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America's Foreign Policy *Product, Process, and Purpose*

OVERVIEW

In this book I discuss American foreign policy within the framework of the tension between power and principles. First I look at foreign policy as a product, paying particular attention to what foreign policy is and to the important aspects of American foreign policy. Next I survey the benefits and burdens of world leadership. The many meanings of "America" in the eyes of the world are examined, as is the question of why it matters how the rest of the world sees the United States. A discussion of the foreign policy process focuses especially on the primacy of the president and the watchdog role of Congress. I note the inherent tension between power and principle in international politics and argue that the proper role of policymakers is to strike the optimal balance between self-interest and idealism, between vigilance and virtue, and between force and justice. I then examine political realism as a concept that seeks to solve this policy puzzle, stressing that no state, not even a superpower, can ever afford to make unlimited commitments or overextend itself. The chapter closes with a brief look at how American foreign policy, and the approaches to this balance, changed after September 11, 2001.

Since the founding of the Republic, a tension between power and principles, self-interest and ideals, has characterized American foreign policy. To say that there is "tension" between power and principles is not to deny that power can often be exercised within the realm of one's principles but, rather, to point out that interstate rivalry and national ambition create temptations, opportunities, and threat perceptions that militate against the strict observance of moral principles or legal constraints. The argument in this book draws on the theoretical insights of political realism, which views international politics as an arena of anarchy and conflict. The tension between power and principle thus arises from the dangers inherent in a world order that comprises competing states, as well as from domestic political pressures to act in ways that are at odds with the nation's core values or true interests. As the United States grew in territory and power, this tension also grew, as did the political controversy it generated. To understand America's role in the world today, it is necessary to understand how and why the relationship between the nation's principles and its interests has changed over time.

In the 1790s the United States, a vulnerable and untested federation of thirteen former colonies huddled along the

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Atlantic seaboard, was a small power separated from the world of the great powers by a vast body of water and a political system directly at odds with the monarchies that prevailed in Europe, including France, Great Britain, the Hapsburg Empire (Austria-Hungary), Prussia, Russia, and Spain. Within the European balance-of-power system, the great powers competed for wealth, territory, and prestige—in a word, for power.¹ Significantly, Europe's rivalries extended to the Western Hemisphere: the British, the French, and the Spanish had major holdings in the Americas at the end of the eighteenth century. In addition, Russia laid claim to territory along the Pacific Coast from present-day Alaska to California.

The United States and the entire Western Hemisphere at first played virtually no role in this competition except as a potential pawn. The very weakness of the United States left the nation's early leaders with little or no choice but to assert the importance of certain moral principles in politics and diplomacy. When power is not immediately attainable, nations, like individuals, naturally fall back on principle. The United States at the time of its founding is an excellent example of this behavior.

Today, the United States finds its role in the world reversed. Instead of being one of the weakest powers it is the strongest, despite the fact that the international system now encompasses the entire globe rather than a single region or continent. Power in its starkest form—namely, military power—is a major ingredient in American foreign policy. Indeed, critics charge that it has become the primary ingredient, that force has replaced diplomacy in the conduct of American foreign policy, and that power has eclipsed principle.

That the question of principle has not disappeared from domestic debates about foreign policy in the United States attests to the strength and endurance of America's liberal-democratic political culture. And that the United States can now intervene almost at will in the world attests to the success of the experiment undertaken at Philadelphia in 1787.²

1. Three classic "realist" theories of international politics emphasizing the balance-of-power concept that have greatly influenced my understanding of foreign policy are Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1973); and Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). A fourth "realist" book, which may in time become a classic, is John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001). In addition, any short list of "must read" books on the balance of power would include Inis Claude Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), and F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

2. The historian Catherine Drinker Bowen called the constitutional convention at Philadelphia a "miracle"; there is little doubt that many Americans would agree. Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention May to September 1787* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press / Little, Brown, 1966).

Two competing and contradictory tendencies have shaped American foreign policy since the nation's founding—isolationism and internationalism. Both were present at the creation and continue to influence the way Americans see the world, but the relative importance of these two tendencies has been reversed. Whereas isolationism was the main tendency then, internationalism triumphed after World War II. In the second half of the twentieth century, American internationalism became closely identified with an assertive use of military force, commonly known as “interventionism.”

As we will discover in the chapters to follow, there have been at least seven distinct eras in American diplomatic history. During the first, from 1789 to 1848–1849, the United States combined isolationism with a commitment to the status quo in the New World (formalized in the Monroe Doctrine). In the second, from 1850 to 1898, westward expansion under the guise of “manifest destiny” replaced the previous status quo policy, but America remained isolationist vis-a-vis the Old World. During the third, between 1898 (the Spanish-American War) and 1914 (the outbreak of World War I), this isolationist tradition broke down as the United States ventured beyond the Western Hemisphere for the first time. After World War I, President Woodrow Wilson preached internationalism and led the drive to create a new League of Nations and ensure world peace through collective security.

In the fourth era, between 1918 and 1941, the United States reverted to its isolationist ways rather than join the League, but the seeds of internationalism sown in different ways by three presidents (William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Wilson) after 1898 would germinate in the hothouse of World War II. In the fifth era, during the cold war (1947–1989), the United States enthusiastically embraced internationalism but soon abandoned President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's dream of collective security (symbolized by the United Nations) in favor of a policy of containment through “collective self-defense” (symbolized by the North American Treaty Organization, or NATO, and various other made-in-America military alliances).

During the sixth era, after 1989, the era of containment rapidly gave way to a “unipolar moment.” Unrivaled in power and prestige, the United States teetered between interventionism and a tendency to turn inward.³ As we will see, President William J. Clinton's administration did not shrink from the unilateral use of force but avoided large-scale military actions. President Clinton

3. Steven W. Hook and John Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, 16th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), pp. 246–251. For a neoisolationist argument by a respected American scholar, see Eric A. Nordlinger, *Isolationism Reconfigured: American Foreign Policy for a New Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For a view by a pundit and would-be president, see Patrick J. Buchanan, “America First—and Second and Third,” *National Interest*, Spring 1990, pp. 77–82.

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was careful to justify U.S. intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo on “humanitarian” grounds and to seek the approval of the United Nations and the international community.⁴

Finally, all this changed after September 11, 2001, when the administration of George W. Bush embarked on a course of action that reflected the two contradictory tendencies of interventionism and isolationism in American foreign policy. The former assumed the form of preemptive military action; the latter appeared in the guise of “homeland security.”

The reader will find this skeletal treatment of American diplomacy fleshed out in greater detail in subsequent chapters. This chapter has two main purposes: namely, to provide a brief introduction to the subject matter of the book and to tantalize the reader with some thought-provoking questions. The purpose of the rest of the book is to help the reader find the answers.

Two elements—power and principle—provide the framework for this book as well as the keys to its main line of analysis. Power is the ultimate commodity in international politics, and more is better than less. When power is scarce and more is unattainable, as often happens when a new state is born, the country naturally falls back on moral defense because it cannot resort to military offense and can only hope that potential adversaries will refrain from doing so at its expense. In this manner, principles become embedded in the country’s core values—a part of its political culture—and cannot be discarded once greater power is achieved without simultaneously discarding vital elements of the political culture that also support the nation’s basic political institutions. For example, American presidents cannot declare that they are indifferent to political repression in other countries (including strategic partners such as Egypt, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia) without raising serious questions about America’s commitment to freedom and democracy. However, when domestic pressures or personal presidential preferences are given priority over strategic national interests the results are almost always disappointing and sometimes disastrous (for example, the Bay of Pigs).

Thus, power and principle are often rivals in the policy arena, and it is always necessary to find the best balance between the two when that happens. The difficulty of finding that balance—and gaining a national consensus around it—largely explains why foreign policy criticism has long been a hallmark of American democracy. It is significant that the critics of America’s foreign policy both here and abroad often evoke principle and argue that the United States relies too heavily on military power while giving only lip service to moral considerations. Today,

4. Nonetheless, President Clinton did commit combat troops to the Balkans, where, as of late 2003, they remain.

economic and military power defines America in the eyes of the world, but principle remains integral to America's political culture.

In the following section I define "foreign policy" and identify what is and is not unique about the American approach, the way America relates to the rest of the world and defines its role in the world. Next, I weigh the consequences of being a dominant, or hegemonic, power with global responsibilities. I then consider the meaning of "America," noting that it means different things to different people, and ask why it matters how others see us. Following that discussion is a look at foreign policy as a process and an examination of how the role of the president and Congress has evolved, what it means, and whether it might be necessary to adjust the balance of power within the existing matrix of branches, departments, and agencies that formulate and implement foreign policy. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of political realism in the post-cold war era. I ask whether the American penchant for foreign policy "doctrines" is a good thing or not. I also consider the limits of American power in a world that is not "unipolar" despite the popularity of this misconception. Finally, I look at some of history's lessons and try to assess whether, or to what extent, contemporary American foreign policy reflects the kind of wisdom that comes from learning from past mistakes.

