic aid to almost a half of the remaining world’s states.⁸⁷ Yet this substantially expanded American empire was also significantly less cohesive and therefore less viable than that of the third phase. Throughout the fourth phase, though it maintained an upper hand against the communists in many countries, and though it eventually secured partnerships with former Soviet clients such as China or Egypt, the US was unable to successfully ensure the complete absorption of any of the major Third World regions into its empire and even had to work hard to preserve its hold over the Western Hemisphere. In the Middle East, the US could only rely on the steady support of Israel and Turkey, having lost clients in Baghdad and Teheran in 1958 and 1979, and lacking prior to the 1990s military bases in the Persian Gulf. In continental South East Asia, the American empire crumbled in the aftermath of Vietnam, surviving only in Thailand and Malaysia. In sub-Saharan Africa, the US could or would not acquire a strong foothold. In Latin America, the US had to contend with the loss of Cuba in 1959 and faced resistance in Chile in the 1970s and Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Quoted in Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 222-3, 226-31.

⁸⁷ Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 134.

⁸⁸ Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

The reasons of this lack of cohesiveness had been foretold by Lippmann. On the one hand, “the satellite states and puppet governments... will act for their own reasons, and on their own judgments, presenting us with accomplished facts that we did not intend, and with crises for which we are unready.” On the other hand, the structural weakness of Third World regimes meant that “we shall have either to disown our puppets which would be tantamount to appeasement and defeat, and the loss of face, or must support them at an incalculable cost on an unintended, unforeseen and perhaps undesirable issue.”⁸⁹ Thus, third world client governments presented simultaneously the US with the risk of manipulation so as to remain in power and get rid of rivals, and with that of potential collapse— risks that could be prevented only by an open-ended commitment of US resources. To this extent America’s new imperial subjects plagued by corruption, endemic poverty, and ethnic conflict were frequently more liabilities than assets, requiring constant US protection. In turn, their lack of self-reliance (real or feigned) forced the US to fall back on second phase imperial tactics: subversion, overthrow, direct intervention, and, in last instance, counter-insurgency warfare.

Therefore, while in the Cold War America was able to showcase in Europe and Japan the tolerant side of its informal empire, which allowed the flourishing of democracy, economic recovery, and even a certain amount of dissent toward US policies, in the Third World its imperial presence frequently relied on naked coercion. Moreover, in so doing the American empire’s scope also grew to encompass the domestic politics of its newest members. The US might have refrained from putting into place in the Third World democratic regimes in its own image, but it drew a line when the question was of preventing the coming to power and of shortening the time in office of any regime

⁸⁹ Lippmann, *Cold War*, 15-6.

susceptible of communist political sympathies. The best known examples of this heavy-handed policy are the toppling of the Mossadegh, Arbenz, Diem, Goulart, and Allende governments in Iran, Guatemala, South Vietnam, Brazil, and Chile in 1952, 1954, 1963, 1964 and 1973; the failed attempt to unseat Fidel Castro in 1961; and the interventions in Lebanon, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and Cambodia.⁹⁰ Of course, American involvement by fanning the flames of Third World nationalism also resulted in a vicious circle: since nationalism led to anti-American resistance, this necessitated further US intervention to quell it, which produced in turn further anti-American resentment. In this manner, the US ended up fighting both nationalist and communist opponents at the same time, even though frequently the two groups entertained divergent political agendas.

The Vietnam war epitomized the dilemmas of the fourth phase of expansion, in so far as the conflict was understood in Washington as the key test of American resolve.⁹¹ In the words of National Security Advisor Walt Rostow: “Vietnam is a clear testing ground for our policy in the world.”⁹² Consequently, since so much prestige had been invested in achieving victory in Vietnam, the eventual American defeat, whose reality began to sink in since the aftermath of the Tet offensive in 1968, produced a lasting national malaise. This implied at the same time dissatisfaction with the acquisition or maintenance of empire in the Third World, doubts about America’s own ability and prowess to lead the world, and a considerable diminution of US prestige in relation to both the Soviets and its imperial charges. From 1968 to the end of the Cold War, every American presidency had

⁹⁰ Kinzer, *Overthrow*, chaps. 6-9; Melvin Gurtov, *The United States against the Third World: Antinationalism and Intervention* (New York: Praeger, 1979).

⁹¹ George Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁹² Quoted in Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy*, 214.

to confront the ghosts of Vietnam and the dilemma of renouncing empire in the Third World.⁹³ This elicited three different patterns of response. For the Nixon and the subsequent Ford administration the cardinal objective was to reduce imperial costs while producing the least amount of damage to American prestige.⁹⁴ By contrast, the Carter administration attempted to make empire more palatable to the Third World by subscribing American foreign policy to moral standards.⁹⁵ Yet neither retrenchment nor morality was ultimately able to put an end and even less to reverse America's imperial expansion. For every profession of withdrawal from the Third World, there was a statement or action abdicating the withdrawal policy. Nixon for instance resorted to covert intervention in Chile, and even Carter acquiesced in the Carter Doctrine, proclaiming the right of US intervention in the Persian Gulf for the purpose of thwarting Soviet offensive designs. Hence, in the long run, the only viable path of action open to the US was the path chosen by the Reagan Administration, which advocated a no-holds barred policy of "national reawakening". Essentially, Reagan went back to the tenets of NSC 68, engaging the US not only in an unprecedented military build-up, but also backing up any Third World regime or group professing willingness to aid the US in its global struggle against the "evil" Soviet empire.⁹⁶ As a result, the end of the fourth phase of expansion found the US still committed to the imperial project.

⁹³ See George Liska, *Career of Empire: America and Imperial Expansion over Land and Sea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). The commonly accepted wisdom in the 1970s and the 1980s was that the US was suffering an irreversible decline as new great powers were rising. See inter alia Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict, 1500-2000* (New York: Random House, 1987); David Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

⁹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979); Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown, 1982); Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, chaps. 9-10.

⁹⁵ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

⁹⁶ Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994); Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, chap. 11.

In the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, the pattern of American expansion bore at first a distinct resemblance with the third phase, in the sense the US was not itself interested in expansion, but had to agree to it in order to secure its existing imperial domain. At the same time, the US was besought to expand by the expansion targets themselves. This pattern was seen both in the cases of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In Eastern Europe, though it had initially pledged not to extend NATO's jurisdiction one inch to the East, save for East Germany, the US eventually accepted the expansion of the organization to include in 1999 Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.⁹⁷ Although the decision to expand is usually explained by reference to either the exceptionalist doctrine of enlargement that held that increasing the number of world democracies would result in a world more congenial to American interests, and to the primacy of domestic interests in the form of the vote of Polish-Americans in the 1996 presidential elections, the more plausible rationale for adding new members to NATO had to do with the viability of the alliance itself in the absence of a Soviet threat.⁹⁸ In so doing, the US was essentially concerned with maintaining its chief instrument of exercising empire in Europe, while catering to the security concerns of East European countries still nervous about the possibility of Russian (or German) revisionism. In fact, the conservation of NATO was invoked as the overriding reason for expansion, because expanding the organization would have demonstrated its continued relevance to the contemporary security framework of Europe. As a group of RAND analysts argued "NATO must go out of area or it will go out of business." The same point was emphasized by Vice-President Al Gore and by the Under-Secretary of State Richard

⁹⁷ On the promise not to expand see James Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1999), 15-6.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29-32, 38-40, 70-8, 166-7 ; "Oops! A Blunt Canadian on NATO," *New York Times*, July 11, 1997.

Holbrooke: “everyone realizes that a military alliance, when faced with a fundamental change in the threat for which it was founded, either must define a convincing new rationale or become decrepit.”⁹⁹

Similar considerations affected America’s expansion in the Middle East in the early 1990s. Throughout the Cold War, with the exceptions of Oman with which it had signed a security treaty during the Iran-Iraq war, and of the case of the so-called tanker war when it allowed Kuwaiti tankers to sail under its flag and escorted Arab vessels, America had no actual security ties with the Gulf oil monarchies. America’s domain in the Middle East was thus limited in a last instance to Turkey, Israel, and Egypt. In fact, the military command responsible for operations in the Middle East the Central Command (CENTCOM) had its headquarters outside the region in Tampa, Florida.¹⁰⁰ This situation changed in the 1990s, due to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Reversing decades of policy, Saudi Arabia asked for US military support to defend it against Saddam Hussein, allowing hundreds of thousands of American troops on its territory.¹⁰¹ In the aftermath of the war, the US expressed its interest in disentangling itself from the region by encouraging the strengthening of regional security ties in the form of an alliance between the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) and the larger Arab states such as Egypt and Syria for the purpose of resisting either Iraqi or Iranian ambition. This led to the adoption of the Damascus declaration in March 1991. Yet this process was undermined by distrust among the signatories and by the conviction of the GCC that even the prospect of

⁹⁹ Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, 32-5, 71; Ronald Asmus et al., “Building a New NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (September/ October 1993): 28-40, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America’s Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf: 1833-1992* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

¹⁰¹ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon& Schuster, 1991), 239-46, 263-73.

military help from Egypt, Syria, or Morocco would not deter an Iraqi or Iranian attack. Instead, the GCC preferred bilateral American security guarantees in the form of security treaties in 1991 and the creation of US permanent bases in the region, most notably in Saudi Arabia. On the US part, refusing the GCC invitation to for inclusion in its empire, would have been inconceivable since it would have left these crucially important states at the mercy of stronger neighbors: Iran and Iraq.¹⁰² Nevertheless, this emerging pattern did not endure. America's initial expansion in the fifth phase had been accomplished with the support of other states, without resorting to coercion, and more out of necessity than for American gain. By contrast, the late 1990s inaugurated a different model of American expansion, governed, as seen in the later case studies, by considerations of prestige.

This historical survey suggests that the 1998-2003 interval is by no means singular in light of America's foreign policy record. The US has had considerable experience with imperial expansion. Hence, no revolutionary change or abnormal political development was at work in recent US foreign policy by comparison to the past, though the method and the objectives of imperial expansion might have differed. As Daalder and Lindsay put it, the debate was not whether to have an American empire, but of what kind.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ghassan Salamé, "Assessing Alternative Future Arrangements for Regional Security," in Geoffrey Kemp and Janice Gross Stein, eds., *Powder Keg in the Middle East: The Struggle for Gulf Security* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 65-84; Marc O'Reilly and Wesley Renfro, "Evolving Empire: America's 'Emirates' Strategy in the Persian Gulf," *International Studies Perspectives* 8 (May 2007): 137-51.

¹⁰³ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "American Empire: Not 'If' But of 'What Kind,'" *New York Times*, May 10, 2003.

Chapter Four

The Years of Illusions, 1989-1998

In his 1991 State of Union Address President George H.W. Bush was buoyant: “if anyone tells you America’s best days are behind her, they are looking the wrong way.”¹

This feeling of euphoria was by no means out of place: even the more cautious American decision-makers concluded that the twenty first century was going to usher in the golden age of US dominance.² Yet the roots of the policy of expansion of 1998-2003 are to be found precisely in this interval seemingly marked for tranquility under the Pax Americana. When the US embraced imperial expansion from 1998 onwards it did so chiefly because earlier in the decade it had found itself unable to translate its superior capabilities into favorable outcomes.

In turn this failure was caused by: a) the proliferation of challenges from weaker actors and b) the resistance to US policy preferences from Russia, China, and even from members of its own empire. Considering the disparity of forces in the balance in the Post Cold War, one should have expected the US to emerge successful in most of its initiatives regardless of the opposition met: in fact the US decision-makers themselves expected to do so. For this reason, a contrast was created between America’s status in terms of its lead in military forces and economic output, and its mediocre record of international achievements, resulting ultimately in a condition of status inconsistency. To quote Hyland, throughout the interval, US foreign policy was “vague and unpersuasive.” As a

¹ George H. W. Bush, “State of the Union Address: Transcript of the President’s Address to the Nation” *New York Times*, January 30, 1991.

² Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), X-XI.

result, “American credibility and influence have declined at a time when this country’s power is unmatched.”³ The impact of status inconsistency was all the stronger since the US was aware of its superior international ranking in the 1990s and, hence, was profoundly convinced of its unique ability both to ensure international order and to transform the international environment to match its political desiderata. If the US was not yet a complete top dog or a hegemon, it nevertheless thought itself to be irreversibly on the way of becoming one, as demonstrated by its decision-makers’ fascination with providing leadership to the world.

However, in so doing, America set for itself too high expectations at the level of political performance. Status inconsistency was the direct product of three illusions—order, cooperation, and peace: first, that the end of the Cold War had resulted in a much more manageable international environment, second, that other states would wholeheartedly assist Washington in its task, and, third, that traditional matters of war and peace had come to be superseded by issues of international trade and finance. On all these accounts, America’s expectations turned out to have been wrong.

The Roots of Illusion

The illusions were predicated foremost on the belief in a post-Cold war revolution in the way international affairs were being conducted. As Nye put it in 1992, “the world has changed more rapidly in the past two years than at any time since 1945.”⁴ The transformation was at the same time ideological, economic, and technological—and

³ Hyland was the editor of *Foreign Affairs*. William Hyland, “A Mediocre Record,” *Foreign Policy* 101 (Winter 1995): 69-74; Hal Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 195.

⁴ Joseph S. Nye, “What New World Order?” *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Spring 1992): 83-96.

unmistakably worked to the great advantage of the US. The conclusions derived from ideas such as the democratic peace, the reinvented role of international institutions (especially of the UN), and globalization, were not only that America was entering a great period of opportunity, but also that even better things were in store for the Star and Stripes. Unmistakably, America in the 1990s felt it was “on the right side of history.”⁵

In this respect, no analysis was more celebratory than Fukuyama’s. For Fukuyama history had represented a progressive struggle of competing ideologies, which had ended with the victory of the American liberal-democracy over communism.⁶ As a result, liberal-democratic states had moved “beyond history,” meaning that they had reached a point where war had become an unthinkable prospect, except in those contexts where the opponent (by necessity a non-democracy) was still “stuck in history.” As Fukuyama put it, “within the post-historical world, the chief axis of interaction between states would be economic, and the old rules of power politics would have decreasing relevance.” In practical terms, since Fukuyama argued that democracy and wealth went hand in hand, “the post-historical” states tended to be clustered in the developed North, while “the historical” states occupied most of the South. Moreover, the Soviet Union and China were gravitating increasingly towards the post-historical camp. This imagery essentially divided the planet into a zone of prosperity and peace where the leading world states shared the same interests, and a zone of poverty and disorder still mired in history, but which was going to be moving inexorably towards liberal democracy.⁷ This conviction

⁵ The first US official to use the expression was Anthony Lake, who wrote about the commitment of “backlash states” “to remain on the wrong side of history.” See Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (March/ April 1994): 45-55, 55.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 211-2; Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18.

⁷ Fukuyama, *End of History*, 276-7.

was in turn reinforced by democratic peace theory: democracies do not go to war against other democracies.⁸ In effect, if, as Huntington had argued, the world had become increasingly democratic since 1974, the US could count on a more peaceful environment; and this was a prospect it had every interest in encouraging.⁹

In this respect, the George H. W. Bush cabinet had been reluctant to accelerate the drive towards democracy of post Tiananmen China, the Middle East autocracies, and the Gorbachev-led Soviet Union.¹⁰ By comparison, the Clinton administration was outspoken in articulating its steady belief in democratic peace.¹¹ As National Security Advisor Anthony Lake argued in September 1993, “the successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement—enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies.” Furthermore, Lake contended that as a key component of “enlargement,” the US “should help foster and consolidate new democracies and market economies, where possible, especially in states of special significance and opportunity.” This meant that “our strategy must be to help democracy and markets expand and survive in other places where we have the strongest security concerns and where we can make the greatest difference. This is not a democratic crusade; it is a pragmatic commitment to set freedom take hold where that will help us most.”

In the same vein, Under-Secretary of State Strobe Talbott stated that “the larger and more close-knit the community of nations that chose democratic form of government, the safer and more prosperous the Americans would be, since democracies are

⁸ See on democratic peace theory the works quoted in Chapter Two.

⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹⁰ David Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Touchstone, 2002).

¹¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy Toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), chaps. 5-7, 88-91; Robert Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of US-China Relation* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), chaps. 5 and 7.

demonstrably more likely to maintain their international commitments... and less likely to make war on each other. That proposition is the national security rationale for vigorously supporting, promoting, and when necessary defending democracy in other countries... Only in an increasingly democratic world will the American people feel themselves truly secure.”¹² By Talbott’s own account, this bright future was already in the making, since 61% of the world population in the 1990s was already living in democratic states. Hence, with most of the world already democratic, and with Russia and China set to soon follow suit, there was no reason for the US to worry excessively about the prospects of international order.

This was the more so since a consensus reigned in the early 1990s that the US could count on an international following both eager and wide. For conservatives, cooperation was going to be the automatic result of America’s unrivalled power, which would have caused other states to seek to ingratiate themselves with the new hegemon. As Krauthammer put it: “the true geopolitical structure of the post-Cold War world... consists of the United States at the apex of the industrial West. Perhaps it is more accurate to say the United States and behind it the rest, because where the United States does not tread, the alliance does not follow... The unipolar moment means that... an ideologically pacified North seeks security and order by aligning its foreign policy behind that of the United States.”¹³ By contrast, liberals attributed cooperation to the constraints of globalization. Globalization created new challenges that could be addressed efficiently

¹² Anthony Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement, Speech at Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC, September 21, 1993,” in Alvin Rubinstein et al., eds., *The Clinton Foreign Policy Reader: Presidential Speeches with Commentary* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 20-7, 22-4; Strobe Talbott, “Democracy and the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (November/ December 1996): 47-63, 48-9, 63. In a footnote, Talbott makes extensive reference to the literature on democratic peace theory. See fn. 2, 49.

¹³ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Winter 1991): 23-33, 24-5.

only in a multilateral format, preferably by means of international institutions. As the Under-Secretary of Defense Nye argued, the magnitude of transnational problems, such as nuclear proliferation, AIDS, and global warming, meant that the best approach to an increasingly interdependent world was some form of international coalition headed by the US and blessed by international institutions.¹⁴ Both the American and the international institutional components were necessary, but neither was sufficient on its own: “The way to steer a middle path is...to renew American commitment to multilateral institutions... The use of multilateral institutions, while sometimes constraining, also helps share the burden that the American people do not want to bear alone.”¹⁵

As a result, cooperation was elevated to the level of guiding principle for Post-Cold War policy, on par with enlargement or democracy promotion. No wonder therefore that the most coherent foreign policy document put forward by the first Clinton administration was entitled suggestively “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement.” Engagement itself was a concept developed by a group of the Brookings Institution scholars comprising the future numbers one and two at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense William Perry, and his assistant Ashton Carter. What they meant by cooperative engagement was “a strategic principle that seeks to accomplish its purposes through institutionalized consent rather than through threats of

¹⁴ In the aftermath of the Gulf War the UN had become America’s favorite institutional instrument for building all-inclusive coalitions. A secondary function of working through the UN was to provide guarantees of non-aggressive US behavior to the other permanent members of the Security Council, since Washington could not have acted without express Russian or Chinese consent. Consequently, the early 1990s opened up the vista of a considerably extended role for the UN, including in carrying out functions such as peace maintaining and peace enforcement. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “Empowering the United Nations” *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Winter 1992): 89-102; Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peacekeeping* (New York: United Nations, 1992); Bruce Russett and James Sutterlin, “The UN in a New World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Spring 1991): 69-83; William Durch, ed., *UN Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Nye, “What New World Order?” 95-6.

material or physical coercion. It presupposes fundamentally compatible security objectives and seeks to establish collaborative rather than confrontational relationships among national military establishments.” Such cooperation implied the conclusion of arms limitation and arms reduction agreements, greater security transparency, and a commitment to “an internationally supported concept of effective and legitimate intervention which is always multilateral and elected only as a last resort.”¹⁶

In this line of thought, when the “National Security Strategy” spoke of engagement, it referred to an *imperative strategy of multilateral cooperation*. The document effectively made the point that “no matter how powerful we are as a nation, we cannot secure these basics goals unilaterally... the threats and challenges we face demand cooperative, multinational solutions. Therefore, the only responsible US strategy is one that seeks to ensure US influence over and participation in collective decisionmaking in a wide and growing range of circumstances... Accordingly, a central thrust of our strategy of engagement is to sustain and adapt the security relationships we have with key nations around the world.”¹⁷ Hence, engagement entailed America’s commitment to ensure the persistent cooperation of other important states and the smooth functioning of international institutions. The US was not going to simply consult with other states—it also was going to take their objections and concerns to heart, and, in case no consensus was achievable, it would forego action instead of pressing ahead on its own. While the

¹⁶ The authors took this prescription so seriously as to dedicate almost six hundred pages to the topic of how the US forces could be integrated with those of allies, and act under UN mandate. See “The Concept of Cooperative Security,” in Janne Nolan, ed., *Global Engagement: Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994), 3-19, 4-10; William Perry, “Military Action: When to Use It and How to Ensure its Effectiveness,” in *ibid.*, 235-41; Janne Nolan, “Cooperative Security in the United States,” in *ibid.*, 507-42, 512-7; Ashton Carter, William Perry, and John Steinbrunner, *A New Concept of Cooperative Security* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1992), 6-8, 24-5.

¹⁷ White House, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, February 1996,” accessible at [http:// www. fas. org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm](http://www.fas.org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm).

US reaffirmed in the “National Security Strategy” its right to act alone if “its vital or survival interests are at stake,” this was rarely an option before the decision to conduct strikes on the Bosnian Serbs in August 1995.¹⁸

The explanations for this cooperative behavior on the part of the US were twofold. On the one hand, the US was a power satisfied with its levels of influence and prestige, which it deemed to be above any realistic challenge. The US could afford therefore to be generous. On the other hand, the US needed the cooperation of other states in a quid pro quo deal: in return for demonstrating restraint, it expected other states to back up its political preferences. In other words, the US intended to act in a concert with other great powers, but with the tacit proviso that the concert would not run foul of America’s wishes on the matters it deemed significant and that it would recognize the US as first among equals.

A third illusion propped those of order and cooperation: that of the steady decline in relevance of military force. This obsolescence was caused not only by the above mentioned trends, but also by the *deus ex machina* of globalization, which rewarded certain states for showing openness to foreign products, services, capital, and ideas, while punishing those that resisted them. In this line of thought, once a state had been engulfed by the transnational forces of economy, technology, and information it was less likely to use force against another similarly developed polity.¹⁹ This was so for three reasons.

¹⁸ The “National Security Strategy” restricts the use of unilateral force solely to the defense of vital US interests: “as much as possible, we will seek the help of our allies and friends or of relevant international institutions. If our most important national interests are at stake, we are prepared to act alone. But especially on those matters touching the interests of our allies, there should be a proportionate commitment from them. Working together increases the effectiveness of each nation’s actions.” See *ibid*.

¹⁹ This insight was best captured by Friedman in his golden arches theory of conflict prevention: “no two countries that both had McDonald’s had fought a war against each other since each got its McDonald’s.” On the relation between globalization and peace see Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Benjamin Barber, *Jihad versus McWorld* (New York: Times

First, interconnected states would greatly suffer from any disruption of their mutual commercial and financial relations by waging war against each other. Second, a state could advance its objectives much cheaper through technological innovation and economic prowess than through military conquest and coercion. Third, markets abhor the instability and uncertainty inherent in a military conflict: if a state was foolish enough to resort to fighting, investment would immediately leave its shores in quest of more peaceful havens, in the process wrecking the warmonger's economy.²⁰ Hence, for the crucial purpose of prevailing in the realm of global economic and technological competition, the maintenance of a sizable military establishment had become counter-productive, by divesting valuable resources away from economic growth. As for the actual use of force by a developed nation it could be seen increasingly as an "act of desperation." The only practical use of military force was dealing with challenges or instability in the Third World, and for this purpose, a minimum amount of troops and hi-tech weaponry would be sufficient.

Accordingly, the 1990s marked the low point of military matters and the simultaneous peaking of interest in economic developments. This trend was fully acknowledged by the US decision-makers especially by the Clinton administration. As Clinton put it: "globalization is not a proposal or policy choice, it is a fact. But how we respond to it will make all the difference."²¹ In 1993, Clinton made this transformation explicit by creating an institutional counterpart to the National Security Council, the

Books, 1995); Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* 3rd edn. (New York: Longman, 2001), chap. 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 14-6, 23-5; Friedman, *Lexus and Olive Tree*, 195-8; Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

²¹ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 152-4; Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton Wars* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), 652.

organism reuniting the principal decision-makers in term of security policy, in the form of the National Economic Council, in charge of coordinating domestic and foreign economic policy, thus placing on an at least formal parity economy and security. Furthermore, during Clinton's first years in office, the economy ended up by capitalizing a larger share of presidential attention than matters of war and peace. The Special Trade Representative Mickey Kantor was accordingly given more frequent access to the President than either Lake or the Secretary of State Warren Christopher, while, the Secretary of Treasury and the NEC's first director Robert Rubin emerged as the central power player in the administration.²² In Kantor's words: "past administrations have often neglected US economic and trading interests because of foreign policy and defense concerns. The days when we could afford to do so are long past. In the post-Cold War world, our national security depends on our economic strength."²³

While issues pertaining to globalization monopolized the agenda, the other side of the coin was represented by a growing inhibition on the part of Clinton to employ force on a large scale in support of its policies.²⁴ This much maligned trait is not only attributable to the fear of domestic backlash against casualties or to rocky relations with the Pentagon, which through the 1990s swore by the Powell-Weinberger Doctrine.²⁵

After all, both of these two factors were still at work in Clinton's second term, in

²² Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 242-4; Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 150-4.

²³ Quoted in Hyland, *Clinton's World*, 128. Also see Clinton's speech "Liberal Internationalism: America and the Global Economy," at the American University in Washington, DC on February 26, 1993 in Rubinstein, *Clinton Foreign Policy Reader*, 8-13.

²⁴ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 80-5; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 265? ; Hyland, *Clinton's World*, chaps. 3, 4, 15; Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (January 1996): 16-32.

²⁵ The doctrine consisted of a set of rules of intervention: conduct no interventions except in a handful of contexts vital to America's strategic interests, but when deciding to do so use overwhelming force, have a clearly defined objective as well as an exit strategy, and amass sufficient domestic and international legitimacy to guarantee victory. See "Excerpts from Address of Weinberger," *New York Times*, November 29, 1984; Colin Powell, "US Forces: The Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* 71(Winter 1992): 32-45; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 148-9, 576-7.

particular in the context of the bombing campaign in Kosovo, but, nevertheless, they could not derail the decision to intervene against Yugoslavia. Hence they should be seen as necessary but not sufficient causes of America's hesitancy to employ force. A supplementary factor needs to be considered: the conviction of the Clinton administration that force itself had become a blunt foreign policy tool, ill-suited for the globalized post Cold War in any other respect than in a deterrent role.

To sum up, the illusions of order, cooperation and peace added up to a sanguine view of the 1990s as the fitting time for "rational exuberance." To quote Friedman: "if 100 years ago you had come to a visionary geo-architect and told him that in the year 2000 the world would be defined by a system called 'globalization,' what sort of country would he have designed to compete and win in that world? The answer is that he would have designed something that looks an awful lot like the United States of America."²⁶

The Illusions Set In, 1990-1993

How did the illusions take hold? Having just left behind the trustworthy guidelines of four decades of containment, the US ended up convinced that the conditions it had first experienced during the opening years of a new age due to an exceptionally propitious turn of events would last. The key issue in this respect was the triumphal denouement of the Gulf War.²⁷ The Gulf War was more than a simple question of who controlled the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait.

²⁶ Friedman, *Lexus and Olive Tree*, 298-303.

²⁷ See for the point that the Gulf War victory was more profoundly felt than victory in the Cold War, David Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker, *The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 1-2.

In as far as it represented the first major international crisis to arise in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was interpreted as the major indication of the direction international relations would take in the new era. To quote National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft: “in the first days of the crisis we had started self-consciously to view our actions as setting a precedent for the approaching post-Cold War world. Soviet cooperation in condemning the attack [by Saddam Hussein on Kuwait] provided the initial impetus for this line of thinking, inasmuch as it opened the way for the Security Council to operate as its founders envisioned. That in turn had led to our August [1990] discussions of a ‘new world order.’”²⁸ Scowcroft emphasized this point in a later interview: “one of the underlying premises of the Gulf War...for the president and me, probably for Baker, was to conduct this whole thing in a way that would set a useful pattern for the way to deal with crises in an area of cooperation.”²⁹

What exactly was the pattern that American decision-makers wanted to set in the Gulf War? Again this is explained by Scowcroft: “our foundation was the premise that the United States henceforth would be obliged to lead the world community to an unprecedented degree, as demonstrated by the Iraqi crisis, and that we should attempt to pursue our national interests, wherever possible, within the framework of concert with our friends and the international community.”³⁰

As a result, the top American decision-makers derived from the Gulf War the lessons first, that the US could exercise effective international leadership to a degree it had never experienced before and, second, that the support of other states was crucial to

²⁸ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 400; Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 109-10.

²⁹ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 11; Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 49-50.

³⁰ Bush and Scowcroft, *World Transformed*, 400.

its success in this endeavor. For the world to almost unanimously throw its lot with the US against the wily dictator of Iraq would have been all but inconceivable during the Cold War.³¹ Had Saddam Hussein proceeded to invade Kuwait just a decade earlier, he could have reasonably counted on diplomatic and economic backers that would have prevented both sanctions and intervention by a coalition under the UN flag. However, instead of the customary Cold War pattern of discord among the world's leading powers, the Iraqi attempt at regional conquest was met with unequivocal unity, which, moreover, survived Saddam's repeated wedge-driving efforts. The US succeeded in all its major diplomatic forays against Iraq: the gradual deployment of 250,000 troops to Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Shield, the worldwide imposition of a complete blockade on Iraqi products, and, finally, the authorization through UN Security Council resolution 678 of the use of "all necessary means" in order to free Kuwait.

The Gulf War also proved conclusively that America was a force to be reckoned with in world politics. Military victory in the Gulf provided a boost to America's prestige, still recovering from the legacy of Vietnam. According to Pentagon estimates, Iraq fielded at the time the world's fourth largest army in terms of troops and had proved in its eight year war with Iran that it could withstand conflict against a numerically superior enemy. By some forecasts, the losses suffered by the coalition in an attempt to liberate Kuwait were estimated as high as 20,000 troops, of which 7,000 dead.³² Astonishingly, the US freed the emirate while registering only 458 casualties, of which

³¹ In the words of Freedman, "Saddam was unfortunate to pick a unique period in international affairs. Had he invaded Kuwait a few years earlier, such wide-ranging collaboration would have been inconceivable." Lawrence Freedman and Ephraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 438.

³² *Ibid.*, 285-6.

only 148 dead, while inflicting casualties in the tens of thousands on Iraq.³³ “The specter of Vietnam,” boasted Bush, “has been buried forever in the desert sands of the Arabian peninsula.”³⁴ The war even prompted talk of a revolution in warfare that had resulted in America achieving an unrivalled advantage over other states in military technology.³⁵

On the other hand, the US could not have defeated Iraq without the express support of a large number of states.³⁶ Whether their contribution came in the form of logistical help, of financial burden-sharing, of granting the use of territory for armed operations, of enforcing sanctions, of contributing troops, or simply of not sabotaging American initiatives, the collaboration of other states was essential to America’s success. Furthermore, once the Soviets were on-board, the US could unleash the full power of the UN against Saddam Hussein. Throughout its Cold War existence, the UN had been eternally hamstrung by the American-Soviet rivalry that prevented by the threat or the use of veto the effective functioning of the Security Council. The Gulf War opened up new and staggering possibilities: not only could the US deny at will any legitimacy to an opponent, but it could also call against it the awe-inspiring power of universal economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, or even of collective military action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. As President Bush insisted: “clearly no longer can a dictator count on East-West confrontation to stymie concerted United Nations against aggression. A new partnership of nations has begun.”³⁷

³³ The exact figure of Iraqi casualties varies, probably standing at around 35,000 killed and 60,000 wounded. *Ibid.*, 408-9.

³⁴ Quoted in Hendrickson and Tucker, *Imperial Temptation*, 152.

³⁵ Eliot Cohen, “A Revolution in Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (March/ April 1996): 37-54.

³⁶ Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 52-3; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, chaps. 7, 9, 16.

³⁷ See George H. W. Bush, “Address to the Joint Session of Congress,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1990; Hendrickson and Tucker, *Imperial Temptation*, 40-1, 54.

America went to unprecedented lengths to secure international support. On the occasion of the vote on resolution 678 alone, Secretary of State James Baker met in a diplomatic marathon ranging from Russia to China and from Colombia to Yemen with representatives of all the other fourteen countries occupying a seat on the UN Security Council. This included even the Cuban foreign minister, whom Baker met in New York. Of particular interest is the considerable degree of attention the US showed toward the Soviet Union. As Baker puts it, “from the start I viewed the Soviets as key. In every strategy calculation, I considered their support a prerequisite to a credible coalition. They had to be courted, nurtured, and included to a degree once unthinkable by American policy makers... Their endorsement was so critical ... that I was willing and able to go many an extra mile to keep them on board.”³⁸ Moreover, maintaining international cooperation was one of the key reasons to stop the Gulf War short of unseating Saddam Hussein: doing so would have exceeded the mandate of the UN Security Council. As Scowcroft argued there was no single rationale for the US to stop its offensive, “but one of the factors was we had a UN mandate to take whatever measures necessary to get the Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. And that was all.”³⁹

This cooperation was eventually transformed in the doctrine of the new world order.⁴⁰ Initially, the concept had been hinted at only in reference to joint American-

³⁸ James A. Baker, III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1995), 281-3; Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), chaps. 13-18.

³⁹ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 15; Bush and Scowcroft, *World Transformed*, 487, 489-90. However, the decision reflects the peculiar Bush combination between Kissingerian realism and the imperative of cooperation in that the other important consideration was that overthrowing Saddam risked upsetting the regional balance of power by weakening Iraq. Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 516; Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 154-63.

⁴⁰ There is still considerable dissent as to the exact meaning of the new world order. By contrast to Scowcroft, Baker writes in his memoirs published three years before the Bush-Scowcroft collaboration that “although we didn’t do a good job of explaining the concept, this worldwide advance of democratic ideals

Soviet arms agreement and joint crisis management, perhaps as early as the Malta summit in November 1989.⁴¹ But following the start of the Gulf conflict, Bush and Scowcroft had on August 23, 1990 a conversation on a fishing trip that unveiled a much more ambitious project: “if the attack on Kuwait marked the end of forty-odd years of ... superpower confrontation, what vistas might open up?... The United States and the Soviet Union could, in most cases, stand together against unprovoked interstate aggression.”⁴² The new world order buzz word then appeared repeatedly in President Bush’s subsequent speeches.⁴³ As he put it: “We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf... also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times...a new world order...can emerge: a new era—free from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony.”⁴⁴

Unsurprisingly, even though the Bush administration was known for its realist credentials the above rhetoric exposed it to criticisms, since any genuine realist accepts as axiomatic the point that conflict rather than cooperation is the constant state of affairs in the international realm, especially over security issues.⁴⁵ Moreover, the new world order

represented what we really meant by the phrase ‘new world order’—not the absence of regional conflicts, as most interpreted it.” For his part, Brands has argued that the concept represented a catchphrase destined for domestic consumption. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 415; Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 80-5. Also see for a contradicting interpretation Paul Schroeder, “The New World Order: A Historical Perspective,” *Washington Quarterly* 17 (Spring 1994): 25-44.

⁴¹ Bush and Scowcroft, *World Transformed*, 164-5; US News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Random House, 1992), 140-3.

⁴² Bush and Scowcroft, *World Transformed*, 353-5.

⁴³ According to Alfonsi, it was Scowcroft who added in the new world order as part of Bush’s speech on the objectives the US pursued in the Gulf Conflict. Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 109-11.

⁴⁴ Bush, “Address to the Joint Session of Congress”; also see for similar remarks Bush, “State of the Union Address 1991”; George H. W. Bush, “Address to Joint Sessions of Congress, March 7, 1991.”

⁴⁵ Also see Brent Scowcroft, “Geopolitical Vertigo and the US Role,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 9 (Summer 1992): 6-9. Scowcroft arrives at a shocking conclusion for a hardcore realist: that balance of

ignored the features that set apart the Gulf conflict as a unique development that had unified only temporarily most of the world states behind the US: the danger that Iraq's occupation of Kuwait posed to the balance of power in the Middle East, Saddam's violation of the taboo on conquest, and the presence in power in the Kremlin of the most accommodating Soviet leadership ever, which was disposed to grant America a free hand in the Middle East.⁴⁶ Scowcroft might have added a belated caution sign regarding the ill-defined new world order when writing that "we certainly had no expectation that we were entering a period of peace and tranquility" and that "the phrase, as we thought of it, applied only to a narrow aspect of conflict—aggression between states."⁴⁷

But the genie was already out of the bottle, since even Bush and Scowcroft thought, beyond any reasonable effort to come up with a catchphrase, in terms of a world order that America (presumably with the automatic and wholehearted support of other states) would create and maintain into being.⁴⁸ When asked whether he envisioned the Post-Cold War as a new era of using American military power, Bush answered that "because of what's happened we won't have to use US forces around the world. I think when we say something... people are going to listen. Because I think out of all this will be a new-found—let's put it this way: a reestablished credibility for the United States of

power politics no longer suit the emerging international environment. For criticisms of the new world order see Lawrence Freedman, "Order and Disorder in the New World," *Foreign Affairs* 71(Winter 1991): 20-37, 22, 35-7; Schroeder, "New World Order"; Hendrickson and Tucker, *Imperial Temptation*, 67-8.

⁴⁶ Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*; Talbott, "Post-Victory Blues," 59-60.

⁴⁷ Bush and Scowcroft, *World Transformed*, 355; Talbott, "Post-Victory Blues," 68; Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 85-7. Similar objections were raised against the new world order by Baker and Powell.

⁴⁸ This is precisely the interpretation of the new world order argued by Schroeder. As he writes, "one could define the NWO[new world order] as an international system in which the United States and like-minded friends and allies act together, preferably under the aegis of the United Nations to preserve or establish peace by upholding international law and order against aggressors, law breakers, and oppressors." Schroeder, "New World Order."

America.”⁴⁹ Even a Thucydides-quoting, self-defined realist such as Baker could contemplate that “the entire world suddenly wanted to get closer to the United States. The Soviet Empire was gone. The principles and values of the American experience—democracy and free markets—were being embraced around the globe as never before. It seemed as though everyone wanted to be America’s best friend.”⁵⁰

The commitment of Bush and his main foreign policy advisors to order and cooperation could be seen at work in the decision to reject the Pentagon’s Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) of 1992. The document drafted by Zalmay Khalilzad advocated that the US top priority should be preventing the emergence of any power capable of mounting a challenge to American supremacy as formidable as the one posed by the Soviet Union.⁵¹ In practical terms this goal meant opposing the effort of any power to gain regional dominance of Europe, East Asia, or the Middle East through a combination of moderate American leadership, posing no obvious threat to its allies and giving them some stake in the American-imposed order, and of retaining an unrivalled lead in military capabilities over any would-be challenger. In the words of the DPG, “we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role. An effective reconstitution capability is important here, since it implies that a potential rival could not hope to quickly or easily gain a predominant military position in the world.”⁵²

⁴⁹ “Excerpts from Bush’s News Conference on Postwar Moves,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1991.

⁵⁰ Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 414-5.

⁵¹ The DPG expressed the beliefs of a group of aides to the Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and of his deputy Paul Wolfowitz. Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 43-5.

⁵² See “Excerpts from the Pentagon’s Plan: ‘Prevent the Reemergence of a New Rival,’” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992; Patrick Tyler, “US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1992; Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 44-7.

Hence, the DPG was proposing a view diametrically opposed to the new world order in at least two respects. First, it argued that the American rank as number one had to be consolidated further to the point where the mere thought of a challenge to the US would be unconceivable. By contrast, the new world order rested on the premise of an America distinctly satisfied with the status it already enjoyed. Second, the DPG entertained a paranoid view of a world populated by rivals-in-the-making in which the safest course of action for the US was not cooperation but ensuring obedience through overwhelming strength.⁵³ Alternately, the very foundation of the new world order was the imperative of international back-up for America's exercise of international leadership: this was to be obtained by negotiations, not by coercion.⁵⁴ This is to say that the reasons for the key Bush foreign policy-makers to repudiate the DPG, after excerpts of it had leaked into the press in March 1992, ran deeper than just the desire to avoid the very vocal public outcry.⁵⁵ The administration's own worldview favored the preservation of order in a partnership with other nations, as exemplified in the State Department's transition memo written by Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger to his successor Warren Christopher. According to the memo, the US should be "a provider of reassurance and architect of new security arrangements; an aggressive proponent of

⁵³ As Khalilzad later emphasized, the US should not only have been concerned by challenges from China and Russia, but also had stakes in preventing the reemergence of a multipolar environment. Zalmay Khalilzad, *From Containment to Global Leadership? America and the World After the Cold War* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1995), 17-21, 41.

⁵⁴ This aspect was quickly seized upon by commentators who emphasized the absence from the DPG of any reference to coalitions under the UN banner or to Security Council approval. See Tyler, "US Strategy".

⁵⁵ See for this interpretation in particular Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 47. For reactions to the DPG see Patrick Tyler, "Senior US Officials Assail Lone-Superpower Policy: Ammunition for Critics," *New York Times*, March 11, 1992; Leslie Gelb, "They're Kidding," *New York Times*, March 9, 1992. A substantially-toned down version of the DPG was released and approved in May 1992.

economic openness; an exemplar and advocate of democratic values; a builder and leader of coalitions to deal with problems.”⁵⁶

These recommendations stress the continuity between George H. W. Bush and Clinton’s first term. Clinton came into office with little apparent personal interest in shepherding foreign affairs except in matters concerning globalization. One disaffected former aide refers to him as a president “less interested in international affairs than at any time in the previous six decades combined.”⁵⁷ In the first months following his election, he even turned the entire responsibility of foreign policy decision-making to his officials, with the advice to keep him informed, but not to take too much of his time.⁵⁸ This was by no means a return to isolationism. Rather, Clinton acted on the premise that the world had become much more manageable than it had been throughout the Cold War, and that the US could rely on its partners to help it ensure peace and order. This meant that under Clinton’s initial approach the US preferred the role of a laid-back manager, who delegates tasks to its subordinates, instead of that of a hands-on one that seeks to supervise or achieve everything by itself.

