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The eagle in a turbulent world US and its global role

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Rod Lyon

Dr Rod Lyon is the Program Director, Strategy and International, with ASPI. Rod was most recently a Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Queensland where he taught courses on conflict, international security, and civil–military relations. His research interests focus on a range of problems associated with global security, nuclear strategy and Australian security. He also authored ASPI STRATEGY report *Alliance Unleashed: Australia and the US in a new strategic age* released in June 2005, SPECIAL REPORT *Australia's strategic fundamentals* released in June 2007 and another SPECIAL REPORT *Whither the Bush doctrine?* released in August 2007.

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Level 2, Arts House
40 Macquarie Street
Barton ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Email jointhedebate@aspi.org.au
Facsimile +61 2 6273 9566

The eagle in a turbulent world

US and its global role

Rod Lyon



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ASPI

Level 2, Arts House
40 Macquarie Street
Barton ACT 2600
Australia

Tel + 61 2 6270 5100
Fax + 61 2 6273 9566
Email enquiries@aspi.org.au
Web www.aspi.org.au

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Executive Director's introduction

The United States is the world's strongest power and Australia's closest ally. Its role in the world matters intensely to us. During a presidential election year, we always try to track closely possible shifts in US strategic policy. But even by those standards, 2008 is a special year. It marks the transition from the 9/11 president to his successor, and brings to the fore the whole issue of the consistency and durability of US strategic policy in the post-9/11 era. This report is intended to help our readers think through the relevant issues.

It does so by examining the broader contours of the US role in the world, teasing readers to think about the 'long poles' in the strategic tent as well as the possibilities for change. It canvasses the 'different Americas' that might lie ahead, and looks specifically at the policies that Barack Obama and John McCain might bring to the White House. And it places the US role in the world into context, with a chapter that looks at the 'rise of the rest', to use Fareed Zakaria's words.

Rod Lyon, the Director of ASPI's Strategy and International Program, is the principal author of this report. I am grateful to him for pulling together such a wealth of material and presenting it to our readers in digestible form. But I also want to recognise the contributions and comments that others have made to the report both inside ASPI and beyond. Government officials and academics provided valuable commentary on earlier drafts, and helped to make the report a better product. As always, ASPI owes a profound debt to its administrative staff for the efforts they make to ensure that we deliver high-quality presentations to our members.

Peter Abigail

Executive Director

Photo opposite: US Presidential candidates Senator Barack Obama (L) and Senator John McCain (R) meet onstage between back to back Republican and Democratic debates in Manchester, New Hampshire 5 January 2008. © REUTERS/Brian Snyder/Picture Media

Executive summary

An era of turbulence in US grand strategy has raised the issue of the future US role in the world under a new president. The turbulence began before 9/11: since the end of the Cold War, the US has lacked a clear set of guiding principles for its global role. US strategic policy has been fitful and uncertain, and—despite the onset of the War on Terror—remains so today. In a world of diverse challenges, the debate within the US over strategic priorities is likely to continue. A new president probably won't be able to articulate a set of core strategic principles that would enjoy anything like the support that the doctrine of containment enjoyed during the Cold War.

Although the post-Cold War years have been difficult for US strategy, the period of the Bush Administration has seen new uncertainties emerge. The direct assault upon the US homeland on 9/11 came as a profound strategic shock to Americans. Key elements of US strategic policy were rewritten in the wake of the attacks, redefining the principal threats to the US, the nature of future conflict, and the instruments that might be of greatest use to Washington in its campaign against global terrorism. Collectively, those redefinitions came to be understood as the 'Bush doctrine'. The doctrine hasn't been without its critics, and an important test will be the extent to which it can be passed to a succeeding president.

So where does the US go from here? Broadly, it can choose between strategies of primacy, liberal internationalism, a more selective realist form of global engagement, and some new form of neo-isolationism. The options don't mix well, even though the standard recipe for US grand strategy since 1990 has been to mix three of them (liberal internationalism, primacy and realism) in varying proportions. It's reasonable to suppose that the next president will follow a similar line, attempting to meld several grand strategy options simultaneously. Such a meld makes the US role in the world awkward and unpredictable, including for allies and partners.

The likelihood of continuing vacillation in US strategic policy shouldn't be allowed to disguise the significant and durable themes in US grand

strategy, including the theme of exceptionalism. That theme seems to have survived the challenges to American identity posed by immigration, multiculturalism and the growth of a globalised cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the idea of exceptionalism seems likely to remain a formative influence on Washington's policy making in coming decades. Its effects will be felt most profoundly in the low priority accorded to the principles of realism in US strategic policy, and the elevated priorities given to ideas of US primacy and liberal internationalism.

Impelled by those strategies of primacy and liberal internationalism, the US will remain an important driver of world events. Isolationist impulses are especially unlikely to shape US policy, even though isolationism, in its way, also appeals to the notion of American exceptionalism. The last time the isolationist strategy enjoyed some degree of mainstream political support in the US was in 1972, when the anti-Vietnam War theme, 'Come home, America', formed an important part of Senator George McGovern's campaign for the White House. Current US weariness with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is giving a fillip to isolationist impulses, but those impulses remain comparatively weak in the political mainstream. War weariness is much more likely to galvanise shifts in the forms of US engagement, rather than a more radical disengagement.

Indeed, with the US highly likely to remain an active global player, the test for Washington in coming decades will be what we might call the 'instrumentalist' one: to identify the instruments that give it best leverage to address its key strategic challenges and to use those instruments effectively. The instrumentalist challenge is both political and military: the US needs to rebuild lost influence and to nurture a new domestic and international consensus regarding the use of force to address contemporary strategic challenges. The candidates in the presidential election have articulated two different visions for achieving those objectives: Barack Obama wants to renew US global leadership by moving towards a post-partisan world; John McCain wants to reinvigorate it by reclaiming the classic US position as the 'shining city on the hill.'

Of course, the US role in the world is also partly dependent upon the role that the world wishes the US to play. Some analysts believe the world is hungry for the US to resume its global leadership role. Others say the US will soon discover that it's now a leader without followers, that global management will be weaker, and that regionalisation will become the new flavour in global geopolitics. And still others say that the US will increasingly be obliged to share global leadership with China and the European Union. It's easy to overstate the theory of US decline: the US will remain a potent power for decades to come. Still, non-Western influences are on the rise in global politics, and the long-term effect will be to make the world less of the Western-led entity that it's been for at least five hundred years.

Australia will remain a close ally and partner of the US. The new Rudd government, like its predecessors, wants an America that continues to provide global leadership. But it would be among those keenest to see some adjustment in Washington to the instrumentalist challenges that the US faces. It hopes the US might resume a more tempered, consultative, institutionalised form of global leadership. It might not get exactly the US it wants, even under a new president. Indeed, it's likely to find itself partnering a US still pursuing a mixture of grand strategies, still attached to notions of US exceptionalism, and still lacking certainty about which levers work best in which situations in the post-9/11 world. Moreover, that US will continue to define its global priorities in ways that don't always accord with Australia's. And Canberra will be conscious that other sources of global influence are rising. More than ever, Australia will want to be a close friend and ally of the US, but a partner to others as well.



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AN ERA OF TURBULENCE

As the US presidential election of 2008 enters the home straight, speculation is mounting about what the US role in the world will look like under a new president. That speculation has been fed by two factors: the controversial nature of President George W Bush's post-9/11 strategic policy, and the fact that the Bush Administration doesn't have 'a dog in the fight', as it were, in the election. For the first time since 1928, neither the President nor the Vice President is contesting the campaign.

During the Cold War, US strategic policy remained comparatively stable across the tenure of nine presidents: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush Snr. For almost forty years, the central tenets of strategic policy enjoyed high levels of bipartisan support, resulting in a high level of policy continuity from one administration to the next. The core of the Cold War policy—containment and power-balancing—was a realist one. True, a current of liberal internationalism ran through the Cold War era, but that current was constrained by the broader theme of East–West coexistence: witness Western behaviour in relation to Hungary in 1956, or Czechoslovakia in 1968, or even Poland in 1980.

Since the end of the Cold War, US strategic policy has been marked by division and debate across the tenure of only three presidents: the latter part of George Bush Snr's Administration, Clinton's and George W Bush's. During the 1990s, the policy often seemed hesitant. Liberal internationalism enjoyed a comparatively higher profile than it had in the Cold War days, as the need for containment and power-balancing abated and the number of UN-driven intervention missions increased. Clinton's national security strategy promoted themes of engagement and enlargement, but the domestic consensus on strategic policy seemed fractured. Academic commentators debated—among other things—whether the world was unipolar,

whether the US even needed a grand strategy, and whether the broader strategic environment revealed the 'end of history' or a looming 'clash of civilisations'.

The Clinton Administration struggled to come to grips with a world in which the US remained a superpower but much of the restraining discipline of the Cold War was absent. It vacillated over its management of great-power relations, never clear about whether it wanted a partnership with Russia or an expanded NATO, nor whether it wanted to contain China or engage it. Some academics coined the word 'conengagement' to describe a US policy that wanted to walk both sides of the street simultaneously. The administration also had problems in articulating the role that US forces should play in intervention missions, especially in relation to Somalia and Rwanda.

Analysts Barry Posen and Andrew Ross decided that the Clinton Administration's grand strategy might best be described as 'Selective (but Cooperative) Primacy'. It consisted, they observed, of 'a core of cooperative security principles and impulses', but the strategy was 'drawn towards primacy as it ... faced a less tractable international environment than ... expected' and was 'constrained towards selectivity by a US citizenry whose support for ambitious foreign projects seem[ed] shallow at best' (Posen and Ross 1996–97). In retrospect, Walter Russell Mead spoke of the 1990s as 'the lost years' in US foreign policy. And, at the end of the decade, one of the editors of *International Security* wrote, 'The debate over US grand strategy is unlikely to be resolved until there is more agreement on the threats facing the US' (Lynn-Jones 2000).

Subsequently, George W Bush campaigned in the 2000 presidential election on a policy of reinstating a set of realist precepts at the core of US foreign policy. In the presidential debates that year, Bush called for greater modesty in the US's dealings with the world. Multilateral agreements and institutions were not ends in themselves, he claimed; the world would benefit most from the US pursuing its own national interests. Great-power relationships would once again become the focus of US grand strategy. There would be a greater reluctance to commit US forces to distant humanitarian missions. Nation building was taken right off the agenda; Condoleezza Rice said in an interview with the *New York Times* that it wasn't the job of the 82nd Airborne to walk little children to school. When the new administration took office in January 2001, its strategic reflex was primarily a realist one.

Several of the Bush Administration's early policies—the scrapping of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the refusal to resume talks with the North Koreans about their nuclear program, and the thrust of the Quadrennial Defense Review of 2001, for example—were pointers towards a more assertive US strategic policy than some might have anticipated. But the events of 9/11 proved decisive in pulling the Bush Administration away from its realist moorings and towards policies of US primacy. In the *National Security Strategy 2002*, the US committed itself to a global war against shadowy networks, using pre-emption when necessary to achieve its goals and to protect the US from further attack. In a deep and fundamental shift away from the realist containment doctrines of the Cold War, US strategic policy came to be characterised by the aggressive and early resort to force, an intolerance of multilateral constraints on the US's use of force and a more arbitrary commitment to the rights of detainees and suspects in the War on Terror. The non-UN sanctioned intervention in Iraq, and the issue of Abu Ghraib, came to symbolise in the public mind much of that repositioning of US policy.