FOREIGN POLICY AS PRODUCT: A U.S. APPROACH

Before getting started with the main themes of this foundation-building chapter, I must first define what I mean by "foreign policy." Foreign policy can be defined as a set of ideas, assumptions, and strategies aimed at promoting the national interests of sovereign states in an environment of anarchy. (The term "anarchy" is commonly used in this context to emphasize the absence of world government.) The word "policy" is similar in meaning to "strategy," and whereas the latter often refers to military matters the former typically refers to politics and economics. In fact, the two words are used interchangeably: hence, we frequently talk about "defense policy" and "negotiating strategy," although "defense" is primarily a military term and "negotiation" is primarily political. Foreign policy is closely related to diplomacy, and these two terms are often used synonymously. Strictly speaking, they are not identical because "diplomacy" refers to the political conduct of foreign policy, rather than to the content of policy itself.

As for American foreign policy, it bears the same stamp of self-interest no less than the foreign policy of other sovereign states, but it also exhibits several distinctive characteristics. This book is about what sets American foreign policy apart, as well as about what the United States has in common with other great powers, past and present. My thesis is that the United States has always struggled with the tension between power and principle; that the oscillations and contradictions that

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characterize American foreign policy can best be explained by reference to this struggle; and that the search for the proper balance between realism and idealism, between the demands of survival in a dangerous world so vividly portrayed by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and the desire for something better and more ennobling represented in the writings of John Locke (1632–1704), took on a new urgency after September 11, 2001.⁵

This struggle between the proponents of “power politics” and the advocates of a high-minded morality was clearly discernible in the debates at Philadelphia. It is also evident in the constitution the Founders drafted and in the *Federalist Papers*, which so lucidly explained the theory behind those remarkable documents.⁶

As a makeshift nation the United States is a kind of artifice created by reason and conscious design rather than by a natural process of political evolution. The contrasting experience of the United Kingdom (the “parent”) and the United States (the “offspring”) illustrates this point: the British parliamentary system is organic, the result of a long historical process; the American presidential system is mechanistic, the result of a constitutional convention that met in a certain place at a certain time. What happened in the United Kingdom is akin to horticulture; what happened in Philadelphia in 1787 was all about architecture.

The structural integrity of the “edifice” found in that blueprint depends on the balance—and the dynamic tension—between the idealism and realism of its authors. The same attempt to find a balance between idealism and realism is evident in American foreign policy, and has been since the nation’s inception. In a real sense, the attempt to reconcile this quest for a more principled world order with the realities of power and the imperatives of security in an anarchic system is the essence of American foreign policy. This struggle has surfaced time and again for more than two centuries. More recently, it has been at the center of a policy debate within the George W. Bush administration and, more broadly, in the Washington policy community, as we will see later.

The necessity for foreign policy is glaringly apparent in today’s world, but it was not always so. The United States always needed a foreign policy even during the first century and a half of its existence, when the isolationist impulse called

5. For a synopsis of the contrasting views of Hobbes, Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau on human nature and the causes of conflict, see Thomas Magstadt, *Understanding Politics: Ideas, Institutions, and Issues*, 6th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2003), esp. pp. 473–485; on Locke, see also pp. 369–370 and 428–429. Hobbes and Locke were both Englishmen. The American founders were particularly influenced by the ideas of John Locke, but there is a great deal of Hobbes to be found in the letter and spirit of the *Federalist Papers*, as well. See Douglass Adair, *Fame and the Founding Fathers* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 90.

6. Written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, the papers explain the theory behind the U.S. Constitution. They stand out as the most important and original work of political theory in American history. They were first published in 1787–1788 to influence public opinion and thus boost the chances of ratification.

this truism into serious question. Since World War II the fate of the world, not only one nation, has to an unprecedented degree rested on the foreign policy of a single state, known everywhere as simply “America.”

The word “America” is universal and carries heavy freight in most every language. It has many meanings, both good and bad, and has different connotations depending on the cultural, linguistic, and ideological context in which it is used. All this adds up to a powerful case for the importance of America’s foreign policy. The United States needs a sound foreign policy because it is the preeminent state actor on the world stage. Above all, it needs a smart foreign policy because other great powers are always looking for a chance to gain more power at the expense of potential rivals.⁷ At present, because of its global reach and pervasive presence, the United States is a potential rival of every other great power (including such allies as France, Germany, and Japan).

Burdens and Benefits of Leadership

The power vacuums that existed in Europe and Asia after World War II cast the United States in a historic leadership role. In many ways, President Harry S. Truman was an ideal chief executive at that moment in the nation’s history. According to one distinguished presidential scholar, he was a decisive and self-assured “active-positive” personality type of strong moral character.⁸ President Truman had a sign on his desk declaring, “The buck stops here.” By his own testimony, Truman never lost a night’s sleep while in the White House, not even when he made the controversial decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japanese cities (that is, on civilian targets). He carried the burdens of leadership remarkably well, but can a president who is not troubled by an act of mass annihilation directed at civilians be a good leader? Is the use of military power without moral constraint consistent with the principles of American democracy?

Since 1945 America’s leaders and citizens have carried a heavy burden. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. president was not only the leader of the nation but also of the “free world”—a vague term encompassing all democracies and elastic enough to include all non-Communist countries. The cost to American taxpayers of defending America’s allies in Europe and Asia during the

7. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 29–40.

8. James David Barber, *The Presidential Character*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985). Barber identifies four presidential character types: active-positive, passive-positive, active-negative, and passive-negative. Barber places Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy in the active-positive category. A president of this type is energetic, self-confident, enjoys his work, tends to be productive, adjusts readily to new situations, and generally feels good about himself. See also George C. Edwards III and Stephen J. Wayne, *Presidential Leadership: Politics and Policy Making*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990), esp. pp. 217–247.

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cold war is difficult to calculate, but the reader can get a sense of the sums involved from a widely publicized estimate of U.S. expenditures on nuclear and other weapons between 1945 and 1996—\$8 trillion.⁹

In the language of politics, America was not only the hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere (meaning that it had no serious challengers in the region) but also the paramount military power in the North Atlantic, Western Europe, and the Pacific Rim. As such, the United States bore the burden of deterring a Soviet attack on the European democracies and of preparing to defend these countries (America's NATO allies) in the event that such an attack occurred. In addition, the United States fought two major wars in Asia during this period (in Korea and Vietnam); both these wars came at enormous human, economic, and psychological costs and ended without victory (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Most Americans like being Number One and would not want it any other way, which implies that on balance the benefits of leadership outweigh the burdens. The price of world leadership can be very high, especially when Americans are fighting and dying on foreign soil. The Korean War (1950–1953) and the Vietnam War (1961–1975) were by far the bloodiest, but there have been numerous other conflicts in which American soldiers have fought: the first Gulf War (1990–1991), the “war against terrorism” involving the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001–2002), and the second Gulf War (2003) are three well-known recent examples. In addition, the United States has sent military forces into many other countries in the past half century, including Lebanon (1958), the Dominican Republic (1965), Cambodia (1970), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), Somalia (1992–1994), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995), and Serbia (1999). There have been other costly moments of decision when presidents have asked Congress and American taxpayers to expend huge sums for foreign aid (for example, the Marshall Plan in 1948) or national defense (for example, under John F. Kennedy, 1961–1963; Ronald Reagan, 1981–1988; and George W. Bush, after September 11, 2001). Significantly, in all of these historical examples, both the quest for power and the pursuit of principle can be discerned—the question raised throughout this book is whether or not these two elements were kept in balance during these “moments of decision.”

The fact that the United States alone emerged economically unscathed from World War II put America in a position of economic and military superiority unprecedented in history. Far from being destroyed by the war, the American economy rose by 70 percent between 1941 and 1945. It was the point in time when America was at the very peak of its power in international relations. In 1947 the United States accounted for fully half of all the goods and services produced

9. Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, *Cold War: An Illustrated History*. This is the companion book to the *COLD WAR—cold war* series aired by CNN. The excerpt from which this figure was obtained can be read at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/24/epilogue/>

in the whole world.¹⁰ America was the world's preeminent factory, farm, and exporter. At the same time, it also enjoyed the prestige and military prowess that accompanied its (short-lived) status as the world's only nuclear power. As that fleeting moment illustrates, nothing lasts forever.

Doctrines and Foreign Policy

To a large extent, the immediate period after World War II shaped America's self-image in the years that followed. Fear of a new totalitarian threat to freedom and democracy—the very principles on which America was founded—personified by the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, was a major motivating factor; hubris, bravado, and a sense of invincibility, understandable in light of the American-led victory over the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) in the world war just ended, were also major factors. Finally, a belief in the moral role of America as the defender of freedom and democracy, the world's best (and only) hope of stopping the march of “godless Communism” through a vigilant policy of containment, gave Americans a vibrant sense of purpose.

