

WHY BUSH GRAND STRATEGY FAILS

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the Bush administration embarked on the most ambitious rethinking of American grand strategy since the early years of the Cold War. Controversial ideas about the preventive war, coalitions of the willing, and hegemonic dominance were enshrined as doctrine. Bush administration officials also sent signals to the world about basic shifts in America's postwar national security policies regarding the use of force, deterrence, and alliance partnership. President Bush announced a "war on terror" and a determination to "take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge."¹ The American invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 – a preventive war launched over the opposition of many Western allies – was the definitive expression of this strategic reorientation.²

But in both general and specific ways, this Bush "revolution" in foreign policy has not succeeded – even if it is judged in terms of the expectations of administration officials who shaped and pursued it. Most specifically, the war in Iraq has failed in terms of its original justifications – disarmament and liberation. The failure to find WMD and a welcoming people have intensified American and international opposition to President Bush's essentially unilateral and preventive use of force. The absence of planning for postwar Iraq and the distortions of prewar intelligence also reveal policy failure. The escalating violence in Iraq, mounting costs in American blood and treasure, increasingly strapped military forces, and the scandal of the Abu Ghraib prison abuses are testimony to administration policy misjudgements. Not surprisingly, domestic support for the war – and Bush policy in Iraq – has reached new lows.³

More generally, the Bush administration's grand strategy is failing when measured in terms of international support and the strength of its overall international political position. At

¹ President George W. Bush, West Point commencement address, 1 June 2002.

² For the formal statement of Bush grand strategy, see [The National Security Strategy of the United States](#) (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

³ A recent Newsweek poll, for example, found that 61 percent of Americans disapproved of the war George W. Bush is handling in Iraq. Moreover, 50 percent of those polled indicated that the United States is losing ground in its efforts to establish security and democracy in Iraq. See [Newsweek Poll](#): "Bush's Battle: More Americans are questioning U.S. strategy in Iraq," 6 August 2005. Web exclusive.

the heart of the Bush doctrine is the proposition that the United States will act directly and – if necessarily, alone – in pursuit of global security threats that it itself identifies, and in this struggle countries are either with United States or against it. “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” President Bush declared in a joint session of Congress soon after the September 11th attacks.⁴ These exhortations have done little to rally international support. In effect, the United States has said that their treatment by the world’s most powerful state will hinge on their fidelity to Washington’s war on terrorism. The Bush administration’s more general impulse toward unilateralism and resistance to international rules, institutions, treaties, and commitments makes it worse. In the eyes of many around the world, President Bush’s war on terrorism has released the United States from the discipline of international law and obligations but simultaneously put other countries under Washington’s thumb, to be held to standards imposed by America.

These circumstances have created a crisis in America’s global position – a crisis that has not yet abated. Anti-Americanism around the world has never been so intense or wide-spread even among traditional friends. If American power is measured not only in terms of hard military power but as a larger bundle of assets which include prestige, credibility, respect, and the ready support of close allies, the United States has just witnessed the most massive collapse in national power in the country’s history. It is a crisis of legitimacy in which many governments and peoples around the world have lost confidence in the leadership and moral authority of America.

What explains the Bush foreign policy failure? The debate today focuses almost entirely on the Iraq war itself -- failures of intelligence, planning, diplomacy, and public candor. But the problems of Bush foreign policy run much deeper. It is American power that has so unsettled the world. There is a global worry about how this new post-911 American-dominated unipolar world will work. The fundamental questions of world politics -- namely, who benefits and who commands -- are the not-so-hidden subtext of debate about American power in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. To simply blame the failings of the Bush administration in Iraq is to miss the deeper source of America’s problems – problems that will bedevil subsequent presidents wielding different grand strategies.

The underlying sources of Bush foreign policy failure are two-fold. First, the Bush administration does not understand the implications of the two most historic transformations in world politics in half a century -- the rise of American unipolar power and changing norms of state sovereignty. The first of these transformations is the most obvious. It is the near-monopoly on the use of international force that the United States has enjoyed since the demise of the Soviet Union. But the second – an eroding norm of sovereignty marked by rising acceptance of intervention in the traditional internal affairs of states – is no less important. These dual epochal shifts in the underlying character of the international system make American power -- regardless of specific Washington foreign policies -- more worrisome to other states than in the past. But the specific content of Bush foreign policy makes this problem worse. Bush strategic ideas about unilateralism, hegemony, and preemption are not in themselves so new or revolutionary, as John Lewis Gaddis has argued recently.⁵ But these ideas are being implemented in a global system

⁴ George W. Bush, speech to joint session of Congress, 20 September 2001.

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, Surprise, Security and the American Experience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

that has undergone radical changes in recent decades that make the unilateral and preemptive exercise of American power unusually provocative and alarming.

Second, a basic contradiction lies at the heart of the Bush administration's national security vision. The Bush administration wants both to serve as the global provider of security and simultaneously to pursue a traditional conservative foreign policy based on narrowly defined self-interest. That is, it wants to solve the Hobbesian problem of order by becoming a global Leviathan but it also wants to use American power to advance nationalist goals at the expense of others and reduce its commitment to international rules and institutions. But it cannot do both – it must choose. The United States cannot claim to act on behalf of the international community while shunning it, to enforce rules of international conduct while ignoring them, and – perhaps most importantly of all – to assert U.S. exceptionalism while promoting what we call universal values.

Bush foreign policy will continue to fail – and so will the foreign policy of any future president – unless American grand strategic ideas are designed to deal with the global instability caused by American unipolar power. If it persists in its ways, the Bush administration will find itself in a futile effort to govern the world as a conservative Leviathan. The world will recognize this Leviathan for what it is: empire. Such an approach is not sustainable. It will end in tears; indeed it already has. The United States will be successful only if it seeks to use its commanding power to provide a wider and more mutually acceptable array of public goods delivered through a system of global rules and institutions. That is, it must become, in effect, a liberal Leviathan.

In this paper, I first identify the underlying shifts in America's power position – what I call the Westphalian flip. Next I look at the “double shift” in Bush foreign policy: the rise of neo-conservative, post-Westphalian grand strategy, and the return of conservative nationalist impulses in American foreign policy. After this, I examine the conditions under which an American grand strategy built on unipolar dominance could be sustained.