Alongside those shifts in declaratory policy, the Bush Administration introduced a number of important structural adjustments to the mechanisms for foreign policy making, among them an overhaul of intelligence arrangements and the creation of the new Department of Homeland Security. When those adjustments are viewed alongside the doctrinal shifts discussed above, and the much-increased tempo of operational commitments generated by the Bush doctrine, it's fair to conclude that the changes in US foreign and strategic policy were 'nothing short of revolutionary' (Campbell and Chollet 2006–07: 193).

Long-held partisan positions underwent profound shifts. As Kurt Campbell and Derek Chollet have noted, a conservative administration became an exponent of grand intervention and democracy promotion, while Democrats often sought to distance themselves from precisely those traditional liberal stamping-grounds. Conservative strategic figures pursued courses that threatened the breakdown of the US Army, and placed the administration into rough civil–military waters, while Democrats offered a refuge to disgruntled military officers (Campbell and Chollet 2006–07: 193–194).

In short, US strategic policy became radically contentious, and not merely because the principles upon which the new policy was apparently based were novel and disconcerting. Critics complained that the core of Bush's policy was ill-defined and unsustainable. Academic commentators, such as Stephen Biddle, insisted that the new strategy had not been well articulated (Biddle 2005). And public and congressional support gradually became more fragile for a policy that apparently demanded open-ended engagements, interventions in hostile environments like Iraq, and a continuing flow of US casualties for decades to come.

The looming transition from George Bush to a successor is the first test of whether the 9/11 president can hand off a new long-term US grand strategy to the next president, or whether US strategic policy is still in that broader post-Cold War state of flux.

The looming transition from George Bush to a successor is the first test of whether the 9/11 president can hand off a new long-term US grand strategy to the next president, or whether US strategic policy is still in that broader post-Cold War state of flux. In some ways, the presidential election—the choice between one candidate promising essential continuity and another advocating fundamental change—symbolises that test. That there is a 'fundamental change' candidate in the field at all suggests US strategic policy remains contested and controversial in the War-on-Terror era. Indeed, given that US grand strategy has lacked key moorings since the end of the Cold War, further shifts in strategy could reasonably be expected even if the candidate favouring continuity were elected.

This paper examines the prospects for the US's future global role. Chapter 2 begins by sounding a note of caution. It identifies a set of enduring stabilisers in US strategic policy, including interests, national strategic culture, a high level of consistency in the 'American way of war', and the existing institutionalisation of US power in the world, to argue that the US will remain an important shaper of global events for many years to come. It is an attempt

to identify a set of deeper, structural drivers of US strategic policy. Identifying those drivers partially compensates for our inability to know which of the candidates will become the next president of the US, but also alerts us to the sheer ‘ballast’ in the entrenched levels of US global engagement.

Chapter 3 turns to a more active consideration of what could be deemed the ‘spectrum of possibilities’ for future US grand strategy. Along that spectrum is a range of different Americas, each playing a different role in the world. For Australia, some of those Americas would be highly unsettling. Critics of the Bush Administration’s policies often profess that an activist, vengeful America is a menace on the global stage, but so too is a distracted, introverted America.

In Chapter 4, the paper explores the different approaches that Barack Obama and John McCain might bring to US strategic policy under the next administration. Bipartisanship is typically a casualty in election years, for the simple reason that candidates emphasise ‘product differentiation’ precisely in order to build a winning coalition of electoral support. So the actual arguments now being deployed by both candidates might well contain a higher degree of overlap than either feels it safe to point out. Still, the two candidates do seem to have different strategic worldviews, and we should expect those differences to show through in their administrations.

Chapter 5 examines the rising debate over what role the world actually wants the US to play. This is an issue of considerable academic discussion as the transition from the Bush presidency to its successor looms. Some suggest the world is keen to see the US resume its traditional leadership role; others suggest we might be on the cusp of a new global order, one in which the US will play a less central role. Such predictions are, of course, not new—older readers might remember the forecasts of US declinism that circulated around the time that Paul Kennedy published his book *The rise and fall of the great powers* in the 1980s (Kennedy 1987). Most of the latest versions of the theory of US decline point only to a relative loss of US power as others rise, and thus suggest US influence will take a long while to fade. Still, the new models of global power distribution are worth canvassing, if only to establish the idea that the US role in the world is not solely within the gift of Washington policy-makers.

Finally, Chapter 6 looks at the future of the bilateral relationship between Australia and the US. The relationship has been central to Australian strategy since at least the signing of the ANZUS Treaty in September 1951, and it will remain an important one for decades to come. There has long been an argument that the treaty has value for the opportunities it gives Canberra to have its voice heard in Washington and to shape US strategic behaviour. There’s merit in that view. But the more fundamental reason that Australia supports the alliance is because it supports a Western-shaped global order within which we feel secure. So how does Australia get its ‘Goldilocks America’: the America whose global role is not too big, not too little, not too hot, and not too cold?

Australia’s problem, reflecting the theme that runs through Chapter 5 of this paper, is that the abilities of non-Western countries to shape the global future are growing. Australia’s close relationship with the US will increasingly be complemented by a range of important relationships with other international actors.

DURABLE THEMES IN US GRAND STRATEGY

The presidency of George W Bush has sharpened an important question for Americans and non-Americans: what role should the US play in the world? The proclamation of a vigorous, interventionist strategic doctrine—a doctrine marked by specific claims for the pre-emptive use of military power and an intolerance of multilateral restraints—gave the Bush presidency a degree of notoriety even among Western publics. The sense that a sudden and dramatic change has occurred in the US global role has made observers especially interested in the future trajectory of US grand strategy. That sense of change needs to be placed in a broader context. US strategic policy is still defined primarily by a set of long-lived traits that add durability and ballast to the US global role.

Despite the volatility that has characterised US grand strategy since the end of the Cold War, a number of important stabilising factors add durability and resilience to the central themes of US global engagement.

Scholars disagree over whether—and by how much—US grand strategy has really changed. A broad historical perspective seems to support the notion that Bush hasn't been the aberration some suppose. For example, Walter Russell Mead (2002) believes that US grand strategy hasn't changed much in 200 years. And John Lewis Gaddis (2002) has argued that, while Bush has genuinely reshaped US strategic policy, this must be seen in the context of similar efforts by earlier presidents faced with sudden and destructive attacks

upon the US. Both are inclined to see Bush's grand strategy as consistent with the broad sweep of precedents. On the other hand, some insist that Bush has essentially 'undone' US grand strategy. Barry Buzan (2007) argues that Bush has burned the stored assets of US goodwill; Immanuel Wallerstein (2002) writes of the eagle having 'crash landed'.

Despite the volatility that has characterised US grand strategy since the end of the Cold War, a number of important stabilising factors add durability and resilience to the central themes of US global engagement. The first is a stable set of long-lived interests. The second, a defined set of 'schools' of foreign policy influence within the US, which act as channelling devices to ensure that debates about strategic policy arise—and are resolved—within the dominant currents of US political life. The third stabilising factor is what might be called the US 'strategic culture'; the fourth, the 'American way of war'. A final factor is the institutionalisation of American power. The US is tied into global engagement by a series of contracts: military alliances, a worldwide set of military bases and access arrangements, and extended nuclear deterrence guarantees, all underwritten by substantial numbers of forward-deployed troops.

US interests

Interests lie at the core of US strategic policy. They always have. Key US objectives include both a secure homeland and a favourable world order. In Michael Lind's words:

The traditional formula for American security combines US hegemony in North America with a pattern of power favourable to US interests in the world as a whole. In the nineteenth century, by expanding across the continent and achieving regional hegemony in North America, the United States averted the danger of a North American balance of power, in which a smaller and weaker United States would have been only one of several actors in a Balkanized continent manipulated by extra-hemispheric great powers. From its secure position as the hegemon of North America, the United States in the twentieth century was able successfully to intervene to prevent Germany or Russia from dominating Europe and also to prevent Japan or Russia from dominating Asia. (Lind 2006: 255)

Lind, of course, argues that agreement on US strategic policy has become harder to sustain precisely because Washington has put aside its traditional means of pursuing a favourable global pattern of power—great power cooperation in a multipolar world—in favour of haughty unilateralism. But essentially he is arguing for a return to a set of long-lived interests. Walter Russell Mead makes a similar point when he claims that American presidents for two hundred years have pursued a similar objective: a stable, prosperous United States in a stable, democratic world.

Foreign policy schools

Mead has long been a key exponent of the idea that US foreign policy is not a solo performance but a symphony produced by many players. In *Special providence: American foreign policy and how it changed the world*, he argues that 'American foreign policy does not proceed out of a single, unified worldview' (Mead 2002). Similarly, in *Power, terror, peace, and war* (2004), he notes that the democratic nature of US foreign policy making encourages the emergence of a difficult balance of contrasting and competing points of view. 'Over the long term, American foreign policy is not just random noise—280 million monkeys typing furiously on 280 million keyboards...Over time we can see patterns and structures in America's encounters with the world' (Mead 2004: 19).

Mead specialises in identifying the dominant patterns in US foreign policy, by singling out four schools of policy preferences. Jeffersonians cluster around the notion of restraint, Hamiltonians around the theme of commerce, Wilsonians around the idea of morality and justice, and Jacksonians around the martial virtues that keep the US secure. That clustering isn't enforced by any guiding central intelligence. So the patterns aren't prescriptive for how the US will behave on any particular day.

... the long-term patterns are frequently confounded by short-term considerations ...

Indeed, the long-term patterns are frequently confounded by short-term considerations: US officials making decisions that relate to electoral cycles, congressmen tied to conflicting visions of foreign policy and eager to check the powers of both the president and the other house, and a public opinion pushed about by the fads of the day. In many cases, the determination of policy is distinctly inharmonious. On some issues, the US runs more than one policy line. US policy towards North Korea is a good example of this: Charles Pritchard's recent book, *Failed diplomacy* (2007), argues that the US has been running two different policies towards North Korea—a hardline policy of pressure and sanctions and a softer policy of diplomacy and engagement. Each policy has had some support within the Bush Administration. Pritchard, one of the 'engagers', has clearly felt the hot breath of the hardliners on his neck, and obviously believes the hardliners have been able to frustrate and undermine the engagement strategy at key decision points.

Still, Mead's schools broadly 'bound' the set of available options for US policy-makers, primarily by circumscribing the frameworks within which the world is understood. They mightn't tell us which policy option is likely to prevail on a particular day, but they seem to have an important role in shaping the available options. In that sense, they are important 'stabilisers' in US strategic policy.

Strategic culture

Similarly, US strategic culture is an important force for continuity. As an academic device, the idea of strategic culture suffers from a number of weaknesses. The concept of culture is amorphous, and it's difficult to prove the importance of cultural factors in shaping strategic outcomes. However, the concept has considerable value as 'shading' added to a broader picture.

