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The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration: Terrorism and the Promotion of Democracy

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Abstract
During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush announced that he would pursue a "distinctly American internationalism" in foreign policy (Bush i999a), largely in contrast to the liberal internationalism of the Clinton administration. He initially sought to have a foreign policy that placed greater emphasis on American national interests than on global interests. The 9/11 attacks quickly changed both the content of the administration's foreign policy and the process by which American foreign policy was made. As a result, the administration pursued a foreign policy that was universal in scope and that viewed virtually all international actions as affecting American interests. The efforts to build a "coalition of the willing" to find and defeat "terrorists and tyrants" on a worldwide scale illustrated the universal nature of this policy, but the difficulties that the invasion and occupation of Iraq created also demonstrated the limitation of this policy approach...

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During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush announced that he would pursue a “distinctly American internationalism” in foreign policy (Bush 1999a), largely in contrast to the liberal internationalism of the Clinton administration. He initially sought to have a foreign policy that placed greater emphasis on American national interests than on global interests. The 9/11 attacks quickly changed both the content of the administration’s foreign policy and the process by which American foreign policy was made. As a result, the administration pursued a foreign policy that was universal in scope and that viewed virtually all international actions as affecting American interests. The efforts to build a “coalition of the willing” to find and defeat “terrorists and tyrants” on a worldwide scale illustrated the universal nature of this policy, but the difficulties that the invasion and occupation of Iraq created also demonstrated the limitation of this policy approach. At the beginning of its second term, the Bush administration reiterated its commitment to de-

mocratization worldwide as yet another way to combat global terrorism, and it initiated some actions toward that goal. Yet the Bush administration's foreign policy efforts were largely overshadowed by the continuing occupation of Iraq and the failure to bring that war to an end.

The Bush administration's foreign policy employed several approaches over its two terms—one used prior to 9/11, one adopted after 9/11, and one at the beginning of the second term, when the administration attempted to modify its most recent approach. The first approach was informed by the Bush administration's assumptions and policy positions and its initial commitment to classical realism. After 9/11, the administration moved toward defensive realism and idealism in foreign policy, as enunciated in the Bush Doctrine. The Bush Doctrine underwent an apparent modification at the beginning of the second term with the introduction of a "democracy initiative." Each approach has left its impact on the future of American foreign policy.

An important point of departure for understanding the initial foreign policy approach of the George W. Bush administration is to consider the foreign policy legacies that he inherited from the Clinton administration and from his father's (George H. W. Bush) administration. Both of those previous administrations experienced the seismic foreign policy shock that the end of the cold war wrought, and both administrations sought to put their own stamp on the new American foreign policy that would replace the anti-Soviet and anti-communist principles that had informed U.S. policy for so long. One stamp left the imprint of political realism, while the other left the imprint of liberal internationalism. Neither administration was wholly successful in setting the United States on a new foreign policy course, and, in this sense, both left different kinds of legacies for the George W. Bush administration.

An Initial Belief in Classical Realism

Because the George W. Bush administration was more inclined toward a foreign policy approach closer to that of his father's administration, the Clinton foreign policy legacies were generally not welcomed by the new Bush administration. Indeed, those legacies were a target of attack by candidate Bush and his foreign policy advisers since they represented a more universal and multilateral approach than the new Bush administration envisioned. Instead, George W. Bush was initially more inclined toward a foreign policy of classical realism.

Classical realism originates in several important assumptions about
states and state behavior that had direct implications for the Bush administration's initial foreign policy approach. First, classical realists assume that states are the principal actors in foreign policy and that actions between states would trump any efforts to change behaviors within states. In this sense, the quality of relations between states is the major way in which to evaluate a country's foreign policy, and American policy would focus principally on state-to-state relations. Second, a state's “interests are determined by its power (meaning its material resources) relative to other nations” (Zakaria 1998, 8–9). As a state's relative power increases, it would seek to expand its political influence, albeit based upon a careful cost/benefit analysis. In this regard, American power can and should be used to restrain states that could clearly harm the United States and its interests, but American power should be used carefully and selectively. Third, classical realists focus upon managing relations among the major powers, since these states are the ones that are likely to be the major threats in the international system. A guiding principle for realists is that no great power, or coalition of great powers, should dominate or endanger a nation or a group of nations. In this sense, the United States should focus on strengthening its alliances and on challenging some states, but it should do so in a highly prudent and selective manner.

These assumptions largely informed the types of policies that the George W. Bush administration initially supported or opposed when it took office in 2001. First of all, George W. Bush came to office as a particular kind of internationalist, one who sought to develop a “distinctly American internationalism.” What that phrase implied was a much narrower definition of the American national interest than that of his immediate predecessor and even of his father's presidency (Bush 1999a). Second, candidate Bush made clear that a top priority of his administration would be to refurbish America's alliance structure around the world as a tangible manifestation of managing great power relationships. Europe and Asia would be the highest foreign policy priorities, since those regions contain longtime allies—and potential rivals. Third, Russia and China would be viewed in a more skeptical way than the Clinton administration had done, and American military capacity would be important for exercising American influence with these nations. Fourth, “hard power” would be preferred over “soft power” for dealing with the international system (Bush 1999b). Hard power refers to the utility of military capacity, sanctioning behavior, and threat behavior, among other coercive measures, as ways to influence the behavior of nations. Soft power relies upon the ap-
peal of American culture and American values to enable the United States to influence the behavior of other states. Fifth, in concert with refurbishing alliances and the use of hard power, the remaking and strengthening of the American military would be a top priority for the new administration, both in terms of increased military pay and increased military spending.

The assumptions of classical realism also pointed to the policies that the Bush administration initially opposed. Most fundamentally, the new administration, largely in contrast to the Clinton administration, sought to narrow the number of American actions around the world and focus only on strategically important ones. First, the United States would not be as involved in trying to change other states internally or create political democracy within other countries. As Bush stated, “We value the elegant structures of our own democracy—but realize that, in other societies, the architecture will vary. We propose our principles, but we must not impose our culture” (Bush 1999a). Second, Bush opposed American humanitarian interventions without a clear strategic rationale for being involved in such missions. The American military, Condoleezza Rice stated, is neither “a civilian police force” nor “a political referee” in internecine and communal conflicts (Rice 2000, 53). Indeed, during the 2000 election campaign, Bush and others demonstrated this position by indicating a willingness to pull back from American involvement in Middle East discussions and, later, by deciding to move away from negotiations with North Korea during the administration’s first months in office. Third, the Bush administration eschewed involvement with international institutions and opposed several key international agreements—rejecting the Kyoto Protocol to control global warming, opposing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and indicating its willingness to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in order to deploy national missile defense. Fourth, the Bush administration was not inclined to afford much influence to Congress or America’s allies in the conduct of foreign policy. Instead, executive power in foreign affairs would be reasserted.

