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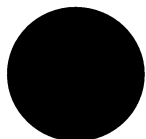
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Hegemony on the Cheap Liberal Internationalism from Wilson to Bush

Colin Dueck

One of the conventional criticisms of the Bush administration's foreign policy is that it is excessively and even disastrously unilateralist in approach. According to the critics, the administration has turned its back on a longstanding and admirable American tradition of liberal internationalism in foreign affairs, and in doing so has provoked resentment worldwide.¹ But these criticisms misinterpret both the foreign policy of George W. Bush, as well as America's liberal internationalist tradition. In reality, Bush's foreign policy since 9/11 has been heavily influenced by traditional liberal internationalist assumptions—assumptions that all along have had a troubling impact on U.S. foreign policy behavior and fed into the current situation in Iraq.

The conduct of America's foreign relations has—for more than a hundred years, going back at least to the days of John Hay's "Open Door" Notes and McKinley's hand-wringing over the annexation of the Philippines—been shaped, to a greater or lesser extent, by a set of beliefs that can only be called liberal. These assumptions specify that the United States should promote, wherever practical and possible, an international system characterized by democratic governments and open markets.² President Bush reiterated these classical liberal assumptions recently, in his speech last November to the National Endowment for Democracy, when he outlined what he called "a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East." In that speech, Bush argued that "as long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will re-

main a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export." In this sense, he suggested, the United States has a vital strategic interest in the democratization of the region. But Bush also added that "the advance of freedom leads to peace," and that democracy is "the only path to national success and dignity," providing as it does certain "essential principles common to every successful society, in every culture."³ These words could just as easily have been spoken by Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt—or Bill Clinton. They are well within the mainstream American tradition of liberal internationalism. Of course, U.S. foreign policy officials have never promoted a liberal world order simply out of altruism. They have done so out of the belief that such a system would serve American interests, by making the United States more prosperous, influential, and secure. Americans have also frequently disagreed over how to best promote liberal goals overseas.⁴ Nevertheless, it is fair to say that liberal goals and assumptions, broadly conceived, have had a powerful impact on American foreign policy, especially since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson.

The problem with the liberal or Wilsonian approach, however, has been that it tends to encourage very ambitious foreign policy goals and commitments, while assuming that these goals can be met without commensurate cost or expenditure on the part of the United States. Liberal internationalists, that is, tend to define American interests in broad, expansive, and idealistic terms, without always admitting the

necessary costs and risks of such an expansive vision. The result is that sweeping and ambitious goals are announced, but then pursued by disproportionately limited means, thus creating an outright invitation to failure. Indeed, this disjuncture between ends and means has been so common in the history of American diplomacy over the past century that it seems to be a direct consequence of the nation's distinctly liberal approach to international relations.

The Bush administration's current difficulties in Iraq are therefore not an isolated event. Nor are they really the result of the president's supposed preference for unilateralism. On the contrary, the administration's difficulties in Iraq are actually the result of an excessive reliance on classically liberal or Wilsonian assumptions regarding foreign affairs. The administration has willed the end in Iraq—and a very ambitious end—but it has not fully willed the means. In this sense, the Bush administration is heir to a long liberal internationalist tradition that runs from Woodrow Wilson, through FDR and Harry Truman, to Bill Clinton. And Bush inherits not only the strengths of that tradition, but also its weaknesses and flaws.

The Lost Alliance

The liberal internationalist pattern of disjuncture between ends and means really begins in earnest with Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, of course, traveled to Europe at the end of 1918, in the wake of the First World War, intending to “make the world safe for democracy” while insisting that a universal League of Nations serve as the linchpin for a new international order. Wilson intended the League to function as a promoter of collective security arrangements, by guaranteeing the territorial integrity and political independence of all member states. But Wilson also intended the League to function, more broadly, as the embodiment of a nascent liberal international order where war would be outlawed and self-determination would remain supreme. The other great

powers were to be asked to abandon their imperialistic spheres of influence, their protectionist tariff barriers, their secretive military alliances, and their swollen armories.⁵