What are the distinctive elements of US strategic culture? Thomas Mahnken, currently a senior official in the US Department of Defense, has listed a number of them (Mahnken 2006). His list includes:

- a rejection of the European tradition of power politics
- a belief in American exceptionalism, so an aggression against the US is an armed rebellion against the universal and eternal principles of world society
- an impulse to transform the international system in the service of liberal democratic ideals

- a belief that war is not the continuation of policy, but policy's breakdown
- a belief that war is fought for unlimited political aims
- a tendency by Americans to see their wars as crusades against evil.

Many of those beliefs contribute to US ferocity in war, precisely because wars are fought for ideals. But they also underpin a larger and more important point: that American power is 'good' power. That point is central to the narrative that Americans tell themselves about their own role in the world, and it flows through the diplomatic side of their strategic culture just as strongly as it does through the military side. Often US global leadership is said to be characterised by 'soft power'—the ability to co-opt rather than to command. Joseph Nye, who has argued this case since at least 1990, distinguishes the US era of global leadership from earlier eras (Spanish, Dutch, French and British) precisely on the basis of the growth of soft power as a core asset in leadership style. A recent report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington (CSIS 2007) attempts to broaden the soft power argument to claim that US power should increasingly be characterised by 'smart power'—the judicious rebuilding of US influence in the political, economic and technological fields.

While not a perfect indicator of strategic intent, the way a country chooses to utilise its military forces ... says much about how it views its role in the world.

A slightly different way of looking at the strategic culture issue is to adopt Caroline Ziemke's 'strategic personality' model (Ziemke 2000: 5–20). Ziemke applies something akin to a Myers–Briggs personality test to states. Under that model, the US ranks as an 'extroverted, intuitive, feeling' (ENF) state. That means, says Ziemke, the US is an outward-looking state, which sees its ultimate concerns tied up with issues beyond its own borders. Moreover, it's a nation born out of a philosophy that seeks to advance a specific set of values in the world. And it feels most secure when its value system is expanding in the world and it's fulfilling its role as a 'city on the hill'. But even under Ziemke's strategic personality model, the outcome is the same as that from other 'strategic culture' models: leopards don't easily change their spots. The US that entered the 21st century—the US before the presidency of George W Bush—was an ENF state and it will remain one in the years ahead, under a new president.

The American way of war

A further way of testing the durability of US grand strategy is to look more specifically at how the Americans use their primary security instruments. While not a perfect indicator of strategic intent, the way a country chooses to utilise its military forces—the consistency of its conflict behaviour, so to speak—says much about how it views its role in the world. In the case of the US, we already have both Russell Weigley's classic 1973 study into the 'American way of war' and a number of more recent contributions on the same topic.

According to Weigley, the American way of war (since the War of Independence) has been characterised by a range of elements that together help define a unique approach to combat. Those elements include:

- annihilation through the lavish use of firepower
- aggressiveness at all levels of warfare
- a quest for decisive battles
- a desire to employ maximum effort
- a preference for the direct approach to strategy over the indirect
- an industrial approach to warfare
- an emphasis on technology as a principal determinant of outcomes
- more recently, and ambiguously, a seeming reluctance to incur casualties.

Weigley also discusses the objectives of US strategy, concluding that from its earliest days the US has aimed high in grand strategy. In the War of Independence, for example, it aimed at nothing less than the expulsion of a European great power from the continent of North America. This feature of US grand strategy suggests that an attempt to reform the Middle East as an objective of the current War on Terror isn't as anomalous as some might suppose. We'll return to this point below.

After the Kosovo conflict, Eliot Cohen argued that Weigley's classic American way of war might be shifting, and that we were witnessing the emergence of a 'new' American way of war (Cohen 2001). Cohen observed that the 'old' American way of war—characterised by extreme aggressiveness, the quest for decisive battle, discomfiture with ambiguous objectives and political constraints, and 'bright lines' of separation in civil–military relations—had resulted in a style of warfare that was 'direct, simple, and overwhelming'. But modern conditions had rendered that way of war obsolete, he argued. A new American way of war was on the rise, characterised by a willingness to use force for other-than-vital interests, an attraction to coalitional warfare arrangements, a preference for airpower as the weapon of choice for US statecraft, and the rise of a new generation of military 'proconsuls' with extraordinary influence over decision making.

In retrospect, it's possible to see some of Cohen's argument as a product of its time, reflecting the sorts of conflicts with which the US was most engaged in the post-Cold War 1990s. But Cohen's thinking was also a precursor to more recent reappraisals of the classic approach. Some commentators have said that Weigley's work was more about a way of battle than about a way of war (Echevarria 2004). Moreover, American strategists have recently become far more critical of the limitations in that 'way of war'. For example, Jeffrey Record argues that the traditional American way of war has distinct blind spots: that Americans are easily frustrated by limited wars, averse to risking American lives when vital interests aren't at stake, and demoralised when their conventional military advantages don't deliver a quick, decisive victory (Record 2006). That all those weaknesses are still readily apparent in current US engagements suggests the traditional American way of war hasn't died out quite as quickly as Cohen once imagined.

Institutional ballast

All those factors lend substantial ballast to US grand strategy. Interests define the core of US engagement, Mead's foreign policy schools help to shape the US understanding of grand

strategic issues, US strategic culture (or personality) tells Americans what sort of society they are and how and why they use power in the world, and the American way of war reinforces a disposition to pursue grand objectives with a technological, lavishly resourced approach to warfare. Between them, those factors serve a variety of purposes: they help to shape American perceptions of domestic political debates about the US's global role; they establish a set of cultural preferences for US engagement in global affairs; and they define the foundations of the way that Americans think about the use of force in international relations.

When we add 'institutional ballast', such as the current structure of international relations and the distribution of power in the world, to those factors, we might plausibly expect even greater consistency in US grand strategy. For example, US strategic projections suggest that the current structural drivers of US strategic and foreign policy will remain influential for some years to come. The world will remain a world of 'persistent conflict', to use the Pentagon's jargon, and one in which state failure will be as important as the growth of strong states. Similarly, in sheer hard power, the US will remain the world's most powerful country for many years to come. It's certainly not for want of hard-power assets that the US role in the world might change. Even with a recession looming, the US economy is huge. In a US\$13.8 trillion economy (the 2007 estimate from the *CIA world factbook*), even a \$500 billion defence budget is just loose change.

With Americans still interested in the shape and direction of global politics, and still engaged in a set of contractual arrangements—including alliances, basing rights, trade agreements and technology exchanges—that give them great scope to shape those politics, it would be both presumptuous and wrong to believe that Washington will cast aside its global responsibilities anytime soon. US power is institutionalised in the current system. Even during periods of distraction and introspection—and we're probably in one of those periods now—the wells of US influence in the world will remain deep. The US will remain an important shaper of global events for years to come.

At a minimum, we should assume that a number of these existing themes will probably continue. First, the US doesn't see itself as just another great power playing great-power politics; nor does it have any desire to play such a role. It sees that possibility as tarnished by everything it disliked about the old European power struggles. It tries in both its rhetoric and its actions to rise above that vision of international politics—indeed, the attempt to rise above mere power politics lies at the core of American exceptionalism.

Second, we should accept that the US has a direct interest in global order in the absence of a world policeman. This isn't merely because it believes there's a need for a sheriff in a lawless town, but because it believes the provision of order is a systemic benefit. Joseph Nye recently argued this point in the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Survival* magazine: 'To a large extent, international order is a public good—something everyone can consume without diminishing its availability to others' (Nye 2008:63).

Third, we should acknowledge that the US role in the world is likely to retain a messianic, universalist edge—a belief that American truths are universal truths, readily exportable to others. This belief has endured since the American Declaration of Independence, and it would be unrealistic to think that it would run its course in the early decades of the 21st century.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

If we stand a little further back from current US grand strategy and ask what that strategy *could* be like, it's possible to get a broader perspective on possible US roles in the world. US academic Colin Dueck (2004: 513) argues that US options tend to boil down to four alternatives:

First, there are those who clearly reject the notion of the United States as a world power, with its troops and alliances scattered around the globe, and who favour a withdrawal from strategic commitments incurred as a result of the Cold War. Second, there are those who question the liberal assumptions behind US grand strategy, and who advocate a balance of power strategy, an internationalist strategy, but one shorn of global and liberalizing ambitions. Third, there are those who call for a strategy of American primacy, based upon the energetic assertion of US predominance worldwide, as well as the promotion of an 'Americanised' international system. Finally, there are those who share the desire to promote a liberal international order, but who wish to do so primarily through the use of multilateral institutions, rather than military power.

We can flesh out those alternatives a little more. The core of the disengagers' argument is that the US would be more secure if it pulled back from its Cold War alliances, brought home the vast bulk of its forward-deployed forces, and shunned military adventures abroad. The argument tends to get a run in the wake of unpopular wars. For example, George McGovern, the 1972 Democratic candidate for the presidency, famously called for America to 'come home' in his acceptance speech at his party's convention, signalling his supporters' weariness with the Vietnam War. But even in 1972, disengagement wasn't popular: McGovern lost forty-nine states out of fifty to Richard Nixon in the election later that year.

An echo of the isolationist position sounded during the 1990s. For example, Eric Nordlinger argued in his 1995 book *Isolationism reconfigured* in favour of a national security strategy of ‘non-engagement’—a strategy that would draw an ‘exceptionally narrow security perimeter ... around North America’, and tolerate only a ‘true minimum of security-centered involvements beyond’ (Nordlinger 1995: 3). He argued that:

[T]he metaphorical aviary of security studies, which already includes hawks, doves, chicken hawks, owls and putative ostriches, should be expanded to include eagles. They are powerful, keen-sighted, high-flying, remotely-perched, and thus eminently well-protected birds. (Nordlinger 1995: 6)

In 1997, academics Eugene Gholz, Daryl Press and Harvey Sapolsky wrote an article entitled ‘Come home, America’ for the *International Security* journal, praising the option of ‘restraint in the face of temptation’ (Gholz et al 1997). That temptation, they claimed, was to intervene needlessly abroad at a time when there were no fundamental challenges to US security.

Those earlier fans of neo-isolationism have not gone away. Indeed, many of them believe the Iraq War has presented a golden opportunity to argue their case afresh. In December 2006, Gholz and Press co-authored an op-ed in the *New York Times* in the wake of the release of the Iraq Study Group’s report. They argued that the report’s recommendation—withdrawing US combat forces from Iraq—was not bold enough, and that the best option was to drastically reduce US troops across the entire Persian Gulf region (Gholz et al 2006). Indeed, the idea of a world without a pervasive American military presence has been the subject of considerable recent theorising. Barry Posen, an academic who argued persuasively against neo-isolationism back in the 1990s, has more recently argued in favour of an option of strategic restraint (Posen 2007), under which the US would be not only more reticent about its role in the world but more distant from traditional allies.

It’s already apparent that neither John McCain nor Barack Obama favours an isolationist grand strategy or finds the disengagement option attractive.