Reviving Wilsonianism after 9/11

Much as December 7, 1941, was a “day of infamy” for an earlier generation of Americans, September 11, 2001, became such a day for the millennial generation. Indeed, it is one of those days that has prompted every American to remember forever where they were and what they were doing when they first heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pen-
tagon. From an analytic point of view, the events of that day represent one of those rare and spectacular political events that can change the mind-set or the image of the public and its leaders regarding foreign policy. Such "watershed" events are rare indeed, as one political scientist noted many years ago, but when they do occur, they can reverse or change the views of a whole generation or even several (Deutsch 1966, 5–26). Yet 9/11 appears to rank at the top end of these spectacular events not only because of its pervasive effect on the generation being socialized to politics at the time but also for the leveling effect it had on foreign policy beliefs across generations.

The 9/11 attacks had such a profound effect for at least three reasons. First, they were the first substantial attack upon the American continental homeland since the burning of Washington in the War of 1812. The American public had always assumed the security of the U.S. homeland, and these events shattered that assumption. Second, 9/11 was fundamentally an attack upon American civilians, not military personnel (although, to be sure, military personnel were killed at the Pentagon). Even the attack on Pearl Harbor had been directed primarily at military personnel. Third, and importantly, the terrorist attack was the deadliest in American history—costing almost three thousand lives and surpassing the total at Pearl Harbor by almost one thousand deaths. In all, then, 9/11 had a profound and pronounced effect, whether measured by the changed attitudes among the American public toward foreign policy, the changed agenda within Congress and new levels of support for the president on foreign policy issues, or the changed nature of the presidency itself.

**Effects on the President**

While the impacts on the public and Congress certainly merit attention and analysis and have been analyzed elsewhere (McCormick 2006), the effects on George W. Bush and his foreign policy approach are the focus here. Indeed, the impact of these events was evident at both the personal and policy levels. At a personal level, for instance, President Bush dictated for his diary on the night of those tragic events that "the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century took place today" (from Woodward 2002, 37). With that assessment, the president appeared to realize that "he was now a wartime president," as Bob Woodward (2002, 37) noted, with all the implications of that judgment for his leadership. Fred Greenstein (2004), a longtime scholar of the presidency, argues that Bush’s cognitive style and his effectiveness with the public were the areas most affected by the events of that
day. His emotional intelligence was strengthened in that Bush was able to face this national tragedy, and his political skills were sharpened by his need to try to put together a coalition against terrorism. Thomas Preston and Margaret Hermann reach a similar conclusion: “[Bush’s] normal lack of interest in foreign affairs and desire to delegate the formulation and implementation of foreign policy to others, which had been the dominant pattern within his advisory system before the terrorist attacks, was forced to give way to his current, more active and involved pattern” (Preston and Hermann 2004, 370). Political psychologist Stanley Renshon, too, argues that 9/11 was a transforming moment for President Bush: “Those moments [on 9/11] changed the public’s view of the Bush presidency, the president’s view of the presidency, and, crucially, the president himself.” Those events helped Bush find “his place and his purpose,” Renshon writes, and Bush then “turned his efforts toward transforming America’s place in the world and the world in which America has its place” (Renshon 2008, 386).

Effects on Policy

Indeed, the Bush administration’s approach to foreign policy and its content changed almost overnight. While 9/11 ironically confirmed some of the administration’s assumptions about the world and its approach (e.g., the importance of hard power over soft power and the need for enhanced military preparedness), they also suggested the limitations of the Bush administration’s commitment to classical realism. While the administration did not do a volte-face in its policy, it did change from classical realism to what we would describe as “defensive realism,” yet it also incorporated a distinct form of idealism into its approach.

While defensive realism makes many of the same assumptions as classical realism, it differs in one important aspect: the importance of “insecurity” as the motivating force for state actions. Fareed Zakaria summarizes the fundamental difference when he compares defensive realism and classical realism: “While the latter implies that states expand out of confidence, or at least out of an awareness of increased resources, the former maintains that states expand out of fear and nervousness. For the classical realist, states expand because they can; for the defensive realist, states expand because they must” (Zakaria 1998, 8–9). The new threatening environment after 9/11 thus propelled the Bush administration to change some of its foreign policy assumptions and actions—and eventually to create a new security strategy statement that incorporated elements of defensive realism rather than classical realism.
Combined with this new defensive realism, the Bush administration also embraced a form of idealism in foreign affairs, especially as it related to combating international terrorism in the post-9/11 era. A nation pursuing an idealistic foreign policy approach is motivated by a moral imperative in its actions and seeks to promote common values within and across states. In this sense, foreign policy became more than state-to-state relations among the strong for the Bush administration, which instead began seeking to advance universal norms. That is, the Bush administration sought to promote a worldwide imperative against terrorism, even as it also pursued greater global democratization. As such, it became increasingly concerned about the actions of all states (and groups) and the internal composition of many states, especially their attitude toward terrorism. Put somewhat differently, the administration appeared to embrace the more idealistic Wilsonian tradition in American foreign policy, albeit an idealism driven rather singularly on the imperative of combating international terrorism and doing so in a particular way (for a critique, see Dorrien 2003).

This change in approach—and the Bush administration’s combining of realism and idealism—could be described as essentially the adoption of the key assumptions of what Francis Fukuyama (2006) labeled the “neo-conservative legacy.” The administration came to accept that the “internal characteristics of regimes matter” in the conduct of foreign policy, that American power and capabilities can and should be used for moral purposes even within states, and that international institutions and international law should be viewed skeptically in the conduct of foreign policy. At the same time, the Bush administration continued to view with suspicion any social engineering undertaken by governments (Fukuyama 2006, 48–49). In another analysis, Walter Russell Mead (2005) labels the Bush administration adherents of these views as “Revival Wilsonians.” That is, they supported the spread of democracy and the goodness of American intentions and actions, albeit without the embrace of international law and institutions, as Wilson initially proposed. Hence, a revamped Wilsonianism is the result, driven fundamentally by domestic American values and implemented primarily by American power and American unilateralism.