When the United States belatedly entered World War I in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson cloaked our involvement in the noblest of purposes: it was not to restore the discredited balance of power in Europe, but rather “to make the world safe for democracy.” Similarly, when the United States embarked on the cold war with the Soviet Union after World War II, our new “containment” policy was, again, couched in lofty moral terms. We were not simply adopting a long-term strategy to defend America's national (and international) interests, but rather our aim was to make the world safe from tyranny. When Greece was threatened with a Communist insurgency in 1947, President Truman asked Congress for \$400 million in arms and economic aid for the beleaguered governments of Greece and Turkey. In his historic address to Congress, he declared, “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”¹¹ Here was not merely a policy aimed at dealing with a specific problem; here for the first time in more than a century was a *doctrine* designed to serve as a universal principle.

10. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 432. Kennedy presents a lot of statistical evidence showing that the U.S. share of world gross domestic product (GDP) declined sharply between 1945 and 1980, when it was barely more than 21 percent. In the 1990s the U.S. share rose again (to nearly 30 percent of world GDP by the end of the decade), but it has never approached the high-water mark it hit at the end of World War II. Also, Europe's combined GDP is now roughly equal to America's.

11. See, for example, Thomas M. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 7th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), pp. 796–799.

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The Truman Doctrine was only the first in a series of doctrines that have defined and framed American foreign policy. This foreign policy by formula—what one professional diplomat and critic has called “the diplomacy of doctrine”—became a substitute for a far more subtle, flexible, and pragmatic diplomacy—what the same critic calls “the diplomacy of reason.”¹²

Not surprisingly, America’s allies and adversaries alike often see American foreign policy as crude, doctrinaire, and overly dependent on military force. In the eyes of the world America the beautiful now looks more like America the bully.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, so did the edifice of American foreign policy. The end of the cold war led many people at home and abroad to question America’s purpose in the world. That, in turn, raised a deeper question: What is America?

The Many Meanings of America

Ask middle-class Americans to associate a single word with the idea of America and many will reflexively focus on America’s virtues, such as democracy, liberty, and justice.¹³ Ask members of minority groups and lower economic classes, however, and the word associations will often be far less flattering. Whether American democracy has been—or is now—a vehicle of freedom or repression depends very much on who you are and where and when you lived. The simple and undeniable truth of this observation is less likely to persuade than to offend a wide swath of American society, especially in times of fear-tinged patriotic fervor. Yet particular groups, irrespective of social or economic class—Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Arab Americans—are far more ambivalent about the meaning of American history and the benevolence of American democracy than European Americans. Japanese Americans, for example, have not forgotten the humiliating policy that incarcerated them *as a group* in concentration camps during World War II.

By the same token, most people(s) in the world beyond our borders view America with a mixture of admiration, envy, fear, and anger. The ambivalence of the outside world toward the United States is the result, on the one hand, of America’s unrivaled position as the world’s oldest, richest, and most powerful constitutional democracy and, on the other, of America’s heavy military, economic,

12. Monteagle Stearns, *Talking to Strangers: Improving American Diplomacy at Home and Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 20–54.

13. See, for example, “Night Fell on a Different World,” *Economist*, Special Report, Sept. 7, 2002, p. 22. Opinion polls show that 80 percent of Americans say “yes” when asked, “Do you think your country is better than any other?” Ninety percent say “yes” when asked, “Would you rather be a citizen of your country than any other?” Similarly, 96 percent of respondents say they are “very proud” to be Americans.

and political footprint in literally every region (and virtually every country) of the globe in the past half century. The deadly terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on two of the most prominent symbols of American power and prowess—the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon—were a stark reminder that America's presence in many parts of the world is perceived as hostile and malevolent rather than helpful and benevolent.

Americans ought not to be surprised at this perception but often are; we ought to be alarmed but are not. Why? That Americans remain deeply insular in their mentality despite the presence of American military bases and corporations in every corner of the world, are ignorant of world history and geography despite universal and compulsory education, and display little interest or proficiency in foreign languages despite the fact that the United States has spearheaded the march toward globalization begs an explanation.

How “They” See “Us”: World Opinion and Soft Power

Europeans tend to see Americans as naive, shallow, and materialistic with a peculiar bent for navel-gazing; nowhere is this view more prevalent than in western Europe—that is, in the very countries with which the United States is most closely allied. This perception is no doubt due in part to simple prejudice, for Europeans are not immune from the jealousy and resentment that America's postwar success has sparked elsewhere in the world. But many Europeans also see America as bullying and hypocritical, a country that talks incessantly about morality (principles) but relies first and foremost on its military establishment (power) to get its way. America is all about hard power, in this view, whereas soft power is generally preferable and often more effective. The open clash between the United States and several of its NATO allies (including France and Germany) over the timing of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is a prime example of this policy divergence.

There is another America, as well, that Europeans know. It is the only America most foreigners ever see; namely, the America depicted in Hollywood movies (*Marathon Man*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Terminator*, or *The Silence of the Lambs*), TV series (for example, reruns of *Miami Vice*, *Hunter* and *NYPD Blue*), and video games (*Grand Theft Auto*; *Vice City*; *Mortal Kombat*; *Doom*). The America they come to know in this way is a violent place where crime is rampant, everybody has a gun, good cops are thwarted by bad politicians, and crooked lawyers keep criminals out of jail. American pop music, which has an even greater impact abroad than American movies, often conveys similarly negative images. From heavy metal to “gangsta rap” this music creates the impression that growing up in America is all about self-indulgence, defiance, drug abuse, and promiscuity. The commercial side of American pop culture also has a big impact abroad. The “golden arches” are now ubiquitous. Not only McDonald's, but many other American fast-food chains dot the urban landscapes of virtually every major city

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in the world. The first (and only) taste of America that foreigners often get is at Dunkin' Donuts or Pizza Hut, seen by many natives as a threat to local commerce, customs, and cuisine—or simply in bad taste.

The image of the “ugly American” is largely false, but the impression Americans working or traveling abroad often create without realizing it is almost as bad. As Americans, we almost always rely on the ability of the natives to speak English. Indeed, many Americans *expect* waiters, cab drivers, and shopkeepers in the countries they visit to speak our language. As a result, people in the host country get the impression that Americans are rich but unsophisticated. Anyone who has lived abroad for any length of time knows that this stereotype is commonplace.

Americans on the whole have access to more information but often know less about the outside world than educated people in other developed countries, despite the fact that virtually anybody can enroll in a public university in the United States. Thanks to the information superhighway the sheer volume of published material on politics and foreign policy is enough to overwhelm the most avid speed-reader. Books by the dozens, foreign policy journals and news-magazines, the op-ed pages of daily newspapers, the nightly news on network and cable television, provide a steady flow—indeed, a barrage—of information. Yet poll after poll drearily demonstrates that most Americans are poorly informed and apathetic. Only the gathering of war clouds in crisis situations is likely to rivet public attention on any piece of real estate or problem outside of the United States and then only for the duration of the crisis.

As a result, Americans typically do not know much about the world even though “America” is a pervasive presence in every part of it. Yet despite the bad impression Americans often make as a result of this glaring deficiency, most people in most foreign countries do not hate Americans. In the eyes of the world what is wrong with America is most often not its ideals or its people but its leaders and the policies of its government.

In one sense, it does not matter whether this view is fair or unfair because it is a reality that policymakers must deal with one way or the other. It can be ignored but only at America's peril. In the long run this problem left unattended will almost certainly foster other problems and make the solutions more difficult. The reason has to do with the importance of “soft power” as opposed to the kind of coercive (or hard) power we commonly associate with military capabilities or economic sanctions. This kind of power is discussed at greater length later in the chapter in the section “The Limits of American Power.” The point here is that asking “Why do they hate us so much?” as many Americans did after September 11, 2001, begs the question: Who or what do “they” hate?

What the rest of the world finds to hate or love about America is not personal, it is political—it is American foreign policy in all its facets, including trade policy, arms sales, military interventions, peace initiatives, and the like. It

is not only what America does that can cause problems but also what America chooses not to do—for example, not intervening in civil wars or not imposing economic sanctions against dictators who are friendly to the United States. In much the same way as Americans expect people around the world to speak English, the rest of the world expects America, more than any other country, to be true to its ideals.

This is a tall order. Indeed, it is impossible. Why? Because America's principles are so high—too high to be upheld 100 percent all the time. The fact that the world holds America to higher standards than it holds other countries (or the world itself) is a kind of tribute as well as a challenge. It is a tribute in the sense that America stands for goodness, hope, and decency in the minds of people everywhere—it has been the most powerful people magnet in the history of the world since the nineteenth century. It is a challenge because it requires the United States to play “by the rules” even when others do not.

FOREIGN POLICY AS PROCESS: GETTING ORGANIZED

The U.S. Constitution is an “invitation to struggle” involving the executive and legislative branches of government.¹⁴ In this policy struggle, both Congress and the president use principles as “weapons” because it is a struggle played out in the public arena under the glare of stage lights with the voters as spectators, many of whom become active participants at election time. But it is also a struggle for power within the government, as the authors of the Constitution intended it to be. Thus, the twin themes of power and principle are illustrated in the tug-of-war over foreign policy—the very essence of the foreign policy process—that often occurs between the White House and Capitol Hill, especially when the same political party does not control both branches (or both houses of Congress).