THE WESTPHALIAN FLIP

The first source of failure in Bush foreign policy is a double transformation of the international state system. For 500 years, international order has been based on two elements which together make up the Westphalian system. At the international level, order has been maintained by the diffusion and equilibrium of power. Multiple states with roughly equal capabilities – the so-called great powers – balanced each other, alone or in concert, in an attempt to create order through equilibrium. Domestically, countries have been sovereign, deploying what the German sociologist Max Weber called a “monopoly on the legitimate the use of physical force within a given territory.”⁶ This was the classic understanding of the modern nation-state. The result was a two-tiered Westphalian system: balance and equilibrium of power internationally and strong states with supreme legal authority in their own territory.⁷

⁶ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 78.

⁷ For discussions of the logic and evolution of the Westphalian system, see Leo Gross, “The Peace of Westphalia, 1648-1948,” in Richard A. Falk and Wolfram F. Hanreider, eds., International Law and Organization (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968), pp. 45-67; Hedley Bull, The Anarchical Society (London: Macmillan, 1977); Bull and Adam

But in a dual transformation, the Westphalian order has been flipped on its head. We now have one country -- the United States -- with a quasi-monopoly on the use of force internationally.⁸ We also have growing legitimate international authority over what goes on within countries. Westphalian sovereignty is increasingly contingent.⁹ The layers of the onion of state sovereignty are slowly being peeled away.¹⁰ After World War II, it was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt and other visionary liberals were very important in pushing forward this proclamation of rights that set forth international standards for the treatment of individuals secured not exclusively by their own government but also by the international community. Decades of human rights treaties and conventions followed.¹¹ Added to this, the rise of terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction have created new reasons why the international community might intervene inside states. And, indeed, Bush administration post-911 thinking about “contingent sovereignty” and preemption provide rationales for further outside intrusions.¹²

The first of these two transformations -- the rise of a unipolar system -- would be destabilizing enough. It is no less than a shift in the underlying organizing principle of international order. The Italian scholar, Vittorio Parsi, has called it a transition from pace

Watson, eds., The Expansion of International Society (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); F.H. Hinsley, The Pursuit of Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); K.J. Holsti, Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order, 1648-1989 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁸ See William Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” International Security, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1999), pp. 5-41. For discussions of unipolarity and its implications for great power relations, see Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., Unipolar Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and G. John Ikenberry, ed., America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁹ In his landmark book on sovereignty, Stephen Krasner argues that external or Westphalian sovereignty has always been compromised and violated by powerful states. This is true. But over the postwar era, the scope (i.e. range of issues) and depth (i.e., extent of intervention) over which major states are willing and able to intervene have increased. So too have the realms of intervention that are seen as proper and legitimate. Stephen Krasner, Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ On the changing – and eroding – character of state sovereignty, see Mark W. Zacher, “The Decaying Pillars of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance,” in James N. Rosenau and Ernest-Otto Czempiel, eds., Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gene M. Lyons and Michael Mastanduno, eds., Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Michael Ross Fowler and Julie Marie Bunck, Law, Power, and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); and K.J. Holsti, Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chapter Four.

¹¹ See Jack Donnelly, Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Gordon Lauren, The Evolution of Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), second edition. On Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see Mary Ann Glendon, A World Made New (New York: Random House, 2001).

¹² See Richard Haass, “The Changing Nature of Sovereignty,” lecture at Georgetown University, 14 January 2003 (Washington: U.S. State Department, Policy Planning Staff).

d'equilibrio (“peace of equilibrium”) to a pace egemonica (“hegemonic peace”).¹³ For centuries, the security of states was maintained by ensuring an absence of an overarching power in the international system. Indeed, over the centuries, Western great powers have expended great blood and treasure in heroic efforts to prevent powerful and rising states from gaining hegemonic position in Europe and Asia. The Napoleonic war and the two world wars were all fundamentally about the overturning of these dangerous hegemonic challenges to international order based on the equilibrium of power.¹⁴ British foreign policy since the age of the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V was organized around this fundamental goal: to prevent the rise of a powerful European state that could dominate the continent.

It is therefore not surprising that the world is worried about entering an era where the United States presents itself as a unipolar fait accompli. Unipolarity happened almost without notice during the 1990s. The United States began the decade of the 1990s as the world’s only superpower and it had a better decade than the other major states. It grew faster than an inward looking Europe while Japan stagnated and Russia collapsed. China has grown rapidly in recent years but remains a developing country. America’s expenditures on defense are almost equal to half of global spending. Interestingly, the United States did not fight a hegemonic war to become the unipolar state or overturn the old international order. It simply grew more powerful while other states sputtered or failed. This peaceful ascent to unipolarity probably has made the transition less destabilizing. But in the aftermath of September 11th and the recent American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, American power has been exposed to the light of day. The simultaneous rise of America’s quasi-monopoly on the use of force and the unbundling of sovereignty is a volatile mixture and must be handled with care.

BUSH GRAND STRATEGY

The Bush administration has eagerly embraced this new unipolar logic. In its vision, outlined in the September 2002 National Security Strategy report, the United States will increasingly stand aloof from the rest of the world and use its unipolar power – most importantly, its military power – to arbitrate right and wrong and enforce the peace.¹⁵ In a Hobbesian world of anarchy, the United States will step forward and act as an order-creating Leviathan. Where in previous eras the problem of order could only be solved by the balancing of power, it will now be solved by American dominance. The dangers of anarchy and balance of power politics will be replaced by the stability of American-directed global hierarchy.

¹³ Vittorio Emanuele Parsi, L'alleanza Inevitabile: Europa e Stati Uniti oltre l'Iraq (Milan: Universita Bocconi Editore, 2003).

¹⁴ Jack Levy, War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975 (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1983).

