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To Lead the World: American Strategy after the Bush Doctrine

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EDITED BY MELVYN P. LEFFLER AND JEFFREY W. LEGRO

TO LEAD THE WORLD

*American Strategy after the
Bush Doctrine*

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Introduction

Melvyn P. Leffler
and Jeffrey W. Legro

FOR MANY AMERICANS, the past decade has been a bewildering era. They have seen their country attacked and their husbands, sons, wives, and daughters sent to war in faraway places. They have read about orange alerts and red alerts. They have waited on long lines at airport security checks. They know that defense expenditures have soared and that Homeland Security has mushroomed. They have seen gruesome daily headlines about the carnage in Iraq, the strife in Afghanistan, and the turmoil in Pakistan. They read about the suicide attacks that were prevented or aborted in Europe, and they know, darkly, that terrorists are at work from North Africa to Southeast Asia, from the United Kingdom to Russia to China. With perils abounding, Americans want a national strategy that makes sense.

U.S. leaders grasp the anxieties on Main Street as well as on Wall Street. They recognize, moreover, that terrorism is just one aspect of a complicated international landscape. Other threats—a nuclear Iran, an irrational North Korea, a revisionist China or Russia, a vulnerable international economy—could be even more dangerous. They do not want to be caught unawares and unprepared—for the sake of their country, for the sake of their careers, for the sake of their sanity—should the unthinkable happen.

Yet they know the world is changing rapidly and that their ability to foresee future dangers is limited. They have read the *9/11 Commission Report*: the “system,” it emphasized, “was blinking red.” Yet neither Democratic nor Republican administrations took notice. Trapped in a cold war view of

threats, those earlier decision makers suffered from a “failure of imagination” and were blind to the gathering storm of terrorism.¹ History can repeat itself. Terrorism has replaced the cold war in the national psyche, but that new specter may similarly hinder imagination about impending dangers. Late at night, when their staffs have left, when the overwhelming demands of daily tasks are barely met, the president and his or her top advisers must wonder anxiously whether new warning lights are blinking, unseen. They need to know, as we all do, what the path ahead might look like, what threats and opportunities are most significant, and how the United States can best prepare.

This volume is conceived with the hope that it will stimulate creative thought about the planning and implementation of national security policy. It is about how the United States can recover from an especially tumultuous period in its foreign relations. It is about U.S. strategy after the Bush doctrine.

A Starting Point

The administration of George W. Bush published two national strategy statements. The first statement, issued in September 2002, aroused enormous controversy, and the second did not flinch from its predecessor’s most controversial propositions. The strategy appeared to be a radical departure from the policies that had defined America’s approach to world affairs throughout the cold war and beyond. Seemingly abandoning containment, deterrence, and a reliance on collective action, the Bush strategy called for a policy of unilateral action and preventive war: “Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.”²

The emphasis on a unilateral, preemptive initiative shaped the administration’s reactions to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. President Bush and his advisers decided to destroy the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which had provided shelter to the al Qaeda movement, and to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq for supposedly developing weapons of mass destruction and conspiring with terrorists to attack the United States and its allies. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq form the core of the war on terror. They have consumed thousands of American lives, probably hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan lives, and vast sums of money, likely to exceed two trillion dollars by the end of the decade. They are worth the cost, says President

George W. Bush, if they will contribute to a safer, more peaceful world, conducive to the spread of freedom and democracy.

More than any president in recent history, President Bush has defined the nation's security in terms of the promotion of freedom around the world. All people, he stresses, want freedom. And freedom everywhere, he claims, is essential for the safety of the United States. "The survival of liberty in our land," he stated in his second inaugural address, "increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."³ America's principles, according to Bush, should shape U.S. decisions on international cooperation, foreign assistance, and the allocation of resources.⁴

Bush's strategy statements contain much more than platitudes about the value of human freedom and dignity. They outline policies that go far beyond the emphasis on unilateral, preemptive military action. Focusing considerable attention on the advantages of an open international economy, they espouse the importance of global economic growth through free markets and free trade. They stress the importance of disseminating the rule of law, promoting sound fiscal, tax, and financial policies, and nurturing investments in health and education. They state that fighting poverty is a "moral imperative," and they envision doubling the size of the world's poorest economies within a decade. Fighting disease, they acknowledge, is as important as fighting poverty; indeed, it is a key to fighting poverty. And notwithstanding the emphasis placed on anticipatory unilateral action, the administration's strategy statements acknowledge the importance of strengthening ties with partners, energizing alliances in Asia, and building and expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁵

However comprehensive the strategy statements have been, the war on terror and the struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan have consumed the attention of the administration and its critics. In the past few years, book after book has appeared discussing the shortsightedness and ineptitude of the administration's actions in Iraq.⁶ So vast is this literature and so focused has been the administration's defense of its actions in Iraq that most of us have lost sight of the larger issues of national security. Yet the larger context is essential for evaluating the merits of the case in Iraq. Probing questions have arisen about the centrality of that conflict for the war on terror in general. And even more fundamental inquiries have arisen about the logic of a war on terror when some commentators maintain that the threat has been hugely exaggerated, that the concept itself—a war on terror—unwisely conflates terrorist groups, and that it makes little sense because terror is a tactic, not an adversary.⁷ And in its second term, the Bush administration itself appears to have backed away in practice from the defining traits of its doctrine, such as preventive action,

unilateralism, and aggressive democratization.⁸ The puzzle that faces America is: what should come next?

The Aim

Many have debated Bush's foreign policy.⁹ Critiquing the president's actions in Iraq is easy; examining Bush strategy overall is more challenging but still unsatisfying unless one can outline better alternatives. The purpose of this volume is to call on some of the nation's foremost thinkers on foreign policy to lay out their thoughts about the road ahead. The contributors were chosen carefully, representing a mix of political predilections and personal experience. They come from the right, the center, and the left of the political spectrum; some have served in government positions and some have not. They represent diverse scholarly specialties, including historians, political scientists, economists, and international relations experts. They are renowned for their writings on diplomacy, public policy, human rights, international institutions, military strategy, and trade and financial practices.

They all faced the same assignment—to write a concise national security strategy statement. They were not to dwell on defending or attacking current policy but to focus on framing advice for future officials. We challenged them to:

- Identify and assign priority to the greatest threats facing the nation.
- Define the overall goals of national strategy.
- Reconcile values and interests.
- Integrate economic and military initiatives.
- Incorporate trade, budgetary, and payments issues.
- Delineate acceptable trade-offs between domestic objectives and foreign policy goals.
- Illuminate the role of human rights and democratic impulses.
- Ponder whether institutions of national governance need to be rearranged.
- Outline a desirable architecture of international institutions, agreements, and alliances.
- Inform us how to regain respect in the world and ensure our security at the same time.

In short, they faced a formidable task. We knew the contributors would focus on different aspects of the agenda reflecting their priorities and biases. Still, they would have to defend them against a larger matrix of issues and concerns. The aim was to nurture the best thinking about overall national

strategy that might inform public debate and guide officials in the future. Governing America in a global era is a formidable task; our mission is to engender the wisest thinking about the overall enterprise.

Crucible of Strategy

Although each of the contributors has taken his or her own unique approach to this assignment, the chapters should be examined against a set of strategic criteria that forces critical analysis about national purpose and national interest. Of course, these are contentious concepts, and reasonable people should argue fiercely about their meaning. Still, U.S. policy makers must come to grips with a number of tasks and must make choices. They will have to decide whether the nature of world politics is changing and how that affects strategy making. They must identify the most significant threats and opportunities, and they must determine how resources should be allocated to meet those dangers. They must be attuned to new opportunities for maximizing the security and welfare of their own citizens, as well as those abroad—whose well-being will benefit the United States. They must ponder whether they should take a leadership role in the international arena, simply react to events, or distance themselves as much as possible from the turbulence in the world; whether to try to maintain the country's dominant global position or redirect its energies inward; whether to retain massive military capabilities or concentrate on counterinsurgency. They must determine how hard they should try to spread U.S. values concerning democracy, human rights, and capitalism to other countries. They must garner the support of U.S. citizens and those of other countries—or offer a plan as to why such mobilization is not needed.

These are not theoretical criteria. The lessons of the past suggest that when issues of this sort have been ignored or handled badly, the consequences have been hurtful to the nation's interests; when they have been attended to with success, the results have been beneficial not only for Americans, but for others as well.

The United States has typically prospered when its leaders have understood the nature of the changing world. George Washington recognized the nation's vulnerable geopolitical position when he set forth one of the nation's most enduring strategic concepts: no entangling alliances. This was not a design for disengaging from the world; at the time it was an intelligent formula for safeguarding the nation's security by avoiding embroilment in Europe's recurrent wars, many of which emanated from rivalries in the New World. When U.S. officials have not been equally attuned to the evolving international landscape, the results have been doleful—as was the case in the

1930s, when the United States failed to readjust its economic and military policies and forfeited an opportunity to play a constructive role in the quest for global stability and prosperity.

