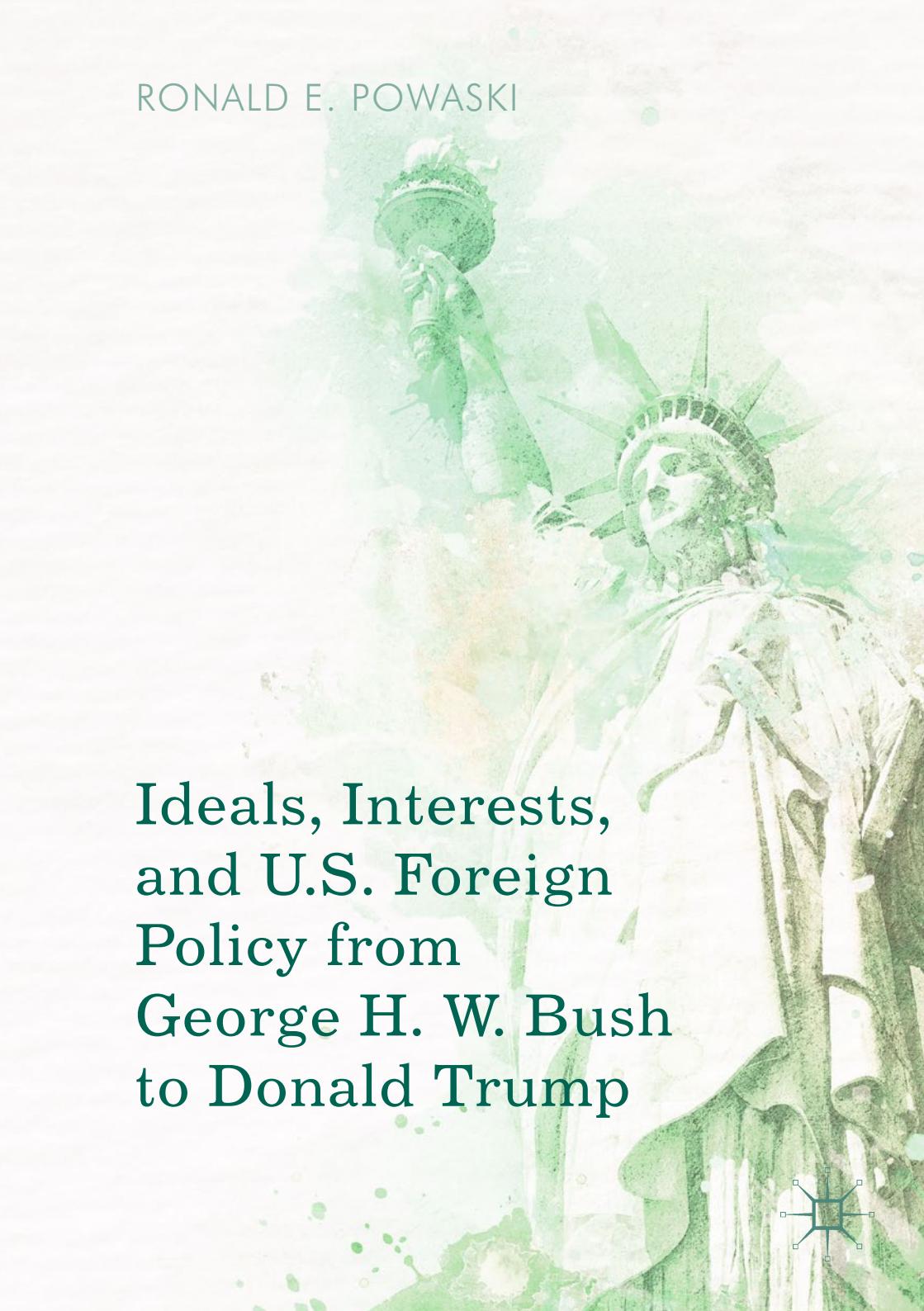
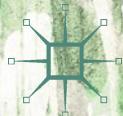


RONALD E. POWASKI



Ideals, Interests, and U.S. Foreign Policy from George H. W. Bush to Donald Trump



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To Jo Ann

PREFACE

This is the third volume in a planned three-volume study that will examine how realism and idealism have influenced US foreign policy, beginning with the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt and culminating with Donald Trump's first 17 months in office.

The first volume of this trilogy will examine the clash of realism and idealism in the foreign policies of US presidents beginning with Theodore Roosevelt and ending with Franklin Roosevelt. During this time, the USA abandoned its traditional policy of limited entanglement in the political affairs of the world's and fashioned a liberal international order whose chief features persist to this day.

The second planned volume will examine the era of the Cold War, beginning with the presidency of Harry Truman and ending with the presidency of Ronald Reagan. During this period, the USA employed a variety of methods to contain the expansion of Soviet and Chinese communism.

The volume before you will discuss the presidential foreign policies of the post-Cold War era, beginning with George H. W. Bush and ending with Donald Trump. During this period, the USA emerged from the Cold War as the world's most powerful nation. Nevertheless, the presidents of this era faced a host of problems that tested their ability to successfully blend realism and idealism. Some were more successful than others.

Euclid, Ohio

Ronald E. Powaski

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Jo Ann, without whose support this book would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

Prologue: Interests Versus Ideals

The Greek historian Thucydides, in his account of the Peloponnesian War, gave classic expression to the eternal conflict between ideals and interests in international relations. According to Thucydides, the Athenian leader Pericles proclaimed that only Athens governed its affairs on the basis of the highest morality. “We alone do good to our neighbors,” he said, “not upon calculation of interest, but in the confidence of freedom and in a frank and fearless spirit.”¹

But during the fifteen years of the Peloponnesian War, Athenians saw their original goal of ensuring that all of Greece would be free from the threat of Persian conquest turn into a blatant struggle for dominant power over other states. When the Athenian ambassadors approached the magistrates of Melos, it was expediency, not morality, that governed their words: “You and we should say what we really think, and aim only at what is possible, for we both know that … the weak grant what they may.”²

The conflict between moral values and amoral national interests is as much a part of the diplomatic history of the United States as it was of ancient Athens. In fact, the conflict between morality and self-interest is a fundamental part of all human relations. One’s conscience may be geared to ideal aspirations, but selfishness can prevent their realization. Yet because conscience, as well as ego, demands satisfaction, we try to reconcile ideals with self-interest. The fact that we never completely succeed in doing so usually does not stop us from trying.³

In foreign policy, as in personal relations, the problem of reconciling national interests with ideals held sacred by the nation has always been a central theme of American foreign relations, and it is one that is never completely resolvable. Generally, statesmen or stateswomen, like individuals, blend both philosophies. Indeed, no statesman professing to be a realist who is concerned primarily with the nation's interests can completely forsake its ideals, nor can anyone subscribing to idealism proclaim that he or she is not acting in the nation's best interest. Historian Felix Gilbert believed that America's "great historical moments have occurred when both were combined."⁴ In the same vein, historian Adrienne Koch attributes the success of the Founders to their reliance upon power as well as morals.⁵

However, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believes that the interplay of American idealism and realism helps to explain the ambivalence of America's approach to the world. "No nation," Kissinger writes in reference to the United States, "has been more pragmatic in the day-to-day conduct of its diplomacy, or more ideological in the pursuit of its historic moral conviction. No country has been more reluctant to engage itself abroad even while undertaking alliances and commitments of unprecedented reach and scope."⁶

Still, one philosophy always takes precedence in the thinking of statesmen, even if it is disguised. Realists usually use idealistic language to conceal the realistic character of their policies, while idealists, in promoting their values, usually claim to be defending a "higher realism."

The realism-idealism binary is also useful in understanding the motives and objectives of statesmen as well as the wisdom, or folly, of their policies. The debate over the George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 is just one example of the perennial clash between realism and idealism. Realists asked, should the United States have invaded Iraq? Were vital US interests at stake? Was Iraq a threat to US security? To which neoconservatives responded, the United States must promote democracy in the Middle East if America is to be safe from radical Islamists. Echoing this debate, Gideon Rose, the managing editor of the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*, argued that it was time for some "old fashioned realism again." Praising the realism of George H. W. Bush, Rose argued that he was succeeded in office by a "left-wing idealist (Bill Clinton) and then a right-wing one (George W. Bush), who both dedicated themselves to moralism in foreign policy and [as a consequence] had more than their share of failures."⁷

DEFINING REALISM AND IDEALISM

It is difficult to make generalizations about realism and idealism. Neither term comprises a single, all-encompassing theory. Both realists and idealists can be internationalists. And, throughout the history of US foreign relations, isolationists have been found in both schools. Nevertheless, the human mind needs to categorize facts in broad generalizations in order to better understand them. And, in spite of the intrinsic limitations of generalization, realism and idealism are useful categories for understanding how and why US foreign policy has been conceived and implemented. What, then, is meant by realism and idealism?

In their purest forms, realists emphasize the nation's interest above all other concerns, while idealists insist that certain universal values transcend purely national interests. Realists claim to see the world as it is, not as idealist would like it to be. And the world realists see is a "jungle," one characterized by competition between nations for territory, markets, increasingly scarce natural resources, and the like, all of which they believe contribute to national security and prosperity. Accordingly, realists hold that the national interests, and particularly national security, must be the paramount consideration in the conduct of a nation's foreign policy. And it is the application of power, whether military, economic, or in support of diplomacy, that is the ultimate guarantor of a nation's interests.

During the 1950s, a prominent realist, the political scientist Hans Morgenthau, wrote an essay entitled "Forget and Remember!" which brilliantly sums up the credo of classical realists:

FORGET the sentimental notion that foreign policy is a struggle between virtue and vice, with virtue bound to win. FORGET the utopian notion that a brave new world without power politics will follow the unconditional surrender of wicked nations. FORGET the crusading notion that any state, however virtuous and powerful, can have the mission to make the world over in its own image REMEMBER that the golden age of isolated normalcy is gone forever and that no effort, however great, and no action, however radical, will bring it back. REMEMBER that diplomacy without power is feeble, and power without diplomacy is destructive and blind. REMEMBER that no nation's power is without limits, and hence that its policies must respect the power and interests of others. ... And, above all, remember always that it is not only a political necessity but also a moral duty for a nation to follow in its dealings with other nations but

one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action: THE NATIONAL INTEREST.⁸

Idealists, on the other hand, are concerned with building a better world, one based on values that they hold dear. In general, American idealists desire to spread what they perceive as the benefits of American democratic capitalism. They also advocate the application of an international moral code (based to a great extent on the values of Judaeo-Christianity), international cooperation, and the transcendence of universal human interests—such as peace, freedom, justice, self-government, and the innate dignity and worth of every human being—rather than narrow national self-interests.

Realists argue that, while an international moral code based on these values may sound good, its realization is a pipe dream. Realists associate idealism with naiveté that they believe is damaging to the national interest and, insofar as these virtues are disassociated from power, bound to be ineffective in application. To base a nation's security on international law, or some innate moral code, realists believe, is the ultimate folly.

Idealists rejoin by arguing that it is naïve to believe that the pursuit of national interests that are not related to universal ideals can maintain the popular support that is necessary for its achievement. Realists reply that ideals that ignore national interests will make diplomacy appear hypocritical as well as be ineffective. Policies conceived in careful consideration of long-range national interests, realists argue, may be more genuinely moral than hypocritical idealism.

Rather than international law or morality, realists view the balance of power as the most effective way of restraining the behavior of states. Today, realists insist, the United States, as the world's strongest nation, has the primary responsibility for maintaining the global balance of power, not only to prevent war but also to preserve and advance America's global interests.

Idealists, on the other hand, have no use for the balance of power, which they insist causes wars, not prevents them. Instead of relying primarily upon power to keep the peace, idealists put their trust in international law and multinational agencies, like the United Nations, as well as such methods as negotiation, meditation, and arbitration.

President Woodrow Wilson's effort, at the end of World War I, to create a League of Nations, is a classic example of idealistic internationalism. Wilson insisted that the security of states should depend not on the balance of power but on a collective security system established and maintained through the League of Nations. A universal grouping of largely democratic nations, he believed, could act as the "trustee of peace," thereby precluding the need for military alliances. League members would employ negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, rather than war, to resolve international disputes. Aggressors would be confronted with economic sanctions, rather than military action. Diplomacy would no longer be conducted in secret but on the basis of "open agreements, openly arrived at."

To the hardened veterans of a European diplomacy that was based on the balance of power, Wilson's views about the ultimately moral foundations of foreign policy appeared naive and hypocritical. To American realists, like Theodore Roosevelt, basing world peace, let alone the security of the United States, on a league of nations was the height of folly. Rather than Wilson's League, Roosevelt insisted that the peace of the world, and US security, would best be served by the continuation of America's wartime association with Britain and France. Nor did Roosevelt and other American realists like ideological crusades. They insisted that the United States did not go to war with Germany in 1917 to "make the world safe for democracy," as Wilson had proclaimed, but rather to restore the European balance of power, which had been threatened by German militarism.

However, while Wilson lost the battle to win the Senate's approval for US participation in the League of Nations, his philosophy, which has been termed "Wilsonianism," has been a major influence on US foreign policy ever since.⁹ Indeed, some have charged that the administration of George W. Bush engaged in Wilsonian diplomacy by trying to promote the spread of democracy in the Middle East. Others say that Wilson would not have used military force against Iraq—certainly not without the approval of the United Nations—but instead would have continued to apply economic and diplomatic pressure against Iraq. This debate, of course, is beyond resolution. Nevertheless, it illustrates the continuing relevancy of the realist–idealistic duality.

NOTES

1. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian Wars*, 2: 40.
2. Thucydides, 5: 89, 105.
3. Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (1953), 1.
4. Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (1961), 136.
5. Adrienne Koch, *Power, Morals, and the Founding Fathers: Essays in the Interpretation of the American Enlightenment* (1961), 89.
6. Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (1994), 18.
7. Gideon Rose, "Get Real," *New York Times*, August 18, 2005.
8. Hans Morgenthau is quoted in H. W. Brands, "The Idea of the National Interest," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Spring 1999), 250.
9. See Frank Ninkovich, *Wilsonianism: U.S. Foreign Policy Since 1900* (1999).



CHAPTER 2

Introduction

An era ended when the Soviet Union collapsed on December 31, 1991. The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union had defined the Cold War era. The end of that conflict left the United States in a position of unprecedented international preponderance. America's economy was 40% larger than that of its nearest rival. Its defense spending equaled that of the next six countries combined. And because four of these six countries were close allies, the US advantage was even larger than these figures suggest. The United States also led the world in higher education, scientific research, and advanced technology (especially information technologies), making it difficult for other states to catch up quickly. Despite America's enviable position, the aftermath of the Cold War presented US presidents with a host of problems, changes, and challenges, including financial crises, genocide, mass atrocities, rogue states, terrorist attacks, and wars.¹

In addressing these problems, the first four presidents examined in this volume—George H. W. Bush (1989–1993), William “Bill” Clinton (1993–2001), George W. Bush (2001–2009), and Barack Obama (2009–2017)—attempted to blend realistic considerations with American ideals. While all of them gave precedence to what they conceived to be the national interests of the United States, they also attempted to uphold American ideals, to a greater or lesser extent, including democracy, free enterprise, open trade, and respect for human rights.

In Europe, among the problems they faced in attempting to blend realism and idealism were the aftereffects of the disintegration of Yugoslavia into its ethnic components. Brutal wars and genocide occurred in Bosnia, Serbia, and Kosovo. The disintegration of the Soviet Union's East European satellite empire, and the Soviet Union itself, also posed monumental problems for these presidents. Most of the former allies of the Soviet Union eventually joined the European Union and NATO, but accommodating Russia to this transformation—as well as the reunification of Germany in 1991—posed enormous challenges to the presidents of this era. Meanwhile, Russia, the main remnant of the Soviet Union, would experience a decade of serious economic decline followed by the overthrow of its embryonic democracy and its replacement by a plutocracy headed by Vladimir Putin. Under his leadership, Russia would challenge the European international order by invading neighboring Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine six years later.

The economic resurgence of China also posed challenges to the United States. While Chinese trade with the United States continued to grow—as did US indebtedness to that country—the Chinese restrictions on US imports also persisted, as did Chinese violations of their citizens' human rights. The Chinese also challenged the territorial claims of neighboring countries to islands in the East and South China Seas, countries that were allies of the United States, such as Japan and the Philippine Islands. More ominously, China did little to prevent its client state, North Korea, from continuing to develop a nuclear arsenal.

The Middle East also became a more troublesome area for the United States. Iraq and Afghanistan were the centers of US attention in the area. Following the successful reversion of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 by the first President Bush, his son invaded that country in 2003, as well as neighboring Afghanistan. The US military intervention in Afghanistan was directly related to the attacks by Al Qaeda terrorists on the World Trade Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia on September 11, 2001. US forces quickly overthrew Afghanistan's Taliban government, which had allowed Al Qaeda to use that country as a base of operations against the United States.

However, the invasion of Iraq was motivated primarily by President George W. Bush's determination to overthrow that country's dictator, Saddam Hussein. Although the US invasion succeeded in toppling Hussein, it also opened a can of worms that Bush's successor, Barack Obama, found impossible to close. Hussein's overthrow created a power vacuum in Iraq that generated years of sectarian conflict between

Iraq's Shiite majority and its Sunni minority, culminating in the rise of another jihadist movement, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq. As a result, Obama felt compelled to reintroduce military forces into Iraq in 2015, after having withdrawn them four years earlier. A reduced US military presence also continued in Afghanistan in order to prevent the Taliban from regaining control of that country.

As if Islamist terrorism were not enough of a problem, President Obama had to respond to popular uprisings against dictatorships in Egypt, Libya, and Syria, the so-called Arab Spring. They severely strained his desire to balance American values with the national interests of the United States. While Iran took advantage of the turmoil in the region to increase its influence, particularly with other Shiite entities, Obama did manage to get the Iranians to freeze their nuclear weapon program. However, like previous presidents, he was unable to persuade the Israelis and Palestinians to conclude a treaty ending their decades-old conflict.

The flight to Europe of millions of refugees from the war-torn countries of the Middle Eastern would prove to be one of the greatest challenges ever faced by the European Union and the liberal international order fashioned largely by the United States. Popular fears of unlimited emigration from Middle Eastern countries, increased terrorist attacks on European cities, the loss of jobs to globalization, and the continuing growth of income inequality contributed to the populist upsurge. So, too, did the austerity programs European governments initiated in response to the Great Recession that began in 2008, as well as the European Union's inability to resolve the acute debt problems of some European countries. As a consequence, there was increased populist hostility toward free trade, open borders, multilateralism, military alliances, and the institutions that promoted them.