Focusing on the relationship between process and product can be both fascinating and frustrating for students of foreign policy. Describing foreign policy requires little attention to the political process involved in its formulation. Analyzing foreign policy, however, is a different matter. It is no more possible to explain the content and quality of various policies without reference to organizational issues than it would be to explain the quality of modern automobiles without reference to assembly lines, robotics, working conditions, design teams, training programs, crash tests, and the like. Simply put, any product is the result of a process. If the product falls short of expectations, it stands to reason that the process it embodies could be one of the causes, whether or not the keen interest

14. The phrase “invitation to struggle” is the title of a classic book on this subject. See Cecil V. Crabb Jr. and Pat M. Holt, *Invitation to Struggle: Congress, the President, and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1980).

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in “process” is always justified. Today, when a major policy fails the first question often asked is, “Why did the policy fail?” The second question is, “How can the problem that led to the failure be fixed?” These questions, rightly or wrongly, often lead directly to an inquiry into the policy process, the role of the various agencies and actors, and the like. Often this quest for answers takes the form of a search for “intelligence” failures or some flaw in the way the federal government is organized to deal with specific problems such as illegal immigration or drug trafficking or international terrorism.

The foreign policy process changed after World War II as a result of a dramatic change in the foreign policy machinery in 1947 (see below). The reader might question how organization affects the policy process and whether it makes any difference if, say, a new agency is created and given a place in the cabinet. (The cabinet comprises the appointed members of the president’s “team” who serve as secretaries of departments and agencies.) In fact, it does matter, for reasons that are spelled out in the next few pages.

Throughout this book I will periodically point to extragovernmental domestic influences (including political parties, interest groups, and public opinion) as they relate to various policy questions. In general, domestic factors are important, but factors relating to the international system usually take precedence when these two sources of influence diverge. I will reiterate from time to time that when domestic political factors are given greater weight than systemic or strategic considerations, the results are often regrettable. I will also be careful to note when and how domestic pressures bring questions of principle into “great debates” over foreign policy.

The “Imperial” Presidency and the Foreign Policy Bureaucracy

In the center of the “inner circle” sits the president. Under the Constitution, the president is commander in chief of the armed forces but shares responsibility for the nation’s defense with Congress, which alone has the power under Article I “to raise and support Armies” and “to provide and maintain a Navy.” The Framers also left it to Congress “to make Rules for the Government and Regulation of land and naval Forces” and, of course, to declare war. But the Constitution allows chief executives great latitude in the conduct of foreign policy, and the commander in chief has frequently asserted presidential prerogatives not found in the Constitution in matters of war and peace.¹⁵ Indeed, the

15. See Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor Jr., and Lawrence J. Korb, *American National Security: Policy and Processes*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 84–85. The authors note, “In 1793, George Washington asserted the prerogative of the president to act unilaterally in time of foreign crisis by issuing, without congressional consultation, a neutrality proclamation in the renewed Franco-British war.”

president did not bother to seek a declaration of war in Korea or Vietnam, and presidents have frequently ordered military interventions without first seeking formal approval by Congress. "Time and again the law of national self-preservation was seen to justify placing extravagant power in the hands of the President."¹⁶

The machinery of American foreign policy was radically overhauled in the late 1940s, giving institutional expression to the broad sweep of presidential powers and prerogatives in the realm of "national security."¹⁷ Prior to this time, the distinction between war and peace was clearly reflected in the way the foreign policy "furniture" of the executive branch was arranged. Responsibility for defense was lodged in the War and Navy Departments, whereas responsibility for diplomacy was the province of the State Department. There was no central foreign-intelligence-gathering unit. The National Security Act of 1947 formalized what some critics have called the imperial presidency and others less provocatively label the institutional presidency.¹⁸

This act created four new entities of major importance: the Department of Defense (DOD), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Council (NSC). Today, the NSC has four statutory members—the president, vice president, secretary of state, and secretary of defense—and two statutory advisers—the director of the CIA and the chairman of the joint chiefs. In addition, the assistant to the president for national security affairs, the secretary of the treasury, the chief of staff to the president, the assistant to the president for economic policy, the U.S. representative to the United Nations, and the director of homeland security have been regular (nonstatutory) attendees in recent years. (The exact lineup changes somewhat from administration to administration, however.) This council as originally constituted balanced the need for a strong defense and intelligence presence at the highest decision-making level with the desire to uphold the principle of civilian control over the military. With "bipartisan" approval in Congress, President Truman established a separate NSC staff *within* the White House, thus making it crystal clear where "the buck stops" in the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

16. Richard Haas, "Congressional Power: Implications for American Security Policy," Adelphi Papers, no. 153 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, summer 1979), p. 3.

17. The term "national security" came into vogue at this time and became a common substitute for terms such as "foreign policy" and "diplomacy" in the official vernacular that frames virtually all concepts and daily communications inside the Washington bureaucracy.

18. See, for example, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973). Schlesinger, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and member of President John F. Kennedy's White House inner circle, argues, "Time and again, the law of national self-preservation was seen to justify placing extravagant power in the hands of the President" (p. 291). See also Jordan, Taylor, and Korb, *American National Security*, pp. 87–104.

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In retrospect, this period was a watershed in American diplomatic history. Truman's decision to create a national security adviser and staff in the executive office, thus placing it beyond the "advise and consent" reach of Congress, set the stage for an assertive foreign policy, including undeclared wars (Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf), frequent military interventions (Cuba, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Somalia, and Afghanistan, among others), and various covert actions and special operations (Iran, Guatemala, Cuba, Laos, the Congo, and Chile, to mention but a few known cases). For a time, assassination plots also played a limited role in this secret foreign policy.¹⁹ The last time Congress itself declared war was after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

In addition to strengthening the president's hand in dealing with Congress, the postwar reorganization also greatly changed the policy process *within* the executive branch. Prior to World War II, the State Department was the president's single most important source of advice and information on foreign policy issues of the day. Not only was the State Department the proprietor of the Foreign Service and the conduit through which all embassy reports from around the world were filtered, but the secretary of state faced no rival in foreign affairs within the federal bureaucracy. As a result, presidents relied heavily on foreign embassies to provide a window on the world, and the secretary of state enjoyed the second-most prestigious position in the federal government (next to the president, of course).

The only other member of the cabinet with an important role in international affairs was the secretary of war, but the importance of that post was diminished by the fact that the United States was at peace during most of the nineteenth century—except for the Civil War, armed conflicts were rare and short (the War of 1812, the Mexican War in 1848, and the Spanish-American War in 1898). The "winning of the West" during the nineteenth century was

19. John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 236: "In late November 1975 more dramatic details of CIA assassination programs were leaked to the press by the Senate investigators. The CIA had been directly involved with the killers of Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, Ngo Diem of South Vietnam, and General René Schneider of Chile. It had plotted the deaths of Fidel Castro and Patrice Lumumba." (Stockwell is a former Marine and was the chief of the CIA's Angola task force in the 1970s. After twelve years as a CIA officer, he resigned in 1977.) Evidence of a "rogue elephant" CIA was unearthed in the mid-1970s by the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Rockefeller Commission created by President Gerald Ford at that time to investigate charges of CIA misconduct. In 1976 President Ford issued Executive Order 11905 forbidding U.S. involvement in political assassinations, but not before the controversy and public revelations badly damaged the CIA's reputation at home and complicated (as well as compromised) its activities abroad. On the background to Executive Order 11905, see Jordan, Taylor, and Korb, *American National Security Policy*, pp. 130–155, esp. pp. 148–149.

bloody, but contrary to popular myth it was accomplished without a major military call-up or any other extraordinary measures.²⁰ So even the secretary of war was no match for the secretary of state in the competition for the president's ear.

Indeed, the whole idea of "competition" in the foreign policy bureaucracy does not become an issue until after World War II. Today, as everybody who has worked in Washington's sprawling foreign policy bureaucracy knows, it is a major factor. There have been many attempts by policy analysts and academicians to make flow charts showing precisely how foreign policy decisions are made in theory. These diagrams all emphasize the "flow" of information, foreign intelligence, and analysis through the "system," usually with lots of arrows that show how it all pours into a great funnel located in the White House. That "funnel" is the NSC, which functions as both a funnel and a filter.

In fact, by the time information gets to the president, it has been filtered many times on many levels. This filtering process serves a useful purpose, but it is routinely taken to extremes in large bureaucracies. For thousands of operatives and analysts at the "working level" within the government, this filtration system is so extensive that they often see no relationship between the "inputs" they make and the "outputs" (actual policy). In fact, "worker bees" in the bureaucracy grumble a lot (to each other) about White House declarations and decisions that ignore policy papers they painstakingly draft and guide through the "system"—often over a period of many months. How often that happens depends on factors entirely beyond the control of people on the working level.

