Bruce W. Jentleson

Tough Love Multilateralism

To their credit, neoconservative foreign policy strategists know the power of a paradigm. They play on national pride by framing their policies in the overarching worldview of U.S. unipolarism and dominance. They advocate unilateralism as right and realist while dismissing multilateralism as naive and unrealistic, soft and weak. Although multilateralists have had some success in conveying the flaws of unilateralism, they have yet to make the positive case for multilateralism as a credible and preferable U.S. foreign policy strategy. Unless multilateralists stop preaching to the choir and start getting tough on themselves, addressing the weaknesses that still cause too many people to have too many doubts about multilateralism's viability as a realistic foreign policy strategy, they will not be trusted by the American public to conduct U.S. foreign policy in a dangerous world.

The broad unilateralism-multilateralism debate is about overarching ways of viewing the world and the role of the United States. The debate is important in and of itself in that it frames and at least partially shapes positions on specific policies. The dynamic also works in the opposite direction: general worldviews are shaped by positions on particular issues. Many issues come into play, including broad views of the United Nations, the global environment and the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, and arms control and nonproliferation; but no issue is more central to the overall debate, and none more problematic for multilateralists, than the use of force. Whether Democrats trying to close the foreign policy confidence gap, Republicans battling within the Bush administration, or Europeans wary of

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the United States acting alone, multilateralists' lack of credibility on the use of force—the will to use it and the capacity to use it effectively—is their most damning weakness.

When President George W. Bush made his "Top Gun" landing aboard the USS *Abraham Lincoln* off the coast of San Diego in early May 2003 and declared that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended,"[1] the drama and apparent decisiveness of the U.S. victory had multilateralists in retreat more than ever. The shock and awe of Operation Iraqi Freedom garnered stratospheric approval in American public opinion polls. Pundits lauded the birth of the New American Empire and predicted the death of the UN. U.S. power appeared impenetrable.

But in just a few months, a great deal has changed. The Bush administration's largely unilateral strategy for winning the peace in Iraq is proving far more difficult, dangerous, and expensive than advertised. Concerns are mounting about the sustainability and completeness of the military victory in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Other recent cases that evoke memories of ethnic conflict in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo, such as Liberia, remind us that debates about the use of force predate the war on terrorism and raise their own issues about when, why, how, and by whom military force should be used.

The current security environment has thus left the foreign policy debate in the United States as open as it has been at any time in recent history. Opinion polls on Iraq show that the American public's prewar doubts about going it alone, swept aside by the wartime "rally 'round the flag" sentiment, have resurfaced and intensified. Other polls and studies paint a picture of a public open to broad debate about the United States' role in the world. A recent Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) study concluded that "Americans have become more attentive to what is happening beyond their borders."[2] A leading scholar observes that "the general public has shown little indication of a mindless retreat towards isolationism."[3] Further, in a recent memo, a team of top political consultants advises that "voters are ready to listen to alternatives."[4]

This very political context makes now the right time for multilateralists to strengthen their case. Doing so will require affirming multilateralism's current strengths and taking a tough-love approach to strengthening its weaknesses, especially on the core issue of the use of force.

Realism as a Strength of Multilateralism

Multilateralists need to start by staking their own claim to the mantle of realism and to stop ceding it to unilateralists. Being an idealist rather than a realist can be refreshing and beneficial in some walks of life; in the realms of

foreign policy and national security, however, where risks are great and the stakes are high, this is not the case. Unilateralists start with the advantage of tougher-sounding rhetoric, especially in the post–September 11 world, with their sweeping challenge to the rest of the world of being "either for us or against us" and other verbal bravado. Multilateralists can never outswagger them, but they can potentially make a stronger substantive case.

Multilateralism's greatest strength lies in its very logic. Any strategy's reach must measure up to the scope of the problems it seeks to address. Given the global scope of so many of the threats and challenges in today's world, one nation acting alone simply cannot solve or even manage them. To be sure, there will always be times and threats that require unilateral action, and some political third-rails must be avoided, such as full foreign command of U.S. troops. In the contemporary era, however, the scenarios that are best met unilaterally, or even largely unilaterally, are becoming more the exception than the rule.