Needless to say, in practice, such concessions were hard to extract. The actual outcome at the Paris Peace Conference, contrary to Wilson's desire, was a series of compromises: Japan maintained its sphere of influence in the Chinese province of Shantung; Britain maintained its great navy, as well as its colonial conquests from Germany and Turkey; many of the arrangements negotiated in secret by the Allied powers during the war were in fact observed, though running contrary to Wilson's own pronouncements (including the famous Fourteen Points); and in blatant disregard of Wilson's alleged aversion to “old diplomacy” horse trading, France and Britain had their way vis-à-vis the peace terms imposed on Germany at Versailles while obtaining an explicit security guarantee from the United States.⁶ To be sure, Wilson did succeed in winning the assent of the other victorious powers toward common membership in a new League of Nations. Furthermore, it is clear that he took the League's collective security obligations quite seriously. He certainly hoped that future acts of territorial aggression could be prevented through such peaceful means as deterrence, arbitration, and the use of economic sanctions. But in the final analysis, he understood perfectly well that collective security would at times have to be enforced militarily, through the use of armed force on the part of member states. Indeed, Wilson said quite explicitly that the League was meant to function as “a single overwhelming, powerful group of nations who shall be the trustee of the peace of the world.”⁷ And the United States was to be the leading member of this group.

Still, at the same time that Wilson laid out this extremely ambitious vision, he refused to draw the logical implications for the United States. Obviously, under any sort of meaningful commitment to a worldwide

collective security system, the United States would henceforth be obliged to help enforce the peace in areas outside its traditional sphere of influence as proclaimed in the Monroe Doctrine (and subsequent “corollaries”)—that is to say, in Europe and Asia. This would necessarily require maintaining a large standing army. Yet Wilson refused to admit that any such requirement existed, just as he disingenuously maintained that the League’s covenant would not impinge on America’s sovereignty, by insisting that said article carried only a “moral” obligation. In fact, he argued that the League would render a large standing army unnecessary.

Some of Wilson’s Republican critics, especially in Congress, far from being isolationist know-nothings, saw through the contradictions in the president’s vision, and advocated a pragmatic alternative. Led by Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, these conservative internationalists called for a straightforward security pact with France and Great Britain as the key to their and America’s own postwar security. Lodge and his supporters were willing to enter into the new League of Nations, but not into any global collective security arrangement. These Republican internationalists favored clear but restricted U.S. strategic commitments within Western Europe as the best guarantee of future peace.⁸

Lodge’s alternative of a limited, Western alliance actually made perfect sense, strategically speaking. It avoided the impossible implication that America would come to the aid of any state, worldwide, whose territory or integrity was threatened. At the same time, it specified that the United States would defend France from any future attack by Germany while encouraging Britain to do the same. In this way, America’s strategic commitments would be based upon concrete, vital national interests, rather than upon vague universalities; and upon real military capabilities, rather than utopian aspirations. The one problem with this alternative vision is that it seems to have been

incompatible with domestic liberal pieties. Even Lodge admitted in 1919—at the time of the battle in the Senate over the League—that the idea of a League of Nations was quite popular in America. As Wilson himself suggested, the only way to preserve America’s sense of moral superiority, while at the same time bringing its weight to bear in favor of international stability, was through membership in a universal organization, rather than through any particular and “entangling alliances.”⁹ Lodge and his supporters managed to defeat Wilson’s League in the Senate, but they did not succeed in replacing it with a more realistic alternative.

Containment

During the Second World War, Franklin Roosevelt attempted to learn from Wilson’s mistakes by carefully building domestic support for American membership in a postwar United Nations. Roosevelt was much more flexible in his approach than Wilson had been. But in terms of his substantive vision for the postwar order, Roosevelt was hardly any less idealistic than Wilson. Roosevelt’s “grand design” was that the five major powers fighting the Axis would cooperate in policing the postwar system, each power (more or less) within its own regional sphere of influence. At the same time, however, each great power was to respect such liberal norms as nonaggression, democratic institutions, and free trade within its own sphere.¹⁰ FDR was strikingly successful in nudging the American public toward a new internationalist consensus. His administration laid the groundwork for U.S. postwar leadership of a more liberal international political and economic order. The one great stumbling block to Roosevelt’s plans was the Soviet Union. Roosevelt recognized that Moscow would end the war with disproportionate influence over Eastern Europe, but he insisted that such influence be exercised in a benign, democratic, and non-coercive fashion. Stalin, of course, would

not accept such conditions, whatever his rhetorical commitments to the contrary. Once this basic clash of interests between Washington and Moscow became visible for all to see, by the end of 1945, American officials were faced with the inevitable dilemma of how to respond to Soviet behavior. To allow the Soviet Union to construct, with impunity, an autarchic, militarized sphere of influence within Eastern Europe—and beyond—would have flown in the face of America's wartime objectives. The United States, under Truman, therefore settled on a strategy of containment in order to curb Soviet power and at the same time preserve FDR's hope for a more liberal world order.