¹⁵ The United States National Security Strategy Report. For discussions of the NNS report and Bush national security strategy see: John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” Foreign Policy (November/December 2002); Philip Zelikow, “The Transformation of National Security,” The National Interest (Spring 2003); Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” Political Science Quarterly, 118 (Fall 2003), pp. 365-88; and G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Imperial Ambition,” Foreign Affairs (September/October 2002)

The Bush administration proposes to pursue what might be called a hegemonic strategy with imperial characteristics.¹⁶ The United States will remain a global military power in a class by itself. It will have no “peer competitor.” It will increasingly stand above the international community, less encumbered by rules and norms of alliance and multilateral cooperation.¹⁷ But it will also take on unique obligations to identify threats and keep the peace. The Bush administration is, in effect, making a grand offer to the rest of the world. The United States will serve as the unipolar provider of global security, but in return the world must allow the United States to be treated differently. The United States will not be obliged to play by the same rules as other states. Such is the price the world must pay for the American provision of the global public good of security.

In the Bush vision, the United States is providing a service to the rest of the world. It spends more on defense. It deploys its troops and navies around the world. If the United States were to pull back from its far flung commitments in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East, these regions would suffer greater insecurity and instability. The problems of anarchy would return. But in return for the provision of security, the United States must be allowed to operate outside the full array of international rules and agreements. It will not sign the International Criminal Court because it uniquely has troops in countries in every corner of the world that make the United States more vulnerable to politically-inspired legal actions. It cannot sign the Land Mines Treaty because of its unique role in protecting South Korea along the DMZ. In this new unipolar order, the United States will be at least partially above the law but the world will get what it should value most -- peace and security.¹⁸

For many Americans, there is an additional attraction of this unipolar grand strategy -- it gives full sway to American exceptionalism. This self perception, as old as the nation’s founding, sees America as a unique world historical experiment; a polity more noble and enlightened than any other on earth. If in the past, American exceptionalism was possible only through isolation or withdrawal from the outside world, now American exceptionalism is made possible by global dominance.¹⁹

¹⁶ It is useful to distinguish between a hegemonic order with liberal characteristics and a hegemonic order with imperial characteristics. An order with liberal characteristics is built around multilateralism, alliance partnership, strategic restraint, and institutional and rule-based relationships – prominent features of the post-1945 Western system. An order with imperial characteristics is built around American unilateralism, coercive domination, divide and rule strategies, and reduced commitment to shared rules of the game. For a discussion of these two logics, see G. John Ikenberry, “Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age,” Review of International Studies, Vol. 30 (Fall 2004), pp. 609-30.

¹⁷ In what appears to be a continuation of this strategy, President Bush announced on 17 August 2004 that the U.S. intended to withdraw 70,000 troops from Western Europe and East Asia. See Mike Allen and Josh White, “President Outlines Overseas Troop Cut,” Washington Post, 17 August 2004, p. A1. This announcement has been interpreted by some critics as evidence that the administration seeks to reduce its alliance commitments. See, for example, Ron Asmus, “Bush’s Withdrawal From the World,” The Washington Post, 18 August 2004, p. A19.; and Quentin Peel, “The Wrong Way to Change the World,” The Financial Times, 19 August 2004, p. 13.

¹⁸ On the Bush administration’s efforts to disentangle the U.S. from international rules and treaties, see Ivo H. Daalder and James Lindsay, America Unbound (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2003).

¹⁹ See Anders Stephanson, Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

This unipolar grand vision was introduced in President Bush's West Point speech in the summer of 2002. "America has, and intends to keep, military strength beyond challenge, thereby making destabilizing arms races pointless and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits."²⁰ In effect, President Bush is arguing that centuries of great power military rivalry is over. This is a breathtaking statement. United States power is to be used to transform international politics itself, making old balance of power rivalries obsolete. American unipolar power is good for the world.²¹

But in standing above the rest of the world, the Bush administration has also announced a new freedom of action in the American use of force. It is a double-barrel message. First, in the words of the National Security Strategy report, the United States claims a new right to use force "to act against emerging threats before they are fully formed."²² Self-defense is redefined to include preventive war. And second, in the words of the President in his 2004 State of the Union message, "the United States does not need a permission slip to take action to defend itself."²³ Washington does not need to subject its security decisions to international scrutiny.

The flipping of the logic of the Westphalian state system together with the imperial-hegemonic vision of the Bush administration constitute a revolution in world politics. Think of the international system as a town. For most of its history the town had multiple police authorities and districts scattered across its neighborhoods. But suddenly all this changes and the town now has only one sheriff – and all the locks are off the doors. Moreover, the sheriff indicates that he will be most concerned to protect his own house but he also announces the right to use police power when, how and where he wants in order to go after threats to the peace that lurk elsewhere -- threats that may not be manifest yet and which only he will decide if they are worthy of action. There are no elections, review boards, or other mechanisms of accountability. So the question confronting the townspeople is: will the sheriff be a responsible servant of the public interest or will he abuse his power, intimidate townspeople, and trespass at will? The sheriff may be perfectly honest and upstanding but then again he might be capricious and abusive. It is perfectly reasonable for the townspeople to be worried, even frightened, and to be watching every little move the sheriff makes. The point is this: regardless of the specific policies of the Bush administration – a town with one self-appointed sheriff and no locks on the doors is a new and potentially unstable situation. The sheriff will need to be very careful about his actions if he wants to retain the confidence of the townspeople.

CONSERVATIVE DISCOURSE ABOUT ORDER

²⁰ "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," White House Press Release, 1 June 2002.

²¹ For a discussion of this neo-Wilsonian vision, see Fareed Zakaria, "Our Way: The Trouble with Being the World's Only Superpower," *The New Yorker*, 14 and 21 October 2002.

²² White House, National Security Strategy Report.

²³ President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 2004.

The Westphalian transformation together with the Bush vision of a unipolar Leviathan would be enough to unsettle the global system. But there is another underlying source of discontent that creates contradictions in Bush foreign policy -- the dominance of conservative ideas about American foreign policy. At each of the earlier great historic junctures in the last century -- 1919, 1945 and 1989-91 -- American officials evoked liberal ideas about international order. The world is now at a new historic juncture where again the United States is in a commanding position to shape the emerging order. But now -- if only by accident of elections and timing -- conservative ideas hold sway. The world is a bit shocked and is pushing back. But the more important problem for Bush foreign policy is that these conservative ideas are fundamentally inconsistent with the American unipolar management of the system.