> Multilateralists have yet to make the positive case for multilateralism.

The freedom of action given up by acting multilaterally tends to be outweighed by the capacity gained to achieve shared objectives. Part of that gain is a political version of the international trade principle of comparative advantage, by which different nations, relevant international institutions, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) all bring to bear their complementary expertise based on their own historical experiences, traditional relationships, and policy emphases. Another part of that gain is burden sharing in ways that can help with the politics and the finances of sustaining commitments over time. Yet another part is the legitimacy that can come only from a broadly multilateral effort. International norms surely do not determine action but, as Martha Finnemore aptly put it, they do "create permissive conditions for action."[5] Achieving broadly multilateral efforts admittedly has its own set of obstacles and pitfalls, but it also has benefits that are inherently not possible for any nation, even the United States, to achieve when it acts without others or even with just a select few.

The global war on terrorism has only proven the importance of multilateral cooperation. Although the decisive battles in Iraq and Afghanistan—largely the product of unilateral U.S. military power—have gotten the most attention, much of the success that has been achieved thus far in the war on terrorism has been through broad multilateral cooperation on a number of lower-profile fronts such as intelligence sharing, border security, economic sanctions, and law enforcement. Such ongoing efforts to break up cells, cut off financial flows, interdict supplies, and intercept plotters may only make

page A24 of the *New York Times* or may even get bypassed by the press, but they are essential to mounting the global reach needed to counter the global scope of Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks. In the debate over going to war with Iraq, multilateralists made an altogether realistic calculation by raising concerns about the potential net negative effects on the overall war on terrorism if U.S.-European disputes and resentments over Iraq ended up hampering cooperation on these other fronts.

These are common sense arguments and need to be presented as such. Too often, multilateralists come across as if their positions are based on the world the way they hope it can be. They need to do much more to convey that they are the ones who see the world the way it is and base their policies accordingly. There is an underlying pragmatism that comes with recognizing that no nation is as strong on its own as it is with the support, approval, and cooperation of others.

Multilateralists' lack of credibility on the use of force is their most damning weakness.

A second key strength of multilateralism is that it is more attuned to the strategic distinction between possessing power and having influence. Things are not nearly as automatic as they are in the old adage, so often invoked by the Bush administration and other unilateralists, that "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."[6] The weak don't always roll over or fall into line, and the strong are not always strong enough to achieve their objectives on their own or on their own terms. Even a nation as incontestably powerful as the United States today finds that its greatest foreign policy challenges are not about doing what it wants to do but about getting others to do what it wants them to do and ensuring that the outcomes are what it wants them to be. Other nations balance against the United States, bargain with it, oppose it, and even bandwagon against it. This may be because of the very preponderance of U.S. power, or it may be in spite of it. Either way, the bottom line is that the exertion of power does not guarantee the assertion of influence.

No less a realist than Henry Kissinger warned of this dynamic in 2001: "An explicit insistence on predominance would gradually unite the world against the United States." Kissinger cautioned that some anti-Americanism is to be expected as "the inevitable result of America's unique position as the sole remaining superpower and would exist no matter how the United States conducts its diplomacy." According to Kissinger, the key is to assert leadership in ways conducive to countries "find[ing] their identity compatible with cooperation with the United States" rather than "in reflexive opposition to it."[7] One can see Kissinger's advice being heeded on a number of

more multilateralist positions taken by Secretary of State Colin Powell and key administration allies such as then-Policy Planning Director Richard Haass. The Bush-ian unilateralists, on the other hand, paid as little attention to Kissinger as to other Republican non-neoconservatives. Democrats who may not be used to citing Kissinger as a voice for multilateralism would do well to do so on this point.

Following this course means avoiding any reversion to the overly deferential approach that the Clinton administration initially took, such as with Secretary of State Warren Christopher's first trip to Europe in 1993 to consult with NATO allies on behalf of the new administration but which came across as a "what do you think we should do?" style of leadership. Nor does this approach mean buying into the penchant of France and others to seek to check U.S. power at every turn—often knee-jerk reactions in their own right. U.S. leadership can be assertive without being arrogant and open to genuine consultation and give-and-take collaboration without shrinking into deference. The United States has plenty of power; the challenge is converting this power into influence.