Latin America also presented enormous challenges to US presidents during the post-Cold War era. The region suffered from an extremely unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, corrupt governments, drug trafficking and violence, human rights violations, civil wars, and periodic financial crises. Attempting to escape these conditions, tens of thousands of illegal immigrants entered the United States from Mexico, Central America, and Haiti. In a number of Latin American countries, leftist governments came to power, the most extreme of which was Hugo Chávez's regime in Venezuela.

The US presidents of this era responded to these challenges in a variety of ways. They denied, or threatened to deny, economic and military assistance to unfriendly Latin American countries. They also intruded into

their domestic politics, and in a few cases, such as Haiti and Honduras, supported military coups. Only in Panama was there outright US military intervention, which overthrew the government of Manuel Noriega. On the other hand, friendly, often corrupt, governments, such as those in Colombia and Mexico, received US economic and military assistance, not only to stanch the flow of illegal drugs and emigration to the United States, but also, as in the case of Colombia, to combat leftist guerrillas.

Clearly, these presidents subordinated concern for human rights to their preeminent consideration of protecting US economic and strategic interests in the region. This was demonstrated, among other ways, by the younger Bush's creation of the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba and Obama's inability to close it. All four presidents, from the first President Bush to Obama, championed expanded trade with the Latin American nations, and defended against strenuous criticism, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Africa could not totally be ignored by the US presidents of the post-Cold War era, but it certainly was not high on their lists of priorities. An ill-fated US humanitarian intervention in Somalia, begun under the first President Bush in 1992, culminated in the deaths of American soldiers and the desecration of their bodies by a mob in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. The disaster explains in part the reluctance of succeeding presidents to intervene militarily elsewhere in Africa. One result was the non-response of the Clinton administration to mass genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Instead of military force, Clinton and his successors preferred humanitarian aid programs. But the Obama administration also encouraged private investment in Africa, home to six of the world's ten fastest growing economies. Nevertheless, the rise of Islamist terrorists groups in several African countries prompted increasing US military involvement on that continent. It was reflected in George W. Bush's decision to create the US African Military Command, supplemented by increased economic and military assistance to friendly governments threatened by terrorists.

In addition to these regional problems, US presidents of the post-Cold War era would have to confront a number of pressing global problems, including the proliferation of nuclear weapons and increasing global warming. The first four presidents examined in this volume concluded agreements with the Soviet Union or its nuclear-armed successor states—Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—to reduce or eliminate nuclear weapons. In addition, they instituted steps to safeguard the remaining nuclear weapons, materials, and installations against seizure by terrorists. However, their efforts to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons were

largely unsuccessful. Although Obama signed an agreement freezing Iran's nuclear weapon program, it was undermined by the development of nuclear arsenals by India, Pakistan, and North Korea. The international nuclear nonproliferation regime was weakened further by the continued development of new nuclear weapons by the major nuclear powers, specifically Russia and the United States.

Finally, the presidents of the post-Cold War era were confronted with the increasingly menacing problem of global warming, but they did not agree on how—or whether—to deal with the problem. The Clinton administration helped to write the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement with binding limitations on greenhouse gas emissions for developed countries, but George W. Bush rejected that agreement. Obama signed the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, but he was compelled to support it with an executive agreement because the Senate would not ratify it. US participation in the Paris Agreement was subsequently terminated by his successor, Donald Trump.

Trump was elected president in November 2016 in large part because he successfully tapped into populist hostility toward immigration, globalization, and the liberal international order, which the United States took the lead in creating and sustaining since the end of World War II. In his first seventeen months in office, Trump attempted to implement an “America First” agenda whose key features are nationalistic, xenophobic, protectionist, and anti-democratic. He called NATO obsolete, criticized the United Nations, rejected multilateral trade agreements, raised tariffs in violation of World Trade Organization rules, praised authoritarians, and ignored their violations of human rights and attacks on democracy in the United States and in Europe—all actions that constituted a significant effort to overthrow the post-Second World War consensus that had guided US foreign policy for over seven decades.

In its place, Trump has attempted to implement a foreign policy that not only is not idealistic, but also not realistic either, for it has undermined a vital national interest of the United States that is, the preservation of an international order that, despite its serious flaws, not only has promoted democracy, but also has enhanced the security and prosperity of the American people.

NOTE

1. Stephen M. Walt, “Two Cheers for Clinton’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2000.



CHAPTER 3

The “Enlightened Realism” of George H. W. Bush, 1989–1993

George H. W. Bush brought a wealth of foreign affairs experience to the presidency from 1989 to 1993. He served as UN ambassador, director of the CIA, and vice president under President Ronald Reagan. A realist, he emphasized US national interests in conducting his foreign policy, rather than the promotions of American values abroad.

Among his foreign policy achievements as president were the creation of an international coalition that reversed Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the negotiation of German reunification within NATO, and the peaceful dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Under President Bush, the United States also played the leading role in upholding the liberal international order. Nevertheless, Bush’s achievements as a statesman were not sufficient to help him win reelection to the presidency in 1992 (Fig. 3.1).

THE RISE OF GEORGE HERBERT WALKER BUSH

George Herbert Walker Bush was born in Milton, Massachusetts on June 12, 1924. His parents, Prescott Sheldon Bush and Dorothy Walker Bush, moved the family to Greenwich, Connecticut when George was a young boy. His family was wealthy but his parents raised their children to be modest, stressing the importance of public service and giving back to society. An investment banker, Prescott Bush later became a Republican senator from Connecticut, serving from 1952 until 1963.



Fig. 3.1 George H. W. Bush, Official White House Photograph (Credit: David Valdez, courtesy of the Library of Congress; Valdez, David, photographer. *George Bush, half-length portrait, facing front/David Valdez, 1989*. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/89715763/>)

Young George was educated at an elite prep school, Phillips Academy, in Andover, Massachusetts. Upon graduation in 1942, on his eighteenth birthday, he joined the US Navy. The following year, he became a pilot, the youngest in the Navy. In the Pacific theater during the war, he flew fifty-eight combat missions on torpedo bombers. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism under fire. Bush returned to Connecticut in January 1945 and married Barbara Pierce. Together they had six children, including George W., who would serve two terms as the forty-third President of the United States, and John Elliot (Jeb), who would

serve two terms as governor of Florida. Nine months later, in September 1945, Bush was discharged from the Navy. Soon thereafter, he enrolled in Yale University, where he received an undergraduate degree in economics in only two and one-half years. With degree in hand, in 1948 he moved with his wife and young son, George W., to Midland, Texas, where he began a highly successful career in the oil business, and in the process became a millionaire.

In the 1960s, Bush became involved in Republican Party politics. From 1966 to 1970, he served two terms in the US House of Representatives from Houston's Seventh District. After losing an election for a US Senate seat in 1970, Bush was appointed the US ambassador to the United Nations by President Richard Nixon, a post he held between 1971 and 1973. He went on to hold a number of positions within the presidential administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, including chairman of the Republican National Committee, US envoy to China (1974–1976), and director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1976. Bush thrived at the CIA and wanted to stay in that position after Jimmy Carter was elected president in November 1976, but Carter chose to replace him with his own nominee.

In the 1980 Republican presidential primaries, Bush ran as a moderate Republican candidate who had years of experience in government. However, he was quickly eclipsed by Ronald Reagan, the former governor of California. However, Reagan asked Bush to be his vice president to help attract moderates as well as bring foreign policy experience to the ticket. The Reagan-Bush ticket won handily in both 1980 and 1984. As vice president, Bush continued to expand his foreign policy experience by traveling widely. In 1988, he won the Republican nomination for the presidency and subsequently defeated the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis, in the presidential election that November.

THE MODERATE CONSERVATIVE AND PRAGMATIST

George Bush entered the presidency as one of the most qualified individuals to assume that office. He had a long career in both domestic politics and foreign affairs, was familiar with the operations of the Federal bureaucracy, and had eight years of hands-on training as vice president. He was not much interested in domestic policy; instead, he regarded foreign policy as his forte, and that is where his attention as president would focus and most of the achievements of his presidency result.

Both politically and temperamentally, Bush was a moderate conservative. He was uncomfortable with bold, dramatic change, instead preferring stability. Caution was his hallmark. He was careful not to do anything imprudent, and he was at pains not to arouse expectations that he could not fulfill. He considered himself a pragmatist. “I am a practical man,” he described himself. “I like what’s real. I’m not much for the airy and the abstract. I like what works. I am not a mystic, and I do not yearn to lead crusades.”¹

Unlike Reagan, Bush intended to be a “hands-on” president. “I planned to learn enough,” he recalled, “so I could make informed decisions without micromanaging,” and he intended to rely heavily on his national security advisors for advice.² Fortunately, Bush appointed an exceptionally talented and experienced team of national security advisors. His close friend and political advisor, James A. Baker, became secretary of state. Baker had served first as Reagan’s White House chief of staff and then as his secretary of the treasury. Although Baker knew relatively little about foreign policy when he became secretary of state, he proved to be an excellent diplomat and master negotiator. But some considered him more a tactician than a strategist. Like other lawyers who had served as secretary of state, Baker considered international politics “a series of discrete problems that required solutions.”³

Bush chose Richard Cheney to be his secretary of defense. Cheney had served in the Congress for a dozen years and as President Gerald Ford’s chief of staff. As secretary of defense, Cheney championed presidential preeminence in the conduct of foreign policy, which he insisted was irresponsibly challenged by Congress when it passed the War Powers Act in 1973.

As the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Bush appointed General Colin Powell in October 1989. A decorated veteran of the Vietnam War, Powell had served as Reagan’s last national security adviser. He also was the primary architect of a military doctrine, popularly referred to as the Powell Doctrine, that was designed as an antidote to the Vietnam syndrome. It stated that before the United States committed its military to battle, it should have clearly defined objectives, public support, an exit strategy, and overwhelming force at its disposal to accomplish its goals. The president would follow Powell’s guidelines during the Gulf War.

Yet the individual who had the greatest influence on Bush’s foreign policy was another close friend of the president, Brent Scowcroft.

A former Air Force lieutenant general who held a Ph.D. in international relations, Scowcroft became Bush's assistant for national security affairs, a position he held under President Ford. Scowcroft embodied the principles of traditional realism more than anyone else in the Bush administration. Like other realists, he argued that US foreign policy should be devoted primarily to matters of national interest, geopolitics, and the balance of power, and not concern itself principally with American values, such as political freedom or democracy. Yet while Scowcroft believed that the United States must take the lead in maintaining the global balance of power, he insisted that, where possible, the United States should work with allies and with international organizations in playing that role. Scowcroft considered the United States uniquely qualified to play that leading role because, he pointed out, America is the exceptional nation, militarily powerful, wealthy, blessed with a stable government, and professing ideals and values that are universally admired. Those values included democracy, respect for human rights, individual freedom, the rule of law, and open economic international relations. "We're the only ones who can be the guiding light," he boldly asserted.⁴

To be sure, Scowcroft realized that the United States could not ignore humanitarian crises, but he also insisted that the United States should not attempt to right all wrongs. Like President John Quincy Adams, he did not think that America should go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. He especially was opposed to trying to reform other nations. What happens inside another country's borders, Scowcroft insisted, is none of America's business. Although he did not state so explicitly, Scowcroft believed that human rights could only be addressed by engaging in quiet diplomacy in the hope of persuading other governments to respect human dignity. Scowcroft called his philosophy of international relations "enlightened realism."⁵

Bush's views were very closely aligned with those of his chief national security advisor. This was reflected in only one of many ways in the national security document that the president signed in March 1990. Drafted under Scowcroft's supervision, its principal emphases were clearly on the realist objectives of national survival, acquisition of material resources, and promotion of international stability. And while the document stated that the United States also would foster political freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions around the world, the administration had no intention of imposing democratic values on others states; it would only encourage them.⁶ Later, after it became clear to Bush and

Scowcroft that the Cold War was indeed over, they both would envision the creation of a “new world order” in which the United States would take the lead in working with other nations to promote global peace. But first they had to deal with the effects of the disintegrating Soviet empire.

BUSH AND GORBACHEV

Reflecting his cautious approach to change, Bush was slow to pick up the baton of détente. In a speech before the United Nations on December 7, 1988, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had challenged the then president-elect to end the Cold War. Not only did he announce a massive, unilateral reduction of Soviet armed forces, 500,000 in two years, and the withdrawal of ten divisions from Eastern Europe, he also challenged the United States to cooperate with the Soviet Union in resolving conflicts around the world—particularly in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Angola. Gorbachev also recommended that a revived UN should be the instrument of superpower cooperation in creating a new world order.⁷

However, Bush, as well as Scowcroft, believed that Reagan had become too enthusiastic about détente in the last years of his presidency and, consequently, too willing to outdo Gorbachev in demilitarizing the world. At a summit with Gorbachev at Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986, Reagan had offered to eliminate all nuclear weapons—without consulting America’s NATO allies in advance. This was the most startling example of the kind of one-ups-manship Bush was determined to avoid. Scowcroft, for his part, thought the Cold War was far from over. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops remained in Eastern Europe, Germany was still divided, and the Warsaw Pact was still intact. Scowcroft viewed *perestroika* “not as leading toward democracy but as a way to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Soviet Union.”⁸ As a result, he advised new president to slow the tempo of détente, at least until a comprehensive review of America’s Soviet policy was completed.

The results of that review, which took four months to complete, were announced by the president on May 12. He said that “now it is time to move beyond containment. ... our objective is to welcome the Soviet Union back into the world order.” However, he also warned that “in an era of extraordinary change, we have an obligation to temper optimism—and I am optimistic—with prudence.”⁹ By this time, however, observers on both sides of the Atlantic, including former President

Reagan, were criticizing Bush for what they believed was his excessively cautious pursuit of détente. During the previous month, George Kennan, the “father” of the containment theory, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the time for regarding the Soviet Union as a military opponent had “clearly passed.”¹⁰

Gorbachev also kept the pressure on Bush. In mid-May, the Soviet leader announced that he would eliminate 500 nuclear warheads unilaterally from the Soviet European arsenal. He also proposed more generous cuts in conventional weapons in the Conventional Forces in Europe negotiations (CFE), which had resumed on March 9, 1989. Not to be outdone by Gorbachev, later that month Bush proposed 15% cuts in NATO and Warsaw Pact conventional forces and 20 per reductions in total US and Soviet military personnel in Europe. The president’s proposal also called for a ceiling of 275,000 troops in the respective European forces of the United States and the Soviet Union. The Bush initiatives, which represented the beginning of the end of his cautious approach to the Soviet Union, were well received both in Western and in Eastern Europe.¹¹

THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1989

During 1989, momentous events in Eastern Europe dramatically changed the tempo of the Bush administration’s approach to the Soviet Union. During that year, one Soviet satellite state after another threw off, or was in the processing of throwing off, their communist governments. In Poland, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who had imposed martial law in Poland in 1981, allowed free parliamentary elections in June 1989. To the surprise of Jaruzelski, and many others, the opposition Solidarity Party won control of both houses of the Polish parliament and, as a result, named the new prime minister, the first to head a non-communist government in Eastern Europe since 1948. In Hungary, the communist government and newly created opposition parties agreed to conduct a free election in March 1990. The result was the creation of a noncommunist government under the leadership of Jozsef Antall.

East Germany’s transition to a free society, however, was much more tumultuous. Demonstrations and a general strike rocked that country. In an attempt to restore order, as well as halt the exodus of East Germans to the West through Hungary, on November 9, 1989, the East German government opened the Berlin Wall. Hundreds of thousands

of East Germans immediately poured into West Berlin. After demonstrations continued throughout East Germany, on December 1, 1989, the communist regime agreed to conduct free elections in April 1990. As a consequence of those elections, East Germany's first noncommunist government was formed under the leadership of Lothar de Maziere, who favored the rapid reunification of the two Germanys. As a major step in that direction, de Maziere negotiated an agreement with West Germany's chancellor, Helmut Kohl, providing for the economic merger of the two Germanys on July 2, 1990.

While East Germany was throwing off communism, so too was Czechoslovakia. On December 10, 1989, a new cabinet, with non-communists in the majority, took office. On December 29, hard-line President Gustav Husak was replaced by the dissident leader, Vaclav Havel. As a result of a June 1990 election, the communists were ousted from the Czechoslovak government.

Bulgaria also was affected by the events in the other Soviet satellites. On November 9, 1989, the day the Berlin Wall was opened, Bulgaria's communist politburo removed Todor Zhivkov, who had been the party's leader since 1961, and replaced by reform communists who were able to hold on to power for more than a year before finally being overtaken by democratic forces.

The transition from communism in Romania, however, was far bloodier than in any other satellite state. In December 1989, thousands of Romanians demonstrated against Nicolae Ceausescu, the long-time and much-hated Romanian president. Sensing that he was losing control, Ceausescu and his wife attempted to flee the country, but they were captured before they could do so and summarily executed by the army on December 25. By the end of 1989, communism in Eastern Europe was finished.

The revolutions in Eastern Europe could not have occurred without Gorbachev's assistance. In order to preclude the necessity of Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev had hoped that its communist regimes would acquire a semblance of popular legitimacy by holding free elections. But he vastly underestimated the extent to which the moral bankruptcy of communism had destroyed any possibility of its legitimization in Eastern Europe. What began as an effort to reform communism ended with its collapse in Eastern Europe and, not long thereafter, in the Soviet Union as well. In fact, not only Soviet communism but also the Soviet Union itself would cease to exist by the end of 1991.¹²

THE MALTA SUMMIT, DECEMBER 1989

Bush initially had planned to meet Gorbachev early in 1990, but on October 31 the pressure on the president to end the Cold War prompted him to announce that he and the Soviet leader would have an “informal meeting” off the coast of Malta on December 2 and 3, 1989. During that meeting, which convened alternately on US and Soviet warships, both of which were rocked by a severe storm. Bush told Gorbachev that he no longer considered the Soviet Union an enemy. Accordingly, he proposed to normalize US-Soviet trade by granting the Soviet Union most-favored-nation status, credits, and observer status in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), thereby helping to bring the Soviet Union into the world economic structure. Gorbachev, in turn, pledged to work with the United States in ending conflicts in the Third World. He agreed to support free presidential elections in Nicaragua and to halt Soviet arms shipments to the El Salvadoran Contras. Two months later, when the ruling Sandinistas lost the election in Nicaragua, the Soviet Union accepted the new government of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. However, Bush could not get Gorbachev to abandon Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Gorbachev said he had tried to persuade Castro to adopt some form of perestroika, “but we cannot dictate to him.”¹³ Finally, Bush and Gorbachev agreed to make progress in START, the CFE talks, and negotiations to reduce chemical weapons. Not surprisingly, some historians have called the Malta Summit the event that really marked end of the Cold War.¹⁴

CHINA AND THE TIANANMEN SQUARE MASSACRE

One of the earliest tests of Scowcroft’s “enlightened realism” in application was the Bush administration’s reaction to China’s brutal suppression of student-initiated demonstrations in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square during the spring of 1989. Using tanks and armored cars, Chinese soldiers crushed the demonstrations and fired into the crowd, killing hundreds of protestors.