Clearly, the policy process is cumbersome and complicated. No model can capture how it works in practice, because there are too many human variables and because, in the final analysis, the president can short-circuit or ignore "the process" as he sees fit. Every president since World War II has brought his own decision-making style and foreign policy team with him upon taking office. The permanent bureaucracy is always at the mercy of the short-timers, who may be gone in four years.

For this reason, if for no other, presidents and presidential advisers often regard the permanent bureaucracy—the professionals—with disdain and distrust. There is no law that says they must pay attention to the professionals. Furthermore, when problems arise presidents often have to act (or react)

20. On this point, see Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 77–78. Mearsheimer notes, "The American military remained much smaller than its European counterparts during the latter half of the nineteenth century because it could dominate the hemisphere on the cheap. Local rivals such as the various Native American tribes and Mexico were outgunned by even a small U.S. army, and the European great powers were unable to confront the United States in a serious way."

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quickly. Bureaucracies do not move quickly. So the real policy process is often much more restricted in practice than it appears to be on paper; in practice, it is not that different from the decision-making process. Under most presidents since World War II, this process has been exclusive, not inclusive: it usually comes down to a very few high officials in the government.

However, the existence of this exclusive decision-making “club” or cabal by no means implies unanimity or the absence of competition. One famous theory of presidential decision making called “groupthink” does, in fact, stress the consensus-seeking behavior of the president’s inner circle and sees this tendency as one of the causes of past foreign policy failures.²¹ As compelling as this study was when it first appeared (and still is), it fails to take into account the strong evidence of competition and friction within the president’s inner circle.

The reported clash of views between Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld over the war in Iraq and other matters is a contemporary case in point. Similarly, President Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, often gave him conflicting views on policy questions. President Richard Nixon deliberately chose a weak secretary of state (William Rogers) who brought nothing to the table. Nixon used NSC adviser Henry Kissinger almost exclusively, in effect acting as his own secretary of state and marginalizing Foggy Bottom (a synonym for the State Department) in the process.

At various times, the CIA director has also played a key role in the policy process. For example, William Casey was President Reagan’s close friend and confidant when he ran the agency in the 1980s, as Allen Dulles (the brother of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles) was President Dwight Eisenhower’s in the 1950s. In contrast, Stansfield Turner, the CIA director under Carter, wanted a kinder, gentler foreign intelligence service and in the process weakened the competitive position of the agency he headed.

In most cases, the secretaries of state and defense, the CIA director, and the NSC adviser are in the best position to compete for “access” in the realm of foreign policy—and most often they do compete. In Washington, access to the president is everything. A secretary or director with easy access to the president is likely to get respect from the professionals within the part of the bureaucracy he or she heads. The competition (or conflict) within the president’s foreign policy team is rarely acknowledged openly even when it may be widely reported in the press. If it becomes an obstruction or embarrassment to the president, however, he can always replace one of the disputants by quietly asking one or the other to resign. In the final analysis, presidents consult whomever they please and make foreign policy by whatever process they chose.

21. Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

The Watchdog Role of Congress

One of the main functions of Congress in the realm of foreign policy is to act as a check on the president. This role places Congress at odds with the president at times. When the president seeks to assert powers not granted by the Constitution, for example by waging an undeclared war, Congress has the prerogative, if not the solemn duty, to stand in the way. Such confrontations, although infrequent, have occurred at crucial times in American history and always revolve around questions of constitutional and moral principle. This clash of principles, however, cannot disguise the fact that an institutional power struggle is taking place at the same time. Such power struggles in turn typically involve a contest between the two major political parties.

The idea of a bipartisan foreign policy is not found in the Constitution. Indeed, the Constitution makes no mention of political parties at all. Nor is bipartisanship in foreign policy a long-standing tradition in the United States. Instead, it was the product of a unique set of circumstances arising after World War II. The fear of Soviet totalitarianism at that time gave rise to the new spirit of bipartisanship in Congress. The perceived danger to the nation meant that politics, it was said, had to stop at the water's edge. The fact that politics had greatly impeded presidents in the realm of foreign policy (including President Roosevelt) prior to World War II reinforced the tendency of Congress to defer to the president during the cold war, especially in times of crisis.

The Constitution gives Congress the power of the purse, as well as the power to declare war and to regulate interstate and foreign commerce. It also gives the Senate the power to approve or reject treaties. Both houses can and do hold hearings to investigate the government's policies, programs, and practices. Of these powers, none is more vital than control over "ways and means"—the purse strings of government. Every year the White House must ask Congress for money to carry out its programs at home and abroad. The budget process is thus a vital part of the foreign policy process, and one that necessarily involves Congress in the details of diplomacy and national defense.

Congress thus has the potential to impede or even block executive action by moving or threatening to withhold funding. For the first 150 years, this power meant that Congress could and did assert itself in the foreign policy process.

Power and Policy: A Question of Balance

We noted at the outset that American foreign policy is uniquely driven by a creative tension between ideals and self-interest. Americans often seem surprised to learn that the United States "plays rough" in its foreign dealings. That is less because Americans are naive or idealistic than because our leaders have always

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made a point of couching official policy in moral platitudes. No one can seriously dispute the right of a state to use force in self-defense, but what about military intervention, covert action, political assassination, and preemptive strikes? In a perfect world, it would not be necessary ever to resort to such measures. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world.²² Violence is a fact of life. But it is most effective when it is used sparingly, in a judicious and fair way, especially by a democracy that prides itself on liberty and bases its claim to world leadership on moral rather than military grounds.

Balancing liberty and justice is never easy, even in domestic politics. In international politics it is far harder. The essence of sound foreign policy is a different kind of balance, namely, bringing means and ends into alignment: “[A] foreign policy consists in bringing into balance, with a comfortable surplus of power in reserve, the nation’s commitments and the nation’s power. The constant preoccupation of the true statesman is to achieve and maintain this balance.”²³ If balance is the end, diplomacy is the means.

Balancing power and commitments requires skillful diplomacy. It is a job for professionals, not amateurs or political appointees (which often amounts to the same thing). It is up to the president as commander in chief to make the right decisions, but sound decision making depends on good information, expert analysis, and sound advice. Under the current set of institutional arrangements dating back to the early years of the cold war, the National Security Council has eclipsed the State Department as the primary source of foreign policy support to the president. If a secretary of state wants to talk to the president about a diplomatic problem, he or she has to get into a line that includes the national security adviser, the secretary of defense, and the director of central intelligence, among others. The president thus has a personal “foreign policy cabinet” complete with an in-house foreign policy staff supervised by the NSC director. Under this system, the Department of State could be abolished were it not for that fact that our foreign embassies would then become institutional orphans, lost in the wilderness of the Washington bureaucracy.²⁴

22. For example, who can say that the world would not have been far better off if Hitler had been assassinated in 1936 after his intentions were known but before he started mass-murdering Jews and invading neighboring countries?

23. Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943), p. 9. Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) was a famous syndicated columnist and the author of many books on politics and foreign policy.

24. The State Department, like other parts of the executive branch, was not established in the Constitution but rather by an act of Congress; it *could*, therefore, be abolished in the same manner, although no one has seriously suggested doing so.

Under the current system, nothing gets to the president without going through the White House filtration system. If the secretary of state is forced to compete with other cabinet-level officials for the president's attention, ambassadors are often cut off from the White House altogether.²⁵ Moreover, the reports written by professional political and economic officers pouring in on a daily basis from embassies around the world are seldom read by the political appointees who are most likely to have the president's ear (or the ear of someone high up who is rumored to have it). Finally, these reports must compete with foreign intelligence that is gathered in mass quantities and that gives the foreign policy establishment a chronic case of indigestion.

This system made more sense in 1947 than it did two decades later as events in Vietnam spiraled out of control. It made even less sense two decades after that when Col. Oliver North, an obscure NSC staffer, was busy running a covert arms-for-hostages operation, involving Iran (a country the Reagan administration called the leading sponsor of international terrorism and the current Bush administration considers part of the "axis of evil") and Nicaragua (where the United States was backing an insurgency against the Marxist government of Daniel Ortega). It makes even less sense today when the specific danger the current system was designed to counter, namely the Soviet threat, has ceased to exist.

With the collapse of Soviet communism, the policy of containment, which was based on the assumption of a bipolar distribution of power and which subordinated all other global issues to the East-West conflict, became irrelevant. The idea of Pax Americana (American hegemony) was not a viable alternative for a nation with liberal-democratic traditions and principles.²⁶

A study of the way the more venerable practitioners of American statecraft conducted foreign policy prior to the nuclear age points to one conclusion of the greatest significance: in a multipolar world there is no formula, framework, protocol, or theory to be found, no "doctrine" that can substitute for good old-fashioned reason and pragmatism in foreign policy. However unsatisfying or frustrating it may be to some, there is no substitute for a knowledge-based foreign policy that is as resistant to political rhetoric and ideological zeal as

25. Stearns, *Talking to Strangers*, pp. 148–178.

26. For a cogent argument against the notion that America's superpower dominance is a permanent fixture of international politics, see Charles Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (New York: Knopf, 2002). The author argues that the rise of Europe as an economic and political force in the world and the decline in the American public's willingness to bear the heavy burdens of an internationalist foreign policy foreshadow the end of "unipolarity" and a return to the sort of great-power rivalry associated with the pre-cold war period.