The advantage multilateralists have here is their grasp of the multiple currencies of contemporary power. "Soft power," to use Joseph Nye's term, really does matter; it is an instrument of influence that "unilateralists forget at their and our peril."[8] Soft power is manifested in the legitimacy that comes when power is used in ways consistent with international norms. Being able to claim the rightness of action in terms of international norms and values, not just national ones, is more than just an affirmation of a nation's ideals; it also bears upon its power and influence. In this respect, the spate of polls showing the steep and widespread decline in the esteem in which the United States is held around the world are not just measures of sentiment, but factors in the United States' declining international standing that tangibly affect the nation's capacity to conduct foreign policy effectively.[9]

Both the prewar debate and the dilemmas of winning the peace in Iraq demonstrate this gap between power and influence. The prewar diplomatic imbroglio with France and Russia in the UN Security Council made the gap blatantly obvious. Even more telling was the potency of "just say no" domestic politics within a number of key countries. Opposition to the U.S. position on Iraq was a, if not the, deciding factor in the 2002 German and 2003 South Korean elections. No matter how justifiable the criticisms of foreign leaders and candidates who exploited these sentiments may be, the reality remains that the sentiments were strong enough to be exploited. Moreover, in Turkey, another long-standing U.S. ally, and India, an emerging one, popular governments found pro-U.S. positions on Iraq politically unsustainable: in Turkey the issue was prewar military cooperation,[10] in India it was postwar peacekeeping. The Bush administration tried both carrots and

sticks, but at crucial moments it could not sufficiently convert even the United States' incomparable power into the influence needed to get friends to cooperate.

Although the war was still successfully waged, with the U.S. military again showing its extraordinary prowess, the limits of a strategy lacking broad-based multilateral support became all too evident all too quickly when the task became winning the peace. The Bush administration is right in many of its criticisms of the details of the alternatives pushed by France and others, and it has made some efforts to move toward common ground. Yet, it keeps missing the point of the weaknesses inherent to its largely unilateral strategy, weaknesses that will not be resolved by another $87 billion from Congress, longer troop-deployment periods, or other new or reasserted U.S. commitments. A genuinely and robustly multilateral strategy is what we need, not just what others want.

The exertion of power does not guarantee the assertion of influence.

Only such a strategy will enable the United States to share the financial and manpower costs of reconstruction; to tap the comparative advantage of other national, nongovernmental, and international actors who have more experience and expertise in reconstruction as well as nation building; and to improve the perception of legitimacy for the nation-building enterprise that the rest of the world associates with acting through the UN, whether we like it or not and notwithstanding the validity of many of the criticisms of the UN. The influence needed to really win the peace cannot come without a genuinely multilateral effort. And if the peace is not won, much that was won in the war will ultimately be lost.

Still, the war was won, and doubts remain about whether multilateralists could have done that. The Bush administration may well have gone to the Security Council more as a charade than genuinely to try to make the multilateral option work, but the French and others, including many American proponents of the UN, played right into Bush's hand by eschewing genuinely coercive diplomacy so incessantly as to create a sense of inaction more than a credible multilateral alternative.

Nor was it just Iraq on which questions have been raised about multilateralism and the use of force. The general sense has been that, although multilateralists get much of the multifaceted nature of U.S. power right, they still need to get more comfortable with U.S. power in its harder forms. They have to grasp its scope and not just its limits. The United States cannot do it all on its own, but the world cannot do very much without U.S. power. Above all, multilateralists have to come to grips with the use of military force.

