

OLD ELEMENTS IN THE NEW SECURITY POLICY

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Most of the arguments in support of the recent American foreign policy under the Bush administration, as well as, of course, the Bush administration itself, portray the adoption of this new national security strategy as the result of the new threat of terrorism. I would argue that the new national security strategy is more a result of the unparalleled military strength and economic influence that the country possesses and how it chooses to use them. I would also argue that how the country currently chooses to use its military strength and harness its economic prowess is a continuation of, rather than a departure from, American foreign policy objectives as they were set at the end of the Cold War.

In essence, I am arguing that President Bush's seemingly new national security strategy really encapsulates the consensual view of America's proper role abroad since the end of the Cold War. This post-Cold War national consensus over the country's foreign policy is reflected not only in President Bush's recently announced national security policy, but is also evident in the foreign policies of his two predecessors. In this regard, the events of September 11 acted more as a catalyst to a well-formed foreign policy agenda than as a formative experience in the nation's life.

The evolution of this national consensus over foreign policy can be traced back by looking at political leaders' beliefs and how these informed their vision about American foreign policy, and at the concrete steps they took to implement this vision. What one notices then is the common thread that unites, rather than differentiates, the fundamental beliefs about foreign policy goals that guided Democratic and Republican presidents alike. One also sees a distinct similarity in the manner with which these administrations attempted to translate their beliefs into foreign policy.

The first element that permeates America's post-Cold War behavior abroad is the belief in the exceptional character of the American nation. The country's unique political and eco-

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conomic makeup, best defined as democratic capitalism,² has, since the inception of the republic, rendered the home front immune to class, religious, and ethnic cleavages, has promised equal opportunity to all, and has recently created the unprecedented affluence of the 1990s. Abroad, democratic capitalism seems to have succeeded in crippling the former Soviet Union and its alternative politico-economic experiment, has reinstated Kuwait's national sovereignty, and has restored respect for human rights in areas like Bosnia and Kosovo. All these tangible successes, both at home and abroad, could not but point to the leadership role with which the United States has been entrusted by history, by virtue of its unique ability to succeed where all other countries have failed, both domestically and at the international level.

Such belief in the centrality and righteousness of the American role abroad was echoed by President Bill Clinton when he argued that "the country is on the right side of history." In contrast, Clinton found China at the time on the "wrong side of history." Thus, prior to his trip to China in 1998 he said that he intended to offer the Chinese "a new a different historical reality."³ The same theme was continued with George W. Bush, then governor of Texas, when he said in 1999 that "we firmly believe that our nation is on the right side of history."⁴ This belief in the country's right choice is now explicitly included in the new security document where it is stated that there is "a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise."

Another constituent element of this consensual view of the American role abroad is the promise of an open international trading system. In order to achieve this end the Bush administration wants to expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy. According to the national security document, the United States will "provide resources to aid countries that have met the challenge of national reform." In particular, the United States calls for "pro-growth" legal and regulatory policies, "tax policies—par-

² Eugene R. Wittkopf, Charles W. Kegley, Jr., James M. Scott, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), p. 246.

³ Andrew J. Bacevich, *Different Drummers, Same Drum*, in *Annual Editions on American Foreign Policy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2002), p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 20.

ticularly lower marginal tax rates—that improve incentives for work and investment,” and free trade that “fosters the diffusion of technologies and ideas.”

This is not so different from Bill Clinton’s pledges in 1993 to “expand and strengthen the world’s community of market-based economies” and his demands that Japan open more of its markets to American exports.⁵ The liberalization of world trade was guaranteed with the signing of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1994, and the creation of a new World Trade Organization was seen by Clinton as means for the “economic renewal” of the United States and the world.⁶

If the beliefs of the post-Cold war presidents seem to be quite similar, so were the means they used to secure their preferred foreign policies abroad. Even before September 11, George W. Bush was arguing that the defensive barrier around the United States was rapidly eroding and that to do nothing would be perilous to the country. President Bush had argued at the time that the country was threatened by “all the unconventional and invisible threats of new technologies and old hatreds.”⁷ The end of the Cold War saw not the dissolution of what could have been considered a Cold-War relic, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but rather the expansion of its mission. Instead of dissolving, following the demise of the reason for its existence—Soviet military power—NATO redefined itself and its mission. It now sought to deal with issues such as ethnic conflict in the Balkans, viewed as a threat to the security of NATO members, and the promotion of democracy in the former Soviet bloc as means to maintaining the peace. The transformation of NATO took shape in the 1990s when the Pentagon announced its “strategy of engagement” in so-called out-of-area operations. The elder Bush first proposed the program of NATO enlargement to the East. Clinton converted that idea into reality. With the alliance’s enlargement, its mission to help spread democratic institutions took central stage in how NATO saw itself and was seen by others. In essence, it saw itself, and was seen by others, as useful and necessary.

⁵ *New York Times*, September 28, 1993.

⁶ Thomas Patterson, J. Garry Clifford, and Kenneth Hagan, *American Foreign Relations: A History Since 1895*, 5th ed., vol. 2, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p. 470.

⁷ Bacevich, *Different Drummers, Same Drum*, p. 22.

The closest parallel to America's "new" thinking of a borderless defense perimeter is where the nation had drawn its defense borders during the Cold War period. Back then, as now, American presidents from Truman to Reagan had vowed to resist communism wherever it existed, no matter how far from the homeland. Equally evocative of President Bush's foreign policy triad of economic goals, military means, and international diplomacy was the country's foreign policy during the Cold War, which was similarly operating in all three spheres. But what seems to show most clearly the similarity between the content of American foreign policy in the Cold War era and at present is the justification behind the militarization of the country's foreign policy in both eras. The pre-eminent document that signified the militarization of American foreign policy after World War II was NSC-68 in 1950. Back then, as now, an international crisis was presented as the reason for a massive military build-up during peacetime. In June of 1950, it was the outbreak of the Korean War that made NSC-68 the blueprint for American foreign policy for the next forty years. In 2002, it is the terrorist attacks against the homeland on September 11 that have justified the militarization of foreign policy.

But, is it really the case that national disasters redefine nations? In the case of the adoption of NSC-68, the Korean War was just the catalyst that helped put into practice the national consensus over America's foreign policy that had been building since 1944. In the post-Cold War era, if one were to look at the foreign policy continuity between the Clinton and Bush administrations, one can see the emergence of this national consensus over foreign policy before the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The tragic events of September 11, therefore, seem to have solidified in the nation's mind a vision of its foreign policy mission that had been taking shape since the end of the Cold War, rather than to have helped the nation redefine itself.