Still, the option is comparatively unattractive to a wide range of Americans. True, the Pew Research Center, which surveys ‘America’s place in the world’ every four years, found in its November 2005 survey that 42% of Americans believed that the US should ‘mind its own business’ in the world. But commentators have argued about what this question means and whether it is a valid test of support for isolationism. Isolationist ideas simply don’t have much traction in mainstream politics, even after the recent difficulties in Iraq: too many key US interests would be left in the hands of others. In the broad sweep of US grand strategy options, isolationism tends to be the weakest of the four options. It’s already apparent that neither John McCain nor Barack Obama favours an isolationist grand strategy or finds the disengagement option attractive.

The second school is the abode of the realists, who support an engaged America but are suspicious of liberal and idealistic causes as drivers of US policy. Much of what this school wants is simple balance-of-power politics. Among the doyens of the realists we would find Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. The realists are

not much fussed with using US power to remake the domestic political structures of other states; nor are they much in favour of humanitarian intervention or given to lecturing other countries about subjects like human rights. The realists argue for US intervention only where concrete and important US interests are at stake, in order to avoid commitments and overextension in marginal areas.

Realism's main appeal lies in its acceptance of the genuine constraints on US power. The realists typically argue for more selective engagement by the US, and for a greater interest in maintaining the US's 'strategic solvency', to use Richard Betts's expression (Betts 2007). Many strategic commentators want to suggest restraint in relation to a particular engagement. For example, Michael O'Hanlon wrote an article in 2001 for *Foreign Affairs* magazine, entitled 'Come partly home, America: how to downsize US deployments abroad' (O'Hanlon 2001). In this form, restraint has less to do with isolationism and more to do with selective engagement.

The realists draw strength from the success of US grand strategy during the Cold War, when power-balancing, deterrence and containment formed the core of US strategic policy. With such a record of successful management of a serious challenge to US and global security, the realists tend to occupy the managerial high ground over the liberal internationalists and the primacists. However, realism suffers from one important weakness in the US: it's often seen as the foreign policy approach of traditional great powers, and even as the foreign policy approach of authoritarian great powers. To suggest that US strategic policy should be based on 'realism' is to say that it should have the same foundations as the strategic policy of the former Soviet Union.

The third school is the home of the primacists. In theory, the primacists share a sense of unilateralism with the isolationists, but unlike the isolationists they project their unilateralism outwards, and want the world to run along American lines. A strategy of primacy suggests acting proactively to maintain America's political and military predominance in the world. An Americanised global order is seen as a benevolent global order. Supporters of primacy include Robert Kagan, William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer and Paul Wolfowitz, many of them prominent neoconservatives. They are less interested in balances of power than they are in sustaining the US's preponderance of power. And they are invariably more idealistic than the realists, meaning that they are more likely to embark on strategic 'crusades'.

The fourth and final school is that of the liberal internationalists. This is the school of Joseph Nye, John Ikenberry, Charles Kupchan and Dennis Ross. Like the primacists, the liberal internationalists favour an Americanised world order, albeit one constructed essentially along multilateral lines rather than through military predominance. It is the liberal internationalists who favour greater US involvement in cooperative security arrangements, and hope to secure US strategic interests by building institutional arrangements and norms that outlive US power. Dennis Ross (2007) has recently endorsed Francis Fukuyama's idea of 'realistic Wilsonianism' as 'the template for neoliberalism':

We should not lose our ideals. We should not give up transformation as a goal internationally. We should, in Fukuyama's words, recognize 'the importance of what goes on *inside* states' and better match 'the available tools to the achievement of democratic ends' ... Here is a call not just for preserving idealism but for developing the means, the tools and the mind-set to be able to pursue idealism.

... splitting US strategic options along these lines— isolationism, realism, primacy, liberal internationalism—isn't the only way to structure Washington's strategic alternatives.

Of course, splitting US strategic options along these lines— isolationism, realism, primacy, liberal internationalism—isn't the only way to structure Washington's strategic alternatives. Other scholars have suggested a wider array of choices by portraying the choices as a set of different end-points. Glenn Hastedt from James Madison University, one of the doyens of US foreign policy studies, has canvassed a much broader set of possibilities for policy. His options suggest that the US foreign policy trajectory is not as fixed as we might suppose.

Among the alternatives Hastedt canvasses, the US might choose to be:

- an *Ordinary State*, where foreign policy is no longer based upon an assumption of American exceptionalism
- a *Reformed America*, which attempts to lead the world on human rights and economic and social development rather than on military spending
- a *Global Manager*, which brings its managerial skills to global politics
- a *Pragmatic America*, with a more utilitarian outlook on world politics and a policy of moderation in terms of its own involvement
- a *Neocontainment Power*, which acts according to balance-of-power principles to contain traditional threats to the international system, especially those emanating from Russia and China
- a *Triumphant America*, which exploits its victory in the Cold War to lay down new rules of world order and enforce them
- an *American Crusader*, which uses the unipolar 'moment' to further the US mission in the world, primarily through military force
- a *Balancer State*, which accepts that multipolarity is bound to return and retains the freedom to 'balance' threats as they emerge
- a *Disengaged State*, which withdraws from a world increasingly inhospitable to US values, and unresponsive to efforts to manage or shape it (Hastedt 2006:391–405).

It's possible to disentangle Hastedt's alternative futures and make them fit—if a little uncomfortably—into Dueck's four schools: Disengaged America and the US as an Ordinary State possibly fit into the isolationist school; Global Manager, Pragmatic America and America the Balancer fit more into the realist school; Triumphant America, American Crusader and Neocontainment Power fit into the primacy school; and Reformed America fits into the liberal internationalist school. If we do that sort of exercise, we can see that the four broad alternatives are often marked by their own internal divisions rather than being coherent entities. But the value of Hastedt's depiction of alternative futures is that it shows US global leadership might come in a variety of forms. The choice for Washington isn't merely between engagement and non-engagement. Much more critically, the choice involves the form of engagement, and the choice of one set of instruments over another.

During the tenure of the next president, arguments over the means of US leadership might well prove to be more important than the arguments over ends.

The debate over primacy

The debate over what sort of leader the US ought to be in the post-Cold War world is not new. The intervention in Iraq has undoubtedly sharpened that debate, but even in the 1990s Americans focused on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of global leadership: what primacy meant in international relations, and how the US ought to exercise its power in the world.

Even in the heyday of its unipolar moment, the US was a self-conscious and reflective power. A key theme running through the debates then concerned the nature of US leadership, for the simple reason that in a unipolar international system the character of the unipolar power matters enormously. The more the unipolar power acts like the hegemon, the more the entire system slips towards empire; the less the unipolar power acts as a hegemon, the more the system starts to resemble a society of states.

The War on Terror has confirmed the fundamental limits on US leadership, sharpening the question of how the US should attempt to exercise power and which forms of that exercise maximise its prospects for influence.

By the end of the 1990s, several commentators had seized upon this distinction to explore—and either implicitly or explicitly to advocate—different styles of US global leadership during the unipolar moment. Robert Kagan had already begun to advocate a leadership style that spoke of America’s central importance in building a ‘benevolent empire’ (Kagan 1998). By contrast, David Wilkinson, from the University of California, Los Angeles and less noticed than Kagan outside strictly academic circles, had begun to write about what non-hegemonic unipolarity looked like as a distinctive form of international structure. Wilkinson argued that ‘unipolarity without hegemony is a configuration where the preponderant capability of a single state is not matched by a predominant influence.’ He defined predominant influence in relation to eleven formal tests: investiture; installation; appointment and deposition; adjudication; maintenance of order; convocation; command; veto; subsidy; tribute; and conversion. In substance, the tests measured the ability of a hegemon to impose its will on the system. Judging against the tests, he concluded that ‘although the United States sometimes successfully behaves as a hegemon in some bilateral, regional, or functional relationships, it does not do so often enough, or widely enough, to be considered a systemwide hegemon’ (Wilkinson 1999; quotes drawn from pp. 143–145).

Note that Wilkinson’s view of the US as a non-hegemonic unipolar power was written in 1999, before Bush’s attempt to mobilise the world into a War on Terror. From the vantage point of 2008, it’s clear that the strenuous efforts made by the Bush Administration only confirm Wilkinson’s initial judgment: that the US has not been able to exercise genuine hegemony. To apply just two of Wilkinson’s formal tests, installation and maintenance of order, the US has had genuine difficulties in attempting to install new regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and even greater difficulties in trying to suppress local wars by US intervention.

In fact, many American policy-makers have now become much more interested in finding new ways for the country to supplement its existing levels of influence. The recent interest in reviving American ‘statecraft’ is part of that effort, as are the return to the notion of soft power and the new attempt to define a category of ‘smart power’.

The years since 2001 haven’t transformed the US into a unipolar hegemon; rather, they’ve shown that its role as a non-hegemonic unipolar power isn’t merely one of choice, but one of necessity. The War on Terror has confirmed the fundamental limits on US leadership, sharpening the question of how the US should attempt to exercise power and which forms of that exercise maximise its prospects for influence.

But the War on Terror has been important in transforming an essentially theoretical 1990s debate about the US role in the world into a much more serious political issue. The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent declaration of the War on Terror, the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the intervention in Iraq in 2003 by the ‘coalition of the willing’ took the issue of US global leadership out of the ivory towers of academia and into the halls of power. The events prompted a substantial shift in US foreign policy priorities, and a new concentration on the practicalities of US leadership. John Ikenberry spoke of a ‘neoperial vision’ in the Bush Administration (Ikenberry 2002, Wallerstein 2002). Robert Kagan’s famous essay, ‘Power and weakness’, published by *Policy Review* in the middle of 2002, argued that the Europeans had fallen away from power and from global responsibilities (Kagan 2002). Donald Rumsfeld spoke of the different worldviews of ‘new’ Europe and ‘old’ Europe. Intra-Western strategic debates were increasingly marked more by heat than by light. Reorienting US leadership will similarly involve an act of political leadership and not mere academic reflection.

Likely trajectories

Why has it proved so difficult to sustain bipartisan agreement on US strategic policy over the past decade or so, given that America’s central strategic objectives haven’t changed? In part, it is because challenges to global order are now more diffuse and don’t consist merely of a set of great-power rivalries in or about Eurasia. Indeed, a short-hand description of the current strategic difficulties confronting Washington might say that we’re in an environment in which structural conditions aren’t yet sufficiently imposing to hold US grand strategy to one policy. It’s also difficult to anticipate the conditions that might be required to force that sort of change. A series of 9/11-type incidents? A terrorist WMD attack in a major US city? The emergence of peer competitors, and a return to competitive bipolarity or multipolarity? Certainly, the current security environment stands in sharp contrast to that of the Cold War years. Then, the Soviet challenge posed a direct threat to the US objective of a favourable pattern of power in the world. Today’s challenges are more indirect.