Credibility on the Use of Force

The very nature of the multilateral process, of so many countries with so many national interests trying to act jointly, is especially problematic, given the need for timeliness and decisiveness in decisions for the use of force. The rap against multilateralism on the use of force grew in part out of early 1990s cases such as Somalia and Bosnia. In both of these cases, the failures of U.S. policy were blamed on the UN[11] and on the Clinton administration's own penchant for multilateralism. Although President Bill Clinton had used force on a number of occasions—in Haiti in 1994, in Bosnia in 1995, against Iraq in 1998, against Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in 1998, the Kosovo war in 1999—critics argued that he tended to do so in too minimalist a way (by using "pinpricks") and was too often guided, as Condoleezza Rice put it during the 2000 presidential campaign, by "the belief that the United States is exercising power legitimately only when it is doing so on behalf of someone or something else … the 'national interest' replaced with 'humanitarian interests' or the interests of 'the international community.'"[12]

For multilateralists to solve their credibility problem on the use of force, they need to do a much better job of addressing four key aspects: when military force should be used, why it is justified, who decides, and how to use it effectively.

When?

First and foremost, multilateralists must recognize that force cannot always be held back strictly as a last resort. Force should never be a first resort, but in certain circumstances it may need to become an early resort. Consider not only Iraq but also Rwanda and Bosnia and what last-resort thinking wrought in these and other horrific cases. A report by the UN-linked International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), formed prior to the September 11 attacks and focused on the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, sought to shift the terms of the use-of-force debate from the right of intervention to the responsibility to protect against aggression, whether against another state or within a state against its own people. Part of what makes the ICISS report a basis for policy rather than just high-minded rhetoric is that it couples the norm of the responsibility to protect with proposals for using force as an early resort.

Specifically, the report calls for resort to military force only after other options "have been explored … not necessarily that every such option must literally have been tried and failed. … But it does mean that there must be reasonable grounds for believing lesser measures would not have succeeded."[13] It goes on to assert that "military action can be legitimate as an

anticipatory measure in response to evidence of likely large[-]scale killing."[14] Diplomatic prose aside, these ideas are not all that substantively different from the Bush doctrine's formulation that, "if we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long."[15] Whereas ICISS gets there with the Rwandas in mind, and the administration with the Iraqs, both sides broach the same issue of force potentially as an early resort.

For multilateralists, this shift away from force only as a last resort requires breaking out of the tendency to conflate conflict avoidance with security enhancement, making the former instead of the latter the criteria for success. In diplomacy, the desire to come to agreement and avoid conflict comes with the territory. It should, but as a preference, not a postulate. Certain situations and adversaries necessitate the willingness to threaten or use force. The international community will never be taken seriously if its position comes across as "Please, don't make me do this." If adversaries or aggressors know that force will be used only as a last resort, only after the incremental pursuit of an array of options, they retain the strategic initiative and tactical advantage. This sequential last-resort approach forfeits any prospect of acting preventively. It would consign the world to wait until episodes of ethnic cleansing and genocide have run their horrific courses, terrorist networks have become deeply entrenched, or weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have been further proliferated or even been used.

Why?

Multilateralists need to be less willing to accept the invocation of state sovereignty behind which aggressors seek to hide. Sovereignty confers responsibilities, not just rights. Multilateralists should follow the lead of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, who has stressed that the UN Charter "was issued in the name of 'the peoples,' not the governments. … [I]t was never meant as a license for governments to trample on human rights and human dignity." Even Article 2(7)—"Nothing in this present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state"—needs to be qualified, according to the secretary general, with the important caveat that "even national sovereignty can be set aside if it stands in the way of the Security Council's overriding duty to preserve international peace and security."[16]

The ICISS report also hits hard on this point:

> The responsibility to protect its people from killing and other grave harm is the most basic and fundamental of all the responsibilities that sovereignty imposes—and if a state cannot or will not protect its people from such harm, then coercive intervention for human protection purpose, in-

cluding ultimately military intervention, by others in the international community may be warranted in extreme cases.[17]

Although the report contains qualifiers, its thrust is still very different from that of traditional noninterventionism.

Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter advocate extending this reasoning in the name of international peace and security to include nonproliferation by maintaining that it is "the duty of nations to work in concert to prevent governments that have engaged in behavior sufficient to demonstrate the absence of internal checks on their power from acquiring [WMD] or the means to deliver them."[18] The justification can be similarly extended to apply to state sponsors of terrorism whose role may be a more indirect one of aiding and abetting, yet of a threat not only to international peace and security but against mass civilian populations. All these scenarios pose difficult calculations of thresholds of threat, reliability of evidence, and other considerations that factor into decisions to use force. Multilateralists are right to raise concerns about the risks of using force, but they also have to confront the risks of not doing so. To stick too strictly to traditional noninterventionism undermines multilateralists' broader claims to peace, justice, and security. This position is as morally untenable as it is strategically unsound.

Multilateralists grasp the multiple currencies of contemporary power.

Who Decides?

Multilateralists' concerns about the dangerous precedents set by the unilateralist prerogative claimed by the Bush doctrine are well founded. Multilateralists are also right about the "unique legitimacy," as Annan phrased it in his opening speech to the UN General Assembly in the fall of 2003, with which the Security Council is endowed in any cases other than those that clearly meet the Article 51 self-defense criteria. Collective action based on collective decisionmaking is at the heart of multilateralism. The "who decides" question especially taps into this. At the same time, it is important that they follow the secretary general's lead in recognizing that "it is not enough to denounce unilateralism, unless we also face up squarely to the concerns" that the Bush administration and others have raised and "show that these concerns can, and will, be effectively addressed through collective action."[19] U.S. multilateralists can hardly be less critical of the UN than its own secretary general is.

This concern about the UN's capacity for firm and decisive action runs deeper than just the Iraq debate. In 1999, Annan was critical of the United

States and NATO for going to war in Kosovo without the Security Council's authorization but also of the Security Council for not acting when faced with these "crimes against humanity" and thereby "betray[ing] the very ideals that inspired the founding of the United Nations."[20] The ICISS report also pushed to confront the problems of Security Council inaction: "It is a real question" when there is a "conscience-shocking situation crying out for action … where lies the most harm: in the damage to international order if the Security Council is bypassed or in the damage to that order if human beings are slaughtered while the Security Council stands by." The ICISS issued its own tough love warning that, if the Security Council does not act in such situations, "it is unrealistic to expect that concerned states will rule out other means and forms of action to meet the gravity and urgency of these situations."[21] Surely no U.S. leader, whatever his or her general foreign policy orientation, would ever forswear that option. Considering the limits that are being learned the hard way in Iraq, however, future U.S. leaders need to continue to seek ways to make Security Council decisionmaking a more viable alternative.

Force cannot always be held back strictly as a last resort.

Ultimately, of course, the issue of "who decides" is not about what commissions recommend or even what the secretary general urges as much as what the nation-state members do, especially the Security Council's veto-wielding permanent members. On Kosovo, although other issues did come into play, such as Russia's ties to the Serbs as well as Taiwan and other disputes then current in China's relations with the United States, Russian and Chinese invocations of nonintervention were really more about precedent than principle, with Chechnya and Tibet more in mind than international law. On Iraq, France was more intent on balancing against the hyperpower than on genuinely helping the UN succeed where it had not for more than 12 years of Saddam Hussein's defiance of Security Council resolutions.

These national positions are entirely normal behavior on behalf of national interests, but these stances cannot be allowed to remain garbed in the global interest. The vision of the UN founders cast the permanent members of the Security Council not just as privileged great powers in positions to ensure their own national interests but also in part as global trustees expected to act with some sense of global interest. The bipolar structure of the Cold War made this perspective and approach extremely difficult, often impossible. Although the end of the Cold War tore down the bipolar barriers to a greater sense of globalism, it also opened up geopolitical space for divergent national interests to play out as Iraq, Kosovo, and other recent examples all too amply demonstrate. One lesson, yet again, is how difficult consensus

and collaboration among the permanent Security Council members is; the other lesson, yet again, is how essential it is. Whether getting mired in the Security Council or circumventing it is worse can be debated. Either way, though, both global and national interests suffer.