The demonstrations began as a way of mourning the death of a reformer, Hu Yaobang, on April 15, 1989. But the students quickly turned their energy to protesting the perceived failures of China’s Communist Party. They were energized further by Gorbachev’s state visit to Beijing on May 15. In response, hundreds of thousands

of students marched in Tiananmen Square carrying his picture and demanding a Chinese version of Gorbachev's reform program, *perestroika*. Perceiving, quite accurately, that the demonstrations were a threat to the communist regime, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping declared martial law on May 19. When that failed to end the protests, Deng ordered the army to clear Tiananmen Square on the night of June 3–4. In the ensuing bloodshed, some 3000 protesters were killed and 10,000 more were wounded.¹⁵

The violent repression of the student protesters in Tiananmen Square placed President Bush in a difficult position. Global reaction almost universally condemned China's government for the bloodshed and demanded harsh reprisals against it. But while the president personally abhorred the Chinese government's violent crackdown, he did not want to permanently damage US relations with China by overreacting, for example, by embagoing trade with that country. If trade relations between the two countries were thwarted, he argued, it would mean the end of an important incentive for internal reform in China. Consequently, while Bush expressed his "abhorrence" over the brutal suppression of the protestors, he also applied only relatively mild exchange restrictions on China. He suspended weapons sales, halted the exchanges of senior-level officials, and postponed multilateral development bank loans to China. When asked why the president did not impose economic sanctions on China, Scowcroft replied, the United States "had too much invested in the China situation to throw it away in one stroke."¹⁶

Bush's reaction to Tiananmen, however, was severely criticized on both sides of the congressional political spectrum. The president was accused of "groveling" before the Chinese leadership and "kowtowing" to the "butchers of Beijing."¹⁷ On June 28, the House of Representatives reacted by voting 418 to 0 to impose additional sanctions on China. In November, the House unanimously passed another bill calling for stronger sanctions. Bush vetoed it and, on January 25, 1990, the Senate sustained his veto, but by only a three-vote margin. Bush also vetoed a bill introduced by Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D.-Calif.), which would have granted Chinese students in the United States political asylum. The bill passed in the House unanimously, by a vote of 403 to 0, and was subsequently passed by the Senate by voice vote. Although Bush vetoed the bill, he felt compelled to offer the same protection by executive order.

Faced with continuing congressional opposition to his China policy, the president engaged in secret diplomacy to repair relations between the two countries. On June 30, Scowcroft secretly traveled to Beijing to tell the Chinese leadership that progress in normalizing relations between their two countries was impossible until they ceased their repression. However, the Chinese continued to resist releasing the dissidents from prison. As a result, Bush informed the Chinese that he would not extend most-favored-nation (MFN) status to them unless they did. In response, the Chinese privately promised that their position would soon be moderated. This prompted Bush, on May 24, 1990, to extend China’s MFN status and, by 1991, the dissidents were freed.¹⁸

Nevertheless, Bush’s China policy continued to be controversial. Winston Lord, a China expert who had served under Henry Kissinger during the administrations of Nixon and Ford, accused Bush of applying a double standard to his dealings with Gorbachev and Deng. While the president pushed Gorbachev toward greater democracy in the Soviet Union, he tolerated Deng’s suppression of a democratic movement in China.¹⁹ However, Bush, like other realists, did not believe that universal standards of behavior can be applied equally to all nations. China’s modest progress on human rights and political freedoms, the president asserted, had to be weighed against the great advantage of having a stable Chinese government and society. A stable China, in turn, was a requirement for the continued expansion of US-China commercial ties, which brought profits to US companies and provided cheap goods to American consumers. Thanks to China’s great trade surplus with the United States, China also became a huge foreign investor in US Treasury securities, thereby helping the US government finance its growing national debt. In short, the Bush administration was willing to sacrifice ideals in China for the economic benefits Chinese commercial ties brought the American people.²⁰ Finally, Bush certainly was correct in asserting that nothing the United States could have said or done would have prompted the Chinese leaders to eliminate what they considered to be a major threat to their regime. In the end, US-Chinese relations did improve, but only very slowly in the wake of the Tiananmen tragedy.

NORTH KOREA

In addition to China, Bush had to deal with another major East Asian problem: the threat of a potentially nuclear-armed North Korea. Although the North Koreans were a party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), US intelligence learned that during a 70-day shutdown period in 1989, the North Koreans violated that treaty by secretly removing spent fuel from their nuclear reactor at Yongbyon. Afterward, they separated the plutonium in a reprocessing facility built at the same location. According to CIA estimates, the North Koreans probably produced enough plutonium for one or nuclear weapons. Bush responded by launching a counter-proliferation campaign designed to stop North Korea from building a nuclear arsenal. It would employ a combination of “carrots and sticks”—diplomatic and economic pressure with the prospect of benefits—if the North Koreans agreed to permit inspections of their nuclear installation by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The centerpiece of the Bush administration’s effort was the announcement, in September 1991, that the United States would withdraw all of its tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea, where some of them had been deployed since the 1950s. Washington and Seoul also said they would suspend for one year their annual Team Spirit military exercise, long condemned by the North Koreans as provocative. The United States also agreed to a long-standing North Korean request for direct talks, but only for a single session, with more to follow if the North cooperated and allowed nuclear inspections.

North Korea reacted favorably to the US-South Korean concessions and agreed to engage the Americans and South Koreans in nuclear talks. One result was the signing, on December 31, 1991, of a historic Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. It prohibited both Koreas from storing, manufacturing, possessing, or otherwise obtaining nuclear weapons. In addition, both Koreas promised to eschew any nuclear reprocessing capability—a provision that would require the North Koreans to dismantle its plutonium reprocessing plant at Yongbyon. The accord was to be verified by Korean inspection teams as well as by the IAEA.²¹

The agreement between the two Koreas was followed, the next day, by an announcement that the United States and North Korea would hold an unprecedented nuclear weapons conference later in January. In those

talks, which were held at the United Nations on January 22, 1992, US Under Secretary of State Arnold Kanter called on the North Koreans to implement the IAEA inspections agreement and the North–South denuclearization accord. In return, the United States offered a continuing series of high-level discussions on such subjects as foreign investment in North Korea and US diplomatic recognition of the North Korean regime. Eight days later, North Korea signed a safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

However, the IAEA inspectors discovered evidence of more plutonium reprocessing than the North Koreans had admitted. The IAEA, which had missed Saddam Hussein’s nuclear program in Iraq, now demanded the right to conduct challenge inspections. But the North Koreans responded that they would allow challenge inspections only after the United States agreed to permit North Korean inspection of US military installations in South Korea, a condition that was rejected by the Bush administration. As a result, during the last half of 1992 and the early months of 1993, the euphoria that had resulted from the opening of North Korea’s nuclear program to international inspection gave way to suspicion, antagonism, and, eventually, in 1993, during the Clinton administration, a crisis.²²

OVERTHROWING NORIEGA

Although Bush was opposed to getting the United States involved in the internal affairs of China, he ordered a US military operation to overthrow Panama’s dictator, Manuel Noriega, in 1990. Noriega was a former CIA informant whom Bush had first encountered when he was director of the CIA. Over several years, the CIA and the Pentagon had paid Noriega some \$322,000 in cash and gifts. He also became a huge operative in the Latin American drug trade. In 1983, Noriega assumed control of the Panamanian military and from that power base essentially ruled the country.²³

The Reagan administration initially saw Noriega as an ally because he opposed the pro-Soviet Sandinista government in Nicaragua. But after Noriega shifted his allegiance to the Sandinistas in 1987, the Reagan administration tried to remove him from power. He was indicted by a federal grand jury in 1988 on drug trafficking charges, economic sanctions were imposed on Panama, and an additional 2000 US troops were sent to the Canal Zone. However, Reagan also was willing to deal with

Noriega in order to get him to go into exile. Then-Vice President Bush objected: “How can we make the argument we’re getting tough on drug dealers, if we let this guy off?” Reagan shrugged off the question and offered Noriega the exile deal anyhow, but the obstinate general refused to accept it.²⁴

Once Bush became president, getting rid of Noriega became a foreign policy priority. For one reason, as Secretary of State Baker recalled in his memoir, the United States did not want to transfer the Panama Canal to Panamanian sovereignty, as required by the treaty negotiated by President Jimmy Carter in 1978, with Noriega in power. In addition, Noriega posed a threat to the ability of the United States to defend the canal as well as the 40,000 American servicemen and citizens living in Panama. Moreover, Baker wrote, Noriega’s “corrupt and repressive military regime undermined our efforts both to promote democracy in the hemisphere and to combat narcotics trafficking.”²⁵

Bush and his advisors considered a variety of possible ways to remove the Panamanian dictator, including kidnapping or “snatching” him, as Baker phrased it. In the end, however, Bush decided that democratic elections in Panama would be the smartest way of getting rid of Noriega. In the presidential election that was conducted in May 1989, Guillermo Endara defeated Noriega’s candidate. But Noriega reacted by nullifying the results, and his supporters attacked the opposition candidates. Bush was appalled by Noriega’s thwarting of democracy; however, he refused to support a coup engineered by a major in the Panamanian army, Moises Giroldi. Colin Powell recounted that “the whole affair sounded like amateur night.”²⁶ The coup, which was attempted in October, failed, and Noriega’s forces executed Giroldi. Reaction to the failed coup in the United States was harsh, with many critics on both sides of the political spectrum taking Bush to task for missing an opportunity to remove Noriega. Bush and his advisers privately admitted that the critics were right and that they could not afford to ignore another opportunity to oust the Panamanian dictator.

The next opportunity occurred after Noriega’s forces murdered a US Marine and sexually molested his wife on December 17. Bush reacted quickly, ordering into operation the invasion plan, dubbed “Operation Just Cause.” The invasion was launched three days later. About 10,000 troops landed in Panama, where they joined 13,000 already there. Within twenty-four hours, the Panamanian military was overthrown, Endara was sworn in as Panama’s new president and Noreiga fled to the

Vatican’s embassy, where he was granted temporary sanctuary. Finally, in early January 1990, Noriega surrendered to US forces and was taken to Miami, Florida, where he was eventually convicted on drug charges and sent to prison.²⁷

Although the US invasion violated international law and was condemned by the Organization of American States and the UN General Assembly, public opinion polls indicated that a large majority of Panamanians supported Noriega’s overthrow. In the United States, Bush’s standing in the polls rose sharply. Moreover, even though he did not attempt to get Congress’s approval prior to launching the operation, as required by the War Powers Act, most members of Congress applauded his decisive action. Operation Just Cause not only achieved its objective of ousting Noriega, it did so with few US casualties.

THE DECLINE OF GORBACHEV

As 1990 dawned, growing problems within the Soviet Union increasingly affected the US-Soviet relationship. Above all, Gorbachev’s reform program had not only failed to produce any visible improvement in the Soviet economy, it actually had contributed to its continuing decline. Not surprisingly, while Gorbachev’s popularity was soaring in the Western world, it plummeted in the Soviet Union. Moreover, unlike earlier Soviet leaders, Gorbachev had to contend with public opposition.

Nevertheless, at a conference of the Soviet Communist Party in June–July 1988, Gorbachev had been able to push through the Soviet parliament a new constitution. One of its major features was a new Congress of People’s Deputies, most of whose members would be directly elected by the Soviet people in an election during March 1989. But the election results were a disaster for the Communist Party. One communist establishment figure after another was defeated and replaced by anti-party candidates, the most outstanding of whom was the maverick communist Boris Yeltsin. In another election conducted on May 29, Yeltsin was elected the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation—in effect, president of Russia. From that post, he would increasingly challenge Gorbachev.²⁸

Yet the greatest immediate challenge to Gorbachev was the threat to the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union posed by Lithuania, which, along with Estonia and Latvia, had been forcibly annexed by Stalin in 1940. On March 11, 1990, the Lithuanian parliament declared

Lithuania's independence. In an attempt to prevent the breakup of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev reacted by imposing an economic blockade on Lithuania, threatened to rule the republic by presidential decree, and sent Soviet troops to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, all in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to reverse the independence declaration.²⁹

A crucial question for the Bush administration during 1990 was how much the United States should do to help Gorbachev sustain his position. Gorbachev's resistance to the growing independence movements in the Soviet republics made it increasingly difficult for the administration to support the Soviet leader. On the other hand, Bush feared that the political disintegration of the Soviet Union would pose a much more difficult problem for the United States than one that remained intact.³⁰ Consequently, the president tried to walk a fine line between supporting self-determination for the republics and urging the peaceful resolution of ethnic differences. On March 29, 1990, he sent Gorbachev a letter assuring him that the United States did not want to do anything to inflame the Lithuanian crisis. But he also warned the Soviet leader that the use of force against the Lithuanians would have a negative impact on Soviet-American relations, and particularly on the administration's effort to end US restraints on trade between the two countries. Responding to this pressure, Gorbachev rescinded the economic embargo on Lithuania shortly before heading to Washington for a summit meeting with Bush at the end of May.³¹

GERMAN REUNIFICATION

One of the most important issues discussed at the Washington summit was the reunification of Germany. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the two Germanys had moved inexorably toward unification. Gorbachev was alarmed by this process, not only because of the threat he believed a reunited Germany would pose to Soviet security, but also because he feared that hard-liners in his own country would use it as an instrument to drive him from power. However, in elections conducted in East Germany on March 18, 1990, the communists were routed and a noncommunist coalition put into power. German reunification, as a consequence, had become only a matter of time. Faced with this fait accompli, Gorbachev shifted his effort to preventing a reunited Germany's membership in NATO. But the Western powers insisted that only the Germans could decide whether they would remain in NATO, and it was clear to everybody that they desired to do so.³²

In an attempt to get Gorbachev to accept a reunited Germany’s membership in NATO, at the Washington summit, Bush gave the Soviet leader a number of assurances. Among them was his promise that NATO military forces would not be placed in the former territory of East Germany, and that the borders of a reunified Germany would not extend beyond the Oder-Neise River Line, the existing border with Poland. Baker also assured Gorbachev that beyond a reunified Germany NATO would not expand eastward “one inch more.”³³ However, that promise never appeared in a formal document, thereby insuring, inadvertently, that the pledges would be a matter of controversy in future years.³⁴

In July 1990, delegates at a NATO summit in London also attempted to ease Soviets fears about Germany’s continued membership in the Western alliance. They approved a declaration proclaiming the end of the Cold War, and pledged to adopt a new strategy, one making nuclear forces the weapons of “last resort.”³⁵ But the assurance that probably was most instrumental in getting Gorbachev to accept continued German membership in NATO was West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s promised to loan the financially strapped Soviet Union \$8 billion. With the assurances provided by Bush, Kohl, and NATO, on July 14, 1990, Gorbachev accepted the reunification of Germany and its continued membership in the Western alliance. On October 1, the World War II victors formally surrendered their four-power rights and responsibilities over Germany and Berlin. Two days later, Germany was reunified. On December 2, the first freely elected all-German government since the 1920s took office.³⁶

The Soviet withdrawal from East Germany was duplicated elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In 1990, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had negotiated agreements providing for the total withdrawal of some 123,000 Soviet troops stationed on their soil by mid-1991. In June 1990, Hungary became the first Warsaw Pact country to announce it would pull out of that alliance (by the end of 1991). The other satellite states followed the Hungarian lead and timetable. Then, in a stunning—but not unexpected—move, on February 25, 1991, the Warsaw Pact announced its dissolution, effective July 1, 1991.³⁷

Meeting in Paris on November 21, 1990, the member countries of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which included states from both eastern and western Europe, signed a charter formally ending the Cold War in Europe. The member states declared that they were “no longer adversaries” and affirmed a “steadfast

commitment to democracy based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, prosperity through economic liberty and social justice, and equal security for all countries.”³⁸

ENDING THE COLD WAR IN THE THIRD WORLD

As multilateral diplomacy was ending the Cold War in Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union turned their attention toward resolving conflicts in the Third World, particularly in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Central America, South Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

In September 1991, the Bush administration accepted Gorbachev’s invitation to cut off all arms to both sides in the civil war raging in Afghanistan in the hope that the action would lead to a negotiated end to the conflict. Gorbachev also took the lead in ending the conflict in Cambodia. In April 1989, he successfully pressured the Vietnamese to announce that they would withdraw all of their troops from Cambodia by that September. However, it took more than a year (in October 1991) to bring the Cambodian parties to an agreement that effectively ended their civil war.

After the signing of the Cambodian peace accords, the Bush administration opened talks with the Vietnamese on normalizing relations between their two countries. However, it was not until 1995, during the administration of Bush’s successor, President Bill Clinton, that the United States and Vietnam finally established diplomatic relations.

The Bush administration also collaborated with the Soviet Union to end the conflicts in Namibia and Angola. The Namibian civil war ended as a result of national elections in November 1989, followed by a grant of independence from South Africa in March 1990. In Angola, both superpowers cooperated to monitor implementation of the December 1988 peace accords between the rival factions, the Marxist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). All Cuban and South African troops were withdrawn from the country by the end of May 1991. Shortly afterward, the MPLA disavowed Marxist–Leninism and converted to social democracy, a process that enabled the party to win national elections in October 1992.

As a part of his effort to end Third World confrontations with the United States, Gorbachev also put new emphasis on the peaceful resolution of Central America’s conflicts. During a visit to Havana in April 1989, he

informed Fidel Castro that the Soviet Union would no longer support Cuba’s effort to export revolution. He also told Castro that the Soviet Union would no longer pay the higher-than-world-market price for Cuban sugar imports. He encouraged Castro to cooperate with the United States as a way out of the squeeze the Soviet Union was compelled to place on the Cuban economy. In addition, in September 1991, Gorbachev informed the United States that the 2800-man military brigade, which the Soviets had stationed in Cuba since the 1960s, would be withdrawn. Obviously, Gorbachev’s retreat from Cuba did nothing to endear him to Castro.