With this change in approach after 9/11, three initial foreign policy assumptions were changed. First, and perhaps most significantly, the Bush administration moved from a narrow or particularistic foreign policy approach to a more universal one. That is, it moved from a focus on narrow-
ing American national interests to a focus on broadening them to combat international terrorism. Second, the Bush administration initially moved away from its rather narrowly defined unilateralist approach to American foreign policy and toward a greater multilateral effort, albeit a multilateralism with a unilateralist option for the United States. While the United States sought to pursue multilateral goals, President Bush threatened to act unilaterally if multilateral support did not develop—much as the initiation of the war against Iraq would demonstrate. Third, the administration moved from its reliance on a starkly realist approach to foreign policy—without much concern about the internal dynamics of states—to a version of idealism—with a clear concern about the internal dynamics of some states. In this regard, humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping efforts, and peacemaking actions within states had now become part and parcel of the Bush foreign policy approach, which was not unlike that of his immediate predecessor.

Several administration actions provide evidence of these changes in assumptions. President Bush addressed a joint session of Congress shortly after 9/11 and called for a new universalism. Instead of embracing a “distinctly American internationalism,” President Bush now adopted what might be called a “comprehensive American globalism,” albeit defined and animated by the moral outrage against the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. President Bush committed the United States to fight terrorism and states that support terrorism, and he outlined the nature of the global struggle in stark and dichotomous terms—in words reminiscent of the Truman Doctrine. The struggle, he noted, was now between the way of terror and the way of freedom, between states that support terror and those that do not, and between an uncivilized and a civilized world (Bush 2001a).

At the same time, President Bush conveyed the initial multilateral impulse of this new foreign policy approach and took several steps to implement such an approach against al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The administration adopted a coalitional approach to taking on al-Qaida and the Taliban effort, put the coalition together quickly, and incorporated an array of participants (U.S. Department of State 2001a).

By the time that military operations commenced in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, several allied countries (Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, and France, among others) pledged to assist with the operation. And more than forty nations, by that time, had approved American overflights and landing rights (U.S. Department of State 2001a; 2001b; U.S.
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Embassy Islamabad 2002). These expressions of assistance came from the several continents and regions (Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia). In all, “Operation Anaconda” in Afghanistan eventually included contributions from some twenty countries. It quickly proved successful in breaking the Taliban’s control in Afghanistan, and that country made progress toward democracy and reconstruction for a time. By 2007 and 2008, however, the Taliban was resurgent and posed an increasing problem for the outgoing Bush administration and the incoming Obama administration.

The Bush administration also undertook actions regarding communal and regional conflicts. While the decision to focus upon the internal situation in Afghanistan is hardly surprising in light of 9/11, the extent to which the administration committed itself to changing or to assist in changing the domestic situations in a series of other countries was surprising. Examples ranged from the effort to challenge the “axis of evil” countries—Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—to the commitments of sending personnel for military training as well as advisory units to several countries throughout the world—the Philippines, Yemen, Georgia—and to efforts to use American naval power around Somalia to block possible escaping al-Qaida fighters. Furthermore, the administration initiated some efforts at conflict resolution in the Middle East and between India and Pakistan and also opened up discussions with North Korea. At the same time, the administration was willing to look past some internal issues in other nations (e.g., China, Russia, and Pakistan), especially their human rights conditions, since their cooperation in the war on terrorism was more important than the differences that this Bush administration initially expressed about them.

In sum, the new approach, quickly labeled the Bush Doctrine, sought to hunt down terrorists, and those that supported terrorists, on a worldwide scale. While cooperation and support from other countries would be sought, the United States would go it alone if necessary. The globalism of this effort and the motivation for its actions represent the major transformations of the policy approach of the Bush administration after 9/11.

**Formalizing the Bush Doctrine in the National Security Strategy Statement**

While its statements and actions conveyed the new foreign policy approach, the Bush administration issued a fuller rationale for its policy direction almost exactly one year after 9/11. “The National Security Strategy Statement of the United States of America” (2002) postulated that the
fundamental aim of American foreign policy was "to create a balance of power that favors freedom." To create such a balance, the administration asserted that the United States "will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants[,] . . . will preserve peace by building good relations among the great powers[,] . . . [and] will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent." The statement demonstrates how much American actions would now be motivated by the new threatening environment, much as defensive realism would postulate. The policy statement also conveyed the idealist and universal nature of this proposed foreign policy agenda with its concerns for the internal make-up and operations of states and groups. The United States, it noted, "is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones . . . less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few," but it also recognized and accepted the fact that the United States "possesses unprecedented—and unequaled—strength and influence in the world" and acknowledged that "this position comes with unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity."

The Bush administration outlined seven courses of action to promote this fundamental goal of promoting freedom and advancing the "nonnegotiable demands of human dignity." These included seeking to rally nations and alliances around the world to defeat terrorism (and relying on a broad array of actions to do so); addressing (with the goal of resolving) regional conflicts to reduce their impact on global stability; and focusing on those "rogue states" and terrorists who might gain access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The administration indicated, moreover, that it would seek to lead a broad coalition—"as broad as practicable"—to promote a balance of power in favor of freedom (National Security Strategy 2002). This coalition would consist not only of traditional American allies but also Russia, India, and China as well as others. In addition, the national security strategy statement included U.S. commitments to ignite global economic growth, fundamentally through free trade initiatives but also through increased development assistance and an expansion of the number of global democracies. Finally, the document called for transforming national security institutions at home. The priorities were to improve the military and the intelligence communities and strengthen homeland security to meet the demands of defending peace at home and abroad. While there was a brief mention of improving diplomacy and the Department of State, the emphasis was more on the "hard power" agencies than the "soft power" ones.
In what became the most controversial statements in the document, the Bush administration asserted first that the United States must have available "the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security." In addition, the statement concluded by emphasizing the commitment of the Bush administration to act unilaterally if collective efforts fail: "In exercising our leadership, we will respect the values, judgment, and interests of our friends and partners. Still, we will be prepared to act apart when our interests and unique responsibilities require" (National Security Strategy 2002). These statements concerning preemption and the unilateral option would ultimately gain most of the critical attention at home and abroad and would soon undermine the administration's initial effort to produce a "grand strategy" against terrorism with broad support.