Foreseeing the main threats that challenge the nation's security is a formidable task, and getting it right is vitally important. During World War I, American officials were able to imagine that a German victory on the continent would constitute a threat to U.S. commercial and political interests. Accordingly, President Woodrow Wilson mobilized the country for intervention. Yet he failed to foresee the magnitude of the strategic and economic problems that would emanate after the war from his failure to deal adequately with reparation and war debt issues.

Even when threats are accurately identified, leaders must match means and ends. In 1823, President James Monroe declared that the Western Hemisphere was closed to further colonization; any attempt by European monarchical (and mercantilist) powers to extend their systems to any portion of the Western Hemisphere would be regarded as dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States. But Monroe had no ability to enforce his doctrine. Of course, he realized that he could rely on British military capabilities to deter France and Spain from intervening and reestablishing their presence in the New World, but Monroe and his successors had no ability to offset British power, the principal threat to U.S. well-being and security. At the end of the nineteenth century, when Secretary of State John Hay issued the famous Open-Door notes calling on the great powers to allow equal commercial opportunity within their spheres of influence inside China and to respect China's territorial integrity, he, too, had no ability to support his policy. The open-door policy beautifully encapsulated the mixture of commercial ambition and ideological zealotry that characterized U.S. strategic thinking, but it invited contempt abroad for the absence of military force to buttress American diplomatic principles.

Nonetheless, the record of U.S. diplomacy is not one of unremitting error, as many Americans think. At various times, U.S. officials have moved proactively to create opportunity for the country and to promote stability for the world. During World War II, they conceived institutions, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, that were designed to overcome the problems that had beset the international economy after World War I. They also recognized the need to establish a favorable balance of power in Europe and Asia. In the 1960s, President John F. Kennedy initiated the Peace Corps to address third-world development and burnish the U.S. image in the competition with the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, President Richard M. Nixon reversed more than two decades of U.S. policy, opened relations with the People's Republic of China, and tried to use Beijing

to counter the burgeoning military power of the Soviet Union. And in the wake of Gorbachev's reforms and the toppling of the Berlin Wall, George Herbert Walker Bush worked assiduously to bring a unified Germany into the NATO alliance.

Throughout their history, Americans have debated the position and role of the United States in world politics. Until 1945, they mostly preferred to disengage from conflicts in Europe, focus on territorial expansion in North America, thwart perceived dangers in the Western Hemisphere, and promote their trade. After World War II, U.S. officials made a different set of choices and decided that the country should play the role of hegemon and stabilizer in international politics—that was a choice. Twenty-five years before—after World War I—that choice had been rejected. Whatever role it assumes in the future, the United States must develop military and economic capabilities and deploy them in a way that matches its aspirations, thus raising difficult choices about levels of military spending, the desirability of volunteer versus professional armies, the balance among conventional, nuclear, and counterinsurgency forces, and the trade-offs between domestic priorities, such as universal health care, and strategic goals.

The United States has often attempted to spread its political, economic, and social values to other countries. Yet in doing so it has had to face difficult trade-offs with security and economic interests. Woodrow Wilson wanted to universalize American principles. Peace, he insisted, required that the European powers embrace U.S. principles: freedom of the seas, equal commercial opportunity, self-determination of peoples, and arms limitation. He did not, however, sufficiently acknowledge the practical requirements and burdens that inhered in such a vision. Nor could he persuade Europeans or Americans to support him. Years later, Nixon and Henry Kissinger attempted to strip U.S. policy of its ideological fervor but, in so doing, produced a policy that many Americans found to be deeply troubling. Today, the tension between values and interests often involves choices between supporting democracy and human rights and retaining the loyalty or stability of authoritarian governments, such as in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or China, that benefit the United States.

Finally, U.S. leaders must create support for their strategy without generating myths that later constrain effective adaptation. Truman's mobilization of the country to battle Communism, for example, produced an ideological fervor that blinded the country to subsequent disagreements between Soviet and Chinese Communists. Ronald Reagan seemed to master the balance more ably—he rallied the country to build strength to cope with the Soviet threat and then adjusted his vision and mobilized domestic support to exploit new opportunities to cooperate with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, a cooperation that helped to bring the cold war to an end.

The lessons of the past can certainly be debated. But, ultimately, policy makers do need to formulate policy based on an appreciation of the international landscape, an assessment of threats, a calculation of objectives, and an integration of values and interests. Policy makers must assign priorities and make critical trade-offs on such key issues as international leadership, military dominance, the use of force, the promotion of democracy, the United States' global image, and participation in international institutions. Once priorities are sorted through, means and ends must be reconciled, resources need to be assigned, and instruments of governance designed. Disparate bureaucracies must be mobilized in pursuit of shared goals, and public opinion must be garnered to support the overall mission. These undertakings are the necessary requisites of any strategy.