Gorbachev also moved to end the civil war in Nicaragua by unilaterally stopping military aid to Nicaragua’s Sandinista government and persuading the Sandinistas to conduct free elections in February 1990. Combined with the Bush administration’s decision to withdraw US support from the “Contras,” the opponents of the Sandinistas, the Soviet action was instrumental in finally bringing an end to the Nicaraguan conflict. Bush and Gorbachev also agreed to work together to end the civil war in El Salvador, a goal that was achieved with the signing of a peace accord in January 1992.³⁹

THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

While fishing off the coast of Kennebunkport, Maine in late August 1990, Bush and Scowcroft mused about the possibility that the end of the Cold War created an opportunity to create a new international order. They envisioned a world system in which the United States and the Soviet Union, freed from Cold War, would cooperate with the United Nations in fulfilling the vision of that organization’s founders in resisting aggression and ameliorating the causes of war and civil strife.

However, there was a more immediate and important motivation prompting the late August 1990 musings of Bush and Scowcroft about a new world order: their perceived need to rally the international community, the Congress, and the American people to deal with a major crisis in the Middle East. On August 1, Iraq’s dictator, Saddam Hussein, ordered his army to invade the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait. Quickly gaining control of that country, Hussein then proclaimed Kuwait the “Nineteenth Province” of Iraq.

Bush’s initial reaction to Iraq’s aggression the next day was ambiguous. Although he demanded that Hussein withdraw immediately and unconditionally from Kuwait, he said nothing about what the United States

would do if the Iraqi dictator did not comply. However, he quickly signed executive orders banning all trade with Iraq and freezing both Iraqi and Kuwaiti assets. Bush also engaged in personal diplomacy by phoning every leader of the NATO alliance. But while the allies also promised to freeze Iraqi assets, they also gave no indication that they were prepared to do anything else to reverse the Iraqi aggression. The one exception was British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who told Bush that it was vital to restore Kuwait's independence. "If Iraq wins," she said to the president, "no small state is safe."⁴⁰

The next morning, August 3, Scowcroft, with the president's approval, led a meeting of the National Security Council on the Kuwait issue by stating that it was vital for the United States to demonstrate that it would not permit aggression to succeed. The US reaction, he added, would set a precedent for approaching the post-Cold War world by cooperating with the international community to check aggression. But first, Hussein had to be prevented from overrunning Saudi Arabia, a country with the world's largest oil reserves. Consequently, Bush dispatched a contingent of 100,000 US ground troops to that country after gaining the approval of Saudi King Fahd on August 6. The operation, which was code-named Desert Shield, would eventually grow to over 500,000 US troops. Bush also ordered the *USS Independence* carrier battle group (two carriers, one guided missile destroyer, two frigates, and one ammunition ship) into the Persian Gulf from the Indian Ocean.⁴¹

FORGING THE COALITION

Bush and Baker were extremely successful in getting support where it counted: not only from the Soviet Union, but also from America's allies and, more importantly, from friendly countries in the Middle East. On August 3, Baker persuaded Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to agree to a joint declaration condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Gorbachev decided that even the need to support Soviet clients as important as Iraq did not supersede his paramount requirement of obtaining Western assistance to save the Soviet economy and, indeed, the Soviet Union itself.

Accordingly, on August 6, the Soviets voted in favor of a Security Council resolution implementing a UN embargo on arms shipments to Iraq. On August 25, the Soviets supported another UN resolution authorizing the use of military force, if necessary, to enforce the embargo

on Iraq. However, primarily because of the opposition of the Soviet military, Gorbachev refused to accept a US invitation to send military forces to the Gulf region. Nevertheless, Bush expressed his belief that with the two nations working together to reverse Iraq’s aggression, they could close the book on the Cold War and offer a vision of the new world order in which they would cooperate. Bush also was successful in persuading the Chinese to refrain from blocking the UN sanctions, which the president obviously regarded as China’s payback for his efforts to restore amicable US-Chinese relations in the wake of the Tiananmen crisis.

In the end, Bush and Baker were able to create a coalition of over two dozen nations to support the effort to oust Iraq’s army from Kuwait. Some of America’s allies committed military force to the operation. The British sent squadrons of Tornado fighters and the Seventh Armored Brigade to Saudi Arabia. Even France, which had been the closest to Iraq of any Western nation, eventually sent 4200 troops. All totaled, almost 200,000 thousand troops from twenty-seven other states were added to the 500,000 US troops deployed in Saudi Arabia. In addition, Bush was successful in persuading over fifty nations to pay for the war by pledging \$48.2 billion in assistance, with the largest amounts from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Japan, and Germany.⁴²

Israel also made a commitment to the operation—albeit one that was passive in nature. Bush and Baker obtained from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir a promise that Israel would not enter the war against Iraq. The president and his secretary of state feared that if the Israelis participated in the operation, it would lose Arab support.⁴³

“THIS WILL NOT STAND”

On August 5, Bush announced to reporters that “this will not stand, this aggression of Kuwait.”⁴⁴ In an address to a joint session of Congress on September 1, he explained that “an Iraq permitted to swallow Kuwait would have the military power, as well as the arrogance, to intimidate ... neighbors who control the lion’s share of the world’s oil reserves. We cannot permit a resource so vital to be dominated by one so ruthless. And we won’t.”⁴⁵

Not everyone, however, was prepared to go to war with Iraq in order to reverse its conquest of Kuwait. Bush’s inclusion of the oil motive for challenging Iraq’s aggression was quickly pounced on by antiwar activists. In New York City, a parade of marchers six blocks long chanted, “Hell,

no, we won't go—we won't fight for Texaco.”⁴⁶ In addition, many feared, particularly more than a few members of Congress, that a war with Iraq would turn into another Vietnam-like quagmire.

In order to counter these concerns, in his September 1 address to Congress, Bush appealed to the idealism of the American people. He described his vision of a new international order that might evolve in the wake of the Cold War if the United States stood by the United Nations in reversing Iraq's aggression. It would be characterized, the president waxed idealistically, by a “shared commitment among nations, large and small, to a set of principles that undergird US relations: peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals, and just treatment of all peoples. … a world in which freedom and respect for human rights would find a home among all nations.”⁴⁷

Although, in retrospect, Bush's vision of a new post-Cold War international order appears wistfully naive, he certainly was no utopian. He realized that the Cold War's end did not ensure that a wholesale transformation of interstate relations would occur any time soon. Conflict would remain, aggression would occur, and crises could erupt in a number of places, including the Soviet bloc, the Middle East, and the Korean peninsula. He thought that the most that was possible within his generation's life span was to “move toward” a more cooperative global system. But it is important to point out that Bush's vision of a new international order was addressed primarily to an American audience in order to get their support and the support of Congress for military action against Iraq. Scowcroft admitted as much—but only after the Gulf War was over—when he told a reporter that the new world order concept was merely a “catchphrase” that had served its purpose, that is, to gain public and congressional support for the Gulf War and then, after that conflict had ended, was no longer needed.⁴⁸

Although Bush believed that the United States had the right to act unilaterally against Iraq under international law and Article 51 of the UN Charter, he also thought that it was important to obtain UN sponsorship for every enforcement measure taken against Iraq. UN blessing would help to persuade the American people, the Congress, and the members of the anti-Iraq coalition that it was both necessary and legitimate to reverse Iraq's aggression, by force if that proved necessary. Naturally, then, Bush was pleased when, on November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council authorized the use of “all necessary means” against Iraq if it did not withdraw from Kuwait by the following January 15, 1991.⁴⁹

And while Bush argued that he did not need Congress’s approval to go to war, because he would be exercising his powers as commander-in-chief, he nevertheless requested a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force. That resolution passed both houses of Congress on January 12, but only by small margins, 57-42 in the Senate and 250-183 in the House. Moreover, the votes were largely along party lines. All but two Republicans in the Senate voted in favor of the resolution, while 45 Democrats opposed it. In the House, only three Republicans voted against the measure, while 164 supported it. The Democrats voted 86 in favor of the resolution while 179 opposed it.

OPERATION “DESERT STORM”

Preparations for the war with Iraq had begun in earnest as early as October 1990. In an October 11 strategy planning meeting with key military leaders, Scowcroft was appalled by the war plan prepared by General Powell. It relied primarily on air power, followed by a coalition assault on the Iraqi defense line along the Kuwait border with Saudi Arabia. Scowcroft considered the plan an unenthusiastic effort “by people who didn’t want to do the job”—an indirect reference to the fact that Powell thought that sanctions should be given more time before turning to military action. Scowcroft suggested an alternative plan, one that called for the major coalition forces to invade Iraq west of Kuwait and then head east in order to surround and trap the Iraqi forces in Iraq. Ultimately, Scowcroft’s recommendation became the basis for the military strategy the coalition would adopt.⁵⁰

The war against Iraq, code-named “Operation Desert Storm,” began on January 17, 1991, with a massive bombing campaign that lasted over three weeks. The ground offensive, which began on February 24, consisted of two major thrusts. One part of the coalition forces advanced from northeastern Saudi Arabia into Kuwait and southern Iraq. Within four days, they encircled and defeated the Iraqi army and liberated Kuwait. With Iraqi resistance collapsing, and the Iraqi army in full retreat, Bush saw no need to continue the killing. Powell advised him to end the fighting, and the president complied, declaring a ceasefire beginning on February 28.⁵¹

However, Bush’s decision to end the war without first sending US troops to Baghdad to overthrow Saddam Hussein became controversial. One critic, the conservative journalist John Podhoretz, considered

Bush's decision a display of "shockingly poor foresight." But Bush believed he had good reasons for not ordering US forces to advance on the Iraqi capital. For one, he did not want to incur the costs—and risks—of occupying Iraq. In addition, the UN resolutions had only empowered the US-led coalition to free Kuwait, not to overthrow Hussein. Pursuing the latter objective would have placed the United States outside the UN authorization and thereby undermined Bush's vision of a new international order in which the UN would play a major role. In addition, Bush knew that to prevent the Iraq operation from becoming another Vietnam-like quagmire, he had to keep its objectives limited. Furthermore, he had been pressured by Gorbachev to avoid "piling on" to the humiliation of a Soviet client state.

Another important consideration in the president's decision was Saudi Arabia's argument that the overthrow of Hussein would initiate a civil war in Iraq between his Sunni supporters and the Shiites, who comprise a majority of Iraq's people, as well as the Kurds, who inhabit the northeastern part of the country. A weakened Iraq, Bush and his advisors feared, would no longer be able to serve as a barrier to the expansion of Iranian influence in the Middle East. As a consequence of these considerations, Bush and his advisors decided that if Hussein were going to be overthrown, it should be done by the Iraqis themselves.

No one on the Bush team, certainly not the president, expected that Hussein would survive in power after his Kuwaiti adventure had collapsed. They thought his Sunni-dominated military would overthrow him. But Bush and his advisors failed to appreciate that the Sunni minority saw Hussein as their protector. Moreover, the Iraqi dictator held onto the reins of power by ruthlessly killing any suspected opponents. Consequently, his army remained loyal to him and subsequently obeyed his orders to suppress uprisings by the Kurds and the Shiites, killing between 30,000 and 60,000 people in the process.

Reflecting the dominant strain of realism in his foreign policy philosophy, Bush refused to support these uprisings—even though he had encouraged them—because he now feared that the Iraqi state would dissolve if the revolts succeeded and Iran would emerge as the ultimate winner. A secular, functioning Iraq, even one ruled by Hussein, the president now reasoned, was needed to maintain a regional balance of power with the more populous, Shia-governed Iran. Scowcroft conceded that the administration's action was "in a way, cold-blooded," but, he insisted, it was "absolutely the right course of action" however "unfortunate" and regrettable.⁵²

In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, most commentators considered the Gulf War a decisive victory. Only 300 coalition troops were killed, compared to an estimated 8000–10,000 Iraqi troops. And even though Iraq proved to be an easy foe to defeat, the US military had won its first major victory since World War II, and in the process, Bush believed, removed the stain of the defeat in Vietnam.⁵³ “We’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome,” Bush declared on March 1. By using US military power in a short, successful war, he insisted, the American people had overcome their reluctance to use military force “once and for all.” As a result, he said, the United States had “a reestablished credibility central to its ability to provide world leadership, collective security and … a peaceful international order.”⁵⁴

However, the Gulf War did not eliminate the threat posed by Hussein, even though it did weaken him considerably. According to the peace terms that Hussein accepted, in addition to recognizing Kuwait’s sovereignty, Iraq promised to get rid of all its weapons of mass destruction (WMD, including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons). The United States also established a no-fly zone in the north of Iraq to protect the Kurds from Iraqi air strikes. However, the Iraqi dictator would continue to be a problem for the United States long afterward, until he was ultimately overthrown by a different Bush administration.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

In the wake of the Gulf War and the defeat of Iraq, Bush believed the opportunity had arrived for a new order of international relations in the Middle East. The war not only had neutralized the military threat Iraq had posed to Israel, but it also exposed the inability of the Soviet Union to aid radical Arabs as well as the dependence of moderate Arab states on the United States for their security.⁵⁵ Moreover, Bush thought that unless the United States engaged at the highest levels to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, conditions in the Middle East would only worsen, undermining moderates and strengthening radicals, all of which would endanger the vital interests of the United States in the region. Consequently, Bush announced his intention to convene a multi-party international peace conference in Madrid, Spain. The Israelis, Palestinians, and key Arab governments would be invited to participate with the Soviet Union and the United States. However, Secretary of State Baker ran into a number of problems in trying to arrange the conference. For one, Syrian President Hafez Assad

flatly said there would be no peace until Israel returned every inch of the Golan Heights, which the Israelis occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.⁵⁶

In addition, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir refused to negotiate with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which the Israelis considered a terrorist organization. In an attempt to give the Palestinians a voice at the conference, Baker worked out a compromise plan which permitted Palestinians who were not members of the PLO to join the Jordanian delegation. However, Shamir's government raised still another roadblock. In early April, its housing minister, Ariel Sharon, announced plans for the construction of 13,000 new housing units in the occupied territories by 1994. Baker considered this "a deliberate effort to sabotage the peace process," and asked Shamir to repudiate Sharon's announcement, but the Israeli prime minister refused.⁵⁷ Then, shortly before the Madrid Conference was to convene, Shamir requested the United States to guarantee an \$11 billion loan to Israel, but he refused to pledge that the money would not be used to build new settlements in the occupied territories.

Baker knew that if he failed to oppose the loan without that pledge, he would severely damage his credibility with the Arab governments and the Palestinians, who naturally would conclude that the United States was financing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Consequently, in early September 1991, President Bush publicly declared his opposition to new Israeli settlements and asked Congress for a 120-day delay before voting on the loan guaranty in order to prevent it from interfering with the Madrid Conference. However, Shamir and the pro-Israel congressional lobby in Washington tried to end-run the president by pressing Congress to approve the loan guaranty anyhow. But with Bush at the height of his popularity in the wake of the victorious Gulf War, Congress went along with his request to postpone a discussion of the loan guaranty until after the Madrid Conference.⁵⁸

The Madrid Conference opened on October 30, 1991, and ended on November 4. It was co-chaired by Bush and Soviet President Gorbachev and was attended by delegations from Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon as well as a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. For the first time, all of the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict had gathered to hold direct negotiations—a historically unprecedented event. Although the parties largely stuck to their traditional positions, they nevertheless agreed to participate in the follow-up talks, which began in Washington in

December 1991 and Moscow during the following month. While these talks acquired greater momentum following the election of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in June 1992, they failed to yield any results before the Clinton administration took office. Nevertheless, while unproductive in the short run, the Israeli-Arab talks had longer-term significance. For one, they signaled genuine movement toward Arab acceptance of Israel. In addition, the groundwork was laid for what would be an eventual peace treaty between Jordan and Israel as well as direct talks between the PLO and Israel during the Clinton administration.⁵⁹

THE CONTINUING DECLINE OF GORBACHEV

By the spring of 1991, there was considerable doubt about Gorbachev's ability to stay in power. Beginning in the fall of 1990, rumors of a right-wing coup against him began to circulate. Kremlin hard-liners were particularly upset by a Gorbachev-initiated referendum on March 17, 1991, in which the Soviet people were asked to approve the preservation of the Soviet Union “as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which human rights and freedoms of all nationalities will be fully guaranteed.”⁶⁰

In a clever move, Yeltsin persuaded the Russian parliament to append to Gorbachev's referendum a separate proposal calling for the establishment of a popularly elected Russian presidency, a step Gorbachev refused to emulate at the Soviet level. While Gorbachev's referendum was approved by 70% of the Soviet voters, Yeltsin's proposal received a favorable vote from 85% of the Russian voters. On June 12, Yeltsin won the election, making him the first popularly elected president of Russia. From that position, he would continue to pressure the un-elected Gorbachev to move toward democracy and capitalism.⁶¹

In a London G-7 summit, Gorbachev hoped to obtain substantial Western economic assistance to help him revive the ailing Soviet economy, as well as his own declining prestige back home. But he was disappointed by the tepid response of the Western leaders. Not only did they not offer him any meaningful economic assistance, they even denied his request for full Soviet membership in the International Monetary Fund, instead offering him associate membership. Bush and most of his advisers wanted to provide economic support to Gorbachev, but they were not convinced that it would not be wasted by the inept and corrupt Soviet bureaucracy. “We didn't give them economic aid,” Scowcroft later

explained, “because we just couldn’t see how to do it without putting money down a rat hole.”⁶²

Moreover, the United States was in a recession itself, and the president was being criticized for being more willing to help foreigners than he was his own people. However, in a subsequent Moscow summit, from July 29 to 31, 1991, Bush announced that the United States would ratify a bilateral trade agreement and consider granting the Soviet Union most-favored-nation trade status. Still, he remained notably cautious in helping the Soviets economically. Most-favored-nation status and a modicum of Western economic aid package were not implemented until the following year.⁶³

In another effort to prop up the tottering Soviet leader, after the Moscow summit the US president traveled to Kiev, the capital of the Ukrainian republic. There he tried to convince the Ukrainians of the wisdom of working with Gorbachev to preserve the Soviet Union. To Bush’s dismay, his recommendation did not endear him to the Ukrainian people. Critics in the United States quickly labeled Bush’s statement his “Chicken Kiev.”⁶⁴

THE AUGUST COUP

Gorbachev’s attempt to create a federal state with a new union treaty and his proposal to create a democratic Russian Communist Party proved to be too much for the hard-liners in the Soviet Politburo. On August 19, one day before the union treaty was scheduled to be signed, an eight-member “State of Emergency Committee” declared that Gorbachev, who was on vacation in the Crimea, had been removed from power. The committee, led by Vice President Yanayev, also declared a six-month state of emergency and announced that the signing of the new union treaty would not take place.