Containment was a pragmatic strategy, but it was also very much influenced by Wilsonian assumptions regarding the nature of international relations. The purpose of containment, after all, was not simply to check or balance the Soviet Union, but also to nurture the long-term vitality and interdependence of an American-led, liberal international order outside of the Communist bloc.¹¹ The strategists of containment refused to accept permanent Soviet control over Eastern Europe, or to negotiate in earnest with Moscow over the outlines of a general postwar settlement that did not accord with Wilsonian principles. Instead, they hoped to achieve an eventual geopolitical, economic, and ideological victory over the Soviet Union by using every means short of war.¹² The goal was not to learn to coexist with the enemy, but gradually to convert and/or help him destroy himself. It was precisely this ideological, uncompromising tone that gave containment its political viability at home.

During the late 1940s, under the strategy of containment, the United States embarked upon a series of dramatic and unprecedented commitments abroad. Military and economic aid was extended to friendly governments worldwide; anticommunist alliances were formed around the globe; and U.S. troops were deployed in large numbers

to Europe and Asia. The Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and NATO all embodied this new commitment to a forward strategic presence overseas. The problem, however, was that the Truman administration hoped to implement this very ambitious strategy without sacrificing the traditional American preference for limited liability abroad. Defense expenditures, in particular, were at first kept at a level that was exceedingly low, given the diverse and worldwide military commitments the United States had actually undertaken. In effect, the administration gambled that the Soviet Union and its clients would not test America's willingness or ability to contain military aggression by conventional means.¹³ With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, this gamble proved to be a failure. As a result, in the early 1950s, the United States finally raised defense expenditures to a level commensurate with its strategic commitments overseas. Inevitably, the Wilsonian preference for low-cost internationalism reasserted itself: high levels of defense spending turned out to be politically unsustainable at home, leading the Eisenhower administration to return to a potentially risky reliance on nuclear deterrence. Americans wanted to contain the Soviet Union—an ambitious and in many ways a remarkably idealistic strategy—but they did not necessarily want to bear the full costs of such a strategy. In this sense, even at the height of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy operated very much within the Wilsonian tradition.

The implementation of containment continued to be characterized by a persistent gap between ambitious liberal ends, and somewhat limited capabilities. In the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy made a concerted effort to close this gap through a strategy of "flexible response," emphasizing conventional and counterinsurgent, as well as nuclear, capabilities. Yet at the same time, Kennedy escalated America's military involvement in Vietnam, without providing

any clear idea of how that conflict could be won. The decision to stand by Saigon, on the part of both Kennedy and, later, Lyndon Johnson, was driven primarily by concerns over the credibility of America's worldwide alliance commitments. But this decision was also very much informed by the Wilsonian belief that developing countries such as Vietnam could be reformed, liberalized, and won over to America's side through a vigorous, U.S.-assisted program of nation building.¹⁴ In the words of Walt Rostow, one of Kennedy's leading foreign policy advisors, "Modern societies must be built, and we are prepared to help build them."

In Vietnam, America's willingness to sustain serious costs on behalf of a liberal strategy of containment and nation building was tested to the breaking point. Within the United States, domestic political support for a protracted, expensive, and bloody engagement in Southeast Asia proved to have definite limits. The Johnson administration itself was unwilling to call for maximum effort on behalf of its goals in the region; instead, it tried to achieve them through a process of limited and gradual escalation. The Nixon administration, having inherited this immense commitment, attempted to square the circle through a policy of "Vietnamization." The United States would slowly withdraw its forces from the conflict, relying upon air power and increased military aid to bolster the regime in Saigon. But Nixon's approach was no more able to achieve its stated aims than Johnson's. If Communist forces in Vietnam could not be defeated by half a million American troops, a lower level of American engagement was not going to do the trick. In the end, the United States proved neither willing nor able to bear the costs of meeting its commitments to Saigon—commitments that had been deeply informed by liberal internationalist assumptions.