Much as the accusation of lacking an overarching grand foreign policy strategy became a litany among Clinton’s critics and an obsession to come up with a catchy bumper-sticker phrase within the administration itself, concepts such as “assertive multilateralism,” “neo-Wilsonian pragmatism,” and “enlargement and engagement” amounted to the notion of America acting by means of coalitions under the aegis of the UN in order to promote besides objectives such as peace and stability, values such as

⁵⁶ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 47-51.

⁵⁷ Mandelbaum, “Foreign Policy”.

⁵⁸ The recommendation was made by Thomas McLarty, the White House Chief of Staff, to Lake. See Tom Matthews and Eleanor Clift, “Clinton’s Growing Pains,” *Newsweek*, May 3, 1993; Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 57-8.

democracy and respect for human rights.⁵⁹ This was not, however, a revolutionary call for the indiscriminate overthrow of dictatorships and for punishing human rights violators. Despite the rhetoric of his main foreign policy advisors (Lake, the Under-secretary of State Strobe Talbott, and the UN ambassador Madeleine Albright), which Bush ironically referred to in the 1992 presidential campaign as “the vision thing,” Clinton was not a genuine visionary. By all accounts, he was much more pragmatic than he was neo-Wilsonian.⁶⁰ In this line of thought, the promotion of American values was a desirable goal for the Clinton administration, but one that could only be achievable in certain specific contexts—primarily where international consensus on the matter existed and where there was no risk of having to use force on a large scale.

The net effect of these measures was a policy largely interpreted by most analysts as incoherent.⁶¹ First, America had no plans in the eventuality, by no means implausible, that it could not secure the support or compliance of the other permanent members of the UN Security Council. Second, although it obsessively styled itself the world’s leader—for instance, in one speech, Clinton’s Secretary of State Warren Christopher mentioned leadership no fewer than twenty three times—actually the US was reluctant to lead,

⁵⁹ For the lack of a grand strategy see Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996): 5-53; William Hyland, *Clinton’s World: Remaking American Foreign Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 1999); for the bumper sticker obsession see Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*; Douglas Brinkley, “Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine,” *Foreign Policy* 106 (Spring 1997): 110-27, 114-5.

⁶⁰ To quote Lake: “I believe strongly that our foreign policies must marry principle and pragmatism. We should be principled about our purposes but pragmatic about our means.” Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” 20-7, 26.

⁶¹ Mandelbaum, “Foreign Policy”; Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996): 5-53; James Schlesinger, “Quest for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (Winter 1993): 17-28; Paul Wolfowitz, “The Clinton’s Administration First Year,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (January/ February 1994): 1-25.

particularly when use of force was actually needed to prevail.⁶² To quote Lake in the context of Rwanda, “when I wake up every morning and look at the headlines and the stories and the images of television of these conflicts, I want to work to end every conflict, I want to work to save every child out there. But neither we, nor the international community have the resources, nor the mandate to do so.”⁶³

In the early 1990s, rather than risk confrontation with other significant international actors and their likely veto by standing firm for decisive action, the US preferred to strike compromises, which, while successful in preserving international consensus, could only do so at the cost of tolerating at various times human rights abuses, instability, war, WMD proliferation, and ethnic cleansing. Basically, cooperation was its own reward and came at a cost: whenever it could not persuade its partners to embrace its viewpoint, the US had to consent to deadlock. This resulted not only in American political impotence, but also in a corresponding decline in prestige. In this regard, America’s relations with Russia and China deserve special mention because of the particular degree of forbearance shown by Washington.

In the interest of engagement, the Clinton administration continued Bush’s political line of exhibiting moderation in relations with the Kremlin, by humoring President Boris Yeltsin so as to strengthen the domestic hand of Russia’s pro-Western camp.⁶⁴ To accomplish this goal, the US turned therefore a blind eye to Yeltsin’s heavy-

⁶² For Christopher’s speech on leadership, see Steven Holmes, “Christopher Reaffirms Leading US Role,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1993; Hyland, *Clinton’s World*, 24-5; Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 64-5.

⁶³ Quoted in Mandelbaum, “Foreign Policy,” 20.

⁶⁴ The future of Russia’s pro-Western orientation and of its fledgling democracy was seen as hinging on the survival in power of Yeltsin. “Helping the Russian people to build a free society and a market economy” was regarded by American officials such as Christopher and Talbott as “the greatest strategic challenge of our time... For America and the world the stakes are monumental” and as comparable in magnitude with

handed handling of domestic affairs (such as the shelling of the Russian Duma in the fall of 1993 and the 1994-5 war against the breakaway republic of Chechnya). On the foreign front, the US showed a healthy appreciation of Russian sensibilities foremost by putting on ice the planned eastward expansion of NATO through the imprecise formula of a Partnership for Peace, which, while not turning away Eastern Europeans admission supplicants, did not make any commitment regarding their eventual joining. Furthermore, the US did not object to displays of Russian coercion in Georgia, Moldova, and Tajikistan; accepted the modification of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) to allow a Russian deployment in the Caucasus; did not insist on Russia abandoning the sales of missile and nuclear technology to India and Iran; and accepted Russian concerns about American intervention in Bosnia.⁶⁵

In respect to China, the Clinton team, which through the 1992 presidential campaign had spoken about “the butchers of Beijing” and about not coddling dictators, had initially decided to reverse the pragmatic approach put in place by Bush.⁶⁶ As Christopher had put it in his confirmation hearing: “our policy will be to seek to facilitate a broad, peaceful evolution in China from communism to democracy by encouraging the forces of economic and political liberalization in that great and highly important country.” To this end, Clinton signed in May 1993 an executive order that conditioned renewal of most favorite nation (MFN) status for China on Beijing achieving progress on human rights.⁶⁷ However, by 1993, China had become the world’s fastest growing

the two World Wars. Quoted in Hyland, *Clinton’s World*, 84-7; Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 120-2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., chaps. 6-7, 41-58, 195-6.

⁶⁶ On Bush’s China policy see James Mann, *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Knopf, 1999), chaps. 9-11, 13.

⁶⁷ Ibid., chap. 15, 276-81.

economy and was therefore in a position to resist America's pressures to liberalize. Instead, the pressure had turned on Clinton because a decision to impose trade sanctions on China would have hurt the competitive chances of American business interests. A last-ditch effort in early May 1994 by Christopher to journey to Beijing so as to convince the Chinese leaders to offer concessions on human rights turned into a diplomatic fiasco. Even before the Secretary of State had reached in China, the government had cracked down on known dissidents. In subsequent meetings with China's leaders, Christopher was informed that "China will never accept the United States' concept of human rights" and that Beijing was confident it would be awarded MFN regardless of its internal policy. Faced with the prospect of an open trade conflict with an inflexible Beijing, the Clinton cabinet retreated and announced the same month it dropped any linkage between human rights and MFN.⁶⁸ The imperatives of cooperation and globalization had thus trumped by 1994 the ideals of enlargement and of a principled international order.

Furthermore, the US also faced difficulties as a result of its relegation of force to the role of an instrument of last resort. This vacillating behavior, dismissed by Mandelbaum as a strategy of exit, combined with the requirements of cooperation severely hampered the US ability to act effectively so as to ensure order in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti, Iraq, North Korea, and Rwanda.

The Illusions Dispelled, 1993-1998

The context that contributed the most toward ending the years of illusions was the conflict in Bosnia. As the US eventually discovered, effective settlement of the Bosnian

⁶⁸ Mann, *About Face*, chap. 16, particularly 297-304; Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 404-9.

civil war could not be reached as long as Washington was both reluctant to employ military force and insistent on acting only under the Gulf War format of an all-encompassing coalition..

Throughout 1992, the US thought it could delegate management of the Yugoslav civil conflicts to the Europeans, who seemed eager for the job. As far as the Bush administration was concerned, the US, in Baker's words, "didn't have a dog" in the acerbic fight taking place in the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁹ Admittedly, officials of the Bush administration, in particular Eagleburger, who had served as Ambassador to Yugoslavia, had qualms about the wisdom of giving a complete free hand to the strongest party in the conflict, the Serbs. However, they also agreed that any involvement in Yugoslavia could reach alarming proportions, necessitating a long-term commitment and the deployment of tens if not hundreds of thousands of American troops—the highest estimate put the figure of forces needed to keep into place a cease-fire in Bosnia at 400,000.⁷⁰

However, much as the Chairman of the European Commission Jacques Poos of Luxembourg claimed that "the age of Europe has dawned," meaning that the European institutions would assume responsibility for dealing with a security crisis in their own backyard, it soon became clear that the major European players, Germany, France, and Britain had little appetite for peace-maintaining in either Croatia or Bosnia.⁷¹ Instead, they encouraged a multi-track approach consisting of the deployment of UN

⁶⁹ The US had initially sought to defuse the conflict by advocating the non-recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 90-1; Steven Burg and Paul Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 79-80, 100-1; Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 634-51; Warren Zimmerman, *Origins of a Catastrophe* (New York: Random House, 1996); Samantha Power, *'A Problem from Hell': America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 258-63, 279-93.

⁷⁰ Halberstam *War in Time of Peace*, 132-41; Zimmerman, *Origins*, 170, 216; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 201-2, 204, 210.

⁷¹ Any European military option for the former Yugoslavia had in fact been ruled out both by the European Community and by the Western European Union since the summer of 1991. *Ibid.*, 84-5.

peacekeepers under UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force), the pursuit of negotiations, and the imposition of an embargo on all warring parties through UN resolution 713. This new approach was however disowned by the US, where Clinton had come into office in January 1993. In the opinion of Clinton's advisors, the European proposed Vance-Owen peace plan (named after the UN and the EU negotiators) was both unworkable and rewarded Serb ethnic cleansing. Therefore, the US decided to undermine it, by making clear it would only "endorse," "welcome," or "support" an agreement that was acceptable to all conflicting parties.⁷² America's alternative consisted in the so-called "lift and strike": lifting the arms embargo imposed on the Croats and Muslims, while at the same conducting air strikes on the Bosnian Serb positions near the Bosnian capital Sarajevo.⁷³ But this option was in turn unacceptable to the Europeans, since their forces ensuring peacekeeping were the ones exposed to Serb retaliation and potential hostage-taking. The European powers maintained that the US could not employ air power as long as it did not have troops of its own in harm's way.⁷⁴

At this point, America became trapped by its shibboleths. The commitment of American boots on the ground in an effort to reassure the European allies it was sharing the same risks as they faced, risked degenerating into a quagmire and inflict heavy economic, not to mention political, costs. It is highly telling that in the very same speech in which he stressed the need for US leadership, Christopher referred to Bosnia as a "problem from hell," "a morass" and "a quagmire," while for his part Clinton refused to

⁷² This was an opportunity for the Bosnian Serbs who wanted to preserve the territory they had ethnically cleansed to reject the plan. Ivo Daalder, *Getting to Dayton: The Making of America's Bosnia Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institutions Press, 2000), 8-11; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 232-47.

⁷³ As Burg and Shoup argue, it was far from clear what the political settlement that "lift and strike" wanted to put in place was or what the conditions which would trigger strikes were. Ibid., 252-3.

⁷⁴ The best summary overview is Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, chap. 1. Also see Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 148-58.

send troops in the Bosnian “shooting gallery.” As one analyst put it, “the Balkan black hole” risked jeopardizing Clinton’s domestic program regarding economic growth, balancing the budget, and reforming health care, the same way Vietnam had killed off Johnson’s Great Society.⁷⁵ Peace and its global economic rewards could not therefore be jeopardized for the sake of promoting order in Bosnia. Yet, on the other hand, pressing ahead with “lift and strike” without the approval of the Europeans was equally unpalatable, since it violated the principle of only using force under multilateral auspices. As Clinton put it repeatedly: “the United States cannot proceed here unilaterally” and “Europe must be willing to act with us. We must go forward together.”⁷⁶

The American predicament became evident on the occasion of the European visit by Christopher in the beginning of May 1993, a diplomatic disaster from which the Secretary of State returned “with bullet holes all over him.” Having left in order to sell “lift and strike” among others to London, Paris, and Bonn, Christopher was met with a frosty reception by European leaders. The British Prime Minister John Major flatly rejected lift and strike, arguing his own government could fall if there was escalation in Bosnia. The Serb-leaning French President François Mitterrand unconditionally rejected lifting the arms embargo and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé even threatened to withdraw France from UNPROFOR should such event occur. By the time Christopher was heading to Moscow, where Yeltsin refused even to talk about the use of force in Bosnia, he found out from Secretary of Defense Les Aspin that the White House had lost the heart to pursue “lift and strike”—in Aspin’s words: “the President has gone south on

⁷⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, “Any War in Bosnia Would Carry a Domestic Price,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1993; Hyland, *Clinton’s World*, 36; Holmes, “Christopher Reaffirms”; Drew, *On the Edge*, 161-2.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 120-1.

us.”⁷⁷ Christopher himself put his finger on the very problem when reporting to Clinton that “we have to tell [the Europeans] that we have firmly decided to go ahead with our preferred option and that we expect them to support us.”⁷⁸ However, instead of the US imposing determinedly its policy of choice on its allies, it was the European view of creating and defending UN safe areas within Bosnia that eventually prevailed.⁷⁹

This impression became even more pronounced in the fall of 1994, when the Bosnian Serbs began shelling the Muslim safe haven of Bihac. In a replay of the 1993 scenario, the US pressed for unprecedented massive air strikes to defend Bihac, while the Europeans objected out of concern for their peacekeepers under direct threat of Serb retaliation. As a result of unproductive negotiations throughout late November, Lake argued in a memo to Clinton that the allies’ opposition to strikes meant that “the stick of military pressure is no longer viable.”⁸⁰ Accordingly, the US ended up by stating it would not insist on “strategic strikes.” The conclusion was inescapable: the US preferred inertia to acting without its allies and partners.

Nevertheless, cooperation soon found itself under fire not only in Bosnia, but also in Somalia, which was since 1991 in the throes of inter-clan warfare that wreaked havoc on the state’s fragile economy. Faced with the threat of mass starvation in Somalia, the UN, which already had a peacekeeping presence in the country under UNOSOM I

⁷⁷ Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 226-8; Drew, *On the Edge*, 151-7; Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 15-8.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 18; Warren Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 346-7. Hyland writes in assent: “Obviously, Washington was determined not to act alone. Consistent with the administration’s basic philosophy, it would act only within the safety and comfort of allied or international support.” Hyland, *Clinton’s World*, 38; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 226-9; Drew, *On the Edge*, 158-9.

⁷⁹ A related concern was not to jeopardize relations with Russia over intervention in Bosnia. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 17.

⁸⁰ In the words of a senior official: “the principals agreed that NATO is more important than Bosnia.” Ibid., 31-6; Michael Gordon et al., “Colliding Missions—A Special Report: US and Bosnia: How a Policy Changed,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1994; Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 157-8.

(United Nations Operation in Somalia), appealed in the fall of 1992 to the US for help. America's decision to deploy 25,000 troops to help the UN deliver food to the famished Somalis—the UNITAF (Unified Task Force) mission—was ultimately determined by the need to back the rhetoric of a new world order with some semblance of action.⁸¹ In this respect, in the opinion of America's top decision-makers Somalia represented, by contrast to Bosnia, a context where intervention would have both made a sizable difference in saving lives, and could have been undertaken on the cheap with no risks of escalation attached. That is to say, Somalia was first and foremost a demonstration undertaken in order to placate critics: a Pentagon official referred to it as "Powell's way of doing something humanitarian."⁸² Thus, according to Scowcroft, the US had to show first that "it was not that we were afraid to intervene abroad; it was just that the circumstances weren't right in Bosnia." By contrast, Somalia had all the markings of a new world order showcase: "it was a Southern Hemisphere state; it was black; it was non-Christian; it was everything that epitomized the Third World." Consequently, "we did not want to portray the administration as wholly flint-hearted realpolitik, and an airlift in Somalia was a lot cheaper to demonstrate that we had a heart."⁸³ For the US, success in Somalia would have managed to wash away the simultaneous discomfiture of Bosnia.

The eventual outcome of Somalia, instead of good public relations, was political debacle. This was so because while the US and the UN were shackled to each other in their first joint peacemaking operation since the Gulf War, they pursued nevertheless

⁸¹ Robert Gallucci, the Assistant Secretary the State to Eagleburger argued for intervention for public relations purposes in either Bosnia or Somalia. Don Oberdorfer, "The Path to Intervention: A Massive Tragedy We Could Do Something About," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1992.

⁸² Ibid.; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 251; Jon Western, "Sources of Humanitarian Intervention: Somalia and Bosnia," *International Security* 26 (Spring 2002): 112-42, 117-130; John Hirsch and Robert Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995), 37-43.

⁸³ Quoted in Power, *Problem from Hell*, 293.

considerably different agendas in Somalia. For the UN, the real mission was to stabilize the political situation in Somalia by disarming the Somali warlords and conducting nation-building. Conversely, for the US, the mission was strictly humanitarian: the US troops were there to ensure food reached those in need of it, and once this task was accomplished and the immediate emergency addressed, they would depart. A tug-of-war ensued between Boutros-Ghali and the US throughout the winter of 1992-3, which resulted in the worst of both worlds.

Accordingly, in the interest of US-UN cooperation the Clinton administration agreed to maintain a substantially reduced US military presence in Somalia to constitute the backbone of the UN-led task force as the Quick Reaction Force (QRF).⁸⁴ Moreover, American troops in Somalia were given in March 1993 by Security Council Resolution 814 a considerably wider mandate to rehabilitate the Somali political institutions and economy and promote a country-wide political settlement and reconciliation, by confiscating weapons and raiding the warlords' arms caches. This was hailed by Albright as an "historical undertaking" the administration was excited about and ready to "support vigorously." Yet at the same time, the US troops of the QRF were denied at the Pentagon's insistence the heavy weapons to carry out the job so to avoid being dragged into a protracted intervention. Furthermore, the US expected its 1,500 lightly armed

⁸⁴ To add to the problems of US-UN coordination, there was considerable confusion even in the mind of Clinton and in the ranks of the US Congress over who was actually in command in Somalia. The reason was that there were not one but *three* separate American forces in Somalia: a 3,000 strong logistics unit which was part of the UNOSOM, the 1,500 strong QRF which was independent of the UN, even though its commanding officer Major General Thomas Montgomery was at the same time the deputy commander of the UNOSOM wider forces, and the 400 strong Task Force Ranger, which was deployed in August and had a separate command structure. These matters were complicated further because the special representative of the Secretary General of the UN in charge of the political aspect of the mission was also a former American admiral Jonathan Howe. To sum up, though it was the UN that originally had sought to arrest Aideed, the entire logistics of the operation were left at the discretion of the Pentagon. William Durch, "Introduction to Anarchy: Humanitarian Intervention and 'State-Building in Somalia,'" in Durch, ed., *UN Peacekeeping*, 311-65, 335-9; Drew, *On the Edge*, 319, 327-8.

troops and a contingent of 400 commandos to accomplish an objective that a US force of 25,000 had had qualms pursuing.⁸⁵

In fact, even more was asked of the QRF, as the mission objective evolved from disarming Somali warlords to apprehending those who resisted. In June 1993, following an arms inspection, the Pakistani contingent of the UNOSOM II came under fire by soldiers under the command of warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed. A low-key series of attacks and counterattacks throughout the summer culminated in August in the death of four American troops. Albright summed up America's options in a *New York Times* commentary: "the decision we must make is whether to pull up stakes and allow Somalia to fall back into the abyss or stay the course and help lift the country and its people from the category of a failed state into that of an emerging democracy."⁸⁶ Hence, the Clinton administration believed that, to preserve the idea of world order, Aideed had to be made an example of as a warning to "perpetrators of crimes against the United Nations."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, to implement this agenda the administration opted for just a moderate escalation by sending in the elite formations of the Army Rangers and of the Delta Force.⁸⁸ On October 3, the Rangers botched an attempt to capture Aideed to put him on trial, as Boutros-Ghali had requested. In the ensuing battle, 18 American troops were killed, 74 were wounded, three Black Hawk helicopters were downed, and the body of an

⁸⁵ On the one hand, Boutros-Ghali had maneuvered the US into agreeing to participation in a nation-building mission under UNOSOM II by refusing to take over from UNITAF, as long as his proposed objective of stabilization was denied US military support. Hirsh and Oakley, *Somalia*, 103-11. On the other hand, the Pentagon refused to be sucked into Somali politics and rejected the request for tanks. Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 260-1.

⁸⁶ Madeleine Albright, "Yes, There Is a Reason to Be in Somalia," *New York Times*, August 10, 1993.

⁸⁷ Yet the administration decided simultaneously to seek a political settlement with Aideed, which would have allowed it to pull out of Somalia. The raid in October thus took Clinton by surprise because he was under the impression that his administration was committed to talks. Drew, *On the Edge*, 324-5.

⁸⁸ This decision was strongly criticized at the time by both Aspin and by the former US Ambassador to Somalia, Robert Oakley. According to Oakley, "the Rangers and the Delta Force became a posse with standing authority to go after Aideed." See Hirsch and Oakley, *Somalia*, 122-3; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 258-9.

American pilot was filmed being dragged through the streets of the Somali capital Mogadishu. An immediate decision was made on October 5 to withdraw all US troops from Somalia.⁸⁹ Somalia represented a heavy blow to American prestige, particularly coming on the heels of Bosnia. In both contexts, the US engaged in a damage-control effort trying to put a best face on setbacks by presenting them as irrelevant. In regards to Bosnia, Christopher argued that the Bosnian war did not concern NATO, even though the organization took charge of coming to the defense of the UN troops protecting the safe havens.⁹⁰ In Somalia, so as to avoid the impression that the US was running away, Clinton decided to send over as a symbolic gesture the requested tanks just before the US troops were withdrawn.⁹¹ In both cases, the American efforts to avoid the appearance of defeat were unconvincing.

When the US had to pull out of Somalia, Clinton gave the first indications of status inconsistency by bitterly complaining that the US was being pushed around by “two-bit pricks” and by worrying that American “leadership in global affairs would be undermined at the very time when people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the Post Cold War.”⁹² However, the US was even less willing after the events of October 1993 to contemplate use of military force, particularly in joint partnership with the UN. In 1994, the administration actually put forward a formal decision, Presidential Decision Directive (PDD 25) which conditioned drastically

⁸⁹ Hirsch and Oakley, *Somalia*, 118-27; Durch, “Introduction to Anarchy,” 339-48; Rick Atkinson, “The Raid That Went Wrong,” *Washington Post*, January 30-1, 1994; Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Books, 1999).

⁹⁰ Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 148-9; Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 18-9, 21-2, 187-8. The US had committed itself to the defense of the safe havens since May 1993, under the Joint Action Plan together with Britain, France, Spain and Russia. NATO pledged to protect the safe havens in August of 1993.

⁹¹ Hirsch and Oakley, *Somalia*, 128-9; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 262-4.

⁹² George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), 214; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 262-3; Hirsch and Oakley, *Somalia*, 129.

participation in UN peacekeeping activities in terms of satisfying the tenets of the Powell doctrine. As Holbrooke put it, the US was suffering from the “Vietmalia” syndrome, a combination of the experiences of Vietnam and Somalia.

There was good reason for such concern, as problems encountered in Bosnia and Somalia soon resurfaced in a multitude of other contexts. In Haiti, the US had committed itself to restoring to power the elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide overthrown in 1991 by a military junta led by General Raoul Cedras, which produced a massive Haitian refugee flow towards Florida. While Cedras had officially agreed to a gradual restoration of Aristide, in practice the junta sabotaged the transition of power. The most egregious such episode was the orchestration of a demonstration in October 1993 that prevented US peace-keepers under the banner of the UN from landing on the island. Faced with mobs chanting “Somalia!” *The Harlan County*, the ship carrying the troops, turned tail and left Haitian waters. After this incident, Clinton was so enraged that his officials had allowed him to be ridiculed by Third World strongmen that he told them he wished he had better people working for him, like Reagan did: at least if the US suffered a setback in Lebanon, they compensated the loss of credibility by invading Grenada.⁹³ Yet this outburst did not lead to an improvement in policy. Even though the US threatened Cedras in September 1994 with intervention if he did not step down for Aristide and ultimately had to follow through with a ultimatum, negotiations conducted past the American deadline and with invading US troops already in the air managed to avoid the actual use of force. This anti-climactic result prevented the US from reaping the prestige benefits of a victory, particularly since the political deal reached allowed the

⁹³ Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human*, 217-9; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 272-3. In fact Clinton was here embracing a position first expressed by his political advisor David Gergen, who had favored intervention in the aftermath of the firefight in Mogadishu. Drew, *On the Edge*, 326.

junta members to depart Haiti free with all their assets.⁹⁴ The US experienced even more difficulty in asserting its authority against Iraq. America's failure to dislodge Saddam was compounded by the impenitent attitude of the Iraqi despot, who set out to undermine sanctions, penetrate the Kurdish safe haven areas, mass troops on the Kuwaiti border, and allegedly attempted to assassinate former President Bush on a visit to Kuwait City.⁹⁵

Meanwhile, the hermit state of North Korea was able to conduct a successful nuclear blackmail of the US. Thus, Pyongyang conditioned the freezing—but not the elimination—of its nuclear program and allowing in inspections by the IAEA, in return for America putting an end to the Team Spirit yearly joint military exercises with South Korea and providing economic assistance to the famine stricken communist state. Despite being faced with the most significant challenge to nuclear non-proliferation in the post Cold War, and though most Americans (51% in June 1994) actually favored a preemptive attack on the Yongbyon nuclear facility, Washington refrained from forceful action. Even the American threat of UN sanctions faltered due to opposition from Russia and China.⁹⁶

Finally, in the context of the “most pure and unambiguous genocide since World War Two” committed in Rwanda in the spring of 1994 by the Hutu army and militias against the Tutsi minority and those Hutu who had ties with the Tutsi, the US response went beyond inaction, as Washington actively worked to prevent intervention. The US initially favored withdrawing the entire UN mission from Rwanda, then voted to

⁹⁴ See on Haiti, *ibid.*, 278-82; Philippe Girard, *Clinton in Haiti: The 1994 US Invasion of Haiti* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); chaps. 5-7, 120; Ralph Pezzullo, *Plunging into Haiti: Clinton, Aristide, and the Defeat of Diplomacy* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2006). Girard estimates that the various incentives offered only to Cedras approximated “a one million dollars bribe.”

⁹⁵ For a succinct overview see Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), chap. 14.

⁹⁶ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), chaps. 12-13; Robert Gallucci et al, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004), chaps., 10- 11.

substantially reduce the UN presence, and did its best to prevent referring to events in Rwanda as genocide, an admission that might have required military involvement.⁹⁷

As a consequence of these successive failures by 1995, US prestige was in a free fall. Instead of complaining of the enormity of American power under unipolar conditions, the rest of the world had begun to complain about the lack of results of American foreign policy. It is precisely this status inconsistency between ranking in capabilities and performance that dispelled America's illusions and set-off a policy of prestige seeking. The Clinton administration thus found itself confronting unbearable domestic and international pressure to deliver a redeeming success in Bosnia in the wake of the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995.

Srebrenica was one of the Muslim safe havens under UN protection, which in turn relied on NATO for air cover. Throughout 1994, NATO was called to the rescue several times when the Bosnian Serb forces endangered the safe havens—the threat of bombing and the conduct of pinprick strikes in April and November 1994 were usually sufficient to make the Serbs back off in most standoffs. But in the spring and summer of 1995, this pattern changed as the Bosnian Serbs sought to consolidate their territorial hold. Consequently, not only were the safe havens repeatedly attacked but the threat of NATO airpower proved increasingly unworkable, as French, Canadian and Dutch peacekeepers came under threat, and eventually were taken hostage. Srebrenica constituted therefore an act of defiance to the US and its military arm in Europe NATO, as well as the worst mass atrocity to occur in Europe since the end of World War Two. Hence, the US had very little room to maneuver because in the eventuality the UN

⁹⁷ Power, *Problem from Hell*, 358-64; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 276-7; Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: The History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

mission would have been terminated, it had committed itself and NATO in December 1994 to extracting UN peacekeepers from Bosnia, which implied ground deployment. Yet this operation and in fact any use of force in Bosnia also carried a sizable political risk in a pre-election year with the Republican Party being opposed to commitment in the Balkans. In the meantime, inaction only affected further US prestige and risked emboldening even more the Bosnian Serbs, who after the fall of Srebrenica had gone on to conquer another safe haven, Zepa.⁹⁸

The Clinton cabinet fully realized that its reaction to Srebrenica was essential to the preservation of America's status as world leader.⁹⁹ As Clinton told Lake, Bosnia was "killing the US position of strength in the world" and "doing enormous damage to the United States and our standing in the world." "We look weak," concluded a beleaguered Clinton. This discussion took place on July 17, 1995, in the aftermath of a dramatic outburst by the newly elected French President Jacques Chirac, who had been incensed by the lack of international response to the fall of Srebrenica. "The position of leader of the free world," said Chirac, "is now vacant," adding later that France stood alone in wanting to act on Bosnia, and, if it was not accommodated in its call for decisive action, it was ready to abandon its participation in UNPROFOR. Chirac's declarations, added to the growing domestic criticism of his Bosnia policy, had enraged Clinton to such a degree that it provoked the president on July 14 into launching a half-hour rant complete with expletives directed at his National Security officials. "I am the President of the

⁹⁸ Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, chaps. 4 and 7, in particular 323-7; Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), 65-8; Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 40-61, 64-73, 163-6; Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, chaps. 9-13; David Rohde, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica* (London: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997).

⁹⁹ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 84-5, 92-3, 101-8, 164; Halberstam argues that by that time Bosnia had become a sort of test for Clinton: "its importance... appeared to suggest... impotence on the part of the Clinton administration not just in this but in all matters." Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 296-7.

United States,” complained Clinton. “I am checkmated on the most important issue I face by people who should not be able to checkmate our policy. This can’t continue.” Lake agreed: “this is larger than Bosnia. Bosnia is the symbol of US foreign policy.” In his view, “the issue was US credibility as a world leader, its credibility in NATO, the United Nations, and at home.”¹⁰⁰

Consequently, the US decided to use force in 1995, even if in the process it had to sacrifice cooperation. The US therefore did not ask for the prior permission of other states to launch a bombing campaign against the Bosnian Serbs—allies and partners were simply politely informed of the action the US was going to take and told they were welcome to join it, but that America will proceed alone if necessary.¹⁰¹ After a (presumed) Bosnian Serb mortar attack on Sarajevo, the US conducted a thorough eight-day bombing against the Serb artillery and communication centers. In conjunction with an offensive of the Croat army supplied with American weapons in the Krajina Serb republic in Croatia, and incentives offered to Milosevic, the strikes produced a commitment of all sides to negotiations. In less than a month of talks conducted at the US Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, in October/ November 1995 the seemingly intractable conflict in Bosnia was settled, chiefly through America’s new-found determination.¹⁰²

The chief lesson that the US extracted from the strenuous experience of solving the conflict Bosnia was that cooperation and the non-use of force if taken as *sine qua non* conditions could turn into a major liabilities for achieving political success. As long as the US had been committed to get West European and Russian assent for its policy and

¹⁰⁰ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 108; Bob Woodward, *The Choice: How Clinton Won* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 260-2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 267. While France wanted a ground deployment, Britain and Russia opposed even air strikes. Burg and Shoup, *War in Bosnia*, 342-6.

¹⁰² Ibid., 167-8, 347-67; for a blow by blow account of the Dayton talks, see Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

had hesitated to employ its military might on a large scale, Bosnia had been trapped in limbo. But once the US opted for a combination of a “don’t ask, tell” approach and a more muscular policy, success materialized quickly, and, what is more, America’s partners soon rallied behind its position. Hence, the US decision-makers concluded that the post Cold War context required a much more determined exercise of American leadership. The US role was to chart the course to follow and then to pursue it resolutely, by force if necessary, instead of attempting fruitlessly to hammer out consensus. In this respect, the bombing in Bosnia and the Dayton talks represented Clinton’s *High Noon* moment. Just as in Clinton’s favorite movie *High Noon*, where the sheriff played by Gary Cooper is left alone by a terrified town to confront a formidable outlaw, the US was the only party that could end the carnage in Bosnia.¹⁰³

In this sense America had faced a similar fateful choice over Bosnia and had opted “for a course of action driven less by concerns over niceties or allied consensus than by the desire to get things done.”¹⁰⁴ This proved, as Christopher put it a watershed for Clinton’s foreign policy: the US experienced “a palpable feeling of relief that impotence had been replaced by determination... the success at Dayton reaffirmed the imperative of American leadership. Some Europeans grumbled about how we had dominated the Dayton process... but... they really knew that without us the settlement would not have happened.”¹⁰⁵ The same impression was relayed by Holbrooke, now promoted to Assistant Secretary of State and the main architect of Dayton: for him, after

¹⁰³ “I loved that movie,” confessed Clinton,” because from start to finish Gary Cooper is scared to death but does the right thing anyway.” Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 20-1.

¹⁰⁴ For this interpretation see Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 130-1; Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 179, 182-7.

¹⁰⁵ Christopher, *In the Stream of History*, 358-9.

Bosnia, US foreign policy was at once more assertive and more muscular, a clear sign “America was back.”¹⁰⁶

For all intents and purposes this “Gary Cooper” doctrine stressing the necessity of demonstrating American resoluteness came to dominate the second half of Clinton’s presidency under such labels as foreign policy by posse and in particular the indispensable nation.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, the US chose a more confrontational approach in relation to both Russia and China, by deciding to expand NATO in 1997 and by standing up to Beijing over its military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in the spring of 1996. Moreover, America became more aggressive in responding to the challenges of other states, in particular those coming from the two chief serial offenders: Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic. Rather than forging all-inclusive UN-sanctioned coalitions for castigating the two strongmen, America gradually became convinced that the only viable course of action was to take matters in its own hands. The US had therefore to expand its imperial influence not for the sake of gain or because of fears over its physical security, but out of sheer concern for its steadily deteriorating standing in the eyes of the world. Clinton had put it best in the days after Srebrenica: the US could not afford to be any longer the world’s punching bag.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 358-9..

¹⁰⁷ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 146-7.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Woodward, *The Choice*, 263.

Chapter Five

Prestige and the Bombing of Yugoslavia

During the years of illusions the US had downplayed the seriousness of challenges to its standing as the world leader. As Powell expressed this optimist belief: “I would be very surprised if another Iraq occurred. I’m running out of demons. I’m down to Castro and Kim Il Sung.”¹ But the unfolding decade proved even Powell wrong— particularly in Clinton’s first term the US seemed to wander from crisis to crisis, each occasion reducing a little further America’s prestige. This perceived failure eventually resulted in a condition of status inconsistency based on the contrast between America’s capabilities and its political performance, a condition that the US sought to address starting with the energetic solution to the Bosnian civil war. Yet by the late 1990s the US had not given up completely its soft spot for multilateralism: if feasible, Washington sought to secure international support before acting decisively. To paraphrase Krauthammer, the US was still worshipping at the altar of cooperation and of peace, though the ardor of its faith in these principles had been sensibly reduced by repeated setbacks.²

In this respect, Operation Allied Force— the three months long NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia in response to Belgrade’s actions in Kosovo—represents a decisive moment of transition away from the policy of the years of illusion and towards a more forceful and unilateral political line. True enough, Operation Allied Force was still clothed in appropriate humanitarian and multilateral rhetoric with human rights and

¹ See Stephen Budianski, “Missions Implausible,” *US News & World Report* 111 (October 14, 1991): 24-31.

² Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Winter 1991): 23-33, 24-5.

NATO solidarity taking place of pride in the declarations of American decision-makers.³ Furthermore, there continued to be considerable reticence in Washington to stomach even minimal American casualties over Kosovo. Nonetheless, America's intervention stands out in several respects from established post Cold War practice. First, instead of relying on the UN and the EU, and intervening at the last possible moment, the US took the lead from the beginning of the crisis in putting pressure on Belgrade.⁴ Second, as Chapter Six elaborates, the US moved away from multilateralism by giving up on the obligatory seal of approval of the UN Security Council and by claiming legitimacy from NATO. Third, the bombing of Yugoslavia constituted the single largest military operation undertaken by America in the aftermath of the Gulf War. NATO carried out nearly three months of pounding Yugoslavia, conducting more than 40,000 sorties, and employing in the process 1,000 allied warplanes of which more than two thirds belonged to the US.⁵

But is prestige the most accurate explanation for America's actions over Kosovo? For structuralism, the main stake was the security of America's empire, endangered by a conflict spiraling out of control that might engulf Greece and Turkey. Conversely, for exceptionalism, the bombing campaign was warranted by America's lasting commitment to human rights, which were put in jeopardy by the Serb ethnic cleansing of Kosovars.

³ See the interviews of National Security Advisor Sandy Berger and Secretary of Defense William Cohen PBS *Frontline*, "War in Europe," February 22, 2000, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/Kosovo/interviews. Also see on the same site the interviews of Madeleine Albright, Wesley Clark, Richard Holbrooke, and Ivo Daalder.

⁴ Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2008), 211.

⁵ Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, 2000), 117.

Revisionism contends that Operation Allied Force was determined by the desire to prop the American imposed political and economic international order.⁶

Security, Human Rights, and Domestic Interest

In his speech to the nation on March 24, 1999 justifying the bombing campaign, Clinton emphasized the security rationale, by proclaiming that America's predominant objective in Kosovo consisted in diffusing a "powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before this century with catastrophic results."⁷ Before long, skeptics made their voices heard. Gaddis summed up the general expert opinion regarding "the powder keg" metaphor by remarking that the parallel with the two World Wars did not hold up to scrutiny. In the case of the two World Wars, he argued, the threat to the Balkans came from states qualifying as great powers: Austria-Hungary and Nazi Germany respectively. In 1999 Kosovo, by contrast, the threat came from a small power, Yugoslavia (the federal union of Serbia and Montenegro), which simply did not have the means to seriously challenge the balance of power in Europe, much less globally.⁸

By all means, Gaddis was undoubtedly right in that no American decision-maker seriously envisaged the prospects of World War Three erupting over Kosovo. The best evidence to this effect is that the operation went ahead in clear disregard of any possibility of Russian military retaliation on behalf of their Serb religious brethren. The US did not reconsider its decision to intervene even after an April 7 statement by Yeltsin, which threatened NATO with "a minimum of a European war or maybe even a world

⁶ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 182-97.

⁷ "In the President's Words," *New York Times*, March 25, 1999.

⁸ Ethan Bronner, "Historians Note Flaws in President's Speech" *New York Times*, March 26, 1999.

war,” and its resolve held firm even when once a cease-fire had been reached in June, Russian troops rushed into Kosovo occupying the airport in the provincial capital Pristina.⁹ As to the threat posed by Yugoslavia itself to the security of the US this was negligible. Unlike in the two World Wars, America’s main foe was decisively outgunned and isolated.

Yet the security implications of Kosovo should not be summarily dismissed, since they could have involved if not America per se, then America’s empire.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Clinton mentioned in his speech the risk of the conflict spilling over to NATO countries—specifically referring to the long-standing rivalry of Greece and Turkey. “Eventually”, said Clinton, “key US allies could be drawn into a wider conflict.” This view was elaborated further by Berger on March 25: America’s national interest was at stake in Kosovo, because the security of South Eastern Europe was threatened and, therefore, a wider conflict in that area would have involved sooner or later the US as well.¹¹ In this line of thought, the repressive tactics employed against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) by Milosevic’s forces would have caused widespread instability throughout the Balkans that might have ended up in a full blown war between Athens and Ankara. At a first glance, the danger of a Greco-Turkish war sparked by the events in

⁹ Allies were considerably more nervous about Russia’s reaction as seen in the refusal of British General Mike Jackson, commander of the British forces of occupation in Kosovo to obey the order of General Wesley Clark, NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR) to stop the Russian troops from reaching the airport: “I’m not going to start World War Three for you.” Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 389-96. On American-Russian relations in the context of Kosovo, see John Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo* (Westport: Praeger, 2005); James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy Toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), chap. 10.

¹⁰ See Michael McGwire, “Why Did We Bomb Belgrade?” *International Affairs* 76 (January 2000): 1-23.

¹¹ Francis Clines, “Strike Goes On As Serbs Step Up Campaign” *New York Times*, March 27, 1999.

Kosovo may have seemed “farfetched.”¹² There was nevertheless a plausible argument to be made for such concern.

In the early 1990s the US arguably had had an eye out for precisely such a nightmare development. As Scowcroft admitted when explaining America’s policy in Bosnia, “we were heavily national interest oriented, and Bosnia was of national interest concern only if the war broke out into Kosovo, risking the involvement of our allies in a wider war.” Moreover, Secretary of State Eagleburger, while continuing Baker’s policy of non-involvement in Bosnia, took the measure of warning Milosevic over Christmas 1992 that an escalation of the war in Bosnia by a Serb attack on Kosovo would provoke the military involvement of the US. For his part, Christopher entertained a similar view: any conflict in Kosovo “would bring into the fray other countries in the region—Albania, Greece, Turkey” and this conflict could well degenerate “into a world war.”¹³ Consequently, on two occasions, in February and July 1993, Christopher repeated Eagleburger’s Christmas warning to Belgrade.

The central element in the scenario of a confrontation between Greece and Turkey triggered by the events in Kosovo was the neighboring Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Macedonia had a historical grievance against Greece due to the Greek occupation in 1913 of the harbor of Salonika (today’s Thessalonica, the second largest city in Greece after Athens.)¹⁴ The declaration of independence of Macedonia in

¹² James Kurth, “First War of the Global Era,” in Andrew Bacevich and Eliot Cohen, eds., *War Over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 63-96, 77.

¹³ David Binder, “Bush Warns Serbs Not to Widen War,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1992; Stephen Engelberg, “Weighing Strikes in Bosnia, US Warns of Wider War,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1993; Barton Gellman, “The Path to Crisis: How the United States and Its Allies Went to War,” *Washington Post*, April 18, 1999; Samantha Power, *‘A Problem From Hell’: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 288, 446.