For a variety of reasons, however, the coup against Gorbachev failed. One reason was Yeltsin’s decision to denounce the Emergency Committee as illegal. Thousands of Muscovites rallied to his side, erecting barricades around the Russian parliament building, where Yeltsin led the resistance. But the pivotal reason for the coup’s failure was the refusal of Soviet troops to obey the orders of the Emergency Committee to storm the Russian parliament. Realizing that they could not rely upon the military to overthrow Yeltsin, the coup leaders abandoned their enterprise and the Russian president quickly assumed control of the

government, arrested the coup leaders, and suspended the activities of the Communist Party.

President Bush, true to character, was slow to condemn the coup against Gorbachev. He did so only after Yeltsin pleaded with him to intervene. And, after Gorbachev was restored to power, Bush was reluctant to accept, let alone support, his eclipse by Yeltsin. Bush clearly preferred to deal with Gorbachev rather than risk the uncertainties of his demise. Some of this caution was rooted in apprehensions about Yeltsin, whom Scowcroft referred to in private conversations with British Prime Minister John Major as “an egoist, a demagogue, an opportunist, and a grandstander.”⁶⁵

Bush also delayed recognizing the independence of the Baltic states, and did so, on September 2, only after recognition had been granted by other nations and it was inevitable that Gorbachev would have to do so as well. Bush’s pro-union, pro-Gorbachev stance earned him considerable criticism. He was faulted for placing his personal prestige behind a leader, Gorbachev, who was trying to save communism and the Soviet empire rather than behind the leading democrat, Yeltsin, who was trying to bring them down. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful coup, however, it was Yeltsin who was in charge, not Gorbachev, a fact Yeltsin made obvious by publicly humiliating the Soviet leader after his return to Moscow on August 22. Two days later, Gorbachev resigned as the Communist Party’s general secretary and banned the party’s activities within the central government and the security organs. While the party itself was not abolished, the events of August spelled the end of its preeminent status.⁶⁶

WINDING DOWN THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

In spite of Gorbachev’s weakened status, he and Bush were able to undertake significant steps to wind down the nuclear arms race. At the Moscow summit in July 1991, they signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (START I). Among other features, it required each party to reduce the number of their deployed strategic warheads to no more than 6000 and their launchers (missiles and bombers) to a maximum of 1600. (At the end of 1990 the United States had slightly fewer than 12,778 strategic warheads on 1876 launchers and the Soviet Union had 10,880 warheads on 2354 launchers.)⁶⁷

On September 27, 1991, Bush initiated another major nuclear arms reduction measure by announcing that the United States would remove or destroy all of its tactical nuclear weapons that were deployed in Europe, Asia, and on US warships. He also said the United States would abandon plans to deploy mobile MX and Midgetman missiles. Moreover, he announced that he was ordering an end to the twenty-four-hour alert status of US strategic bombers as well as those missiles—about 600 ICBMs and SLBMs—that were scheduled for deactivation under the START Treaty. He called on the Soviet Union to negotiate additional arms control measures, including an agreement eliminating all land-based ICBMs with multiple warheads (MIRVs). Gorbachev responded by announcing reciprocal reductions in the Soviet nuclear arsenal, including a decision to begin the dismantling of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons.⁶⁸

All in all, the Bush and Gorbachev arms control and reduction initiatives in September and October 1991 were a major step in lowering the ceilings set in the START Treaty. They provided the basis for the even deeper strategic arms cuts—roughly two-thirds of their pre-START I level—that the United States and Russia would accept in the subsequent START II agreement, which Bush and Yeltsin signed in January 1993, shortly before Bush left office.⁶⁹

In still another nuclear arms reduction measure, in November 1991 Congress passed, and the president signed, a bill sponsored by Senators Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.) and Richard Lugar (R.-Ind.) which authorized the United States to spend up to \$400 million in fiscal year 1992 to help the Soviet Union destroy nuclear, chemical, and other weapons, as well as establish verifiable safeguards against the proliferation of such weapons. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Nunn-Lugar assistance was granted to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. This assistance not only made possible the implementation of both START Treaties, it also reduced significantly the risks that Soviet nuclear weapons would fall into the hands of terrorists.⁷⁰

NATO also took additional steps to end the Cold War late in Gorbachev's presidency. On November 8, 1991, NATO's military doctrine was changed to reflect that an invasion from the East was no longer likely. Accordingly, the alliance's "forward defense" doctrine, which envisioned a defense of West Germany on its border with East Germany, was abandoned.⁷¹ However, NATO rejected a proposal by Yeltsin that would have permitted Russia to join the alliance as an equal partner. Instead, NATO offered Russia, as well as the other former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact members, associate status with the alliance in what was called the Partnership for Peace.⁷²

THE DEMISE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Despite Gorbachev’s, as well as Yeltsin’s, efforts to preserve some form of union binding together the Soviet republics, the centrifugal force of nationalism that was released by the failed August coup and the demise of communism proved much too strong to overcome. One republic after another followed the lead of the Baltic states and declared their independence. After the Ukrainians voted for independence on December 1, Yeltsin decided there was no point in trying to preserve the union. On December 8, he joined the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus and together decided to supplant the Soviet Union with a “Commonwealth of Independent States.” On December 21, eight other republics joined the new Commonwealth.⁷³

Three days earlier, on December 18, Yeltsin announced that Ukraine and Belarus (and later Kazakhstan) had agreed to transfer their nuclear missiles to Russia. On December 25, Gorbachev resigned the presidency of the Soviet Union and transferred control of the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons to Yeltsin. The next day, the Supreme Soviet met for the last time and dissolved itself. On December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist.

President Bush, in an address to the American people on Christmas day, praised Gorbachev “for his intellect, vision, and courage,” and credited him for ending the Cold War.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Bush also played an essential role in bringing that four-decade-old conflict to an end. He facilitated the dramatic concessions that Gorbachev was compelled to make, and which finally made possible the conclusion of the Cold War. Bush provided the necessary assurances that Gorbachev needed to accept the membership in NATO of a reunified Germany.

In addition, by proceeding slowly and delicately on the independence of the Baltic states, Bush provided Gorbachev with some breathing space on the issue. This facilitated the Soviet leader’s effort to separate himself from the hard-line crackdown on Lithuania and eventually made it possible for him to rejoin the reformers. And, while Bush was tardy in supporting the Soviet leader during the unsuccessful coup, his arms control initiatives after Gorbachev was restored to power insured that, even though the Soviet Union did disintegrate, the transfer of Soviet nuclear weapons to Yeltsin’s control was accomplished without tragic consequences.

YUGOSLAVIA

Yugoslavia was another communist country that ceased to exist during Bush's presidency. Elections in Slovenia and Croatia in 1990 gave non-communist parties control of their governments. On June 25, 1991, both countries declared their independence. However, the Serb minority in Croatia declared their own independence from that republic and their desire to join Serbia, which triggered violence between rival ethnic militias in Croatia. The Yugoslav army intervened, ostensibly to separate the combatants, but it quickly became apparent that the army favored the Croatian Serbs. The war that followed devastated Croatia, killed tens of thousands of people, and displaced hundreds of thousands. In another Yugoslav republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, a referendum on independence took place in March 1992, but the Serb minority boycotted it. Nevertheless, the republic declared its independence from Yugoslavia in May 1992, while the Serbs in Bosnia declared their own areas an independent republic. Over the next three years, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and displaced millions of people from their homes.

As Yugoslavia began to break apart, the Bush administration hoped to persuade its constituent nationalities to avoid violence and adopt a democratic process to facilitate the peaceful dissolution of the country. But there was no thought of actually sending US troops to Yugoslavia which, unlike Iraq, Bush did not consider a significant strategic interest of the United States. Unless a fundamental US interest was at stake, Scowcroft insisted, the United States had to avoid getting entangled in civil wars or attempting to prevent or stop genocide and other atrocities, such as those occurring in the former Yugoslav republics.⁷⁵ Bush agreed completely. "I've told our top people," he confided to his diary as the conflict began, "We don't want to put a dog in this fight, ... The concept that we have to work out every problem, everywhere in the world, is crazy."⁷⁶ Baker, in his memoir, was equally blunt, even though Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, "had Saddam Hussein's appetite, ... Serbia didn't have Iraq's capabilities or ability to affect America's vital interests, such as access to energy supplies."⁷⁷

Although many Croatians, Muslims, and Serbs would die before the Bush administration left office, Baker, reflecting the sentiments of both Bush and Scowcroft, was unapologetic. If the United States had intervened in the conflicts in Yugoslavia, he argued, the losses in American

lives would have been heavy. Moreover, Baker said, “I do not believe [the breakup of Yugoslavia and slaughter] would have been prevented by any combination’ of political, diplomatic, and economic measures.” He also insisted that “the Europeans, not the Americans, should take the lead in managing the Yugoslav crisis, which after all was occurring on Europe’s doorstep.”⁷⁸

Unfortunately for the thousands of victims of the war, meaningful intervention by the European Community did not occur. As a result, the problem of what to do about the continuing conflict was left for the incoming Clinton administration. Clearly, the idealistic vision of Bush’s new world order—especially the notion that the United States had the primary responsibility to lead the world community in preventing wars or ending them—had vanished in the face of more realistic considerations, which certainly included the absence of any vital US interests in Yugoslavia.

SAVING SOMALIA

The dearth of substance in Bush’s vision of a new world order was also demonstrated in his reaction to the massive humanitarian tragedy in Somalia, which was engulfed in a civil war following the collapse of the dictatorship of Siad Barre in January 1991. Three hundred thousand Somalis would die of starvation and over a million people would flee the country as a result of the conflict.⁷⁹

In April 1992, the United Nations responded by initiating a massive relief effort. But since there was no vital national interest at stake, the Bush administration initially refused to consider getting involved in the humanitarian aid program. However, in mid-July, the president responded to reports of starvation in Somalia by ordering a US military airlift to transport food to that country as well as to northern Kenya, where Somalis had fled from the war. But it was soon obvious that additional military support was necessary to create a secure environment for the relief efforts. Eighty percent of the relief goods were being looted and famine was claiming in excess of a thousand victims a day.

By November, the administration was being heavily criticized in the media and in Congress for its failure to do more for the suffering Somali people. The idealistic rhetoric that Bush had used to sell his vision of a new world order had appealed to the idealism of the American people, who believed, and expected, that the president would try to bring it about. But, as both Bosnia and Somalia demonstrated, Bush and his

key national security advisors were opposed to getting involved in such humanitarian crises primarily because there were no vital US interests at stake, but also out of their fear that by intervening militarily in these countries, the United States would get bogged down in another Vietnam-like quagmire.

However, faced with the intense congressional and media criticism, Bush felt compelled to do more about Somalia. In a meeting with his principal national security advisors the day before Thanksgiving, Powell recommended a plan of action in which US forces would intervene massively in Somalia and then leave quickly. But Scowcroft did not like the idea. “Sure, we can get in,’ he said. “But how do we get out?” But the president liked Powell’s plan. “We’ll do it,” he responded, “and try to be out by January 19.” He added, “I don’t want to stick Clinton with an ongoing military operation.” “Mr. President,” Cheney interjected, ‘we can’t have it both ways. We can’t get there fully until mid-December. And the job won’t be done by January 19.”⁸⁰

Nevertheless, Bush stuck to his decision. But he said the United States would launch “Operation Restore Hope” only on condition that the UN Security Council agreed that all international troops engaged in the operation would be placed under US command. On December 2, the Security Council agreed to Bush’s terms. One week later, on December 9, the first of 26,000 US troops landed in Mogadishu, the Somali capital. They eventually were joined by more than 20,000 additional troops from twenty other countries. The mission of the US troops was defined as narrowly as possible—that is, limited to opening supply lines to feed the people—in order to avoid their involvement in the continuing civil war.

Bush intervened in Somalia primarily in response to the criticism from Congress and the America media, not out of altruistic considerations, and certainly not to implement his earlier vision of a new international order in which the United States would play a major role in supporting the humanitarian missions of the United Nations. That the Somalia intervention was going to be a one-time exception was made clear in a national security directive (NSD 74) that Bush signed on November 24, just before US troops departed for Somalia. In the future, the directive stated, the United States would not commit US ground troops to humanitarian missions, but instead would only do the “heavy lifting,” that is, providing air transports, logistics, communications and the like.⁸¹

In the end, tens of thousands of lives were saved as a result of the US intervention. But the narrowly defined mission left untouched the

political and social problems that had caused the civil war and mass starvation in the first place. The resolution of those problems, and the fate of the United States troops that Bush did not withdraw before he left office, would also be left to his successor.⁸²

A NEOCONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Defense Secretary Cheney and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz envisioned a different kind of international order than the idealized one Bush had envisioned. Wolfowitz was one of the recognized leaders of a group of intellectuals and policy experts who were called neoconservatives or, more derisively, “neocons.” The label initially referred to a group of liberal intellectuals who had become more conservative, and anti-Soviet, in the 1970s. They rejected the *Realpolitik* policies of Nixon and Kissinger, and especially their efforts to promote détente with the Soviet Union and China. Rather than dealing with such tyrannical regimes, the neoconservatives insisted that the United States must work to spread American ideals around the world, including democracy and respect for human rights.⁸³

One belief that the neoconservatives did share with realists like Bush and Scowcroft was their faith in the efficacy of United States economic and military power. But, unlike Bush and Scowcroft, they had little use for diplomacy or treaties, and even less for multinational institutions like the United Nations, whose effectiveness and regard for United States interests they considered to be minimal. The neoconservatives insisted that only the United States could adequately address its interests and, if necessary, do so unilaterally or with “coalitions of the willing.” The lesson of America’s “remarkable record” of building coalitions during the Cold War, Wolfowitz wrote, was that leadership consists of “demonstrating that your friends will be protected and taken care of, that your enemies will be punished, and that those who refuse to support you will live to regret having done so.”⁸⁴

Although Cheney was not a neoconservative, he supported Wolfowitz’s philosophy. Like Wolfowitz, he was much more skeptical of global cooperation through institutions, such as the United Nations, and of the need for the United States to legitimize the use of its power. In 1992, Cheney supervised the writing of a top-secret document, entitled the “Defense Policy Guidance for 1994–1999,” that was almost completely at variance with the president’s and Scowcroft’s conception of

a new international order. It portrayed the world as a very threatening place, requiring the United States to maintain large military forces and deploy new generations of advanced weapons. Above all, the document insisted that the United States must prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere. If some country challenged American predominance, the United States would act to block it. The document, in short, aimed at establishing outright United States hegemony.⁸⁵

However, after the draft of the defense document was leaked to the press in March 1992, its vision of the United States acting unilaterally, and even preemptively, and entangled in ambiguously defined military engagements around the world provoked a furor in Congress. It also embarrassed President Bush, who was championing collective security and multinational cooperation. Bush ordered the guidance rewritten. The new version, which appeared in January 1993, reaffirmed America's adherence to the principle of collective security and no longer committed the United States to prevent the emergence of a global or regional rival. But it still retained many of its original features, and they would reappear a decade later to guide the president's son, George W. Bush.⁸⁶

NAFTA

One of Bush's final actions as president was the signing of the controversial North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on December 17, 1992. NAFTA was an outgrowth of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement that President Reagan initiated and ultimately signed in 1988 with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Shortly afterward, Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari proposed to President Bush a similar agreement between his country and the United States. Fearing that the advantages Canada had gained through its own free trade act with the United States would be undermined by a US-Mexican bilateral agreement, Mulroney asked to become a party to the US-Mexican talks. The result was two years of negotiation that produced NAFTA shortly before Bush left office.

NAFTA called for the phased elimination over 15 years of most tariffs, custom duties and other trade barriers between the three countries. Proponents argued that establishing a free trade area in North America would bring prosperity to the three participating countries through increased trade and production, resulting in the creation of millions of

well-paying jobs. But opponents, led by Texas millionaire Ross Perot, claimed that if NAFTA were approved by Congress, it would be followed by a “giant sucking sound” of American jobs going south to Mexico.⁸⁷ In an attempt to ensure that it would not be approved by Congress, Perot entered the 1992 presidential election campaign as a third party candidate. His success in obtaining 20% of the popular vote did much to prevent Bush from winning another term in the White House. But Perot failed to kill NAFTA, and Bush’s successor, Bill Clinton, would make the ratification of the treaty one of the major tasks of his presidency.

THE STATECRAFT OF GEORGE H. W. BUSH

For the most part, President George H. W. Bush attempted to implement a foreign policy that put more emphasis on realistic considerations rather than American values. Besides the president, Scowcroft was the leading exponent of realism in the administration. Like other realists, Scowcroft argued that US foreign policy should be devoted primarily to matters of the national interest, geopolitics, and the balance of power, and not concern itself principally with exporting American values, such as political freedom or democracy, to other regions of the globe. As he paraphrased John Quincy Adams, the United States should not go about the world “seeking monsters to destroy.”

On the other hand, both Bush and Scowcroft believed that human rights violations could not be ignored. But they thought they should be addressed by engaging in quiet diplomacy designed to persuade offending governments to respect human dignity. If military action were required, Bush and Scowcroft believed that, where possible, the United States should act with the participation of allies and through international organizations. But if military action was required to secure vital national interests, they believed the United States must be prepared to act alone if that proved to be necessary.

Without a doubt, the most important of Bush’s accomplishments was ending the Cold War with the Soviet Union without, as he put it, “a shot being fired,” or without humiliating Mikhail Gorbachev. As a consequence, the Eastern European satellites of the Soviet Union were liberated from communism, Soviet military forces were withdrawn, and the Warsaw Pact was dissolved. Bush also skillfully negotiated the reunification of Germany and won Mikhail Gorbachev’s acceptance of a reunified Germany in NATO.

However, Bush refused to extend NATO membership to the former members of the Warsaw Pact for fear of embroiling the United States in a conflict with Russia. Most importantly, Bush also facilitated the peaceful expiration of the Soviet Union by not assuming a triumphalist response to its demise. Instead, he supported the transfer of power from Gorbachev to Yeltsin and worked with the Russian president to ensure that the nuclear weapons deployed in some of the former republics of the defunct Soviet Union would not fall into the wrong hands.

The prime example of Bush's success in organizing multinational action in the defense of US national interests, while upholding the principles of the United Nations Charter, was the Persian Gulf War. In that conflict, the United States and its allies reversed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In doing so, the president proved that the international community, and particularly the UN Security Council, could work to reverse aggression—at least in the case of Kuwait. But reflecting his realism, Bush refrained from overthrowing Saddam Hussein because he wanted to prevent a power vacuum in the Middle East that Iran could fill.