A more effective Security Council is as necessary as it is difficult to achieve. Although not the most pressing issue, Security Council reform and expanding permanent membership is a necessary step. Professor Thomas Weiss is right to question the immediate urgency of this issue and its potential complications, especially regarding use-of-force decisionmaking.[22] He hits hard on those more interested in process than results as yet another manifestation "of a perpetual problem in the organization as a whole: the UN is so consumed with getting the process right that it often neglects the consequences."[23] Even aside from the UN's own proclivities, there is the inherent problem that any increase in the size of a body that tries to work by consensus, especially when increasing the range of perspectives and interests, tends to make achieving that consensus more difficult. Nevertheless, given the sensitivities military intervention inherently carries in the historical contexts of colonialism and Cold War interventionism by the superpowers, greater participation by developing countries is ultimately necessary to enhance Security Council legitimacy, especially if it is to move toward force as an early resort and toward more of a responsibilities-based conception of state sovereignty.

Proposals to strip the existing permanent members of the veto would be going too far, as would extending the veto to any new permanent members. This is in part a practical matter of what the United States, among other permanent members, would accept: the official U.S. position continues to be open to Security Council expansion but opposed to loss of or further extension of the veto. It also is to ensure that going forward in member numbers does not push the Security Council backward in capacity. Nonetheless, whatever the composition of the Security Council, the crucial issue will remain how states, new members and old, approach their roles, not just who has the seats.

Those who genuinely believe that the Security Council should be the primary arbiters of the use of force need to do more to have their voices heard and their pressures felt in the political debates, in policy channels, and in the media to counter those who purport solidarity but whose actions undermine and discredit the very credibility and viability of the UN option. This is the essence of tough love. Part of these efforts needs to come from players within the European and other national political debates.[24] U.S. multilateralists also have to be more willing to take on not just their unilateralist foes but also their multilateralist friends, whether American or non-American, when they do and say things that make shared interests and goals harder to achieve.

Positions taken within the debate in the United States, whether of our own policies and actions or those of other countries and the UN, have an impact in

this country and also resonate internationally. There should have been more op-eds, television commentaries, policy analyses, and speeches in Congress by U.S. multilateralists on what was flawed in the French and German pre–Iraq war positions, on the problems with recent proposals for Iraqi instant sovereignty, and on where Europeans and others still are not delivering on their commitments to Iraqi and Afghan reconstruction and stabilization.

How?

Multilateralists need to be pragmatic in acknowledging the limits of the UN's operational role. The UN has numerous strengths, but conducting major military operations is not one of them. Article 43 and its provision for a standing military force may someday become a reality, but it is not likely in the foreseeable future. When confronted with interstate aggression, the optimal combination has been and will continue to be for the Security Council to exercise its unique legitimacy in authorizing the use of force and for the United States (or conceivably others) to take the lead in carrying it out, as was the case in the Korean War and the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

In dealing with ethnic and other civil conflicts, the UN has largely succeeded in peacekeeping, that is, military operations in situations in which peace has been reached but requires an agreed-upon third party to provide the reassurance needed to keep it. The UN has failed for the most part, however, in peace enforcement, that is, situations in which there is not much more than a shaky cease-fire or other weak agreement and military forces must try to impose and enforce peace on the warring parties. The UN's traditionally limited rules of engagement, patched-together military forces, inadequate logistical infrastructure, and other limited military capacities have proven adequate in situations that only require peacekeeping but cannot measure up in cases when peace must be enforced.

Regional organizations, alliances, and coalitions can perform some of the tasks that the UN cannot, either because of its capability or will. NATO is the strongest example: in Bosnia, NATO did what the UN was unable to do; in Kosovo, it did what the UN was unwilling to do. Only time will tell how NATO performs in Afghanistan, where it recently took over the command of the International Security Assistance Force. The Australian-led coalition force in East Timor is generally considered a success. The record is more mixed in Africa, with the Nigerian-led intervention forces of the Economic Community of Western African States having stabilized some conflict situations but exacerbated others and the African Union just starting to build a regional military capacity of its own. There are and will continue to be limits to all these efforts, but they do add to the repertoire of strategies that are multilateral in nature.

