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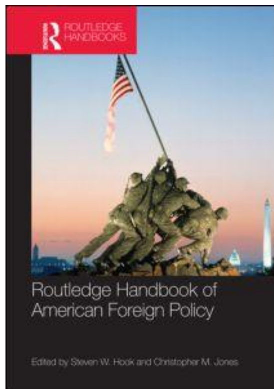

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The Post-Cold War Era

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4

The Post-Cold War Era

Steven W. Hook

As the previous two chapters have described, the defining feature of U.S. foreign policy from its origins through the Cold War was the persistent growth of American power both absolutely and relative to other major nation-states. The nineteenth century was characterized by aggressive westward expansion and rapidly expanding trade, both of which were fostered by a diplomatic strategy that preserved the government's autonomy and unilateral prerogatives (see Gaddis 2004). The world wars of the early twentieth century, sparked by the implosion of Western Europe as a cohesive power center, ultimately produced a unipolar world based in Washington, D.C. The "American century," a term coined by *Time* magazine editor Henry Luce in 1941, had begun.

The conventional wisdom holds that the Cold War produced a bipolar power balance, with the Soviet Union and its allies reaching parity with the West. This is hardly the case, however (see Gaddis 1997). To the contrary, Soviet economic activity never came close to U.S. levels, its political system quickly ossified, and its cultural influence was minimal. The "superpower rivalry," if one actually existed, was limited primarily to nuclear weapons and strategy. For the vast number of developing countries, Havana rather than Moscow served as a more fitting role model. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991—exactly halfway through Luce's American century—clearly affirmed the enduring unipolar balance of power.

Paradoxically, many of the factors that propelled the rise of American power—its sense of national exceptionalism, decentralized system of governance, *laissez faire* economic policies, and vibrant civil society—made it difficult for U.S. foreign policy makers to manage the America-centric world that their predecessors had created (see Hook 2011). Rather than transforming Americans into global citizens, the general public and its leaders became less rather than more engaged in world politics. News coverage of foreign affairs declined, test scores revealed less knowledge of world history and geography, and public opinion surveys found most Americans less concerned with foreign policy. The U.S. government, meanwhile, descended into a period of political polarization as members of Congress found common ground on few issues, even those relating to national security. Lacking a coherent grand strategy and gauge of foreign threats, U.S. military forces veered from one post-Cold War military conflict to another (see Halberstam 2001). The nation's economy, meanwhile, sputtered in the face of globalized market forces and reckless financial practices at home. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, it was widely believed that the United States was not only in decline but in the midst of a protracted free fall.

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This chapter reviews the key developments of the period between the Soviet Union's collapse and the early experience of Barack Obama as the fourth post-Cold War president. The first of these chief executives, George H. W. Bush, effectively guided the United States through the Soviet collapse but failed to set a unified course for American foreign policy that would outlive his presidency (see Baker 1995). His successor, Bill Clinton, led the United States through a period of rapid economic growth but neglected a variety of transnational threats, including Islamist terrorism, that haunted future presidents (see Hyland 1999). George W. Bush sought to make American primacy the foundation of world order but instead left the United States widely discredited and resented overseas (see Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Mayer 2008). For his part, Obama's pledge to "renew" America's bond with the international community upon his election in 2008 was stymied by economic crisis and political dissension (see Hook and Scott 2010).

Managing the "New World Order"

As noted above, the post-Cold War world seemed on the verge of a profoundly new era of peace, prosperity, and individual freedom.[1] This hope was based in part on the collapse of the Soviet Union, and more broadly on political, socioeconomic, and technological developments that extended far beyond the traditional boundaries of interstate relations. The very forces that historically had fueled international tensions were themselves being transformed. As one scholar (Fukuyama 1989: 4) declared, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."

Two forces would presumably characterize this "post-historical" world: democracy and free-market capitalism. Both had already taken hold in many parts of the developing world and were expected in the 1990s to spread across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. To adherents of this view, the expansion of democracy would benefit average citizens while enhancing the prospects for global stability. Democracies, while frequently engaging in armed struggles against nondemocratic states, traditionally had engaged in peaceful behavior toward other democratic states (see Russett 1993).

According to this conventional wisdom, a market-based world economy would tie states together in a cooperative search for prosperity. Not only would military conflicts become less frequent, but the powerful countries of the world also would be able to confront global problems such as environmental decay, weapons proliferation, population growth, and widespread poverty. Furthermore, economic "globalization" would lift the poorest regions of the world from poverty, thereby reducing the economic disparities that had grown ever wider during the Cold War.