It is remarkable that at each of the last great historical turning points when the United States was in a position to shape global order its leaders invoked liberal ideas. This certainly was not inevitable. After the two world wars and the Cold War, the United States talked about international order as a progressive, liberal project. American power was to be used to strengthen the fabric of international community, to construct new rules and institutions for managing global problems, and to bind the United States more closely to other democratic states.²⁴ Woodrow Wilson famously called for a democratic world order where peace was maintained through collective security and the rule of law.²⁵ FDR and Truman articulated a vision of international order anchored in a Western system of cooperative security and multilateral cooperation. Indeed, the period from 1944 to 1952 witnessed the most ambitious and hyper-active period of institution building ever seen. The assertion of American power was associated with the strengthening of the rules and institutions of the wider system.²⁶ After the Cold War, both the elder Bush and Clinton administrations also invoked liberal ideas to guide foreign policy in the new era. Bush and his Secretary of State, James Baker, argued that even without the Soviet threat, the United States and Western Europe formed an unbreakable Euro-Atlantic community. President Clinton articulated more grandiose notions of a democratic alliance and global community.²⁷

²⁴ For overviews of these American order-building moments that stress liberal-progressive impulses, see G. John Ikenberry, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); John Gerard Ruggie, Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Tony Smith, America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁵ See Thomas J. Knock, To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and John Robert Cooper, Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁶ Ikenberry, After Victory, Chapter Five. Accounts of specific aspects of this institution building agenda include: Robert C. Hilderbrand, Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Robert A. Pollard, Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); John Gimbel, The Origins of the Marshall Plan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976); Michael J. Hogan, The Marshall Plan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert E. Osgood, NATO: The Entangling Alliance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). For a survey of the ideas and personalities, see David Fromkin, In the Time of the Americans: The Generation That Changed America's Role in the World (New York: Knopf, 1995).

²⁷ Ikenberry, After Victory, Chapter Six.

Conservative foreign policy discourse focuses not on how to run or remake the global order but on how to protect the nation's interests in a competitive and dangerous world of anarchy. Three convictions are most important. First, there is a deep skepticism about anything that might be called the "international community." So to try to use American foreign policy to strengthen the international community or to adjust policy to abide by its norms and precepts is misguided -- even dangerous. United States operates in a system of states where power politics prevails. Condoleezza Rice articulated this conservative realist view in 2000 in describing how a Republican administration would differ from Clinton liberal internationalism. Many in the United States are "uncomfortable with the notions of power politics, great powers, and power balances," Rice observed. "In an extreme form, this discomfort leads to a reflexive appeal instead to notions of international law and norms, and the belief that the support of many states -- or even better, of institutions like the United Nations -- is essential to the legitimate exercise of power." In contrast to this view, which she describes as deeply rooted in Wilsonian ideas and for which "there are strong echoes in the Clinton administration," a Republican foreign policy would be internationalist but it would also "proceed from the firm ground of the national interest, not from the interests of an illusory international community."²⁸ At best, the notion of an international community is a polite fiction.

Second, conservative discourse also downplays the importance of international institutions and rules as tools of American foreign policy. Rules and institutions are primarily useful for weak states that want to try to constrain powerful states, most particularly the United States. State Department official John Bolton argues, for example, that the postwar growth of multilateral treaties and agreements -- the so-called "global governance" movement -- is primarily a liberal agenda that threatens American sovereignty and self-rule.²⁹ And so a dominant conservative theme is prudent resistance to entangling multilateral institutions. The rise of American power after the Cold War provides an opportunity to restore American policy autonomy and sovereign control of its affairs.³⁰

Finally, conservative discourse suggests that the source of legitimacy in American foreign policy is domestic, rooted in popular sovereignty and the constitution. The rectitude of American actions is ensured by the legitimacy of the nation's democratic process and not by the opinions of other governments. States around the world may approve or disapprove of what the United States does but they do not speak for some vague international standard of legitimacy; on the contrary, their views reflect their own national interests and (unlike the exceptional United States) nothing more lofty or virtuous. As John Bolton has remarked: "The question of legitimacy is frequently raised as a veiled attempt to restrain American discretion in undertaking unilateral action, or multilateral action taken outside the confines of an international

²⁸ Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (January/February 2000), pp. 45-62.

²⁹ John Bolton, "Should We Take Global Governance Seriously?" *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2000), pp. 205-22.

³⁰ This view is expressed, for example, by conservative pundit, Max Boot, who thinks that the growth of American power in the 1990s has reduced its incentives to operate in a multilateral order: "Any nation with so much power always will be tempted to go it alone. Power breeds unilateralism. It is as simple as that." Boot, "Doctrine of the 'Big Enchilada,'" *The Washington Post*, 14 October 2002, p. A29.

organization, even when our actions are legitimated by the operation of that Constitutional system. The fact, however, is that this criticism would delegitimize the operation of our own Constitutional system, while doing nothing to confront the threats we are facing. Our actions, taken consistently with Constitutional principles, require no separate, external validation to make them legitimate.”³¹ A concern for the “decent opinion of mankind” is dismissed as naïve, even anti-patriotic.

These conservative themes all lead in the same direction -- toward an old-style nationalist-realist foreign policy.³² The United States attempts to defend itself and get what it can in a competitive state system while also protecting its national sovereignty. America presents itself to the world as a hard-nosed, self-regarding actor. The United States does not have any special obligation to uphold the international order, provide public goods, or abide by global norms. It is out for itself like all other states. The United States is a great power in a world of competing great powers. Power rules. The words of the Athenian general in the Melian dialogue, as recorded by Thucydides, still captures the essence of this view: “The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”

Conservative ideas about international order have always coexisted with liberal ones in the American experience, but they have not guided Washington policy at the most critical order building junctions of the last century. But today they do -- and this creates problems. The immediate problem is that these ideas alarm people around the world, particularly because the international system seems so fluid and Washington seems to be making such a radical turn in its orientation toward order. The historical accident that liberal ideas predominated at America’s three previous great order building moments might have convinced the outside world that less progressive ideas about order were absent in Washington or easily put aside when push comes to shove. It must be surprising -- even shocking -- for foreigners to hear official Washington use such a different set of ideas in talking about post-911 world order. It is all the more distressing because the stakes are so huge. In a well established bipolar international order, like the one that shaped the world during the Cold War era, conservative foreign policy impulses were less threatening to allies. Power constraints put a check on such ideas. But today – with the collapse of Cold War bipolarity, the rise of American predominance, the strange election of George Bush, and the dramatic shift in security threats – these conservative ideas are both more firmly at the center of American foreign policy and potentially more consequential in shaping the new international order. And so the world has reacted.