¹⁴ See on Macedonian politics and history Elisabeth Barker, “The Origins of the Macedonian Question” in Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonia Question*, 3-14; James Pettifer, “The New Macedonian Question,” in

1991 was thus seen by Greece as a threat to its national integrity, the more so as the leadership in Skopje was at pains to create something approaching a national conscience in a severely divided society that numbered besides Slavs a considerable and unruly Albanian minority. To do so, it basically invented the myth of a Macedonian people stretching back to the days of Alexander and Philip of Macedon, as illustrated by the adoption on the national flag of the emblem of Philip's sun. That was nevertheless an inopportune connection, since Greece perceives Macedon to be essentially a part of the Greek heritage. Furthermore, given that Macedon is roughly estimated to correspond to the region of Greek Macedonia, the flag was seen by Greece as an attempt at changing borders.¹⁵ Athens was incensed as well by the widespread talk in Skopje of a "Great Macedonia," which would have extended to the Aegean and comprised Thessalonica. In retaliation, Greece obstructed the European Community's recognition of FYROM for two years. When it was eventually forced by explicit European pressure to concede recognition, Athens retaliated by putting into place a one year economic blockade of Skopje, which coupled with the UN sanctions imposed at the time on Yugoslavia wreaked havoc on the already fragile Macedonian economy. Greece lifted its blockade only after international pleas and after being given Macedonian assurances that the republic name would be changed to FYROM, that the offending flag would be modified, and that Skopje would denounce any intention to alter existing borders. But by 1999,

ibid., 15-27; Evangelos Kofos, "Greek Policy Considerations over FYROM Independence and Recognition," in ibid., 226-262; Michael Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 238-42.

¹⁵ Jens Reuter, "Policy and Economy in Macedonia" in James Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonia Question* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 43-5.

these matters were still not conclusively settled, since Skopje maintained that FYROM represented only an interim compromise name.¹⁶

To outside observers, it might have appeared that Greece had overreacted. After all, as one analyst put it, it was problematic how a state with a population of two million and with an army of less than 10,000 troops could ever take on Greece. But for Athens it was not so much FYROM that it feared, but rather Skopje's growing association with Greece's hereditary enemy and fellow NATO-member Turkey. FYROM had signed a treaty of military cooperation with Ankara and had extended recognition to the Turkish controlled republic of Northern Cyprus. Hence, Greece feared the possibility of encirclement by Turkey and a string of Turkish client states.¹⁷ (In fact, to counter-balance this threat, Greece had renewed its traditional alliance with Belgrade, by strengthening ties with Milosevic, who was interested himself in reintegrating Macedonia in a renewed Yugoslav Federation as southern Serbia.)

Thus, Greece's fears were worsened by the intensification of Albanian nationalism inside FYROM. The Albanian ethnic group has undergone one the highest demographic increases in Europe in the last quarter of the century.¹⁸ This development had as a result a modification of the population balance in several parts of the Balkans, most dramatically in Kosovo and in FYROM. It is estimated that perhaps as many of 40% of the 2 million people that comprise the population of FYROM are of Albanian origin.¹⁹ Furthermore, this large minority is highly political active, pressing since the vote

¹⁶ Kofos, "Greek Policy Considerations", 234-6, 254-6.

¹⁷ Reuter, "Policy and Economy in Macedonia", 42.

¹⁸ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁹ Pettifer, "The New Macedonian Question", 16-7; James Pettifer, "The Albanians in Western Macedonia after FYROM Independence" in Pettifer, ed., *The New Macedonian Question*, 137-47; Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, 13-5. The official figures of a census in 1994, which the Albanians contest, put the total number

on the independence of the republic (which they boycotted) for the awarding of autonomy. Since the region the Albanians inhabit inside FYROM is practically contiguous to Kosovo and to Albania proper, the prospects of a Muslim dominated greater Albania loomed ominous for both Belgrade and Athens. Hence, if in 1999, 300,000 Albanian refugees together with a good number of KLA fighters had crossed the border in to FYROM they would have seriously affected the stability of the republic by transforming the Albanians there into a de facto bare majority. This prospect would have been even more menacing to Greece than the one of a revisionist Macedonia, since the Albanians could have also counted on the support of their kin in Tirana and with Turkish and Islamic help constituted an altogether much more formidable threat. Greece had actually been warning Albania since 1993 against endorsing the actions of nationalists in Kosovo by stating that in the eventuality of Albanian autonomy there, it would seek the same status for the Greek minority in Albania proper, effectively issuing a masked threat of military intervention.²⁰

Basically, in this line of thought, Milosevic's repression of Albanians in Kosovo could have ended up affecting the security equation in the Balkans so badly that it would have triggered Greek intervention, which might have provoked in turn the involvement of Turkey. Under such a scenario, the possibility of escalation to a war between the two members of NATO (and of the American empire) may not have been ruled out by Washington. Hence, a case could be made that the US was determined by strategic necessity to act in order to put an end to conflict in Kosovo in its incipient stages.

of Albanians in Macedonia at 442,000 or 23% of the population. It is suspected that the real number is somewhere between 30 and 40%.

²⁰ Ibid., 243.

But while this structuralist argument may not be as farfetched as commonly assumed, it does present still two major weaknesses. First, even if one assumes that NATO acted in Kosovo in order to lessen the security concerns of Greece, it is hard to imagine from Athens' perspective how the Greek sense of security could have been enhanced by the American proposal an autonomous Kosovo with the possibility of a referendum on independence after three years. Actually, this would have constituted a highly alarming step for Athens, since it would have created an Albanian center of power on its northern border, the very thing it wanted to avoid in the first place. To have catered to Greek concerns, the best course of action would have been to allow the Serb forces to completely eradicate the KLA. In effect, polls in Greece at the time of the NATO intervention showed that 95% of Greeks disapproved of the action, 94% of them distrusted Clinton, and 63.5% had a good opinion of Slobodan Milosevic.²¹ It is difficult to imagine how such figures could have been justified if NATO was seen as acting in Greece's best interests. The objection that Washington's actions over Kosovo might have been designed to cater to Turkish security concerns over losing their FYROM ally also does not withstand scrutiny. In fact, if the Kosovo Albanians would have been permanently relocated to FYROM, Ankara could have found the regime in Skopje even more accommodating.

Second, the US could not have developed concerns for the stability of the Balkans overnight. If regional security was indeed the goal justifying the nearly three months of NATO bombing, one would have to find indications of such concern in the months and years preceding the Kosovo intervention beyond the declarations of Eagleburger and

²¹ "NATO Bombing Tears at Greek Opinion: Reawaken Anti-Americanism" in *New York Times*, April 25, 1999. These figures were by far the highest in NATO. Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 161.

Christopher. Yet such signs are conspicuously lacking: the US decision-makers tolerated for most of 1998 Milosevic's transgressions in Kosovo, without losing sleep over the stability of the Balkans. In August 1998, the US Ambassador to NATO Alexander Vershbow sent a cable that read that sooner or later the US would have to deploy troops to Kosovo, because "we have too much at stake in the political stability of the South Balkans to permit the conflict to fester much longer." Greece and Turkey were specifically mentioned in the cable. Vershbow was consequently urging the creation of a joint American-Russian task force to be deployed in Kosovo, which would have not only defused the crisis, but also fitted well in the security cooperation process between Washington and Moscow. However, the US government took no initiative in response to Vershbow's telegram. Momentarily preoccupied with the impeachment process over the Monica Lewinski affair, the Al Qaeda bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the showdowns with Saddam Hussein, the Clinton administration had little time to spend on the security of southeast Europe.²² Had the US shown any serious concern for conflict in the Balkans it would have pressed, at the very least, for the reinforcement of the existing UN peacekeeping force in FYROM, UNPREDEP, or asked for a mandate expanding UNPREDEP role of surveillance of the border with Yugoslavia. Such action was all the more warranted, since by July 1997, violence had broken out between Slavs and Albanians inside FYROM.²³

Worse, 1997 witnessed widespread social convulsions in Albania, which were directly responsible for the emergence of the KLA as a viable fighting force. The government of Sali Berisha in Tirana, out of economic and political weakness, had

²² Elaine Sciolino and Ethan Bronner, "How a President, Distracted by Scandal, Entered a Balkan War," *New York Times* April 18, 1999.

²³ Pettifer, "Albanians in Western Macedonia", 143.

allowed the perpetuation of multiple pyramid schemes, totaling about half a billion dollars. Ultimately, these collapsed wiping out in the process the savings of tens of thousands of Albanians. The result was that for all intents and purposes in March 1997 the Albanian state disintegrated. Mobs took to pillaging the army's weapons stocks (it was estimated that more than 1 million weapons were stolen) and the country descended into lawlessness as the armed rebels marched unopposed on the capital. In the words of the Albanian Justice Minister Spartak Ngjela: "All structures of the state have failed. In this moment, we are a natural state, if you know your Hobbes."²⁴ The US simply did not respond to the alarming crisis in Albania.²⁵ The result was that many of the weapons and the ammunition stolen found their way north into the hands of the KLA and enabled it to conduct large-scale operations against Belgrade.²⁶

This leaves the problem of the Christmas warning. However, by 1998, US officials themselves were confused whether the warning was still applicable. To complicate matters further, there are indications that even the original "Christmas warning" had been a bluff all along. (Eagleburger's Undersecretary of State Arnold Kanter answered a question as to how much truth there was in the Christmas warning by saying "to tell you the truth, this is a very hard question. I really don't know.")²⁷ The political bottom-line was that on each of the four occasions when the Serb forces

²⁴ Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, 316-27.

²⁵ The only international reaction was a limited intervention by Italy, which was concerned about the influx of Albanian refugees.

²⁶ At the time a Kalashnikov rifle could be bought for \$ 5 in Albania. Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 126-9.

²⁷ For some officials the Christmas warning "was not on the table," but for others the warning was still standing and consequently the US would not tolerate a Serb offensive in Kosovo. Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, fn. 21, 283; Philip Shennon, "US Says It Might Consider Attacking Serbs," *New York Times*, March 13, 1998; Gellman, "Path to Crisis". Berger later argued that the Christmas warning was a commitment to unilateral US action and that Washington attempted in 1998 to transform it into a NATO commitment. See interview with Berger PBS *Frontline*; interview with Holbrooke PBS *Frontline*.

intervened in Kosovo during 1998, there was no invocation on the US part of the Christmas warning as a justification for military action. As Daalder eventually put it: “it was very clear from the moment the violence started that the Christmas warning was off the table as far as Sandy Berger, as far as the president is concerned, and as far as Madeleine Albright is concerned. She may have wanted it on the table, but there was a clear decision not to have it on the table.”²⁸

This passive American attitude toward the Balkans not only undermines the structuralist claim that Washington intervened in Kosovo out of security concerns, but also weakens any claim that the US could have been the victim of misperception.²⁹ One may try and make the point that the US intervened in Kosovo because it genuinely thought it saw the potential ingredients of a Greco-Turkish conflict, even if in fact there were none. But in such an eventuality, one would have a pattern of enduring US involvement every time the prospect of instability in the Balkans was raised. Hence, the US should have seen in every major convulsion in the region during this time the specter of a war opposing Athens and Ankara. However, such concerns were noticeably absent from American foreign policy in the Balkans.

Indeed, misperception was involved in America’s decision to intervene in Kosovo, but only in that the US was convinced that any military action would be short, on the precedent of the experiences with air power against Iraq and the Bosnian Serbs. The common wisdom in Washington both in civil and military quarters was that once Milosevic was persuaded by falling bombs and incoming cruise missiles that NATO was

²⁸ Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

²⁹ Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwartz, “For the Record: Kosovo II,” *National Interest* 57 (Fall 1999): 9-15; McGwire, “Why Did We Bomb Belgrade?” On misperception and war see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Alexander George, ed., *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview, 1991)

serious, he would back down.³⁰ As Secretary of State Madeleine Albright remarked on the night the bombing was initiated: “I don’t see this as a long term operation. I think that it is something that is achievable within a relatively short period of time.”³¹ Furthermore, evidence that this was the case comes from the lack of preparation of the US military for a long-haul campaign: after one week of bombing, the air force only had 100 cruise missiles left in its arsenal since it did not believe that the mission would have required more weapons to achieve its objective.³² However, to this extent, initial misperception of the length of the mission is a necessary, but not a sufficient component of the decision to intervene— since the US did not stop the bombing once it realized it had been mistaken about Milosevic’s willingness to resist.

By contrast to structuralism, exceptionalism accounts for America’s concern with Yugoslavia in terms of rooting out the unsavory human rights abuses of Milosevic. The early 1990s had witnessed a plethora of arguments in favor of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention, which referred to the right, and even the obligation of great powers to act as to prevent gross violations of the universal rights of individual human beings or of ethnic and religious groups by a state government.³³ This is to say that in a globalized world, a government could no longer brutalize with impunity its own citizens

³⁰ The person in charge of the actual bombing General Michael Short argued that “this’ll be over in three nights.” David Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Touchstone, 2002), 420-5; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 118-20, 198-200.

³¹ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 91-2. This conclusion was also supported by intelligence estimates. Sciolino and Brommer, “How a President”.

³² Lawrence Korb, “Not Enough Missiles to Go Around?” *New York Times*, April 6, 1999.

³³ On humanitarian intervention, see Oliver Ramsbotham and Todd Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict: A Reconceptualization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Sean Murphy, *Humanitarian Intervention: The United Nations in an Evolving World Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Fernando Tesón, *Humanitarian Intervention: An Inquiry into International Law and Morality* (Irvington-on-Hudson: Transnational Publishers, 1997); J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert Keohane, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jennifer Welsh, *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

by arguing it was the sole master in its own territory—when such acts occurred, other states were arguably warranted to put an end to the atrocities by resorting to humanitarian intervention. This is essentially the conclusion Daalder and O’Hanlon arrive at in explaining Operation Allied Force: “upholding rights and alleviating humanitarian tragedy are worthy goals for American national security and policy. Doing so reinforces the notion that the United States is not interested in power for its own sake but rather to enhance stability and security to promote certain universal principles and values.”³⁴ Other analysts agree with this assessment, though they are much less sanguine regarding the wisdom of the policy, seeing Kosovo as “the latest example of an incoherent policy driven by moral impulses and mushy sentiments, one that hectors and scolds other nations to obey our sanctimonious dictates and ineffectively bombs or sanctions them if they don’t” or, to quote Kissinger, as “virtue run amok.”³⁵

It should be stressed, however, that the vast majority of exceptionalist accounts of Kosovo derive their evidence exclusively from the humanitarian declarations and the ideological underpinnings of the Clinton administration.³⁶ However, moral revulsion does not by itself explain the launching of a campaign of this magnitude. After all, when Albright, heralded as the chief advocate of armed humanitarianism, had first suggested

³⁴ Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 11-2; 194-6; Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need A Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the Twenty First Century* (New York: Simon& Schuster, 2001); Michael Mandelbaum, “A Perfect Failure,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (September-October 1999): 2-8; Joseph S. Nye, “Redefining the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (July/ August 1999): 22-33; Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (Toronto: Viking, 2000); Tony Judt, “The Reason Why,” *New York Review of Books*, May 20, 1999. Also see Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 212-4, 216. However, in a later interview Daalder appears more supportive of the credibility of NATO as the central motivation of the intervention. Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

³⁵ Walter Isaacson, *Madeleine’s War*, *Time*, May 9, 1999, 26-7. Prominent among these authors were Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the Twenty First Century* (New York: Simon& Schuster, 2001), 255-64; Mandelbaum, “Perfect Failure”; and Doug Bandow, “NATO’s Hypocritical Humanitarianism,” in Ted Galen Carpenter, ed., *NATO’s Empty Victory: A Postmortem on the Balkan War* (Washington: CATO Institute, 2000), 31-47.

³⁶ See in particular Isaacson, “Madeleine’s War.”

the situation in Kosovo might come down to bombing Belgrade, the principal decision-makers had been appalled by her suggestion.³⁷ Berger, who, despite having a nominally lower position compared to Albright, was the key figure in the second Clinton's administration foreign policy, reacted vehemently: "You can't just talk about bombing in the middle of Europe... What would you do the day after? It's irresponsible to keep making plans outside of some coherent plan." Secretary of Defense William Cohen equally rejected the possibility of the US acting as "the KLA air force."³⁸ Hence, the question that exceptionalism fails to ask is how and why Albright managed to eventually coax the other members of the cabinet and the Pentagon to rally around her point of view? It seems dubious that the argument employed by Albright managed to bring skeptics on to her side, by persuading them of the virtues of humanitarian intervention. The best proof to this effect is the ensuing ostracism of the strongest proponents of action in Kosovo: not only Albright, but also Clark.³⁹

Nevertheless, exceptionalism runs into even more serious challenges, since both the NATO military tactics during Operation Allied Force and the treatment of the Kosovar refugees indicate that their well-being represented a secondary priority on the

³⁷ In Daalder's words : "since the beginning of the Clinton administration Secretary (sic) Albright has been perhaps the most forceful advocate for the strong forceful opposition to the kind of policies Milosevic was conducting in Croatia, then in Bosnia, and by February 1998, inside Kosovo." Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

³⁸ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 383; Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 30; Sciolino and Brommer, "How a President"; Cohen interview with PBS *Frontline*. Berger went on to accuse the State Department personnel who had come up with the proposal of acting like "lunatics." On Berger's central role within the administration see Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 404-9; R. W. Apple, "A Domestic Sort with Global Worries," *New York Times*, August 25, 1999. As Halberstam writes "to know what Clinton felt, you only needed to know what Berger felt ,and if Berger was not ready to take a position on a complicated and pressing issue like Kosovo, it meant that the President wasn't either."

³⁹ See Jane Perlez, "With Berger in Catbird Seat, Albright's Star Dims," *New York Times*, December 14, 1999; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 454-6, 478-80; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 253-4, 409-12.

American agenda.⁴⁰ In order for Operation Allied Force to satisfy the requirements of a humanitarian intervention, one should be able to first and foremost prove a predominant humanitarian intention has determined the intervention.⁴¹ Thus, one should find evidence of the intention on the part of the US to safeguard the Kosovars from potential harm by Serb forces. However, America's tactics envisaged only the conduct of an air campaign against Yugoslavia, without a simultaneous protective deployment of ground troops within Kosovo to defend the Albanians. Arguably, one could still support the view that America's air campaign war plans still posed a deterrent threat to Milosevic's forces. There are certainly such clues in the first days of bombing. For instance, Clinton's speech of March 24 expressly mentioned that the action was aimed at hindering a major offensive that Milosevic was planning against the Albanians. "We act", said Clinton, "to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive." This message was reinforced by several statements to the same effect such as the one by the Pentagon that "the primary goal of the air strike would be to arrest the ability of the Serbs to brutally attack the Kosovar Albanians."⁴²

But if this was the goal at hand, it was pursued by woefully inadequate tactics, since it soon became evident that high altitude bombing could not thwart the highly mobile Serb troops and militias from forcing the Albanian population out of Kosovo. By the end of April, Kosovo had been for all intents and purposes ethnically cleansed, with 800,000 Albanians pushed into FYROM and Albania, and another 500,000 displaced from their homes.⁴³ The US could only acknowledge this grim reality— by April 1, a

⁴⁰ For a similar argument see Power, *Problem from Hell*, chap. 12.

⁴¹ This is a requirement of most definitions of humanitarian intervention in the studies quoted in fn. 39.

⁴² Daalder, O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 116.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 108-9.

NATO official quoted by the *New York Times* was providing a full backtrack by stating that “we said from the outset that we couldn’t prevent atrocities and crimes against humanity with just air campaigning.” The NATO Secretary General Javier Solana similarly argued that “we may have no means to stop [the violence against Albanians], but we have shown we have the will to try.”⁴⁴ However, if so why had the US been so blind in the first place to the possibility of Serb retaliation against the Kosovars? Furthermore, since bombing had been exposed as an ineffective tool in deterring Milosevic, why did the US continue to stick to a tactic that had failed to protect the supposed beneficiaries of the intervention?

The most likely answer to the first question is that the US had known all along that Yugoslavia would lash out at Albanians, and despite this knowledge, did not take any special measures to protect them from harm. Daalder and O’ Hanlon argue rather awkwardly that “remarkably, some officials appear to have ignored the basic fact that NATO airpower would simply not be physically able to stop Milosevic’s onslaught against the Kosovars. NATO leaders collectively ignored the distinct possibility that Milosevic might actually intensify his efforts once NATO bombings began to fall.”⁴⁵ But such invocation of American naiveté fails to convince. While it is possible the US was wrong about the actual numbers of victims of Serb ethnic cleansing, it cannot claim it had no inkling that Belgrade was going to conduct ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Both American and German intelligence reports had predicted a massive crackdown starting in February 1999 and the director of the CIA George Tenet himself had briefed the

⁴⁴ Craig Whitney and Eric Schmitt, “NATO Had Signs Its Strategy Would Fail in Kosovo” *New York Times*, April 1, 1999; Craig Whitney, “For NATO, Doubts Nag,” *New York Times*, March 31, 1999.

⁴⁵ Daalder and O’ Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 106-7. For a similar argument, see Gellman, “Path to Crisis.”

president and his advisors on this topic.⁴⁶ While stating that the dimensions of the forced exodus of Albanians had caught him by surprise, Berger still acknowledged that the US had expected hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees.⁴⁷

But in this respect the strongest evidence comes from Clark's memoirs, in which the former SACEUR recalls a discussion with Albright. In the conversation, Clark predicts that once the bombing began, "almost certainly they [the Serbs] will attack the civilian population. This is what they are promising to do." Albright then asks in turn whether the US can do anything to prevent reprisals against the Kosovars. Clark's response is blunt: "we can't. Despite our best efforts the civilians are going to be targeted by the Serbs. It will just be a race, our air strikes and the damage we cause them against what they can do on the ground. It's not going to be pleasant." Clark goes on to elaborate on the more important rationale for the intervention: not saving the Kosovars, but American and NATO prestige. When Albright presses him whether the US should go ahead with the bombing despite the high probability of Serbian retribution against the Kosovars, Clark answers: "we have to [go ahead]. We put NATO's credibility on the line. We have to follow through and make it work."⁴⁸ One could argue that the US believed that any damage the Serbs inflicted by the Kosovars would be easily reversible, particularly considering the belief the war was going to be short. But such an argument is not compatible with the requirements of humanitarian intervention, for which the people one claims to protect cannot be disposed of as expendable assets.

⁴⁶ Sciolino and Brommer, "How a President"; "The Road to Hell Was Paved with Good Intentions, but Muddled Planning," *Time*, April 12, 1999, 36-7. However, see Judah's argument against the existence of a Serb master plan to oust the Kosovars from the province and of the dubious nature of the German intelligence on the so called Operation Horseshoe. Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, 240-6.

⁴⁷ Berger admitted that no more than 350,000 refugees were anticipated. Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, fn. 25, 302; Sciolino and Brommer, "How a President".

⁴⁸ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 170-1.

Moreover, this does not explain why, once it was clear the intervention would be a drawn-out affair, the US still refused to contemplate a change of tactics. Actually, the decision to stick to the air campaign was not a blunder, but the result of a deliberate American choice. The main advantage of stubbornly pursuing an intervention only by air was not that it helped defend the vulnerable Kosovars, but that it ensured a low number of possible American casualties. Accordingly, the three objectives of using air power against Yugoslavia mentioned by Clark do not include the protection of the Albanian refugees: instead they consisted of not losing aircraft, affecting Belgrade's political will, and deterring an attack on NATO's ground forces in neighboring states.⁴⁹ The risks of losing planes was minimized by the decision to fly only missions above 15,000 feet, which, while diminishing the chance of targeting objectives on the ground, also reduced the peril coming from anti-aircraft artillery or from shoulder-fired surface to air missiles.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the US adamantly refused until after the NATO summit of April 23-25 to even consider a complementary ground option in Kosovo, so that by May, the US still had no concrete plans for conducting land operations within Yugoslavia.⁵¹ Clinton had been emphatic on this point in his war message: "I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war."⁵²

An additional proof confirming that the well-being of the Kosovars ranked low on the political agenda comes from America's policy towards the refugees. Unless the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 183; Adam Roberts, "NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo," *Survival* 41 (Autumn 1999): 102-23, 111-2.

⁵⁰ Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 122-3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 33-4, 96-9; Sciolino and Brommer, "How a President".

⁵² In fact, the first draft of Clinton's message announced that the US had no plans to send ground troops to Kosovo. It was Ivo Daalder, formerly the Director for European Affairs on the National Security Council, who argued that the speech be changed to announce a lack of intentions, since, in his opinion, either the US did not have the plans and appeared incompetent, or, it had them, and was hence appearing to be lying. Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*; Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 423-4.

Albanian refugees returned to Kosovo and their homes were rebuilt by October they would have faced the prospect of freezing to death in the harsh Balkan winter. This left NATO with only six months in which to find a solution to the refugee problem. By the end of May, if Milosevic continued to resist, the alliance would have had only two months to actually stage an invasion before winter set in—given it would have taken at least an additional two to put into place the logistics of the operation from scratch.⁵³ However, by that time, the refugees had become not only a liability for the alliance, but also something of an embarrassment. Albania and FYROM could not accommodate further arrivals (FYROM was anyway reluctant to do so in the first place due to the fragile ethnic balance of its population.) Creating appropriate conditions for surviving winter in the tent cities that had emerged at the borders between Kosovo, Albania and FYROM was itself a task of staggering proportions since this involved setting housing for almost a million persons. Moreover, there was also the problem of those Albanians who were displaced inside Kosovo, a number estimated at another 580,000 and who had found refuge in the woods. In these conditions, a genuine humanitarian policy would have required evacuating the refugees from Kosovo and the countries surrounding it and into the NATO member states. However, the NATO allies were reluctant to engage in such an operation, due to concerns over being seen as acquiescing in ethnic cleansing, the economic costs involved, and the possibility of refugees deciding to stay on in the West. Western Europe was confronting a period of economic recession with as much as 10% of the total work force unemployed in France and Italy. Germany had already spent an estimated \$1 billion on the 750,000 refugees that had resulted from the Bosnian war and

⁵³ Eric Schmitt and Michael Gordon, “British Pressing to Deploy Ground Troops” *New York Times*, May 18, 1999; “Before Winter Arrives in Kosovo” *New York Times*, May 20, 1999; Eric Schmitt and Michael Gordon, “Time Running Out for NATO to Plan a Kosovo Invasion” *New York Times*, May 23, 1999.

had no wish to assist further arrivals.⁵⁴ The allies finally agreed to take out of the region 70,000 refugees out of a grand total of 900,000.⁵⁵

America's actions stand out in this regard. The US vehemently refused to exceed a quota of 20,000 Balkans refugees that the Congress had imposed on it and initially chose out of all possible relocation places the base at Guantanamo. The reason for this odd location was that since Guantanamo actually constitutes Cuban soil the refugees could not have claimed the right of asylum into the US. The proposal met with a wave of protests from US human rights groups, who were concerned the base seemed more like a "POW camp" than a suitable relocation facility for Milosevic's victims. One human rights activist (presciently as it turned out) said the whole base was surrounded "by concertina wire. It's like a jail." In the end, the US agreed to drop the Guantanamo relocation plan, but only on condition that the refugees would return to Kosovo as soon as the situation normalized. Moreover, the only people eligible to go to the US would have been persons with serious medical problems as well as those who had family there willing to help them.⁵⁶ To sum up, the welfare of the Kosovo Albanians was not enough of a concern to either cause the US to send its troops into harm's way for their sake or to warrant their temporary shelter on American soil. This is not to deny that America's intervention in Kosovo had a humanitarian component—the US certainly believed it had right on its side. But humanitarianism was not so important as to have determined the intervention in the first place or the use of land troops in Kosovo.

⁵⁴ Roger Cohen, "Already Burdened, Western Europe Is Reluctant to Take in Kosovo's Outcasts", *New York Times*, April 2, 1999.

⁵⁵ Philip Shenon, "US Grapples with Issue of Finding Refugees Homes", *New York Times*, April 3, 1999; Joanne Van Selm, ed., *Kosovo Refugees in the EU* (London: Pinter, 2000).

⁵⁶ Philip Shenon, "US Chooses Guantanamo Bay Base in Cuba for Refugee Site," *New York Times*, April 7, 1999; Katharine Seelye, "Gore Says US Will Open Door to 20,000 Kosovars" *New York Times*, April 22, 1999.

Revisionist authors see Kosovo as an example of the growing militarization of American politics. For Bacevich, Kosovo is representative of the American tendency to transfer authority to modern proconsuls, military leaders who assume responsibility for decision-making in a certain area—in the case at hand, Clark, who acted both as supreme allied commander and as CINC (commander in chief) of the US European Command (CINCEUR). In Bacevich's opinion, Clark was the single most responsible actor for the intervention because he miscalculated the extent of the likely opposition that Milosevic would put up. Nevertheless, for Bacevich, America's decision to fight over Kosovo, while a possible error of judgment on the part of Clark, cannot be seen as an aberration in the overall US strategy, as it was demanded by the logic of preserving the American principle of openness in the key European region, by force if necessary. As he puts it, "the United States fought over Kosovo not to protect Kosovars, but to forestall the intolerable prospect of European backsliding...If Operation Allied Force did not rise to the level of a great moral victory, it was a necessary strategic one, an example of the work that goes along with running an empire."⁵⁷ Similarly, Johnson sees Kosovo as proof that "the Pentagon monopolizes the formulation and conduct of foreign policy." According to Johnson, the US increasingly relies on military force as the most expedient instrument in managing its empire and attaining its goals.⁵⁸

However, in Operation Allied Force the Pentagon's leaders represented by Secretary of Defense Cohen and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Hugh Shelton were by far the actors the most opposed to intervention of all the principals involved in

⁵⁷ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 182-97; Andrew Bacevich, "Neglected Trinity: Kosovo and the Crisis in US Civil-Military Relations," in Bacevich and Cohen, *War Over Kosovo*.

⁵⁸ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 93-4.

the decision. Not only did the Pentagon fight tooth and nail against the bombing of Yugoslavia, on the grounds it did not conform to the Powell doctrine, but it also did its very best to resist Clark's demands for escalation to a land war, as illustrated by the bitter dispute over the use of Apache helicopters in Kosovo. The Pentagon opposed the Apaches deployment because the Apaches are used only in tandem with targeting teams, and therefore could trigger a much larger (and potentially bloodier) ground conflict, which was it suspected, Clark's hidden agenda. After much wrangling, even when the Apaches were sent on the Yugoslav front at Clark's insistence, the Pentagon invoked bad weather, the lack of landing facilities, and the risk of accidents, managing to prevent the assault helicopters from flying a single combat mission.⁵⁹ By the end of the campaign, relations between the Pentagon and Clark were positively venomous. On the one hand, Secretary of Defense Cohen, privately ruing the day he had made him SACEUR, ordered Clark to stop asking for ground troops and withdraw from the public light, and attempted not to invite him at the NATO summit in Washington, which occurred in late April. Clark returned the favor by lobbying outside the command chain both Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. This excess of zeal actually cost Clark the traditional second term as supreme allied commander.⁶⁰ This leaves one in serious doubt as to how much authority or autonomy a "proconsul" truly enjoys.

Bacevich's argument on Kosovo as run-of-the-mill imperial work is itself rooted in the orthodox revisionist view of Vietnam: a turbulent regional rogue calls into question the American-imposed order, and hence places in jeopardy if not the actual export of goods, services, and capital, than the principle of openness on which the American social

⁵⁹ Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 465-8; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 246-88; Dana Priest, "Risks and Restraints: Why the Apaches Never Flew in Kosovo," *Washington Post*, December 29, 1999.

⁶⁰ Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 441-456, 468-9; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 253-62, 409.

elite has staked its fate. But, by contrast with Cold War Vietnam, in 1999 Yugoslavia was not (or not any longer) a Communist state, preaching a rival ideology throughout the Balkans; its repression of the KLA did not risk producing a domino effect resulting in Serb domination of the entire region; and its potential victory did not pose the same economic threat as the success of a Third World regime rebelling against the dominant capitalist state. In fact, by the US standards Yugoslavia was both a democracy, albeit of an illiberal kind, and integrated in the global economy. Yugoslavia was the single exception to the “golden arches theory of peace,” being home to sixteen McDonalds.⁶¹

Having considered the pros and cons of structuralism, exceptionalism, and revisionism, does status inconsistency fare any better in accounting for the intervention?

Kosovo and American Prestige

Perhaps the most significant consideration in the context of Kosovo is the discrepancy between the two sides: the American empire as embodied by the NATO alliance against the rump Yugoslav federation. The statistics are telling: in military ranks the US defense expenditures totaled in 1999 \$ 454 billion, while those of Yugoslavia barely amounted to \$ 1.5 billion; NATO had 4 million military personnel on active duty compared to Yugoslavia's 110,000. In economic terms the combined NATO GDP stood at a towering \$ 16.5 trillion compared to Yugoslavia's \$ 19 billion. To quote Posen, the economic ratio was 870 to 1 in favor of NATO, and 67 to 1 in terms of population.⁶² The

⁶¹ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracies at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 113-7; Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 195.

⁶² Barry Posen, “The War for Kosovo,” *International Security* 24 (Spring 2000): 39-84, fn. 24.; Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 103.

US was clearly aware of its advantage. In the words of Berger: “we had a thousand-to-one advantage over Milosevic from the air once we took out his air defenses.”⁶³

This is to say that the US enjoyed a mind-boggling superiority in capabilities over Yugoslavia, and yet, despite this obvious disproportion, the US could not sway the policy of Belgrade concerning Kosovo. The Milosevic-led regime managed for more than a year before the bombing started to elude America’s increasingly more threatening demands.⁶⁴ With each US threat that was not carried out in the face of Serb non-compliance, the prestige of NATO, America’s key instrument of empire in Europe, was reduced further on the same pattern that had characterized for four years the war in Bosnia. Status inconsistency was thus created between America’s pretensions as an effective world leader based on its capabilities and its record in ensuring order in the Balkans. The indispensable nation doctrine only contributed to this discrepancy because if the US played a unique role in managing international affairs, then, unlike other states, it could not afford the luxury of simply shaking its finger at Milosevic and then looking the other way when he refused to comply. Doing so risked losing the respect and allegiance of states that looked to it for leadership.⁶⁵ Consequently, what made Belgrade’s transgressions in Kosovo alarming to Washington was not the extent of the Serb infractions per se, but rather the fact that they were cumulative, so they took a toll on American prestige over a longer haul. In other words, the magnitude of each US failure

⁶³ Quoted in Norris, *Collision Course*, 32; Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 376-400.

⁶⁴ For the historical background of the Kosovo crisis see Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), chaps. 3, 7-8.

⁶⁵ For a similar argument see Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 391-2.

over Kosovo paled by comparison with the general pattern of failure which was emerging in Washington's relations with Milosevic.⁶⁶

Evidence to this effect comes from the absence of a trip-wire, which if triggered by the Serb side, would produce automatic NATO intervention against Belgrade. Throughout 1998, Milosevic's forces conducted no fewer than four major offensives in Kosovo, the last two followed by the exodus of several tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees. However, these infractions were met each time with an ambiguous American response, restricted to economic and diplomatic sanctions, air exercises, and threats of strikes. This suggests first that the Serb actions in Kosovo were not so significant in themselves as to justify an immediate military response; and second, that the use of force over Kosovo appeared the least desirable course of action out of all policy alternatives at the US disposal.⁶⁷

That much became clear in the aftermath of the first Serb offensive in February 1998, when a meeting of the principal American decision-makers vehemently rejected the suggestion to employ force. Not even the largest Serb offensive in Kosovo in December 1998, ending in the massacre of 45 Albanians in the village of Račak, succeeded in causing the US to bomb Yugoslavia on the spot. Instead, Washington pushed for a diplomatic settlement in talks conducted at the Rambouillet chateau near Paris. It was only after these talks failed to produce an accord signed by both Serbs and Kosovars that the US decided to intervene militarily, and even then, after first granting a last chance to

⁶⁶ This effect was reinforced by the concomitant creation of a similar pattern of threat and last minute retreat in connection to weapon inspections in Iraq, as Chapter Six discusses in further detail.

⁶⁷ The reasons for which the US avoided at first even discussing intervention were 1) the distraction of Iraq; 2) the need, as Berger put it, to "multilateralize the use of force," by gaining the assent of allies. Daalder and O' Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 29-31; Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*.

Belgrade to reverse course by dispatching Holbrooke to meet Milosevic.⁶⁸ Clearly, to quote Berger, “force was the last option, not the first option.”⁶⁹

But eventually force had to be used, precisely because these repeated setbacks were eating away at NATO’s and America’s prestige. As Cohen put it, credibility was “at the heart” of the intervention “to the extent NATO was telling Milosevic he could not do what he was doing. I was cautioning not to make empty threats, without the ability to back up those threats. We had to be prepared to back up threats with military force.”⁷⁰ Berger agrees with this assessment: “in international affairs you never threaten things you are not prepared to do.”⁷¹ So does Albright, for whom Kosovo “was emerging as a key test of American leadership and of the relevance and effectiveness of NATO... And we would look like fools for proclaiming the alliance’s readiness for the twenty-first century when we were unable to cope with a conflict that began in the fourteenth.”⁷²

This was the more the case since Milosevic had come to be seen as a dangerous and brazen serial offender, now adding the insult of Kosovo to the many injuries of Bosnia.⁷³ Due to the technicality that the war in Bosnia had not actually been fought by Belgrade, but by the Bosnian Serbs of the nominally independent Republika Srpska, Milosevic had avoided being indicted as a war criminal for atrocities in Bosnia, the fate that met the Pale leaders Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic. Actually, Milosevic had emerged out of the Dayton negotiations not as the villain, but rather as the savior of the agreement because of his last minute intervention to provide the Muslims

⁶⁸ See Judah, *War and Revenge*, chaps. 5-8; Sciolino and Brommer, “How a President.”

⁶⁹ Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁷⁰ Cohen interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁷¹ Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁷² Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 391.

⁷³ On Milosevic’s background and political career see Judah, *Serbs*, chap. 8; Louis Sell, *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), chaps. 7-8.

with an additional 1% of territory, which the Croat side refused to surrender.⁷⁴ Yet the US side could not exculpate him of direct responsibility in the outbreak and the continuation of hostilities in Bosnia. This was particularly so for Albright, who thought that the Kosovo confrontation was essentially a replay of the Bosnian scenario: as she put it, if nothing was done “Bosnia’s past would become Kosovo’s future.”⁷⁵ James Rubin, the Department of State spokesman succinctly summarized this view in December 1998: “Milosevic has been at the center of every crisis in the former Yugoslavia over the last decade. He is not simply part of the problem; Milosevic *is* the problem.”⁷⁶

Of course, the more elusive success proved in Kosovo, the more prestige the US stood to lose, particularly when NATO upped the ante and began bombing Yugoslavia, only to see Milosevic refuse to capitulate and expel hundreds of thousands of Kosovars from the province. Only three months before, the US had attempted to coerce Iraq to provide unlimited access to UN weapon inspections, and had been forced to abandon course after just three days of bombing without having made Baghdad bow to its demands.⁷⁷ A similar walk-out was not an option in the case of Kosovo. After all, a state ranking high in prestige can always refuse a challenge from a weaker actor with plausible excuses, which either downplay the magnitude of the offense committed, or claim the state has more important priorities elsewhere. But once a state decides to escalate beyond mere rhetoric by issuing threats and then risks even more escalation by implementing

⁷⁴ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), 305-9.

⁷⁵ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 381-4, 388-92; Albright interview with PBS *Frontline*. Daalder supports this view: “the administration’s experience in Bosnia was the single most defining element in how it approached the impending crisis in Kosovo... you had to act in a way that was consistent and forceful against the main perpetrator of the conflict, which was believed to be Mr. Milosevic.” Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Ignatieff, *Virtual War*, 15-6. Also see Albright, *Madam Secretary*, chap. 23.

⁷⁷ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 179-204.

them, the penalties for failing to deliver success are already proportionally more severe than would have been the case if no action had been taken in the first place.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the stakes in terms of prestige were also higher, because in a last-ditch effort at maintaining cooperative security, the US had sought legitimacy from NATO. As a regional organization, NATO could provide the authorization that Washington could not obtain from the Security Council, where it faced the risk of veto from Russia and China. Besides, as seen in Chapter Four, NATO had been fundamental to the solution of the crisis in Bosnia, and therefore seemed as the best institutional framework to deal with Kosovo from a military point of view. But in so doing, the US had unwittingly put once again, just as in Bosnia, NATO's viability on the line by tying it to achieving success against Yugoslavia. Accordingly, the perspective of failure in Kosovo was, to quote a Senior American official, "too awful to think about."⁷⁹ This verdict was shared by both Democrats and Republicans. For instance, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, argued that "if we do not achieve our goals in Kosovo, NATO is finished as an alliance."⁸⁰ Similarly, Kissinger, otherwise a wholesale critic of Operation Allied Force, threw his support behind the campaign because "the future of NATO, the credibility of the alliance, and the commitments of the United States require we achieve success."⁸¹ Daalder sums up this point by arguing that decision makers believed that "politically we can't lose the war,

⁷⁸ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), chap. 2.

⁷⁹ See Steven Erlanger, "NATO Was Closer to Ground War in Kosovo Than It Is Widely Realized" *New York Times* November 7, 1999.

⁸⁰ Jane Perlez, "NATO Confronts a New Role: Regional Policeman," *New York Times* April 22, 1999.

⁸¹ Newshour with Jim Lehrer, transcript Online Focus, Assessing the Situation, April 2, 1999 accessible at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/jan-june99/assessment_4-2.html; Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, 263.

militarily we can't lose the war, strategically we can't lose the war. If we lose this war, NATO is ended, and the credibility of American foreign policy is at an end."⁸²

This is why prestige explains not only why intervention was chosen to begin with, but also why it was not abandoned once it became clear that the expected folding on Milosevic's part was not going to occur as soon as predicted. Instead of opting for a speedy withdrawal as had been the case every time resistance had been encountered in Somalia, Haiti, and 1998 Iraq, the US escalated the intervention by dispatching more warplanes to the front, by increasing the number of military and infrastructure targets, and, ultimately, by contemplating breaking the taboo of ground operations in Kosovo.

Consequently, the two strongest indicators that America's intervention over Kosovo was motivated by status inconsistency concern the evolution of America's position regarding the use of force against Belgrade in the months preceding the bombing and, the change in the American ban on a ground invasion. At first, the only partisan of employing force against Belgrade on the model of the 1995 strikes in Bosnia had predictably been Albright.⁸³ Convinced that Milosevic understood only the language of force, Albright wanted to head off Kosovo as early as possible, before there was a repetition of the massacres and ethnic cleansing of Bosnia: as she put it "we knew better now, that we shouldn't allow these kinds of things to happen."⁸⁴ But Albright found herself isolated in the cabinet, which was subscribing instead to the view advocated by Holbrooke that a deal on Kosovo could be struck with Milosevic. The factor that contributed the most to undermining Holbrooke's analysis of the situation and conversely

⁸² Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁸³ Albright had been one of the leading hawks in the Clinton administration's first term which led to friction especially with Colin Powell. Halberstam, *War in Time of Peace*, 376-86; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 576; Albright, *Madam Secretary*, chap.12.