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possible.²⁷ In a democratic society, providing public education in world history, geography, and foreign languages is an essential and indispensable safeguard.

REALISM AND IDEALISM IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

The United States has never gone to war solely for idealistic or moral reasons, nor has American foreign policy ever been placed wholly in the service of ethical principles. That is not the American way any more than it is the British, Chinese, Egyptian, French, Israeli, or Russian way; governments, whether democracies or dictatorships, do not act out of altruistic motives but, rather, out of calculations rooted in a conscious (though not necessarily correct) set of notions about the national interest. In the words of the late Hans J. Morgenthau, perhaps the most influential political realist of the twentieth century: “International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim.”²⁸ This dictum is also interesting for what it does not say. It says nothing about ends (“ultimate aims”) or means. If power is “always the immediate aim,” diplomacy, as I pointed out earlier, is the means except, of course, in the extraordinary event of war.

America’s revolutionary beginnings and unique geography have given rise to a popular misconception that the United States was (and is) qualitatively different from other states, a “city on a hill.”²⁹ In part, this idea that America is

27. Sporadic, event-driven outbursts of patriotic emotion are a domestic political factor that elected officials cannot afford to ignore. In a country increasingly susceptible to anti-American “blowback” (which includes but is by no means confined to international terrorism), such outbursts are an ever-present possibility. (The term “blowback” was actually invented by officials at the CIA and intended only for the agency’s internal use, according to Chalmers Johnson: “It refers to the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people. What the daily press reports as the malign acts of ‘terrorists’ or ‘drug lords’ or ‘rogue states’ or ‘illegal arms merchants’ often turn out to be blowback from earlier American operations” [Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Holt, 2000), p. 8]). In this context, reported anti-Arab incidents in the United States following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon caused alarm in some quarters but were surprisingly limited in scope given the scale of the destruction involved. President Bush embraced Arabs and Muslims immediately after the 9/11 tragedy in an effort to counteract retaliatory acts by an outraged and aroused citizenry against innocent bystanders.

28. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 31. For a clear and concise discussion of realism and how it differs from idealism, see Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 14–27.

29. For example, the distinguished Seymour Martin Lipset (author of the well-regarded *American Exceptionalism* [New York: Norton, 1996]) argues that Americans “exhibit a greater sense of patriotism, and of belief that their system is superior to all others . . . than the citizens of other industrialized democracies.” Cited in “Night Fell on a Different World,” *Economist*, Special Report, Sept. 7, 2002, p. 22. The “city on a hill” was a phrase originated by John Winthrop (1588–1649), the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony.

exceptional can be traced to the rhetoric of George Washington, Woodrow Wilson, and others. We will return to this theme in the next chapter, but for now suffice it to say that the belief in American “exceptionalism” can affect the way we think about foreign affairs—and obscure reality.

A realistic approach to foreign policy is necessary because what is at stake in international politics is survival. What is realism? “Realism,” according to the late E. H. Carr, a well-known British realist, “tends to emphasize the irresistible strength of existing forces and inevitable character of existing tendencies, and to insist that the highest wisdom lies in accepting, and adapting oneself to these forces and these tendencies.”³⁰ Realists make three basic assumptions about international politics. First, sovereign states are the main actors, and the Great Powers are the ones that shape world history. Second, the behavior of Great Powers is dictated by the external environment, not by internal characteristics (such as regime type, race, culture, nationality, or ideology). Realists often see little difference in the external behavior of democracies and dictatorships because the logic of survival in an anarchic world is essentially the same for all states.³¹

Third, realists stress that the struggle for survival forces states to compete for power and that this competition frequently involves war. In the words of Carl von Clausewitz, the famous nineteenth-century military strategist, “War is a continuation of politics by other means.” Political realists, therefore, see war as a normal phenomenon in world politics, not as an aberration.³² Political realists emphasize the primacy of power in politics, coining the term “power politics.” The first priority of every state is to maximize power.

Thus, the world is a dangerous place, self-interest is the driving force, and trust is notable for its absence. The natural state of international politics is disorder; without a central governing authority the only hope for order is the balance of power. Acting rationally, states will seek to maintain a balance. When a hegemon (dominant power) challenges the status quo (and thus the survival of existing states) the defenders of existing order must make common cause against the challenger. To hardcore political realists, this basic logic is a universal law.

Political realism stresses that morality has a different meaning in public and private life. The standards of personal or private moral conduct cannot be mechanically applied to policymaking. Morality has a place in public life, but it must not be allowed to impede the clear-eyed, dispassionate pursuit of national interests. The same goes for idealism. In politics, however, idealists who let hopes

30. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 10.

31. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 17–18.

32. Ibid. The famous dictum that “War is a continuation of politics by other means” is found in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

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and dreams guide policy choices inevitably fail. In the process, they may do more harm than good.

But realism requires us to see ourselves as others see us. It also requires us to hold ourselves to standards that are the same as (or higher than) those to which we hold others—or face the consequences—because failure to do so opens America to the charge of hypocrisy and erodes the trust on which diplomacy thrives. This is where America's principles and ideals come into play. There is more than a grain of truth in the notion that our principles *are* our interests—that is to say, America's ideals are what appeals most to “them” (the global community or world opinion) about “us.” Because the United States is the world's preeminent economic and military power, American foreign policy is on exhibit everywhere and is felt the world over. As Americans, no matter where we go, the people we encounter have experienced “America” in various ways. Often that experience has involved U.S. military or intelligence operatives. Some of these encounters have happy endings for the indigenous peoples, but many do not. In these cases the fallout is likely to “blow back” on us in one form or another.³³

It is not “idealistic” to question the use of military force as a first rather than last resort—quite the opposite. Realism, above all, requires the balancing of power and commitments.³⁴ No country has unlimited resources and capabilities because no country has a monopoly of power—not even the United States. In the absence of such a monopoly, it is necessary to use military force prudently (the political dimension) and parsimoniously (the economic dimension).

Idealism is the main alternative to political realism, and it has a time-honored place in American foreign policy. Idealism is rooted in European political thought during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the Enlightenment, which immediately preceded (and some historians would argue culminated in) the French and American Revolutions.³⁵ During the period of the Enlightenment intellectuals and political leaders celebrated the role of reason in human affairs and embraced the idea that “man is the measure of all things.”³⁶ Idealists tend to be considerably more optimistic about the possibility of peace and harmony in the world. They also tend to believe that human beings are basically good but are often led astray by bad institutions, ideas, and individuals.³⁷ Realists, not surprisingly,

33. See Johnson, *Blowback*.

34. Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 9–10.

35. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 15.

36. Kenneth Clark underscores this point in his famous documentary, *Civilization*. See also F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*, part 1, and Torbjorn L. Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), chap. 5.

37. For a discussion of the differences between liberals and conservatives, see Magstadt, *Understanding Politics*, chap. 12, esp. pp. 369–373.

tend to dismiss idealists as naive. The success of realist thought can be roughly gauged by the fact that nowadays calling somebody an “idealist” is often a form of rebuke or an easy way to dismiss that person’s opinions.

Intellectual heirs of Wilson believe in the basic goodness of human beings and tend to see conflict, war, and disorder as aberrations caused by some defect or other that can be found and fixed. If war occurs it is because something that could have been done to prevent it was not. The proper response to war, then, is to figure out why it happened and take steps to correct the problem. If only the governments of the world would get together, decide what to do, and then do it, war could be eradicated (or greatly reduced in frequency and scale). So, too, could poverty, hunger, and disease. The balance of power was not a success if peace is the criterion. On the contrary, it was a “war system”—that is, war was the main mechanism for keeping order (peace). The paradox of an unstable “balance” was a recurrent theme in the Old World order (prior to the two world wars of the twentieth century).

This idealistic brand of internationalism favors world organization and collective security over unilateral action, military alliances, and the balance of power. Today, Wilsonian idealists typically do not see American values as superior to all other value systems in the world and would not try to impose our institutions or ideas where they are not wanted. They generally abhor imperialism in all its manifestations and cannot stand to see America act like a bully or throw its weight around.

Of course, not all idealists would agree that war can ever be abolished or that poverty, hunger, and disease will ever vanish from the earth, but the tendency to think that the world could be a much better place is common to this school of thought, as is the tendency to distrust power (and power politics). In this view, morality is a better guide to action than self-interest in public as well as private life. Indeed, morality is not the enemy of power but its best ally. In the world according to Wilson’s heirs, morality multiplies power, especially “soft power”—the ability to get others to want what we want.

Realism and idealism are both present in American foreign policy. Often, individuals who consciously reject the latter are nonetheless inclined to embrace at least some of its assumptions. To make matters even more confusing, the terms “liberal” and “conservative” are used in different ways. In foreign policy debates, liberals often lean toward idealism and conservatives pose as tough-minded realists. Liberals tend to believe that there is a close relationship between the internal makeup of states and the external behavior they exhibit. To be more specific, liberals tend to believe that democracies are less war-prone than dictatorships.³⁸ Despite the success of realism as reflected in America’s huge postwar

38. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 15–17.