But the longer-term problem with the dominance of conservative discourse is that it is fundamentally in contradiction with the Bush administration’s vision of the United States as the

³¹ John Bolton, “‘Legitimacy’ in International Affairs: The American Perspective in Theory and Operation,” Remarks to the Federalist Society, Washington, D.C., November 13, 2003.

³² Walter Russell Mead describes this foreign policy orientation as Jacksonian. See Mead, Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World (New York: Knopf, 2001). This Jacksonian or nationalist-realist orientation should be distinguished from a classical realist orientation which can actually be quite internationalist – manifest, for example, in the Nixon-Kissinger policy of détente . See Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

new global Leviathan.³³ Bush foreign policy cannot have it both ways. In the unipolar vision, an American Leviathan provides security to the world. It upholds and enforces order as a public good. In return, the rest of the world accepts American dominance. After all, it is not an inherently bad deal for most states. But when fused with conservative ideas about order, it results in a global Leviathan that is fundamentally above the law and out for itself. The idea is to use American unipolar power to replace the risks and dangers of a balance of power system with the peace and stability made possible in a single, unified order. Liberals who never liked the balance of power system can understand the attraction of this vision, particularly when it is coupled with a commitment to promoting democracy and human rights. This is a vision that is not that far away from the progressive international ambitions of Wilsonian liberalism.³⁴ But when coupled with conservative ideas about the use of American power – manifest as profound skepticism about international community, multilateral institutions, and legitimacy – it becomes unipolarity with no strings attached. It is a unipolar bargain in which there is no bargaining. It is a vision of a conservative Leviathan -- and it is both intellectually and politically untenable.

The contradiction in the Bush foreign policy is that it offers the world a system in which America rules the world but does not abide by rules. This is, in effect, empire.³⁵ As such it is both unsustainable at home and unacceptable abroad. A unipolar order without a set of rules and bargains with other countries leads to a system of coercive unipolar American dominance. As the Iraq episode shows all too clearly, under these circumstances other countries will tend to “under supply” cooperation. They will do so either because they decide to free ride on the American provision of security, or because they reject the American use of force that is untied to mutually agreed upon rules and institutions – or both. So the United States will find itself – as it does now – acting more or less alone and incurring the opposition and resistance of other states. This is the point when the conservative unipolar vision becomes unsustainable inside the United States. The American people will not want to pay the price for protecting the world while other countries free ride and resist. This appears true in the case of Iraq: a majority of Americans now believe that the Iraq war was not worth it, after sustaining less than a thousand military deaths.³⁶ The

³³ This contradiction is reinforced in the Bush administration by competing factions that embrace either the unipolar or traditional great power vision. See James Mann, Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet (New York: Viking Press, 2004).

³⁴ See Tony Smith, America's Mission.

³⁵ The rise of unipolarity and Bush grand strategy have together triggered a growing literature on America as empire. For critical views, see Chalmers Johnson, The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Michael Mann, Incoherent Empire (London: Verso, 2003); Benjamin Barber, Fear's Empire: War, Terrorism and Democracy (New York: Norton, 2003); and William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, America's Inadvertent Empire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). For views that see American empire as more benign and sustainable, see Niall Ferguson, Colossus: The Price of America's Empire (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); and Andrew Bacevich, American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of American Diplomacy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). For an overview, see G. John Ikenberry, “Illusions of Empire,” Foreign Affairs (March/April 2004).

³⁶ American public reluctance to act unilaterally to protect and rule the global system can be seen in several ways. First, President Bush's popularity dropped after his 7 September 2003 speech to the nation announcing a need for \$87 billion in funding to support the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. See Mike Allen, “What the \$87 Billion Speech Cost Bush,” Washington Post, 20 September 2003, p. A02. Second, in a German Marshall Fund public opinion survey, when given three alternatives about the role of the United States in solving international problems, most Americans (71%) said that the U.S. should act to solve problems together with other countries, and only 17%

United States is 5 percent of the world's population but generates 50 percent of total world military expenditures. How sustainable is this in a world where other countries are in open revolt against an American imperium?

America's power advantages – massive, useable, and enduring -- are what gave rise to the ambitions of Bush grand strategy. Indeed, extraordinary power is needed if the United States is to simultaneously pursue a strategy of unipolar rule and reduce its exposure to global rules and institutions. To get other countries to bend to American goals, the U.S. must be able to successfully threaten, induce, coerce, and punish other states – and it must be able to do it alone when other states refuse to cooperate. The emergence of the United States as an unrivaled global power did give Bush administration officials confidence that they could lead a global order on their own terms. Washington could do so not by operating within consensual rules and cooperative frameworks but by wielding a big stick.³⁷

But this Bush administration vision is premised on a radical misreading of functional power realities. The flipping of the Westphalian system does give the United States extraordinary global influence. Its military power is without peer or precedent. But in economic and political realms the world is not unipolar at all. The failure of the Bush administration to get Turkey and Russia to cooperate in the run-up to the Iraq war is revealing. In the end, American leverage over Russia and Turkey was extraordinarily limited. Both countries have more important trade and economic relationships with the European Union. They are also fledgling democracies that are sensitive to heavy-handed pressure tactics. Even Bush officials must be surprised at how little of America's unipolar power could be turned into useable diplomatic and political influence.³⁸ More generally, the American overestimation of its own power reinforces the contraction in Bush grand strategy between its unipolar and nationalist visions. In an echo of the classic problem of great power overextension, overconfidence in American power leads to bold imperial-hegemonic ambitions which founder because that power is not sufficiently great to overcome foreign resistance and dwindling domestic support. These failures, in turn, reinforce American nationalism and global disengagement.³⁹