⁸⁴ Albright interview with PBS *Frontline*.

strengthened Albright's tactic of "leading through rhetoric" was the unrepentant policy of Belgrade, which after announcing a deal, was renewing its onslaught against the Kosovars. US and NATO prestige was suffering proportionally with each Serb infraction. Therefore, each such confrontation contributed to a gradual hardening of America's view of the usefulness of the use of force against Milosevic.⁸⁵

In this respect, the four successive offensives carried out by the Serb forces in Kosovo provided the best excuse to escalate the response from threat to weapon rattling to ultimatum, and, in the end, to wholesale intervention. The first Serb campaign began at the end of February 1998, with police attacks on prominent KLA members, culminating on March 5 with the killing of 58 members of the Jasheri clan in the village of Denji Prekaz, including 28 women and children.⁸⁶ These dramatic events were followed on March 9 by a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Contact Group on Yugoslavia in London, where Albright delivered a plea for a stern response, arguing that "in 1991, the international community did not react with sufficient vigor and force... this time we must act with unity and resolve" and concluding on a dramatic note: "history is watching us. In this very room our predecessors delayed as Bosnia burned, and history will not be kind to us if we do the same...we have an opportunity to make up for the mistakes that had been made four or five years ago."⁸⁷ The US along with the Contact Group sponsored UN Security Council 1160 demanding under the threat of diplomatic and economic sanctions that Milosevic stop targeting civilians, that the Serb special police forces be withdrawn, and that a dialogue be initiated between Belgrade and Kosovars. By May, sanctions were

⁸⁵ Michael Dobbs, "Annals of Diplomacy: Double Identity," *New Yorker*, March 29, 1999, 50-5; Albright interview with PBS Frontline; Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁸⁶ Judah, *Kosovo*, 137-45. The Contact Group had been established in the Spring of 1994 and comprised the US, Russia, Britain, France, and Spain.

⁸⁷ Gellman, "Path to Crisis"; Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 24-8; Isaacson, "Madeleine's War".

put into place, since no sustained diplomatic effort had materialized despite the Serb strongman's promises to Holbrooke and a symbolic meeting between Milosevic and the moderate Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova.

By June 1998, however, the Serb forces launched a second round of attacks on Kosovo in response to a guerilla campaign begun in May by the KLA. This time around NATO responded more forcefully, through the conduct of a military exercise known as Determined Falcon, in which 80 warplanes flew over Albania and FYROM. Yet at the same time, the US still had qualms about military intervention, as foreign policy leaders, in particular Cohen, worried about strengthening the KLA too much—as a background briefing put it “the KLA need to know and NATO has made clear, the US government has made this clear, that the cavalry is not coming.”⁸⁸ The fighting in June and July had actually ended with the KLA in the advantage—at one point in July the guerillas controlled about 40% of the territory of Kosovo. To reclaim the lost territory, Milosevic began in July a third offensive that turned out to be not a regular police operation as much as a full-scale military campaign, driving away from their homes an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 of Kosovars. The US responded first by passing on September 23 Security Council resolution 1199 repeating the demands of resolution 1160, and then by delivering a clear ultimatum to Milosevic.

Albright was instrumental in this process by organizing a key meeting on October 8 with the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany, and Russia at London's Heathrow Airport. The conclusions of the meeting were on the one hand, that the US could press ahead with international support and threaten Milosevic; and, on the other hand, that Albright managed to get the US to commit to using force if Milosevic did not

⁸⁸ Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 35; Judah, *Kosovo*, 159-69; Cohen interview with PBS *Frontline*.

comply. As Albright emphasized, “we have to take into account... Milosevic’s long-standing unwillingness to negotiate seriously, and the accumulated barbarity of the last three months. Time and again, Milosevic has promised us to do things he had no intention of doing.... But he has to understand that the minimum is not good enough. The only thing that is good enough is full compliance... one of the keys to diplomacy is knowing when diplomacy has reached its limits. And we are rapidly reaching that point now.”⁸⁹ In the aftermath of the meeting, Holbrooke and US general Michael Short, in charge of NATO’s air force, were dispatched to Belgrade where, dispensing with diplomatic niceties, they showed their cards to Milosevic. “I’ve B52s in one hand and U2 surveillance spy planes in the other,” said Short to Milosevic. “It’s up to you which I’m going to use.”⁹⁰ On October 12, Holbrooke optimistically announced an agreement, whose main points comprised a reduction of Serb forces in the province and the conduct of serious negotiations with the Kosovars. Nevertheless, while the Holbrooke accord appeared to have defused the crisis, it in fact made much harder for America to turn a blind eye if there were any further Serb infractions in Kosovo.⁹¹

Predictably, the US found itself with its back against the wall in January 1999, when violence flared again in Kosovo. Responding to a series of KLA attacks in late December 1998, Belgrade launched a fourth offensive, which eventually culminated with

⁸⁹ Quoted in Judah, *Kosovo*, 184-5; 169-89.

⁹⁰ In retrospect, these series of direct meetings with Milosevic were the factor most responsible in producing the American misperception that Yugoslavia was going to cave in. Holbrooke left Belgrade with the distinct impression that “he and his military were sweating.” For his part, Short too concluded that “if you hit that man hard, slapped him up side the head, he’d pay attention.” After the meeting, in November 1998, a National Intelligence Estimate concluded that “the October agreement indicates that Milosevic is susceptible to outside pressure. He will eventually accept a number of outcomes... as long as he remains the undisputed leader in Belgrade.” See *ibid.*, 185-6; Gellman, “Path to Crisis.” On Holbrooke’s deal see Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*; Holbrooke interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁹¹ As Judah and Daalder rightly note, the accord however did not include the KLA so it did not guarantee that there was not going to be violence initiated by the Albanian side. Judah, *Kosovo*, 189; Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

the killing of 45 Kosovar civilians on January 15 at the village of Račak. Račak was the catalyst of intervention because it seemed to confirm in a dramatic fashion Albright's previous dire warnings about the risks of not standing firm against Milosevic. Just as the massacre was taking place, the American decision-makers had reunited to discuss Kosovo. During the meeting, Albright summed up three possible avenues of action: "stepping back, muddling through or taking decisive steps." Even though she was again overruled in the meeting by Cohen and Berger, who favored a "Status Quo Plus" solution, which reaffirmed the Holbrooke accord with only the additional demand of the restoring of autonomy for Kosovo, Albright's position eventually carried the day thanks to the developments on the ground.⁹² After Račak, even the skeptics in the Clinton cabinet came to accept that in the light of Milosevic's non-compliance, Albright's viewpoint regarding the use of force constituted the only viable policy left on the table. To do anything else would have meant as Albright colorfully put it, to be reduced to the condition of "gerbils running on a wheel," forever trapped by the reluctance to take decisive steps in order to achieve effective results.⁹³ To quote Cohen: "The Račak massacre served as a galvanizing and rallying point for the NATO allies, saying we've had enough of Milosevic lying and misrepresenting himself to NATO and to the world—that this could not stand...It didn't change my thinking."⁹⁴

American foreign policy in this context hence confirms the propositions of Chapter One: a state enjoying high status sooner or later has to take action to punish a challenger, regardless of the geopolitical merits of the case, simply because not doing so

⁹² Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*; Cohen interview with PBS *Frontline*; Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁹³ Gellman, "Path to Crisis"; Daalder and O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 70-2; Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 392-7; Judah, *Kosovo*, 192-6.

⁹⁴ Ibid; Cohen interview with PBS *Frontline*; Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

would contribute to diminishing its standing in the world by affecting its reputation for successful political performance. This is why the US intended to make an example out of Milosevic by forcing him to acknowledge an unequivocally humiliating settlement of Kosovo. Hence, all that was needed for the bombing to proceed was an appropriate justification that would have allowed the rest of the NATO members to rally behind the US, and, in the process, cut any escape avenue for Milosevic.⁹⁵ Ultimately, this excuse was provided by the negotiations conducted from 6 to 23 February between Serbs and Kosovars at the French chateau of Rambouillet and mediated by the states of the Contact Group, by the EU, and by the OSCE.⁹⁶ In the words of a close aide to Albright, Rambouillet served the purpose of getting “the war started with the Europeans locked in.” For Daalder as well, the US strategy was to “get the Kosovars to sign on, get the Serbs to renege, bomb the Serbs, get the Serbs to sign on, deal—that’s the strategy.”⁹⁷

Accordingly, the talks were managed in such a way so as to lay the blame for their collapse squarely on Milosevic. To this end, the US exerted strong pressure on the rag tag Albanian delegation, composed of mortal rivals, to sign the agreements in order to give it a free hand to act against Milosevic. The US correctly gambled that the Serb delegation was both not really interested in negotiating (unlike Dayton, Milosevic had not bothered to come to Rambouillet) and under the belief that the differences between the Albanians would preclude the signing of an accord that required *inter alia* that the KLA should disband.⁹⁸ Yugoslavia was accordingly at Rambouillet playing for time, going

⁹⁵ Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*; Albright interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁹⁶ Marc Weller, “The Rambouillet Conference on Kosovo,” *International Affairs* 75 (April 1999): 211-51; Judah, *Kosovo*, 201-28.

⁹⁷ Daalder, O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 89; Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-84; Judah, *Kosovo*, 207, 218, 223. Judah quotes a diplomat recalling the shock on the faces of the Serb delegation and their sudden panic in Paris when one of their members burst the news that “They [the Albanians] are going to sign!”

through the motions of the talks without the expectation of any concrete result. America turned this negligence to its advantage, by presenting the Albanian side with an offer it could not refuse: either the Kosovars signed, and bombing could proceed or Yugoslavia will be allowed a free hand in Kosovo. This offer was explicitly spelled in a press release on 21 February by Rubin: “we believe it is extremely important to put pressure on the Serbs. We cannot put the full amount of pressure if we don’t get an agreement from the Kosovar Albanians... in order to move towards military action, it has to be clear that the Serbs were responsible.”⁹⁹ America’s sticks and carrots approach culminated with Albright’s written pledge of February 22 for a referendum on the statute of Kosovo three years after the entry into force of agreement.¹⁰⁰ To the US allies’ great surprise at the Paris signing ceremony for the agreements on March 15, while the Yugoslav delegation predictably refused to do so, the Albanians unanimously signed on, emphasizing their right to conduct a referendum after three years. The NATO members thus found themselves virtually overnight committed to conducting a bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, the US ensured that Milosevic could not back out yet again at the last minute by agreeing to token concessions: to escape bombing, he would have had to be subjected this time around to a deep humiliation by accepting harsh terms such as the unimpeded access of NATO (instead of the UN or the OSCE) to the entire

⁹⁹ James Rubin, “Press Briefing on the Kosovo Peace Talks, Rambouillet, France, 21 February 1999,” in Marc Weller, *The Crisis in Kosovo* (Cambridge: Documents & Analysis Publishing Ltd., 1999), 451; Judah, *Kosovo*, 212. This offer was reiterated on several occasions both by Albright and by Bob Dole, a major supporter of the Kosovars. See 213, 216, 218; Sciolino and Brommer, “How a President.”

¹⁰⁰ The letter to the Albanian delegation stated that it concerned the future of the province article in the agreement and that “we will regard this proposal or any other formulation, of that Article that may be agreed at Rambouillet, as confirming a right for the people of Kosovo to hold a referendum of the final status of Kosovo after three years.” Judah, *Kosovo*, 215, 212-6; Weller, “Rambouillet Conference,” 232-4. As to the promise of a referendum, it was expressed in a more veiled form in the final signed agreement in Paris, promising the convening after three years to determine the final status of Kosovo, taking into consideration among other factors “the will of the people.”

Yugoslav territory, withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo except for police, autonomy for the province and the perspective of a political referendum (which while not written in the actual accords was still heavily implied.)¹⁰¹ The essential meaning of Rambouillet was hence that America was so dead set on see its prestige vindicated by the thorough castigation of Milosevic at long last after so many delays and call-offs that it was willing to go many an extra mile to guarantee that a fight was going to take place.

The other indication of the fundamental role prestige played in the NATO intervention over Kosovo consists of America's eventual acceptance of the necessity of a ground campaign in Kosovo. As seen from the above, there was considerable reluctance in the ranks of American decision-makers, especially at the Pentagon, to contemplate such a step. By the second month of bombing there was still no concrete plan of operations for a ground campaign. Hence, the question to ask is why the US was willing to revise its position on ground forces after months if not years of rejection.

The most convincing explanation of this puzzle is that the US accepted escalation to a ground option only as a supreme measure in order to safeguard its own prestige and that of NATO. For two months, the US had pinned its hopes on the bombing campaign, which was supposed to soften Milosevic into submission on the pattern of Bosnia. However, by the month of May, the US had even given up its original objective of coercing Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet agreements, which after all had been the obvious rationale of the intervention. To quote Daalder, "our goals by April... are no longer to prevent him from conducting atrocities against the Albanians or to degrade his

¹⁰¹ "Rambouillet Agreement: Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government of Kosovo," accessible at http://www.gov/www/regions/eur/ksvo_rambouillet_text.html. It should be said, however, that this was a very hard fought and costly victory for the US—some calling Rambouillet as the worst experience in Albright's career. Judah, *Kosovo*, 214.

capacity to do so. Now our goal becomes to have refugees return.”¹⁰² Therefore, America was willing to settle for any solution that would have had the Kosovars returned to the province—thus creating at least the illusion of success. However, as the list of military targets that could be bombed inside Yugoslavia became shorter, as Milosevic showed no signs of yielding, and as time elapsed in the race against the clock to have the refugees returned to their homes before winter set in, the US eventually accepted that only a ground campaign could deliver the victory NATO and America required.

The tilt toward a ground option could be traced to the aftermath of the NATO Summit in Washington of April 23-5 when the US government formally asked Clark to draw plans for invasion. The NATO Summit in Washington at the end of April celebrating NATO’s 50th birthday was in this respect a conspicuous effort to show that the alliance would stand by its commitments in Kosovo. The declaration the summit issued began with the words: “The crisis in Kosovo represents a fundamental challenge to the values for which NATO has stood since its foundation... We will not allow this campaign of terror to succeed. NATO is determined to prevail.”¹⁰³ Subsequently, by early May the possibility of ground operations was no longer ruled out. On May 20, Clark presented the president with the plans for a force of 175,000 troops including 100,000 Americans entering Kosovo from Albania. He also stated that a decision on whether to invade or not would need to be reached no later than June 10, if the operation was to be mounted at all. By his own admission, by that time Clinton had reached the conclusion a ground offensive would be necessary. Still, at a meeting in London of the NATO defense

¹⁰² Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*. Also see the response by Strobe Talbott to the question how do you define success in Kosovo: “Very simple. They’re going home.” Gellman, “Path to Crisis.”

¹⁰³ See “NATO Statement Setting Forth Demands on Kosovo,” in Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 262-4. No mention of the previous goal of signing Rambouillet was made in the statement’s demands.

ministers on May 27 only two states abstained on the issue of ground troops: one was Germany—the other was the US.¹⁰⁴ Yet the US was to dramatically change its position in the days to follow. On June 2, Berger wrote a memo to the president that recommended proceeding with the ground offensive. The very same day Berger met with a number of Washington insiders and presented them with a very short and emphatic agenda of US goals in Kosovo. Point one read “first, we will win. Period. Full stop. There is no alternative.” Coming on the heels of this already very forceful statement Point Two argued that “Second, winning means what we’ve said it means.” Finally, after Point Three, which reaffirmed that the air campaign was working, Point Four completed the circle by saying that: “Fourth, the president has said that he has not ruled out any options. Go back to 1: We will win.”¹⁰⁵

The ostensible reason cited by Berger for this sudden turnabout was the approaching winter and its possible impact on those Kosovars still trapped in the province. Yet the issue at stake was not the Kosovars: after all if the US was preoccupied with their safety it could have used troops from the first hours of the intervention, or at the very least once it was clear that air power alone would not stop Milosevic from widespread ethnic cleansing. Rather the US was concerned with what would happen to its prestige, if it failed to deliver a clear win over Milosevic. Had the US failed to restore the refugees to the province, or had thousands of Kosovars perished in the winter of 1999, its prestige would have severely suffered—the intervention could no longer be presented a showcase of successful American leadership in the world. Evidence that this was the case

¹⁰⁴ Steven Erlanger, “NATO Was Closer to Ground War Than It Is Widely Realized,” *New York Times*, November, 7, 1999; Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 150-7, 160.

¹⁰⁵ Daalder and O’ Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 158-9. As Daalder argues the message was essentially “we were going to win, no matter what it took.” Daalder interview with PBS *Frontline*.

comes from Clinton's aide Sidney Blumenthal who describes a meeting with the president before Berger's private announcement. Both Clinton and Blumenthal were in full agreement that victory in Kosovo was imperative so the US could avoid appearing ineffective on the world stage and that in order to secure it the administration would be prepared to accept a heavy political price.¹⁰⁶ In order to achieve victory, the US was even willing to go beyond NATO, which might have authorized a land campaign but not participated in it. As Berger put it: "a consensus in NATO is valuable. But it is not a *sine qua non*. We want to move with NATO, but it can't prevent us from moving."¹⁰⁷

The intervention in Kosovo thus encouraged the US on the path of imperial expansion dictated by prestige considerations. Because of its putative position as the strongest state in the international system and the natural world leader, America was not able to tolerate indefinitely the challenges of miscreants such as the regime of Milosevic. Moreover, in punishing challengers, the US became aware it could not afford to have its hands tied either by the requirement of Security Council permission, or by the necessity of war by committee. The US empire became in the process not only more assertive, but at the same time more susceptible to unilateralism.

¹⁰⁶ See Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton Wars* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 648.

¹⁰⁷ Erlanger, "NATO Was Closer to Ground War"; Berger interview with PBS *Frontline*.

Chapter Six

Indispensable Nation: Prestige and US Unilateralism

In the late 1990s the US adopted unilateralism as a tactic of choice for addressing a large array of international issues: the use of force as in Kosovo and in Iraq, questions of international law, and nuclear weapons, to mention but the most prominent items concerning war and peace on an otherwise much longer and diverse list.¹

Frequently, America's unilateralism is identified as a primary component of the Bush revolution in foreign policy.² Nevertheless, unilateralism actually antedates the George W. Bush presidency, being already at work during Clinton's second term in office in the refusal to sign in 1998 the Statute of Rome that put in place the International Criminal Court (ICC); in the endorsement of National Missile Defense (NMD) in 1999 even though it violated the existing Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty; and in the interventions without Security Council authorization against Iraq and Yugoslavia. George W. Bush thus inherited a legacy of American unilateralism that he simply carried through to its logical conclusion: the rejection in his first three months in office of the Kyoto Protocol, the ICC, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, followed by the abrogation of the ABM treaty in December 2001, and, by the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.³

¹ Comprehensive lists should also include peacekeeping, relations with the UN, chemical weapons, the Landmine Treaty, the ban on nuclear tests, climate change, human rights, and international trade relations. Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman, eds., *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002); David Malone and Yuen Foong Khong, eds., *Unilateralism and US Foreign Policy: International Perspectives* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

² Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 13-4, 40-1; Charles Krauthammer, "The Bush Doctrine: In American Foreign Policy, a New Motto: Don't Ask, Tell," *Time*, March 5, 2001, 42; Charles Krauthammer, "The New Unilateralism," *Washington Post*, 8 June, 2001.

³ For analyses stressing the continuity of policy between Clinton and George W. Bush, see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004): 214, 286-8; Melvin

But is unilateralism the appropriate term for designating the measures embraced by Clinton and George W. Bush? This might not be the case, assuming that unilateralism refers to the rejection of any form of international partnership whether in terms of collective action, or conclusion of treaties. Under this rigid definition, the US-led intervention over Kosovo, undertaken under NATO auspices in collaboration with eighteen other members, or Operation Desert Fox jointly conducted with Great Britain do not qualify as unilateralist.⁴ However, a succinct examination of US foreign policy between 1998 and 2003 will confirm that America's international approach was distinctively less cooperative than it had been since at least the end of the Cold War. America's "unilateralism" was not restricted to a few specific instances of non-cooperation justified by a pressing national interest—by its frequency and scope it amounted to a distinct action pattern.⁵ Besides, the US had been the main promoter of international agreement in all the afore mentioned areas and had been a fervent supporter of multilateralism throughout the first part of the 1990s. This is why it is more useful to think of unilateralism as a policy that either places limits on the extent of international cooperation or curtails it by assigning a higher value to defection instead of collaboration.

Leffler, "9/11 and American Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 29 (June 2005): 395-413; Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

⁴ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 144-5, 147. Another definition understands multilateralism as the coordination of policy among three or more states, thus distinguishing between unilateralism, bilateralism, and multilateralism. For Ruggie multilateralism is "an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct." John Gerard Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution," in John Gerard Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3-47; Robert Keohane, "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research," *International Journal* 45 (Autumn 1990): 731-61.

⁵ The scope of unilateralist measures exceeds the strict area of arms control, thus contradicting Ikenberry, who argued that American unilateralism was focused on the exclusive issue of security. G. John Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (September 2003): 533-50. For the view that cooperation in terms of security is more difficult to achieve or maintain than in areas of low politics see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30 (January 1978): 167-214; Robert Jervis, "Security Regimes," *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982): 357-78.

As such, “there is no clear dichotomy between unilateralism and multilateralism,” but rather a state faces a spectrum of possible cooperative and conflictual behaviors ranging from perfect harmony on one extreme to complete deadlock at the other end.⁶ A policy would therefore qualify as unilateralist or as multilateralist according to how close it is to either of the two ends. It is in this sense that some policies are more or less unilateral than others, or the strategy of a state could gradually turn from multilateralism to unilateralism and vice versa. In other words, unilateralism and multilateralism stand for degrees of cooperation and defection.⁷ It is therefore in light of the facts that America became more reluctant to offer concessions or consult with other states, that it employed less frequently international institutions to achieve its goals, and that it withdrew from several international agreements that the American foreign policy in between 1998 and 2003 can be seen as unilateralist.

This policy was the result of status inconsistency, itself the consequence of the mounting perception among the Clinton and Bush decision-makers that America’s political performance was left wanting due to over-fondness for multilateral solutions that hindered or even blocked the effective exercise of American power. On the one hand, the international system did not include a state or organization that was able to supplant the US in dealing with challenges such as regional instability, terrorism, nuclear

⁶ David Malone and Yuen Foong Khong, “Unilateralism and US Foreign Policy: International Perspectives,” in Malone and Khong, eds., *Unilateralism*, 1-18, 3.

⁷ This point is well developed in the literature on cooperation, which argues that certain contexts such as those represented by game theory models like Stag Hunt, Prisoner’s Dilemma, or Chicken are inherently likely to encourage cooperation or defection, in a spectrum of possible cooperative or conflictual behaviors. See Kenneth Oye, “Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy,” *World Politics* 38 (October 1985): 1-24; for a similar view that distinguishes collaboration as the pursuit of common interests from coordination as the avoidance of common aversions and argues that the former is much harder to achieve than the latter, see Arthur Stein, “Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World,” *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982): 299-324. Also see Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Robert Powell, “Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberalist Debate,” *International Organization* 48 (Spring 1994): 313-44; David Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

proliferation, or ethnic conflict: accordingly the alternative of America providing decisive leadership was plunging the world headlong into disorder.⁸ On the other hand, the help the other states provided to the US was seen as a liability rather than as a prized asset: being considered so limited and conditioned as to restrict severely America's freedom of action. Therefore America's prestige as an effective leader was suffering both because of its inability to move forward on those issues where international consensus was not feasible; and because of other states' refusal to grant America extra privileges. The US increasingly conceived of its international role not as the facilitator and manager of all-encompassing coalitions, but more in leading the world by sheer strength of will, dragging other states along if need be. Alternatively, for structuralism, states that are as powerful as the US do not have to abide by the rules that bind ordinary polities. Exceptionalism invokes America's self-perceived role as a covenanted people not subjected to the same restrictions that apply to other states. Revisionism contends that the US seeks to preserve its ability to keep the Open Door functioning smoothly.⁹

Strength, Tradition, and the Open Door

For structuralism, the more power a state enjoys, the less it is likely to have to depend on others, as others come to depend on it against their will. Consequently, an empire such as the US is not likely to be a supporter of multilateralism, simply because it

⁸ Krauthammer had made the point as early as 1991 that the alternative to unipolarity was chaos. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Winter 1991): 23-33, 26-8. Also see Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003). This became a common argument in the neoconservative literature, as seen in Chapter Seven.

⁹ For general overviews of the causes of unilateralism see Yuen Foong Khong and David Malone, "Resisting the Unilateral Impulse: Multilateral Engagement and the Future of US Leadership" in Khong and Malone, *Unilateralism and US Foreign Policy*, 421-9; Rosemary Foot, Neil McFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno, "Introduction," in Rosemary Foot et al., eds., *US Hegemony and International Organizations: The United States and Multilateral Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-22.

does not require the assistance of other states to succeed in its political endeavors.¹⁰ To quote Waltz, “Other countries depend more on us than we do on them... The United States can get along without the rest of the world better than most of its parts can get along without us.”¹¹ However, structuralism does not suggest that a powerful state such as the US is unable to, will not, or should not cooperate with weaker states. Instead, it emphasizes that the cooperative relation created will reflect the power disparities underlying it, working to the advantage of the stronger polity. To quote Mearsheimer, “the most powerful states in the system create and shape institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it. In this view, institutions are ‘arenas for acting out power relationships.’”¹²

Accordingly, for structuralism, the US by being substantially more powerful than other states, is able to proceed without their blessing whenever it chooses. Naturally, a powerful state will seize this opportunity to advance unhindered its interests either in terms of gains or of security. To quote Max Boot, “any nation with so much power will always be tempted to go it alone. Power breeds unilateralism. It is as simple as that.”¹³ In the same vein, for Kagan, the power at its disposal is responsible for America’s recent unilateralism: “now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do.” As a result, the policy of choice of strong states, argues Kagan, is and has been to act

¹⁰ To be sure, structuralists are fundamental skeptics regarding the extent of states’ potential for genuine cooperation. See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1979), 105-7; Joseph Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” in Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*, 116-40.

¹¹ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 159, 129-59.

¹² John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994): 5-49. esp. fn. 13. Mearsheimer’s critique is all the more poignant since he unequivocally identifies institutions with multilateralism: “The term ‘multilateralism’ is also virtually synonymous with institutions.” Also see Stephen Krasner, “State Power and the Structure of International Trade,” *World Politics* 28 (April 1976): 317-47; Stephen Krasner, “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” *International Organization* 36 (Spring 1982): 185-205.

¹³ Max Boot, “Doctrine of the ‘Big Enchilada,’” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2002.

without considering or sparing the trodden feelings or interests of weaker polities. “The facile assertion that the United States cannot ‘go it alone’ is more a hopeful platitude than a description of reality. The problem today, if it is a problem, is that the United States can ‘go it alone,’ and it is hardly surprising that the American superpower should wish to preserve its ability to do so. Geopolitical logic dictates that Americans have a less compelling interest than Europeans in upholding multilateralism as a universal principle for governing the behavior of nations.”¹⁴ Multilateralism, by implication, represents the strategy employed by the weak (in this case the Europeans) in order to conserve a semblance of influence on the actions of the great powers, i.e. the US.¹⁵

Nevertheless, structuralism faces several objections. First, structuralism deduces motive from capability: to quote Kagan, “when you have a hammer, all problems start to look like nails.”¹⁶ The assumption behind this reasoning is that states will be prompted to seek to increase their gains in power, wealth, or security at other states’ expense every time they are able to get away with it at minimal cost. But one does not necessarily follow the other, because multilateralism might still be more cost-effective than unilateralism for an empire, even though the latter policy might be pursued at little risk of actual punishment. This is so because multilateralism could, at least, under some circumstances, deliver rewards that would otherwise be lost: locking into place an order conducive to the empire’s interests, enhancing its legitimacy and hence reducing the need to appeal to coercion, and helping it address collective action problems. America’s own record since 1945 is in this respect favorable to multilateralism. Therefore, great power will prefer to employ multilateral institutions and rules in so far as these prove useful in

¹⁴ Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, 10-11, 38-9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 37-8, 31-4; Charles Krauthammer, “Axis of Petulance,” *Washington Post*. March 1, 2002.

¹⁶ Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, 27-8.

advancing their interests—they will not necessarily reject them as a hindrance the first time an opportunity presents itself.¹⁷

Second, more importantly, structuralism believes that America is far more powerful than it actually is. The examination of America's unilateral measures in the cases of the ICC, the ABM treaty, and the use of force in Iraq and Kosovo attests that the US first attempted to shape the decisions taken so as to promote its preferences but ended up being defeated each time. It was *only in the aftermath of these defeats* that America rejected cooperation. This means in accordance with the above, that unilateralism was not the solution the US would have preferred in the first place, but the backup once multilateralism had failed to deliver an outcome embodying America's wishes. Eventually, the US reached the point where the opposition it faced in getting its favorite policies adopted was so certain and daunting that it came to see further efforts negotiations with the other parties as useless, and stopped pursuing them altogether. To quote an inspired comparison, the US policy followed the *modus operandi* of Julia Roberts' character in the movie *The Runaway Bride*: "leading partners to the altar, only to jilt them during the final vows."¹⁸

The US two greatest desiderata in the case of the ICC negotiations in the summer of 1998 in Rome were to change Article 12 of the Statute, referring the manner of

¹⁷ For the advantages of multilateralism for great powers and the dominance of multilateralism in Post-World War Two US foreign policy see Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), chap. 8; Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); G. John Ikenberry, "State Power and the Institutional Bargain: America's Ambivalent Economic and Military Multilateralism," in Foot et al., eds., *US Hegemony* 49-72; Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" 538-9, 541-2. For a dissenting skeptic view arguing that the US has remained unilateralist at heart see Edward Luck, *Mixed Messages: American Policy and International Organizations, 1919-1999* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1999).

¹⁸ American Law University professor Kenneth Anderson quoted in Stewart Patrick, "America's Retreat from Multilateral Engagement," *Current History* 99 (December 2000): 430-9, 430-1.

ascertaining court jurisdiction, and to circumscribe the role of the office of the independent prosecutor. Regarding the draft of Article 12, the proposal backed by the largest number of states (the so-called Like-Minded Group, provided that the ICC could sit in judgment of a person, if *either* the state where the alleged offense was committed or the state of nationality of the accused gave their assent in this sense. By contrast, America proposed that the ICC put on trial a person only if *both* these states agreed or if there was an express permission in this sense from the UN Security Council.¹⁹ In respect to the role of the independent prosecutor, the US contested his or her right to indict, on the basis of any signatory's referral, those parties who had escaped being put on trial in their home countries, either because the domestic courts would not or could not do so, or because such domestic trials would have been susceptible of bias.²⁰

America's efforts to persuade other states proved unsuccessful, even though the US exerted a considerable amount of pressure behind closed doors, including reportedly threatening revising security ties to some of the chief dissenters.²¹ A further American

¹⁹ *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* in Roy S. Lee, ed., *The International Criminal Court: The Making of the Rome Statute: Issues, Negotiations, Results* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1999): 479-572; Philippe Kirsch and John T. Holmes, "The Rome Conference on the International Criminal Court: The Negotiation Process," *American Journal of International Law* 93 (January 1999): 2-12; Cherif Bassiouni, "Negotiating the Treaty of Rome on the Establishment of the International Criminal Court," *Cornell Journal of International Law and Public Policy* 32, 3, (1999): 443-70; Georg Nolte, "The United States and the International Criminal Court," in Malone and Khong, eds., *Unilateralism*, 71-93; Bartram Brown, "Unilateralism, Multilateralism, and the International Criminal Court," in Patrick and Forman, *Multilateralism*, 323-44; Bartram Brown, "The Statute of the ICC: Past, Present, and Future," in Sarah Sewell and Carl Kaysen, eds., *The United States and the International Criminal Court: National Security and International Law* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 61-84.

²⁰ Philipp Meißner, *The International Criminal Court Controversy: An Analysis of the United States' Major Objections against the Rome Statute* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 33-56; Nolte, "The United States," 73-5; Marcella David, "Grotius Repudiated: The American Objections to the International Criminal Court and the Commitment to International Law," *Michigan Journal of International Law*, 20, 2, (1999): 337-412.

²¹ The alleged threat was made against Germany by the US Secretary of Defense William Cohen and involved Germany giving up its lobbying in favor of universal jurisdiction, meaning that any state could have prosecuted persons accused of committing crimes included in the Statute. Cohen appears to have threatened Germany with a possible withdrawal of American forces from Europe, an allegation the Pentagon denied, but which was substantiated by documents. Alessandra Stanley, "US Presses Allies to Rein In Proposed War Crimes Court," *New York Times*, July 15, 1998.

proposal that would have allowed the US to accept for ten years only those parts of the Statute that it found unobjectionable (hence not Article 12 or the role of the prosecutor) with the possibility of renewal, was equally rejected by 113 countries, with only China and six other nations endorsing America's views. Placed on the defensive, the US next attempted a last-ditch effort to convince the other participants not to sign the Statute. These efforts at sabotage, however, were to no avail, as the US ended up by suffering what a commentator referred to as "the most serious diplomatic defeat since the end of the Cold War": in the final tally 120 countries voted in Rome to sign the statute, 21 abstained, and only 6 supported America and voted against.²² Before departing the White House, Clinton signed the Statute with the understanding that the hypothetical task of seeking ratification would be bequeathed to Bush. In March 2001, in response to an inquiry from the Senate, Bush made public that his administration had no plan to ask for ratification of a treaty it considered to be substantially flawed.

The pattern of negotiations failure followed by American withdrawal was also visible in the abrogation of the ABM treaty. The US wanted to get Russia to agree to an American deployment of sufficient interceptors in order to counter a limited ICBM attack on the US by a rogue state.²³ However, this was precisely the sort of system that the ABM treaty outlawed in its Article 1, which read that "each party undertakes not to deploy ABM systems for the defense of the territory of its country and not to provide a

²² Nolte, "The United States and the International Criminal Court," 71; Lawrence Weschler, "Exceptional Cases in Rome: The United States and the Struggle for an ICC," in Sewell and Kaysen, eds., *United States and the International Criminal Court*, 85-111, 102-9; Cherif Bassiouni, "Negotiating the Treaty of Rome," 459-60. Regarding the six countries that voted with the US in rejecting the Statute only China and Israel acknowledged the vote, but the other four were identified as Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Qatar.

²³ The US designated five such rogue states on the criteria of opposition to the US foreign policy, support for terrorism, and development of WMD: Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, and Cuba. Cuba was added for political reasons, just as states such as Pakistan and Syria were excluded from the list. Robert Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy: Containment After the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 57-65, 75-9.

base for such a defense.”²⁴ The reason for this provision had been to remove the risk of an arms race between the US and Soviet Union and of either country mounting a first strike with impunity. Arguably, similar considerations counseled against, America’s decision to pursue a defense of its entire territory—this posed a threat to both the Russian and in particular the Chinese nuclear deterrent since China possessed at the time about twenty ICBMs.²⁵ In 1999, Congress passed the National Missile Defense Act committing the US to deployment of a defense system as soon as technologically possible. Consequently, the Clinton administration first attempted to amend rather than do away with the ABM treaty to make room for a NMD option. Indeed, Clinton stressed heavily that “I have no intention of supporting or initiating a unilateral abrogation of the ABM treaty. I will not do that... I have never initiated, encouraged, sanctioned, or blinked at the possibility that we could unilaterally abrogate the ABM treaty.”²⁶ But the American plan allowing for the initial deployment of twenty interceptors in Alaska, even though emphasizing the wish to preserve the ABM treaty, ran into the anticipated opposition not only of Russia and China, but also of its NATO allies.²⁷

The NATO countries led by France and Germany criticized NMD on the grounds that the ICBM threat from rogue states was non-existent and, moreover, that NMD was

²⁴ *Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems*, signed at Moscow May 26, 1972, reproduced in James Lindsay and Michael O’ Hanlon, *Defending America: The Case for Limited National Missile Defense* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 169-74. On NMD’s history and the differences with predecessors such as Reagan’s SDI, see Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, “Deploying NMD: Not Whether, But How,” *Survival* 42 (Spring 2000): 6-28.

²⁵ The NMD deployment would violate the ABM in two other ways: allowing the development of non-ABM missile components that could be used for ABM purposes, and permitting the use of forbidden space-based sensors. Dean Wilkening, “Amending the ABM Treaty,” *Survival* 42 (Spring 2000): 29-45, 33-6.

²⁶ Bill Clinton News Conference March 5, 1999 at www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=57203.

²⁷ This first phase of the deployment was at the time expected to be completed by 2005, and would have comprised 100 interceptors at Fort Greely, Alaska. A second phase to be implemented by 2010 or 2015 was anticipated to deploy up to another 250 interceptors at at least one other additional location— possible mentioned locations in 1999 being Maine or/ and North Dakota. Bradley Graham, *Hit to Kill: The New Battle over Shielding America from Missile Attack* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 144-5.

undermining deterrence, encouraging an arms race with Russia and China, and risked decoupling America from European security.²⁸ This came as a sizable shock to the American officials, who had assumed “that this was going to be so limited and evolutionary and modest in its overall impact that they would not get overly upset by it.” Instead, Europe refused to rally behind the US: even Britain expressed the private view that the consultations were “a sham” and that the US had already made up its mind.²⁹ While the Europeans’ assent was not an absolute requirement to change the ABM, their opposition isolated the US and denied it legitimacy in seeking the modification of the treaty. France, for instance, co-sponsored together with Russia and China a UN General Assembly resolution condemning NMD as harmful to international stability, passed in December 1999 by 80 votes to 6, with 64 countries abstaining.³⁰ This is why the US ended up by subscribing to the view that instead of bringing the Europeans on board so as to corner Russia, it was going to be Russian assent that was eventually going to sell NMD to the Europeans. This was, however, wishful thinking.³¹

The declarations of Vladimir Putin’s defense and foreign policy officials made it clear that the development of NMD constituted a breach of the ABM treaty, and any such act would be seen as a hostile act in Moscow. Putin himself described the ABM treaty in June 2000 as “the major key point in the whole strategic balance and for maintaining security” and criticized NMD as “a cure worse than the disease.”³² Under these

²⁸ Part of the problem was that the Clinton cabinet had decided, in order to minimize Russian objections, to restrict the missile shield to the American territory. Ibid., 166-7. This stance was reversed by Bush.

²⁹ Ibid., 156, 160, 153-62; Stephen Cambone et al., “European Views of National Missile Defense,” Atlantic Council of the United States Policy Paper (September 2000).

³⁰ Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 157.

³¹ On Russia’s refusal to amend the ABM Treaty see James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003), 287-97, 357-8; Wilkening, “Amending the ABM Treaty,” 30; Lindsay and O’ Hanlon, *Defending America*, 120-1.

³² Ibid., 118-9.

circumstances, Clinton washed his hands of the entire issue by declaring on September 1, 2000 that, given that the latest tests of the system in October 1999 and January 2000 had been failures, the final decision was going to be made by the next president.³³ The ABM treaty was the unique issue on which the incoming Bush administration actually bothered to conduct serious negotiations, instead of dismissing the value of talks straightaway. But while Russia was warming up to the possibility of a compromise, in the sense that Putin indicated the possibility of a joint US-Russian missile shield, by this time the Bush administration was no longer seeking to amend the ABM, which it had vilified as a “relic of the Cold War.” Instead it aimed at replacing it with a completely new security arrangement.³⁴ Consequently talks dragged on. In light of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush cabinet decided to avoid further delays and concessions to Putin and on December 13, 2001 announced America’s unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty.³⁵

In terms of using force, the unilateralist policy was set into motion by Saddam Hussein. Convinced that the US would do anything in its power to maintain UN sanctions against Iraq in perpetuity, Saddam chose a strategy of confrontation, with the goal of bullying the UNSCOM weapon inspectors into giving Iraq a clean bill of health on disarmament, thus enabling the lifting of sanctions. America strongly argued for retaliation on the model of the celebrated resolution 678 of 1990, which had authorized the use of “all necessary means” against Iraq —only to discover that its fellow permanent members on the Security Council refused it authorization and that, moreover, they did

³³ Clinton chose the most neutral option—not doing anything—out of five possible courses of action. The most probable alternative was “deferral plus,” advocated by Secretary of Defense William Cohen, which consisted in deferring but giving the go-ahead for the building of a radar facility on Shemya Island, in Alaska. This determined whether NMD could become operational in 2005. Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 326-30.

³⁴ Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January/ February 2000): 45-62; James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 313-4; Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 322.

³⁵ Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 368-78.

their very best to block military action against Iraq. The American-introduced resolution 1154 of February 1998 had to settle for the tamer formulation of “severest consequences” in case of “any violation” by Iraq of its obligations under the previous UN resolutions. The US interpretation of this formulation was that it allowed action against Saddam—on March 9, White House Spokesman Mike McCurry told journalists that the U.S. might consult again other Security Council members, but that it already had the authority it needed to use force. This declaration was repeated two days later by President Clinton. However, for Russia, “any hint” had been excluded from the resolution about “automaticity with regard to the application of force, which would be unacceptable for the majority of the members of the council”; for France the resolution excluded “any idea of automaticity”; while for China “the passing of this resolution in no way means the Security Council automatically authorizes any state to use force against Iraq.” This was also the view espoused by the rest of the Council members as well as by Kofi Annan. As he put it: “if the United States had to strike, I think some sort of consultations with the other members would be required.”³⁶ The same scenario was visible in the case of resolution 1205 of November 1998, which warned that the Security Council, “in accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security” will “remain actively seized of the matter” of Iraqi obstructions. For the US and Britain, the text meant that the UN had effectively permitted attacking Iraq to ensure the implementation of UN resolution, while for the opposition, it signified a guarantee that Iraq would not be attacked without a further explicit Security Council resolution.³⁷

³⁶ Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 261-3, 273; Marc Weller, “The US, Iraq, and the Use of Force in a Unipolar World,” *Survival* 41 (Winter 1999): 81-100, 84-5.