Another part of this equation was the nature of military power in the post-Cold War era. Nuclear weapons, it was widely believed, had rendered warfare among the great powers suicidal and thus prohibitive. Large-scale military conflict was destined to become obsolete, just as dueling, once widely accepted, became viewed as "contemptible and stupid" in the nineteenth century (Mueller 1989: 10). Because of the climbing costs of conventional warfare and the tangible rewards that could be expected from growing economic cooperation, war also might become obsolete among developing countries, where most violent conflicts were occurring. George H. W. Bush (quoted in Sloan 1991: 19), the first U.S. president to serve in the aftermath of the Cold War, took all of these factors into account and proclaimed to a joint session of Congress in March 1991, "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."

Even as Bush announced the arrival of the "new world order," debates began about the future role of the United States. One question raised frequently was whether American foreign policy after the Cold War would resemble that of 1918, when the United States retreated into its hemispheric shell after World War I, or that of 1945, when it assumed a strong internationalist posture after World War II. Of central concern was how much attention and how many resources should be devoted to foreign policy when, for all practical purposes, the nation no longer confronted any formidable military threats.

To address these concerns, policy analysts within and outside the U.S. government devised an array of possible strategies that clustered around four basic models (see Posen and Ross 1996–97):

- **Isolationism**. The United States would distance itself politically, diplomatically, and militarily from the affairs of the great powers in Europe and Asia (see Nordlinger 1995). Other countries may follow the American lead as a role model, but otherwise Washington would not meddle in their internal affairs or regional conflicts.
- **Liberal internationalism**. The United States would use its immense power to consolidate democracy and promote economic growth overseas (Smith 1994). American leaders would align national interests with those of the "international community," and they would seek conflict resolution through global governance and international law rather than military force (Christopher 1998).
- **Primacy**. The United States would exploit its military predominance, imposing itself in regional power struggles and aggressively containing potential challengers (see Huntington 1993). The nation's hard-won primacy in global affairs would be exploited to maintain a stable world order that reflected American political values, cultural attributes, and economic practices.
- **Selective engagement**. American leaders would confront and react to international problems on a case-by-case basis (see Van Evera 1990). No single grand strategy would guide the U.S. response to global problems; instead, this response would be based upon a careful analysis of relative costs and benefits as they pertained to U.S. national interests.

Still, no consensus emerged regarding the best course for U.S. foreign policy after the Cold War (Ripley and Lindsay 1997; Scott 1998). Clinton, who became president in January 1993, focused on domestic policy in his campaign and devoted little attention to foreign policy concerns. Still, Clinton advanced three principles for the nation's foreign policy. First, the country's primary goal in the mid-1990s would be achievement of strong economic growth. Second, many of the problems neglected during the Cold War—ecological decay, rapid population growth, and political repression, among others—must receive attention at once. Finally, international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and World Bank should play a meaningful role in achieving the nation's goals.

Efforts to apply these principles, however, foundered after the 1994 midterm elections, which brought a Republican majority to both houses of Congress for the first time in four decades. Led by Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga), the Speaker of the House, the Republicans drafted a "Contract With America" that, among other items, pledged to restore former President Ronald Reagan's foreign policies with their emphasis on national defense, unilateralism, and the unabashed assertion of American power. Faced with this congressional challenge, which was clearly anticipated in the U.S. Constitution, Clinton was forced to modify his principles of foreign policy and to adopt the case-by-case strategy of selective engagement.

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Regional Conflicts in the 1990s

Events overseas did not wait for the U.S. government to overcome its lack of consensus and clarity over post-Cold War foreign policy. In particular, the absence of a superpower rivalry that coincided with the Soviet Union's downfall left a power vacuum in the Middle East that Iraq's Saddam Hussein attempted to fill. Saddam's bid for hegemony produced the first world crisis of the post-Cold War era. On August 2, 1990, Saddam ordered his army to invade his oil-rich neighbor, the emirate of Kuwait. The Iraqi army quickly overran the largely undefended capital, Kuwait City. As Iraqi forces massed near Saudi Arabia's border, the possibility that Saddam might soon control 40 percent of the world's oil reserves forced an aggressive response. Japan and the Western powers froze Iraqi assets in their countries. This measure was accompanied by an embargo on Iraqi oil and other economic sanctions, to be enforced by a naval blockade of the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, the United States proceeded with its largest troop buildup (dubbed Operation Desert Shield) since the Vietnam War; 250,000 troops were deployed to deter an Iraqi attack on Saudi Arabia.