Even as they experimented with Vietnamization, the Nixon-Kissinger team

attempted to place the United States in a more sustainable strategic position by toning down the Wilsonian rhetoric. The new emphasis was on great power relations, rather than on ideological crusades to liberalize or reform the internal politics of other states. As Henry Kissinger put it in 1969, "We will judge other countries, including Communist countries, on the basis of their actions and not on the basis of their domestic ideologies."¹⁵ This more pragmatic approach bore considerable fruit through a relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union, as well as a dramatic improvement in relations with China. Despite these successes, Nixon and Kissinger were attacked from both left and right for abandoning America's Wilsonian mission overseas. Both Jimmy Carter, who took office in 1977, and Ronald Reagan, who succeeded him in 1981, criticized the policy of détente from a Wilsonian perspective. Both Carter and Reagan, despite their many differences, insisted that U.S. foreign relations should be rebuilt upon the premise that the United States had a vital practical as well as moral interest in the promotion of a liberal world order. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 seemed to many to have vindicated the Wilsonian approach. But it was the combined economic and military power of the United States and its allies, not Wilsonian idealism, that finally brought the Soviet Union to its knees. In the euphoria over the collapse of communism, the fact that for over 40 years the United States had often pursued a sweeping and ambitious foreign policy with inadequate means was forgotten. The United States had been forced to pay for this strategic mismanagement in both Korea and Vietnam. In the end, the relative weakness of the Soviet Union gave U.S. policymakers considerable room for error. However, the upshot was that Americans misattributed their victory in the Cold War to the unique virtues of the Wilsonian tradition, which only led to a continuing gap

between ends and means in the conduct of American foreign policy.

Democratic Enlargement

Following the end of the Cold War, the United States was faced with the choice of either expanding its military and political presence abroad, or retrenching strategically. The Clinton administration decided to do both. Thus it pursued a very ambitious strategy of “democratic enlargement,” designed to promote the spread of market democracies worldwide. This included, notably, a new emphasis on humanitarian intervention in civil conflicts of seemingly peripheral interest to the United States. But it also tried to carry out this strategy at an extremely low cost in terms of blood and treasure. Defense expenditures, for example, were kept at a level that was unrealistically low, given the global range of America’s military commitments. Just as significantly, Clinton also proved remarkably reluctant to use force in support of his Wilsonian agenda.

Clinton came into office having criticized the foreign policy of George H. W. Bush for being insufficiently true to America’s democratic ideals. The new president promised to be more consistent than his immediate predecessor in promoting democracy and human rights in countries such as China, the former Yugoslavia, and Haiti. A leading test of the Clinton administration’s rhetorical commitment to the liberal internationalist credo was on the question of humanitarian intervention. Clinton and his advisors repeatedly stated that the United States had a vital humanitarian interest in cases of civil war and disorder. The administration therefore placed a new emphasis on American-led peacekeeping, peacemaking, and nation-building operations.¹⁶ More broadly, foreign policy officials articulated a doctrine of “enlargement,” by which they meant that the United States would press for the expansion of free trade, open markets, democratic governments, and human

rights worldwide.¹⁷ Their assumption—building on the old Wilsonian gospel—was that such an expansion would encourage an upward cycle of global peace and prosperity, serving American interests and allowing the United States to deemphasize its own military strength.

Under the Clinton administration, the liberal internationalist assumptions of democratic enlargement informed U.S. policy in virtually every region of the globe. In Central Europe, three new members were brought into NATO. In Russia, democratic market reforms were the price demanded for improved bilateral relations with the United States. In China, U.S. diplomats pressed Beijing on human rights issues while working to bring the People’s Republic into the international economic system. And in Bosnia, Haiti, Somalia, and Kosovo, Washington undertook to help create or recreate stable, democratic polities, through military intervention, amidst generally unfavorable conditions.¹⁸

Nevertheless, even as President Clinton laid out his extremely ambitious foreign policy goals, he proved unwilling to support them with the necessary means. In particular, he proved reluctant to support these initiatives with the requisite amount of military force. In one case after another of humanitarian intervention, a pattern emerged: the Clinton administration would stake out an assertive and idealistic public position, then refuse to act on its rhetoric in a meaningful way. Yet in every such case, whether in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, or Kosovo, the president was ultimately forced to act, if only to protect the credibility of the United States.¹⁹ The result was a series of remarkably halfhearted, initially low-risk interventions, which only reinforced the impression that the United States was unwilling to suffer costs or casualties on behalf of its stated interests overseas.²⁰