That means US strategic policy is beset by more than difficulties of style, and those deeper problems will constrain future US policy. If we were to attempt to make a set of judgments about the likely trajectory of US global leadership after Bush, we would probably start by ruling out the isolationist option. Americans don’t want to think of the US as an ordinary state. And disengagement probably wouldn’t make the US more secure. Deprived of US security commitments and extended nuclear deterrence, US allies would be much more likely to consider drastic options to better assure their own futures. Japan might develop nuclear weapons, so might South Korea, and so might others. The world would be a more turbulent place with a series of potential arms races. And the US would probably lose even

more of its influence as many of its vital national interests (which are certainly not confined to the North American continent) fell under the influence of other states.

... the difficulties of the war in Iraq seem to show that unilateralism and pre-emption haven't worked very well.

Primacy, on the other hand, has been given a bad name by the Bush presidency. Pre-emption and unilateralism have combined to make the US look worryingly like a rogue, wounded giant. More insidiously, the difficulties of the war in Iraq seem to show that unilateralism and pre-emption haven't worked very well. The Iraq War has effectively taken the edge off the vision of a triumphant America; certainly the early-1990s vision was much sharper. Similarly, the idea of a crusader America that spreads its vision of the world through military power has taken a drubbing lately. Still, the primacist option does appeal directly to those who think that the US ought to lead the world towards a specifically American set of virtues.

That leaves the realist or liberal internationalist options. Both are forms of engagement that the American population can support, although the liberal option allows and encourages an idealistic vision of US power in the world that the realist option downplays. Realism is essentially based on an appreciation of the constraints on one's behaviour, but pre-eminent global powers aren't very good at accepting those constraints. Liberal internationalism, on the other hand, hasn't yet been well defined. In part that's because Obama, and the Democratic Party more generally, still have some serious thinking to do about the future of US grand strategy. It's also because the liberal internationalist approach requires a form of global leadership much more consultative and patient than the one that's typified the Bush years.

Perhaps the most likely grand strategy of all is a continued unholy mixture of different elements. In just the same way that Bill Clinton's policy consisted of elements of liberal internationalism, mixed up with bits of realism and bits of primacy, there's a reasonable chance that the successor to Bush will work his way towards a similar outcome. In 2000, Harvard academic Sean Lynn-Jones claimed that US grand strategy was unlikely to settle into a firmer shape until there was broader agreement on the nature of the threats to the US; the events of 9/11 seem to have built short-term agreement on that subject, but it remains unclear whether the agreement can be sustained.



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PRESIDENT OBAMA OR PRESIDENT McCAIN?

This year's presidential election in the US offers an opportunity to explore the contours of the on-going public debate about strategic policy. That exploration should be preceded by two initial observations. First, in elections candidates tend to highlight the differences in their strategic worldviews rather than the commonalities. Product differentiation is the basis for building partisan support amongst traditional party supporters. That differentiation is typically less pronounced in non-election years. Second, campaign statements aren't always a reliable guide to future presidential behaviour. Once in office, politicians frequently find that their decisions are shaped by pressures rather different to those they encountered back on the campaign trail.

Elections are also a poor guide to future US strategic policy because the major political parties aren't each of one mind.

Elections are also a poor guide to future US strategic policy because the major political parties aren't each of one mind. For example, Campbell and Chollet have argued that the Republican and Democratic parties are really composed of a series of 'tribes' who hold distinctive views about US strategy. Under this tribal model of US politics, the Republican Party includes Oldsmobile Conservatives, Reagan Republicans, America Firsters, and Faith-Based Interventionists. The Democratic Party has its own tribes: Globalists, Truman Democrats, Come Home Americans and American Skeptics. It would be tedious to rehearse here the differences between the tribes, since that's done at length elsewhere (Campbell and Chollet 2006–07: 196–201). But the 'tribal'

explanation for US strategic policy under Bush is interesting: Bush campaigned in 2000 as an Oldsmobile Conservative, but has governed since 9/11 mainly as a Reagan Republican. And that underlines an important factor: regardless of who wins the 2008 presidential election, we can't yet be sure which tribe will be decisive in shaping US strategy.

Still, bearing those caveats in mind, what clues do we find in the current campaign as to what US grand strategy might look like under a McCain or an Obama presidency? In this chapter we canvass the current policies—and broader approaches—of the two presidential candidates. What is certain is that the incoming president will take the reins at a difficult moment: he will inherit two hot wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a contentious War on Terror and the likelihood of further mass-casualty terrorist attacks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and a disturbing level of economic turmoil. So how do the candidates propose to handle the likely challenges ahead?

Obama supports greater US engagement with existing multilateral institutions ...

President Obama

Obama's foreign policy has been described as liberal internationalist. But what does this mean in the present context? In a major speech in July, he proposed a national security strategy that would focus on five goals: ending the war in Iraq responsibly; finishing the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban; securing all nuclear weapons and materials from terrorists and rogue states; achieving true energy security; and rebuilding US alliances to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Obama 2008a). Most of those seem to address relatively conventional priorities.

True, Obama has also argued for a new way of thinking about national security that places a higher priority on dealing with transnational security issues such as terrorism, pandemic viruses, and cybercrime. And he often speaks in terms that suggest a desire to move beyond a '20th-century mindset':

'In 2002, I stated my opposition to the war in Iraq, not only because it was an unnecessary diversion from the struggle against the terrorists who attacked us on September 11th, but also because it was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the threats that 9/11 brought to light. I believed then, and believe now, that it was based on old ideologies and outdated strategies—a determination to fight a 21st century struggle with a 20th century mindset' (Obama 2007a).

Obama supports greater US engagement with existing multilateral institutions, including the World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court, though his stance on ratification of the latter remains ambiguous, dependent on consultations with US military leaders before deciding to fully commit the US. He has expressed a strong willingness to tackle humanitarian problems in distant arenas, including Darfur and Myanmar, and has promised broader and deeper engagement with states in the Middle East. He supports democracy promotion via financial instruments, including increased government funding for pro-democracy elements in developing nations, debt relief, and aid. Obama supports the

idea of addressing a broader security agenda, and that the US should have a capability ‘to participate in post-conflict, humanitarian, and stabilization efforts around the globe’.

The senator has stated his willingness to engage in dialogues with ‘rogue states’ such as Cuba and Iran. And he has called for a ‘common security’ approach to thinking about US national security, stating that ‘the security and well-being of each and every American depends on the security and well-being of those who live beyond our borders’ (Obama 2007b). He has argued that the US ‘must consider using military force in circumstances beyond self-defense in order to provide for the common security that underpins global stability’. He has also stated that ‘the United States has a direct national security interest in dramatically reducing global poverty and joining with our allies in sharing more of our riches to help those in need.’

Obama has called for the creation of a ‘twenty-first-century military to stay on the offensive, from Djibouti to Kandahar’; a military with the capability to project power globally. Specifically, Obama has called for expanded ground forces, so that the US is ‘better prepared to put boots on the ground against foes that fight asymmetrical and highly adaptive campaigns on a global scale.’ He also favours increased spending on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), large transport aircraft (C-17s), and refuelling aircraft, and more investment in electronic warfare capabilities. Forces would also be tailored to protecting vital sea lanes needed for the transport of oil and general trade. He has also called for the expansion of Special Forces capabilities, and greater spending on reserve units and the National Guard. And he has kept open the option of unilateral action: ‘I will not hesitate to use force, unilaterally if necessary, to protect the American people or our vital interests whenever we are attacked or imminently threatened’ (Obama 2007b).

In line with a belief that the central front of the fight against terrorism lies in Afghanistan, Obama has committed to bolstering the US presence in Afghanistan ...

Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan

Obama continues to retail a narrative of US engagement in Iraq that is highly unflattering:

‘This war distracts us from every threat that we face and so many opportunities that we could seize. This war diminishes our security, our standing in the world, our military, our economy, and the resources that we need to confront the challenges of the 21st century’ (Obama 2008b).

In Iraq, he would use a phased withdrawal of US troops to pressure the warring parties to reach a solution, and launch regional and international initiatives to help build support for an end to the civil war. But he has also stated that any phased US withdrawal of forces must be done ‘carefully’, and he talks of leaving in Iraq a ‘residual force to perform specific missions’ (Obama 2008c). Those missions include the targeting of any Al Qaeda remnants, protection of service members and diplomats, and training and supporting Iraq’s security forces.

In line with a belief that the central front of the fight against terrorism lies in Afghanistan, Obama has committed to bolstering the US presence in Afghanistan, and to deploying about 10,000 more troops to the theatre. He says that he would make greater use of political and economic instruments to broker a solution to the Afghanistan conflict, increasing non-military aid by US\$1 billion to fund, for example, projects aimed at increasing economic opportunity and prosperity. More specifically, he has identified a need to generate alternative means of revenue for poppy farmers.

Obama frequently talks of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the same breath, as he did on 15 July: ‘the second goal of my new strategy will be taking the fight to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan...Al Qaeda has an expanding base in Pakistan that is probably no farther from their old Afghan sanctuary than a train ride from Washington to Philadelphia’ (Obama 2008a). He has argued that ‘the security of Afghanistan and the United States is shared’ and that ‘the greatest threat to that security lies in the tribal regions of Pakistan.’ And he has not ruled out the unilateral use of force against Al Qaeda in Pakistan if there was ‘actionable intelligence’ about their location. ‘We can’t succeed in Afghanistan or secure our homeland unless we change our Pakistan policy.’

On nuclear weapons proliferation

Obama supports the goal of ‘a world without nuclear weapons’, but acknowledges that while nuclear weapons exist, America ‘must retain a strong deterrent.’ He has said he will work to de-emphasise the role of nuclear weapons in US strategy, but has not indicated support for unilateral initiatives to reduce capabilities where US has superiority. He supports a global ban on fissile material for weapons, the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and closer engagement with Russia to secure nuclear weapon stockpiles and materials. He has said that he will seek to expand the existing intermediate-range missile treaty between the US and Russia to make it into a global agreement.

On the issue of nuclear proliferation, he has been explicit about the dangers that would be posed by an Iranian program ...

On the issue of nuclear proliferation, he has been explicit about the dangers that would be posed by an Iranian program: ‘Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a vital national security interest of the United States.’ He has not ruled out the use of force against Iran if that state maintains its reticence to comply fully with international regulations on nuclear-related capabilities. ‘I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Everything in my power...everything,’ he said, adding, ‘I will always keep the threat of military action on the table’ (Obama 2008d).

On the Asia Pacific

Obama doesn’t often directly address major strategic issues in Asia. An article that he wrote for *Foreign Affairs* in mid-2007 included only one paragraph directly related to Asian issues. There he argued for ‘a more effective framework in Asia’, an ‘inclusive infrastructure with the countries in East Asia that can promote stability and prosperity and help confront

transnational threats.’ Other comments suggest the US under Obama will remain committed to a long-term strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific that engages China but simultaneously reassures US allies. He has encouraged China to play ‘a responsible role as a growing power’, but noted that the US will compete with China in some areas and cooperate in others (Obama 2007b). And he has said that clean energy development must be a central focus of US relationships with major countries in Europe and Asia.