America's allies, friends, and even adversaries initially supported the Bush administration's new foreign policy approach after 9/11. The acknowledgment that the Bush administration needed other states to fight terrorism, its initial turn to international institutions, and the recognition of multiple actors in the international arena undoubtedly struck a responsive chord. Furthermore, the concern with the internal dynamics of some states and the need to address festering regional and communal conflicts also met with some receptivity in Europe and elsewhere. After all, Article V of the NATO pact ("an armed attack against one . . . should be considered an attack against . . . all") was invoked for the first time in the history of the fifty-year alliance, immediately after 9/11, and virtually all European nations agreed to provide some assistance against al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

This international receptivity, however, was short lived. The 2002 State of the Union address, in which President Bush identified the "axis of evil" nations and appeared to foreshadow actions against one or more of them, caused some immediate alarm. As the French foreign minister, Hubert Védrine, noted at the time, "We are currently threatened by a simplified approach which reduces all problems of the world to the mere struggle against terrorism." Javier Solana Madariaga, the European Union's minister for foreign affairs, warned about the "dangers of global unilateralism," and the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, called the "axis of evil" notion a concept "not in accordance with our political ethos" (from Schwarz 2002). In the ensuing months of 2002, as Iraq, one of the axis of evil nations, increasingly drew the attention of President Bush and key American policymakers, further concerns were expressed over the di-
rection of American policy, both at home and abroad. Although Saddam Hussein's regime had used chemical and biological weapons against its own people in the past and had started a nuclear program, Iraq's links to terrorists were seemingly tenuous.

By summer 2002, the issue of Iraq had set off a pitched debate within the administration. Some key advisors supported quick and unilateral action to remove Saddam Hussein, while others, most prominently Secretary Colin Powell and his deputy, Richard Armitage, argued that this approach had "risks and complexities" that needed more analysis (Purdum and Tyler 2002). Such discussion of war against Saddam also alienated Republican allies in Congress and officials from previous administrations, notably former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft. While these officials supported the need to remove Saddam Hussein, they were concerned that the administration's approach risked "alienating allies, creating greater instability in the Middle East, and harming long-term American interests" (Purdum and Tyler 2002). Indeed, the Europeans, too, were becoming increasingly leery of America's future intentions and its policy.

**Iraq and the Bush Doctrine**

A series of actions that began in the fall of 2002 only accelerated these domestic and international concerns and ultimately moved the Bush administration toward unilateral action against Iraq. First, the national security strategy statement of September 2002, with its use of preemption and the "go it alone" language, quickly alarmed many. Second, President Bush (2002a) issued a challenge to the international community at the United Nations to address the issue of WMD in Iraq and hinted that the United States would act alone if necessary. To be sure, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1441 unanimously on November 8, 2002, finding Iraq in "material breach" of previous UN Resolution 687, but it also called for more international inspections. Over the next several months, the chief inspectors provided reports to the UN Security Council on the status of the inspections and the disarmament activities. In all, these reports indicated that Iraq was not fully complying with the resolution and with the inspectors. The inspectors requested more time from the Security Council to continue their work. As a result, real divisions emerged among the UN Security Council members on how to address the Iraq issue. Third, with the White House's support, Congress passed a sweeping resolution that authorized the president to use American military forces against Iraq "as
he determines to be necessary and appropriate” to defend the national security of the United States and to enforce “all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.” Fourth, and very importantly, by March 2003, the Bush administration’s patience had run out on the failure of the UN Security Council to act against Iraq. At the urging of the Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain, the United States, Britain, and Spain circulated another draft UN resolution to once again find Iraq in “material breach” and, implicitly, to get approval for military action to enforce UN Resolution 1441. This resolution never reached a vote, since several nations on the UN Security Council, led principally by French opposition and the potential use of its veto, indicated that they would not support it.

As a result, President Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraq and its leadership on March 17, 2003: “Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing” (Bush 2003b). When the Iraqi leadership refused to comply with the ultimatum, the United States attacked a command bunker in Baghdad, and the war, called “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” had begun. The president took this action without another UN resolution and instead relied upon the congressional resolution passed in October 2002 and his constitutional authority as commander in chief. To be sure, the administration put together a “coalition of the willing” (some forty-two nations initially), much as the national security strategy statement of a few months earlier had implied. Yet the United States and the United Kingdom carried out the principal military action, with some assistance from Australia and a few other countries. In all areas, the Bush administration was willing to act alone (or with an informal coalition) in addressing the issues of tyrants and terrorists and in implementing its national security strategy.

The war campaign went well and progressed quickly for the United States and Great Britain, with the loss of relatively few lives. The United States gained control of Baghdad by April 9, only three weeks after the war’s initiation, and President Bush declared “major combat operations” over on May 1. Still, “winning the peace” and establishing a stable democratic government proved extraordinarily difficult. Indeed, Americans continued to be wounded and killed over the following months as Iraqi resistance remained—and increased. Equally challenging was the effort to uncover clear evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, the fundamental rationale for the war. As a result, the Bush administra-
tion's foreign policy quickly came under greater scrutiny and criticism by the summer of 2003.

Criticism of the Bush foreign policy approach arose from the bureaucracy and Capitol Hill at home and from several sources abroad. At home, some charged that the administration had skewed intelligence data to support its desire to pursue the war against Iraq or had pressured intelligence analysts to provide supportive estimates (see Pillar 2008). And the Pentagon was accused of developing its own "hard-line view of intelligence related to Iraq" to justify American military actions there (see, e.g., Schmitt 2003). While the Bush administration denied such charges, skeptics remained, and Congress initiated inquiries into these matters. By July 2003, the administration was forced to admit that a passage in the president's State of the Union address regarding Iraq's efforts to obtain uranium from an African nation was not supported by American intelligence (see Sanger and Risen 2003). In general, the integrity of the Bush administration's policymaking was called into question, and the Senate Intelligence Committee called hearings to investigate. By this time, too, foreign policy arose in the incipient 2004 presidential election campaign. Representative Richard Gephardt, for example, charged the president with "stunning incompetence" in the area of foreign policy (from Beaumont 2003), and Senator John Kerry, the eventual Democratic nominee in 2004, accused the administration of failing to have a plan to "win the peace" in Iraq and pointed to the "arrogant absence of any major international effort to build what's needed" in Iraq (from Balz 2003, A6).