Buoyed by the successful outcome of the Gulf War, Bush and Baker also attempted to achieve a diplomatic resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They succeeded in convening an international conference in Madrid, Spain, in which, for the first time, Israel and its Arab neighbors met to discuss peace. Although the Madrid Conference produced no agreements, it did set the stage for future negotiations and a gradual improvement in relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

While Bush embraced the idea of multinational action—at least during the Gulf War—by ousting Noriega from power in Panama, he demonstrated that the United States would act unilaterally—and in face of condemnation from the United Nations as well as the Organization of American States—when he felt such action was necessary. While Bush acted primarily to restore democracy in Panama and remove a drug dealer from power, he was more concerned about the potential threat the erratic Panamanian dictator posed to the Panama Canal and to the US forces guarding it.

Bush also attempted to balance both American ideals and US interests in reacting to the Tiananmen Square massacre in China. But the weight of his reaction clearly was on the side of US interests. To be sure, he addressed American ideals by condemning the massacre, but in order to restore amicable relations and economic ties between the two countries as quickly as possible, he kept US retaliatory measures against China

relatively innocuous and brief. As a result, US-Chinese relations were back on track by the time Bush left the presidency.

The preeminence of realism in Bush’s foreign policy also was displayed in his reaction to the civil strife in Yugoslavia and Somalia. Fearing entanglement in the ethnic conflicts that engulfed the former republics of Yugoslavia, the president refused to engage massive amounts of US forces in peacekeeping activities in those countries. However, he did send some 20,000 US troops to protect humanitarian aid to Somalia, but only in response to intense pressure from Congress and the American media.

While most Americans appreciated Bush’s foreign policy achievements, his bid for re-election in 1992 was unsuccessful. The voters elected his Democratic opponent, Bill Clinton, apparently because they thought that domestic issues, which Clinton emphasized in the campaign, were more important than world issues, Bush’s forte. In addition, the Republican vote was split by the third party candidacy of Ross Perot, who attacked Bush’s support for NAFTA. As a consequence, Clinton would inherit the responsibility for determining how the United States would deal with the world during the remaining years of the twentieth century.

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CHAPTER 4

William Clinton: The Pragmatic Idealist, 1993–2001

Bill Clinton entered the White House in 1993 intending to place more emphasis on advancing American ideals than his predecessor, but at the same time, of course, without sacrificing U.S. national interests. However, he soon realized that he, too, could not impose American ideals on other countries. Nevertheless, he believed that the United States must take the lead in addressing the world's outstanding problems. In so doing, he endeavored to prove that America is the world's indispensable nation (Fig. 4.1).

THE RISE OF WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON

William Jefferson “Bill” Clinton was born in Hope, Arkansas, on August 19, 1946. His father, William Jefferson Blythe, died in an auto accident several months before his mother, Virginia Cassidy, gave birth to him. In 1950, she married Roger Clinton, a car dealer and abusive alcoholic, whose last name his stepson took for his own. Bill Clinton’s mother was a vivacious and fun-loving free spirit who, before her marriage to Roger Clinton, often was away from home taking nursing classes in New Orleans. During those periods, Clinton’s grandmother, Edith Cassidy, a temperamental and strong-willed disciplinarian, tried to shape her grandson’s character.

Clinton attended public schools in Hot Springs, Arkansas, after moving there from Hope. As a teenager, he excelled in school and showed a passion for politics. His energy, dashing good looks, and personal charm



Fig. 4.1 Bill Clinton, Official White House Photograph (Credit: The White House, courtesy of the Library of Congress; *Bill Clinton, half-length portrait, facing front, at podium, February 17, 1993*. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/95509403/>)

pushed him to the top in student government. Graduating from high school in 1964, Clinton attended Georgetown University in Washington, DC. An international affairs major, he managed to cover his expenses through scholarships and by working part-time jobs. He also worked on the staff of Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, the chairman of the

Foreign Relations Committee. Clinton shared Fulbright's belief that the United States had no moral or strategic reason for being in Vietnam.

Just prior to his graduation from Georgetown, Clinton won a prized Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University in England for two years. Although federal policy had eliminated almost all college draft deferments, his local draft board allowed him to sail for England. And when he re-subjected himself to the draft in the fall of 1969, his birth date in the draft lottery was high enough to ensure that he would never be called, and he was not. Nevertheless, later, after he had entered politics, he was accused of being a "draft dodger." In 1970, Clinton entered Yale Law School, earning his degree in 1973 and meeting his future wife, Hillary Rodham, whom he married in 1975. After graduating from Yale Law School, Clinton briefly taught law at the University of Arkansas.

Clinton entered politics in 1974 by running unsuccessfully for a seat in the US House of Representatives. However, two years later, he was elected Arkansas's attorney general. In 1978, at the age of only thirty-two, he was elected that state's governor, a position he held for five two-year terms. In 1992, he won the Democratic nomination for the presidency and then went on to defeat incumbent President George H. W. Bush and the independent candidate, Ross Perot.

Clinton was a social dynamo, supremely gregarious, outgoing, upbeat, enthusiastic, and very intelligent. The psychologist John D. Gartner believes Clinton has a "hypomanic temperament." Such individuals, Gartner writes, are "charismatic leaders, with immense energy, drive, confidence, visionary creativity, infectious enthusiasm, and a sense of personal destiny. They also have problems with impulse control, frequently in the area of sex." Gartner adds that such individuals are restless and impatient. "They are quick thinking; thoughts race through their heads, and they jump from idea to idea. They can be distracted, attending to too many things at once."¹ Onetime political aide Dick Morris observed that Clinton had "a tendency toward intellectual clutter," which caused him to lose focus on priorities.²

CLINTON'S GRAND STRATEGY

As Clinton entered the White House in January 1993, he was determined to focus on domestic policy, not foreign relations. He realized that the American electoral timeline gave him a relatively short time to enact his domestic program, which centered on economic recovery,

deficit reduction, and universal health care. But it is not true, as his critics argue, that he had no foreign policy goals and no grand strategy with which to achieve them.

From the very first, Clinton insisted that America's economic prosperity depended on the expansion of American exports and overseas markets. As a result, he and his administration would place an inordinate amount of time and effort on securing free trade agreements with other nations. "Clinton's belief that foreign and domestic agendas could be combined for the good of the nation," Historian James Boys observes, "was a revolutionary concept and one that appalled those who maintained their faith in classic power politics."³

However, because Clinton was preoccupied with his domestic agenda during his first year in office, he relied heavily on his chief national security advisors to formulate his administration's grand strategy. To head the State Department, Clinton chose Warren Christopher, a lawyer by background who had served as the deputy to President Jimmy Carter's secretary of state, Cyrus Vance. In a January 1993 address, Christopher mentioned some of the key components of the new administration's foreign policy. He asserted that the end of the Cold War made it possible for the United States to deemphasize power politics, as practiced by Clinton's Republican predecessors, and concentrate more on promoting Americans ideals, albeit without neglecting US national interests. By supporting the expansion of democracy and respect for human rights, Christopher said, the new administration hoped to make the international environment more hospitable to American interests.⁴

But more important than Christopher in fashioning Clinton's grand strategy was the president's first national security advisor, Anthony Lake. With the title "Engagement and Enlargement," Lake gave form to Clinton's grand strategy in the administration's first national security policy statement, which was unveiled in July 1994. It stated that the United States would engage other countries in dealing with a variety of global issues, but would also work to enlarge the number of democracies with free market economies. "Democratic states," the document asserted, "are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with us to meet security threats and promote sustainable development." Moreover, the document asserted, "Free market nations with growing economies and strong and open trade ties are more likely to feel secure and to work toward freedom."⁵ The enhanced international stability that would result as more countries became enmeshed economically as well as politically,

Clinton believed, would make wars less likely and make possible a significant reduction in the size of America's Cold War era military establishment, thereby helping to trim substantially the federal budget deficit.

Clinton also thought he could reduce America's military establishment by relying primarily on the United Nations to resolve international disputes, end regional wars, and ameliorate the effects of humanitarian crises. But he also stated that, where necessary, the United States would act unilaterally to protect its interests abroad. In every other case, the United States "as much as possible" would seek the cooperation of its allies or "relevant multilateral institutions" and especially the United Nations. By working through the United Nations, the administration believed, the United States would exert its moral leadership, as it had during the Gulf War, not only to lend legitimacy to US foreign interventions, if and when they became necessary, but also to ensure that other nations would support them. Madeleine K. Albright, US ambassador to the United Nations and, during Clinton's second term, secretary of state, described the policy as "assertive multilateralism." She personally pushed for an expansive definition of US interests to include the promotion of American values abroad with force if necessary.⁶

In short, the Clinton administration's grand strategy promised an active international role for the United States in the post-Cold War era, not a return to the quasi-isolationism that some individuals were advocating. Attempting to justify an active US international role, Albright declared that the United States is the "indispensable nation." "If we do not provide international leadership," Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott explained, "then there is no other country that can or will lead in our place as a constructive, positive influence."⁷

SOMALIA

The first major international crisis the Clinton administration had to face took place in Somalia. In late November 1992, less than two months before Clinton took office, outgoing-President George H. W. Bush sent 27,000 US troops into Somalia to protect food shipments to that country's starving masses. But what began as a humanitarian mission turned into a bloody conflict between US forces and those of Mohamed Aideed, one of a number of warlords who were fighting one another.

In May 1993, the Clinton administration handed over operational command of the Somali mission to the United Nations and reduced

the US military contingent to just 1100 rapid reaction troops and 3000 logistical support personnel. The US withdrawal emboldened Aideed to target the U.N.'s multinational peacekeepers. On June 5, Aideed's forces killed 23 Pakistani peacekeepers. Responding to a recommendation of the Joint Chiefs, Clinton ordered US Rangers to capture the Somali warlord. But in the attempt to do so, 18 of the Rangers were killed on October 3, when Aideed's soldiers downed a US helicopter carrying the American soldiers. To add to the US humiliation, their bodies were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, the Somali capital, as crowds of Somalis cheered.

In response to the demands of an outraged American public and Congress, Clinton announced that US forces would be withdrawn from Somalia, an action that was completed in March 1994. Without US support, the remaining U.N. peacekeeping troops left the country in the spring of 1995. Although an estimated 250,000 Somalis were saved from starvation as a result of the US-U.N. mission, most Americans considered it a mistake to have intervened in the first place, primarily because of the deaths of the US soldiers. Although their deaths certainly were a tragedy, even more tragic was the failure of the international community to leave a functioning government in place in Somalia after the US and U.N. troops left. As a result, the disastrous civil war continued.

In an attempt to avoid US involvement in future Somalia-like interventions, in May 1994, Clinton approved a new national security strategy, as stated in Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25). It declared that before the United States would participate in future U.N. missions, the following questions would have to be answered satisfactorily: Were US interests at stake? Was there a threat to world peace? A clear mission goal? Acceptable costs? Congressional, public, and allied support? A working cease-fire? A clear command-and-control arrangement? And, finally, was there an exit strategy? In effect, PDD-25 was a restatement of the prerequisites for US intervention established by the Powell Doctrine. Although the United States would not wholly avoid multilateral actions in global affairs in the future, the administration intended to be more careful in deciding which ones to support. The new policy explains in large part the Clinton administration's reaction to the next humanitarian crisis in Africa: genocide in Rwanda.⁸

RWANDA

The genocide in Rwanda, a small country in central Africa, started in April 1994, when forces loyal to its Hutu-controlled government began murdering an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis. Although the Clinton administration and the international community were well aware of the genocide in Rwanda, neither the United States nor the United Nations moved to stop the slaughter. Subsequently, in a 1998 tour of African nations, Clinton stopped briefly in Rwanda to meet with survivors of the civil war and to apologize for not doing more to stop the genocide.

In fact, doing nothing about the genocide was an explicit objective of Clinton's new policy toward U.N. humanitarian missions that was described in PDD-25. In essence, it stated that if no US national interests were directly affected, US troops would not participate. Rwanda, in the opinion of Clinton's top policymakers, did not pass this test. Moreover, Clinton was preoccupied with domestic issues, especially a health care bill and upcoming midterm congressional elections and, consequently, was determined to keep US troops out of dangerous humanitarian adventures. He not only failed to send troops to stop the slaughter, he virtually ignored Rwanda and turned the problem over to the State Department to handle. Moreover, Secretary of State Christopher responded by initiating a successful effort to get most of the U.N. peacekeepers removed from Rwanda, fearing that the United States would be pressured into sending troops to assist them. The State Department even shunned the term "genocide" for fear that its use would oblige the United States to act to stop it.⁹

The Clinton administration was able to get away with ignoring Rwanda primarily because there was almost no political pressure to become involved there. With the Mogadishu tragedy very much in mind, the editorial boards of major American newspapers discouraged US intervention. And there was little pressure to intervene from the Congress. Eventually, a few members of the Africa subcommittees and the Congressional Black Caucus appealed for the United States to play a role in ending the violence, but they did not urge sending US troops to Rwanda. Only after the Tutsis regained control of the Rwandan government, which prompted nearly two million Hutus to flee the country, did Clinton order airdrops of food and supplies to them. In July, he also sent 200 non-combatant US troops to the Rwandan capital of Kigali to

manage the airport and distribute relief supplies. However, these troops were withdrawn by October 1994.¹⁰

Could Clinton have done more to stop the slaughter in Rwanda? Samantha Power, who later would serve as President Barack Obama's ambassador to the United Nations, thought so. In an article that appeared in the September 2001 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, she argued that "once the killing of thousands of Rwandans a day had begun, the President could have deployed U.S. troops to Rwanda." She admitted that "securing congressional support for U.S. intervention would have been extremely difficult, but by the second week of the killing, Clinton could have made the case that something approximating genocide was under way, that a supreme American value was imperiled by its occurrence, and that U.S. contingents at relatively low risk could stop the extermination of a people."¹¹

Instead of acting in this manner, Power argues that Clinton and his advisers employed a "rational" approach that had been described two decades earlier in an article written by Anthony Lake and Roger Morris. It attempted to explain Nixon's intervention in Indochina and why they resigned in protest from the staff of Henry Kissinger's National Security Council. This "rational" view of foreign policy, Lake and Morris wrote, employed a lifeless, bloodless set of abstractions, such as "nations," "interests," "influence," and "prestige"—"all dehumanized terms which encourage easy inattention to the real people whose lives our decisions affect or even end."¹²

HAITI

Clinton took a much different approach to a crisis in Haiti. In September 1991, a military coup, led by Lieutenant General Raoul Cédras, had ousted the country's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. By the time Clinton entered the White House, more than 40,000 Haitians had attempted to flee to the United States, almost all of them attempting the 600-mile journey in rickety boats. Clinton responded by continuing the Bush administration's policy of returning the refugees directly to Haiti, ostensibly to avoid the tragic loss of life that was sure to follow if they were not halted. He also committed his administration to restoring democracy in Haiti by getting the military junta to return power to Aristide.

To that end, in June 1993, he stiffened the economic embargo imposed on Haiti by the Bush administration. It prompted Cédras to

sign an agreement restoring Aristide to power, effective October 30. However, an incident occurred in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, on October 11, that prevented the agreement's implementation. A US warship carrying American and Canadian military trainers was about to dock in that city when it was confronted by an unruly crowd of Haitians, armed with handguns and shouting anti-American slogans. Cédras obviously had broken his promise to provide a secure environment for US and Canadian military personnel. An angry Clinton reacted by ordering preparations for a US invasion of Haiti. His decision was supported by a resolution of the U.N. Security Council, and a coalition of 28 nations agreed to participate in the invasion force. But only hours before the invasion was scheduled to begin, Clinton permitted former President Jimmy Carter to go to Port-au-Prince to persuade Cédras to step down. Faced with the threat of an imminent US invasion, Cédras agreed to leave the country and turn over the government to Aristide.

Why did Clinton intervene in Haiti but not Rwanda? For one reason, unlike in Rwanda, Clinton said that US interests were directly affected by the presence of approximately 1000 US citizens in Haiti, and certainly by the prospect that tens of thousands of Haitians would flee their country and sail to the United States if peace and order in Haiti were not restored. Obviously, these practical considerations transcended the idealistic goal of restoring a democratic government in Haiti. Similar US interests were absent in Rwanda.¹³

BOSNIA

Clinton, reluctantly, felt compelled to intervene in still another humanitarian crisis, this one in Bosnia, one of the former republics of Yugoslavia. In the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton had harshly criticized George H. W. Bush for doing little to end Serb attacks on Muslim and Croat minorities in Bosnia. The Bush administration had argued that there was no threat to American interests in Bosnia, no clear exit strategy if the United States did intervene militarily, and no clear political objectives that would justify using massive force. Consequently, while the Bush administration had complied with a U.N.-imposed arms embargo on Bosnia, there was no US or European military action to stop the slaughter.

In spite of Clinton's criticisms of Bush's Bosnian policy, he was not prepared to do much more after he entered the White House in January

1993. The Pentagon's civilian and military leaders opposed US military intervention in Bosnia, and even the use of air power, whose effectiveness they doubted. And Clinton was not prepared to jeopardize his domestic program by getting US forces entangled in Bosnia, much as Lyndon Johnson had done by expanding US involvement in Vietnam. But in March 1993, Clinton did agree to permit the US Air Force to help enforce a U.N.-authorized no-fly zone in Bosnia. In addition, on May 1, he sent Secretary of State Christopher to Europe to propose a plan to the NATO allies and Russia that called for the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia and the authorization of NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serb targets. However, the allies rejected this "lift and strike" strategy because they feared that Europeans serving with U.N. peacekeeping forces in Bosnia would be seized as hostages by the Bosnian Serbs if air attacks were conducted. As a result, for the first two and one-half years of his presidency, Clinton was content to leave the Bosnian problem to the European Community.

In July 1995, however, a Dutch peacekeeping battalion defending Srebrenica, one of six Bosnian cities established as "safe havens" for civilians, was overwhelmed by Serb militia. The Serbs subsequently gathered some eight thousand Muslim men and boys into a soccer stadium and summarily executed them. The Srebrenica massacre was particularly shocking because it occurred less than one year after the genocide in Rwanda. The Srebrenica massacre prompted a 180-degree turn in Clinton's attitude and policies toward Bosnia. Anthony Lake had told him that Bosnia was cancer threatening to devour his presidency, and that it had to be resolved before the 1996 presidential election campaign. In early August 1995, Clinton decided that he would send US troops to Bosnia, but only after a comprehensive peace settlement had been concluded. The task of negotiating that settlement was given to Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs.