The rise of unipolar American power is paradoxical: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War did make the U.S. a superpower without peer but it also eliminated a geopolitical threat that made countries in Europe and East Asia fully dependent on American

said that “as the sole remaining superpower the United States should continue to be the preeminent world leader in solving international problems.” There was also high and rising support for strengthening the United Nations and using diplomatic methods to combat terrorism. See German Marshall Fund, [A World Transformed: Foreign Policy Attitudes of the U.S. Public After September 11th](#) (Washington, D.C.: 4 September 2002). Third, in the summer of 2004 public opinion polls showed that the American people thought the war was not worth its costs. A Los Angeles Times poll, for example, found that 51% of their sample of the American people said no when asked if the “situation in Iraq was worth going to war over.” 44% the war was worth it and the rest were undecided. Ronald Brownstein, “The Times Poll: Bush, Kerry Neck and Neck in Survey,” [Los Angeles Times](#), 23 July 2004, Page A1. See also Tyler Marshall, “Voters Worried about America's Global Image,” [Los Angeles Times](#), 19 August 2004.

³⁷ I develop this point in G. John Ikenberry, “The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment,” [Survival](#) (Spring 2004).

³⁸ For an excellent statement of this problem, see Michael Mann, [Incoherent Empire](#).

³⁹ See Jack Snyder, “Imperial Temptations,” [The National Interest](#) (Spring 2003).

security protection. To go back to our post-Westphalian town: the U.S. is the town's only sheriff and the locks are off the doors – but in addition to this, the town's biggest menace to public safety has disappeared. So the town worries a great deal about the sheriff's conduct while their dependence on him for protection has decreased. Old bargains and restraints erode. The United States is powerful enough to block, disrupt, and punish. But in the absence of cooperation by other states, Washington is doomed to a cycle of foreign policy failure and declining public approval which further reduces the availability of useable American power – and the entire grand strategic vision is thrown into crisis.

AMERICA AS A LIBERAL LEVIATHAN?

The looming question therefore is: can a stable, cooperative and rules-based international order be organized around American unipolar power? Can America step forward as the world's underwriter of order but do so in a legitimate and sustainable way? Put most grandly, is it possible for the United States to act as a liberal Leviathan? No one knows the answers to these questions, but there are reasons to think that the answer is yes, maybe.

To be sure, skeptics question the possibility of a sustainable rules-based international order under conditions of unipolarity. The basic problem is that even if the United States wants to act like the benign, public-spirited sheriff of Mayberry RFD, the rest of the world can never be certain that it will not eventually become the abusive policeman of the LAPD. It is a problem of credible commitment.⁴⁰ As such, unipolarity presents weaker states with the same dilemmas they experience in a more decentralized world of anarchy. Uncertainty creates insecurity and the cooperative order unravels.⁴¹ In part because of this problem, scholars of both the liberal and realist persuasion have doubted that international law can function without a decentralized distribution of power. Hans Morgenthau, the most influential realist scholar of the 20th century, argued that international law will be weak under any circumstances, but he thought it would be next to impossible to sustain when power is concentrated. "International law owes its existence and operation to two factors, both decentralized in character: identical or complementary interests of individual states and the distribution of power among them. Where there is neither community of interest nor balance of power, there is no international law."⁴² L. Oppenheimer, a leading early 20th century legal scholar also saw diffusion of power as a precondition for international law. "The first and principle moral is that a Law of Nations can exist only if there be equilibrium, a balance of power, between the members of the Family of Nations. If the Powers cannot keep one another in check, no rules of law will have any force, since an

⁴⁰ On the general problem of credible commitment, see Douglass North and Barry Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth Century England," Journal of Economic History, Vol. 49 (1989), pp. 803-32.

⁴¹ For classic statements of this problem, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," World Politics, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167-214; and Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁴² Hans Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace (New York: Knopf, 1967), Fourth Edition, p. 266.

overpowerful State will naturally try to act according to discretion and disobey the law.”⁴³ But these views are too pessimistic.

There are three ways in which an American unipolar order can be infused with liberal characteristics: through the expanded provision of public goods, multilateral rules and agreements, and shared strategic decision-making. Each of the three areas entails the same American calculation: offering liberal forms of American-led global governance in exchange for the acquiescence and support of others.

The rise of unipolarity has created problems in how the world sees the American provision of public goods.⁴⁴ During the Cold War – in the age of bipolarity – the United States tended to provide “services” to other states which made it easier for them to tolerate the uncertainties and vagaries of American power.⁴⁵ What is happening today is that the United States appears to be providing fewer public goods – in both security and economic realms -- while at the same time the untoward features of American dominance are being felt more fully. The U.S. looks as if it is more reluctant to make strong alliance security commitments, preferring to act unilaterally or through flexible coalitions of the willing. The U.S. also appears less willing to make difficult economic choices to support an open global economic system. The economist Jeffrey Frankel argues that “President Bush turned protectionist more strongly than any other postwar president.”⁴⁶ Likewise, in areas ranging from the environment to global health and development challenges, the U.S. appears less committed to providing international public goods – manifest simply as leadership or as the willingness to incur disproportionate costs to ensure global cooperation.

The rise of unipolarity is part of the problem: growing power disparities together with the absence of a common external threat make it easier for the United States to ignore the wishes of other countries even as these countries depend increasingly on a cooperative, public goods-providing America.⁴⁷ But the Bush administration has intensified this problem by limiting what it proposes to offer the world as a public good to unipolar security protection – through the

⁴³ L. Oppenheim, International Law (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1919), 2nd Edition, Vol. 1, p. 193.

⁴⁴ For the classic statement of the problem of public goods in international economic relations, see Charles P. Kindleberger, The World in Depression, 1929-1939 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). See also Kindleberger, “International Public Goods Without Government,” American Economic Review, Vol. 76 (March 1986), pp. 1-13. For a discussion of contemporary problems in the provision of international collective goods, see Inge Kaul, Pedro Conceicao, Katell Le Goulven, and Ronald U. Mendoza, eds., Providing Public Goods, Managing Globalization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Todd Sandler, Global Collective Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ American postwar provision of international public goods included alliance security protection and the underwriting of an open multilateral economic system. Strictly speaking, countries could and were excluded from these security and economic goods. Yet even excluded countries could indirectly benefit from the global stability and economic expansion that resulted.