The UN gave Saddam a deadline of January 15, 1991, to withdraw from Kuwait. Once this deadline passed, a massive U.S.-led air assault sent Saddam's forces fleeing for cover. Not until February 24 did the coalition's tank forces launch their ground attack across the Saudi border. The ground forces promptly surrounded the Iraqis, most of whom surrendered quickly. The successful outcome of Operation Desert Storm, as the mission was later known, did not result in Saddam's removal from power. Despite his undisguised brutality toward his own people, the United States and its allies expected the country to maintain its pivotal role in the Middle East balance of power. After the war, Saddam defied a series of international demands, making it clear that despite the coalition's victory he would remain a threat.

A second regional conflict occurred in the impoverished country of Somalia, a "failed state" located along the Horn of Africa. Somalia became embroiled in a war of succession among rival factions. Its government ceased to function and chaos prevailed. Widespread starvation followed when the rival militias prevented farmers from planting, disrupted the activities of nomadic traders, and killed most of the nation's livestock. For months, the world looked the other way. Media attention finally compelled a Western response through the UN. More than 27,000 troops, at first mainly American, were dispatched in late 1992 to provide order and food. After they had accomplished the mission of Operation Restore Hope, the U.S. forces were to be withdrawn and replaced by a temporary contingent of UN forces.

This intervention occurred as President Bill Clinton took office. Clinton, the former governor of Arkansas whose top priority was economic revival at home, immediately confronted unexpected obstacles to resolving the Somali conflict. It soon became clear that, once the outside forces were withdrawn, the Somali warlords would resume their struggle for power, leading to renewed killing and hunger. Thus in 1993 the UN changed its mission from one of humanitarian relief to one of rebuilding Somalia's political and economic structures. But the country's principal warlord, General Mohammed Farah Aidid, who controlled Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, resisted the enlarged UN mission, because it called for his own removal and disarmament. In the fighting that followed, twenty-four Pakistani peacekeepers were ambushed and killed. The deaths of eighteen U.S. troops in the "battle of Magadishu" provoked demands for U.S. withdrawal. Clinton responded by accelerating their departure, and the UN suspended its mission in the spring of 1995.

These regional conflicts collectively deflated the euphoria that followed the end of the Cold War. Many members of Congress openly doubted that the United States had vital interests in the failed states. Support for U.S. involvement quickly evaporated when it became clear the United States could not resolve the underlying problems in these

countries—or when U.S. interventions clashed with domestic priorities. It became clear that Washington could not solve the many problems in developing countries that were sparking widespread violence after the Cold War. The regional conflicts also demonstrated the limits of multilateral intervention and peacekeeping, which Clinton had hoped would restore stability in the regional trouble spots. The failure of "state building," combined with more general misgivings about Clinton's foreign policy, provoked a general backlash against U.S. activism in developing areas.

Finally, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s also served as a frightening example of how the removal of Cold War restraints could unleash nationalistic rivalries (see Zimmerman 1996). Yugoslavia, created in the aftermath of World War I, was a diverse federation of ethnic and religious groups—mainly Serbs (Eastern Orthodox), Slovenes and Croats (Catholic), and Bosnians and Albanians (Muslim). After the Cold War these ancient religious hatreds quickly returned to the surface, and Yugoslavia's descent into a spiral of violence soon followed. After the provinces of Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, the Yugoslav army intervened in both territories. The Serbs then directed their military campaign to the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which also had declared its independence from Belgrade. In a self-described campaign of "ethnic cleansing" that brought back the most ghastly memories of World War II, Serb forces burned and looted villages, tortured and starved non-Serbs in concentration camps, raped Islamic women, and besieged the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, for three years, depriving its citizens of food, water, and electricity.

An international arms embargo imposed on Yugoslavia in the early days of the conflict favored the well-equipped Serbs. When Clinton occasionally advanced proposals for multilateral military action and for lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia, he was widely opposed overseas. Within Congress and among the general public, domestic issues were of greater concern. For all these reasons, Clinton was unwilling to assert himself and demand action as Bush had done in Kuwait. Instead, he wavered, sometimes threatening to intervene with air power and to lift the arms embargo, at other times retracting these positions.