Holbrooke's task was facilitated by an intensive three-week-long NATO bombing campaign against Bosnian Serb targets that began on August 30, after the Serbs shelled Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. The NATO air campaign was instrumental in bringing the Serbs, Croatians, and Bosnian Muslims, along with representatives from NATO countries and Russia, to a peace conference in November at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. The resulting Dayton Peace Accords ended the fighting and called for the creation of a federal Bosnia, comprised of a Serb-controlled republic and another one controlled jointly by

Croatians and Muslims. The cease-fire was to be enforced by a NATO-led implementation force of 60,000 troops, one-half of which were provided by the United States. The Dayton Accords ended a war in which more than 200,000 people were killed, a majority of them Muslims.

While the Clinton administration announced that it would welcome congressional support for the Dayton Accords, it insisted that the president did not need congressional authority to send US troops to Bosnia. In so doing, Clinton joined a long list of presidents who had invoked their constitutional authority as commander-in-chief to deploy troops abroad without congressional authorization. However, the administration's promise to limit the deployment of US forces to one year was instrumental in winning Senate acquiesce, by a vote of sixty-nine to thirty. But fearing that the Bosnian conflict would resume if NATO forces were withdrawn, Clinton announced—after he was safely reelected to a second term—that US forces would remain until July 1998. However, the US troops would stay in Bosnia, albeit in gradually decreasing numbers, until 2004 when the last 700 soldiers were withdrawn. Although Clinton was slow to respond to the slaughter in Bosnia, his decision to become militarily and diplomatically involved ultimately was the key to bringing relative peace to that troubled land.¹⁴

NAFTA AND MEXICO

In addition to helping end the slaughter in Bosnia, Clinton considered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) one of the other major achievements of his presidency. NAFTA was designed to eliminate barriers to trade and investment between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as protect intellectual property rights. Although NAFTA had been negotiated by the Bush administration, it fell to Clinton to get Congress to approve the agreement. However, NAFTA proved to be a tough sell. The union-supported wing of the Democratic Party argued that NAFTA would send American jobs south of the border. So, too, did Ross Perot, who challenged both Clinton and Bush in the 1992 presidential election. If NAFTA were approved, Perot warned, it would be followed by a “giant sucking sound” of American jobs going south to Mexico.

But Clinton argued that NAFTA would not only increase trade between the three parties to the agreement, it would also create more jobs in the three countries. Moreover, he linked free trade to the march

of democracy, arguing that a democratic, free market Mexico would set the standard for other Latin nations.¹⁵ After much heated debate, the House of Representatives passed NAFTA on November 17, 1993, by a narrow vote of 234-200. The bill passed the Senate three days later by a vote of 61-38. Clinton signed the agreement into law on December 8, 1993, and it went into effect on January 1, 1994. Yet NAFTA remains a controversial measure until this day.

The US Chamber of Commerce credits NAFTA with increasing US trade in goods and services with Canada and Mexico from \$337 billion in 1993 to \$1.2 trillion in 2011. However, while NAFTA increased jobs in American export industries, some 700,000 US jobs were lost because NAFTA facilitated the shift of manufacturing jobs to Mexico, where wages and benefits were much lower than in the United States.¹⁵ In addition, most Mexicans did not benefit from NAFTA. Between 1994 and 2013, Mexico's annual per capita growth averaged just 1.2%, one of the lowest in the hemisphere. During this period, Mexican real wages declined and unemployment rose. Farmers particularly were hit hard as heavily subsidized US corn and other staples poured into Mexico and caused producer prices to drop. As a result, small farmers found themselves unable to make a living, compelling some two million of them to leave their farms by 2013. At the same time, consumer food prices in Mexico rose, with the result that by 2013, twenty-five percent of the Mexican population did not have access to basic food and one-fifth of Mexican children suffered from malnutrition. Not surprisingly, Mexicans migrated to the United States at the unprecedented rate of one-half million per year after NAFTA went into effect, with the result that there were as many as eleven million illegal migrants in the United States. The increase in Mexican poverty also fueled organized crime and particularly the export of illegal drugs. As a consequence, rather than trade, the war on drugs became the central issue affecting US-Mexican relations.¹⁶

Of course, not all of Mexico's problems can be blamed on NAFTA. Mexico is a very poor country, with a society badly divided between the very rich and the poor, a corrupt political system, and a large foreign debt. Moreover, in 1994, Mexico experienced a severe financial crisis that ultimately required a bailout by the United States and the International Monetary Fund. The crisis was triggered by a peasant revolt in the Mexican state of Chiapas, followed by the murder of the ruling party's presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio. These events contributed to a loss of confidence on the part of Mexican investors, who

responded by selling pesos for dollars, triggering a massive run on the dollar reserves of the government. The Clinton administration, fearing that illegal emigration to the United States would increase by as much as 30%, felt compelled to respond by lending Mexico \$20 billion and persuading the IMF and other lending institutions to provide an additional \$30 billion. When Congress balked at funding financial aid to Mexico, Clinton used his executive authority to use money from the Exchange Stabilization Fund. In bypassing Congress, he was able to stave off a potentially ruinous collapse of the Mexican economy. Nevertheless, the Mexican bailout and other problems with that country did much to add to NAFTA's decreasing popularity in the Congress and among the American people.¹⁷

RUSSIA

Clinton was determined to seize the unique opportunity offered by the end of the Cold War to build a new relationship with Russia, one in which the United States would help to transform Russia into a democratic country with a capitalist economy. The hope was that a democratic Russia would be peaceful, and Russia's still massive remaining nuclear arsenal would no longer pose a threat to the existence of the United States. Moreover, Russia's integration into Western-inspired institutions, such as the economic and financial Group of 7 and the World Trade Organization (WTO), would help make the changes irreversible.

However, the Clinton administration's belief that Russia could be drastically transformed contradicted the Russian historical record. For a millennium, Russia had been ruled by autocrats and dictators, not laws. Moreover, the Russian ruler on whom Clinton would rely upon to bring about this transformation, Boris Yeltsin, had spent decades as a communist bureaucrat. And although Yeltsin was determined to turn Russia into a democratic country with a free market economy, throughout his presidency he would be faced with a parliament, the Duma, which was dominated by communists and ultra-Russian nationalists who opposed his reforms and closer ties with the West.¹⁸

In September 1993, Yeltsin responded by ordering the dissolution of the Duma, pending the implementation of a new constitution to replace the Soviet constitution, which would be followed by parliamentary elections. However, after the Duma refused to dissolve and instead impeached Yeltsin, he reacted, in October 1993, by ordering Russian

tanks to bombard the “White House,” the building the Duma occupied. More than one hundred lives were lost in the attack, an outcome that diminished Yeltsin’s popularity.

To make dealing with the Russian president even more difficult for Clinton, Yeltsin was an alcoholic with severe heart disease—he had four heart attacks and one heart surgery while president of Russia—who could behave erratically, at times demonstrating great bravery and, at other times, indecisiveness. Nevertheless, Clinton supported Yeltsin throughout his presidency, considering him the best hope for turning Russia into a democratic capitalist country. As Clinton remarked to Strobe Talbott, “We can’t ever forget that Yeltsin drunk is better than most of the alternatives sober.”¹⁹

The problems facing Yeltsin throughout his presidency were not only political in nature but acutely economic as well. In fact, Russia was on the verge of economic collapse when Clinton entered the White House. Gorbachev’s reforms had failed to transform the Russian economy and the centralized bureaucracy that continued to direct it. As a result, Russia experienced high inflation, higher unemployment, food shortages, and social unrest. Yeltsin believed that Russia had to adopt, as quickly as possible, the free market economic model that had produced the great wealth and high living standards of the West. To that end, he relied heavily on the advice of Western economists who, unfortunately, had little or no real understanding of conditions in Russia. They persuaded Yeltsin to move Russia toward free market capitalism in one sweeping move—nicknamed “shock therapy”—by quickly eliminating price controls and privatizing large-scale, state-owned enterprises.

However, shock therapy proved to be a disaster for Russia. The elimination of price controls contributed to hyperinflation, more food and fuel shortages, declining medical care, and the evaporation of personal savings accounts. In addition, industrial production went into a free fall, crime soared, and corruption became rampant. To make matters worse in the eyes of the Russian people, the privatization of state-owned enterprises was done haphazardly, enriching a relatively few “oligarchs,” while the Russian masses suffered severely. As a result, Yeltsin’s popularity plummeted, reinforcing the determination of the Communist Party and the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, which dominated the Duma, to block his Western-inspired reform program.²⁰

Clinton tried to help Yeltsin get Russia out of its economic morass. In April 1993, he met Yeltsin in Vancouver, Canada, and promised

financial assistance to stabilize the Russian economy, to house decommissioned military officers and to employ nuclear scientists. Clinton said his aim was to forge a “strategic alliance” with Russian reformers. Yeltsin responded by stressing his firm commitment to democratization, the rule of law, and a market economy. But neither president kept his part of the bargain. Clinton persuaded Congress to approve an aid package of \$2.8 billion but, considering Russia’s needs, as former Secretary of State James Baker commented, that amount was only a “drop in the bucket.”²¹ Moreover, Clinton subsequently turned over the problem of providing economic aid to Russia to the International Monetary Fund. Although the IMF and other international lending organizations provided Russia with \$40 billion in loans, the austere conditions attached to the aid helped to drive the Russian economy into a near catastrophic economic crisis in 1998.

By then, Russia’s gross national product had fallen 50% since 1989, an economic downturn more severe than the United States or Germany had experienced during the Great Depression. Vast sectors of the Russian economy were wiped out, banks failed, inequality and unemployment skyrocketed, while incomes fell. By the end of the decade, an estimated 42 million Russians, nearly one-third of the entire population, were living below the official poverty line. On December 29, 1998, Russia defaulted on the payment of the Soviet-era debt it owed to commercial banks around the world.²² The intense hostility of the Russian people toward Yeltsin’s economic policy was expressed in 1996 by the election of a Duma increasingly dominated by communists and ultra-nationalists. That result did much to explain the subsequent deterioration of the Russia’s relationship with the West and particularly with the United States.

Americans and other Westerners, in turn, became disenchanted with Yeltsin and with Russia. In 1999, Clinton’s support for additional financial aid to Russia came under attack from a hostile Republican-controlled Congress. It was fueled in part by mounting evidence that much of the money borrowed by Russia had been stolen by an organized criminal syndicate that included members of Yeltsin’s own family. Republicans accused the Clinton administration of facilitating the rise of a form of “crony” capitalism that left most Russians impoverished, while a few corrupt oligarchs had become enormously wealthy.²³

CLINTON, YELTSIN, AND START

In spite of the failure of Clinton's economic approach to Russia, he and Yeltsin made considerable progress in reducing the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Early in Clinton's administration, he and Yeltsin agreed to expedite the completion of the START I Treaty and to move toward the ratification of START II, both of which were negotiated by President Bush. With this end in mind, the Clinton administration succeeded in facilitating the transfer to Russia of nuclear weapons deployed in the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The move was made possible by the signing of the so-called Budapest Memorandum on December 5, 1994. In this document, Russia, Britain, and the United States promised not to employ threats or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In addition, the Clinton administration agreed to provide extensive technical assistance and funding to these former Soviet states to help them safeguard their nuclear power plants and to facilitate the dismantling of nuclear weapons.²⁴

However, there was delay in implementing the follow-up START II Treaty, which Bush and Yeltsin had signed in January 1993. The treaty banned the use of multiple-independently targetable-reentry vehicles (MIRVs) on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The US Senate approved the treaty in January 1996, but for a variety of reasons the Russian parliament dragged its feet in ratifying the treaty. One reason for the delay was the revival of the anti-ballistic missile problem. Although the Clinton administration had proclaimed the death of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), it decided to develop a so-called theater missile defense (TMD). This system was designed to give the United States the capability to shoot down short-range missiles, but not the long-range Russian missiles, thereby ostensibly preserving the ABM Treaty. However, the Russians worried that the deployment of theater missile defenses would eviscerate the ABM Treaty, whose basic purpose was to bar deployment of nationwide ABM defenses against strategic missiles. The Russians wanted a strict "demarcation line" to separate theater from strategic ABMs. And they linked Russia's ratification of the START II Treaty to the preservation of the ABM Treaty.

At a summit meeting in Helsinki, Finland, in March 1997, Clinton and Yeltsin were able to resolve the demarcation issue in a way that ostensibly would permit deployment of all six US missile interceptor

systems under development by the Pentagon. As a result, on April 14, 2000, the Duma finally ratified the START II Treaty. But Russian ratification of the treaty proved to be largely symbolic, since it was made contingent on the preservation of the ABM Treaty. After President George W. Bush withdrew the United States from the ABM Treaty in 2002, Russia responded by abrogating the START II Treaty.²⁵

NATO EXPANSION

Russia's relationship with the West was also severely strained by the Clinton administration's 1994 decision to expand, in the near future, NATO's membership to include former East European Soviet satellite states. Clinton's decision ostensibly was designed to encourage the expansion of democracy, human rights, and free market economies in Central and Eastern Europe. But the unstated motive was a desire to bring these countries under the protection of NATO's shield in case Russia once again became an aggressive power.²⁶

George Kennan, the author of the containment strategy, called the decision to expand NATO into Eastern Europe "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era." NATO expansion, he predicted, would "inflame nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion, adversely affect the development of Russian democracy, restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations, and impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking."²⁷ Kennan's prediction would prove to be quite accurate. Said Yegor Gaidar, the leader of the reformist Russia's Choice parliamentary group, NATO expansion "creates the best possible argument for our opponents that there is a world against Russia."²⁸

In an attempt to take the sting out of NATO's decision to expand, in 1994 Russia was offered a more intensive relationship with—but not the prospect of membership in—the Western alliance. (Yeltsin's previous requests to join NATO were ignored.) Styled the "Partnership for Peace," the program was designed to provide a framework for enhanced political and military cooperation between NATO and the East European countries, including Russia. The Eastern Europeans could consult with NATO when faced with a direct threat to their security, but NATO was under no obligation to come to their aid. Yeltsin, realizing that he could not prevent NATO's expansion, accepted the offer to join the Partnership for Peace. In return, he obtained a NATO promise that

no nuclear weapons would be placed on the territory of its new member states.²⁹

In another attempt to mollify Russian anxiety about NATO's expansion, on May 27, 1997, Yeltsin and Clinton met in Paris to sign the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation. The act established a NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council, which would be the a mechanism for consultations, coordination, and, where appropriate, for joint decisions and joint action with respect to security issues of common concern, such as crisis management, preventative diplomacy, joint operations, peacekeeping, arms control, non-proliferation, and disaster response. In effect, Russia was given "a voice but not a veto" in NATO affairs.³⁰ Yet only weeks after the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council was put in place, NATO announced, to Russia's chagrin, that it would admit Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic as full members in 1999. Russian officials pointed out that they were not consulted prior to NATO's action.

KOSOVO

NATO's expansion served as a backdrop to one of the worst crises in the US-Russian relationship during Clinton's administration: a conflict in Kosovo, a province of Serbia, which, along with Montenegro, were the remnants of Yugoslavia. The conflict was triggered by a rebellion by Kosovo Muslims, who comprised ninety percent of the province's inhabitants, after Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic ended its autonomy. Their aim was Kosovo's independence from Serbia. The Serbian government responded to rebel attacks by initiating the "ethnic cleansing"—the removal—of Muslims in the Kosovo region. In the process, thousands of Muslims were murdered and over 800,000 were forced to flee to neighboring Albania. In March 1999, after attempts to produce a diplomatic solution had failed, NATO began a massive bombing campaign against Serbia. Said Secretary of State Albright: "We are not going to stand by while the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away doing in Bosnia."³¹ The Clinton administration also was prompted to intervene by a geopolitical concern that the conflict in Kosovo could become a regional one, possibly involving NATO allies Greece and Turkey.

However, after three months, it was apparent that the bombing campaign by US and other NATO aircraft had failed to end the Serb

ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo. Only the threat of sending NATO ground forces into Kosovo finally compelled the Serbs to agree to withdraw from that province. Subsequently, 4000 US troops joined British, French, and other NATO forces in peacekeeping operations in Kosovo. The Russians also agreed to provide a peacekeeping force, but only after the Security Council approved the international action, thereby making peacekeeping in Kosovo a U.N., rather than an exclusively NATO, operation. As a result, by November 1999, according to the United Nations, 848,100 out of 1,108,913 refugees were able to return to Kosovo. The province nominally remained part of Yugoslavia, but the Kosovars had gained autonomy. Today, Kosovo is still administered by the United Nations, despite its unilateral declaration of independence on February 17, 2008.

Nevertheless, the crisis in Kosovo severely tested the already precarious relationship between Russia and the West. NATO's military action against Serbia, a nation with which Russia had historic religious and cultural links, provoked increased Russian hostility toward the West. That hostility compelled Yeltsin to speak out strongly against NATO's use of force against the Serbs. But he also realized that with Russia heavily dependent on Western economic aid, he was in no position to take direct military action on behalf of the Serbs.³²

However, Russian friction with NATO continued even after Yeltsin had agreed to send a Russian peacekeeping force to Kosovo. The Russian peacekeepers expected to have an independent sector in Kosovo, only to be surprised by the prospect of their operating under NATO command. Rejecting that possibility, Russian forces occupied Pristina International Airport before NATO forces could arrive there. In response, NATO Supreme Commander Wesley Clark considered action to forcibly block the airport's runways with NATO vehicles in order to prevent the arrival of Russian reinforcements. But the NATO ground force commander, British General Mike Jackson, told Clark that he was "not starting World War Three for you."³³ Eventually, a deal was struck that permitted Russian forces to operate alongside the NATO troops, but not under NATO command.

In late 1999, Yeltsin and Clinton openly disagreed on still another issue: the war in Chechnya, a province of Russia in the region of the Caucasus Mountains, which, like Kosovo, had a largely Muslim population. The conflict began in the wake of a declaration of independence by Chechnya's Muslim majority in 1991. The Russian army responded by

invading Chechnya in 1994, but after two years of intense fighting, the Russians eventually withdrew, preserving Chechnya's de facto independence until a second Russian invasion began in 1999. At a November, 1999 meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Clinton demanded that Yeltsin halt Russian bombing attacks in Chechnya, which had killed many civilians. Yeltsin responded by publicly criticizing Clinton for "putting pressure on Russia." In a veiled threat he added, Clinton "has forgotten that Russia has a full arsenal of nuclear weapons."³⁴ By then, the formerly close Clinton–Yeltsin relationship was clearly over—and nearly so, too, were Yeltsin's years in power.³⁵

PUTIN SUCCEEDS YELTSIN

By the end of 1999, Yeltsin's foreign and domestic problems, exacerbated by his deteriorating health, had made him a spent force. On December 31, 1999, he surprised the Russian people by announcing that he was resigning immediately and turning the presidency over to Vladimir Putin, whom he had appointed prime minister the previous August. The former head of the Russian security service, the 46-year-old Putin had little experience in politics and economics. Yet in his brief tenure as prime minister, Putin had gained popularity by taking military action against the Chechens. More important to Yeltsin, Putin could be counted to block prosecution of Yeltsin and members of his family after he left office.