Nevertheless, multilateralists—within the United States as well as those internationally who too readily see multilateralism as a means of checking U.S. dominance—need to reconsider the United States' own role. John Ikenberry and others have made the crucial point that unilateralists grossly underestimate the ways in which the UN and other international institutions enhance rather than encroach on U.S. power and influence.[25] The corollary is that multilateralists too often underestimate how much the UN and other international institutions depend on U.S. leadership. Major military action is much more likely to be effective if led by the United States. So too are tough diplomatic initiatives more likely to succeed with U.S. leadership. Of course, policies cannot be set and roles defined strictly according to U.S. terms, but efforts to confine the U.S. role risk promoting participatory equity and other process-based principles at the practical expense of institutional effectiveness. A win-win dynamic is possible, by which the United States comes to recognize the UN and other international institutions as essential and the UN and other international institutions recognize the United States as crucial to their being essential.

Multilateralists need to be less willing to accept the invocation of state sovereignty.

In sum, on all four questions about the use of force, multilateralists must address concrete issues to make their case stronger and their appeal more credible. Unless they do, the strategy of multilateralism and multilateral institutions will be marginalized to side issues and support-staff roles.

Making the Political Case at Home

Although the importance of making the political case for multilateralism should not be underestimated, the difficulty of doing so is often overestimated. Although not all Democrats are multilateralists and not all multilateralists are Democrats, the gaping deficit Democrats suffer in public confidence on foreign policy compared to Republicans generally gets taken as a surrogate for public support for unilateralism over multilateralism. The gap is real, but the interpretation may not be as accurate as the conventional wisdom holds.

Democrats' foreign policy problem is less a matter of what they are perceived as standing for than the fact that they are perceived as not really standing for much. It is less that they are too multilateralist and more that they have tried too hard to be "Bush lite." One recent study found as many people explaining their doubts about Democrats on foreign policy saying

that they "don't stand up to" Bush enough as that they "criticize … Bush too much" and as many saying that the Democrats "lack their own plans and ideas on national security" as that they "don't support … Bush in his efforts to protect our country."[26]

Beyond party lines, further evidence suggests that the general public actually leans toward multilateralism in its basic foreign policy views. Consider the profile that emerged from the 2002 CCFR study—one that has been conducted every four years since the 1970s and is widely considered among the most authoritative and probing studies available. The study concludes, among other things, that the U.S. public "resists the idea of playing a hegemonic role in the world," "show[s] strong support for strengthening" the UN, and "believe[s] the more important lesson of September 11 is that the United States needs to work more closely with other countries rather than act more on its own to fight terrorism."[27]

Conducting major military operations is not one of the UN's numerous strengths.

A similar portrait comes from Professor Ole Holsti, one of the deans of public opinion scholarship, in his survey of pre– and post–September 11 public opinion data. Among other things, Holsti shows that, before and after September 11, "an overwhelming majority of Americans prefer[ed] a 'shared leadership role' to that of 'the single world leader.'" His evidence takes him to conclude further that the American public supports "an active international role but with a decided preference for multilateralism rather than going it alone."[28]

Public opinion about the war in Iraq followed very similar lines. As late as January 2003, the American public continued to favor acting through the UN. For example, 56 percent of those surveyed agreed that the United States "should not invade unless a new UN vote authorizes action," and only 39 percent favored invading without UN authorization.[29] Spurred by the rallying effect of Bush's State of the Union address and fed by the increasing perception that France and other countries were more intent on obstructing U.S. power than offering a viable alternative, public opinion began shifting toward strong support for the unilateralist option. For example, in polls conducted the night before military action began, 75 percent of those surveyed disapproved of "the way the UN is handling the situation with Iraq and Saddam," and 65 percent said that the president was right for not waiting for "[UN] approval before issuing tonight's [March 17, 2003] ultimatum."[30]

Nonetheless, during the early days of the war, when all seemed to be going well for the United States, when asked "who should take the leading role in rebuilding Iraq and helping its people set up a new government," 61 percent of Americans surveyed said the UN, and only 31 percent said the United States.[31]

The debacle of the U.S. occupation has made this sentiment even stronger. Americans have not wavered from their belief in the cause: 64 percent still agreed in a late September 2003 poll that "the United States should have taken action to remove Saddam ... from power." They have not lapsed into cut and run: 54 percent said "American troops should stay in Iraq until the job there is done," and only 36 percent said that "troops be brought home as quickly as possible."