Advisers

Obama’s principal policy advisers are drawn from the Clinton Administration. They include Jeffrey Bader, former China specialist in President Clinton’s National Security Council and now head of the Brookings Institution China centre; Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter’s national security adviser and now a Center for Strategic and International Studies counsellor and trustee; Richard Clarke, counterterrorism guru for both Presidents Clinton and George W Bush; Anthony Lake, President Clinton’s national security adviser and now a professor at Georgetown’s school of foreign service; and Susan Rice, a foreign assistant secretary of state under the Clinton Administration.

The advisers may shape Obama’s policies in distinctive ways. Jeffrey Bader, for example, has previously criticised the Bush Administration for pursuing policies that could be construed as seeking to ‘contain’ China, either ideologically or in relation to access to energy sources. And his advisory team is strongly interventionist in terms of its strategic preferences. Lake and Rice, during the Clinton years, advocated maintaining a strong US presence in Somalia despite widespread calls for a withdrawal. Lake also urged the Bush Administration in 2006 to threaten military force against Sudan if it did not accept unconditional deployment of a UN force within a week, and has argued for US unilateral intervention in that country without a UN mandate. And Rice has called for the US and its European partners to ‘embrace an emerging international norm that recognizes the “responsibility to protect” innocent civilians facing death on a mass scale and whose governments cannot or will not protect them.’

A different sort of president?

Overall, Obama’s approach to strategic issues seems to have something of the same flavour as his approach to domestic politics, where he tends to see issues through post-partisan lenses. In the same spirit, he might well be more inclined than his opponent to see the world in a post-Westphalian, post-ideological way and feel less need to categorise and label elements of global security in the same way his opponent would. So what constitutes ‘Obama-ism’? Andrew Cherny, a journalist, has written that ‘What Obama is talking about is a bottom-up view of how the world works’ (Cherny 2008).

So what does that tell us about his view of strategy? In a general sense, it suggests he might be more willing to use the full array of US strategic, diplomatic and economic tools to achieve results from the bottom-up, rather than imposing a vision on foreign governments. There are echoes of that approach throughout his speeches and statements. In his policy towards Pakistan, for example, he talks of tripling non-military aid ‘to the Pakistani people’, and ‘standing up’ for ‘their’ aspirations. When talking about Afghanistan he notes that ‘the 21st century’s frontlines are not only on the field of battle—they are found in the training exercise near Kabul, in the police station in Kandahar, and in the rule of law in Heart’ (Obama 2007b).

Obama sees today's challenges as complex and interlinked, and typically requiring more than the use of force to solve. His views might reflect a greater degree of strategic flexibility than McCain might exercise, as well as a more nuanced understanding of what makes America strong over the longer term. But Obama is also less of a known quantity than his opponent: and critics say that he is much more likely to search for new answers to 21st century problems than he is to accept the grinding, on-going reality of hard answers to old problems. For Australia, it will be important that Obama not see ANZUS this way—as merely a hard (and hard-power) answer to an old problem.

Barack Obama: three views

Leon Wieseltier, The New Republic, 12 Feb 2008, 'Obama's Foreign Policy Too Homeopathic'

'One of the striking features of Obama's victory speeches is the absence from these exultations of any lasting allusion to the darker dimensions of our strategic predicament. He makes no applause line out of American defense...My problem is that Obama's declarations in matters of foreign policy and national security have a certain homeopathic quality. He seems averse to the hurtful, expensive, traditional, unedifying stuff.'

Fareed Zakaria, Newsweek, 19 July 2008, 'Obama Abroad'

'Obama never uses the soaring language of Bush's freedom agenda, preferring instead to talk about people's economic prospects, civil society and—his key word—"dignity." He rejects Bush's obsession with elections and political rights, and argues that people's aspirations are broader and more basic—including food, shelter, jobs...This is a view of democratic development that is slow, organic and incremental, usually held by conservatives.'

David Brooks, The New York Times, May 16 2008, 'Obama Admires Bush'

'I asked him if negotiating with a theocratic/ideological power like Iran is different from negotiating with a nation that's primarily pursuing material interests. He acknowledged that "If your opponents are looking for your destruction it's hard to sit across the table from them," but, he continued: "There are rarely purely ideological movements out there. We can encourage actors to think in practical and not ideological terms. We can strengthen those elements that are making practical calculations."'

President McCain

Like Obama, John McCain accepts the need to rebuild US global leadership. But his approach to that task focuses much more upon the traditional verities of US power: a reaffirmation of the US mission in the world, a strengthening of the US's Cold War alliances, and the promotion of a League of Democracies. McCain's conception of national security, while it incorporates elements of a non-traditional security agenda, is still predominantly informed by a Cold War mentality, and a subsequent focus on threats and potential threats to the US that can be dealt with militarily.

In a major speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council in March, McCain described his own worldview:

‘I am, from hard experience and the judgment it informs, a realistic idealist. I know we must work very hard and very creatively to build new foundations for a stable and enduring peace. We cannot wish the world to be a better place than it is. We have enemies for whom no attack is too cruel, and no innocent life safe, and who would, if they could, strike us with the world’s most terrible weapons. There are states that support them, and which might help them acquire those weapons...and will not be placated by fresh appeals to the better angels of their nature. This is the central threat of our time...’ (McCain 2008a).

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A strong commitment to US exceptionalism runs through McCain’s statements. In the article he wrote for *Foreign Affairs* at the end of 2007, he opened with that theme: ‘Since the dawn of our republic, Americans have believed that our nation was created for a purpose. We are, as Alexander Hamilton said, “a people of great destinies.”’ He also closed with it: ‘We are a special nation, the closest thing to a “shining city on a hill” ever to have existed’ (McCain 2007:19).

McCain speaks of US global leadership as taking on a new 21st-century form because of the changing distribution of global power. Now the US cannot lead, as it did in Truman’s day, by virtue of its being the only democratic superpower. ‘Today we are not alone...In such a world, where power of all kinds is more widely and evenly distributed, the United States cannot lead by virtue of its power alone...We must also lead by attracting others to our cause...America must be a model citizen if we want others to look to us as a model’ (McCain 2008a).

Questions have arisen, both in the media and in the Republican Party, as to the consistency of McCain’s foreign policy—in particular over what sort of policies he might pursue in office. Arguments abound over whether he is a neoconservative, a realist or indeed, even a liberal in his outlook, and whether he has the diplomatic skills to keep alive needed security partnerships with authoritarian great powers. His thinking on some issues, like climate change, seems decidedly liberal; on other issues, it seems crusty and unimaginative.

His idea of a League of Democracies, available to act when the United Nations cannot, is a provocative one. McCain describes the plan in terms of Theodore Roosevelt’s vision—like-minded nations working together for peace and liberty—rather than Woodrow Wilson’s plan for a League of Nations. But it may pose as many difficulties for a McCain presidency as it would solve, alienating his administration from strategic partners with whom it must work. China and Russia would be left outside such a structure, as would many Middle Eastern countries. China’s aversion was palpable to a regional quadrilateral security structure tying together the four democracies of the US, Japan, India and Australia; it would scarcely think a global structure much better.

On Iraq and Afghanistan

In McCain's view, Iraq is a crucial battle in a long war against Islamic radicalism in the Middle East; this is a war of absolutes—a struggle for Western principles of freedom and liberty; a war about America's place in the world. 'It is a miscalculation of historic magnitude to believe that the consequences of failure will be limited to one administration or one party. This is an American war, and its outcome will touch every one of our citizens for years to come.' 'There's going to be other wars. I'm sorry to tell you, there's going to be other wars. We will never surrender, but there will be other wars' (McCain 2008b).

But McCain has also seized the opportunity offered by the relative success of the surge in Iraq to talk about a future reallocation of US forces from Iraq to Afghanistan. He has spoken of deploying 'at least three additional brigades' to Afghanistan as those forces become available from Iraq. He has also spoken of the need to do in Afghanistan what General David Petraeus did in Iraq: to bring in a nationwide civil–military campaign focused on providing security for the Afghan population. He has advocated a doubling of the size of the Afghan army, and special efforts to deny terrorists sanctuary in the Pakistani border areas by strengthening the local tribes willing to fight foreign terrorists there.

On proliferation and 'rogue states'

Like Obama, McCain has not ruled out the use of force against Iran if it continues progress on its nuclear weapons program. In his view, Iran is a chief source of terrorist agitation and financing, and rather than a strategy of engagement, he believes that tougher political and economic sanctions will bring about a decisive reorientation in Iranian foreign policy. Importantly, he would revisit the notion that Non-Nuclear Weapons States have an inherent right to nuclear technology, and shift the onus of proof onto suspected violators of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as well as increase the International Atomic Energy Agency's budget. He has also expressed support for the Bush policy of extending nuclear cooperation to India, a non-signatory of the NPT.

On the Asia Pacific

McCain has been more expansive than Obama on how he sees the Asia Pacific. His *Foreign Affairs* article included nine paragraphs on the region in contrast to Obama's one. Behind his interest is the simple acknowledgement that power in the world is moving east, and that the Asia–Pacific region is 'on the rise.' He sees the US legacy alliances from the Cold War as key mechanisms for coping with future Asian challenges. And he has said that we would seek improved partnerships and expanded defence cooperation with a range of Southeast Asian states (McCain 2007:27–29).

He has also sketched out his view of the US–China relationship:

'China and the United States are not destined to be adversaries. We have numerous overlapping interests...But until China moves towards political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interests rather than the bedrock of shared values.'

And he has argued that China should attempt to bolster its claim about its peaceful rise by three devices: by being more transparent about its military build-up; by working with the world to isolate pariah states such as Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe; and by ceasing its efforts to exclude the US from regional forums and economic arrangements.

Advisers

The characters that make up McCain's foreign policy and national security advisory team already give some indication of the trajectory of the Republican candidate's policies towards the Middle East, NATO, and the Asia Pacific. His foreign and national security policy advisory team is made up of both realist and neoconservative voices, including Henry Kissinger, Robert Kagan, Richard Armitage, and Randy Scheunemann. Others include former defense and national security advisor Peter Rodman, and former CIA director James Woolsey.

With a cast of advisers that straddle the neoconservative and realist divide, McCain might well find his administration characterised by an initial internal struggle for dominance. That, of course, would mirror some of the tussles that took place during the early years of the Bush Administration. Scheunemann and Kagan, for example, favour significant increases in defence spending, strengthening ties to democratic allies, and promoting the cause of political and economic freedom abroad. They also argue that America has a 'unique role' in preserving and extending an international order friendly to its security, its prosperity, and its principles. Kagan believes the US should pursue a policy of 'benevolent hegemony', and both believe that regime change is an acceptable policy of last resort to bring about greater regional political stability. Kagan also recently warned, in *New Republic* magazine, of an impending ideological great power competition between the US and Russia and China.

While some of his policies signal a continued US push for 'benevolent hegemony', others—like climate change and his proposal to expel Russia from the G8—suggest a more radical departure from the Bush era.

A traditional president facing new dilemmas?

A President McCain would be a familiar figure for Australian leaders. He is well-versed in the main issues of national security policy, and seems to be more engaged with the Asia Pacific than his opponent. While some of his policies signal a continued US push for 'benevolent hegemony', others—like climate change and his proposal to expel Russia from the G8—suggest a more radical departure from the Bush era. Some of those departures would be welcome to Australia, and would suggest new avenues for future cooperation, others less so. He appears to favour an important renegotiation of the NPT, for example. Another potential issue is how the idea of a League of Democracies translates in the Asian context—it might marginalise China and provoke heightened regional tensions.