Abroad, allies and adversaries alike continued to criticize Bush administration policy. Critics disliked the administration's pursuit of unilateral policies without considering the views of other states. Arguably, these criticisms accelerated after two particular actions the American government pursued during this period. The first action was the holding of "enemy combatants" at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in solitary confinement, without access to counsel and without charges. These prisoners were denied basic rights, critics charged, seemingly in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Furthermore, these prisoners were subject to vigorous interrogation measures that constituted torture or bordered on it. The second action was the revelation in April 2004 of the appalling treatment of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Photographs showed American military members humiliating Iraq prisoners by requiring them to parade naked, making them pose with nooses around their necks, and using dogs to frighten them.
The Bush administration sought to deflect some of these criticisms by engaging in diplomatic initiatives on other pressing regional and international problems during 2003 and 2004. First, and perhaps most importantly, the administration issued its “roadmap for peace” between the Israelis and the Palestinians in April 2003 and promptly began to work on implementing it; President Bush traveled to the Middle East to give impetus to this roadmap. Second, in May 2003, the Bush administration won approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1483, which lifted sanctions against Iraq and encouraged other nations and international institutions to assist with the reconstruction of that nation. Third, President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President Bush exchanged instruments of ratification for another strategic arms reduction treaty in June 2003, signaling continued cooperation with a nation that had opposed the Iraq war. Fourth, and also in June 2003, President Bush met with European leaders at the G-8 summit (and most notably with French president Jacques Chirac) to begin to repair the rift with alliance partners that the war against Iraq had created. Finally, President Bush went on a five-day trip to Africa in July 2003, becoming only the third American president to visit that continent, to promote his AIDS/HIV initiative and to demonstrate a broader foreign policy agenda than the war on terrorism had connoted.

None of these actions, though, reflected a fundamental shift in policy approach by the Bush administration from the one adopted after 9/11. Indeed, terrorist incidents in Saudi Arabia and Morocco in the spring of 2003 (and attributed to al-Qaida) and the Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004, only reinforced the administration’s stance. The mounting criticism at home and abroad of the administration’s unilateral and ideological approach appeared to introduce a more cautionary note in considering further military responses, whether against North Korea, Iran, or another entity. And presidential popularity had declined to the levels of prior to 9/11, and support for the Iraq war was beginning to wane by late 2004. Still, the policy slogan was “stay the course.” That slogan applied to the policy in Iraq, but it applied equally to the unique combination of defensive realism and limited idealism that the Bush administration had adopted in the post-9/11 period.

A New Foreign Policy Approach for the Second Term?

George W. Bush was able to obtain a narrow victory in the 2004 presidential election, and his anti-terrorist foreign policy stance contributed to that success. In the aftermath of that election victory, though, the Bush
administration initially sought to alter its foreign policy approach, including the war on terrorism. The initial hint of a change in approach came in a meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair shortly after Bush’s reelection. At the end of that meeting, President Bush declared that “[in] my second term, I will work to deepen our trans-Atlantic ties to nations of Europe.” He also declared that stronger ties between Europe and America were vital to the “promotion of worldwide democracy” (from Stout 2004, 1, 4; see also McCormick 2006 for some of the themes developed in this section).

The Democracy Imperative

President Bush more fully signaled a modified approach in his second inaugural address and in his State of the Union address a few weeks later. In the inaugural address, for example, he directly tied America’s well-being to the expansion of freedom and liberty around the world. America and the world would be secure only by promoting these ideas and by reconstructing the international system with them. “The survival of liberty in our land,” he declared, “increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in the world.” Later in that address he added, “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world” (Bush 2005a).

In his State of the Union address a short time later, President Bush continued to link America’s well-being at home and the promotion of freedom abroad. A principal goal for his administration, he declared, would be “to pass along to our children all the freedoms we enjoy—and chief among them is freedom from fear.” Key passages from this address convey these sentiments: “Pursuing our enemies is a vital commitment of the war on terror . . . [but] in the long term, the peace we seek will only be achieved by eliminating the conditions that feed radicalism and ideologies of murder. If whole regions of the world remain in despair and grow in hatred, they will be recruiting grounds for terror, and that terror will stalk America and other free nations for decades. The only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror, and replace hatred with hope, is the force of human freedom” (Bush 2005b).

Furthermore, President Bush emphasized that this transformational foreign policy would not be imposed from abroad or implemented by military means. Instead, this change would need to be evoked, or encouraged, by the global community.
At her Senate confirmation hearings in early 2005, Condoleezza Rice, too, was quick to outline some new central themes of the administration: to unite, strengthen, and spread democracies around the world and to do so through diplomacy. In her words, “We must use American diplomacy to help create a balance of power in the world that favors freedom. And the time for diplomacy is now” (U.S. Congress 2005). To be sure, such themes were not entirely new for the Bush administration. After all, the notion of creating “a balance of power favoring freedom” is seemingly straight out of the national security strategy statement (2002), and promoting democracy was a theme that President Bush enunciated in his visit to Britain in November 2003, when he called for the “global expansion of democracy” to be a key pillar of American security (Bush 2003d).

What was new, however, was the initial effort that President Bush and Condoleezza Rice, the new secretary of state, undertook to try to assuage allies, particularly the Europeans. Secretary Rice’s “peace offensive” to several European capitals was one such step. It was generally well received, and it continued from there. By one analysis, Secretary Rice visited forty-nine countries in her first year as secretary of state and “nearly 70 percent of Rice’s time abroad in 2005 was spent in Europe” (Gordon 2006, 81). President Bush, too, sought to send a different signal to the Europeans in 2005 by visiting NATO and European Union headquarters and by having long meetings with two key European skeptics of the Bush approach adopted after 9/11: French president Jacques Chirac and German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Changes in Personnel and Policy Actions

The administration also made changes in foreign policy personnel at home as part of this seemingly new direction. Key neoconservatives (Paul Wolfowitz and Doug Feith at Defense and John Bolton at State) left, and new pragmatists and foreign policy realists took their places (Gordon 2006, 81–82). In particular, Robert Zoellick was appointed deputy secretary of state, Nicholas Burns assumed the number-three position as undersecretary of state for political affairs, and Christopher Hill became assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs (and eventually the lead American negotiator with North Korea).

Multilateral diplomatic initiatives were also established or restarted toward two “axis of evil” countries: Iran and North Korea. Partly as a result of President Bush’s trip to Europe in 2005, the “EU-3”—France, Germany, and Great Britain—agreed to work with the United States on
a diplomatic initiative with Iran to forestall the country's potential development of nuclear weapons. This initiative ultimately led to a series of economic sanctions against Iran and to considerable unity among these key allies and the United States over the next three years. This multilateral diplomatic approach remained the principal foreign policy vehicle for the Bush administration during the balance of its second term, despite some of the administration's rhetoric to the contrary.