A shift in the regional balance of power transformed this stalemate in 1995. The Croatian army launched a successful ground attack against the Serbs, depriving them of many of their earlier territorial gains. Recognizing the shifting power balance, forces from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched a bombing campaign against Serbian munitions dumps, bridges, and air defenses that further weakened the Serbs. American leaders seized their opportunity to negotiate a deal among the Balkan rivals. Forced to negotiate at a U.S. Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio, leaders of the three factions signed an agreement in November 1995 that led to a cease-fire in 1996. Under the Dayton Accords, nearly 60,000 NATO troops were deployed to the region. Bosnian leaders then created a new government led by a three-member presidency, one from each ethnic group. Still, the Bosnian war revealed shortcomings in the system of collective security that was supposed to guarantee peace in the post-Cold War era.

Tragically, the Balkan wars did not end in Bosnia. As many feared, the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic simply redirected his military machine against another Yugoslav province, Kosovo. The province held great symbolic value to Belgrade, for it was there that Serbian armies had made their last stand against the Ottoman Turks in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. To Milosevic, revenge in Kosovo was the only way to overcome his humiliating defeats in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia. In 1999, his troops forced Albanian families from their homes, seized their possessions, and then set entire villages on fire. Forced into action, Clinton approved an aerial bombardment of Serbia which, combined with the prospect of a ground offensive, forced Milosevic to withdraw from Kosovo. Operation Allied Force, the first military encounter undertaken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, achieved Clinton's general objectives and those of his European counterparts. Serbia's ten-year campaign of

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terror and intimidation was finally brought to an end, and fears of a widened conflict beyond Yugoslavia were dispelled, at least for the foreseeable future.

A Unilateral Turn in Foreign Policy

President Clinton's management of these overseas conflicts was overshadowed by his problems at home. Congress became more polarized each year, with partisan attacks on Clinton peaking with his impeachment in 1999 for not being truthful about his affair with a White House intern. His response to al Qaeda attacks on American embassies in Africa had earlier brought criticism from the president's political adversaries. While Clinton could not overturn congressional cutbacks in foreign aid and its rejection of treaties, he held firm on his commitment to promote American economic interests through international financial institutions. Promoting economic growth through greater world trade was one of the only foreign policy goals he and his legislative detractors could agree on. As a result, the United States led a successful effort to create a World Trade Organization (WTO) that would set standards of appropriate trading behavior and serve as an arbiter of trade disputes.

Clinton could not, however, overcome the more general congressional resistance to multilateral cooperation, a policy the United States had actively supported since World War II. In turning against these multilateral institutions and the "constitutional" world order they produced (see Ikenberry 2001), American leaders seemed to be turning their backs on the more democratic world order that, like globalization, also represented a long-standing American dream. Clinton, more concerned with domestic policy, did not strongly resist this pressure. The depth of Clinton's downfall in foreign policy was demonstrated by the Senate's October 1999 rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which had been signed by the United States and more than 150 other governments.

Washington's retreat from multilateralism gained momentum when Republican George W. Bush became president in January 2001. The governor of Texas and the son of Clinton's predecessor in office, Bush was in no mood to mend fences with the "international community," a term his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, had dismissed during the campaign as an illusion. In her view, the multilateral cooperation and institution building embraced by the United States had produced open-ended commitments that threatened U.S. sovereignty while empowering countries hostile to the United States. Rather than working through formal organizations such as the UN, American leaders would form "coalitions of the willing" and dismantle them when their missions were accomplished. When help from other nations was not deemed necessary or was not forthcoming, the United States would go its own way.

Two events in the spring of 2001 dramatized the deepening isolation of the United States. In March, Bush renounced the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which had been signed by Vice President Al Gore in 1997 but never submitted to the Senate for ratification. The treaty, approved by eighty-three other governments, required industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The Clinton administration had agreed to reduce U.S. emissions by seven percent of their 1990 levels by 2012. In rejecting the treaty, Bush refuted the scientific evidence linking greenhouses gases to global warming. He charged instead that the protocol would merely slow U.S. economic growth and unfairly burden the United States while exempting developing nations, including China.