John McCain: three views

Hugh White, The Australian, 27 February 2008, 'Nixonian spirit is essential for US–China relations'

'Making concessions to Beijing would play to traditional voter suspicions about Democrats being wobbly on national security and naïve in the conduct of foreign policy. Only Republicans can do such things and survive. As a Republican, McCain starts way ahead as the candidate likelier to be able to lead the US to a new understanding with China.'

Peter Beinart, 'Balancing act: the other Wilsonianism', World Affairs, Summer 2008

'John McCain has retreated from Bush's stance slightly. He seems more open to a meaningful compact on global warming, and he has even proposed cutting America's nuclear stockpiles...But in fundamental ways, he, too, remains the child of Henry Cabot Lodge. He rarely mentions globalization or discusses threats from financial contagion to pandemic disease, which can be addressed only through cooperation, not conflict.'

Fareed Zakaria, 5 May 2008, Newsweek, 'McCain vs. McCain'

'McCain has turned into a foreign policy schizophrenic, alternating between neoconservative posturing and realist common sense...The neoconservative vision... is essentially an affirmation of ideology... [I]t places the United States in active opposition to all non-democracies...The approach lacks any strategic framework... How would the League of Democracies fight terrorism while excluding countries like Jordan, Morocco, Egypt...? McCain appears to think he can magically unite the two main strands in the Republican foreign-policy establishment. But he can't.'

Fine distinctions, but important differences

Australia would be able to work with either Barack Obama or John McCain as US president. The bilateral relationship is so soundly structured that the policies and personalities of individual leaders—while they can sometimes enhance it—do not disrupt it. Both leaders have policies that correlate closely with Australia's foreign and security interests, which centre less upon how familiar the candidate is with Australia itself, and more upon a president's capacities to nurture sound global and regional outcomes. Obama and McCain would both be sophisticated, capable leaders. Both understand the magnitude of the strategic challenges involved in managing the global order.

But each would bring his own approach to the US role in the world. A fundamental difference between the candidates seems to lie in their policy-making orientations. Obama's approach towards international security issues is problem-oriented: he identifies a problem and then engages the partners he believes can best help solve it. In contrast, McCain chooses his partners first. He works preferentially with partners who share similar ideals, and uses those partnerships as the basis for solving individual problems. The distinction, for Australia, is an important one. A McCain presidency would automatically accept Australia as a traditional partner and player in problem-solving activities; an Obama presidency would probably require us to work harder to show our relevance to addressing the challenges of the 21st century.

THE POST-AMERICAN WORLD?

So far, this paper has analysed the future US role in the world by examining the different schools of thought within the US and assuming that US decisions will be the principal ones in determining that role. That assumption is built upon a supposition: that the world is, as Moises Naim, the editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*, claimed in a recent issue of the journal, ‘hungry’ for the return of the US to its traditional global leadership role (Naim 2008: 111). Naim considers that this trend is likely to be a dominant one over ‘the next several years’, as the world accepts the ‘inevitable’ fact that only the US can fill the ‘vacuums’ of international life.

... the America that the world welcomes back is not the America that has characterised recent international politics—the primacist America of the post-9/11 age.

Of course, even in Naim’s vision of the future, the America that the world welcomes back is not the America that has characterised recent international politics—the primacist America of the post-9/11 age:

The demand is for an America that rallies other nations prone to sitting on the fence while international crises are boiling out of control; for a superpower that comes up with innovative international initiatives to tackle the great global challenges of the day, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation and violent Islamist fundamentalism. The demand is for an America that enforces the rules that facilitate international commerce and works effectively to stabilize an accident-prone international economy. Naturally, the world also wants a superpower willing to foot the bill with a largesse that no other nation can match. (Naim 2008: 112)

That presentation is an orthodox one, in which a global order that has supposedly fretted over US distractions eagerly awaits the return of the US to its magisterial position within the international environment, but there's another side to the issue that shouldn't pass unremarked. For example, Joseph Nye suggests that the US is well placed to resume a leadership role, primarily by concentrating on the supply of public goods—including stable balances of power, an open international economy and access to the global commons—to the international community. But Nye is also conscious of an increasing need for the US to share its leadership role (Nye 2008).

Fareed Zakaria's latest work, *The post-American world* (2008), captures an alternative line of enquiry. The US's global role takes its meaning not merely from US decisions, but also from the broader context within which those decisions are taken. Perhaps the US's role in the world will increasingly be shaped by a set of shifting strategic relativities, in which other players steadily assume larger roles in global and regional affairs, thereby gradually marginalising the former dominant player. As Zakaria notes in the opening lines of his book, 'This is not a book about the decline of America, but rather about the rise of everyone else.'

... there's little agreement about the contours of the 'world' in which the Americans will again be bidding for leadership, and in that sense the current strategic picture of the global security environment is just as contested now as it was during the 1990s.

Zakaria posits three tectonic historical shifts: the rise of the West, the rise of the US, and the 'rise of the rest'. The 'birth of a truly global order' increasingly acts as a constraint on the US's role. The theme is one that Zakaria has argued before. In a *Newsweek* column in December 2007, he argued that the US has become obsessively fearful of globalisation's losers, when it needs to focus more on globalisation's winners (Zakaria 2007). The winners pose a much more fundamental challenge to US global leadership than do the losers. His 'winners' include the great Asian powers, as well as the resource-rich countries able to satiate the winners' growing demands. China, India, Brazil and Russia are among the winners, and the world's tallest buildings, largest dams, bestselling movies and most popular mobile phones are all being produced outside the US. Other winners include non-government organisations, which are becoming more powerful every day. And new media sources are on the rise, breaking the dominance of Western media outlets in providing the world with narratives about itself. For Zakaria, globalisation's winners are important precisely because they can 'win' independently of the US. For this group, US global leadership is becoming less necessary.

Of course, there's little agreement about the contours of the 'world' in which the Americans will again be bidding for leadership, and in that sense the current strategic picture of the global security environment is just as contested now as it was during the 1990s. Parag Khanna, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, author of *The Second World*, argues that we're already living in a world of the Big Three (the US, China and Europe) and that those power centres will increasingly compete for influence and power in a 'Second

World' of potential followers. But Khanna shares Zakaria's judgment that geopolitics is becoming truly global: 'Previous eras of balance of power have been among European powers sharing a common culture ... What we have now, for the first time in history, is a global, multicivilisational, multipolar battle' (Khanna 2008).

For Khanna, the likely contest for influence will have a distinct shape: each of the Big Three will aspire to longitudinal domination. Europe will aspire to dominate in the Mediterranean and Africa, China in Asia, the US in Central and South America. Each will bring a novel form of influence to the contest. Europe already has a waiting list of those who want to 'join' its ranks; China will have the clout of a rising power with a rapidly growing economy; the US will play to its military strengths and global reach. Each will attempt to find followers in the Second World, which includes such countries as Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Barry Buzan is another international relations specialist who claims that the US has essentially lost its global leadership role under the Bush Administration, and is now unlikely to recover it. In the Buzan model of the future, the US becomes something like a leader without followers: it's unable to build a coalition of followers for the War on Terror, nor to contain China, nor to remake the Middle East. Democracy and human rights will remain polarising and contentious subjects, he argues, and so poor fodder for coalitional consumption; so, too, will trade issues. Those areas will offer little scope to regrow US influence. The environment might offer some wild-card opportunities for US leadership, and there's a small chance that terrorism will get much worse than it is now, similarly offering a chance for the US to restore a global leadership role. But as things now stand, the US won't have a substantive basis for that role. Still, in the Buzan model, no alternative global leader arises. The result is a weakened structure of global management and increasing regionalisation of the global order.

Across a growing range of geopolitical thinking, then, we can see a set of claims that the US role in the world is changing because the world has moved on.

Across a growing range of geopolitical thinking, then, we can see a set of claims that the US role in the world is changing because the world has moved on. The basis of those claims is that the world hasn't stood still while waiting for the US to find its rightful role. Indeed, it has discovered that US leadership is less central to global success, and certainly less central to 'winning'. In consequence, the US-shaped world and the institutions that were built by American power, as well as US power itself, have become less instrumental in achieving outcomes in the 21st century world.

It's difficult to judge the extent to which such claims are real or fanciful, but the idea that global political power is shifting away from the US, or even away from the West more generally, is common in modern geopolitical debate. In addition to the papers and books cited above, Kishore Mahbubani's latest book, *The new Asian hemisphere: the irresistible shift of global power to the East*, stakes a claim that the Western era of domination is ending and that the Asian century has arrived. David Rothkopf, author of *Superclass*, argues for a different picture of the modern world: a picture in which nation-states are increasingly bypassed by a new global elite better suited than most national leaders to operating on the global stage.

Like Zakaria, Khanna and Buzan, Rothkopf and Mahbubani don't agree on the future shape of global politics, but both point to new distributions of global power that dilute the influence of the US President.

It's also difficult to imagine the US global role coming to an end quite as abruptly as some commentators assume. The US remains a particularly potent global power. It is rich, technologically advanced, democratic, and militarily strong.

It's also difficult to imagine the US global role coming to an end quite as abruptly as some commentators assume. The US remains a particularly potent global power. It is rich, technologically advanced, democratic, and militarily strong. It faces no serious internal disruptions of the kind that typically hinder other states. It has remarkable adaptivity in both its economy and society. But it's also true that other power centres are rising. Even Goldman Sachs research on the future development trajectories of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) confirms that. We can't be sure about how the trajectories of the late-industrialising powers might be affected by high—and rising—oil prices. Still, the long-term trend still seems to point towards more prominent international roles for a number of countries. The global leadership role that has long been America's must—at some point—reflect the shifting distribution of power.

THE US AND AUSTRALIA

It matters to Australia what sort of role the US plays in the world. Many people think Australian strategy is based on notions of self-reliance and independence—on our ability to be a middle-power ‘player’ that ‘punches above its weight’ in its immediate region. In part it is, but it’s also based on statecraft. That’s what people mean when they say that the ANZUS Treaty is central to our strategic policy. ANZUS is an instrument that serves many functions for us. In a practical sense, it allows us a better trained and better equipped military than we could otherwise have. In a direct sense, it helps to underwrite Australia’s security, by providing us with a formal pledge of US assistance if we’re ever attacked. But, just as importantly, the treaty is a vehicle that allows Australia to make a strategic contribution to sustaining a favourable pattern of power in the world. It’s our key instrument in a strategy of order-building.

ANZUS is an old, well-established alliance relationship. Its intimacy has increased since New Zealand left the partnership, and in particular since 9/11. In a time of war, it has become an operational alliance, and not merely a peacetime set of agreements meant to play a role in the regional balance of the Asia–Pacific area. The Australian connection has been an important one for the US in recent years, when some US allies have vacillated. Only a handful of the US’s ‘legacy’ allies have been there for the Americans in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The United Kingdom and Australia have been at the forefront of that handful.