What's Ahead

The contributors set forth provocative ideas. As readers will see, they agree that threats abound, but they believe that threats have been misconstrued by President Bush and his advisers. Some focus, as does James Kurth, on the mishandling of the Sunni insurgents in Iraq, whereas others, such as Niall Ferguson, are skeptical about the priority accorded to preempting terrorism and downright scornful of the war in Iraq. Preemptive unilateralism, in Ferguson's view, diverts attention from endemic religious strife throughout the Middle East, as well as from the vulnerabilities in the world economy. Other commentators, such as Robert Kagan, worry that while the United States is immersed in a quagmire in Iraq, China is rising as a formidable adversary and Russia is recouping its strength. Still other contributors, such as Stephen Van Evera, G. John Ikenberry, Douglas A. Irwin, and Barry Eichengreen, maintain that officials are so enveloped by traditional thinking and spending habits that they are failing to address the challenges of global warming, pandemics, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), energy shortfalls, and trade and budgetary deficits. Vacuous rhetoric about freedom and democracy, writes Samantha Power, conceals a flawed strategy that obfuscates real interests and tangible objectives. Deeds, she insists, are far more important than words; and the deeds, argue Charles S. Maier, Francis Fukuyama, and David M. Kennedy, must attenuate religious fervor and social and economic inequality, promote justice, and show a respect for the principles of sovereignty abroad and popular will at home. And almost all the contributors agree that unilateralist instincts must be disciplined or resisted and that collaboration and multilateralism must be restored.

We do not attempt to foreshadow their views at length: the chapters speak powerfully for themselves. The contributors do often clash sharply in

what they see ahead and how the United States should respond. We make no attempt to smooth over disagreements or to generate a false consensus. Our aim is not to produce a single strategic vision or recommendation for a future administration. Instead, in the concluding chapter, we explicate the debates that run through the chapters. The goal is to clarify in vibrant colors the nature of the trade-offs involved in choosing between different scenarios and options. Americans do need to think clearly about a complex world, but that does not mean oversimplifying inherent dilemmas. We also save one additional critical task for the conclusion—articulating the key assumptions and principles that almost all the authors, sometimes implicitly, do accept. Differences aside, these principles will likely be central to any American foreign policy, and it is essential to identify them and consider whether they offer a viable basis for effective planning.

Making strategy is tough, and more than one intelligent observer has argued that composing strategy statements is a waste of time, or perhaps even worse. Yet no one involved in the national security community would argue against thinking through goals, interests, and threats. No one would dispute that means and ends must be reconciled and that to do so one must have a sense of priorities. And no one would dismiss the importance of values in thinking through the utility and appeal of any particular policy. Such matters are indispensable for the security and prosperity of the American people and, indeed, for the security and prosperity of peoples around the globe.

Yet formulaic and comprehensive documents such as those designed for submission to Congress, and even those more secret national strategy statements that were so important to waging the cold war, have had serious deficiencies. They conflate and they generalize; they often sound like menus; rarely do they contain the interpretive insights that transform strategic vision into strategic policy. The following chapters are intended to address the essential ingredients that must be incorporated into the making of national security policy. In their eclectic ways, we hope that they will stimulate debate and dialogue about goals, interests, threats, values, and institutions. Our aim is to encourage critical thinking about priorities and trade-offs. If the United States is to lead the world, as all our contributors think it should, we need creative thought and, yes, imagination, about some of the most daunting and most important issues of our times.

Notes

1. Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, *9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, DC, 2004), 254, <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/index.htm>.

2. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2002), 15; also see *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2006).
3. Inaugural address (January 20, 2005), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/01/20050120-1.html>.
4. *National Security Strategy* (2002), 4.
5. For fighting poverty as a “moral imperative,” see *ibid.*, 14; for expanding the “circle of development” and “building the infrastructure of democracy,” see *National Security Strategy* (2006), 31–34.
6. See, for example, Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); George Packer, *The Assassins’ Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2005); Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The America Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America’s Pursuit of Its Enemies since 9/11* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).
7. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005); John E. Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).
8. Philip H. Gordon, “The End of the Bush Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 85 (July/August 2006).
9. Including us. See, for example, Melvyn P. Leffler, “9/11 and American Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (June 2005): 395–413; Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 166–172.