The second revealing episode occurred in May 2001, when the UN Human Rights Commission denied the United States a seat on the panel for the first time since its creation in 1947 under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt. The move was clearly political payback for Washington's refusal to pay past UN dues, for its effort to force the resignation of the previous secretary general in 1996, and for its opposition to international agreements, most of which

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had nothing to do with human rights. The fact that repressive states such as Sudan and Syria were voted onto the commission made it clear that human rights were not a primary concern to the governments that denied the United States its customary seat. Instead, the UN members worried the lack of U.S. engagement created not just a power vacuum but a moral vacuum in world politics.

The 9/11 Attacks and U.S. Response

Although Bush, like Clinton, came to office pledging to focus on domestic problems, global events forced him to make foreign policy a central priority. This transformation came suddenly, on September 11, 2001, when Islamic terrorists turned hijacked passenger jets into guided missiles that struck the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon just outside Washington, D.C. Adherents of militant Islam, based in the Middle East but extending to disillusioned pockets across the Muslim world, had for years expressed ill will toward the West on several counts. They resented the role of earlier Western leaders in redrawing the map of the Middle East after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. They also opposed the UN's creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and charged the industrialized countries, primarily the United States, with exploiting the Middle East's vast petroleum reserves, often with the approval of autocratic monarchs and military dictators who enriched themselves at their people's expense. Finally, the Islamists believed that Western cultural influence was corrupting their societies with its materialism, permissive lifestyles, and political freedoms that violated the strictures of the Koran, the Islamic sacred text.

Bush declared the terrorist attacks an act of war. In a televised address on the night of the attacks, the president vowed to wage war against terrorism, not simply against those who were behind the assaults on New York City and Washington. Bush, relying upon a team of foreign policy advisers known as "Vulcans" (Mann 2004), then widened the scope of the U.S. response by announcing that he would "make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." Thus state sponsors of terrorism would also be targeted by the United States. "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make," Bush declared to a joint session of Congress on September 20. "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." With these words, Bush set the course of an American counteroffensive that would take many forms against many adversaries throughout much of the world.

U.S. military strategists devised a war plan that would unfold in several stages, first against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, then in other parts of the world where al Qaeda cells were believed to be organized. Both the terrorists and their state sponsors would be targeted. Large numbers of U.S. troops would be required in some of these missions. In others, smaller special forces would take the lead, often in tactical alliances with indigenous forces. As in the case of guerilla warfare, the line between civilians and military forces would always be blurry because the terrorists were embedded in civilian areas and were, in the strictest sense of the word, civilians themselves. Bush's immediate response to the attacks formed the pretext of a grand strategy, later known as the Bush Doctrine, which was formally unveiled in September 2002 (White House 2002).

Bush did not wait to unveil his new foreign policy doctrine before launching the "global war on terror." As the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001 revealed, the planners of the 9/11 attacks had to be pursued and destroyed in order to realize Bush's ambitious dream of security at home and enduring U.S. primacy abroad. The U.S. military response to the 9/11 attacks first targeted the government of Afghanistan, whose overthrow was deemed essential if the al Qaeda terrorists based in the country were to be captured. Bush's initial demands to Afghan leaders—that they "hand over the terrorists" or "share their fate"—quickly yielded to a more

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aggressive strategy based on the regime's ejection from power. For better or worse, American forces would soon be thrust into the same mountainous terrain and impenetrable tribal societies that earlier thwarted the imperial ambitions of Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

The counterattack would unfold in two stages. First, American forces would help anti-government Afghan militias overthrow the Taliban and round up the al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks. Second, the U.S. government would lead an effort, presumably with the UN, to create a new, democratic regime that would not threaten its neighbors or serve as a sanctuary for Islamic terrorists. The American-led offensive against Afghanistan's Taliban regime began on September 22, 2001, less than two weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks, when members of the Northern Alliance initiated attacks on government positions. The bombing raids on Afghanistan, conducted by American and British air forces, began in early October. Kabul, the capital city, fell on November 12; Afghanistan was freed from the Taliban regime.

The central task of bringing the al Qaeda leaders to justice still lay ahead, and this proved far more difficult. In the climactic battle at Tora Bora, U.S. special forces were overmatched by bin Laden's armed supporters in the rugged mountain peaks. Meanwhile, the supposedly pro-American militias did not stop members of al Qaeda from crossing into Pakistan. Thus bin Laden, who was believed to be pinned down in the area, escaped and remained at large. Even a U.S. reward of $5 million for his capture proved inadequate in a region where bin Laden retained widespread support.