³⁷ Weller, “The US, Iraq, and the Use of Force,” 85-6.

Furthermore, on no fewer than four occasions, in October-November 1997, January-February, August, and October-November 1998, Paris, Moscow, and Beijing succeeded in averting American attacks on Iraq by calling for more time for diplomacy, by issuing counter-threats, and by launching last-minute diplomatic initiatives that allowed Saddam to back down in return for concessions on inspections.

To illustrate what turned into a typical pattern, in January 1998 Iraq suspended its cooperation with UNSCOM by complaining as usual that the American inspectors were spies. The US and Great Britain declared they could not rule out the use of force. France and Russia, however, while condemning the Iraqi action, added that they wanted a larger role in the inspections process, and they were soon joined by China. Moscow then dispatched its own envoy to Baghdad, as the US deployed a third air carrier battle group to the Gulf. In return, on February 4, Russia warned of possible world war if the US attacked Iraq; and on February 5 China and France declared their shared opposition to American use of force. A war of bellicose declarations followed between Washington and Moscow, which ended when the French and Russian foreign ministers visited Baghdad and persuaded the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to personally broker a deal with Saddam. The deal announced on February 23 mentioned Iraq's acceptance of full and unconditional cooperation with UNSCOM, while also drawing a list of procedures to be employed for the inspection of Saddam's presidential palaces, such as advance notice.³⁸

³⁸ Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions*, 242-50, 223-9, 330-65; Richard Butler, *Saddam Defiant: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Crisis of Global Security* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 96-119, 137-63, 200-9, 221-6; Dilip Hiro, *Iraq: In the Eye of the Storm* (New York: Nation Books, 2002), 107-31.

After the fourth round of play of this cat and mouse game the US gave up on trying to ensure multilateral support.³⁹ The very first instance in which Iraq barred a surprise inspection by UNSCOM to a site triggered a four-day bombing campaign by US and Britain, between December 16 and December 19, known as Operation Desert Fox.⁴⁰ The US argued awkwardly, as China and France asked for an immediate end to the bombing, and as Russia recalled its ambassadors from Washington and London, that the authorization to use force had been derived not from the nebulous provisions of resolutions 1154 and 1205 but from the 1990 mandate of resolution 678.⁴¹ However, the lessons of Iraq were soon applied to the case of Yugoslavia, in the sense that this time around, due to the anticipated resistance of Russia and China, the US did not attempt to secure a UN Security Council resolution and even renounced trying to claim that its justification was the former Security Council resolutions (1160, 1199, and 1203) warning Milosevic of severe consequences if he did not desist from repressing the Kosovars. To quote Heinbecker, “the most striking and significant feature of Security Council decisionmaking on Kosovo was its absence.”⁴²

The Bush decision to seek an explicit Security Council resolution in 2002-3 debate on regime change in Iraq was not a prodigal son’s return to multilateralism. In

³⁹ Bob Woodward, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 492.

⁴⁰ On the sequence of events that caused Operation Desert Fox see Butler, *Saddam Defiant*, 192-5, 219-20, 227-35; Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions*, 366-8; Hiro, *Iraq*, 127-9; Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem Once and for All* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 195-6.

⁴¹ Comparing the legality of the use of force in Operation Desert Fox and Kosovo, Weller argues that the former is closer to being illegal because it lacked any mitigating humanitarian considerations to make up for the sidestepping of the UN. Weller, “The US, Iraq, and the Use of Force,” 82-3, 87-92.

⁴² The US basically expected, particularly from Russia, the same sort of opposition as the one seen in its resistance against punishing Saddam. China too had signaled its displeasure with American foreign policy in Kosovo, by vetoing and thus de facto ending the UN preventive deployment in FYROM (UNPREDEP) in February 1999. Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 396-7; Paul Heinbecker, “Kosovo,” in David Malone, ed., *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 541-2, 537-50.

effect, the Bush approach to the UN was more that of an ultimatum than of consultations: “Iraq had answered a decade of UN demands with a decade of defiance. All the world now faces a test and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment...Will the United Nations serve the purpose of its founding or will it be irrelevant?” Consequently, if the Security Council wanted its own previous resolutions to be taken seriously it had only one viable option—to back up America and act against Iraq: “we must stand up for our security and for the permanent rights and hopes of mankind... the United States of America will make this stand. And delegates of the United Nations, you have the power to make this stand as well.”⁴³

This line of argument, however, ran into the same obstacle as in 1998: in order to authorize an attack, the UN had to follow a two-part course of action: first attempting to revive the inspections process and equipping it with a tough mandate. Only if the inspectors declared Iraq to be in non-compliance could the go-ahead for an attack be given—and most Security Council members demanded therefore two separate resolutions: one for inspections to resume, the second, permitting the use of force against Saddam. While the first resolution numbered 1441, warning Iraq yet again that it “will face serious consequences” if it did not comply with this “final opportunity,” passed unanimously, the second proved controversial, not in the least because weapon inspections proved inconclusive and were still on-going when the US pressed for a second resolution.⁴⁴ In the end, not only was the draft resolution that found Iraq guilty of ignoring the last chance offered to it in resolution 1441 killed by French President

⁴³ George W. Bush, “Address to the United Nations General Assembly,” September 12, 2002 at www.transcripts.cnn.com/2002/US/09/12/bush.transcript/.

⁴⁴ On the negotiations over resolution 1441 see Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Struggle Over Iraq* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 105-14. On the weapon inspections of 2002-3 see Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

Jacques Chirac's pledge of a veto on March 10, but also the effort to build at least a silent majority in the Security Council floundered. Out of the other fourteen members of the Security Council, only Britain, Spain and Bulgaria endorsed America's interpretation; on the side of Paris, Moscow, and Beijing stood Canada, Mexico, and Germany, while Angola, Chile, Guinea and Cameroon were leaning toward the French position. In no way disquieted, the US went ahead to bring down Saddam Hussein, claiming its authority from resolution 1441.⁴⁵

Hence, America might have been so powerful as to create a *fait accompli*, but, the very necessity of resorting to unilateralism was an admission of America's actual powerlessness to sway in its favor the allegiance of the international community.⁴⁶ As Huntington put it, "the settlement of key international issues requires action by the single superpower but always with some combination of other major states," so in the Post Cold War the only privilege enjoyed by the US is to be able to "veto action on key issues by combinations of other states."⁴⁷

For exceptionalism, unilateralism or the rejection of foreign political entanglements represents a venerable tradition in American foreign policy, though it is often mislabeled as isolationism. Indeed, America's foreign policy from 1776 to 1941 can be seen as having been guided by a continual urge to avoid permanent alliances and shun intervention abroad.⁴⁸ As such, unilateralism is an essential component of America's role

⁴⁵ Ibid., 145-54.

⁴⁶ This is in effect a paradox of unrealized power, explainable by the non-fungible nature of power. David Baldwin, *Paradoxes of Power* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), chap. 7; Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York: Longman, 2001), chap. 1; Joseph Nye, *Paradox of American Power: Why the World Superpower Can't Go Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Samuel Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78 (March/ April 1999): 35-50.

⁴⁸ Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 5-15; Bradford Perkins, *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865*, Warren Cohen, ed., *Cambridge History of America Foreign Relations* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 22-4; Walter

as the covenanted people, mentioned in Chapter Two, because the fewer political interactions between the US and the world, the lesser the risk that America's principles of government will be compromised.⁴⁹ As Schlesinger writes: "unilateralism? There is no older American tradition in the conduct of foreign affairs... The isolationist impulse has risen from the grave in what has always been its essential programme—unilateralism." Accordingly, America's international commitments since World War Two are misleading, since the US still refuses whenever it has the chance to pursue or carry them out unless they fully embody American values and interests.⁵⁰ Similarly, Lieven traces what he calls nationalist unilateralism to "a belief in America as a unique city on a hill... since it forms part of the view that if the United States really has no choice at all but to involve itself with disgusting and inferior foreigners, it must absolutely control the process and must under no circumstance subject itself to foreign control or even advice."⁵¹ Luck also writes in assent: "although unilateralism has tended to supplant isolationism in an era of globalization... the core belief in American exceptionalism has persisted with only episodic questioning." Consequently, the US not only believes it is a country whose values might be jeopardized by multilateralism, but also because of its cultural distrust of big government is reluctant to subscribe fully to international

McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 39-51; John Bolton, "Unilateralism Is Not Isolationism," in Gwyn Prins, ed., *Understanding Unilateralism in American Foreign Relations* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 50-82.

⁴⁹ On America's role as the covenanted people see in particular H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*.

⁵⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Unilateralism in Historical Perspective," in Prins, ed., *Understanding Unilateralism*, 20-9, 20, 24.

⁵¹ Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); also see Ikenberry, "Is American Multilateralism in Decline?" 53; G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (September/October 2002): 44-60.

organizations and treaties.⁵² Hence, for exceptionalism, the unilateralism exhibited by Clinton and Bush is quite déjà vu.

Yet, the recent unilateralism has actually little in common with the traditional variant. Unilateralism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not just the result of an American of concerns for ideological orthodoxy, but also represented the consequence of strategic necessity and political calculus.⁵³ The US had to prove cautious in dealing with an ideologically hostile and threatening international environment. In world politics, weak states are all too frequently exposed to abuse by stronger political and military entities. Furthermore, the abuse in question does not have to come from inimical-minded states, but frequently from the state's declared friends, who can use it as cannon-fodder or bargaining chip. Staying clear of such connections was not only a wise decision at the time for the purpose of preserving the purity of American democracy, but also for the correlated aim of ensuring the survival of the American union. To quote George Washington's celebrated Farewell Address: "Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us, have none or a very remote relation... Hence therefore it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitude of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities."⁵⁴

But if this was the case in the time of Washington and Adams, the US cannot plead such weakness when the occupants of the White House were Clinton and George W. Bush. America was through most of the nineteenth century a negligible entity in terms

⁵² Luck, *Mixed Messages*, 15-9, chaps. 2-3.

⁵³ Ironically, it is Kagan who is advancing this argument—though it shows that the stance of weak states can be unilateralist, not multilateralist as he deems is the case with contemporary Europe. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, 9-10.

⁵⁴ George Washington, "Farewell Address," in Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 144-7, 145.

of troops and navy. To exemplify, in 1890 America's army still ranked thirteenth in the world beyond the forces of Bulgaria and of Belgium, and by 1880, the US navy had fewer battleships than Chile, Turkey, and China.⁵⁵ By contrast, at the end of the 1990s, the US military budget exceeded the combined spending of armed forces of the next ten world states, a list including Japan, France, Great Britain, Germany, and China.⁵⁶ Therefore, under such propitious circumstances, no reason was present any longer for the US to play the part of a voluntary international recluse. Washington himself had anticipated the possibility of the US growing so powerful that it could afford to dispense with the expedient of its previous policy of caution: "the time may well come when we choose our own policy."⁵⁷ That is to say that the unilateralism of today, unlike the unilateralism of yore, cannot be understood as stemming any longer from the fear that the US might be taken advantage of by more powerful polities. Under Clinton and George W. Bush, America was not afraid it was going to be used as a pawn by other powers, but rather it resented their unwillingness to serve as its own docile chesspieces. Exceptionalism would thus hold that America's beliefs have remained unchanged from the eighteenth century onwards, despite all other things not being equal. This is a problematic conclusion, because since World War Two the US had broken the taboos on intervention abroad and on establishing permanent political ties to other nations. If the role of the covenanted people is still lingering in the American psyche, it has been increasingly on the defensive.

⁵⁵ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1987), 202-3; Perkins, *History of Monroe Doctrine*, 50; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 46-8; George Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The US Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1-2, 9-26.

⁵⁶ Russia had slipped so much due to the economic crisis of 1998 that it did not even make the top ten list.

⁵⁷ Washington, "Farewell Address," 145.

Moreover, the unilateralism of yore was predicated on the political withdrawal of the US from world (European) politics, while the form at work under Clinton and Bush was bent on consolidating and expanding America's empire. As Adams underlined in 1821, the US should have refrained from intervention overseas, period—not just from eschewing international consent in order to intervene in places such as Iraq and Kosovo. Both Clinton and Bush represented therefore administrations that stood for a significant degree of American international activism, even though this was not cooperative in nature. Clinton's second term was dominated accordingly by the idea of the indispensable nation; while the main force in Bush's cabinet turned out to be the neoconservatives, whose *raison d'être* was a foreign policy of greatness and of benevolent hegemony.⁵⁸ This is not to say that genuine supporters of the unilateralism of yore were not present: they could be found in the person of Pat Buchanan, and arguably in the ranks of Newt Gingrich's Contract Republicans.⁵⁹ The Republican dominated Congress played a part in reinforcing the unilateralism of Clinton and Bush in the cases of the rejection of the ICC and the ABM treaty. But it did not determine these policies in the first place, nor was it responsible for America's increasingly unilateral interventions.⁶⁰

For its part, revisionism argues that in order to be able to foster and maintain openness in the world, the US has to remain both dominant and unconstrained. The Open

⁵⁸ The masterminds of the neocon movement Robert Kagan and William Kristol defined neoconservatism as both distinct from Clinton's commitment to international cooperation and from the isolationism they thought was predominant in the Republican Party in the 1990s. Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996): 18-32.

⁵⁹ See in particular Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*.

⁶⁰ The Clinton administration was no pushover: it successfully resisted Congress pressure against NAFTA, relations with China, intervention in Haiti, Bosnia, Iraq, and Kosovo, and signing the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, Clinton rejected a 1998 letter signed by Republican leaders claiming that the ABM treaty was null and void because it had been concluded with the Soviet Union not with Russia. Of course, Congress also had its share of victories on foreign policy—the most significant being the vote against the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in the fall of 1998. By the time Bush took office most prominent Contract Republicans had already lost their seats.

Door is not only propped open by American propaganda or dollars, but also, and increasingly so, by the naked threat of military coercion. It is hence natural for America to resist arms control treaties or arrangements that limit or raise questions as to the legitimacy of this vital coercive capacity. If the US were to lose its precious military edge, it could be opposed, ergo it would risk losing its primacy in key regions, and with it, its ability to advance the political and economical agenda of the Open Door. As Bacevich argues, these imperatives of America promoting openness, maintaining American preeminence in strategic areas, and conserving in perpetuity and globally its military supremacy are therefore mutually reinforcing.⁶¹

However, revisionism's interpretation of unilateralism is contradicted by the fact that most of the agreements that the US rejected were the unambiguous results of America's own efforts. It was the US that had pushed for the creation of a permanent international court to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity, after having experienced earlier in the decade with ad-hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.⁶² Similarly, America had strong stakes in the ABM as "a cornerstone of US security." The US had in fact re-negotiated the treaty in 1997 with Russia, in order to differentiate between long range forbidden missiles and shorter-range weapons (under 3500 kilometers), which were allowed.⁶³ Furthermore, the US was the state that had inaugurated in the context of the Gulf War of 1990-1 the cooperative formula of the Security Council-sanctioned coalition as the preferred means to address threats to global

⁶¹ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of American Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 215-23.

⁶² Brown, "Unilateralism, Multilateralism, and the International Criminal Court," 324-5.

⁶³ Yeltsin accepted to modify the ABM to allow the deployment of TMD (theatre missile defense) systems, which are designed to provide defense against short-range and intermediate range missiles (with a range no longer than 3,500 kilometers.) NMD, which deals with ICBMs, missiles with a range exceeding 5,000 kilometers, was only mentioned as a subject for future negotiations. Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 118-20, 114-5; Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 292-3; Daalder and Goldgeier, "Deploying NMD," 8.

or regional peace and security. There is little doubt that the ICC, ABM Treaty, as well as Security Council sanctioned military missions would have contributed substantially toward more international openness. America would have found it easier by adhering to these measures to bring miscreants to trial, to limit dangerous nuclear proliferation, and to isolate and punish international “rogues.” Viewed from an Open Door perspective, America’s recent unilateralism appears as self-defeating: instead of furthering openness, it resulted in weaker international norms, not to mention resentment against the US.

To sum up, America’s unilateralism from 1998 to 2001 was far from being rooted in strength, tradition, or the Open Door. In fact, it was the unilateralism of the sullen.

Prestige and Unilateralism

Increasingly throughout the 1990s, whenever its initiatives were blocked by other states, the US found it more expeditious to circumvent the opposition, instead of repeatedly and fruitlessly attempting to persuade it of the suitability of its proposed course of action. Moreover, US decision-makers gradually came to believe that America was entitled to a peculiar freedom of action—in the form of peculiar privileges and exemptions from the shared obligations of ordinary states. When these claims were resisted by America’s partners and allies, who protested what they saw as American arrogance, the US retaliated by refusing to endorse arrangements and policies that did not submit to its special requirements. Preferably, other states would have joined the American camp, but their opposition or apprehension was not reason enough for the US to waver. The achievements of determination would have vindicated in the end America’s position. This American obsession with showing decisiveness is indicative of

the growing status inconsistency that American decision-makers experienced in relation to America's political performance. As the world's strongest state and the de facto world leader, the US could not afford conveying the impression of weakness or ineffectiveness, hence of failure, even though frequently American inaction or concessions were the sine qua non conditions of maintaining cooperation with other states. This perception of America as an embattled lone leader, already prevalent among US decision-makers at the time of the intervention in Bosnia, eventually morphed into the doctrines of foreign policy by posse and of the indispensable nation. Under both doctrines, the US had to provide resolute leadership to the world by pronouncing itself for a policy and then seeing it through despite the resistance met from foes and partners alike.

For Richard Haass, the main proponent of foreign policy by posse, no longer would the US seek authority and support from an overwhelming coalition, meaning that UN consent on the model of the early 1990s was no longer an implicit requirement. Instead, the US, acting as a sheriff, would recruit partners ("the posse") wherever it could find them, improvising coalitions on a case-by-case basis rather than as a permanent fixture of its foreign policy. As Haass phrased it, the approach "differs from alliances or institutionalism in its eschewal of formal organizations and not requiring broad or complete consent. At its core is the idea of selected nation states coalescing for narrow tasks or purposes—and in some cases disbanding once the specific aim has been accomplished."⁶⁴ Though nominally escaping the restriction of his own definition as unilateralism ("unilateralism is an approach ... that minimizes and wherever possible excludes the participation of other governments and organizations"), Haass' "foreign

⁶⁴ Richard Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 1997), 93.

policy by posse” was quite explicitly the distinct ancestor of the George W. Bush formula of “coalitions of the willing.”⁶⁵ Haass in fact, used the two terms interchangeably.⁶⁶ By the time he became Director of Policy Planning in the Bush administration in 2001, Haass was in fact referring to this approach as “multilateralism à la carte,” even though he had earlier on expressly identified unilateralism with an “à la carte approach to alliances and international arrangements.”⁶⁷ For Haass, the US should impose its views by keeping other countries’ contributions limited or, indeed, symbolic. If “posses” were custom-made, there was no danger that the US would ever run into opposition, since it would have taken care to only include states extending it unconditional support.

Almost the same meaning was implied in the Clinton administration’s doctrine of the indispensable nation. As such, the phrase was the joint product of President Clinton and his aide Sidney Blumenthal and was used repeatedly throughout the 1996 presidential campaign, most notably in Clinton’s second inauguration speech in January 1997.⁶⁸ “The world’s greatest democracy will lead a whole world of democracy... America stands alone,” said Clinton, “as the world’s indispensable nation.”⁶⁹ However, the person who single-handedly popularized the concept was the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. As such, “the indispensable nation” appeared in her declarations ever since her concluding statement at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmations hearings in January 1997, when she described herself and the senators in audience as

⁶⁵ Ibid., 86-90.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 93, 97.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 88; Thom Shanker, “White House Says the US Is Not a Loner, Just Choosy,” *Washington Post*, July 31, 2001.

⁶⁸ Chollet and Goldgeier, *America between the Wars*, 146-7; Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton Wars* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 155-6.

⁶⁹ “Transcript of President Bill Clinton Second Inaugural Speech to the Nation,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1997.

“representatives of the indispensable nation.”⁷⁰ Her most famous assertion of the doctrine came in the context of the second of four Iraqi crises in February 1998: “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”⁷¹ In her memoirs, Albright explains the rhetoric of the “indispensable nation” as essentially a tool for domestic consumption, whose aim was to shore up wavering public support for American global responsibilities: “my purpose was not to put down others, but rather to stir a sense of pride and responsibility among Americans, so that we would be less reluctant to take on problems.”⁷²

Nevertheless, the repeated statements on the indispensable nation reflect a significantly broader interpretation than the one Albright offers: the US was the only state in the world capable of ensuring leadership, and this is why its participation was simply vital to the success of any international initiative. To this extent, American leadership could not be dispensed with. This suggested that if America failed to lead, it could not count on another state to fulfill its obligations in its stead, with the likely outcomes being inaction and chaos. As Blumenthal recalls the origin of “the indispensable nation” expression was the attempt to define the role of US power in post-Cold War international politics, “especially after the Bosnian war.” “The position of the United States,” writes Blumenthal “was unique in world history. With the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no competing power. No European nation equaled the United States, nor did the European Union. If anything, the disgraceful behavior of Britain and France in dealing

⁷⁰Madeleine Albright, “Prepared Statement, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Confirmation Hearings, January 8, 1997” at <http://www.fas.org/man/nato/congress/1997/s970108a.htm>.

⁷¹ “Transcript, Madeleine’s Albright Interview on NBC TV, February 19, 1998,” at http://www.fas.org/news/iraq/1998/02/19/98021907_tpo.html.

⁷² Albright, *Madam Secretary*, 506.

with the Bosnian crisis had made it clear that Europe could not assume military responsibilities without the United States.”⁷³ Albright’s February statement on NBC’s Today Show was as well unequivocal in this respect: the US was the only country that foresaw the danger coming from Iraq, and that was prepared, as a responsible leader to act to address it. Moreover, this was not mere rhetoric. To quote Blumenthal: “‘indispensable nation’ was his [Clinton’s] response to foreign threats after Bosnia... These phrases were no mere slogans. The words mattered.”⁷⁴

How did America’s self-perception as the indispensable nation lead to unilateralism in the contexts of the ICC, ABM treaty and international intervention?

Basically, in the negotiations in Rome on the ICC, the US wanted ironclad guarantees that its citizens, more specifically the members of its armed forces, would not be tried by the ICC or any other state’s court without the specific accord of the US, even though the prosecution charges would have consisted of crimes against humanity, war crimes, or genocide.⁷⁵ This demand was unequivocally a request for special dispensation to be made in the case of the US. In some ways, it was not dissimilar to the colonial powers claims for extraterritoriality—the principle that lower-ranked countries could not put their offense-committing citizens on trial or punishing them. Only the US could be trusted to sit in judgment of its own nationals. Moreover, the US claimed that the ability of other states at least in theory to put on trial American servicemen and decision-makers would have hindered America’s unique ability to impose effective international order. To

⁷³ Blumenthal, *Clinton Wars*, 155.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 146-7, 157.

⁷⁵ Ruth Wedgewood, “Fiddling in Rome,” *Foreign Affairs* (November 1998): 20-4. Senator Jesse Helms for instance specifically demanded “100 percent protection” for American soldiers from prosecution.

carry out its leadership task, the US had to be granted freedom of maneuver well in excess of average states.

The strongest evidence comes from the leader of the American delegation in Rome, Ambassador David Sheffer. Sheffer explicitly invoked the singular international position of the US, which imposed a peculiar role of guaranteeing international order, and which warranted in exchange the granting of particular privileges. As he put it: “the United States has special responsibilities and special exposure to political controversy over our actions... We are called upon to act, far more than any other nation.” This being the case, “it is simply and logically untenable to expose the largest deployed military force in the world, stationed across the globe to help maintain international peace and security and to defend US allies and friends to the jurisdiction of a criminal court the US government has not yet joined... No other country, not even our closest military allies, has anywhere near as many troops and military assets deployed globally as does the United States.”⁷⁶ For this reason, if Article 12 were to be applied, this might interfere with America’s leadership ability on behalf of all states: the US must “be extremely careful,” he warned, “that this proposal [Article 12] does not limit the capacity of our armed forces to legitimately operate internationally... that it does not open up opportunities for endless frivolous complaints to be lodged against the United States as a global military power.”⁷⁷ This argument was itself rooted in the conviction that as the world’s strongest state the US deserved status above that of all other states. To quote

⁷⁶ David Scheffer, “The United States and the International Criminal Court,” *American Journal of International Law* 93 (January 1999): 12-22, 12, 18-9.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Barbara Crosette, “World Criminal Court Having a Painful Birth,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1998. Also see Scheffer’s statement that “equally troubling are the implications of Article 12 for the future willingness of the United States and other governments to take significant risks to intervene in foreign lands in order to save human lives or to restore international or regional peace and security.” Scheffer, “United States and International Criminal Court,” 19.

again Scheffer: “the US is not Andorra!... you can’t approach this on the model of equality of all states. You have to think in terms of the inequality of some states. There have been times, there will come others, when the US as the sole remaining superpower, the indispensable power, has been and will be in a position to confront butchery head on... But in order for that to be able to happen, American interests are going to have to be protected and American soldiers shielded.”⁷⁸

This was saying essentially that the US could not be held accountable to the same standards of behavior as other states, because America had both superior capabilities and special functions to fulfill.⁷⁹ America’s stubborn hold-out for the modification of Article 12 proved the straw that broke the camel’s back in the negotiations in Rome. Previously, the Like-Minded Group had accommodated American objections by giving ground on jurisdiction, excluding first the German proposal for universal jurisdiction, and then circumscribing the South Korean proposal by eliminating the right to prosecute of the state of nationality of the victim or of the state that happened to have the accused in custody. Further concessions were offered on the definition of crimes that the World Court could investigate by excluding aggression or the use of nuclear weapons and land mines) and on matters of procedure by including several US constitutional provisions, such as the prohibition of double jeopardy, the presumption of innocence, or the right to

⁷⁸ Weschler, “United States and ICC,” 102-3.

⁷⁹ This point was hammered in even more forcefully by John Bolton, later Under-Secretary of State and UN Ambassador under George W. Bush. Bolton argued that the most worrying consequence of the Rome Statute was that the ICC might prosecute American policy-makers for defending America’s national interests. John Bolton, “The Risks and Weaknesses of the International Criminal Court from America’s Perspective,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 64 (Winter 2001): 167-80; John Bolton, “Courting Danger: What’s Wrong with the International Criminal Court,” *National Interest* 54 (Winter 1998): 60-72; David Frum, “The International Criminal Court Must Die,” *Weekly Standard*, August 10, 1999, 27.

avoid self-incrimination.⁸⁰ Cherif Bassiouni, the chairman of the drafting committee summed up the mood of the conference participants: “most delegations had bent over backward to accommodate the United States...When the delegations began to grapple with such issues as the ICC’s jurisdiction and the independent role of the Prosecutor, the US delegation, which had previously secured broad concessions on many points, adopted an unyielding position. Many delegations were dismayed by this display of diplomatic inflexibility.”⁸¹ Consequently, it was America’s insistence on being awarded more prestige than other states that caused its rejection of the ICC. Besides, the US did not abandon the goal of obtaining eventual complete immunity for its armed forces. The Statute of Rome allows the US to obtain bilateral insurances that other states will not prosecute American troops stationed on their territory: the so-called status-of-forces agreement. In fact, in the aftermath of the signing of the statute of Rome, the US focused on wrestling precisely such “bilateral immunity agreements.” By 2006, one hundred governments had signed BIAs, with the clear understanding under the American Servicemen Protection Act of 2002 that any state that did not sign would be denied both military and economic assistance from the US.⁸²

A similar motivation can be found at work in the case of the ABM. In effect, the avowed rationale for building NMD in the first place was to guard America against the possibility of a missile launch by a rogue state.⁸³ The danger was considered so urgent

⁸⁰ Kirsch and Holmes, “Rome Conference,” 2-12; Weschler, “United States and ICC,” 98-110; Mathew Barrett, “Ratify or Reject: Examining the United States’ Opposition to the International Criminal Court,” *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 28 (Fall 1999): 83-110.

⁸¹ Bassiouni, “Negotiating the Treaty of Rome,” 457; Weschler, “United States and ICC,” 105.

⁸² Wedgewood, “Fiddling in Rome,” 22; Benjamin Schiff, *Building the International Criminal Court* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 172-9. However, the president has the right to waver annually such requirements, and NATO and major non-NATO allies are exempt. Most of the EU refused to sign.

⁸³ The Clinton Administration accepted the need for NMD in the wake of the conclusions of the Rumsfeld Commission in July 1998 that rogue states could build an ICBM much sooner than the intelligence

that the US began to press for a modification of the ABM without confirmation that the NMD technology would even work.⁸⁴ Yet, for a rogue state to contemplate attacking the US with nuclear weapons would have been the equivalent of suicide considering the size of America's own atomic arsenal. Originally, the argument vented by NMD supporters was that unlike the leaders of the Soviet Union, who were interested in their own survival and could be counted on to show self-interested restraint, dictators such as Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il were so irrational and unpredictable they could have decided to attack the US out of malevolence or revenge, regardless of the cost to their own state. Nevertheless, the justification for deploying NMD eventually embraced by the Clinton administration was quite different: it did not consist of irrationality, but rather in the limits the development of ICBM by rogue states would have put on America's ability to successfully intervene against their interests.⁸⁵

NMD was meant to safeguard foremost America's imperial capacity to impose its will on other states by deploying forces with minimal notice anywhere in the world. This view was supported by the two officials most familiar with NMD: Walter Slocombe, Under-secretary of Defense for Policy, and John Holum, the State Department's Senior Advisor on Arms Control. The goal, argued Slocombe, was "to render less credible any

community thought possible (5 years instead of 15) and the launch by North Korea on August 31, 1998 of the Taepodong I missile, the first ever three stage missile launched by a Third World state.

⁸⁴ A host of critics contested NMD on technical grounds, either raising doubts that the concept of "hitting a bullet with a bullet" was achievable, particularly in the midcourse phase in outer space, or arguing that interceptors could have been easily countered by the deployment of countermeasures such as decoys. Andrew Sessler et al., *Countermeasures: A Technical Evaluation of the Operational Effectiveness of the Planned US National Missile Defense System* (Cambridge: MIT Security Studies Program, 2000); Richard Garwin, "A Defense That Will Not Defend," *Washington Quarterly* 23 (Summer 2000):109-26; George Lewis, Lisbeth Gronlund, and David Wright, "National Missile Defense: An Indefensible System," *Foreign Policy* 117 (Winter 1999): 120-39. Also see, Lindsay and O'Hanlon, *Defending America*, chaps.2, 4.

⁸⁵ Most people in the Clinton cabinet with the exception of Cohen were NMD skeptics, who turned into converts after the North Korean launch. James Steinberg, the deputy secretary of defense, summed up the collective viewpoint: the development of ICBMs and WMD by a rogue state "might have made us more cautious and less likely to take on challenges." Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 92.

possible attempts by a rogue state adversary to use ballistic missiles armed with weapons of mass destruction to coerce the United States into holding back from supporting a friend or ally the rogue state threatens with attack.” Consequently, due to NMD, the threat “would be not only fated but futile.” Obviously, NMD would not have protected America’s empire, but with its own territory immune against missile threats, the US could have intervened to protect it from any aggressive designs by rogue states. In this sense, NMD would “reduce the chance that aggressors would miscalculate and use their missiles to threaten strikes at the United States from preventing us to meet our commitments.”⁸⁶ Holum was equally explicit, wondering: “what the public opinion balance sheet would have been like if Saddam or Milosevic could have threatened to use WMD-armed missiles against the United States if we intervened?” To prevent such risk, said Holum, “we have come to the view that such states [rogues] seek missiles and WMD programs primarily as weapons of coercive diplomacy, to complicate US decisionmaking or limit our freedom to act in a crisis.”⁸⁷ As a result, the key role of NMD was “enhancing the credibility of the US global security commitments to our allies and friends”— the measure was meant to protect America’s status as an empire. As Lindsay and O’Hanlon put it: “national missile defense, then, could help the United States remain a global superpower.”⁸⁸

Yet in so doing, the US was arrogating to itself prerogatives in excess of those enjoyed by other great powers such as Russia and China, who not only remained

⁸⁶ Ibid., 163-4; Walter Slocombe, “The Administration’s Approach,” *Washington Quarterly* 23 (Summer 2000): 79-85; Walter Slocombe, “Remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies,” November 5, 1999 at www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=550.

⁸⁷ John Holum, “Presentation at the Conference on International Reactions to US National and Theater Missile Defense Deployments,” Stanford University, March 3, 2000 at www.fas.org/nuke/control/abmt/news/030300holum.htm.

⁸⁸ Lindsay and O’Hanlon, *Defending America*, 18-9, 71-2.

vulnerable to rogue states, but, who, moreover, would have been left at a disadvantage compared to America. Nevertheless, the US might have allayed these apprehensions particularly in the case of Russia, by the commitment to slash the US nuclear arsenal below the levels agreed upon by the START II Treaty.⁸⁹ In its feeble economic condition under Yeltsin with its GDP falling to a mere third of that of the Soviet Union in 1989, Russia could not afford to replace obsolete nukes. As a result, the number of viable Russian warheads had dwindled from the 3,000-3,500 level permissible under START II to about 1,000- 1,500. An American reduction would have therefore managed to re-balance the scales.⁹⁰ But the US adamantly refused to offer Russia concessions on this point even for the purpose of selling NMD. Instead of parity, America aimed for superiority (even though the US still did not enjoy first strike capability.) As to Russia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pronounced themselves against any reduction in America's nuclear forces both in May and in August 2000. In a meeting of the principal decision-makers in August 1999 both Albright and Talbott, advocated in the spirit of the indispensable nation doctrine a so-called "table and stick" strategy in negotiations with the Kremlin: meaning placing the American position on the table and then sticking to it.⁹¹ The US would state its viewpoint and then make Russia agree to it, pointing out that it had no other option. This view persisted under the Bush administration and meant the

⁸⁹ In regards to China, the US decided that is "has never been US policy to acknowledge or grant the Chinese the survivability of their deterrent" and that, as a result the Chinese "are in effect a third party-beneficiary of the ABM Treaty, but we [the US] have no obligations to them." Consequently, the US engaged in talks but did not consult China on the revision of the ABM treaty. Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 174-6.

⁹⁰ Lindsay and O'Hanlon, *Defending America*, 156-8. Also in this respect, the START III treaty concluded between Putin and George W. Bush cannot be seen as compensation for the abrogation of the ABM treaty, because under the treaty both sides, not just the American one, pledge to reduce their forces to 1,700-2,200 levels. Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 322-3.

⁹¹ Talbott was the lonely voice to lobby for a START III reduction to approximately 1,000-1,500 nuclear weapons each, but his position though was never accepted. Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 170-1. The same argument was made by Daalder and Goldgeier, "Deploying NMD"; Lindsay and O'Hanlon, *Defending America*.

Russians were presented with NMD as a *fait accompli*.⁹² Not only was the existing imbalance between the two sides' arsenals allowed to persist, but the US insisted being granted dispensation to develop an open-ended NMD option, which would have made its superiority in nukes and status even more pronounced.⁹³

However, the clearest connection between status inconsistency and unilateralism can be seen in the case of America's use of force without Security Council endorsement. When it came to military action, the chief issue that prompted America to take matters in its own hands was the collapse of multilateral efforts over maintaining sanctions over Iraq. It is highly telling in this respect that Albright's emphatic statement of the indispensable nation was associated with this precise context. Sanctions against Iraq had come into place in the wake of the Gulf War through the draconian resolution 687, which demanded not only that Iraq recognize Kuwaiti sovereignty and borders, return all property seized from the emirate, compensate all injured parties, and forswear support for terrorism, but also that Iraq destroy its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs including their components, delivery systems, production facilities and production data and accept long time monitoring so as not to reconstitute them. Nonetheless, sanctions were not meant to stay in perpetuity—at the time they were regarded to be a temporary measure, which could have been accomplished in less than two years. However, the success of Saddam in staying in power cemented sanctions in place as the best available American means of keeping the Iraqi dictator “in a box.”⁹⁴

⁹² Graham, *Hit to Kill*, 143-7.

⁹³ Russia indeed understood that its status as a great power was the main matter at stake. Lindsay and O'Hanlon, *Defending America*, 120-1; Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 358-61.

⁹⁴ Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 178; Sarah Graham Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 57. In so doing, however, the US expected that Saddam's days in power were numbered following the catastrophic defeat in Kuwait. George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World*

This situation soon led to a duality of views in the Security Council as to the appropriate function of sanctions. For Paris, Russia, and China, the main reason for keeping in place sanctions against Iraq was to ensure the destruction of Iraq's WMD. Once this task had been ascertained by UN inspectors, sanctions could be lifted based on paragraph 22 of resolution 687.⁹⁵ In effect, Russia expressed the view that "as soon as the chairman of UNSCOM reports favorably, then paragraph 22 is engaged, allowing oil sales without limits."⁹⁶ Conversely, for the US and Britain, on the basis of paragraph 21 of the resolution, the destruction of Iraq's arsenal was only one of the conditions to be satisfied in order for the embargo to end. The other requirements of resolution 687 would have had to be satisfied as well, and Baghdad might have had to fulfill additional conditions.⁹⁷ This means that the implementation of "all relevant resolutions" was not in Washington's view sufficient for lifting sanctions. The "policies and practices" of Iraq,

Transformed (New York: Knopf, 1998); Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

⁹⁵ The paragraph reads: "upon Council agreement that Iraq has completed all actions contemplated in paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 above [all of them relating to weapons], the prohibitions against the import of commodities and products originating in Iraq and the prohibitions against financial transactions [...] shall have no further force or effect."

⁹⁶ The position of France, Russia and China is explainable by their having reconciled themselves to the fact that Saddam was the authority one had to deal with when interacting with Iraq. Thus, Russia, France and China were eager to resume economic contacts with Baghdad. Russia was reported to have signed a deal over Iraq's largest oil field at West Qurna, while China had a similar arrangement over the third largest Iraqi oilfield at Ahdab, and France had secured equally lucrative deals for the French companies Total and Elf Aquitaine. In total, no fewer than 60 oil companies had signed deals with Iraq to come into effect upon the lifting of sanctions. Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 60-1; "Stars of the Oil Industry," *International Herald Tribune*, October 1, 1997. Of course, oil was not the only reason for the three countries to resist the US. Status was itself important, especially for Russia and France.

⁹⁷ Paragraph 21 states that: "the Council shall review the provisions of paragraph 20 [referring to the exemption of medicine and foodstuffs from the embargo] above every sixty days in light of the policies and practices of the Government of Iraq, including the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the Security Council, for the purpose of determining whether to reduce or lift the prohibitions referred to therein." Also see Chapter Seven on America's refusal to consider lifting sanctions as long as Saddam was in power.

whatever form these might have taken, were of equal importance in any such decision and could justify maintaining the embargo for as long Saddam remained in power.⁹⁸

The result was a pitched battle over maintaining versus lifting the sanctions, itself hinging upon the results of weapon inspections in Iraq and Saddam's compliance.⁹⁹ By 1995, it was already clear that the US was on the defensive, having staked its prestige on preserving sanctions. After all, the US might not have been able to get rid of Saddam after the Gulf War, but at least it could claim that as long as he was bottled up by sanctions, the Iraqi dictator could no longer mount any bid for regional dominance—so this could be portrayed as political success.¹⁰⁰ But in 1994, UNSCOM announced the inspections were nearing their end, and in March 1995, Russia, France, and China had circulated a draft resolution for lifting the sanctions. By July, UNSCOM seemed set to declare an end to sanctions.¹⁰¹ It took the defection to Jordan of Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law and the person in charge of WMD programs, for Iraq to admit having "found" half a million pages referring to missiles, chemical, and biological weapons—and consequently for sanctions to hang on by a thread.¹⁰² Hence, the problem once Saddam engaged in undermining inspections, was that if the US did not react Iraq would have managed to secure eventually a positive assessment enabling sanctions to be

⁹⁸ Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 58-60, 78-9; Phoebe Marr, "Symposium on Dual Containment," *Middle East Policy* 3, 1, (1994): 1-26.

⁹⁹ Of course, even if UNSCOM had given Iraq a clean bill on disarmament, the US could have still kept sanctions in place because of its veto, but the legitimacy of sanctions would have been undermined since there was no consensus that their goal was to overthrow Saddam, and America would have suffered a commensurate loss of prestige.

¹⁰⁰ The continued presence in power of Saddam was an irritant not only to the neoconservatives as seen in Chapter Seven, but also to the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Clinton. Moreover, Saddam himself presented his ability to hang on to power as an Iraqi victory. Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Cockburn and Cockburn, *Out of the Ashes*.

¹⁰¹ Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, 80.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 84-5. The documents were disclosed preventively by Iraq to minimize the impact of the defection. However, in his debriefing Kamel argued that Iraq has destroyed its WMD. John Prados, *Hoodwinked: The Documents That Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War* (New York: New Press, 2004), 84-9.

lifted. This disturbing picture of American failure would have been completed by America being exposed as impotent and incompetent in dealing with challenges to international order. The danger of Saddam's salami tactics for America's prestige was well understood. Clinton explicitly stressed it in a speech at the Pentagon: "What if he fails to comply and we fail to act or we take some ambiguous third route...Well, he will conclude that the international community has lost its will...If we fail to respond today, Saddam and all those who would follow in his footsteps will be emboldened tomorrow by the knowledge that they can act with impunity."¹⁰³

Yet, the US could not go ahead and punish Saddam as long as he was employing skillfully a strategy of defying the US and then hiding behind his French, Russian, and Chinese protectors. To this extent, the Security Council assent had become a major impediment to the successful exercise of American leadership. Cunning foes understood well that by playing the US and its partners against each other, they could escape American military action. By December 1998, the pressure to act was becoming unbearable. In less than a year the US had faced four showdowns with Iraq, and Baghdad had managed to beat back inspections step by step on each occasion—in December 1998 UNSCOM announced that the whole process could have been wrapped up in as little as six weeks.¹⁰⁴ The US also worried that its failure to attack Iraq was leading Saddam to believe America was unwilling to use force to maintain the sanctions regime. Particularly damaging was the November crisis, when the order of bombing had already been given twice on successive days to CENTCOM and had to be countermanded hastily on both

¹⁰³Text of Clinton Statement on Iraq, February 17, 1998," accessible at <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/02/18/iraq.political.analysis>. Also see Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between Wars*, 144-5; James Bennett, "Clinton Describes Goals for a Strike on Iraqi Arsenal," *New York Times*, February 18, 1998.