Americans have, however, been questioning the Bush administration's unilateralist strategy for getting the job done. Fifty-one percent said the administration "does not have a clear plan" for Iraq. Sixty-three percent said the UN, not the United States, "should have the most say in establishing a stable government in Iraq." Seventy-two percent favored "turning over some authority" to the UN.[32] Thus, the overall pattern is of a strong preference for multilateral policies throughout the Iraq controversy, interrupted only briefly by the rally effect during the heat of war. If public support for the Bush policy continues to erode, it will be less a matter of a reactive public not having the stomach or staying power than of a prudent and reasoning public willing all along to support a multilateral strategy that it believes can work but not a unilateral one in which it has little practical confidence.

Even on Iraq, the swings toward unilateralism were limited and temporary; the American public stuck with its preference for multilateralism for a long time in the period leading up to the war and then came back to it rather quickly after the war. This inclination toward multilateralism reflects the public's basic understanding that, in a world of global threats and problems, we stand little chance of succeeding when we go it alone, even if we are the United States of America.

Still, doubts about multilateralism's practicality linger. Americans lean in its direction but will not land there until they believe that multilateralism is not only desirable but also doable. Efforts to polish the message and other political spin obviously have their place but will not prove sufficient to win over a public that continues to prove itself less spinnable and more pragmatic than pundits and politicians assume. The politics thus bring us back to the substantive aspects of the tough-love imperative: The public largely agrees with the multilateralist critique of what is wrong with unilateralism; their questions are more about what is right with multilateralism.

Tough Love Is What It Takes

The end of the Cold War has not meant the end of war. The ethnic conflicts and genocides of the 1990s taught this lesson. The attacks of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath have reaffirmed it. Although we cannot know for sure where the next major threat or conflict will occur, the issue of the use

of force will undoubtedly remain central to the foreign policy agenda for the foreseeable future.

The use of force is not the only issue on which multilateralists have work to do, but it is the most important one, both in itself and as it shapes the broader debate about the U.S. role in the world. Multilateralism brings a number of advantages to that overarching debate, including a sometimes overlooked realism inherent to the logic of the strategy and infusing its approach to U.S. power and influence. Multilateralists also have a stronger potential political basis for making their case than often recognized. To gain the credibility they need on the use of force, however, multilateralists, especially American ones, need to be clearer and firmer on four key points:

The general public actually leans toward multilateralism in its basic foreign policy views.

- Force cannot always be held back as a last resort and may need to be used as an early resort, judiciously and only when necessary, but recognizing the moral as well as strategic risks of waiting too long.

- The norm for the legitimate use of force should be grounded in a responsibilities-based, not just rights-based, conception of state sovereignty. Despots and aggressors must not be allowed to hide behind the shield of sovereignty. Peoples and nations must be protected against extreme threats to their security, both external and internal.

- The UN Security Council and other multilateral organizations must be more willing and able, with enhanced capacity, to act firmly, decisively, and in a timely manner if it is to live up to its claim to being the priority decisionmaking body on the use of force.

- Major military action is most likely to be effective when authorized by the UN and led by the United States. The UN's military operational role needs to be a limited one, geared more toward genuine peacekeeping than peace enforcement or resolving interstate conflicts. Regional alliances, coalitions, and organizations also can take on some operational missions.

Unless multilateralists shift their positions and develop policies along these lines for when, why, who decides, and how to use military force, they will remain weak analytically, vulnerable politically, and unable to gain the mantle of leadership of U.S. foreign policy.

Simply attacking the other side for its shortcomings is always an easier route than genuinely wrestling with the weaknesses of one's own positions and paradigms. Attacks work for winning applause in campaigns and otherwise preaching to the converted. Yet, in the midst of an era when the United States' role in the world is in need of intensive and thorough political and intellectual debate, bashing the other side is not enough. Unilateralism has its weaknesses, but so too does multilateralism. Its own positive case must be made.

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