Still, Bush's effort to create a new government in Afghanistan went forward. The Bonn Accords, sponsored by the UN and approved by regional leaders in December 2001, called for a "gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic, and fully representative" Afghan government that would cooperate with "the international community in the fight against terrorism, drugs, and organized crime." The task of overseeing the electoral process fell to Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun tribal leader whose friendly relations with the West made him a natural choice to lead the interim government. To the architects of Afghanistan's political future, truly representative government meant holding "free and fair" national elections open to all citizens. This transpired when a majority of Afghans elected Karzai to be president in October 2004 and returned to the polls in September 2005 to elect members of parliament.

The political reforms left open the question of military control of Afghanistan, which remained deeply divided. There was also the question of the Taliban, whose leaders retreated to the surrounding mountains and valleys, where they regrouped and plotted their return to power. No central government could survive for long under such circumstances. American and British forces, therefore, faced an extended mission to keep the new Afghan government from succumbing to internal pressures. In 2003 the two allies turned for help to NATO, which dispatched troops to Afghanistan in the first "out-of-area" deployments in the alliance's history. Although NATO was expected to assume responsibility for all of Afghanistan by 2007, many members withdrew forces as the prospects for national reconciliation dimmed.

Bush's early success in Afghanistan led his foreign policy advisers to turn their attention to the second front in the war on terrorism—Iraq. Preemptive war was a key element of the Bush Doctrine, but this position was controversial because, under international law, states must not invade other states unless they are attacked first or face the near certainty of imminent attack. From Bush's standpoint, waiting to be attacked in the age of terrorism merely invited aggression, a lesson learned at a terrible cost on September 11, 2001. The doctrine of preemptive war seemed tailor-made for Iraq, which Bush claimed maintained weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that could be used against the United States and its allies. Saddam remained firmly in control of the country despite the virtual collapse of its military forces; economic sanctions did not weaken his resolve. On the contrary, the Iraqi leader became more deeply entrenched, more brutal in suppressing internal dissent, and more contemptuous of the United States.

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The political calendar was on Bush's side as he pressed for war against Iraq. Midterm elections were scheduled for November 2002 and members of Congress knew that opposing a popular president in wartime was politically hazardous. Bush appealed directly to voters on October 7: "America must not ignore the threat against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud." Within days, Congress approved a joint resolution calling for military action against Iraq with or without the UN's blessing. Bush's electoral triumph led to his success in the UN on November 8, when the Security Council declared Iraq in "material breach" of past UN resolutions and required Saddam to provide "immediate, unconditional, and unrestricted" access to government facilities previously off limits to the UN. Iraq faced "serious consequences" if it failed to cooperate with UN inspectors searching for WMD stockpiles.

In early March 2003, American and British diplomats tried, but failed, to convince the other members of the UN Security Council to set a March 17 deadline for Saddam's "full compliance" with the weapons inspectors. The deployment of coalition forces to the Persian Gulf created its own impetus for a military solution sooner rather than later. Thus the invasion of Iraq was a foregone conclusion, even as the diplomatic quarrels wore on. The invasion of Iraq, dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom, began early on March 20, 2003. A sustained bombing campaign, dubbed "shock and awe" by U.S. military commanders, followed on March 21 and coincided with a massive ground offensive by coalition forces on a trajectory from Kuwait through the desert to Baghdad. Early resistance by Iraqi forces soon withered and cleared the path to the Iraqi capital, where U.S. Marines helped topple a statue of Saddam on April 9. All of Iraq's major cities were under allied control by the end of April.

But the routing of Saddam's regime did not settle matters. Allied forces could not simply declare victory and return home as they had done twelve years earlier. The troops had to restore order to and ultimately rebuild the cities, which erupted not only in celebration but also in widespread looting, violent reprisals against Saddam loyalists, and attacks on U.S. soldiers. Armed Iraqis ransacked stores, government ministries, hospitals, military installations, and the National Museum of Iraq. Attacks on media outlets and electrical utilities left Baghdad literally in the dark and lacking a telephone system or other means of internal communication. The chaos in Baghdad and other cities revealed a darker reality for the occupation forces, who were not "greeted as liberators" as Vice President Dick Cheney had predicted on NBC's *Meet the Press* just before the invasion.