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investment in “national security,” this belief has informed the foreign policy of virtually every administration since World War II and it has survived the end of the cold war.

Liberals also place less emphasis on power as a motive in international politics. They often assume that there are good states and bad states. Good states will not do bad things even if they have the means and opportunity. Bad states will try to acquire the means and will not pass up any opportunity to grab more power. In recent times, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein in Iraq are prime examples of how this idea plays into American foreign policy. The practice of linking Soviet-style communism with war and revolution before 1989 is another good example of this same tendency.

In practice, it is not so easy to identify realists and idealists, or “conservatives” and “liberals.” More often than not, these two tendencies compete, not only within society or the two major parties, but also within individuals. In March 1991, the first President Bush told a joint session of Congress, “We can see a new world coming into view, a world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order, a world where the United Nations—freed from cold war stalemate—is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders; a world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations.”³⁹ Woodrow Wilson could not have said it better. In this speech, George H. W. Bush sounded a lot like a disciple of Jimmy Carter, the “liberal internationalist” he had campaigned against in 1980. Ironically, as we will see later in the book, Carter himself had largely given up on “world order politics” by the end of his term.⁴⁰

Similarly, President George W. Bush, a staunch conservative, expressed a liberal belief when he called for “regime change” in Afghanistan and Iraq. In other respects, however, the foreign policy of the second Bush administration appears to be steeped in realist assumptions about international politics, particularly the need to maximize power.

The Clinton administration’s foreign policy appeared to be more consistently liberal-idealistic in its assumptions. One astute observer has summarized President Clinton’s worldview as follows: (1) “prosperous and economically interdependent states are unlikely to fight each other”; (2) “democracies do not fight each other”; and (3) “international institutions enable states to avoid war

39. Quoted in Stanley R. Sloan, “The U.S. Role in a New World Order: Prospects for George Bush’s Global Vision,” Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, March 28, 1991, p. 19.

40. Jeral A. Rosati, *The Carter Administration’s Quest for Global Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 142–149.

and concentrate instead on building cooperative relationships.”⁴¹ But his strong support for market-based economic policies and his unilateral use of force in ordering air strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan suggest that, deep down, Clinton was a realist.

Thus, the radical distinction between realism and idealism is misleading and more often confounds than clarifies debate over foreign policy. The fact is that self-proclaimed realists seldom if ever agree on what is the best course of action in a given set of circumstances. The charge of “idealism” is often used to discredit or dismiss views some realists find objectionable.

President Woodrow Wilson is the most celebrated example of a leader who has been categorized (and criticized) by academicians and others as a starry-eyed idealist. In fact, however, there is ample evidence of “realism” in Wilson’s words and deeds.⁴² President John F. Kennedy described himself as an “idealist without illusions.” Despite obvious differences in personality and presidential style, Wilson and Kennedy were cut from the same cloth. Together, these two presidents personify a uniquely American approach to world politics, one that combines realism and idealism.

THE LIMITS OF AMERICAN POWER

Just how new is the new world order? On one side of the debate, conservatives argue that some things (for example, the primal force of nationalism and power-maximizing behavior of tyrannical states) never change, and they tend to minimize the importance of that which clearly has: above all, the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the other side, liberals counter that the end of the cold war transformed the international system and argue that, although nationalism is not

41. Ibid., p. 9. On the theoretical link between economic interdependence and peace, see Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power . . . to . . . Economic and Social Advantage* (New York: Putnam’s, 1912); Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000); and Edward D. Mansfield, *Power, Trade, and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Among the many works on democracy and peace, two of the more recent works are James L. Ray, *Democracy and International Conflict: An Evaluation of the Democratic Peace Proposition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), and Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). On the theoretical link between international organizations and peace, see Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and John G. Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

42. Claude, *Power in International Relations*, pp. 94–106.

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entirely absent from world politics as yet, the sovereignty and independence of the traditional “nation-state” is being rapidly eroded by the forces of globalization, including economic interdependence, democratization, and the growth in the number and variety of international organizations.

In one sense, the whole debate misses the point: the processes of transformation at work in the world were not initiated in 1989. Change is a constant, not something that occurs only at certain critical junctures in history. Even when a single dramatic event like a major war or a revolution appears to change things very suddenly, in retrospect the signs of an impending crisis almost always surface, often unnoticed or underestimated at the time, long before the crisis itself occurs.

The underlying question is always this: Is the state still the primary actor in international politics, or not? If nothing has replaced the state-based system, it logically follows that there continues to be no governing authority capable of regulating the interactions of sovereign states. And if the system remains anarchic, then it stands to reason that the basic patterns of interaction among these states—including the resort to war—remain unchanged.

Let us imagine for a moment that a decade hence the United States is facing several great powers on the rise and rather than being the lone “superpower” dealing with lesser powers is forced to deal with these “new” rivals as equals. Many Americans might be surprised and alarmed. They might wonder whose fault it is, who let it happen. Some politicians, columnists, and professors would be tempted to look around for a culprit, maybe a president or a political party.

In fact, it is likely, perhaps even inevitable, that this scenario will come to pass, albeit not necessarily in ten years. The U.S. share in the world economy fell to about 23 percent by 1980—less than one-half what it was in the late 1940s.⁴³ The United States is still an economic giant without any equal—indeed, the U.S. economy is equivalent to the combined economic might of the next four richest countries (Japan, Germany, Britain, and France). However, power is far more widely dispersed now than it was in the middle of the twentieth century, and this trend shows no signs of slowing.⁴⁴

Joseph Nye argues that international politics in the contemporary world “resembles a complex three-dimensional chess game.” Militarily, the world is “largely unipolar” in Nye’s view but “on the economic board, the United States is

43. It rose relatively in the 1980s, hovering around 25 percent, and climbed back to slightly over 30 percent in the 1990s, as a result of what Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan called the “irrational exuberance” of the stock market and a bubble economy. See Eugene R. Wittkopf, ed., *The Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1994); see also Joseph Nye, “The New Rome Meets the New Barbarians,” *Economist*, Mar. 23, 2002, p. 23.

44. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, esp. chap. 10.

not a hegemon, and must often bargain as an equal with Europe.” Nye focuses the bulk of his analysis on transnational relations, or what he called the “bottom chessboard” involving entities and actors other than governments. Bankers, traders, and tourists share this chessboard with terrorists, hackers, and a host of other nongovernmental players.

On this bottom board, power is widely dispersed, and it makes no sense to speak of unipolarity, multipolarity or hegemony. Those who recommend a hegemonic American foreign policy based on such traditional descriptions of American power are relying on woefully inadequate analysis. When you are in a three-dimensional game, you will lose if you focus only on the top board and fail to notice the other boards and the vertical connections among them.⁴⁵

The crux of Nye’s argument is based on what he calls “soft power,” which means “the ability to get others to want what you want.”⁴⁶ Hard power, by contrast, refers to coercion and intimidation—using economic and military instruments to bludgeon other countries into submission, cooperation, or, at the very least, acquiescence. Threats, of course, are credible only if strong words are backed by strong deeds—“sending in the marines” from time to time. For a government that relies primarily on the armed forces in the conduct of its foreign policy, periodic military intervention is necessary simply to keep up appearances.

There can be no doubt that the United States possesses enormous hard-power capabilities. The doubt arises in the area of soft-power resources in a competitive world in which economic power is measured in services as well as goods and producers are not confined or even seriously constrained by borders. Hard power and soft power can be mutually reinforcing in theory; in practice, however, the unilateral or too frequent or frivolous use of hard power inevitably undermines soft power—that is, the kind that is most useful on the lower chessboard where the real “battles” of the twenty-first century are most likely to be fought. We will return to this theme in a later chapter.

There is much talk in policy and academic circles now about America as the world hegemon. “A hegemon is a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system.”⁴⁷ The notion that any power in the world has the power to conquer or control the world is absurd on its face. One American

45. Nye, “New Rome Meets the New Barbarians,” p. 24.

46. Ibid. For a full elaboration of this idea, see Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

47. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 140. See also Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 29, and William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 12–14.

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scholar argues in a recent book, “[I]t is virtually impossible for any state to achieve global hegemony.”⁴⁸ The main reason is the “stopping power of water”:

The principal impediment to world domination is the difficulty of projecting power across the world’s oceans onto the territory of a rival great power. The United States, for example, is the most powerful state on the planet today. But it does not dominate Europe and Northeast Asia the way it does the Western Hemisphere, and it has no intention of trying to conquer and control those distant regions, mainly because of the stopping power of water. Indeed, there is reason to think that the American military commitment to Europe and Northeast Asia might wither away over the next decade. In short, there has never been a global hegemon, and there is not likely to be one any-time soon.⁴⁹

These words were written before September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S.-led conquest of Afghanistan and Iraq. Some readers (and political analysts) may now question whether the United States “has no intention of trying to conquer and control” lands beyond the Western Hemisphere. Intentions are ultimately unknowable. But if the makers of America’s foreign policy are so rash as to believe the United States could (much less should) conquer and control the “distant lands” that lie across the world’s two great oceans, they (and we) could be heading for serious trouble.