By mid-2005, too, the “Six-Party Talks” over North Korea's development of nuclear weapons were resurrected, even though the North Koreans had declared several months earlier that they were “indefinitely suspending” them. Indeed, by mid-September 2005, all parties reaffirmed that the goal of the talks should be the “verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner” (U.S. Department of State 2008). While the Six-Party Talks experienced ups and down over the next three years (including UN-imposed sanctions over a North Korean nuclear test), the talks ultimately resulted in an agreement in 2007 about the phased shutdown, and eventual dismantlement, of North Korean nuclear facilities. The timely implementation of these agreements, however, eluded the Bush administration. Nonetheless, the Bush administration largely followed this diplomatic course with this “axis of evil” state.

Finally, several other modest changes in the Bush administration's foreign policy approach near the beginning of the second term, and more recently, suggested a slightly different course. Some changes were made in the administration's position on foreign aid, especially in providing more aid for Africa, and on climate change, including a statement that it was "largely a man-made problem." Halting steps of change were also evident in the administration's working with international organizations; there were some favorable actions vis-à-vis the International Criminal Court and UN efforts to solve the Darfur problem in Sudan (Gordon 2006, 83). In 2007 and 2008, the Bush administration made a new drive to prompt some headway in Middle East peace negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, although these efforts were largely stalled after the Israeli invasion of Gaza in January 2009. The administration also worked collectively with NATO allies for expansion of that organization once again, although it did not succeed in getting all the new members desired. Still, by 2008, the administration was gaining unanimous support from the European NATO allies for the placement of a missile shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, even in the face of repeated Russian protests, fueled in part by the Russian incursion into South Ossetia in August 2008.
Declining Support for Bush’s Foreign Policy

Despite these modifications in personnel and policy actions, sharp doubts continued to arise among foreign leaders and publics about the Bush administration and its policy approach. In turn, a majority of the American public and numerous members of Congress raised doubts about the direction of foreign policy, especially as reflected in the Iraq war.

Continuing Criticism from Abroad

Skepticism about any real change in direction by the Bush administration was largely driven by the continued unpopularity of the Iraq war (and the unilateralist approach that it reflected), but it was also driven by Bush’s rhetoric and personal unpopularity. Any goodwill generated after 9/11 among the European public, for example, quickly dissipated in the prelude to the Iraq war, and it did not rebound for the remainder of Bush’s presidency. In March 2003, just before the start of the Iraq war, only 48 percent of the public in Britain, 34 percent in Italy, 25 percent in Germany, 31 percent in France, and 14 percent in Spain expressed a favorable view of the United States (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003, 19). Three years later, and more than a year into President Bush’s second term (April 2006), the favorable perception percentages of the United States had improved only slightly among key European allies; 56 percent of Britons, 39 percent of the French, 37 percent of the Germans, and 23 percent of the Spanish expressed favorable opinions of the United States. This skepticism or downright opposition, of course, was not confined to Europeans. In the 2006 Pew survey of global attitudes toward the United States, in only three countries of the ten surveyed outside Europe did a majority of the publics view the United States favorably; these were Japan, India, and Nigeria. The rest (Russia, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, and China) had favorability ratings of the United States ranging from 12 percent positive in Turkey to 47 percent positive in China (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2006, 1).

President Bush’s personal unpopularity undoubtedly continued to cloud any change in policy direction. In a BBC World Service poll (2005), in only three countries (out of twenty-two surveyed) did a majority or a plurality view Bush’s reelection positively; these were India, the Philippines, and Poland. The rest, including five European countries, viewed the reelection of Bush as “negative for peace and security for the world.”

This skepticism of key European publics (and others) was also mir-
rored at the governmental level. Only a few European states were willing to provide much assistance in the effort to stabilize Iraq. Even among those that did, they later withdrew or announced their intention to withdraw their forces, often because of opposition at home. Still, some of the states most critical of the United States over initiating the Iraq war have been willing to train Iraqi security personnel (e.g., Germany) and have provided some resources for reconstruction (e.g., France). Yet there clearly were barriers to how far they would go to endorse the Bush administration's foreign policy approach. With new leaders elected in Germany in November 2005 (Angela Merkel) and in France in May 2007 (Nicolas Sarkozy) and with the selection of Gordon Brown to replace Tony Blair as prime minister in Britain during 2007, President Bush had a new set of leaders who were generally more willing to cooperate with the United States than those (except for Blair) at the height of the Iraq war. Nonetheless, the Iraq war hovered over other nations moving too close to the United States—and it continued to impinge upon any enthusiastic alliance support for the administration.

**Emergent Criticism at Home**

Although the Bush administration was able to win the White House and keep Republican control of Congress in the 2004 elections based in part on its antiterrorism policy, domestic support for the president and his Iraq policy quickly began to erode by mid-2005. Indeed, public approval of the president dropped significantly after the initiation of that war, and by 2008, it hovered at about 30 percent. Since March 2005, when Bush's approval rating dropped to 45 percent, there were only two instances in the weekly Gallup tracking polls (April 4–7, 2005, and May 2–5, 2005) when the president's approval rating was at 50 percent. Instead, the trend was consistently downward from March 2005, with a low (up to that time) of 31 percent in the polling of May 5–7, 2006 (Gallup poll 2008b). With the full formation of the Iraqi government and the killing of Abu al-Zarqawi, al-Qaida's leader in Iraq, in 2006, President Bush's approval rating inched back up a bit to the high-30 percent level and even to 42 percent, but it eroded to 29 percent in July 2007 and, in April 2008, it dropped to 28 percent (Newport 2008). In all, a majority of the public throughout most of Bush's second term disapproved of his job performance—and much of that disapproval, of course, was related to foreign policy, specifically, to Iraq.

The number of people who thought that sending troops to Iraq was a good idea steadily eroded during Bush's second term, and by its con-
clusion, a large majority believed it to have been a mistake. As early as June 2004, a majority of the public in Gallup tracking polls judged that the United States “made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq.” Over the next year, though, a slim majority usually disagreed with this statement, but, after June 2005, a majority of the public consistently viewed the action as a “mistake,” with only an exception or two (Newport 2006). By April 2008, 58 percent of the public viewed the Iraq war as a mistake, and public disapproval remained at about that level through the balance of the Bush term. In this sense, while majority opposition to Iraq policy was probably more recent than many might believe, the level of popular belief that the invasion was a mistake remained quite stable from 2005 through 2008. Moreover, in his comparison of the Iraq, Vietnam, and Korean wars, political scientist John Mueller reports that the most striking aspect is how much more quickly domestic support for the Iraq war faded (Mueller 2008, 116).