The White House's post-invasion plan called for a short period of U.S. military occupation, followed by the drafting of a constitution and national elections. The American occupation, however, quickly faced new problems (see Gordon and Trainor 2006; Ricks 2006). Contrary to the Bush administration's assurances that, in the words of CIA director George J. Tenet, uncovering evidence of WMD in Iraq was a "slam dunk," weapons inspectors failed to find any stockpiles in the weeks and months following the invasion. The White House then quickly shifted its rationale for the war to democratic state building, a goal that was part of the original war justification but secondary to WMD concerns and Saddam's alleged links to the September 11 terrorists.

Adding to the difficulties, Bush's war coalition was shrinking. Several countries withdrew their forces in 2004. Among the most prominent of these defections was Spain, where multiple terrorist attacks on March 11, 2004, killed nearly two hundred citizens. The exodus continued in 2005 with the departure of troops from Italy, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Portugal, Thailand, and Ukraine, among other countries. Despite these setbacks, Iraq's formal steps toward democratic governance continued. Iraqi voters approved a national constitution in October 2005 that provided the blueprint for a "democratic, federal, representative republic." The constitution granted sweeping powers to regional authorities, including control over oil

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deposits and revenues. National elections were held, but they merely perpetuated Iraq's ethnic and sectarian divisions. Three groups competed for power in these elections:

- *Sunni* Muslims, with about 25 percent of the population, who had dominated Iraq's government under Saddam;
- *Shi'a* Muslims, with about 55 percent of the population, who were repressed by Saddam and sought the political power that came with majority rule; and
- Ethnic *Kurds*, with about 20 percent of the population, who were also Muslim but sought to maintain their regional autonomy in northern Iraq.

The Bush administration, clearly surprised by the ongoing hostility among these groups, found that Iraq was not prepared for American-style democracy. As a result, the U.S.-led campaigns to stabilize Iraq consistently failed. Faced with the prospect of a Vietnam-style quagmire, war planners agreed that more troops were required. Bush responded in January 2007 by ordering a "surge" of American forces to nearly 170,000. Five military brigades with a total of about 30,000 troops bolstered the U.S. presence around Baghdad and other besieged cities. As Bush's presidency drew to a close, both governments approved a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from most cities by June 30, 2009, and from all of Iraq by December 31, 2011. While the impending departure of U.S. troops came as a relief to Americans, there was no guarantee that enduring peace, let alone democracy, would come to Iraq any time soon.

Financial Crisis and Obama's Quest for "Renewal"

As noted earlier, the post-Cold War world was expected to be a more peaceful one, with "geoeconomics" replacing geopolitics as the focus of international relations. Despite growing doubts about free trade, American leaders embraced the trend toward globalization. Meanwhile, private firms and their senior executives enjoyed generous tax breaks, regulations were curtailed, and central bankers kept interest rates low in order to keep consumers borrowing and buying. The beneficiaries of these policies would presumably include other countries as the United States, with its voracious appetite for foreign goods, remained the locomotive of the global economy.

All this changed however, when the U.S. housing "bubble" began to burst. The ensuing crash in real estate prices left millions of Americans without homes, millions of workers unemployed, and the global economy facing its worst crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The bubble originated in the high-tech boom of the 1990s, when foreign investors and governments that had amassed large cash reserves sought "shelter" from the global economy by investing in U.S. government bonds, which ensured a modest return on their investments. As the private capital saturated U.S. banks, President George W. Bush eased many regulations that, in his view, merely hampered economic growth. The rolling back of regulations coincided with a White House campaign to encourage home ownership, a vital part of the "American dream" that could be financed with low-interest loans, many of which carried "sub-prime" interest rates that made borrowing seem risk free.

The first sign of impending crisis appeared in July 2008, when the Federal Deposit Insurance Company assumed control of a California bank, IndyMac, whose loss of $32 billion in assets marked the second largest bank failure in U.S. history. By August 2008, the top 100 U.S. banks faced potential losses of more than $500 billion from unpaid loans. The downward spiral continued in the weeks that followed. On September 7, the U.S. Department of Treasury announced it was taking over Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, two government-sponsored

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mortgage lenders whose massive investment portfolios included more than $300 billion in "risky loans," most of which were issued to low-income buyers. The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers a week later marked the largest financial collapse in U.S. history. Bush's $700-billion bailout of the banking system, approved in October, was also unprecedented in U.S. history.