¹⁰⁴ Butler, *Saddam Defiant*, 212, 225.

occasions with the planes already in the air due to Franco-Russian brokered deals.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Saddam's successful defiance seemed to have inspired imitators elsewhere: just as the Iraq crises were unfolding, Milosevic was following a similar pattern of non-compliance followed by a last-minute retreat in the context of Kosovo, as seen in Chapter Five. Once again, Russia was providing Milosevic with diplomatic cover: when in October 1998, the US had threatened Yugoslavia, Yeltsin swiftly sent his foreign and defense ministers to Belgrade where they promptly announced having concluded a deal with Milosevic. At the same time, Yeltsin personally warned Clinton that the use of force against Yugoslavia was "inadmissible and forbidden."¹⁰⁶

Consequently, Iraq had turned out into an essential test of American leadership, since the failure of getting international consensus was seen as condemning the US to political paralysis. As Cohen put it to Clinton: "a failure to act now will eradicate our credibility. Our word is at stake. If we don't carry it out, we're going to be tested in the future."¹⁰⁷ The very same argument was employed by Clinton—Iraq had to be attacked in order to safeguard the inspections regime; so as to show that the international community led by the US had not lost its will; and because "if we turn our back on his defiance, the credibility of US power as a check against Saddam will be destroyed."¹⁰⁸

The only foreseeable way out of the impasse was for the US to assume its role as the indispensable nation. As Berger put it, "we decided that we would act with the British, ourselves, with the support of many other countries, but not necessarily with their

¹⁰⁵ Cordesman, *Iraq and the War of Sanctions*, 225-42; Woodward, *Shadow*, 492.

¹⁰⁶ To make the message even more emphatic, Yeltsin barely let Clinton speak during their phone conversation and, after having delivered the warning, hung up on the American president. Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 249-50.

¹⁰⁷ Woodward, *Shadow*, 493-4.

¹⁰⁸ "We Are Delivering a Powerful Message to Saddam," *New York Times*, December 17, 1998.

participation.”¹⁰⁹ In the case of Operation Desert Fox, the US had to take on Saddam with a restricted party compared to the grand coalition of 1991—only Great Britain contributed planes. America still received diplomatic support from a dozen other countries, including Germany, Netherlands, Australia, Japan, Canada, and Saudi Arabia. However, the conclusion that was extracted from Operation Desert Fox by the US was that unilateralism was the policy of the day. For the sake of sanctions the US had killed off the process of weapon inspections, because there was little chance that Russia, France, and China were going to accept a return of UNSCOM. Furthermore, it was clear to US decision-makers that future American operations would involve fewer states and avoid going through the Security Council.

The subsequent bombing of Yugoslavia was a textbook example of the new approach: the US organized a posse to go after Milosevic. Using NATO was far more manageable than waiting in a limbo for Russian or Chinese consent, because, despite the large degree of autonomy of Western Europe, ultimately NATO stood for the European arm of the American Empire. The US dispatched the bulk of the forces employed against Yugoslavia (740 aircraft compared to 300 allied planes), did most of the fighting, and had military command over the operation. Even though the US had to secure the nominal acceptance of other NATO members for each Yugoslav target to be hit (a process that did not always run smoothly), it was America that chose the targets in the first place.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, as Daalder and O’Hanlon argue, one of the chief lessons of the campaign against Milosevic was that NATO had worked well as a policy instrument in solving

¹⁰⁹ Steven Erlanger, “US Decision to Act Fist, and then Search for Support, Angers Some Allies,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1998.

¹¹⁰ Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002); Ivo Daalder and Michael O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000),

Kosovo, but NATO could work effectively only if the US took the lead. The UN authorization, while highly desirable, was no longer seen as an absolute requirement.¹¹¹

At the same time Russia was faced with a *fait accompli* so emphatic that the US only let the Kremlin know of the start of the bombing campaign at the very last minute, catching Prime-Minister Yevgeny Primakov on a flight to Washington, and forcing him to turn the plane around. This was an intentional decision by American decision-makers, so as to avoid Russia warning Milosevic or further interfering diplomatically so as to delay the attack. In the words of Deputy National Security Advisor James Steinberg: “for those of us who wanted to do something, the worst outcome would be not to do something because Russia didn’t want us to do it. It would have been bad for us, bad for the Balkans, and bad for Russia. It would have been catastrophic.”¹¹² The US further resisted Russia’s attempt to rekindle the debate by introducing a draft resolution calling for the bombing to stop and diplomacy to resume, the US nipped the initiative in the bud—the Russian resolution was voted down 12 to 3, with only China and Namibia supporting the Kremlin.¹¹³

Nevertheless, even the formula of a NATO posse proved too restrictive. War by coalition still implied agreement among the NATO members not only on using force, but also on the objectives to be accomplished and tactics to be employed. In the case of Kosovo, the US often found out that other countries (principally France) opposed its choices by advocating a pause in the bombing campaign, by arguing for bombing only

¹¹¹ Ibid., 218-23.

¹¹² Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 251.

¹¹³ However, the UN was brought back at the end of the crisis as part of the accord between NATO and Yugoslavia. Thus, the troops that were to enter and control Kosovo were going to be designated as an “international security force” “under United Nations auspices,” and therefore included Russian units. But this attempt at compromise could not mask that the UN had emerged as one of the greatest losers of the Kosovo confrontation, being supplanted by NATO and the G8. *Ahtisaari-Chernomyrdin-Milosevic Agreement*, June 2, 1999 in Daalder and O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly*, 265-7; Heinbecker, “Kosovo,” 545-8.

Kosovo, and in particular by vetoing attacks against certain targets, such as bridges and communication centers. Moreover, during the war, the US military had complained that compared to its state-of-the-art air force, the allied aircraft were technologically obsolete and that NATO members should have spent more to bring up their capabilities up to par.¹¹⁴ This is why when NATO for the first time in its fifty two years history invoked Article 5 in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks the American response was lukewarm. The same day, Under-Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated that “if we need collective action we will ask for it. We don’t anticipate that at the moment.”¹¹⁵ America declined not only NATO’s offer of support, but also a more specific French offer to contribute troops to Afghanistan, specifically stating that it was not interested in waging another war by committee. (The French Ambassador to Washington François Bourgeon de L’Estang referred to this as a fit of the “Kosovo syndrome.”) Instead of paying attention to its European allies, the US took care to recruit in its posse only the countries logistically relevant to the operation against Afghanistan. Accordingly, before launching the attack against the Taliban, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld could be found not on his way to Paris or Bonn, but on a whirlwind tour in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan.¹¹⁶

Why then did the US go back to the UN in September 2002? The Bush administration had already made up its mind to invade and was fundamentally skeptic of the UN as a useful instrument. Nevertheless it had been beseeched to go back to the UN

¹¹⁴William Drozdiak, “War Showed US-Ally Inequality; Arms Gap May Alter Role of NATO States,” *Washington Post*, June 28, 1999; Craig Whitney, “US and NATO Allies Divided over Defense Needs,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1999.

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Daley, “NATO Says It Has Proof against Bin Laden’s Group: Alliance Says It Will Fight If Asked,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2001. Also see Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon& Schuster, 2002), 179-82.

¹¹⁶ R. W. Apple, “Piece-by-Piece Coalition: Rumsfeld Visits Region with Delicate Job of Rallying Countries to Anti-terrorism Cause,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2001.

both by Secretary of State Colin Powell and by its domestic critics, such as Baker and Scowcroft who invoked the success of the Gulf War grand coalition.¹¹⁷ Second, and more importantly, seeking a UN resolution was an adamant request on the part of Tony Blair, the prime minister of Britain, whose government was subjected to even stronger domestic pressure to justify its support for regime-change in Baghdad. The vote of the UN Security Council, Blair argued privately, would have made regime-change palatable to the objectors in his own Labour Party.¹¹⁸ At the end of July 2002, Blair sent his foreign policy advisor David Manning to the US with a private letter and a verbal message to Bush, suggesting that Britain would not be able to support the US in the absence of a UN resolution. This was followed by a visit from Blair in early September to plead the case in person. Bush agreed to consult the UN, but only under the condition that the organization could not stop a war, or delay it indefinitely.¹¹⁹

The US was not keen either on seeking a second resolution after the passing of resolution 1441, since its invasion effort was going to proceed regardless—as evidenced by the deployment of 140,000 troops in the Middle East—and because of the signals from France, which warned against such a diplomatic step.¹²⁰ Throughout January 2003, the US claimed that no second resolution was needed. But Bush decided to overrun in this instance Cheney and Rumsfeld, due to the desperate personal pleas of Blair in

¹¹⁷ Brent Scowcroft, “Don’t Attack Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2002; James Baker, “The Right Way to Change a Regime,” *New York Times*, August 25, 2002.

¹¹⁸ See “Rycroft Memo: Minutes of British Cabinet Meeting on the Subject of Iraq, 23 July, 2002,” *London Sunday Times*, 01 May, 2005.

¹¹⁹ John Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars* (London: Free Press, 2004), 190-200; Karen De Young, “For Powell a Long Path to Victory,” *Washington Post*, November 10, 2002.

¹²⁰ The warning came from the French ambassador to the UN Jean-David Levitte to Assistant National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley on February 21, 2002. Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 148-50. France wanted a “gentleman’s agreement” in which the US would not introduce a resolution, but would not create a crisis over the US use of force. The US rejected the offer.

January and February.¹²¹ Yet the US did not resort, by contrast to Britain, to a desperate last-ditch diplomatic effort to change minds and sway votes in the Security Council. Instead, the US preferred to engage in a war of words against Paris, and quietly elicit pledges of loyalty from other European countries to make it appear that in fact it was France and Germany that were isolated.¹²² The US decided to attack Iraq on schedule even though both the Security Council and the weapon inspectors of UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring and Verification Commission—the successor of UNSCOM) and of the IAEA demanded more time for inspections to determine whether Iraq had disarmed or not. When the US presented Saddam Hussein with an ultimatum on March 17, 2003 inspections were still occurring inside Iraq.¹²³

From 1998 onwards, America was pushed by status inconsistency towards expanding its imperial influence in terms of scope by abandoning those institutional frameworks that obstinately rejected its demands. More such expansion, this time in terms of imperial domain, was in store for the US, as the indispensable nation doctrine came to be superseded by a neoconservative discourse on behalf of the pursuit of empire and American greatness. This ultimately led to the invasion of Iraq.

¹²¹ Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 259-62, 274-5.

¹²² These pledges took the form of the “letter of eight” of January 30 signed by Britain, Portugal, Denmark, Spain, Italy and the Visegrad countries and of the “Vilnius ten letter” signed by the ten East European and Baltic states recently admitted into NATO. Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 128-36.

¹²³ Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 7-12, 249-53.

Chapter Seven

America Supreme: The Invasion of Iraq

The invasion of Iraq represents the apex of America's imperial expansion driven by status inconsistency, since in case of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the US did not just to avoid appearing as a weak leader—the image it wanted to convey to the rest of the world was one of irresistible strength. This difference of approach also marked, as Chapter Six has suggested, the gap between the contrasting visions of Clinton and George W. Bush.¹ While both presidencies acknowledged the importance of prestige for the American empire, they disagreed about how to pursue it.

Even more than other conflicts, Iraq represents the “Rashomon of wars.”² Weapons of mass destruction (WMD), democracy, and oil all claim to account for the decision to topple Saddam.³ These factors can in turn be tied to the three schools of thought of structuralism exceptionalism, and revisionism. For structuralism, Iraq was targeted because of the perception that its pursuit of WMD endangered America's security. For exceptionalism, regime change was caused by America's missionary impulse on behalf of democracy in the Gulf. For revisionism, the overthrow of Saddam was meant to secure Iraq's oil reserves and the Open Door.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all references to Bush refer to the George W. Bush presidency.

² George Packer, *Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 46.

³ On the causes of the invasion see Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), chap. 18; Michael Klare, “Deciphering the Bush Administration's Motives,” in Micah Sifry and Christopher Cef, eds., *The Iraq War Reader: History Documents, Opinions* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2003), 392-402; Hakan Tunç, “What Was It All About After All? The Causes of the Iraq War,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 26 (August 2005): 335-55. For an interpretation of Iraq in terms of US prestige see Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 459-80

Weapons of Mass Destruction, Democracy, and Oil

The argument that the regime of Saddam had to be toppled in order to end Iraq's WMD programs was related to ensuring the physical security of the US and of its empire.⁴ Bush summed up this rationale in Cincinnati in October 2002: "the Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons and diseases and gases and atomic weapons."⁵ This theme resurfaced in the State of Union Address of January 2003: "the gravest danger facing America and the world is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons."⁶

Iraq stood accused of being in actual possession of WMD (chemical and biological,) of reconstituting its nuclear program, and of seeking delivery systems consisting of long range missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), forbidden by UN resolutions.⁷ Bush's war address of March 2003 thus states: "intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised."⁸ What was worse, if not stopped, Iraq allegedly could have obtained an atomic bomb as soon as one year. To quote Vice President Cheney: Iraq posed a "mortal threat" to the US since "Saddam had resumed his

⁴ The security case for invading Iraq is best made by Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), chaps. 5, 7, 11.

⁵ George W. Bush, "Address on Iraq," October 7, 2002 at <http://www.archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/10/07/bush.transcript/>. This was the key speech on Iraq preceding the debate in Congress on whether to authorize military action against Baghdad and was as a consequence the most elaborate undergoing no less than twenty nine drafts. John Prados, *Hoodwinked: The Documents That Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War* (New York: New Press, 2004), 122-7.

⁶ George W. Bush, "State of the Union Address," January 30, 2003 at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/01/28/sotu.transcript/>.

⁷ The term "weapons of mass destruction" is actually a misnomer since it is a blanket terms for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, which are quite different in their destructive capability and capacity for delivery. Joseph Cirincione, Jessica Matthews, and George Perkovitch, *WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 52-4.

⁸ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on War with Iraq," March 17, 2003 at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/17/sprj.irq.bush.transcript/>.

efforts to acquire nuclear weapons... Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.”⁹ Bush went a step further in Cincinnati: “if the Iraqi regime is able to produce, buy, or steal an amount of highly enriched uranium a little larger than a single softball, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year.”¹⁰ This extensive unconventional arsenal was in turn worrisome because of Saddam’s record of employing chemical weapons against Kurds and Iran, of attacking his neighbors, and of entertaining ties to terrorist groups. In Bush’s words, “this regime has already used weapons of mass destruction against Iraq’s neighbors and against Iraq’s people. The regime has a history of reckless aggression in the Middle East. It has a deep hatred of America and our friends. And it has aided, trained and harbored terrorists, including operatives of Al Qaeda.”¹¹ Considering the impact of the September 11 attacks, terrorists supplied with Iraqi-made WMD could have inflicted apocalyptic destruction on the US and its allies: “our greatest fear is that the terrorists will find a shortcut to their mad ambitions when an outlaw regime supplies them with the technologies to kill on a massive scale.”¹² For this reason, as Bush warned “facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”¹³

These were more than mere allegations. The US government claimed to be in possession of reliable intelligence that strongly supported each accusation. As Powell argued repeatedly in his presentation to the Security Council: “these are not assertions.

⁹ Dick Cheney, “Speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars,” August 26, 2002 at <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/08/26/cheney.iraq/>; Barton Gellman and Walter Pincus, “Depiction of Threat Outgrew, Supporting Evidence,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 2003.

¹⁰ Bush, “Address on Iraq”.

¹¹ Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

¹² George W. Bush, “Address to the UN General Assembly,” September 12, 2002, at <http://www.transcripts.cnn.com/2002/US/09/12/bush.transcript/>. Also see Bush, “Address to the Nation.”

¹³ Bush, “Address on Iraq.” The mushroom cloud metaphor had been employed before by Rice in a CNN interview in September.

These are facts corroborated by many sources, some of them sources of the intelligence services of other countries.” Furthermore, “we [the US] know” that Iraq represented a clear imminent threat.¹⁴ Wolfowitz put it more dramatically: “I don’t think we’ve ever had a war... in which the work of the intelligence community... [has] been as important as this one.”¹⁵ Consequently, the decision to invade was based on “fact,” “evidence,” “documented evidence,” which was “bulletproof” and left “no doubt” as to Saddam’s aggressive intentions towards the US.

Yet, “the facts” failed to be confirmed by discoveries of WMD in occupied Iraq. After six months of searches, the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), the organization in charge of the search for Iraq’s unconventional arsenal admitted that the bulk of the accusations against Iraq did not withstand scrutiny. In January 2004, after resigning, the ISG chief inspector David Kay declared that “my summary view, based on what I’ve seen is we’re very unlikely to find large stockpiles of such weapons. I don’t think they exist” and went on to testify before the Senate’s Intelligence and Armed Committee that “it turns out that we were all wrong, probably in my judgment.”¹⁶ How can this contradiction between alleged possession of WMD and their absence be addressed by structuralist interpretations stressing security as America’s overriding motivation in the invasion?

The structuralist view is not that there was a genuine threat coming from Iraq, but rather that the US decision-makers believed that there was one in spite of contradicting

¹⁴ Colin Powell, “Address to the UN Security Council,” February 5, 2003 at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.iqr.powell.transcript/>.

¹⁵ Maria Ryan, “Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Myth and Reality of US Intelligence and Policy-Making After 9/11,” in *Intelligence and National Security* 17, 4, (December 2002): 55-76, 55. Freedman also states that “the prominence of intelligence assessments in justifying a war against Iraq was really without precedence.” Lawrence Freedman, “War in Iraq: Selling the Threat,” *Survival* 46 (Summer 2004): 7-50, 8.

¹⁶ “Text of David Kay’s Unclassified Statement,” Thursday October 2, 2003, at <http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/dkay100203.html>; “Kay: No Evidence Iraq Stockpiled WMDs,” January 26, 2004 at <http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/01/25/sprj.nirq.kay/>.

evidence. Threat assessment is a subjective process in that an actor may feel imperiled and act to ensure its safety even though no concrete danger is in fact present. To this extent, the invasion of Iraq was prompted by misperception in the ranks of US decision-makers and intelligence officers alike.¹⁷ In the aftermath of the surprise attacks of September 11, the Bush administration was prone to exaggerate the likelihood of worst-case scenarios in which the US would be targeted again by terrorists or by rogue states.¹⁸ To quote Bush: “September the 11th obviously changed my thinking a lot about my responsibility as president. Because September the 11th made the security of the American people the priority... a sacred duty for the president.” In this context, “Saddam Hussein’s capacity to create harm, all his terrible features became much more threatening. Keeping Saddam in a box looked less and less feasible to me.”¹⁹ Furthermore, the US desire to avoid at all costs a repetition of September 11 is reconcilable with the well documented psychological tendency to minimize losses, even very improbable ones.²⁰ Consequently, the US decision-makers had an incentive to act early on to eliminate even a very remote threat from Iraq before it could materialize. For structuralists, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein has all the markings of a preventive war—caused not so much by a dramatic modification of the Iraqi despot’s capabilities as

¹⁷ On misperception see inter alia Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Jack Levy, “Misperception and the Causes of War,” *World Politics* 36 (October 1983): 76-99; Alexander George, ed., *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder: Westview, 1991).

¹⁸ Freedman, “War in Iraq,” 16-7.

¹⁹ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 27.

²⁰ Robert Alexander and Daniel Masters, “Prospecting for War: 9/11 and Selling the Iraq War,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 29 (December 2008): 434-52. On prospect theory, see Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk,” *Econometrica* 47 (March 1979): 263-91; Jack Levy, “Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (March 1997): 87-112.

by the perceived increase in his ability to coerce the US.²¹ In this respect, the possibility of Iraq acquiring nuclear weapons within a year was of particular concern. Specifically, Iraq stood accused of having acquired uranium ore from Niger and of importing aluminum tubes, which could be used for building rotors for a centrifuge to enrich uranium. “Saddam is determined to get his hands on a nuclear bomb,” warned Powell. “He is so determined that he has made repeated covert attempts to acquire high-specification aluminum tubes from 11 different countries. These tubes are controlled... precisely because they can be used as centrifuges for enriching uranium.”²² The Iraqi nuclear threat made swift military action imperative since the risk of atomic bombs being used by Baghdad or by its terrorist allies against the US could not be tolerated.²³

This consideration helps account for the apparent puzzle of why the US decided to mount an attack against a dangerous regime it believed armed with WMD.²⁴ Assuming that Iraq, while seeking nuclear weapons, was not yet ready to field them, an offensive to disarm it would have carried less risk of sustaining heavy casualties. This was one of the chief reasons why Iraq, still a non-nuclear state, constituted a more inviting target compared to alternative opponents such as North Korea, which was believed to already possess deployable nuclear weapons.²⁵ Moreover, the window of opportunity for action

²¹ The difference between prevention and preemption is that in preemption offensive action is undertaken to forestall an imminent attack by the other side, while in prevention the objective is to head off an adverse change in the balance of power between the two sides. Lawrence Freedman, “Prevention, Not Preemption,” in Alexander Lennon and Camille Eiss, eds., *Reshaping Rogue States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 37-49; Jack Levy, “Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War,” *World Politics* 40 (October 1987): 82-107. For the view that Iraq was foremost a preventive war see Jonathan Renshon, *Why Leaders Choose War? The Psychology of Prevention* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), chap. 6; Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 115-6, chaps. 3-4.

²² Powell, “Address to the UN Security Council.”

²³ Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), 27.

²⁴ Richard Betts, “Suicide from Fear of Death?” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/February 2003): 34-43.

²⁵ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 345-6; Bush, “Address on Iraq.” Two related considerations are that, unlike Iraq, North Korea did not have a

was closing rapidly: the sooner the attack got under way, the fewer the chances that Iraq could finalize its nuclear projects and gained a deterrent against the US. Essentially, from this point of view, invading Iraq was a race against the clock.

Evidence corroborating this view might be found in the Bush administration National Security Strategy, which affirms an American right to use force “preemptively” in case an opponent is on the brink of developing WMD and is known to sponsor terrorism.²⁶ As the document puts it: “as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed...History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act.” The National Security Strategy then goes on to argue that “the greater the threat, the greater the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, America will, if necessary, act preemptively.”²⁷ Hence, the emphasis is placed on the catastrophic consequences of a possible attack, rather than on the probability of an attack ever occurring.

Accordingly, structuralism argues that the decision-makers used the available intelligence selectively, a process known as “cherry picking.” The Bush cabinet showed signs of both cognitive consistency, by paying attention only to those reports which fit their pre-existing expectation of an Iraqi threat, and of cognitive dissonance by

record of dealings with terrorist networks, and that, while Baghdad was isolated, North Korea could rely on likely Chinese military support if invaded. Michael Gordon and Robert Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and the Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 64.

²⁶ Renshon, *Why Leaders Choose War*, 126-7.

²⁷ White House, “National Security Strategy of the United States,” September 17, 2002, preamble, 16, 13-7, at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/20/politics/20STEXT_FULL.html. This view had been earlier outlined by Bush: “we cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best... If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.” George W. Bush, “West Point Address,” June 3, 2002, at <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0206/01/cst.03.html>. Also see the analysis of the NSS in Jervis, *American Foreign Policy*, chap.4.

dismissing information that raised doubts on their assessment.²⁸ To this extent, misperception might have a genuine case in regards to at least some of the accusations, especially those regarding Iraq's alleged chemical and biological weapons programs, long range missiles and UAV, and even the connections to Al Qaeda.²⁹ The US decision-makers seem to have been guilty of over fondness for worst case scenarios by exhibiting both tendencies of exaggeration and omission consistent with misperception.³⁰ For instance, intelligence assumed that based on the acknowledged precursors for anthrax, Iraq *could have* built a larger quantity than the one found in its declarations—25,000 versus 8,500 liters. In Cincinnati, Bush went further by stating that “the regime [of Saddam] was forced to admit that it had produced more than 30,000 liters of anthrax... The inspectors, however, concluded that Iraq had likely produced two or four times that amount.”³¹ In the speech, not only did the possibility turn into certainty, but also the amount of anthrax produced was heavily inflated. (In later speeches, the figures announced reverted to the original 25,000 estimate.) Conversely, the US glossed over intelligence obtained from the captured Al Qaeda leaders Abu Zubaydah and Ibn Al

²⁸ On cherry picking see Paul Pillar, “Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March/April 2006): 15-27; Greg Thielmann interview on PBS Frontline, “Iraq, Truth, War, and Consequences,” October 9, 2003 at <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/truth/interviews/thielmann.html>. On cognitive consistency and dissonance see Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, chaps. 4 and 11.

²⁹ The connection between Al Qaeda and Saddam remains however an ambiguous case for misperception due to the allegation of a meeting between Mohammed Atta, the leader of the hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center, and an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague in between April 8 and April 11, 2001. This alleged meeting—contradicted by evidence placing Atta the same time space in Virginia and Florida where he used his credit card—was generally ruled out both by intelligence and by US decision-makers, and therefore was excluded from most addresses. The media publicized that the meeting had not taken place in October 2002. Yet, though the information had been proven false, the Prague meeting was however mentioned frequently by Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, and Cheney from February 2002 to as late as September 14, 2003. Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 248-9, 338-9; Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

³⁰ Jervis, *American Foreign Policy*, 117-8.

³¹ Bush, “Address on Iraq.”

Shaykh Al-Libi in September 2002, who revealed that Bin Laden formally had ruled out the possibility of a strategic alliance with Baghdad aimed at fighting the US.³²

Omission and exaggeration often went hand in hand as was the case of the unclassified October 2002 NIE (National Intelligence Estimate), deemed the most authoritative product of the US intelligence community, compiled out of the estimates of the fifteen US intelligence agencies. The October section of the NIE that was made public was followed by an even more condensed version, known as the CIA White Paper. It was only when the public gained access to the full version of the NIE section in July 2003 that the minute changes from one document to the other became clear. First, only the original version of the NIE had included the instances in which individual agencies had qualified or disagreed with the NIE's conclusions, since these objections were consigned to footnotes and therefore were not included in the documents made public in October. Second, the declassified July version showed more than forty omissions from the original text, fifteen of them related to the use of "probably." Hence a phrase that read in the declassified original NIE "*we assess that Baghdad has begun renewed production of mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX*" appeared as "*Baghdad has begun renewed production of mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX*" in the unclassified October version and in the CIA White Paper.³³ What is more, the July NIE was itself inflating an earlier CIA

³² "Captives Deny Al Qaeda Worked with Baghdad," *New York Times*, June 9, 2003; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 242-3. The allegation of ties between Saddam and Al Qaeda was contradicted by the fact that the two sides perceived each other as enemies and were separated by opposed principles, Baathist secularism versus religious fundamentalism respectively. Daniel Benjamin, "Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda Are Not Allies," *New York Times*, September 30, 2002; Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), 264; Freedman, "War on Iraq," 18-21.

³³ Cirincione et al., *WMD in Iraq*, 16-7; National Intelligence Estimate, "Key Judgments," October 2002, unclassified version at www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/iraq-wmd-nie.pdf; National Intelligence Estimate, "Key Judgments," October 2002, declassified version at www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html; Central Intelligence Agency, "White Paper on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs," reproduced in Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 51-76.

claim in April 2002 that read that “*Iraq continues to build and expand an infrastructure capable of producing WMD.*”³⁴ The statement eventually translated in the Cincinnati speech as “*we know* that the regime had produced thousands of tons of chemical agents including mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, and VX nerve gas” (emphasis added)³⁵

Furthermore, the insistence that the intelligence community deliver evidence justifying the use of force against Saddam contributed to the politicization of the intelligence assessment process—as intelligence officers were encouraged to place priority on more alarmist analyses of Iraqi weapon programs.³⁶ This led to a vicious circle, where decision-makers issued a high demand for intelligence documenting a threat from Iraq, which in turn generated material that only contributed to further confirming the doubts they had entertained in the first place.³⁷ Finally, another point supporting misperception is the obstinate conviction of US decision-makers that WMD would end up being found in Iraq, a belief that held firm despite the absence of confirming proof even after Kay’s resignation.³⁸

However, if the Bush cabinet had been animated by an authentic fear of an Iraqi attack, then the decision for war should have been taken in the aftermath of the October

³⁴ Ibid., 78-9.

³⁵ Bush, “Address on Iraq.”

³⁶ This was achieved not only by repeated visits by Cheney at the CIA headquarters to discuss Iraq (a highly unusual procedure), but also by the creation by Rumsfeld in the fall of 2002 of his own intelligence unit to evaluate Iraqi intelligence. This became known as the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans, headed by neocons Abraham Shulsky and William Luti, and was completely separate from the Pentagon’s own intelligence service, the DIA. Seymour Hersh, “Selective Intelligence,” *New Yorker*, May 12, 2003.

³⁷ For politicization see Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 134; Pillar, “Intelligence, Policy, and War”; for the analysis see Robert Jervis, “Reports, Politics and Intelligence Failures: The Case of Iraq,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29 (February 2006): 3-52; Richard Immerman, “Intelligence and Strategy: Historicizing Psychology, Politics and Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 32 (January 2008): 1-23; Chaim Kaufmann, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas,” *International Security* 29 (2004): 1-48.

³⁸ At first the discovery of what appeared to be two mobile biological weapons labs led Bush to declare that “We have found the weapons of mass destruction.” This statement was later rectified. Frank Rich, *The Greatest Story Ever Sold: The Decline and Fall of Truth in Bush’s America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 191-2. On denial see Jervis, “Reports,” 7-8; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 308-15, 320-1, 344-6; Kenneth Pollack, “Saddam’s Bombs: We’ll Find Them,” *New York Times*, June 20, 2003.

1, 2002 unveiling of the NIE, since the NIE, in stark contrast with previous intelligence estimates in February and July 2002 by the CIA and the DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency), painted a highly alarming picture of the threat from Iraq. This assessment constituted the foundation for the severest accusations leveled by the US against Baghdad in the fall of 2002.³⁹ As such, the NIE should have been crucial to informing decision-making about the magnitude of the risk posed by Saddam. Moreover, this hypothetical timeline is consistent with the administration's position, exposed in September 2002 by President Bush: "if the Iraqi regime wishes peace it will immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction, long-range missiles and related material."⁴⁰ In this line of thought, Saddam could have prevented an invasion at any time from the fall of 2002 until March 2003 by admitting to the continuation of efforts to develop and preserve WMD.

Nevertheless, the available evidence points the other way. In fact, the decision to invade Iraq was in all likelihood reached in the months following the fall of the Taliban regime, that is to say in the interval from November 2001 to January 2002.⁴¹ In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the option of a campaign against Iraq was advanced twice: the first time by the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at the suggestion of his second-in-command, Under Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz on September 12 at an NSC meeting in Washington; the second time, it was put forward by Wolfowitz at a principals reunion on September 15 at Camp David. Each time, it was

³⁹ See Cirincione et al., *WMD in Iraq*; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 32-49; Spencer Ackerman and John Judis, "The First Casualty: The Selling of the Iraq War," *New Republic*, June 30, 2003.

⁴⁰ Bush, "UN Address."

⁴¹ However, Paul O' Neill, the former Secretary of Treasury in the Bush cabinet intimates that this decision was taken less than ten days from the inception of the administration in January 2001. Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O' Neill* (New York: Simon& Schuster, 2001), 70-6, 81-6. This view is supported by anti-terrorism czar Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 264-6.

ruled out by the President.⁴² However, by the beginning of October a team under Wolfowitz was reported as already working on a blueprint for regime-change and by November 21, Bush officially asked Rumsfeld to look into plans for possible military action against Iraq.⁴³ By the time of the State of Union address of January 29, 2002 Iraq had been singled out as the most dangerous component of the axis of evil, which also comprised North Korea and Iran.⁴⁴ As the speech put it, the US “will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most dangerous weapons.”⁴⁵ This was no mere rhetoric: on February 12 Powell made comments ruling out any measures against either Pyongyang or Teheran, but mentioning that “with respect to Iraq it has long been, for several years now, that regime change would be in the best interests of the region... And we are looking into a variety of options that would bring that about.”⁴⁶ Gordon and Trainor also write that the State of the Union “was the first hint of what CENTCOM already knew: Iraq would be the next phase in the White House campaign on terror.” Pillar also confirms this information: “clearly fairly in early 2002 to just anyone working in intelligence on Iraq issues that we were going to war, that the decision had essentially been made.” This leaves a conspicuous gap of nearly two months

⁴² Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 48-50, 83-5; Patrick Tyler and Elaine Sciolino, “Bush Advisors Split on Scope of Retaliation,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2001; Patrick Tyler and Elaine Sciolino, “Some Pentagon Officials and Advisors Seek to Oust Iraq’s Leader in War’s Next Phase,” *New York Times*, October 12, 2001.

⁴³ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 3-4, 19; Bryan Burrough et al., “The Path to War,” *Vanity Fair* (May 2004): 228-32.

⁴⁴ David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2003), 224-5, 231-9.

⁴⁵ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002 at <http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/>.

⁴⁶ Michael Gordon and David Sanger, “Powell Says US Is Weighing Ways to Topple Hussein,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2000; Burrough, “Path to War”. In fact Rumsfeld asked the CENTCOM CINC Tommy Franks if the operation could proceed in the spring of 2002. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 38.

between November and January, when, although no information is available on a principals' meeting on Iraq, the decision to invade must have been taken.⁴⁷

In effect evidence from February on shows an irrevocable US commitment to attacking Iraq. In February 2002, the Pentagon began to prepare in earnest plans for an invasion of Iraq after presenting a first draft to Rumsfeld. The following month, Bush dropped by a meeting between the National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and a group of Senators and delivered an unambiguous message: "Fuck Saddam. We are taking him out." The same month, Cheney on a visit to Capitol Hill told Senators in confidence that the question was no longer whether the US would attack Iraq, but only when the offensive was going to proceed.⁴⁸ By the first week of July, Richard Haass, the director of the Policy Planning at the State Department, who raised objections against the invasion was told by Rice "essentially that the decision has been made, don't waste your breath."⁴⁹ On July 23, a British principals meeting took place in London, where the director of MI6 Sir Richard Dearlove (code name "C") reported on a meeting with CIA director George Tenet: "military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."⁵⁰ This alternative timeline does not rule out misperception, but weakens it significantly by contesting the view that it was faulty intelligence analysis which forced the hand of American decision-makers. The

⁴⁷ Ibid., 134. Powell and Rice actually deny any such formal meeting had taken place: according to Powell there was no "moment when we all made our recommendations" and Rice argues that "there's no decision meeting." Freedman, *Choice of Enemies*, 398; Glenn Kessler, "US Decision on Iraq Has Puzzling Past," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2003. Also see Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 333-4.

⁴⁸ Daniel Eisenberg, "We're Taking Him Out," *Time*, May 5, 2002; Burrough, "Path to War"; Michael Elliott, "First Stop Iraq," *Time*, March 31, 2003.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Lemann, "How It Came to War," *New Yorker* 79, March 31, 2003.

⁵⁰ "Rycroft Memo: Minutes of British Cabinet Meeting on the Subject of Iraq, 23 July 2002," *London Sunday Times*, 01 May, 2005; Danner, "Secret Way to War."

US cabinet did not in fact wait on intelligence on Iraqi WMD to reach its own conclusions on toppling Saddam. This is also Pillar's conclusion: "official intelligence analysis was not relied on in making even the most significant national security decisions... intelligence was misused publicly to justify decisions already made."⁵¹

The argument that points at Saddam's non-compliance with the UN demands as the go-ahead for war is also likely ex post facto. "C" reported that the American side "had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraq's regime record." In response, "the Prime-Minister [Blair] said that it would make a big difference politically and legally if Saddam refused to allow in the weapon inspectors. Regime change and WMD were clearly linked in the sense that it was the regime producing the WMD... If the political context was right, people would support regime change."⁵² Therefore, resorting to the UN, the resumption of inspections, and a consistent propaganda effort based on intelligence were not the preferred American measures.⁵³ This point is corroborated by at least three pieces of evidence. First is the "Wolfowitz indiscretion," in which Wolfowitz stated that "for bureaucratic reasons, we settled on one issue weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on." Second, it is backed by Rice's discussion with Powell on the subject of a suitable justification of the argument to attack Iraq. Rice concluded that the WMD issue was the only one which had "legs" because the terrorism case seemed weak and improvable, and the issue of Saddam's abusive rule did not resonate with the US public. Third, this was confirmed by the August speeches by Cheney, which show deep skepticism of the ability

⁵¹ Pillar, "Intelligence". Pillar was the officer in charge of the Middle East on the NIC.

⁵² "Rycroft Memo."

⁵³ The rumors of an offensive against Iraq in August had been met with an opening salvo of criticism by Scowcroft and Baker, as seen in Chapter Six.

to weapon inspectors to disarm Saddam. “A return of inspectors,” said Cheney, “would provide no assurance whatsoever of his compliance with UN resolutions.”⁵⁴

Moreover, the Bush administration’s avowed insistence on WMD as a rationale for regime change was standing the traditional approach of the US vis-à-vis Iraq squarely on its head. From 1991 to 2002, rather than advocating getting rid of Saddam Hussein because of his WMD, the US had invoked routinely the said arsenal in order to get rid of Saddam Hussein, regardless of Baghdad’s intentions to disarm. Wolfowitz actually spelled this policy outright. Blaming Clinton for his 1993 declaration that Saddam might have been redeemable, Wolfowitz commented that “since that occasion, the United States government has never been able to state explicitly that Saddam Husayn (sic) is the heart of the problem. As a result we are left with the subterfuge to explain the continuation of sanctions.”⁵⁵ However, Wolfowitz was wrong: the goal to get rid of Saddam was spelled out quite explicitly by the US government.

In May 1991, Bush specifically stated that sanctions will be maintained for as long as Saddam stayed in power. A memo sent the same month by Under-Secretary of State Eagleburger to embassies in the chief Gulf War coalition countries confirms that this was actual American policy: “all possible sanctions will be maintained until he [Saddam] is gone. Any easing of sanctions will be considered only when there is a new government... We are ready to work with a successor government in Baghdad if the Iraqi people change their government. From the outset, we have made clear that our problem is

⁵⁴ Samuel Tannenhaus, “Bush’s Brain Trust,” *Vanity Fair* 515 (July 2003): 114-24; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 220; Cheney, “Speech to the Veterans.”

⁵⁵ Paul Wolfowitz, “The United States and Iraq,” in John Calabrese, ed., *The Future of Iraq* (Washington: The American Enterprise Institute, 1997), 107-13, 110. Wolfowitz is making here a clear case for the US to admit that “Saddam is the problem.”

not with the Iraqi people but with their leadership and especially Saddam.”⁵⁶ Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it even more forcefully in March 1997. “Iraq’s behavior and intentions must change before our policies can change... Our view, which is unshakeable, is that Iraq must prove its peaceful intentions.” However, Albright went on to affirm that “the evidence is overwhelming that Saddam Hussein’s intentions will never be peaceful.” If sanctions were to be lifted, Iraq would have speedily proceeded to reconstituting its WMD. Under such circumstances, the single Iraqi action that would have contributed the most toward lifting sanctions would have been to bring down Saddam. “Clearly,” concluded Albright, “a change in Iraq’s government could lead to a change in US policy. Should this occur, we stand ready... to enter rapidly into a dialogue with the successor regime. Until that day containment must stay in place.”⁵⁷ Getting rid of WMD was not therefore a sufficient condition for sanctions to be lifted.

This insistence on “disarmament plus the removal of Saddam” as the condition Baghdad had to fulfill to escape US retaliation resurfaced in 2002. For instance, in April 2002, Bush declared in a press conference after meeting Blair that “the policy of my government is the removal of Saddam and all options are on the table.” Moreover, in his speech at the UN in September 2002, the president insisted that disarmament by itself was not enough: “if the Iraqi regime wishes peace,” it had to also immediately end its support for terrorism and act to suppress it, release accounts of missing Gulf War prisoners, and cease the persecution of its civilian population—not only of ethnic or religious minorities, but of Shia and Sunnis as well. Similarly, the ultimatum of March

⁵⁶ “Bush Links End of Trading Ban to Hussein Exit,” *New York Times*, 21 May, 1991; Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: Why We Went Back to Iraq* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 235-6; Sarah Graham Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam: The Politics of Intervention in Iraq* (London: Tauris, 1999), 62.

⁵⁷ Madeleine Albright, “Remarks at Georgetown University,” March 26, 1997 in Calabrese, ed., *Future of Iraq*, 122-6.

17, 2003 did not call for a last minute Iraqi pledge to disarm, but demanded that “Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict... It is too late for Saddam Hussein to remain in power.”⁵⁸ It is conceivable that the elimination of WMD was not a goal in itself, but a means to a different end: the removal from power at long last of the threat of Saddam’s regime. However, by making this point, one cannot make any longer the case of an imminent or apocalyptic Iraqi threat against the US.⁵⁹

Not even a proven Iraqi commitment to disarmament could have averted the invasion. Saddam had been trapped by the American demand that he fully disclose his WMD. If Iraq recognized it possessed WMD, it could have been exposed as having lied all along and found in breach of UN sanctions. Conversely, if it did not recognize it possessed such weapons, and it could have been accused of hiding them. This reasoning was revealed on December 2, 2002 by Ari Fleischer, the White House spokesman: “if Saddam Hussein indicated that he has weapons of mass destruction... then we will know that Saddam Hussein again deceived the world. If he declared he has none, then we will know that Saddam Hussein is once again misleading the world.”⁶⁰ Therefore, American offensive would have followed regardless of Iraq’s actions.

Finally, misperception depends on the intention of the decision-maker: the point is not to state something which is actually untrue, but to be genuinely convinced that it represents the truth. This might well explain the “cherry picking” of intelligence to fit the

⁵⁸ Bush, “Address at the UN”; Bush, “Address to the Nation”; Bush, “Address on Iraq.”

⁵⁹ For the point of a threat from Saddam, not WMD, see Rich, *Greatest Story Ever Sold*, 110-1; Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “The Right War for the Right Reasons,” *Weekly Standard*, February 23, 2004; Charles Krauthammer, “Why Did Bush Go to War,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 2003; David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), 25-7.

⁶⁰ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 234. After the 1995 defection of Kamel and its confession of having hidden documents pertaining to WMD programs, Baghdad was weary of ever again admitting to deception.

version of events preferred by the administration, but it cannot account for the purposeful misuse of data that had been known as being false. This is why misperception fails to explain the decision-makers claims regarding Iraq's nuclear program, specifically the aluminum tubes and the uranium from Niger allegations, the most incriminating evidence justifying immediate regime change.