It might be argued that the nature of U.S. interventions during the Clinton years was a function of the low geopolitical stakes

involved, rather than a reflection of the administration's naiveté. Certainly, the stakes were relatively low. But from a classical realist perspective, the answer would have been to avoid putting America's reputation on the line in the first place—to avoid defining American interests in such an expansive manner as to then call the nation's credibility into question. The fact is that the Clinton administration *said*, in each case, that the United States had a vital national interest in the pursuit of liberal or humanitarian goals. Then it refused to protect this stated interest with requisite seriousness until American credibility had already been undermined. This may have been partially the result of a presidency characterized by unusual fecklessness on matters of national security. But it was also a pattern of behavior very much in the liberal internationalist tradition: sweeping commitments, too often supported by inadequate means.

Wilson Redux

At first, the inauguration of George W. Bush seemed to indicate, if nothing else, that America's national security capabilities would be brought into line with the nation's strategic commitments. As a candidate for president, Governor Bush had called for significant increases in defense spending. At the same time, he criticized what he termed the "open-ended deployments and unclear military missions" of the Clinton era.²¹ Bush was especially critical of employing armed force in nation-building operations overseas; indeed, he suggested that he would not have intervened in either Haiti or Somalia. As Bush phrased it during a debate with Al Gore in October 2000, while referring to the question of intervention, "I would be very guarded in my approach. I don't think we can be all things to all people in the world. I think we've got to be very careful when we commit our troops."²²

To be sure, neoconservative visions of American primacy always had a certain influence on Bush's thinking, but for the most

part, the dominant tone of Bush's foreign policy pre-9/11 was one of "realism." The new administration was determined to be more selective on questions of nation building and humanitarian intervention than its predecessor. American foreign policy was to be refocused on considerations of great power politics and more immediate national interests, and the United States was to play down its pretensions as an international social engineer. Key figures such as Colin Powell and Richard Haass in the State Department and Condoleezza Rice at the National Security Council were well within the tradition of Republican pragmatism on foreign affairs, and hawks such as Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were either unwilling or unable to press for a comprehensive strategy of primacy across the board.²³ Above all, Bush seemed uninterested in any new, sweepingly ambitious—i.e., Wilsonian—foreign policy departures.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed all of that, coming as a severe shock to the president, his advisors, and the American public at large. These attacks stimulated the search for a new national security strategy. Key advocates of a different approach—at first within the administration, and then including the president himself—took advantage of the opportunity to build support for a new foreign policy agenda. This new national security strategy would be considerably more assertive than before and, in important ways, considerably more idealistic.²⁴

Within days of the September 11 attacks, and over the following months, the Bush administration began to outline and articulate a remarkable departure in American foreign policy. The clearest and most elaborate explanation of the new approach came in the National Security Strategy of September 2002. In that document, best known for its embrace of preventive military action against rogue states, the administration began by pointing out that "the United

States possesses unprecedented—and unequaled—strength and influence in the world.” It renounced any purely realpolitik approach to foreign policy, arguing instead that “the great strength of this nation must be used to promote a balance of power that favors freedom.” The promotion of free trade and democratic institutions was held up as a central American interest. Democracy and human rights were described as “nonnegotiable demands.” And, interestingly, the possibility of traditional great power competition was played down. Instead, other powers were urged to join with the United States in affirming the global trend toward democracy and open markets.²⁵

Of course, this broad affirmation of classical liberal assumptions was no doubt employed, in part, for reasons of domestic political consumption. Liberal arguments have historically been used to bolster strategic arguments of any kind. But the United States had been no less liberal—broadly speaking—in the year 2000, when the nascent Bush team was stressing the need for realism in foreign affairs. So the new rhetoric does seem to have reflected a real shift on the part of the administration toward a more aggressive and, at the same time, more Wilsonian approach.