⁴⁶ See Jeffrey Frankel, “Bush’s Spectacular Failure,” The International Economy (Spring 2004).

⁴⁷ For a discussion of how the rise of unipolarity impacts American incentives for multilateral cooperation, see G. John Ikenberry, “Is American Multilateralism in Decline?” Perspectives on Politics (Fall 2003).

maintenance of global military dominance – while also reaffirming America’s intention to act like a traditional great power. The problem is compounded because some countries – particularly in Western Europe – do not see American security protection as needed or, even if they do, as a reflection of America as a public goods provider.

A sustainable unipolar order will require a renegotiation of the global public goods bargain. The logic is not that the United States should abstain from pursuing its own national interests but rather it must calculate those interests in a long-term, enlightened way. The strategy is for the United States to expand its public goods provision; to underwrite the global political, economic, and security infrastructure in a way that other countries see as mutually beneficial. This might entail simply expanding and reemphasizing America’s long-standing commitments to rules and institutions that support commercial, financial and environmental cooperation. The United States shapes and upholds the global framework of institutions that facilitate cooperation, which allows it to shape the character of the overall global order but also provides a flow of benefits to other countries that ensures their willing participation.

The second area where American unipolar order can be infused with liberal characteristics is in Washington’s basic orientation toward international rules and institutions. During the postwar era, the United States was not just the initiator of the greatest expansion of global rules and institutions, it also made commitments to operate within those structures. To be sure, in exchange for supporting and operating within a loose rules-based international system, the United States was given some slack. When it came to the Western alliance system, the United States was understood to be *primus inter pares*. It had a privileged position in NATO but, importantly, informal norms of consultation and reciprocity gave the security pact a sense of partnership and equality.⁴⁸ Disparities of power were obscured by formal and informal rules and norms that gave both the United States and its European partners something they wanted. The United States got willing partners, legitimacy and acquiescence; Western Europe got access, respect and protection. More generally, American support for multilateral rules and institutions after World War II increased the acceptability of an American-dominated Western system. Again, each side got something in this institutional bargain. By institutionalizing its power in an unprecedented web of inter-governmental political, economic, and security institutions, the United States got a postwar order that was more far reaching and durable. At the same time, other countries were more willing to accept and work within this order because the American exercise of power was made more predictable and accessible.⁴⁹

To be sure, the rules and institutions of the American system were incomplete and frequently broken or side-stepped. The type of rules-based order that suited Washington most was one where multilateral rules were qualified by weighted voting, opt-out clauses, veto rights, and so forth.⁵⁰ But the calculation was simple for most states: it was better to have the United States in a loose multilateral system than for it to be cut free of rules and institutions altogether.

⁴⁸ On the ways in which NATO constrained American power, see Steve Weber, “Shaping the Postwar Balance of Power: Multilateralism in NATO,” in John G. Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ See Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

⁵⁰ See Robert Kagan, “Multilateralism, American Style,” *The Washington Post*, 13 September 2002, p. A39.

The rise of unipolarity – coupled with a conservative foreign policy orientation – shifts this logic. At the extreme, the Bush administration wants a two-tiered rules-based order. Other countries operate according to one set of rules while the United States acts as the global Leviathan according to its own self-defined rules. This simply is not politically sustainable. It entails America not as primus inter pares but as primum mobile – the first mover who creates the order, occupies its center, but who does not operate according to its laws. Bargaining over new global rules must be a two-way process. The United States must agree to rules that it will adhere to, while weaker countries must allow the rules to be devised in a way that accommodates a certain looseness, contingency, and understanding of global power realities.

A third way in which unipolar order can be given liberal features is in the sharing of decision making authority. The United States opens itself up in various ways to the views of other states and in return it gets a more legitimate and cooperative order. Other countries get some access to the American decision making process. This notion of offering “voice opportunities” to other countries may be built into an institution such as NATO or be manifest as an informal norm of consultation. As a formal mechanism, the United States commits itself to act as part of a larger coalition of states. For example, rather than decide unilaterally whether force is justified it places the decision within the alliance.⁵¹ The United States gives up some policy autonomy but gets the benefits of other states contributing to the campaign. As an informal mechanism, the United States simply offers to listen to other governments. Washington, in effect, says to others: our door is open, please come in and make your case. In the end, the United States will decide on its own and do what it wants. But it creates a political process where other states get involved in trans-governmental pulling and hauling – and they are given at least the opportunity to influence Washington policy.⁵²

In all three of these ways, liberal political processes make the exercise of American unipolar power more acceptable to the outside world. The United States binds itself to other countries in basic ways, through the provision of public goods, support for rules-based order, and shared decision-making. The stakes are greatest when it comes to the use of military force. The logic of tying the American use of force to other countries is both the most difficult step to take and the step that most crucially defines the character of international order. Robert Kagan has recently argued that to regain its lost legitimacy, the United States needs to return to its postwar bargain: giving some European voice over American policy in exchange for their support. The United States, Kagan points out, “should try to fulfill its part of the transatlantic bargain by granting European some influence over the exercise of its power – provided that, in return, Europeans wield that influence wisely.”⁵³ The logic of doing so is captured by Robert Jervis:

⁵¹ On the formal and informal norms of consultation and joint-decision making within NATO during the early postwar decades, see Thomas Risse-Kappen, Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). The fact that both the United States and its Western European partners are democracies tend to make this form of give-and-take easier than it would in non-democracies. As John Lewis Gaddis notes about postwar Atlantic relations: “Negotiations, compromise, and consensus-building came naturally to statesmen steeped in the uses of such practices at home: in this sense, the American political tradition served the country better than its realist critics – Kennan definitely among them – believed it did.” Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 50.

⁵² For a general discussion of this “stake holder” logic of American hegemony, see Ikenberry, “Getting Hegemony Right,” The National Interest (Spring 2001).