The aluminum tubes accusation had been contested starting a week from Bush's UN speech by experts who pointed out their unsuitability for building a centrifuge. This assessment was based on five conclusions: 1) the tubes were longer and narrower than a centrifuge rotor by at least 300 millimeters; 2) aluminum had not been used since the 1950s for centrifuge building—Iraq's centrifuge rotors in its dismantled 1980s nuclear program had been made of carbon fiber; 3) the tubes had anodized coating, which had to be removed to build rotors; 4) the diameter of centrifuge rotors was at least double that of the tubes, 145 millimeters compared to 81; 5) the tubes were at least 6 times thicker than a centrifuge rotor, 3 millimeters versus 0.5.⁶¹ As the top expert of the Department of Energy summed it up: "it would have been extremely difficult to make these tubes into centrifuges. It stretches the imagination to come up with a way."⁶² This assessment was shared by the March 7 report of the UN weapons inspectors. As the report put it: "it was highly unlikely that Iraq could have achieved the considerable redesign needed to use them in a revived centrifuge programme."⁶³ Moreover, the October NIE contained the dissenting views of the State Department's intelligence unit the Bureau of Intelligence

⁶¹David Albright, "Iraq's Aluminum Tubes: Separating Fact from Fiction," <http://www/isis-online.org/publications/iraq/IraqAluminumTubes12-05-03.pdf>; Gellman and Pincus, "Depiction of Threat"; Ackerman and Judis, "First Casualty"; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 94-8.

⁶²Quoted in Ackerman and Judis, "First Casualty."

⁶³ Mohammed ElBaradei, "The Status of Nuclear Inspections in Iraq: An Update," March 7, 2003 <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2003/ebsp2003n006.shtml>; Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 208-11.

and Research and of the Department of Energy (DOE), which argued that the tubes were poorly suited for rotor building.⁶⁴ Even assuming that Iraq had managed to use the tubes for centrifuges, it could have only built 1,000 machines, and for producing one atomic bomb a year one needs at least 3,500 machines. At its peak Iraq's nuclear program never had operated more than 550 such machines. And even if Iraq could have managed such a feat, there would have been delays which would have likely pushed back the estimate of a deployable nuclear weapon from one year to five to seven. The NIE thus had to inflate the number to 25,000 machines to arrive at a suitable timeframe for the claim of an Iraqi bomb available in one year to be justified.⁶⁵ Despite the contested nature of the aluminum tubes information, which even Powell acknowledged in his UN presentation, ultimately the US decision-makers employed it as verified and uncontested evidence of Iraq resuming its nuclear efforts. To quote Powell: "let me tell you what is not controversial about these tubes... all the experts who have analyzed the tubes in our possession agree that they can be used for centrifuge use." Bush argued as well in the State of Union address of 2003 that "our intelligence sources tell us that he [Saddam] has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production."⁶⁶

The documents attesting the sale of 500 tons of yellowcake from Niger to Iraq were even more visibly forgeries because 1) they referred to the 1965 constitution of Niger, while a new constitution had come into place in August 1999; 2) the foreign minister of Niger whose signature was on the documents dated 2000 had been in office in 1988 but not afterwards; 3) the government of Niger did not operate the mines, whose sales were the monopoly of the Somair (a French-Niger venture) and of Cominak (a

⁶⁴ Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 98-102.

⁶⁵ Albright, "Iraq's Aluminum Tubes"; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 98-9.

⁶⁶ Powell, "Address to the UN"; Bush, "State of the Union Address, 2003."

Niger-Spain-Germany-Japan operation—the two companies are strictly monitored by the IAEA; 4) a sale of this nature needed to be approved by the president, the prime-minister, and the minister of mines of Niger, whose signatures were not included.⁶⁷ In February 2002, the US dispatched at Cheney's request former diplomat Joseph Wilson to Niger to investigate the claims of the sale.⁶⁸ Wilson reported to both the State Department and the CIA was that “it was highly doubtful that any such transaction had ever taken place.”⁶⁹ The US intelligence community showed caution as well: while the Bureau of Intelligence and Research was “highly dubious” of the claim, the other agencies consulted for the NIE concluded that they did not know the status of the transaction. The report on the sale of uranium from Niger was considered so tenuous by the CIA that Langley struck it out from the draft of the speech Bush was to deliver in Cincinnati, on the grounds that both the transaction and the quantity of uranium involved were doubtful.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, the accusation appeared in Bush's State of the Union address in the so-called Sixteen Words: “The British Government has learned that Saddam Hussein has recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.”⁷¹ How, the Sixteen Words made the speech is still unexplained, considering that the CIA had to approve the wording beforehand, and had already objected once to the use of the Niger evidence. In fact, Powell stayed away in following weeks from using it in his presentation at the UN.

⁶⁷ Joseph Wilson, “What I Didn't Find in Africa,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2003; Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 186-93; Cirincione et al. *WMD in Iraq*, 24-5; Ackerman and Judis, “First Casualty”; Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004),

⁶⁸ On the long-reaching consequences of this mission that degenerated into the Valerie Plame scandal see Rich, *Greatest Story Ever Sold*, 97-101, 178-85.

⁶⁹ Wilson, “What I Didn't Find in Africa.”

⁷⁰ Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 124-6.

⁷¹ Bush, “State of the Union Address, 2003”; the accusation also appeared in a Rice opinion piece in January. See Condoleezza Rice, “Why We Know Iraq Is Lying,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2003 and in a State Department rebuttal of the Iraqi declaration on WMD of mid-December 2002.

In March, the IAEA finally gained access to the documents and exposed them as having been forged.⁷² The Bush administration tried to spin the issue by claiming not to have had any indication that the Niger accusation was a fake, thus throwing the blame on the CIA. As Rice put it: “knowing what we now know... we wouldn’t have put this in the President’s speech.” On another occasion she added “maybe someone knew down the bowels of the agency, but no one in our circle knew that there were doubts and suspicions that this might be a forgery.”⁷³ However, the National Intelligence Council itself (the body responsible for the NIE) concluded prior to the State of the Union Address that the Niger accusation was “baseless and should be laid to rest.”⁷⁴ Moreover, the information on Niger had been by that time made privy to the Pentagon, the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Vice President.⁷⁵

In the aftermath of the fruitless hunt for WMD in Iraq, the exceptionalist argument that the invasion had been caused by the zeal of the Bush administration on behalf of propagate liberal democracy gained new credence. The spreading of democracy gradually became a mainstay of official speeches in relation to Middle East policy. In November 2003, Bush introduced the idea of the “great challenge” of bringing democracy to the Middle East as an alternative to military dictatorships or Islamic fundamentalist theocracies—with Iraq as a crucial test. “Iraqi democracy will succeed,”

⁷² Prados, *Hoodwinked*, 193-5; Ackerman and Judis, “First Casualty.” This led to an acerbic attack by Cheney on the credibility of weapon inspectors. Blix, *Disarming Iraq*, 86-7, 249-53; Cheney interview on NBC Meet the Press, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/cheneymeetthepress.htm.

⁷³ Rich, *Greatest Story Ever Sold*, 97-9.

⁷⁴ Barton Gellman and Dafna Linzer, “A Concerted Effort to Discredit Bush Critic,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2006.

⁷⁵ Nicholas Kristof, “White House in Denial,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2003; Ackerman and Judis, “First Casualty”; Seymour Hersh, “The Stovepipe,” *New Yorker*, October 27, 2003. The director of the CIA, George Tenet was reportedly convinced that the person in charge of the presidential speech at the National Intelligence Council Stephen Hadley was a “sleeper agent” of the Pentagon. Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 234, 231-4.

said Bush, “and that success will send forth the news from Damascus to Tehran that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.” This was so, Bush argued, because the stakes were higher than just the future of democracy in Iraq, involving the transformation of the politics of the entire Middle East, and consequently the region’s political stance towards the US. As he put it, “as long as the Middle East is a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export.” Consequently, the president announced that the US “has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East,” leading to a similar consolidation of democracy as in Europe and East Asia under US leadership.⁷⁶ This policy was then further elaborated by Bush in early 2006: “our nation is committed to an historic, long-term goal—we seek the end of tyranny in the world.” Democracy had thus become for Bush the key ideological weapon to combat and defeat terrorism: “ultimately, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of political freedom and political change. So the United States of America supports democratic reform across the broader Middle East... We will lead freedom’s advance.”⁷⁷

Thus, Iraq was conceived of as square one of a “domino theory in reverse.” Unlike the original domino theory, where one state falling to communism would have triggered a similar chain effect in other countries, the new theory argued that the transition of Iraq to fully-fledged democracy would have the consequence of encouraging

⁷⁶ George W. Bush, “Remarks at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy,” November 6, 2003, at <http://www.ned.org/events/anniversary/20thAniv-Bush.html>.

⁷⁷ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” January 31, 2006 at www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/01/31/sotu.transcript/.

the development of democratic regimes throughout the Middle East.⁷⁸ This result would have been achieved through a) successive US regime change interventions; b) intimidating dictators who could see the fate that awaited them; and especially c) capturing the hearts and minds of Muslims by providing them with the model of a successful Iraqi democracy. This theory was a development of the ideas of scholars such as Ajami and Lewis who had long maintained that the Middle East's over fondness for political Islam had held the region back on the path to modernization, producing along the way considerable frustration and anger, which then erupted in misguided violence against the West. The West had in turn erred by ignoring or tolerating the corruption and abuses of Middle Eastern governments and thus allowing this situation to endure. At long last, the US invasion of Iraq was seen as a firm Western commitment to modernize the Middle East, despite its wishes if need be. To quote Ajami, the US should take as its mission "the spearheading of a reformist project that seeks to transform the Arab landscape. Iraq would be the starting point." Both Ajami and Lewis were consulted repeatedly throughout 2001-2 by the Bush decision-makers.⁷⁹

The Ajami-Lewis logic distinctly brought to mind the 1840s arguments regarding the regeneration of Mexico or those of the 1890s concerning the white man's burden. Many analysts thus acknowledged that the experience of progressive imperialists of yore should have informed America's actions in Iraq. The US had therefore to resort to imperialism in the Middle East's best interests as much out of self-interest in guarding

⁷⁸ George Packer, "Dreaming of Democracy," *New York Time Magazine*, March 2, 2003; "Bush's Domino Theory," *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 January 2003; Nicholas Lemann, "After Iraq: The Plan to Remake the Middle East," *New Yorker* 17 February 2003.

⁷⁹ Fouad Ajami, "Iraq and the Arabs' Future," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/ February 2003): 2-18; Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kaplan and Kristol, *War over Iraq*, 95-111; Perle and Frum, *An End to Evil*, 159-63; Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, 50-1.

itself against disorder as out of moral duty to other human beings. As Kurz noted, echoing Kipling: “even the mildest imperialism will be experienced by many as a humiliation. Yet imperialism as the midwife of democratic self-rule is an undeniable good.”⁸⁰ The conclusion of a moral imperative to advance the cause of democracy in the Middle East by use of force if necessary was eventually embraced even by staunch liberals with sympathies in the Democratic camp.⁸¹

Nevertheless, had the spread of democracy and the reform of the Middle East been the chief grounds of contemplating invasion, one should have expected, first that the US decision-makers would insist on these aspects rather than on WMD in justifying the invasion; and second, that significantly more attention would be directed at Iraq’s political transition towards democracy. As the earlier quotes from Wolfowitz and Rice attest, the US decision-makers did not place much faith in democracy as a public argument justifying invasion: the issue was not seen as having “legs.”⁸² Hence, in the exceptionalist interpretation the invocation of WMD was designed to bolster support for a policy that democracy alone could not have sold—a useful cover-up for the real intention of transforming the Middle East.⁸³ Accordingly, the administration did not warm up to

⁸⁰ Stanley Kurtz, “Democratic Imperialism: A Blueprint,” *Policy Review* 113 (April/ May 2003): 3-20; Max Boot, “Neither New Nor Nefarious: The Liberal Empire Strikes Back,” *Current History* 102 (November 2003): 361-6; Edward Rhodes, “The Imperial Logic of Bush’s Liberal Agenda,” *Survival* 45 (Spring 2003): 131-54.

⁸¹ Michael Ignatieff, “The Burden,” *New York Times Magazine* (January 5, 2003); Thomas L. Friedman, “Because We Could,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2003; Thomas L. Friedman, “Repairing the World,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2003; Michael McFaul, “The Liberty Doctrine,” *Policy Review* 112 (April/ May 2002): 3-24.

⁸² Tannenhaus, “Bush’s Brain Trust”; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 220.

⁸³ Suggestive examples are Thomas L. Friedman, “The Long Bomb,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2003; Packer, *Assassins’ Gate*, 57-64; Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (New York: Routledge, 2004), chaps. 5 and 6.

democracy promotion until 2004, when the searches turned out no Iraqi WMD and the original case for invasion began to fall apart.⁸⁴

This is however odd, if one admits democracy as the real motive for invasion, because how can democracy possibly win over the rival ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and win over hearts and minds in the Muslim world when its most fervent proponents in the US are hesitant to actually argue its case openly in the first place? The key issue is that one cannot seriously envision the transformation of the Middle East into a zone of blossoming democracies unless the toppling Saddam was accompanied by a suitably massive and sustained propaganda effort, aimed at portraying the action in the context of a wider American regional effort. In this respect, US propaganda was consigned to a belated and limited effort. Besides, one should be able to find instances beyond Iraq where the rhetoric of ending tyranny and of leading the advance of freedom in the Middle East was translated into policy. However, most of the energies of Bush's second term in office were directed at combating insurgency in Iraq. While it is understandable that the insurgency might have precluded further US military operations, this fails to account for the absence of regional democracy promotion through alternate means, including diplomatic, economic, and propagandistic resources.⁸⁵

Furthermore, if the purpose of the invasion of Iraq was to put in place a democracy that would later constitute a model for the entire Middle East, then the administration should have devoted more attention to issues such as restoring order in occupied Iraq to prevent looting and violence, dealing with the remains of the Baath party

⁸⁴ Freedman, *Choice of Enemies*, 423-4.

⁸⁵ Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Thomas Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/ February 2003), 84-97.

and of the Iraqi army, repairing the destroyed Iraqi infrastructure, and preparing a roadmap of measures to be implemented before the transition of power from the US to an Iraqi authority. However, the available evidence shows that the Bush decision-makers did not spend much time on how to best build democracy in occupied Iraq. As one account puts it, this was not “because the government did no planning but because a vast amount of expert planning was willfully ignored by the people in charge.”⁸⁶ The most significant such planning effort was conducted by the State Department Future of Iraq Project under the direction of Thomas Warrick. Nevertheless, the institution that eventually emerged as the linchpin of the efforts to administrate Iraq in the aftermath of the overthrow of Saddam was the Pentagon, which created for this purpose the ORHA (Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance.) Even though the Pentagon’s nominee to head ORHA retired general Jay Garner wanted to use the State Department study as a blueprint, Rumsfeld and the Office of Special Plans vetoed both the collaboration and the presence of Warrick on Garner’s administration team.⁸⁷

By that time, war was only weeks away. As Garner put it: “this is an ad hoc operation, glued together over about four or five weeks’ time.” ORHA thus went into Iraq with very little preparation besides the expectation that the US would be greeted as the liberator of the country, that order could be restored almost instantly, and that transition will be a speedy process resulting in elections in four months time. On the ground, ORHA had to cope almost instantly with the anarchy that resulted after the collapse of Saddam, including the suspension of basic services such as electricity, the systematic looting of every government building, and widespread violence. ORHA also lacked the

⁸⁶ James Fallows, “Blind into Baghdad,” *Atlantic Monthly* 293, January/ February 2004.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Packer, *Assassins’ Gate*, 124-6; David Rieff, “Blueprint for a Mess,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 2, 2003.

resources to carry out its task, including troops, radios, working phone lines, translators, and vehicles. Garner was replaced in a little more than two weeks with Ambassador Paul Bremer, who contributed further to the deterioration of the Iraqi perception of the US by taking the measures of dissolving the Iraqi army and of forbidding the employment in government positions of former Baath party members—a policy which was responsible for creating within a week 450,000 enemies in Iraq.⁸⁸

Thus, the record suggests that the Pentagon not only refused to contemplate the obstacles democracy promotion could encounter in Iraq, but also did not care much about the process itself. This abhorrence of nation-building was most evident in the policies of Rumsfeld. The assumption of a so-called “Wizard of Oz” moment, where after Saddam was gone, Iraqis would celebrate and state institutions would remain functional was made by the Pentagon chiefly because it supported Rumsfeld’s overall strategy of reforming the US military modus operandi by relying on technology not manpower. In this logic, the US would not have had to police Iraq because such an endeavor was too costly, and could have been delegated to the Iraqis themselves. As Rumsfeld put it, it was ludicrous to use more American forces to secure peace in Iraq than it took to win the war against Saddam. Therefore, the Pentagon spurned taking over the responsibility for managing Iraq’s transition to democracy, ultimately because it wanted to pass on the costs of the occupation to the Iraqis.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid.; Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 158-63; Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate*, 110-48; Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 27-52. The decision however was taken by the Pentagon’s number three Douglas Feith. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 160-1. 475-9. For a dissenting view that ascertains Bremer was in actual control see Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq’s Green Zone* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

⁸⁹ Ibid., 103, 151-2,463; on Rumsfeld’s strategy see Andrew Cockburn, *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy* (New York: Scribner, 2007); Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*.

From a revisionist and popular angle, the American invasion of Iraq has a simple, but cynic explanation: oil.⁹⁰ After the two 1970s oil shocks, ensuring the unimpeded flow of oil from the Middle East had become all the more urgent for the US in a world of climbing energy prices.⁹¹ Therefore, regime change in Iraq allowed access to its considerable oil wealth. These calculations could not have been lost on a cabinet filled with former oil executives, such as Bush, Cheney and Rice, or for an American administration with substantial ties to the Saudi oil industry.⁹² At the very least, as the president of the Petroleum Research Foundation put it: “if we go to war, it’s not about oil...But after Saddam, it becomes all about oil.”⁹³

Nevertheless, if oil had been the rationale for invasion, then regime-change should have occurred much earlier on, either in the context of the Gulf War, or under the presidency of Bill Clinton. The alleged American thirst for oil does not fit the sanctions pattern that cut off Iraq from the global market from 1991 to 2003, since the easiest way to ensure oil flows would have been to rehabilitate Saddam.⁹⁴ One might certainly invoke the oil-for-food deal, which allowed oil trade even under sanctions, but the deal was itself limited, and had been put in place first and foremost for humanitarian considerations in 1995.⁹⁵ True enough, oil affected the strategic picture—but it did so in very different ways from the revisionist argument. Oil was seen as one of the key capabilities available

⁹⁰ Oil is emphasized as a motivation in artistic movies such as *W* (2008) and *Syriana* (2005) and documentaries such as *Fahrenheit 9/11*. For analyses see Noah Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations in the Post 9/11 World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005); Stephen Pelletiere, *America’s Oil Wars* (Westport: Praeger, 2004).

⁹¹ Ibid., chap. 2; Daniel Yergin, *The Prize* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

⁹² Peter Grier, “Is It All About Oil?” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 16, 2002; Craig Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud: The Secret Relationship between the World’s Two Most Powerful Dynasties* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 222-6. As Unger puts it, “never before had the highest levels of an administration so nakedly represented the oil industry.”

⁹³ Grier, “Is It All About Oil?”

⁹⁴ Tunc, “What Was It About After All?” 337-8; John Judis, “Why Iraq?” *American Prospect*, March 2003.

⁹⁵ Brown, *Sanctioning Saddam*, chap.2.

to whichever government happened to be in charge in Baghdad. Hence, if Saddam was allowed to escape sanctions and resume oil exports, the view of the US since 1991 on was that he would use the revenues to rebuild his military and the WMD programs.⁹⁶ Conversely, if Saddam were toppled, US decision-makers were convinced that a new regime could use oil exports to pay for the reconstruction of Iraq.⁹⁷

Regarding the Open Door, Saddam's occupation of Kuwait, and later on, his survival in power called into question the principle of American political supremacy in a region key to the American-run global economy.⁹⁸ Yet, this argument cannot account for the change in policy from Clinton's keeping Saddam in a box to Bush's regime change even though the same Open Door imperative applied. That is to say that, while revisionists believe in a continuity of policy from Clinton to Bush towards Saddam, they cannot explain the escalation to full-scale invasion by reference to just the Open Door.

In fact, a stronger revisionist argument is based on the US need for bases in the Middle East. In effect one of the principal concerns of US decision-makers in the 1990s had been to find alternatives to basing troops in Saudi Arabia.⁹⁹ Even before the troops were deployed, there was considerable dissent inside the Saudi kingdom, including the royal family, as to the desirability of their presence. As the home to the Two Mosques of Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia was reticent to become the host of US non-Muslim troops. However, Saddam's survival in 1991 meant the perpetuation of a permanent US military presence in Saudi Arabia, which soon became a political liability for Riyadh, as

⁹⁶ Freedman, "War on Iraq," 23-4.

⁹⁷ Pollack, *Threatening Storm*, 397-8; Packer, *Assassins' Gate*, 115-6.

⁹⁸ Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 53-65; Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of American Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁹⁹ Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*.

it exposed the monarchy to criticism not only from religious extremists such as Osama Bin Laden, but also from clerical figures on its own payroll.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Washington was sensitive to the risk of possible attacks on Saudi territory, as in 1996, when the Saudi Hezbollah, a Shiite group associated with Iran, conducted a suicide attack against the Khobar Towers compound, which hosted American troops and their families, killing 19 servicemen.¹⁰¹ In this sense, the overthrow of Saddam removed the reason for the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia while finding an even more suitable geopolitical location in Iraq. Indeed, by May 2003, the last American troops had left Saudi Arabia.¹⁰² However, the decision to scale down the American deployment in Saudi Arabia had predated the invasion of Iraq and even September 11: it actually followed the showdowns with Iraq in 1997. The US thus decided to relocate its troops and weaponry to Qatar, which became the de facto hub for American forces in the early 2000s. Certainly, while Iraq was better placed geopolitically than Qatar, the costs to secure it as a base for American troops were prohibitive, given that the US already had a viable regional alternative. More importantly, the US had withstood the mounting Saudi concerns for more than twelve years. Given the extent of American influence, why would Washington believe that it was easier to invade Iraq rather than coerce the Saudis into continuing to accept the presence of its military forces in the kingdom? In fact, since Saudi Arabia is home of the world's largest oil reserves, the maintenance of American troops to protect the fields should have been in the revisionist logic of outmost priority.

Does prestige fare better in accounting for the decision to bring down Saddam?

¹⁰⁰ Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand*, 239-245; Pelletiere, *America's Oil Wars*, 122-6.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin and Simon, *Age of Sacred Terror*, 106-9, 140-2, 147-50, 224-5, 301-2.

¹⁰² Klare, "Deciphering Bush Motives"; Pelletiere, *America's Oil Wars*, 133-4; Unger, *House of Bush, House of Saud*, 279.

Prestige and the Invasion of Iraq

One of the chief consequences of regime change in Iraq was an increased perception of the US as an empire. This was not accidental: it was precisely the message the Bush administration and its neoconservative (neocon) supporters wanted to send out, even though they did not always use explicitly the label “empire.”¹⁰³ The Bush team was highly conscious of the discrepancy between America’s capabilities and leadership ambitions, and the US policy of “drift” throughout the 1990. American imperial expansion was the answer both to world problems and to doubts regarding America’s proper role in international affairs. In this sense, September 11 represented a “moment of clarity”: a revolution bringing a close to the Post Cold War age.¹⁰⁴ As such, the decision to invade was the result of a tactical congruence of objectives in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks between the neocon of the Bush administration who constituted the second tier of decision-makers (Wolfowitz, Perle, Feith, Bolton, Hedley, Abrams, and Armitage) and the two central players in the cabinet: the Rumsfeld-Cheney combo.¹⁰⁵ For the neocons, prestige constituted the very *raison d’être* of the reinvented movement in the late 1990s. This cause of “greatness” found a receptive audience in Rumsfeld and Cheney. For Rumsfeld in particular, the September 11 attacks had to be answered as

¹⁰³ Some of the neoconservatives, in particular Max Boot, William Kristol, Stephen Peter Rosen, and Tom Donnelly advocated that the US acknowledge that by the 2000s it was an empire. Others, such as Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer and Richard Perle, while staying clear of the imperial label, still argued in favor of a decisive policy of primacy, which they referred to as benevolent hegemony.

¹⁰⁴ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 13-5.

¹⁰⁵ Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 14. While Rumsfeld was making his arguments in cabinet meetings, Cheney preferred to lobby the president in one-on-one conversations. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 38-9. Rumsfeld and Cheney had constituted a team since the Nixon Administration. It was Cheney who suggested Rumsfeld as a possible Secretary of Defense to Bush in order to check the influence of Colin Powell as the Secretary of State. Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 37-40; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 53-4; Freedman, *Choice of Enemies*, 375-6. Even so, the relation has not always been smooth on account of Cheney’s endorsement of George H. W. Bush instead of Rumsfeld as the candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988. Cockburn, *Rumsfeld*, 80-1.

strongly as possible, not only in Afghanistan, but with a wider and more significant campaign against terror, aimed at proving American resolve and willingness to lead.¹⁰⁶

The neoconservative movement at the end of the 1990s was the latest outcrop of an American political orientation going back to the 1930s, and which had reinvented itself on multiple occasions.¹⁰⁷ Yet, with the collapse of Communism in 1989, and the subsequent implosion of the Soviet Union, neoconservatives were left triumphant, but without an enemy to fight. By 1996, one of the pillars of modern neoconservatism, Norman Podhoretz, pronounced the movement dead, having achieved its proposed goal of seeing the Soviet Union destroyed.¹⁰⁸ However, two scions of the original neocons Irving Kristol and Donald Kagan, Robert Kagan and William Kristol, joined forces to breathe new life into the movement by founding in 1995 *The Weekly Standard*, which became the flag carrier of the new generation of neocons.¹⁰⁹

In 1996, Kagan and Kristol published a manifesto in *Foreign Affairs*, in which the authors distinctly sought to replace the traditional neocon emphasis on anti-Communism with the exercise of a benevolent hegemony by the US.¹¹⁰ What this entails

¹⁰⁶ This analysis focuses on Rumsfeld instead of Cheney. There are two reasons for this choice. First, the decision to invade Iraq as well as the public selling of the Iraq war were foremost executed by the Pentagon. This is not to belittle Cheney's influence in securing presidential approval for the overthrow of Saddam. However, to the extent that Cheney acted behind the curtains in personal meetings with Bush, there is a dearth of evidence allowing to assess what his motivations might have been. For Cheney's crucial role in policy formulation see Gellman, *Angler*.

¹⁰⁷ The father figure of neoconservatism Irving Kristol argues that neoconservatism is not a "movement" but a "persuasion" on account of the many differences between its members for instance, on democracy promotion, acknowledgment of empire, and grounds for military intervention. Yet movement is a better term because the neoconservatives entertained a political agenda aimed at affecting both policy and public opinion. Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion: What It Was and What It Is," in Irwin Stelzer, ed., *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 33-7; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 10-4.

¹⁰⁸ Norman Podhoretz, "Neoconservatism: A Eulogy," *Commentary* (March 1996): 19-27.

¹⁰⁹ Scott McConell, "The Weekly Standard's War," *American Conservative*, November 21, 2005. On Kagan's and Kristol's background see Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 212-8; on their extensive common publications see Dorian, *Imperial Designs*, chap. 4.

¹¹⁰ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75 (July/August 1996): 18-32; Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 98-9, 100-2.

is outlined by Kagan and Kristol both in the paper and in subsequent publications.¹¹¹ By hegemony Kagan and Kristol mean that “a hegemon is nothing more or less than a leader with preponderant influence and authority over all others in its domain. That is America’s position in the world today.” Hegemony is supported by two fundamental pillars: “military supremacy and moral confidence.”¹¹² In respect of the first pillar, the US already controlled the most powerful military in the world, so this was just a question of preserving America’s lead relative to its would-be competitors. Moral confidence, however, seemed to be in short supply in Clinton’s “tepid times.” The Republican Party, torn between on one side isolationists such as Buchanan and on the other realists in the tradition of Henry Kissinger, hardly provided a viable alternative to the Democrats.¹¹³

The result of this absence of political vision in both parties’ ranks was that “the 1990s were a squandered decade... The United States held a position unmatched since Rome... The great promise of the post Cold War era, however, began to dim almost immediately.”¹¹⁴ Accordingly, America under the first president Bush and particularly under Clinton exhibited a potentially dangerous lack of will in playing its assigned part as world leader: by tolerating the survival in power of Saddam and Milosevic, by reducing instead of increasing defense expenditures, by engaging instead of containing dictators, and by placing a misguided faith in multilateral arrangements. As Kristol put it: “the

¹¹¹ Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Burden of Power Is Having to Wield It,” *Washington Post*, March 19, 2000; Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility,” in Robert Kagan and William Kristol, eds., *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 3-24.

¹¹² Kagan and Kristol, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Policy,” 20, 23. This was also endorsed by Irving Kristol and William Buckley. As Irving Kristol put it in 2000 contrasting US capabilities and the Clinton administration “disgusting” lack of will, “What’s the point of being the greatest, the most powerful nation in the world and not having an imperial role?...I think it would be natural for the United States... to play a far more dominant role in world affairs... to command and to give orders as to what is to be done.” Corey Robin, “Grand Designs: How 9/11 Unified Conservatives in Support of Empire,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 2004. For Irving Kristol’s 1990s anti-imperialism see Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 76-8, 98-9.

¹¹³ On the domestic political circumstances of the writing of the article, see Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 129.

¹¹⁴ Kagan and Kristol, “Burden.”

[main] danger is American withdrawal, American timidity, American slowness... The danger is not that we're going to do too much. The danger is that we're going to do too little."¹¹⁵ Therefore, in a typical status inconsistency argument, Kagan and Kristol identified as the biggest threat "the declining military strength, flagging will and confusion about our role in the world." The peril came principally from the erosion of the US rank as number one: "Americans must shape this [international] order, for if we refrain from doing so, we can be sure that others will shape it in a way that reflects neither our interests nor values."¹¹⁶ Consequently, what was needed to wake the US from its slumber was a foreign policy predicated on achieving "national greatness. "The appropriate goal of American foreign policy is to preserve... hegemony as far in to the future as possible," and, beyond this, "to preserve and extend an international order that is in accord with both our interests and our principles."¹¹⁷

This was to be achieved through the enactment of three measures. First, the US would ensure its continued military supremacy by spending more on its armed forces than any potential rival: "Americans should be glad that their defense capabilities are as great than the next six powers combined. Indeed they may want to enshrine this disparity in US defense strategy," the same way nineteenth century Britain aimed at conserving a navy larger than that of the next two powers combined.¹¹⁸ Second, America would restore "a sense of the heroic" and "a moral clarity" to its foreign policy, educating Americans to accept the US proper role as global leader. Finally, the US would root out challengers.

¹¹⁵ William Kristol interview, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/Iraq/interviews/Kristol.html. Similarly Kristol and Kaplan write that the "in recent history, it has been excessive American reticence, not bellicosity, which has led to more problems and greater dangers." Kaplan and Kristol, *War Over Iraq*, 118.

¹¹⁶ Kagan and Kristol, "Introduction," 4, 12.

¹¹⁷ Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Policy," 20, 23, 32.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 26; Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces, and Resources for a New Century* (Washington: Project for the New American Century, 2000), iv-v, 22-49.

“Because America has the capacity to contain or destroy many of the world’s monsters... and because the responsibility for the peace and security of the international order rests so heavily on its shoulders, a policy of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor.”¹¹⁹ In turn, in Kristol and Kaplan’s words, allowing “successful challenges to American power will invariably weaken America’s created norms,” so that American “abdication of global leadership” will provoke in turn a global descent into Hobbesian chaos, which would soon reach American shores.¹²⁰ This is not therefore a political agenda restricted to the defense of the US international standing: it encourages taking measures to increase the US advantage by comparison to other states even further, to the point where the message sent to any rival or challenger is “don’t even think about it.” “America must not only be the world’s policeman and its sheriff, it must be its beacon and its guide,” because while a policeman gets assignments from a higher authority, in international affairs there is no higher authority than America.” Essentially, the neocon agenda was designed to achieve a complete top dog position for the US, where its status would be beyond dispute.¹²¹

These were not just grandiose words. In the summer of 1997, Kagan and Kristol founded the PNAC—a pressure group reuniting analysts, politicians, and opinion leaders. The PNAC was not in theory a strictly neoconservative enterprise: the list of founding members comprised mainstream conservative Republicans such as Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Jeb Bush. But in practice the group turned into a dissemination instrument for the views of Kagan and Kristol and into a watchdog for the government’s pursuit of a resolute foreign policy of prestige. The PNAC was predicated on the distinct tenets that

¹¹⁹ Kagan and Kristol, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Policy,” 26-7, 31.

¹²⁰ Kaplan and Kristol, *War Over Iraq*, 117-8, 120-1.

¹²¹ Ibid, 120-1, 124; Kagan and Kristol, “Burden”; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 40-1.

the Clinton administration had been squandering away America's prestige; and that the best way to address the mounting world's problems was to reassert US leadership. The PNAC's statement of principles in fact begins with the words: "American foreign and defense policy is adrift. We aim to change this. We aim to make the case and rally support for American global leadership" and concludes by arguing that such a leadership-oriented policy is "necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next." In practice, this meant lobbying in favor of increased defense budgets and eliminating the most outstanding challengers to America's supremacy. Topping the list was Saddam Hussein.¹²²

Getting rid of Saddam became for the PNAC the equivalent of the *Carthago delenda est* call of Cato the Elder. From 1997 to 2001 the PNAC pursued an obsessive campaign in favor of regime change in Baghdad, by means of repeated articles, testimony to Congress, and lobbying decision-makers. To be sure, Iraq was not the only issue raised by the PNAC, which was also vocal in advocating a more muscular American stance against China, Iran, North Korea, and the Hezbollah.¹²³ However, the US policy toward Saddam took the center stage because it epitomized for the PNAC everything that was wrong with America's foreign policy in the 1990s. It relied on multilaterally decided UN sanctions to keep the Iraqi regime bottled up, but sanctions were eroding by the day, and promised to leave Saddam in power and at liberty to resume its efforts to dominate the Middle East. This was seen as "a house of cards policy."¹²⁴

¹²² Project for New American Century, "Statement of Principles," June 3, 1997 at www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm. Also see Halper and Clarke, *America Alone*, 98-110.

¹²³ See the chapters in Kagan and Kristol, eds., *Present Dangers*.

¹²⁴ Robert Kagan, "Saddam Wins Again," *Weekly Standard*, January 4, 1999

As the January 1998 PNAC letter to Clinton put it: “the current policy, which depends for its success upon the steadfastness of our coalition partners and upon the cooperation of Saddam Hussein is dangerously inadequate... In the near terms this means a willingness to undertake military action as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam and his regime from power.” Therefore, “rather than lead, Clinton permitted himself to be led.”¹²⁵ The US had shown throughout the 1990s it was reluctant to use force to castigate Saddam’s many transgressions, chiefly the attempt to assassinate George H. W. Bush and the Iraqi 1996 offensive in the Kurdish safe-haven, which according to Wolfowitz, perhaps PNAC’s most vocal supporter of regime change, had constituted “Clinton’s Bay of Pigs” moment.¹²⁶ As Perle put it: “the problem of Saddam Hussein and his regime cannot be allowed to linger indefinitely in the state of resignation into which the administration now seems to have descended.” This neocon view did not change even after Congress passed in 1998 the Iraq National Liberation Act, committing the administration to supporting the Iraqi opposition against Saddam. Despite the act, Clinton continued to stand accused of sabotaging the enactment of the policy, of tolerating Saddam’s infringements of the sanctions throughout 1998, and, after Desert Fox, of lacking the nerve to bring down Saddam.¹²⁷

As a result, if the goal was to make a show of American global leadership, which Wolfowitz defined as ensuring that “your friends will be protected and taken care of, that

¹²⁵Project for New American Century, “Open Letter to President Clinton,” January 26 at www.newamericancentury.org/iraqlintonletter.htm; Kaplan and Kristol, *War over Iraq*, 92; Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “Saddam Must Go,” *Weekly Standard*, November 1997; David Wurmser, *Tyranny’s Ally: America’s Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein* (Washington: America Enterprise Institute, 1999).

¹²⁶ Paul Wolfowitz, “Clinton’s Bay of Pigs,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 1996.

¹²⁷ Richard Perle, “Saddam Unbound,” in Kagan and Kristol, eds., *Present Dangers*, 99-110, 105; Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “A Great Victory for Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 26, 1998; “How to Attack Iraq,” *Weekly Standard*, November 16, 1998; Kagan, “Saddam Wins Again”; Kaplan and Kristol, *War over Iraq*, 50-62; Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil*, 16-23.

your enemies will be punished, and that those who refuse to support you will live to regret having done so,” then the only viable solution in the case of Iraq was regime change.¹²⁸ This was actually more a debate about means than ends in Iraq: the Clinton administration wanted just as much as the PNAC to see Saddam toppled, but it relied on sanctions; meanwhile, the PNAC advocated the actual use of American troops because “only the substantial use of military force could prove that the United States is serious.”¹²⁹ However, the PNAC never favored a full-scale American offensive penetrating as far as Baghdad. The group’s preferred solution was to seize territory in Southern Iraq, create an enclave permitting the organization of an armed force of the Iraqi resistance. This would have then proceeded with the benefit of American protection to gradually liberate additional areas, eventually driving Saddam from power.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, for all its vociferation, the PNAC did not make any headway in prompting large scale military action against Iraq even after Bush had come into office. True enough, the subject of Iraq was discussed in the first cabinet meetings, as otherwise attested by O’Neill and Clarke, but the new administration did not arrive at any decision other than to maintain in place the policy inherited from Clinton, with little support shown by Rumsfeld or Cheney. This arguable lack of interest, which some of the necons considered tantamount to appeasement soon exposed Bush to strong attacks from Kagan

¹²⁸ Paul Wolfowitz, “Remembering the Future,” *National Interest* 59 (Spring 2000): 35-45, 44.

¹²⁹ Zalmay Khalilzad and Paul Wolfowitz, “Overthrow Him,” *Weekly Standard*, December 1, 1997.

¹³⁰ Paul Wolfowitz, “Statement Before the House National Security Committee,” at www.newamericancentury.org/iraqsep1898.htm; Wolfowitz, “The United States and Iraq,” 112-3; Paul Wolfowitz, “Rising Up: Iraqi Rebels with a Cause,” *New Republic*, December 7, 1998; Robert Kagan, “A Way to Oust Saddam,” *Weekly Standard*, September 28, 1998; also see Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, “The Rollback Fantasy,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (January/ February 1999): 24-41; Stephen Solarz and Paul Wolfowitz, “Letter to the Editor,” *Foreign Affairs* 78 (March/ April 1999): 160-1.

and Kristol.¹³¹ A disappointed Kristol even thought in 2001 of closing down *The Weekly Standard*.¹³² The September 11 attacks, however, provided the neocons with the necessary opportunity to air once again their arguments for invasion. As Perle put it, the weakness shown by the US in the 1990s made September 11 “inevitable.”¹³³

In the very first post- 9/11 number of *The Weekly Standard* on September 17, the director and deputy director of the PNAC made the case that the real stakes of the attacks had been to drive the US out from the Middle East. The American appropriate response to this challenge was to reassert “our role as the region’s dominant power” through “a sustained campaign that addresses not just the problems of bin Laden and other terrorist organizations but the underlying strategic goal that animates them and their allied states.” Hence, the US should mount a demonstration of strength destined at showing its enemies its willingness to preserve its preeminence in the Middle East. For this reason, “eliminating Saddam,” regardless of his involvement in 9/11, “is the key to restoring our regional dominance and preventing our enemies from achieving their war aims.” In addition to ending Saddam’s efforts to acquire WMD, such an action would have had the merit of deterring at once Iran and Syria, “and restore the global credibility tarnished in the Clinton years. Both our friends and our enemies will be watching to see if we pass this test.” For the neocons, instead of a national calamity, 9/11 offered an actual opportunity “to restore American preeminence in a crucial region of the world... America

¹³¹Reuel Marc Gerecht, “Liberate Iraq,” *Weekly Standard*, May 14, 2001; Reuel Marc Gerecht, “A Cowering Superpower,” *Weekly Standard*, July 30, 2000. Though Wolfowitz had been one of Bush’s advisors through the 2000 campaign, the neocons correctly believed that Bush was going to follow the same realist foreign policy as his father. This is why the majority of the neocons supported the presidential bid of John McCain. Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 135-7.

¹³² McConnell, “Weekly Standard War.”

¹³³Richard Perle, “Next Stop Iraq,” November 30, 2001 at <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/america-war.20011130.perle.nextstopiraq.html>.

can avenge the attack on our cities, restore national honour, and, finally, win the larger war in the Middle East.”¹³⁴

A few days after the article, the PNAC wrote another open letter to President Bush advocating action not only against Al Qaeda, but also against Saddam: “even if evidence does not link directly Iraq to the attack, any strategy aimed at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.” This was to be done on the grounds that “failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”¹³⁵ Frum and Perle hammered on the point: “had 9/11 been followed by a resurgence of Saddam’s power, the United States would have broadcast to the world an even more lethal message: The Americans are weakening. The future belongs to America’s enemies. So we had to strike back and hard after 9/11, to prove that terrorism was *not* winning.”¹³⁶ Changing the government of Iraq thus represented a decisive victory that was going to restore and consolidate America’s status as the leading power in the Middle East, and perhaps globally.

This does not mean that the neocons were hoping to convince a reluctant administration to warm up to regime change. By September 24, the case for attacking Iraq, not just Afghanistan, had already been made twice by Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz at principals’ meetings. Rather, *The Weekly Standard* was spelling out a rationale that was by then widespread in the ranks of the administration, well beyond the neocons group: invading Iraq was necessary to preserve and enhance America’s status, it was achievable

¹³⁴ Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly, “A War with a Purpose,” *Weekly Standard*, September 17, 2001.

¹³⁵ Project for the New American Century, “Open Letter to President Bush,” September 19, 2001 at www.neowamericancentury.org/Bushletter.htm. Only Perle among the Bush decision-makers signed on.