The implications of this new Wilsonianism were most visible in the decision for war against Iraq. The argument made by the pro-war camp was that a defeated Iraq could be democratized and would subsequently act as a kind of trigger for democratic change throughout the Middle East. As Bush put it in an address last February to members of the American Enterprise Institute, “a new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region.... Success in Iraq could also begin a new stage for Middle Eastern peace, and set in motion progress toward a truly democratic Palestinian state.”²⁶ From the perspective of many leading officials inside the Bush administration, this argument was probably secondary

to more basic geopolitical and security concerns. But it did seem to have an effect on the president. And again, 9/11 was the crucial catalyst, since it appeared to demonstrate that U.S. support for authoritarian regimes in the region had only encouraged Islamic fundamentalism, along with such terrorist organizations as al-Qaeda.²⁷

Here was a remarkably bold vision for American foreign policy, combining the argument for preventive war with Wilsonian visions of a liberalized or Americanized international system. The goals outlined were so ambitious as to invite intense domestic as well as international criticism. The most common objections to the Bush Doctrine, at least among foreign policy experts, were that the new national security strategy would lead America into “imperial overstretch”; that it would trigger antagonism and hostility toward the United States abroad; that it would set a precedent for aggression on the part of other countries; and that it would undermine sympathy and support for the United States overseas. These were the most frequently articulated criticisms, but in fact an even more likely danger was the opposite one: that the Bush team would fail to make good on its promise of a serious commitment to achieving peace, stability, and democratization in Iraq, let alone in the Middle East as a whole.

Certainly the precedent in Afghanistan was not encouraging. There, the United States relied upon proxy forces, supported by airstrikes, special forces operations, and financial aid, in order to overthrow the Taliban. The failure to send in American ground troops early on meant that many members of al-Qaeda were able to escape and reconstitute their terrorist camps along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Worse yet, the Bush administration proved unwilling to contribute substantially to the postwar political, military, or economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, leaving its central government without effective control over the countryside outside Kabul.²⁸

Iraq's postwar reconstruction was even less well considered than Afghanistan's. Certainly, the Bush foreign policy team understood that Saddam Hussein would not be overthrown without a major commitment of American ground troops. But in terms of planning for a post-Saddam Iraq, the administration seems to have based its initial actions upon the most optimistic assumptions: ordinary Iraqis would rise up in support of U.S. forces; these same forces would rapidly transfer authority toward a friendly interim government; the oil would flow, paying for reconstruction efforts; and the great majority of American troops would come home quickly. These were never very likely prospects, and with all of the warnings that it received, the administration should have known better. As Bush himself said during the 2000 presidential campaign, nation building is difficult and expensive. The administration's preference has been to avoid nation-building operations—an understandable predilection in itself. But once the administration made the decision to go to war against Saddam Hussein, it was also obliged to prepare for the foreseeable likelihood of major, postwar nation-building operations—not only for humanitarian reasons, but in order to secure the political objectives for which it had gone to war in the first place.

The Bush administration's early reluctance to plan for Iraq's postwar reconstruction has had serious and deadly consequences. Once Saddam's government was overthrown, a power vacuum was created, and the United States did not initially step in to fill the void. Widespread looting, disorder, and insecurity were the inevitable result. This set the tone for the immediate postwar era. Moreover, because of these insecure conditions, many of Saddam's former loyalists were given the opportunity to develop and pursue a dangerous, low-level insurgency against American forces. The subsequent learning curve within the Bush administration has been steep. By necessity,

the president has come a considerable distance toward recognizing how expensive this particular process of nation building is going to be. The approval by Congress of \$87 billion for continuing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is clearly a step in the right direction. Bush has indicated repeatedly that the United States cannot cut and run from its commitments. At the same time, there are disconcerting signs, with American casualties mounting, and the president's reelection looming, that the White House may in fact decide to withdraw American forces from Iraq. Indeed, the administration's latest adjustment seems to be toward a version of Vietnamization: handing over authority to a transitional government in Baghdad, while encouraging Iraq's own police and security forces to take up the greater burden with respect to counterinsurgency operations. In itself, this approach has certain virtues, but if it indicates a comprehensive withdrawal of U.S. resources and personnel from Iraq, then the results will not be benign, either for the United States, or for the Iraqi people. Nation-building operations sometimes fail, even under favorable conditions. But without robust involvement on the part of outside powers, such operations simply cannot succeed. It is an illusion to think that a stable, secure, and democratic Iraq can arise without a significant long-term U.S. investment of both blood and treasure.²⁹