⁵³ Robert Kagan, “America’s Crisis of Legitimacy,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 83, No. 2 (March/April 2004), p. 86.

“Binding itself to act multilaterally by forgoing the capability to use large-scale force on its own would then provide a safeguard against the excessive use of American power. This might benefit all concerned: the United States would not be able to act on its own worst impulses; others would share the costs of interventions and would also be less fearful of the United States and so, perhaps, more prone to cooperate with it.”⁵⁴ The United States loses some freedom of action by opening itself up and tying itself to allies, but it gets an international order that other states support rather than resist.

The logic of a liberal unipolar order is now clear, but the question remains: is it sustainable? Two considerations are most important. One is a question of costs and benefits and the other is about credible commitments. At the heart of the debate between conservative and liberal visions of unipolar order are judgments about the costs and benefits of binding American power to wider alliance and global groupings. The Bush administration has calculated that the costs of lost policy autonomy – and national sovereignty – is frequently greater than the gains from cooperation. The liberal calculation is that the lost autonomy associated with making binding commitments is substantially less than the rewards generated by the institutional bargain. The United States gets the gains associated with pursuing its interests in a legitimate order and it gets tangible benefits from the sharing the costs and burdens in various policy areas. The Bush calculation has been that although other states will complain and even withhold cooperation, in a unipolar world this means little. The liberal calculation is that almost everything the United States seeks to achieve within the international system is more attainable with the help of others. An international order with rules and institutions that are normatively embraced by other states opens up the possibilities for a thousand acts of diffuse reciprocity on a weekly basis. The costs to America of binding itself to this rules-based order are well worth the price, particularly when that rules-based order is loosely constructed to allow weighted voting, escape clauses and other safety valves.

The other consideration is whether the United States can credibly commit itself to these binding institutional bargains. After all, the Bush administration was able to make quick and unexpected shifts in basic American policy after September 11th. Rules and institutions can be easily overturned, it would seem. So the worry is – to go back to the example of the self-appointed sheriff – how can the townspeople be certain that the sheriff’s promise to operate within the law will be honored? In a world of anarchy, there is no absolute guarantee that commitments will not be broken. But the fact that we are talking about an international order composed at its core by democratic countries which are deeply integrated and already bound together by dense networks of rules and institutions – all this helps overcome worst case fears.⁵⁵ An America that “breaks out” of its commitments is still not going to use force to punish or conquer other democracies.⁵⁶ Nuclear weapons also all but eliminate the likelihood of conquest

⁵⁴ Robert Jervis, “International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle?” International Security, Vol. 17 (1993), p. 66.

⁵⁵ On the advantages that democracies have in making commitments, see Charles Lipson, Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ See Ikenberry, “Is American Multilateralism in Decline?” Perspective on Politics.

among the great powers.⁵⁷ At the same time, the upside opportunities of working closely with the United States – where there is public goods provision, expansive rules and institutions, and access opportunities – is so great that the circumscribed risks are worth taking. The construction of a liberal unipolar order – or, if you will, a liberal Leviathan – may require great leaps of imagination and leadership, but it does not require defying history or theory.

CONCLUSION

Bush foreign policy is in crisis. The administration sought to mobilize the world in a great campaign against new threats but instead the world is openly questioning the legitimacy of an American-led global order. The Bush administration is seized by the problem of terrorism and the rest of the world is seized by the problem of American unipolar power. The world may not be able to restrain the United States by organizing a counter-balancing coalition. But the world today is about as close as it has ever come to being in open rebellion against the one global superpower. Ironically -- and dangerously -- this global rebellion is particularly intense among citizens in the advanced Western democracies, America's oldest and most established allies.

The Bush administration's global vision must be rethought. Mistakes over Iraq are emblematic of this failure but they are more consequence than cause. It is the deeper, unappreciated shifts in power and the state system – and contradictions in Bush's vision itself – that generate hostility and failure.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the United States has made grand strategic mistakes. After all, the landscape of world politics has changed so quickly and fundamentally. A unipolar distribution of power has never before existed in the modern era. Norms of state sovereignty are weakening. These long-term shifts were accelerated and intensified after September 11th. American power was mobilized and exercised in ways that exposed a quasi-monopoly on the use of force. Meanwhile, the rise of terrorism with roots in failed, backward and oppressed societies made it dramatically clear that new types of interventions and preemptive actions might be necessary, further eroding norms of state sovereignty.

This multiplicity of shifts in the international system plays havoc with any American grand strategy. A traditional realist strategy of reconstructing a Westphalian balance of power order that reaffirms state sovereignty is actually quite unrealistic, particularly given unipolarity and the character of the new security threats. There is no going back. A global governance grand strategy of turning questions about the use of force over to the United Nations or other global groupings is consistent with the search for legitimacy and the transformed character of sovereignty -- indeed liberals have championed this rethinking of sovereignty norms -- but this strategy has great difficulty in dealing with unipolar American power. Washington may be willing to share some authority over decisions about the use of force but it will not transfer authority to higher bodies. Moreover, a strategy that requires wide agreement on threats and the appropriate uses of force is likely to lead to stalemate and the under provision of security protection.

⁵⁷ The remarkable stability of great power relations is explored in Robert Jervis, "Theories of War in an Era of Leading Power Peace," *American Political Science Review*, 96 (March 2003), pp. 1-14.

The Bush vision combines post-Westphalian unipolar thinking and conservative foreign policy ideas where American power is used directly to attack the new threats. But this strategy is built on contradictions that lead to both free riding and resistance by other states. Its greatest attraction is that it provides an easy unilateral solution to security threats. But to the outside world this vision of order looks like modern-day empire – and it is not sustainable. The United States people will not support the burdens associated with the unilateral use of force and other countries will under supply cooperation.

Realist, liberal and imperial visions of unipolar order are all inadequate and some new synthesis is necessary. What the world needs is an order where the United States continues to underwrite global security but does so within a framework of rules and bargains that render the resulting system legitimate and sustainable. We need to move beyond balance of power and empire towards a new international order that combines American unipolar power with widely agreed upon rules and institutions. The world needs a liberal Leviathan.