David Broder (2006), the dean of the Washington press corps, summarized the problems facing the administration by putting himself in the president’s position and asking himself how the world looked from this vantage point. His answer was a single word: “trouble.” Indeed, across the foreign policy horizon in 2006—from Mexico and Canada in the Western Hemisphere; to China, North Korea, and Russia in Asia and Europe; and to Iraq, Iran, Israel, and Lebanon in the Middle East—the administration was encountering trouble in pursuing its foreign policy objectives. More importantly, as Broder noted, the administration seemed to lack good ideas for addressing these festering challenges around the world.

In an intriguing analysis in the same period, political scientist Steven Schier (2006) points to the Iraq war to account for why things went so badly for the administration. That is, he charted the number of positive and negative events, whether discretionary events (where the president had an impact) or nondiscretionary events (where he had no direct impact), and found, not surprisingly, that the Iraq war was a clear turning point for the administration. What is so compelling, though, is the dramatic decline in the ratio of positive to negative events before and after the initiation of the war. Overall, discretionary events were at a 4-to-1 ratio (positive to negative) from 2001 to 2005, but the number of positive events declined from 2003 onward. The nondiscretionary events were at a 1-to-4 ratio (negative to positive) over the time period. The important message is how costly the Iraq war was for the administration both in events that it could affect and those that it could not. The “soft power” of the United
States (to borrow Joseph Nye's felicitous phrase) declined at home and abroad as a consequence of the Iraq war.

During this same time period, congressional criticism of the Bush administration's Iraq policy began to escalate on both sides of the aisle. Two military veterans in Congress dramatized the changing nature of the political environment and epitomized the growing opposition in that body. In late November 2005, Representative John Murtha (D-Pennsylvania), the ranking Democrat on the House Subcommittee on Appropriations, a former marine, and a supporter of the Iraq war, broke with the Bush administration and called for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq within six months: "The military has done everything that has been asked of them. The U.S. cannot accomplish anything further in Iraq militarily. It is time to bring the troops home" (from Nather 2005a, 3120). On the Republican side, Senator Chuck Hagel (R-Nebraska), a Vietnam veteran and a media favorite because of his outspokenness on the Bush administration's postwar Iraq policy (Nather 2005b, 2834), became an increasingly vocal critic. One profile of Hagel characterized his determination on the Iraq issue in this way: "He did not let up, despite extreme pressure from party leaders to cool it" (CQ Weekly Online 2006, 2926). These members of Congress were not alone, and Congress's push for greater White House accountability on the Iraq war escalated in 2005 and 2006. As a result, the 2006 congressional elections quickly became a referendum on Iraq policy specifically and the Bush approach to foreign policy more generally.

A Change in Course?

In a news conference the day after the 2006 congressional elections, President Bush characterized the results as a "thumping" for his party. Republicans lost six seats in the Senate and thirty seats in the House, and both chambers changed from Republican to Democratic control. In short order, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resigned, a new commander was appointed in Iraq, and the president considered a new Iraq strategy. A month later, the Iraq Study Group, an independent, bipartisan group led by former secretary of state James Baker and former congressional representative Lee Hamilton, issued its report, which contained seventy-nine recommendations outlining "the way forward in Iraq." The thrust of these recommendations was a call for the United States to launch "a new diplomatic initiative to build an international consensus for stability in Iraq and the region" and to "adjust its role in Iraq to encourage the Iraqi people to take control of their own destiny." The U.S. military "should evolve into
one of supporting the Iraqi military,” the report concluded, with the principal responsibility left to the Iraqis themselves. Furthermore, the American government “should work closely with Iraq’s leaders to support the achievement of specific objectives . . . on national reconciliation, security, and governance” (Baker and Hamilton 2006). In short, the Iraq Study Group called for new diplomatic initiatives toward Iraq’s neighbors, reduced American military involvement within Iraq except for training and some embedded units, enhanced Iraqi progress in internal reconciliation among religious groups, and improved national governance.

While President Bush indicated that he would carefully review the Iraq Study Group’s recommendations, he rather quickly moved in a different direction. In early 2007, the president embraced a new Iraq strategy prepared by General David Petraeus, the coalition commander in Iraq. Popularly called the “surge strategy,” this new approach called for sending an additional twenty-one thousand American troops to Iraq in an effort to quell the sectarian violence and thus provide the Iraqi government with time to make progress on internal political reconciliation. This policy change provoked sharp criticism from Congress. Senator Hagel, for example, called the president’s speech about the surge strategy “the most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam” (from Nather 2007a, 170). The House of Representatives subsequently passed a nonbinding resolution disapproving surge, although the Senate failed to follow suit.

In the ensuing months of 2007, the Democratic majority made various attempts to cut off funding for Iraq and to set a date for American withdrawal, all in response to the president’s action and as part of its perceived election mandate. One supplemental Iraq war funding measure was passed by Congress in late April 2007 with language requiring the withdrawal of troops if certain “benchmarks” were not achieved. President Bush quickly vetoed this bill on May 1, 2007, and the House upheld his veto a day later (Higa and Donnelly 2007; Clarke 2007). While the veto pen proved important, the president successfully staved off congressional actions for other reasons as well. President Bush was largely able to maintain the support of his Republican colleagues in the House and Senate, even in the face of rather united Democratic opposition. The rules in the Senate require sixty votes of that body to end filibuster on controversial matters, and that procedure also aided the president. Furthermore, the threat of a presidential veto for any Iraq legislation also supported Bush’s position. Finally, and importantly, Democrats (and Republicans) had to
face the real difficulty of cutting off funds for the troops in the field and also to gauge the political backlash that such action might create among their constituents back home.

Although the surge strategy proved successful in dampening sectarian violence in 2007 and into 2008, the Iraqi government's progress on fostering national reconciliation among the competing sectarian groups was markedly slow, as documented in an independent assessment by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and as confirmed by General Petraeus's testimony to Congress on two different occasions. By April 2008, moreover, because of some increase in Iraqi violence, General Petraeus was forced to ask for a "pause" in the draw-down of the surge forces for a year to consolidate the progress that had been achieved. Such actions, along with the continuing loss of American lives in Iraq, made foreign policy, and specifically the Iraq war, a central issue in the 2008 presidential campaign. In this sense, more than five years after the start of the war, Iraq cast a long shadow over those contending for the highest office in the land and over American foreign policy more generally.