The administration responded to the challenge of 9/11 by devising a more assertive, Wilsonian foreign policy. The stated goals of this policy have been not only to initiate "rogue state rollback" but to promote a more open and democratic world order. By all accounts, Bush and his advisors really do believe that 9/11 has offered the United States, in the words of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, an "opportunity to refashion the world."³⁰ The problem is not that the president is departing from a long tradition of liberal internationalism; it is that he is continuing some of the worst

features of that tradition. Specifically, in Iraq, he is continuing the tradition of articulating and pursuing a set of extremely ambitious and idealistic foreign policy goals, without providing the full or proportionate means to achieve those goals. In this sense, it must be said, George W. Bush is very much a Wilsonian.

Whatever the immediate outcome in Iraq, America's foreign policy elites are not likely to abandon their longstanding ambition to create a liberal world order. What is more likely, and also more dangerous, is that they will continue to oscillate between various forms of liberal internationalism, and to press for a more open and democratic international system, without willing the means to sustain it.

Under the circumstances, the choice between unilateralism and multilateralism, which currently characterizes public debate over U.S. foreign policy, is almost beside the point. Neither a unilateral nor a multilateral foreign policy will succeed if Americans are unwilling to incur the full costs and risks that are implied in either case. It is impossible to promote the kind of international system that America's foreign policy elites say that they want without paying a heavy price for it. Iraq is simply the latest case in point. Americans can either take up the burden of acting on their liberal internationalist rhetoric and convictions, or they can keep costs and risks to a minimum by abandoning this ambitious interventionist agenda. They cannot do both. They cannot have hegemony on the cheap. ●

Notes

1. For representative criticisms in this vein, see David C. Hendrickson, "Toward Universal Empire: The Dangerous Quest for Absolute Security," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 19 (fall 2002), pp. 1–10; G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81 (September/October 2002), pp. 44–60; Robert S. Litwak, "The New Calculus of Pre-emption," *Survival*, vol. 44 (winter 2002), pp. 53–79; and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American*

Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 15, 39, 141–63.

2. See Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 17–18.

3. "Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," Washington, D.C., November 6, 2003, available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/iraq/20031106-2.html.

4. For a discussion of various schools of thought in the American foreign policy tradition, see Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 43–59; and Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

5. See Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson: Revolution, War and Peace* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1979), pp. 72–103.

6. In the former Ottoman Empire, for example, Wilson's initial pronouncements in favor of self-determination had raised hopes for postwar national independence among Arabs, Armenians, Jews, and Turks. At Paris, Wilson even promised a U.S. protectorate over an independent Armenia. Yet the eventual settlement in the region, disguised through the creation of League "mandates," closely resembled a classic sphere-of-influence bargain among Europe's great powers. The one major exception was in Turkey itself, where Kemal Atatürk rallied nationalist forces and ejected foreign troops from the Anatolian heartland. In this way, American promises with regard to Armenia were rendered completely irrelevant, even before the Senate's rejection of the Versailles Treaty. For a lively discussion of the postwar settlement within the Middle East, see Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 347–455.

7. Ray Stannard Baker and William Dodd, eds., *Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925–1927), vol. 5, pp. 341–44.

8. William C. Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 298, 331.

9. Baker and Dodd, eds., *Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 5, pp. 352–56.

10. See Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 63–81, 107–57.
11. See Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 8–9, 15–18.
12. As George Kennan put it, “Our first aim with respect to Russia in time of peace is to encourage and promote by means short of war the gradual retraction of undue Russian influence from the present satellite area.” See George Kennan, NSC 20/1, “US Objectives with Respect to Russia,” August 18, 1948, in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, eds., *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 184.
13. See Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years, 1947–1950* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), pp. 532–36.
14. See John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 202–03, 217–18, 223–25.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
16. Stephen John Stedman, “The New Interventionists,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72 (spring 1993), pp. 4–5.
17. Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, at Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 1993, in *Vital Speeches of the Day, 1993*, vol. 60, p. 15.
18. See Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post–Cold War World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
19. See, for example, in the case of Bosnia, James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 208, 218.
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22. Presidential debates, October 3, 2000, at Boston, Massachusetts, and October 11, 2000, at Winston-Salem, North Carolina, available at www.foreignpolicy2000.org/debate/candidate/candidate.html and www.foreignpolicy2000.org/debate/candidate/candidate2.html.
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