Washington policy-makers do have a sense of a ‘special’ relationship with Australia, and that sense has encouraged them to expand the relationship and bring a new intimacy and engagement to the alliance. The Howard government successfully pressed the Americans to give greater definition to the meaning of the special relationship, in terms of access and privileges. A message for Australians from these recent developments is that the ANZUS relationship is not a static thing: it evolves and develops, reflecting the efforts that the partners bring to it.

Further, a relatively high degree of ‘leader sympatico’ has been an important element of recent US–Australia relations across the political spectrum: Keating and Clinton, and Howard and Bush, have each enjoyed close personal relationships. Might we expect to see a repeat? That depends on who is elected US president. An Obama–Rudd relationship might work a little better than a McCain–Rudd relationship. Of course, other domestic political considerations will also play a role in the way both countries think about the alliance. The alliance attracts strong bipartisan support in both countries, but a recent survey by the US Studies Centre in Sydney suggested that Australians’ confidence in the US had been eroded by recent events, especially by the Iraq War. Similar results have been reported even in the US, suggesting that Americans currently lack confidence in their own global leadership role. We shouldn’t take the relationship for granted.

So far, there are few indications on the public record as to how a new US president might seek to alter the ANZUS relationship. That’s probably because the candidates have no intention of altering the relationship and are happy with it the way it is. Indeed, Washington is unlikely to be the principal driver in any major reformulation of the ANZUS alliance. Previous examples of major alliance perturbation have tended to originate from the smaller partner rather than the larger one. The French decision in 1966 to quit the NATO Military Council and to withdraw its military forces from NATO command was one such case. New Zealand’s 1984–86 attempt to define an alliance relationship shorn of nuclear obligations was another. The Philippines’ closure of US military bases in 1991–92—a result of both the eruption of Mount Pinatubo and opposition to the bases in the Philippines Senate—might even be thought to constitute a third case. All three cases suggest that the ANZUS alliance would be more vulnerable to a major shift of political opinion in Australia than to a shift in the US.

True, the US is increasingly attempting to ‘globalise’ its Cold War legacy alliances in order to give them more purchase in areas of growing strategic importance. The two ANZUS partners have typically placed different emphases on different regions of the world. For much of the Cold War, Australia saw the world very much from the perspective of its Asia–Pacific environment, while the US’s focus was definitely transatlantic. Even today, more distant regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia tend to feature less prominently in the Australian strategic mindset, and we have to work to define our strategic interests there.

The US, as the global leader, has a different view. For a hegemonic power, national interests and systemic interests tend to be one and the same. Bearing in mind Wilkinson’s point that the US isn’t a true hegemonic power, it’s sufficiently central to the current global order for Americans to think of the Middle East in systemic terms and to believe that the role they have to play there is a key one. Americans differ over how best to play that role, and in particular over the use of armed force, but their perceptions of the region aren’t the same as ours.

The US presidential candidates differ in their public positions on the US’s future engagement in Iraq. But there might be less daylight between the two than is sometimes supposed. Even the Bush Administration has in recent months canvassed the option of withdrawing some US forces from Iraq over coming months, although it seems to believe that an on-going presence will be required for a considerable time to come. The surge was always seen as something of a short-term political strategy, designed to pressure-cook a solution to Iraq’s security and political problems in the relatively short time still available to the current US President. That led some analysts to see the surge as the Americans’ last throw of the dice in Iraq, with nothing but withdrawal to follow.

True, the US will need to rest some forces after the surge, but it will probably want to keep the question of how long US soldiers spend on or off the battlefield separate from the larger

strategic question about its role in Iraq. The larger mission is shaped by a range of factors both inside and outside Iraq's borders, but which seem likely to be important enough to a succeeding president to ensure some continuity in US policy on Iraq. Those factors include:

- maintaining sufficient troops in country to support the political process and build more competent Iraqi forces
- avoiding 'losing', which might be defined as Iraq becoming an Al Qaeda sanctuary, slipping into open civil war, or drawing its neighbours into the conflict
- maintaining within the broader region a capacity to offset an emboldened Iran.

All of those factors will remain important in shaping the strategic calculus of US engagement.

The Middle East sits atop large fractions of proven oil and gas reserves and will remain a region of critical strategic importance to the US for the foreseeable future. Because of that, the US cannot afford a precipitate withdrawal from Iraq: such a withdrawal would risk leaving a collapsed state and a bloody civil conflict at the heart of the region. Despite the aspirational troop withdrawal targets reportedly outlined in the draft US-Iraq agreement of August 2008, substantial numbers of US forces are likely to remain in Iraq for a protracted period. The US 'age' in the Middle East is not over, but what might be drawing to a close there is the age of 'forceful democracy'.

Even while moving away from the doctrine of forceful democracy, the US has learned several lessons from its engagement in Iraq. One of the main lessons is that its ground forces need to be expanded. Such expansion reflects a judgment that US ground forces will be involved in persistent conflict in coming decades, and the Middle East is likely to remain a prime area of US intervention. Apart from its oil wealth, it's an area where even nontraditional security challenges—like energy and proliferation issues—all too readily mutate into traditional state-on-state conflicts.

Afghanistan might also pose a difficult and more direct set of problems for the bilateral relationship. Both presidential candidates have committed to a further increase of US troops to the country, and might expect other force contributors also to step up to the plate in a more fulsome manner. The burden of that expectation would probably fall on NATO partners rather than on Australia, and it seems unlikely that either Obama or McCain has yet thought through that issue. But with US troop numbers increasing in Afghanistan in the 2009–2010 period, a possible drawing down of Australia's Dutch partners in Oruzgan province scheduled for 2010, a potential refocusing of US combat effort on the Afghanistan–Pakistani border region, and an election due in Australia in 2010, Afghanistan could still create hurdles aplenty for Canberra's relationship with Washington.

One area where Australia will be keen to retain US engagement is Asia. An Asia from which the US is largely absent would be radically different from the Asia we've become familiar with. It's useful to put the US role in the Middle East and the US role in the Asia–Pacific region side by side, as they make a fascinating contrast. If Washington had its choice, it would want the Middle East to look a lot more like the Asia–Pacific region. In Asia, Washington sees a region that is well enmeshed with globalisation, where economic growth is dynamic, and where the local large powers tend to be responsible stakeholders. In the Middle East, it sees a region with low levels of global engagement, fitful and oil-dependent economic growth, and local great powers still driven by national and competing priorities.

The US has long seen its role in Asia and the Pacific as central to stability there. Its alliance structure, the fifty-year-old San Francisco system, has been the principal security architecture in the region, and its promotion of open markets and capitalist economies has been an

important driver of regional economic growth and opportunity. Moreover, Washington believes that in Asia, unlike the Middle East, democracy and good governance have made important inroads. ASEAN countries have emerged from long periods of authoritarian leadership to adopt more democratic systems. So has South Korea. Japan was ‘made’ democratic by World War II (something US policy-makers still talk about in relation to their current efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan). India, long a democracy, has moved to a larger regional role. And China has become an important partner in regional stability; its assistance in helping to broker the latest stage of the North Korean denuclearisation program is only the latest evidence of that.

So the US vision of the Asia–Pacific region remains essentially an optimistic one. That is, it sees good prospects for the slow transition of the regional security structure into one in which the emerging regional great powers take a larger share of responsibility for the regional security order. It still sees a prominent role for itself in that dynamic order, but the role is less one of US hegemony and more one of orchestrated partnership.

An abrupt US withdrawal from the Asia–Pacific region would be highly destabilising for regional security. It would trigger a series of events—including probable nuclear proliferation by a range of states—that would make regional security balances more adversarial and worrying. It would remove the world’s strongest power from its regional engagements and ties, encouraging the growth of strategic contests for local dominance. And it would spur a growth in competitive maritime capabilities as many trade-dependent Asian countries worried more about the security of maritime traffic.

But no abrupt US withdrawal from the region is in prospect. Indeed, at the recent Shangri-la dialogue in Singapore, Defense Secretary Gates spoke of the US as ‘a resident power’ here. So, for Australia, some of the most important dynamics in its relationship with the US will be shaped by the issues canvassed in Chapter 5 of this paper: the growth of regionalist power centres, and the tendency to think of the ‘post-American age’ in global politics. In many ways, Australia could think of itself as one of globalisation’s winners, because of its resource strength in a resource-hungry world. We are also becoming tied more closely to the rising Asian great powers. The ties are mainly economic, but they highlight the slippage of the US position in Asia. William Overholt, director of the RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy, has recently written of a ‘disoriented’ America in Asia—an America that ‘still guards the fort but surrenders the bank’ (Overholt 2008). America has focused on military burdens and democracy promotion in the Middle East, says Overholt, and has taken its eye off the ball in Asia, where the real game is economic development and the construction of regional institutions. Australia would want a new US President to think more about Asia and how to rebuild US influence there.

Even if such rebuilding were to occur, Australia would still be looking at a slow shift in the global tectonic plates towards a new global and regional order. Buzan, Zakaria, Khanna and others have one thing in common in their predictions for world order: they’re all describing a world in which the relative share of Western influence is declining. Australia has lived its entire existence since white settlement under a global order shaped by Western leaders, first Britain and subsequently the US. A world in which US grand strategy remains mixed and uncertain, and in which non-Western civilisations exercise greater influence, will require greater Australian diplomatic and strategic dexterity. We must prepare for that world by building our own strategic linkages in Asia, and it would make sense for us to begin that work while we enjoy a solid alliance relationship with the US.

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The eagle in a turbulent world US and its global role

Australia is one of the US's closest allies, and its interest in America's role in the world is both direct and immediate. This year's presidential election in the US is important—for one thing, it will tell us whether the grand strategy of the War on Terror president, George W Bush, can be passed smoothly to a successor. If it can, it would suggest that we are returning to a level of continuity in US grand strategy not seen since the end of the Cold War. Nine successive presidents supported a Cold War grand strategy of deterrence and containment, but US strategic policy since the fall of the Wall has been fitful and uncertain—part realist, part liberal internationalist and part primacist in its make-up.

Interests, strategic culture, the American 'way of war' and existing commitments will all help to sustain US global engagement in the 21st century. Regardless of who wins the election, the US is not about to disengage from the world. Isolationism has little support in the US political mainstream, and even the liberal internationalists want an Americanised world order. The core of US exceptionalism, that American power is 'good power', will remain a key driver of US strategic policy. Still, there are possibilities for important shifts in US strategic behaviour. 'Alternative Americas' exist, and we explore some of them in this paper—in particular the idea of the US as a non-hegemonic power.

We also explore, briefly, the idea that US global leadership faces new constraints. Even though the US is not in decline, we are witnessing the rise of a set of players who can increasingly 'win' without US support. Those players include the rising Asian powers, the resource suppliers, and many non-state actors. We are entering a period when global leadership will increasingly be a shared, rather than a solitary, condition. And that condition will shape our own policies. The bilateral relationship between Australia and the US will remain strong whoever is president. But its texture might be profoundly influenced by the outcome of the election: with one of the candidates promising more of a post-partisan world, Australia might have to work harder to maintain its influence in Washington.