The economic crisis quickly became global, with markets from London to Tokyo suffering massive losses in private capital and turning to governments and international financial institutions for survival. In October 2008 alone, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided emergency loans to Hungary, Iceland, and Ukraine. Only drastic measures saved Australia, Chile, India, Kazakhstan, and Russia from financial collapse. The crisis spread to the poorest countries of the world, whose meager export markets dried up while commodity prices plunged along with flows of development aid.

While economic managers overseas bore much of the responsibility for their own distress, the financial crisis was clearly made in America. The crisis sprung directly from the false assumptions of the "Washington Consensus" that minimally regulated markets and the free flow of capital around the world would bring greater prosperity even to the most impoverished societies. It was bad enough that such policies failed to stimulate economic growth in many countries. Having the United States fall under the weight of its own economic orthodoxy shattered what little faith remained in the policies. "Everything happening now in the economic and financial sphere began in the United States," Russia's Vladimir Putin complained from the Kremlin in October 2008. "This is not the responsibility of specific individuals but the irresponsibility of the system that claims leadership" (Jagger 2008).

The nation's economic turmoil, which included plummeting stock prices that cost millions of Americans much of their life savings, coincided with presidential elections that brought Barack Obama to power in January 2009. Obama, the first African American president in American history, promised to change the course of American foreign policy by "renewing" the nation's membership in the international community (see Hook and Scott 2010). The president's agenda included renewed engagement with multilateral organizations and treaties, a greater emphasis on diplomatic negotiations and "soft power" rather than military force, and heightened attention on global warming and other transnational problems—goals that clearly resembled those of the incoming Clinton administration. Obama also pledged to restore human rights as a priority in American foreign policy, a concern that focused specifically on the treatment of prisoners in the ongoing struggle against terrorism.

The new president was eagerly welcomed in most foreign capitals. His high-profile speeches in Prague and Egypt on behalf of nuclear disarmament and reduced tensions with the Muslim world, respectively, were so well received that Obama received the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize entirely on the basis of his future promise rather than past achievements. His renewal agenda, however, failed to gain traction as the United States remained mired in the financial crisis. With national unemployment approaching 10 percent, Obama's attention could not stray far from economic recovery. As a result, he was unable to fulfill his pledges to close the Guantánamo Bay detention center by 2011, stop the rendition of war prisoners to third countries, approve the Kyoto Protocols on global warming, gain Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and pursue American membership in the International Criminal Court.

Obama was able to remove all "offensive forces" from Iraq by 2010, although about 50,000 troops remained in the country to train Iraqi forces and resist attempts to destabilize the country. The same questions that were raised earlier—whether Iraq could overcome its internal divisions and create a united and stable government—remained unanswered. As for Afghanistan, whose government remained crippled by corruption in Kabul and expanding control of the hinterlands by the revived Taliban, Obama's replication of the Iraqi "surge" did not produce a resolution of the conflict. Although more Americans were killed in Afghanistan in 2010 than in any previous year, Obama again argued that an American retreat from the

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country would create long-term threats to the United States and its allies. His effort to gain the upper hand in the struggle, however, was plagued by developments in neighboring Pakistan, where militants continued to harbor Taliban forces and to provide them with advanced weapons.

Continuity rather than change marked the first two years of the Obama administration (Hook and Scott 2010). Like Bush, Obama was unable to prevent Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons and vowing to destroy the state of Israel. He also gained little ground in the protracted nuclear deadlock with North Korea, whose conflict with South Korea led to a short but alarming military confrontation late in 2010. At home, Obama faced unwavering opposition from his partisan critics as well as growing skepticism from his supporters in Congress and the general public. In this toxic environment, voters in November 2010 returned Republicans to a majority in the House of Representatives and most state governments, making it even less likely that his most ambitious foreign policy goals would be achieved.

Still, Obama achieved some of his foreign policy goals, including a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia, and global public opinion remained supportive of Obama's efforts to rejoin the international community, however modest they turned out to be. Although no other country or alliance emerged to rival American primacy, the global balance of power was clearly in flux, an uncertain and historically perilous circumstance. In this sense, not only American foreign policy but global security depended upon the capacity of the United States to get its own house in order. Given the economic problems facing the nation, this would require scaling back U.S. defense spending and a variety of military and nonmilitary commitments. Whether these measures would enhance the prospects for world peace or create a dangerous power vacuum remained a critical, but open, question.

Notes

1 This survey of the key developments of this period is drawn from Steven W. Hook and John Spanier, 2010, *American Foreign Policy since World War II*, 18th ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press), chs. 8–13.

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