¹³⁶ Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil*, 28-9.

because of America's military superiority, and it would finally remove the constant irritant Saddam represented. However, the problem lies identifying a precise link between the neocons' efforts on behalf of invasion and the actual decision to invade. In this sense, the relation between the neocons and the administration and should be seen as a tactical alliance, with the neocons the junior partner. The neocons influence over Rumsfeld had clear limits: they could not sway him in embracing the creation of an opposition-run enclave, in warming up to nation building, or in accepting their candidate to succeed the Iraqi strongman, the Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi.¹³⁷ Before 9/11, even though Rumsfeld had signed both the 1997 founding act of the PNAC and the 1998 letter to Clinton, he was not a diehard partisan of regime change.¹³⁸ Rumsfeld in effect favored a different course of action, designed around the two no-fly zones imposed in the North and the South of Iraq since 1992. Since the US planes guarding the areas came under frequent attack from Iraq, forcing American retaliation against Iraqi anti-air defenses and radar sites, Rumsfeld was proposing a disproportionate retaliation for every attack—so not only the offending units, but also the wider armed forces would have been targeted. Eventually, the Iraqi military machine would have been so severely depleted that Saddam's grip on power would have been broken.¹³⁹ Besides Rumsfeld's contacts with

¹³⁷ Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress opposition group, was a former colleague and friend of both Perle and Wolfowitz at the University of Chicago, and had lobbied insistently in favor of the enclave option. The CIA however saw Chalabi as corrupt and lacking support on the ground in Iraq. Chalabi was the provider of much of the faulty intelligence on Iraqi WMD. Jane Mayer, "The Manipulator," *New Yorker*, June 7, 2004; Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York : Harper Collins, 2004), 161-73.

¹³⁸ What is more in the aftermath of the botched occupation of Iraq the neocons used Rumsfeld as a scapegoat for the policy's failures. Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 269-70; William Kristol, "The Defense Secretary We Have," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2004; David Rose, "Neo Culpa: Now They Tell Us," *Vanity Fair*, November 2006.

¹³⁹ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 14-5.

the non-governmental wing of the PNAC, represented by Kagan and Kristol appeared to have been minimal—the most likely channel being Perle rather than Wolfowitz.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, what the neocons provided for Rumsfeld was a ready-made intellectual framework justifying the elimination from power of Saddam for the sake of American prestige.¹⁴¹ Not only was there no intellectual debate in the administration on the policy to follow, but the many conflicting considerations that had bedeviled Clinton's search for a new foreign policy concept were laid to rest in a matter of weeks. "Moral clarity" had replaced uncertainty and doubt to the extent that even the diehard realists Rice and Powell, had converted to the cause of America's "benevolent hegemony." The cabinet members themselves marveled at the sense of transformation taking place in America's role in the world. As Rice put it: "an earthquake of the magnitude of 9/11 can shift the tectonic plates of international politics...The international system had been in flux since the collapse of Soviet power. Now... it is indeed probable—that this transition is coming to an end... this is a period not just of grave danger but of enormous opportunity." Similarly, for Cheney, "when America great enemy suddenly disappeared, many wondered what direction our foreign policy would take...All of that changed five months go [on 9/11]. The threat is known and our role is clear now." Basically, the

¹⁴⁰ Max Boot, "Myths About Neoconservatism," in Stelzer, ed., *Neocon Reader*, 45-52. Rumsfeld seems to have had an uneasy relation with Wolfowitz, but held Perle in high esteem. Perle held influence well above his official role as Chair of the Defense Policy Board. It was widely accepted that Feith was Perle's appointee. Cockburn, *Rumsfeld*, 101-7; Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 231-4; Frances Fitzgerald, "George Bush and the World," *New York Review of Books*, September 26, 2002; Elizabeth Drew, "The Neocons in Power," *New York Review of Books*, June 12, 2003.

¹⁴¹ While neocons downplay their ability to influence foreign policy, and specifically the decision to invade Iraq, arguing that "correlation does not mean causation" they admit that the Bush administration essentially employed their arguments. Boot, "Myths," 45-52, 45-6; David Brooks, "The Neocon Cabal and Other Fantasies," in Stelzer, *Neocon Reader*, 41-2; Muravchik, "Neoconservative Cabal," 255-6.

administration understood September 11 as a fresh beginning, similar to Truman's time in office when containment had first been articulated.¹⁴²

Rumsfeld's immediate reaction to the 9/11 attacks, which caught him at the Pentagon was to scribble a note asking for information so as to "judge whether good enough hit SH[Saddam Hussein] at same time, not only UBL [Usama Bin Laden]... go massive, sweep it all up, things related and not."¹⁴³ While some may view the note as Rumsfeld's instinctive "knee-jerk" reaction, later evidence suggests that it was the first step in a strategy designed to promote a war not only on terrorists, but also on their presumed sponsor states and even those states, such as Iraq, that had been constantly challenging the US.¹⁴⁴ Rumsfeld brought up Iraq on the meeting on September 12, and he seems to have been the person who encouraged Wolfowitz to bring up the subject again on September 15.¹⁴⁵ On this latter occasion, the argument was more developed and hinged on three points: first, the American response should not be limited to retaliation on the perpetrators of the attacks themselves; second, Afghanistan was not an appropriate ground for a war against terrorism as troops could get bogged down into an indecisive campaign in mountainous terrain and comprised few targets that could have been attacked, while an operation in Iraq might be easier to pull off; third, that "the US would have to go after Saddam at some time if the war on terrorism was to be taken seriously."¹⁴⁶ From the point of view of a showcase of American will, Iraq was preferable

¹⁴² Frank Bruni, "For President a Mission and a Role in History," *New York Times*, September 22, 2001; Condoleezza Rice, "Speech at Johns Hopkins University," April 29, 2002 at merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/iran/WH/20020429-9.pdf; Dick Cheney, "Remarks to the Council of Foreign Relations," February 16, 2002 at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/cheneyiraq.htm>; Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 297-9, 315-7; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 78-80, 82-3.

¹⁴³ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Tunç, "What Was It About?"

¹⁴⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 15-6.

¹⁴⁶ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 83-5.

to Afghanistan. In the words of Wesley Clark, Iraq had “a face”: “action against Iraq would provide focus against a visible, defined, and widely disliked adversary. It followed the Cold War mind-set of assigning terrorists, a state sponsor, a ‘face,’ that could be attacked.”¹⁴⁷ Four days later, on September 19, Perle had a meeting with Bernard Lewis and Ahmed Chalabi on Iraq, which Rumsfeld joined. Rumsfeld commented that toppling the Taliban was important, but not enough. “The United States,” Rumsfeld contended, “needed to do more to demonstrate that there were serious consequences for mounting an attack on the US and show it would not suffer any unsavory governments that were affiliated with terrorists.” As one aide remarked: “Rumsfeld was advocating a demonstration of power.”¹⁴⁸

In later interviews, Rumsfeld reminisced about telling Bush how the US had weakened its deterrent because “on a number of occasions [we] seemed to the rest of the world to have been attacked or hit...and the immediate reaction was a reflexive pull-back.” He then went on to quote François de Rose, the French Ambassador to NATO: “the capability and the will of the United States helped discipline the world... by virtue of the fact that people recognized that we had capabilities and were willing to use them.” But during Clinton’s time in office, “to the extent that we were not willing to use them, we had a reflexive pull-back. It encouraged people to do things that were against our interest. I remember talking to the president [Bush] about that and he agreed strongly

¹⁴⁷ Wesley Clark, *Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism, and the American Empire* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 119-20. Three days after the attacks, when visiting the Pentagon Clark was told that “we are going after him[Saddam] anyway... we’ve never been very good at taking on terrorists, but one thing we can do is take down states, and there’s a list of them they[the civilian leaders] want to take out.”

¹⁴⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 18-9. This rationale might have also influenced Cheney. According to his foreign policy advisors Aaron Friedberg and Stephen Yates, Cheney thought that “the world’s last remaining superpower must not stand helpless against the dangers of a state-terror nexus.” What was needed was a “demonstration effect... not just to be a tough guy but to reestablish deterrence. We had been hit very hard, and we needed to make clear the costs to those who might have been supporting or harboring those who were contemplating those acts.” Gellman, *Angler*, chap. 9, especially 231-2.

with it.” In fact, both Rumsfeld and Bush agreed that “the United States and his administration will be leaning forward not back.”¹⁴⁹ This was in fact an almost word-by-word quotation from Kagan and Kristol, who describe the strategy of hegemony as involving a decision between leaning forward and sitting back and choosing the former course of action, thus “being more rather than less inclined to weigh in when crises erupt, and preferably before they erupt.” The 9/11 attacks represented for Rumsfeld the consequence of America’s hesitancy and pusillanimity: “a lot of people in the world had come to conclude that we were gun-shy, that we were risk averse.” Thus, the chief lesson of 9/11 was that “weakness is provocative.”¹⁵⁰

The remedy advocated by Rumsfeld was a strategy of “forward leaning” sending a signal of resolve in leading the world. This was to be accomplished by a series of blows against challengers, even those not directly connected with the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.¹⁵¹ Specifically, this involved the adoption of a wider policy than retaliation against Al Qaeda.¹⁵² It is in this context that on September 20, 2001 Bush offered a choice of being either with the US or with the terrorists; that on September 13, Wolfowitz spoke of a new policy of “ending” states that were seen as supporting terrorism: “it will be a campaign, not a single action”; and that on September 27 Rumsfeld made an argument for a new kind of war: “forget about ‘exit strategies.’ We’re looking at a

¹⁴⁹ Dan Balz and Bob Woodward, “Secretary Rumsfeld Interview,” *Washington Post*, January 9, 2002; James Carney et al., “Inside the War Room,” *Time*, December 31, 2001; Thom Shanker, “For Rumsfeld, A Reputation and a Role Are Transformed,” *New York Times*, October 13, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ Kagan and Kristol, “Introduction,” 14.

¹⁵¹ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 3-4.

¹⁵² The neocons advocated an even wider American offensive in the Middle East after Iraq would have fallen. Possible targets for regime change were Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Authority. See Max Boot, “What Next? The Foreign Policy Agenda Beyond Iraq,” *Weekly Standard*, May 5, 2003; Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 242-3; Frum and Perle, *An End to Evil*, chap. 5; Thomas Powers, “Tomorrow the World,” *New York Review of Books*, March 11, 2004; Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 118-9.

sustained engagement that carries no deadline.”¹⁵³ Even though immediate action on Iraq had been rejected in the two meetings in September, the threshold of a “war on terror” extending beyond Afghanistan had effectively been crossed.¹⁵⁴

The selling of the Iraq war by employing the WMD issue as the least common denominator points at Rumsfeld’s *modus operandi*. Rumsfeld’s career had been decisively shaped by his ability to piggyback on American concern over nuclear issues. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, this pattern could be seen during his first stint as Secretary of Defense in the Ford administration, when he managed to successfully subvert Kissinger’s efforts to secure a new SALT Treaty with the Kremlin. Rumsfeld encouraged the creation of a parallel team of outside experts, the so-called Team B, to assess the available intelligence. Predictably, Team B (comprising Wolfowitz and Perle) arrived at the conclusion that “all the evidence points to an undeviating Soviet Commitment... to global Soviet technology” and that Moscow was using arms limitations to restrain the US while increasing its own capabilities.¹⁵⁵ The second such occasion was the 1998 debate over NMD. Rumsfeld managed to create again a commission formed of outside experts (again including Wolfowitz) to evaluate the risk to the US of rogue states developing ICBM technology. The Rumsfeld Commission contested vehemently a 1995 NIE conclusion that rogue states were at least fifteen years away from building ICBMs, on the grounds that “absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence.” The Commission was in particular upset by the CIA’s “reluctance to go beyond known fact”:

¹⁵³ George W. Bush, “Address to Joint Chambers of Congress,” September 20, 2001, www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/; Elisabeth Bumiller and Jane Perlez, “Bush Top Aides Proclaim Policy of Ending States That Support Terror,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2001; Donald Rumsfeld, “A New Kind of War,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2001.

¹⁵⁴ The most likely interpretation of the decision not to attack Iraq immediately is that it was postponed, not absolutely ruled out. Clarke, *Against All Enemies*, 32; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 16-7.

¹⁵⁵ Cockburn, *Rumsfeld*; Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 74-5; Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 146-7.

its insistence on basing its estimate strictly on the available evidence, instead of speculating on the extent of technology that rogue states could develop, provided certain material, components, and knowledge were assumed as available. The Rumsfeld Commission concluded that rogue states could build ICBMs in the next five years.¹⁵⁶

A similar pattern was followed by the Pentagon in the months preceding the Iraq war. Not only was the threat from Iraq especially its nuclear component exaggerated on purpose, but intelligence was employed selectively to suggest, rather than to prove that Iraq could have built nuclear weapons, if the right ingredients and technology, such as the Niger uranium and the aluminum tubes were present. In carrying out this parallel intelligence task, the Office of Special Plans set up by the Pentagon was heir to Team B and to the Rumsfeld Commission. The reason why nuclear weapons were employed as the most poignant argument for the overthrow of Saddam might, hence, be traced to the successful history of Rumsfeld and his advisors in peddling these points. This success is in turn explainable by the long-standing American concern over nuclear weapons: in fact, between 1990 and 1998 controlling nuclear proliferation consistently ranked in polls of American public opinion as the number one US foreign policy goal.¹⁵⁷ So, even though a stronger case could have been made on behalf of Saddam's chemical and biological weapons, it was the nuclear issue that seized the public imagination and that made invasion necessary and imminent.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Bradley Graham, *Hit to Kill: The New Battle over Shielding America from Missile Attack* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 35-50.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce Jentleson and Rebecca Britton, "Still Pretty Prudent: Post-Cold War American Public Opinion on the Use of Military Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (August 1998): 395-417.

¹⁵⁸ Jon Western, "The War over Iraq: Selling the War to the American People," *Security Studies* 14 (January 2005): 106-39; Kaufmann, "Threat Inflation."

For the purpose of showing America's full power in action the fall of the Taliban had been decidedly anti-climactic—the operation had been too short; the resistance too weak; and complete victory had not been achieved since it had failed to deliver the capture or killing of Osama bin Laden at the siege of Tora Bora.¹⁵⁹ The military operations had assumed the semblance of an extended police search. Routine patrols, and shadowy intelligence operations are not the stuff of policies that capture the public's imagination or bolster America's prestige as the global leader.

This is why a second phase was contemplated in order to maintain the momentum in the war on terror. Iraq was chosen because it best met the criteria for showcasing America's ability to lead. In this respect, the invasion of Iraq was not only required by America's continual failure to dislodge Saddam from power, which had become an obsession in the ranks of neocons. Iraq in itself was but a minor symptom of a wider and potentially catastrophic evolution in US foreign policy. 9/11 was essentially seen by the Bush cabinet as a wake-up call to the dangers following from the sort of foreign policy guided by illusions the US had pursued under George H. W. Bush and especially under Clinton. This approach had missed upon the opportunity provided by the end of the Cold War, which had left the US supreme in terms of power, and thus free to remake the international order as it saw fit. In the acceptance of Bush and of the neocons, the US had had the might, but not the will to lead—a classic formula for status inconsistency.

¹⁵⁹ Philip Smucker, "How Bin Laden Got Away," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 4, 2002.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In 1899, one year after the US had soundly defeated Spain, the German satirical newspaper *Kladderadatsch* published a cartoon reflecting the new American role. The illustration featured a row of small houses with ethnic roofs embodying the European powers and Japan, which was dwarfed by an interminable skyscraper that stood for America. On the skyscraper's cloud-shrouded top a throne-seated Uncle Sam was extending his right arm holding a scepter in the Roman salute under the title "either Caesar or Nothing."¹ In the present context of debate over invasion and occupation of Iraq, on-going war on terror, and American empire, the cartoon provides a striking representation of the central finding of this thesis: the strong effect that the need for prestige exerts over the strategy of states. After all, the US had been an informal empire for more than a century: the 1998-2003 timeframe however stands out not only in relation to previous instances of American expansion, but also in regards to the American foreign policy of the early 1990s still characterized by the formula of the "empire by invitation."² The peculiarly unilateral and forceful approach to empire chosen by the Clinton and the George W. Bush administrations is itself explainable by reference to the constant preoccupation with America's international ranking compared to other states.

Indeed, if there is such a thing as a common political denominator among US decision-makers and analysts of American foreign policy alike in the aftermath of the end

¹ The cartoon is reproduced in Thomas Patterson, Gary Clifford, and Kenneth Hagan, *American Foreign Policy: A History to 1914* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 193.

² There is, however, some continuity, as Chapter Three shows, between the current phase of imperial expansion and the Cold War policy regarding the Third World, which was influenced by credibility.

of the Cold War, this consists in the emphasis placed on America's role as a natural world leader. America's standing as the international number one is so much taken for granted that, with the exception of a handful voices that call for retrenchment and the dismantlement of its empire, the consensus view holds either implicitly or openly that America's strategy should aim at the very least to maintain its current ranking.³ As such, the exercise of global leadership by the US has taken pride of place in every single State of the Union Address delivered by an American president since 1990 on. Similarly, the common wisdom among analysts, whether they recommend selective engagement, offshore balancing, a Bismarckian approach, or primacy as the US grand strategy, contends that, as a bare minimum, the US should resist the emergence of any alternative regional leader in the key areas of the American empire: Europe, Far East Asia, and the Middle East, a course of action that would perpetuate the supremacy of the US.⁴ In other words, debates on the grand strategy of the US revolve around the desirable degree of American leadership and around the proper way to exercise it, not around the point of whether the US should at all be an international leader instead of one-among-many great

³ Indeed, very few voices called for such normalization or for a complete abandonment of the imperial project. See inter alia Jeane Kirkpatrick, "A Normal Country in a Normal Time," *National Interest* 21 (Fall 1990): 40-4; Eugene Gholtz and Darryl Press, "Come Home America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21 (Spring 1997): 5-49; Eric Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from the 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2004).

⁴ On the schools of thought on America's grand strategy in the Post Cold War see Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21 (Winter 1996/1997): 5-53. For examples of strategies directed at countering efforts from other great powers at regional domination see for instance Robert Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Joseph Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Zalmay Khalilzad, *From Containment to Global Leadership? America and the World After the Cold War* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1995), 21-6; Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility" in Robert Kagan and William Kristol, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 3-24.

powers. Consequently, if the strategic choice America has to make is between “global domination” and “global leadership,” then this is in a sense no choice at all.⁵

Why did world leadership weigh so heavily on the American psyche in the aftermath of the Cold War? The thesis hypothesizes that this was the consequence of a constant, and perhaps inevitable condition of status inconsistency: the disparity between on the one hand, America’s military muscle and economic clout, unrivalled since the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and, on the other hand, its limited ability to employ these superior resources effectively in order to fulfill its political preferences. Hence, the US enjoyed high status in some dimensions conferring prestige, but could not do so in all such dimensions. In turn, this led to the American need to balance rankings by bringing political performance up to par with its capabilities, and in the process achieving a condition of complete top dog, i.e. of international hegemon. This requirement was all the more pronounced since it had not been initially anticipated. As Chapter Four shows, the US mistakenly assumed following the Gulf War of 1991 that it could rest on its laurels by presiding over an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity with the wholehearted help of its international partners. As a result, its authority was going to be uncontested: *Pax Americana* was assumed to mean effective peace. However, the illusions of order, cooperation, and peace under the budding globalization of the early 1990s were never fully translated into practice. Instead, the US was soon forced to take effective charge in relation to a host of new demanding challenges. As James Woolsey, the director of the CIA in the first Clinton administration prophetically put it in his 1992 testimony to Congress: “we have slain a large dragon. But now we live in a jungle filled with a

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

bewildering variety of poisonous snake and in many ways the dragon was much easier to keep track of.”⁶ The Post Cold War years, at first understood as a period of tranquility—a “holiday from history”—compared to the half century of confrontation with the Kremlin, thus proved eventually a more complicated and troublesome era, in which, furthermore, the US had a much bigger reputation to protect as the last surviving superpower, the largest empire, and by its own claim, as the *de facto* global leader.

The second Clinton and the successor George W. Bush administrations could not help but feel that America’s foreign policy did not live up to the achievements expected of the strongest state the world had seen since the days of the Caesars. From at the very least 1995 onward, US decision-makers exhibited the constant worry that America’s prestige was slipping away due to its inability to provide a clear-cut response to challenges in the successive contexts of Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, North Korea, Kosovo, and Iraq. The September 11 attacks represented in this line of thought the last and the worst of a series of offenses produced by the perception that America’s will was weak. As Rumsfeld put it, US decision-makers acted on the belief that “weakness was provocative.” Consequently, the 1998-2003 timeframe witnessed simultaneously an American obsession with avoiding the impression of weakness, vacillation, or reluctance to use force and a continuous need to mount shows of US resolve and might, destined to prove to the world America’s mettle as an effective leader.

In effect, prestige considerations help account for US foreign policy at the cusp of the millennium, as illustrated by the cases of the intervention over Kosovo, unilateralist diplomatic measures, and the invasion of Iraq. In Kosovo, as Chapter Five elaborates, the

⁶ James Woolsey, Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United State Senate, February 2, 1993.

essence of the problem was not so much the magnitude of the human rights or security offenses caused by Milosevic's actions in the province, but instead the cumulative effect on America's prestige of successive instances of Yugoslav disobedience—and this coming on the heels of a similar experience in Bosnia, where four years of ineffective threats against the Bosnian Serbs had lowered substantially America's credibility in the eyes of its NATO allies. If the US could not stand up to a petty Balkans dictator, how could it possibly entertain pretensions of maintaining order on the European continent or in the world? For this reason, the US purposefully sought a military confrontation with Milosevic, especially in the context of the Rambouillet negotiations, designed to inflict a humiliating settlement upon the Serb despot and in the process prove beyond doubt America's credentials as the indispensable nation, the single nation capable of leading the others by sheer strength of will. Certainly, the US was influenced by the misperception that Milosevic was going to cave in after a mere few days of bombing. But when this expectation was not born out by facts, the US persisted with bombing, because achieving victory in the sense of returning the Kosovar refugees to the province was crucial to safeguarding American and NATO's prestige. This is also why by May 1999 the US was even willing to consider a ground offensive in Kosovo even without the participation of its NATO allies, a prospect Washington had opposed tooth and nail since the start of the crisis. In Kosovo, the US shed the reluctance to employ force on a large scale in the service of empire, which had been a pillar of its earlier foreign policy.

Prestige explains as well, as seen in Chapter Six, the unilateral turn in American diplomacy initiated during Clinton's term in office and reaching its apogee during the administration of George W. Bush. In its mission to ensure order as the world leader, the

US demanded unrestricted freedom of action, and sought to be awarded certain unique privileges. More specifically, the US required guarantees that its troops stationed abroad would not be the subject of prosecution by the International Criminal Court; that the US would be allowed to deploy a National Missile Defense system in violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty so as to prevent the possibility of being deterred from intervention by rogue states that managed to develop nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles; and that its requests to use force would receive the blessing, preferably unanimous of the United Nations Security Council. However, on all these points, the US was defeated by the resistance of other international actors. America thus faced two options: either persist with a multilateral approach, even at the risk of being often condemned to passivity when international agreement could not be reached; or take matters in its own hands and present its partners with a *fait accompli* even at the risk of provoking their discontent. That is to say that neither multilateralism nor unilateralism are perfect options: both come with advantages and costs attached. Multilateralism presents the sizable advantage of legitimacy and of a large amount of pooled resources, but also imposes the cost of potential political paralysis due to the difficulty of creating and maintaining cooperation. As such, this solution was tried and, in the US opinion failed in the 1990s, with Bosnia, Iraq, and Kosovo perhaps the most poignant examples. From 1998 to 2003, the US thus explored the alternative of unilateralism. It refused to sign the ICC statute; withdrew from the ABM treaty when Russia refused to modify the treaty to allow a NMD option; and progressively did away with the requirement of a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force. In the 1998 context of Iraq, the US claimed to derive legitimacy from previous UN

resolutions; in Kosovo, such legitimacy was supposedly derived from NATO; in Afghanistan, the US preferred to rely on the formula of coalitions of the willing. The return of the US to the UN in the fall of 2002 for a resolution allowing the use of force for the purpose of regime change in Baghdad was not by any means a prodigal son's return—but a policy aimed at once at placating domestic critics and catering to British concerns. Yet this will to please also had limits: and the inability to obtain a majority in the Council or to avoid a French veto did not prevent the US from invading Iraq nonetheless. Of course, neither was unilateralism cost-free: hence the increased talk of American imperialism and the growth of anti-Americanism following the Iraq War.

Finally, as Chapter Seven shows, the invasion of Iraq was conceived of as a showcase of American ability to lead, which was made necessary both by the defiance of Iraq and more importantly by September 11. The US needed a major foreign policy success to compensate for its loss of prestige following the terrorist attacks. The Bush administration, in particular Rumsfeld and Cheney, and its neoconservative supporters wanted to send an unambiguous message to the effect that the US could not be provoked with impunity and that it was the rightful world leader, not only because of its power potential, but also because of its will in making use of it. In this respect, Afghanistan was ill-suited as the grounds for a “demonstration effect”: it was a remote and mountainous place, where any military operation would have bogged down into an extended police search for the shadowy Al Qaeda and the Taliban, which did not seem significant enough foes. Saddam Hussein was, by contrast, perhaps the most prominent of the challengers the US had to face in the Post Cold War, His regime had nowhere to run or hide, and military operations against it would have been “a cakewalk.” Therefore, bringing Saddam

down would have been the ultimate demonstration that the US was willing to take on the burden of being a decisive world leader, a responsibility it had avoided since the start of the unipolar age in 1991. In so doing, the Bush administration would have achieved the national greatness for which the neoconservatives clamored: the US status as the international hegemon would have been uncontested.

As Thucydides foresaw almost two and a half millennia ago, concerns over the international pecking order have always encouraged states to either acquire an empire, or to seek to expand one further so as to demonstrate the ability to “get things done” and in so doing, preserve or improve their international standing. As the Athenians put it to the oligarchs of Melos in justifying the incorporation of the island into their empire: “it is not so much your hostility that injures us; it is rather the case that, if we were on friendly terms with you, our subjects would regard that as a sign of weakness in us, whereas your hatred is evidence of our power.”⁷ The same logic applies to the US: the doubts regarding its international status in the 1990s gradually led to an increasingly unilateralist and violent policy of imperial expansion, ultimately aiming at raising America to the pinnacle of the international prestige hierarchy. Once this hegemonic status had been reached, the implications for any challenger, in the words of Kagan and Kristol, would have been unambiguous: “don’t even think about it.”

Implications and the Future of the American Empire

Was the 1998-2003 pursuit of imperial expansion in the service of prestige a rectifiable anomaly in the course of the history of American foreign policy? At the risk of

⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), Rex Warner trans., V, 95-7, 402-3; also see I. 76, 80.

proving Yogi Berra right in his pronouncement that it is always dangerous to make predictions, especially about the future, this thesis suggests a negative answer.

True enough, such a conclusion might seem hazardous in light of present developments. The second term in office of George W. Bush led to a disavowal of the imperial tendencies of 1998-2003. The occupation of Iraq turned out to be an endeavor much more costly and difficult than the Bush decision-makers first assumed. Though Bush himself had proclaimed the end of hostilities in Iraq in May 2003, the country was soon engulfed not only in an insurgency against the American forces, but also in a wave of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Al Qaeda operatives and in a near approximation of a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. Caught in the middle, the US response was up to the 2007 neocon-inspired surge in troops (which was complemented by political advances towards the Sunnis) largely incoherent: America lost more than ten times the number of troops in the insurgency than it did during the 2003 war against Saddam and generated a world outcry in 2004 by its treatment of Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison.⁸ Consequently, the wider agenda of imposing an American order in the Middle East, with Syria and Iran as the next targets, was abandoned. The architects of the Iraq war were soon either replaced, as in the case of Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Feith, marginalized, as Cheney, or forced to resign, as Perle. The neocon movement in fact traversed a major crisis among some very bitter recriminations—by the late 2000s, individuals designated as neocons not only denied that neoconservatism was a movement,

⁸ On the occupation of Iraq see inter alia George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Strauss, Farrar and Giroux, 2005); Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and the Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006); Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Crown, 2006) ; on the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal see Seymour Hersh, *Chain of Command: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

but also that there was even such a thing as a neoconservative in the first place. Indeed, the very label was abandoned by Kagan and Kristol: neoconservatism has now become allegedly bona fide conservatism.⁹ The election of Democrat Barack Obama in 2008 on a foreign policy platform of rebuilding multilateral ties, beginning a new era of engagement, and withdrawing from Iraq thus appears to have dealt the coup de grace to America's version of imperial policy seen from 1998 to 2003. To quote Obama: "America is not the stereotype of self-interested empire."¹⁰ Presently engulfed in the worst economic recession since 1929, the US seems to have little appetite left for either expansion or international status-seeking.

Yet, such obituaries might turn out to have been exaggerated. Perhaps the single worst defect of foreign policy analysis is to place a disproportional amount of faith in the present trends, as not only a complete break with whatever occurred in the past, but also as iron-firm indication of what is to come. If one were to pay attention to every announcement of change of doctrine or of foreign policy revolution, one might be excused for thinking these transformations occur almost on a yearly basis, yet frequently the more things change, the more they stay the same. This might be all the more so, since the root causes of American foreign policy in the 1998 to 2003 interval are still at work.

The US continues to be dominant militarily, and despite the recent crisis, even economically. Moreover, America still has an empire to contend with, and is still

⁹ See inter alia Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 267-80; G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-Conservatism Movement," *Survival* (Spring 2004): 7-22; Moises Naim, "Casualties of War: The Ideas That Died in Iraq," *Foreign Policy* 144 (September/ October 2004): 96-7; Max Boot, "Myths about Neoconservatism," in Irwin Stelzer, ed., *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 45-52; David Rose, "Neoculpa: Now They Tell Us," *Vanity Fair*, November 2006; Francis Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment," *National Interest* 76 (Summer 2004): 57-69; Charles Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Globalism," *National Interest* 77 (Fall 2004): 15-26.

¹⁰ Barrack Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," Cairo, June 4, 2009 at Barrack Obama, www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-by-the-president-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09.htm.

involved in a wider war against terrorism in an area extending from Iraq to Afghanistan. The American expectation based on the country's capabilities and responsibilities is still that the US has to lead the world—a pledge that President Obama has yet to abjure. Actually, in his very first State of the Union Address Obama made the point that “as we stand at this crossroads of history, the eyes of all people in all nations are once again upon us—watching to see what we do with this moment, waiting for us to lead” and echoed the indispensable nation doctrine by saying that “we know that America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, but the world cannot meet them without America.”¹¹

Therefore, it follows, that sooner or later, due to the accumulation of setbacks and challenges to its authority, the American empire will likely have to take yet again action to protect its prestige as a global leader. To be sure, Obama will probably in the short run turn the clock back to policies followed during Clinton's first term in office, such as engagement, focus on the economy, and reluctance to use force. But in so doing, the same problems that bedeviled the Clinton administration from Mogadishu to Baghdad are likely to resurface. By all means, multilateralism can be given another try but it is also likely to confront again into the risk of Security Council veto. Similarly, using force sparingly is likely to leave challenges unresolved and to result in domestic and international demands for strong-willed American leadership. As a result, in the aftermath of the Bush presidency's emphasis on primacy, the most probable scenario for America's foreign policy is a return to the inconclusive search of a “bumper sticker”

¹¹ Barack Obama, “Address to Joint Session of Congress,” February 24, 2009 at www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/remarks-of-president-barack-obama-address-to-joint-session-of-congress/.

successor doctrine for containment as a guide for action.¹² Yet, since the possible avenues that US foreign policy might take are limited, it is likely that the US will be constrained by status inconsistency to reconsider the imperial expansion model followed from 1998 to 2003 further down the road.

What are the implications of America's preoccupation with status for future international relations? Three possible answers can be offered to this point. The first answer, recently advanced by Wohlforth, argues that the more status the US enjoys relative to other great powers, the more stable and peaceful the international order. This is so because the US tops beyond doubt the international hierarchy in terms of capabilities, and since in his view status estimates are dependent on the distribution of capabilities, the incentive of the next-in-line states to attempt to increase their own relative status is removed. Consequently, under multipolarity and bipolarity, status disputes might cause frequent great power conflict, but under unipolarity this becomes a moot point. In other words, according to Wohlforth, the US has achieved already a condition of status crystallization. Being a complete top dog the US is a satisfied power, while the lower ranks have reconciled themselves to the American superior position, accepting it as a *de facto* given.¹³ But this interpretation is much too sanguine for three reasons. First, Wohlforth only assigns status based on capabilities, without taking into account political performance. Second, Wohlforth fails to provide a definition of status. Third, Wohlforth does not examine the actual record of American foreign policy in the Post Cold War, which shows just how difficult the US has found it to translate its political preferences

¹² Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

¹³ William Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61 (January 2009): 29-57.

into practice, how much doubt and agony US decision-makers suffered on the subject of their ambition to lead to the world, and how vehement the other great powers' reactions to America's status claims have been. Wohlforth would be right, if America had reached the point of dominance across every dimension conferring prestige, but as Post Cold War American foreign policy testifies the US is not at that stage. Instead, the US is caught in a position of status inconsistency: dominant in certain aspects, yet still wanting in others.

The second answer is put forward by authors such as Larson and Shevchenko, who examine the status foreign policy of second-tier great powers such as Russia and China.¹⁴ Basing their arguments on the social identity theory associated with Tajfel, they argue that states have at their disposal a variety of possible responses to problems of status. According to Tajfel, an individual or group experiencing status anxiety—the fear of losing status in favor of other actors—would have three basic strategies at its disposal: social mobility (moving up so to be included in a high status group); social creativity (finding worth and hence a claim for high social ranking in one's own strengths); and finally social competition (or conflict).¹⁵ For Larson and Shevchenko, Russia and China have opted in the Post Cold War for the second strategy. Since they could not surpass the US, or even compete with it under the traditional military and economic dimensions conferring status, Moscow and Beijing have sought to redefine their identity in ways that played to their own strengths. Hence, it is not impossible to conceive of a specialization

¹⁴ Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy," *International Organization* 57 (Winter 2003): 77-109; Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status, Power, and World Order: Integrating Russia and China," unpublished paper presented to the International Studies Annual Convention, New York 2009; Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 482-91, esp. 488-90. However, Lebow expresses doubts that states agree to confer prestige separate from military and economic power.

¹⁵ Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in William Austin and Stephen Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1979), 33-48, 43-4.

of states according to their own specific portfolio of capabilities and achievements, which will obviate their fighting over the distribution of status. This assumption opens hence a whole new vista of thought-provoking possibilities. While the US might be the world's most powerful military state and the strongest economy, other countries might boast a larger population, a vibrant culture, a higher standard of living, greater levels of international aid, or excellence in sports. A state might even claim status not on behalf of the present but in light of its glorious past.

Yet, this argument fails to take account of the implications of status inconsistency. Even assuming that status is conferred according to multiple dimensions, status inconsistency will still dictate that a state must achieve supremacy not only under one dimension but under all dimensions conferring prestige.¹⁶ A state that has the largest military and the strongest economy will insist on also having the best schools, spearheading space exploration, building the most awe-inspiring constructions, and on winning the largest number of Olympic medals. In effect, if one area of activity is accepted as conferring status by the society of states, this will assume before long the form of a positional good, in which all actors compete to reach the top spot.¹⁷ The very essence of status inconsistency therefore affirms the need to balance ranks, not to

¹⁶ Indeed, several accounts link status with dimensions such as population, soft power, culture, history, or achievement in sports. See respectively A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 341-4; Harold Nicolson, *The Meaning of Prestige* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 9, 23-7, 30-5; Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 9-15; Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 46-7, 65-6; Michael Wallace, *War and Rank Among Nations* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970), 18; Lincoln Allison and Terry Monnington, "Sport Prestige and International Relations," in Lincoln Allison, ed., *The Global Politics of Sport* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁷ Schweller argues that "if everyone defines prestige differently it can be commonly enjoyed" but he expresses doubts that prestige can be conferred according to any criterion other than military power. Yet, Schweller's point that prestige is a positional good would continue to hold even under a multidimensional setting, because of status inconsistency considerations that constrain actors to balance their ranks. See Randall Schweller, "Realism and the Present Great Power System: Growth and Possible Conflict over Scarce Resources," in Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and the State Strategy after the Cold War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 47-8.

concentrate on just achieving the highest rank under one dimension. In fact, if this feat is managed, the pressure will increase to repeat it in other areas as well. This is why status inconsistency will be felt in particular by states that do well across several categories and seek to improve further their standing. The better the economies of China and Russia will perform, the higher the incentive will be on their part to also develop strong military forces, and then to increase their international influence proportionally. Similarly, the more the US will seek to resist these efforts, since they endanger its own status.

This thesis formulates the third possible answer: America's drive for status is likely to produce competition, and hence, conflict. This is so for two main reasons: as other great powers improve their capabilities and performance vis-à-vis the US, they will also require additional prestige. However, this requires that the US give up its claim at international leadership, which places it above the level of ordinary great powers. It follows that the US will probably resist such demands so as to protect its standing. But disputes over status might arise in another sense as well: as the US seeks to achieve a complete top dog position, it will demand an exceptional amount of prestige from all the other members of the international system, including the other great powers. In the process, it will threaten to lower further the existing status of states such as China and Russia, who are likely to oppose vehemently such a demotion. The point is that status inconsistency reinforces the view of status as an essentially positional good: any gain in terms of status cannot be secured except at the expense of another actor.

Yet, for conflict to degenerate into violence, more conditions would need to be fulfilled, such as the achievement of power parity between the US and dissatisfied second-tier great powers as argued by power transition theory, or the coagulation of a

great power grand coalition against the US as argued by balance of power theory. Therefore, prestige constitutes a motive for conflict and hostility: it does not itself enable warfare to take place. As such, prestige is likely to be a key issue that will routinely bedevil relations between the US and other great powers, and will constitute a significant obstacle to their achieving or maintaining cooperation.

Admittedly, throughout modern history there have been periods of time in which great powers have been able to devise “rules of the game” enabling prestige to be shared. This may be seen as the equivalent of Tajfel and Turner’s social mobility solution: allowing a rising state to enjoy increased prestige by inclusion in a high status group. Accordingly, upon induction into the club, each great power was granted privileges in excess of ordinary states but commensurate to those enjoyed by other fellow members. This formula was best embodied in the nineteenth century Concert of Europe in between the Vienna Congress of 1815 and the Crimean War of 1854-6, and in the diplomacy of Bismarck from the 1870s to the 1890s. The cardinal rules of these arrangements were “that no one power could attempt to settle a European question by an independent and self-regulated initiative” and that “great powers must not be humiliated. They must not be challenged in either their prestige or honour.” Similarly, Schroeder writes that “the first and great commandment of the Concert was, ‘Thou shalt not threaten or humiliate another great power.’”¹⁸ Consequently, great powers were placed on the same footing. If defeated, a great power was to be granted generous peace terms; if another member

¹⁸ Richard Elrod, “The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System,” *World Politics* 28 (January 1976): 159-64, 164-7; Paul Schroeder, *Austria, Great Britain, and the Crimean War: The Destruction of the European Concert* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 405; Robert Jervis, “From Balance to Concert,” *World Politics* 38 (October 1985): 58-79, 71-3; Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle Over Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

contemplated using force against a third party they could not do so without first securing the other members' assent; if it aimed to expand its empire, it was to be compensated elsewhere in kind; if compensation proved unfeasible, the area in contention was to be neutralized as a buffer; if its prestige was at stake over a given issue, either the matter was quietly withdrawn from the discussion agenda or concessions were to be offered to avoid humiliating any of the interested members.¹⁹

Little wonder that analysts advised the US follow precisely such a formula in the aftermath of the Cold War. The US should demonstrate restraint, consult its allies and partners in decision-making, and be prepared to offer concessions to reach or preserve consensus.²⁰ Ironically, the best summation of this policy was articulated by George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election: "if we are an arrogant nation they will resent us; if we are a humble nation but strong they will welcome us. And our nation stands alone right now in the world in terms of power, and that is why we have got to be humble."²¹ The problem, however, is that the US cannot follow such a foreign policy of humility. The Concert of Europe was successful at keeping its members' requirements for additional status in check in large part because, try as they might, they could not obtain a clear supremacy in the military and the economic dimensions. Status inconsistency was

¹⁹ Edward Vose Gullick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Morton Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: John Wiley, 1964), 22-6; Paul Gordon Lauren, "Crisis Prevention in Nineteenth Century Diplomacy," in Alexander George, ed., *Managing US-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 31-64, 37-57; Schroeder, *Austria*, 404-5..

²⁰ Charles Kupchan and Clifford Kupchan, "Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe," *International Security* 16 (Summer 1991), 14-61; Richard Rosecrance, "A New Concert of Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 71 (Spring 1992): 64-82; Richard Rosecrance, ed., *The New Great Power Coalition Toward a World Concert of Nations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005).

²¹ "Second Presidential Debate between Governor Bush and Vice-President Gore," *New York Times*, October 12, 2000.

therefore minimal to start with, since no distinct leader emerged in either category.²² This is not the case in today's world. America's prominent rank in military and economic terms makes it not only the object of envy for second-tier powers, but also pushes the US to contemplate an even loftier role. Furthermore, it could be argued that the US had effectively attempted to implement a concert-like foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. In particular, the George H. W. Bush's new world order and Clinton's successor doctrine of engagement were designed to ensure and preserve the desiderata of great power cooperation in dealing with pressing international problems. But this consensus could not be preserved because of the limitations it imposed on the US capacity for action and of the decline in America's prestige resulting from the poor political performance restraint entailed.

Consequently, in order for America to successfully put into practice a concert policy, it would have to downsize its capabilities and give up its empire. However, such a strategy cannot be implemented. The same logic that Pericles used to defend the Athenian empire is solidly engrained in America's psyche: "you cannot continue to enjoy the privileges unless you also shoulder the burdens of empire... Your empire is now like a tyranny: it might have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go."²³

²² Even the concert formula failed in the war in Crimea precisely on the point of a dispute over status between Russia and France and Britain. Elrod, "Concert of Europe," 172; Schroeder, *Austria*, 407-9, 413-14. Schroeder draws a parallel between the new world order and the Concert of Europe. Paul Schroeder, "The New World Order: A Historical Perspective," *Washington Quarterly* 17 (Spring 1994): 25-44.

²³ Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 161.

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