Even as Iraq was moving toward stability by the end of 2008, the situation in Afghanistan had taken a turn for the worse. The increase in the number of killings, the expansion of civil unrest, and the limited territorial control by the central government reflected a deteriorating situation. Both the outgoing Bush administration and the incoming Obama administration were looking to increase the number of American troops in Afghanistan and were reviewing new strategies for dealing with the situation. In this sense, the initial site of success in the war on terrorism was now somewhat in doubt.

The Foreign Policy Legacies of the Bush Years

What, then, are the principal foreign policy legacies of the George W. Bush administration across its two terms? How did its foreign policy actions impact the United States and the rest of the world? What policy challenges does it leave for future administrations? In large measure, of course, the Bush administration's response to 9/11 and to Iraq and the Iraq war shape the nature of its legacy in foreign policy.

The Bush administration came to office committed to creating a "distinctly American internationalism" in which it sought to limit American involvement abroad and to pursue a narrower interpretation of the national interest than the Clinton administration had used. In effect, this approach was a commitment to classical realism where relative ca-
pabilities largely shaped actions abroad and relations with major pow­
ners dominated the agenda. With 9/11, however, the Bush administra­tion
jettisoned its classical realist approach and embraced defensive realist,
where foreign policy actions were driven primarily by the threat envi­
ronment. When terrorism intensified the threat environment, the admin­
istration was compelled to pursue a more globalist strategy than it initially
envisioned. This new environment, too, saw the administration embrace
elements of idealism by pursuing regime change abroad, most notably re­
lected in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by providing military
support to several states threatened by internal (and terrorist) insurgen­
cies (e.g., the former Soviet republic of Georgia and the Philippines).

The 9/11 attacks had a profound effect on several dimensions of Ameri­
can foreign policy. On the policymaking side, 9/11 enhanced the author­
ity of the president, increased the degree of congressional deference to the
executive, rallied public opinion behind the actions of the president, and,
in a sense, narrowed America’s foreign policy agenda. On the content side,
9/11 altered some initial foreign policy assumptions that the Bush admin­
istration brought to the office (e.g., opposition to humanitarian interven­
tions and a global strategy) and confirmed others (e.g., the greater need
for hard power over soft power; the importance of security issues over
political and economic issues). At the same time, 9/11 also seemingly af­
forded the Bush administration the opportunity to forge a “grand stra­
tegy” of foreign policy for the years ahead. That strategy was grounded in
the belief that terrorism and rogue states were the major adversaries of
the United States and that a “coalition of the willing” should be developed
worldwide to isolate and defeat those adversaries. Importantly, too, the
United States reserved the right to act alone if necessary and to engage in
preemptive actions, especially when weapons of mass destruction were
in the hands of adversaries. The actions against the Taliban and al-Qaida
in Afghanistan and the war with Iraq illustrate differing dimensions of
this new strategy.

The post-9/11 approach of the George W. Bush administration repre­
sents a determined effort to restore a more consistent, coherent, and uni­
versal foreign policy approach, an approach that more closely resembled
that of the early years of his father’s immediate predecessor, Ronald Rea­
gan, than of any other recent president. Although the contexts were mark­
edly different in the early 1980s and the early years of the new century, the
ideology and universal nature of American actions during each of these
administrations—one staunchly anticommmunist, the other, staunchly
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anti-terrorist—are strikingly similar for each administration. Both were strongly committed to setting a clear course to direct American actions abroad, and both were willing to act alone and use America's military capacity, if necessary.

The Iraq war dramatically affected the transformative foreign policy that the Bush administration initiated after 9/11. The contested rationale for the Iraq invasion over the existence of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a rogue state, the failure of reconstruction planning and implementation after the initial invasion, and the difficulties of bringing democracy to a country fraught with sectarian divisions brought into serious question the transformative nature of Bush's foreign policy approach. Furthermore, the largely unilateral nature of the Iraqi invasion—despite the "coalition of the willing" veneer—the opposition of key allies, and the failure to gain the endorsement of the United Nations further tarnished America's image abroad and weakened its attractiveness in the international community. In short, the transformative foreign policy that the administration attempted to undertake was largely left fallow by actions and events surrounding Iraq and the Iraq war. More than five years after that invasion, America's global reputation remained weakened, and the administration's vision of promoting both a grand strategy against international terrorism and wide-ranging democracy had been seriously compromised.

To be sure, the administration sought to recast its foreign policy approach at the beginning of its second term to focus on promoting democracy and eliminating tyranny worldwide. The administration undertook an effort to modify its approach—by removing or having key neoconservative advisers resign, by reaching out to the Europeans, and by initiating a number of multilateral diplomatic efforts toward the other "axis of evil" states—Iran and North Korea—and toward other international concerns, such as Darfur and the Middle East. Yet these new initiatives were largely lost because of the deteriorating situation in Iraq, the "stay-the-course" approach, and the administration's continued embrace of the rhetoric of the immediate post-9/11 period. Because of the dominance of the Iraq issue and the caricatured way in which the president was portrayed, the Bush administration, and the United States more generally, had a difficult time exercising international influence. In this sense, America's global reputation was yet another casualty of the Iraq war.

The reliance on unilateralism and preemptive action by the Bush administration (along with its strident rhetoric in these areas) had the effect
of tarnishing American images abroad and, more generally, eroding its "soft power"—the attractiveness of its values and culture and the ability to influence international actions more indirectly. Changes in these two areas by the Obama administration—and some important policy changes as well—would likely have the important benefit of improving America's global reputation and restoring its policy influence. Indeed, in the early days of the new administration, President Obama sought to do just that. He issued an executive order seeking to close the prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, within one year and met with his top military officers to discuss ending America's combat role in Iraq within sixteen months. Further, the economic meltdown in the United States and worldwide at the end of 2008 and into 2009 also required a nation more engaged multilaterally to address these shared economic problems. In all, a changed image—and the appeal of America's values and culture—will likely enhance the prospects of the promotion of democratic values abroad, but the Obama administration should harbor no illusions regarding the challenges of advancing democracy in other countries, as the U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan so dramatically reveals.