POWER POLITICS AND THE PURSUIT OF PRINCIPLES AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

Foreign policy was on the back burner during much of the 1990s as Americans were lulled into a sense of complacency by the demise of the other superpower—America’s long-time nemesis. In addition, Americans were caught up in the euphoria of a soaring stock market and a booming economy. All that changed abruptly on September 11, 2001, when a series of terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—two symbols of American power—riveted the nation’s attention on world affairs. Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 had Americans felt so insecure, and not since the Vietnam War had they been so tuned in to foreign policy.

In the emotionally charged atmosphere that followed September 11, a new and untested president launched bold new policies and embraced preemptive action as part of a “war against terrorism.” At the same time, he overhauled the machinery of government, creating a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. These initiatives, designed to give the executive branch

48. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 41.

49. *Ibid.*

greater law-enforcement powers at home and greater latitude for the use of lethal force abroad, were couched in moral principle. Hence, President George W. Bush declared that America's purpose was to overthrow repressive dictatorships in Afghanistan and Iraq, to contain an "axis of evil" that threatened world peace and stability, to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and to promote freedom and democracy. In the service of these noble aims, the White House would not hesitate to use all the internal security and military forces at its disposal. Indeed, the Bush administration would seek even greater police powers and would restructure the policy process to give a larger role to the attorney general (the head of the Justice Department) and the director of homeland security. In addition, the secretary of defense and the national security adviser would continue to be well positioned for countering any soft-power arguments that might emanate from the State Department.

In the days and weeks that followed the horrific events of September 11, the Bush administration set about preparing for the wars to come, first against Afghanistan for harboring terrorism and then against Iraq for allegedly building and planning to use weapons of mass destruction. After the first American invasion of Iraq in 1990–1991, a seasoned American diplomat wrote: "The Gulf War, in fact, illustrates the tendency of American foreign policy to define military actions not in the Clausewitzian sense of a 'continuation of policy by other means' but as the final phase of policy beyond which there is only victory or defeat."⁵⁰ The first President Bush, however, resisted calls for the ouster of the Iraqi tyrant, Saddam Hussein, because "it can be argued that such an outcome would have saddled the United States and its allies with responsibilities for the occupation and governance of Iraq that they were incapable of discharging."⁵¹ Ironically, this is precisely what appeared to be happening in 2003 after the United States again invaded Iraq and this time marched all the way to Baghdad.

The tendency to look at external problems through ideological lenses, rather than political or diplomatic ones, can lead to trouble.⁵² Arguably, the use

50. Stearns, *Talking to Strangers*, p. 7. The author elaborates as follows: "Our diplomacy was most effective when it was working to create and sustain a consensus supporting military action. When it came to the diplomatic and political ends to be served by the Gulf War, the attention of senior administration officials seemed to wander. . . . Diplomatic planning to anticipate the likely effect of the war (on the Iraqi Kurds and Shiite Moslems, or on Saddam Hussein himself) appeared to be almost nonexistent. The problems created for Turkey, first by the massive influx of Iraqi Kurds, then by stirring up the grievances of Turkish Kurds, seem to have taken the administration by surprise."

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.* Stearns argues that the U.S. government in 1990–1991 "should have shunned the language and tactics of total warfare and better weighed the political consequences of the policy it adopted." A similar criticism was also leveled against President George W. Bush in 2003.

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of military force was necessary to stop Iraq's aggression and remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990–1991. But a critic might point out that it did not solve the riddle posed by Iraq's very existence in a strategic location—that is, in close proximity to Israel, the oil fields, and the Persian Gulf. To think of military force as a “solution” to such a problem can be misleading because it implies that there is a quick fix when there is not, as the United States discovered after the second invasion of Iraq in 2003.

How decision makers think about problems can influence the policies they adopt. Iraq under Saddam was like an illness that a well-trained physician can often manage but never cure. Thus, thinking in medical rather than strictly military terms may have avoided an unnecessary second Gulf War. The United States did not withdraw from the region after the first Gulf War (as we did from Europe after World War I), but we continued to rely heavily on unilateral force (military bases in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, no-fly zones enforced by the U.S. Air Force, and an economic embargo), as well as multilateral diplomacy.

The value of military muscle in such circumstances has rarely if ever been lost on American presidents; the value of political expertise and analysis—the stuff of diplomacy—is less apparent. Under these circumstances, there is a risk that diplomacy will be depreciated at precisely those times when it is most needed. This risk was reflected in the new fighting vocabulary of American foreign policy after September 11. Phrases such as the “war on terrorism” and “weapons of mass destruction” were repeated over and over again like official mantras. America's enemies constituted an “axis of evil.” President Bush allowed nobody to be neutral (“you're either with us or you're with the terrorists”) and lapsed into the language of a barroom brawler (“bring 'em on”). He thus adopted “the language and tactics of total warfare.”⁵³

This approach, however, did not exclude the language of morality and religion. To brand the enemy as “evil” is to bring morality into the policy debate and throws the door wide open to religious interpretations, as well. The latter is particularly true when the “enemy” represents a religious tradition, Islam, often at odds with Christianity, and even more so when America's main nemesis—Osama bin Laden—is the very symbol of Islamism (a political-ideological outgrowth of Islamic fundamentalism). President Bush sought to assure Muslims that America was not declaring war on Islam, but he used evocative imagery and spoke in the most idealistic terms of planting freedom and democracy in the Arab world where it had never before taken root—what he called “nation building.” In this manner, he wrapped military power in the mantle of moral principle and in so doing changed the rules of the game. But that part of the story will have to wait until we get to the final chapter.

53. See previous note.

CONCLUSION

American foreign policy can be fruitfully viewed as an ongoing search for the proper balance between moral principles and power politics, between high-minded ideals and narrow national interests. The tension between these two elements has contributed to both successes and failures in America's relations with the outside world.

American idealism and pragmatism are both rooted in the European intellectual ferment that gave rise to the scientific revolution and the Age of Reason (also known as the Enlightenment). These two countervailing tendencies are clearly present in the speeches and writings of the American Founders.

Pragmatists and scientists look at the world in much the same way. They demand proof and trust only empirical evidence to lead them to the truth. Knowledge is acquired gradually through a process of induction (analysis based on experimentation and careful observation). Society can be improved by applying scientific principles to everyday life, investing in basic research and development, and relying on the skills of engineers to put technology to work for the good of all. Conservatives tend to be pragmatists.

Idealists do not reject the findings of science, but they believe that science alone is inadequate to explain life's deepest mysteries or solve the world's worst problems—including war and poverty. They have always turned to theology and philosophy for answers. From at least the time of the Enlightenment, idealists have sought answers in reason rather than faith. They believe it is possible to learn the truth and acquire the wisdom to use scientific knowledge only through a process of deduction (analysis based on logic). In other words, idealists believe it is necessary to channel the findings of science using the insights of philosophy. Liberals tend to be idealists.

The tension between principles and power is always present in the great debates over the direction of American foreign policy and always has been. These debates often take the form of a tug-of-war between “liberals” and “conservatives” trying to win over public opinion.⁵⁴ This contest is usually fought using current issues as the battleground, but the real fight—the one that is rarely mentioned—is about how much weight to give to moral principles and how much to give to hard power in formulating foreign policy.

There can be a big difference between what policymakers are saying and what they are thinking. Similarly, there is a difference between words and deeds. Declaratory policy and “public diplomacy” (or what Marxists call propaganda) are often not the best guides to the intentions and motives of those in power. This

54. Because these terms are used in various (and often arbitrary) ways, I have put them in quotation marks.

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is true everywhere, of course, but it complicates the analysis of American foreign policy more than that of other great powers precisely because of the ever-present tension between power and principle. When Americans hear the president invoke liberty and democracy as reasons for going to war, few doubt the president's veracity or question the validity of the reasons. After all, millions of Americans fought in World War I (more than 116,000 died) and believed President Wilson when he told them it was "to make the world safe for democracy." Not even Wilson's severest critics doubt that he meant what he said or that he really did mean to make the world safer and more democratic.

In sum, the dialectic of power and principle complicates the analysis of foreign policy for precisely the same reason that it complicates the formulation of that policy. The producers of policy are cut from the same basic cloth as the consumers. They, too, can feel conflicted over what to do and how best to do it. They, too, are subject to being pulled in opposite directions. When decision makers cannot decide, or have difficulty doing so, for whatever reason(s), the consequences can be serious indeed. When what is good for the country is not the same as what is morally good, a liberal president might have great difficulty being tough enough. The danger for a conservative president might lie in the opposite direction—being so tough that even our allies jump ship. As the following chapters will show, American has fallen victim to both of these hazards at different times and in 2003 is living with the consequences of one of the worst examples in recent memory.

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