Clinton was impressed with Putin. After their first meeting, Clinton observed that "Yeltsin had picked a successor who had the skills and capacity for the hard work necessary to manage Russia's turbulent political and economic life."³⁶ However, Putin had concluded early on that Clinton, with only a year left in his presidency, was a lame duck. As a result, he felt little compulsion to inject new vigor into the strained US-Russian relationship until the new American president entered office in January 2001.

CHINA: HUMAN RIGHTS VERSUS ENGAGEMENT

As a candidate, Clinton blasted President Bush for maintaining high-level contacts with Beijing after the Tiananmen massacre. He accused his predecessor of "coddling" China's authoritarian leaders, whom he labeled "the butchers of Beijing."³⁷ He also condemned Bush for vetoing

congressional bills canceling China's most-favored-nation status (MFN), which had been Congress's way of protesting Beijing's human rights abuses. When he took office in January 1993, Clinton directly threatened China with cancellation of its MFN status if it did not improve upon its human rights record.

But Clinton's effort to force China to respect human rights quickly proved to be futile. The Chinese bluntly said that China's domestic policies were none of America's business. In addition, lobbyists for American companies, whose profits would be negatively impacted by the cancellation of China's MFN status, pointed out that thousand of jobs in US export industries would be lost, and relatively inexpensive items that China exported to the United States would be effectively cut off. The US Chamber of Commerce emphasized that the United States must not shut itself out of the world's fastest growing economy.

In May 1993, Clinton responded to this pressure by backing off. He extended China's MFN status for one more year, with subsequent renewal made conditional on an improvement in China's human rights record. When that year passed, Clinton announced that China's MFN status would be extended for another year, but essentially without conditions. In other words, Clinton de-linked China's MFN status from its record on human rights. He attempted to justify the change in policy by arguing that revoking China's MFN might cause serious damage to America's economy. Moreover, he said, revocation would not only not help the cause of human rights, it also would risk a "long term fissure" with a country that the United States still had a chance to influence.³⁸ In effect, Clinton adopted the more realistic China policy of his predecessor, a policy he had severely criticized only a year before on the grounds that it was incompatible with American ideals.

Later, Clinton backed off again with regard to China's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). He favored China's admission to the WTO because China was one of the fastest growing markets for US goods and services. Between 1996 and 2001, imports from China doubled, from \$51.5 billion to \$102 billion.³⁹ But the Chinese were compelled to accept considerably harsher conditions than were required of other developing countries in order to gain admission to the WTO, including liberalizing their service sector, permitting foreign investment, and agreeing to protect foreign intellectual property rights. Not surprisingly, the Clinton administration hailed China's admission to the WTO as an enormous multilateral achievement.

TAIWAN

Besides the human rights issue, the status of Taiwan was another problem that strained US-Chinese relations during Clinton's presidency. In three communiqués—in 1972, 1979, and 1982—the United States and China had attempted to define the basis of their relationship as well as their relations with Taiwan. In the 1972 communiqué, the United States acknowledged that Taiwan was a part of China. In return, the Chinese government agreed that the eventual reunification of Taiwan with the mainland would occur peacefully. In a second communiqué, in 1979, the United States recognized Beijing as the legitimate government of China. In so doing, the United States not only promised to end formal political relations with the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), but also stated that it would preserve economic and military ties with Taiwan. However, in the third communiqué, in 1982, the United States stated that it gradually would decrease its sale of arms to Taiwan.

Based on the framework provided by these three communiqués, Taiwan established a vibrant economy and democratic institutions. For its part, Beijing, beginning in the 1980s, put forward proposals for China's unification in which Taiwan was to be given total internal autonomy. However, rather than reunification with the mainland, Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, risked antagonizing Beijing by moving closer to a formal declaration of independence.

While Clinton was sensitive to China's concerns about Taiwan, strong congressional pressure compelled him, in June 1995, to grant a visa for Lee to attend his college reunion at Cornell University. The Chinese responded by firing artillery shells and missiles into the waters near Taiwan. In March 1996, Clinton sent two aircraft carriers to the one-hundred-mile zone east of the Strait of Taiwan in response to ostensible Chinese preparations for an invasion of Taiwan in the event that Lee declared the island's independence. The administration's military response, combined with its reassurances that the United States would continue to support the one-China policy, prompted the Chinese to end their military exercise "ahead of schedule," enabling the US warships to withdraw.⁴⁰

In the aftermath of this crisis, relations between China and the United States gradually mended. A long-sought visit by China's president, Jiang Zemin, to Washington took place in 1997 and was reciprocated by an eight-day visit by Clinton to Beijing during the following year. By

then, it was obvious that Clinton had completely abandoned the idealistic goals he initially had set for his China policy. In the process, he had accepted the realists' argument that there was not much the United States could do to change the domestic policies of the Chinese government, especially those pertaining to human rights.

However, in May 1999, another incident strained US-Chinese relations, but only briefly. An American B-2 bomber engaged in military action over Serbia during the Kosovo War mistakenly destroyed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Protest demonstrations swept over China, during which time the US embassy and a number of consulates were damaged. Clinton expressed regrets and apologized for the attack, but the Chinese were still angered by what they considered his matter-of-fact reaction to the tragedy. However, in July, the United States announced that it would pay \$4.5 million to the families of the Chinese killed and injured in the attack. This was followed, in December, by a further \$28 million US payment for damage to Chinese property. In turn, Beijing agreed to pay \$2.87 million to the United States for damage caused by protest to the American embassy and US consulates in China. As a consequence, the matter was put to rest.⁴¹

NORTH KOREA

As if China were not enough of a problem for the Clinton administration, the nuclear program of China's neighbor, North Korea, posed an even more difficult, and dangerous, challenge. By the time Clinton entered the White House in 1993, the North Koreans were operating a nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and building another, larger nuclear reactor capable of producing 10–12 nuclear bombs a year. Although the North Koreans had signed the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, and agreed to permit the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to open their nuclear sites to inspections, they refused to allow IAEA inspectors to enter the Yongbyon nuclear complex, where there was good reason to believe weapon-grade plutonium was stored. In response to several unsuccessful attempts by the IAEA to gain access to the Yongbyon site, the North Koreans threatened to withdraw from the NPT. Adding to rising tensions, in May 1993, North Korea successfully tested a nuclear-capable missile, with a range of approximately 600 miles.

During July 1993, Clinton warned that the United States was prepared to use force to punish unacceptable proliferation behavior by

“outlaw regimes.” At the same time, however, he said he preferred a diplomatic solution to the crisis, which he demonstrated by offering the North Koreans a number of economic incentives in an attempt to persuade them to discontinue their nuclear weapon program. But the North Koreans were not prepared to abandon their nuclear program. In mid-May 1994, they abruptly shut down the Yongbyon reactor and began removing its spent fuel rods. Once the rods cooled, they could be reprocessed, making possible the extraction of as much as four or five bombs’ worth of plutonium. In the following month, North Korea withdrew from the IAEA and threatened war against South Korea.⁴²

The Clinton administration responded to the North Korean challenge by dispatching military reinforcements to South Korea and persuading the U.N. Security Council to impose economic sanctions on North Korea. However, a last-minute trip to North Korea by former President Jimmy Carter in June 1994 averted a possible military clash and led to US-North Korean bilateral negotiations to resolve the crisis. The result, in October 1994, was the negotiation of an “Agreed Framework” for the denuclearization of North Korea. The agreement required North Korea to halt its nuclear activities at Yongbyon, allow IAEA monitors to inspect the facility, and eventually dismantle it. In exchange, the United States, Japan, and South Korea would provide light water reactors, which generate relatively small quantities of plutonium, which North Korea agreed to export periodically. In addition, the United States agreed to provide North Korea with 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually, starting in 1995, as compensation for North Korea’s forfeited energy production during the transition period.

However, numerous setbacks prevented the Agreed Framework from being implemented. While the Clinton administration followed through on its promise to ship fuel oil, the Congress delayed the deliveries. Moreover, a severe financial crisis in 1997 limited the ability of South Korea to contribute to the construction of the promised light water reactors. In response, North Korea engaged in provocative military acts against South Korea and Japan, including testing ballistic missiles near their waters. In 1998 reports of suspicious North Korean nuclear weapon activities brought the Agreed Framework to the brink of collapse.

American hard-liners criticized Clinton for attempting to reward North Korea for violating the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. But the alternate they favored, a preemptive air strike on North Korea’s nuclear installations, the Clinton administration feared, could have only delayed

North Korea's development of a nuclear arsenal while triggering another Korean war that would produce monumental casualties. In fact, fear of a wider war prompted both South Korea and Japan to oppose the use of force against North Korea. As a consequence, the Clinton administration attempted to get the Agreed Framework back on track through diplomacy. The visit of a North Korean envoy to the United States produced a joint statement in which both countries renounced any hostile intent toward each other. It was followed, in October 2000, by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to North Korea to meet with its leader, Kim Il-sung. However, despite these efforts, the nuclear issue remained unresolved when Clinton left office in January 2001.⁴³

JAPAN

Although Japan was America's main ally in East Asia, a growing trade imbalance between the two countries seriously strained their relationship. When the Clinton administration came to power, Japan was America's second largest export market. However, by 1993, Japan's trade surplus with the United States reached a record \$59 billion, due partly to the restrictions the Japanese government had placed on imports, especially American automobiles. Moreover, Japan and the United States were competing intensively to expand their trade to, and investments in, China and Southeast Asia. This explains in part Clinton's decision to establish diplomatic relations with America's former enemy, Vietnam, in 1995. The move was strongly encouraged by American businesses eager to invest in and trade with that country.

The Clinton administration, from its very beginning, was determined to reduce the trade imbalance with Japan by forcing the Japanese to open their markets to American goods, arguing that American businesses and workers suffered from the tight Japanese market. In addition, the administration worried that the failure to correct the trade imbalance could lead to an erosion of US domestic support for the political relationship, including the Japanese alliance, which many Americans complained was maintained primarily at their expense. But the Japanese resisted, arguing that the trade imbalance was the result of American economic conditions, especially the huge US budget deficit. As a result, American goods were not competitive at home or abroad. Moreover, the Japanese economic "boom" of the 1980s was coming to an end by the time Clinton entered the White House. Japanese stock prices

plummeted, as did real estate prices, and Japan entered a long period of recession. Consequently, the Japanese proved unwilling to fully open their industries to foreign competition.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, in July 1993, both governments signed a “Framework Agreement” in which they pledged jointly “to promote global growth, open markets, and a vital world trading system.” On October 1, 1994, after fifteen months of sometimes contentious talks, the Japanese agreed to open up three of their major markets to products from the United States: insurance, telecommunications, and medical equipment. In addition, by 1999, the United States and Japan signed agreements to open Japan further to American goods and services. But the two sides failed to reach agreement on the import of American-made automobiles, automotive parts, and flat glass (used in automotive manufacturing and construction). Nevertheless, the administration decided to avoid a fight with the Japanese over trade at a time that it was confronting China over its MFN status and North Korea about its nuclear weapons program. Instead, it began to emphasize the “enduring” security partnership as the “cornerstone” of US-Japan relations.⁴⁵

Japan was, and still is, the United States’ major ally in eastern Asia. Despite the end of the Cold War, during Clinton’s administration the United States continued to station 47,000 troops in Japan. The Japanese government spent \$7 billion annually to support them, realizing that it would be much more costly if the US troops left. That fact goes a long way to explain Japan’s willingness to satisfy the Pentagon’s request to provide assistance to US forces operating in the areas surrounding Japan, as well as in Japan, as previously required. The Japanese complied with the US request and agreed to provide rear-area support for such activities as logistics, intelligence sharing, and non-combat operations, such as mine clearing.

The Clinton administration, in turn, made a commitment to maintain at least 100,000 US military personnel in East Asia. The continued US military presence was designed to shore up political stability in the region, which hopefully would ensure the continued growth of the Asian economies. However, in 1997, East Asia received a crippling economic shock that severely challenged the stability of the international order that the United States was trying to maintain in that part of the world.⁴⁶

THE ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS

The financial crisis began in Thailand and spread to Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, and ultimately to Japan. It was a classic example of an economic bubble that was destined to burst, with painful consequences for many people. It was fueled by an enormous inflow of foreign investment capital into the region—for such things as infrastructure, residential apartments, and the like—causing these and other asset prices to skyrocket. And, as in other bubbles, what goes up must come down. Many investments were made on the basis of projections about future demand that were unrealistic, resulting in significant excess capacity. As asset prices began to collapse, individuals and companies defaulted on their debt obligations. The resulting panic among lenders led to a large withdrawal of credit from the crisis countries, causing a credit crunch and further bankruptcies.

Prodded by the Clinton administration, which warned that the United States could not act as the lender of first resort, because Congress would resist any future financial bailouts, the IMF took the lead in attempting to bail out countries hit hard by the crisis. In August 1997, it loaned Thailand \$20 billion, but it made the loan subject to stringent conditions that added to the suffering of many. It required Thailand to reduce government spending and deficits, allow insolvent banks and financial institutions to fail, and aggressively raise interest rates. The IMF asserted that these steps would restore confidence in the stricken nation's fiscal solvency, penalize insolvent companies, and protect currency values. However, while these steps pleased Wall Street creditors, they caused considerable suffering as people in the countries the IMF aided lost their bank deposits, jobs, and property.⁴⁷

The Clinton administration was severely criticized for mismanaging the crisis. Clinton officials, and the president himself, were slow to recognize the severity of the crisis and tardy in trying to alleviate its effects. And once the administration did decide to intervene, critics argued, its remedies were weak and inadequate. Joseph E. Stiglitz, Clinton's chief economic adviser, and later chief economist at the World Bank, stated that when the administration finally did get involved, it linked billions of dollars in emergency aid to even deeper concessions from the assisted countries in the management of their trade, monetary policy, banking,

and privatization. Nearly everywhere this was tried, Stiglitz argued, the changes deepened rather than alleviated recessions. Worse, he suggested, the administration “shilled” for Wall Street, conflating the interests of the big banks with the financial health of the world.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin argued that it was virtually impossible to save the stricken countries from defaulting without saving those who had invested in them. Helping investors and creditors, he said, was a “byproduct” of the emergency aid. Yet even Clinton admitted that he hated to see the bankers “get their money back, plus a profit,” but he argued that failing to subsidize the Asians would have led to a worse crisis.⁴⁹

The fact that the Asian financial crisis was short-lived—by the end of 1999, Thailand’s economy as well as the economies of the other stricken economies of East Asia were on the road to recovery—seems to add credibility to Clinton’s assessment. But most critics do not disagree that US aid was necessary to avert further economic damage to these countries; rather, they argue that the hesitancy of the administration in providing the assistance caused the damage to be much more severe than had the aid been provided much earlier.

For another negative consequence of the Asian financial crisis, it constituted a major setback for Clinton’s free trade campaign. Plans for a Pacific Rim trade zone were shelved, and the administration encountered more organized resistance to its free trade agenda from members of Clinton’s party who had close ties to organized labor. In addition, anti-globalist nationalists as well as nationalists in the Republican Party also condemned the administration’s free trade program. In November 1999, 40,000 protestors convened in Seattle in an attempt to disrupt a meeting of the WTO, whose activities to promote free trade, they argued, hurt American laborers, threatened the environment, and facilitated the exploitation of poor countries by rich corporations.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Throughout his presidential campaign, Clinton made the elimination of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons—as well as the ballistic missiles that could deliver them—a top priority of his administration. The United States already adhered to the Biological Weapons Convention, which had gone into effect in 1975, but the Clinton administration also gave strong

support to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which the United States ratified in 1997.

Perhaps the most important counter-proliferation program of the Clinton administration, however, was the effort to gain international support for the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). With 181 parties in 1995, the NPT had entered into force in 1970, but it was scheduled to expire in 1995, if not renewed. The administration argued that indefinite extension of the NPT was essential for global and regional stability, for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and for facilitating and regulating cooperation among states in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

While the non-weapon states as a whole supported the idea of renewing the NPT, several of them demanded concessions by the weapon states before they would approve its indefinite extension. The Arab states, led by Egypt, refused to endorse any proposal for the extension of the NPT unless pressure was brought on Israel to accede to the NPT and to accept full-scope safeguards. At the same time, the Iranians accused the developed states of violating their obligation (under Article 4 of the NPT) to permit Iran access to peaceful nuclear technology. The failure of the weapon states to negotiate a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT), as called for in the NPT, was another source of friction.

But the core obstacle in the way of extending the NPT indefinitely was the willingness of the weapon states to implement their promise to bring about nuclear disarmament. Obviously, Russia and the United States pointed to their significant nuclear arms reductions as proof that they were heading in that direction. Yet even if strategic warheads on each side fell to about 3500, as called for in the START II Treaty, there would still be more nuclear warheads deployed on land- and submarine-launched strategic missiles than there had been in 1970, when the NPT went into effect.⁵⁰

As another way of encouraging indefinite extension of the NPT, the Clinton administration promised to sign the CTBT “as soon as possible.” Backing up his words, in September 1996, he joined seventy other states in signing the CTBT. Clinton delivered the agreement to Congress in 1997, but the Republican-controlled Senate rejected its ratification in October 1999. Nevertheless, Clinton and his two immediate successors in the White House, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, continued to observe the moratorium on US nuclear weapons tests.⁵¹

Partly because of the strong international support for the CTBT and, more importantly, due to concern about the likely consequences if the NPT were allowed to expire, in May 1995 the NPT Review Conference voted overwhelmingly to extend the treaty indefinitely. However, India, which had tested a nuclear weapon in 1974, refused to sign either the NPT or the CTBT. The Indians claimed that the treaties discriminated against India and other non-weapon states by denying them the right to develop nuclear weapons while permitting the five declared nuclear powers—Britain, France, Russia, China, and the United States—to keep their nuclear weapons.

In another, more significant, way of demonstrating their distain for the discriminatory feature of the NPT, in early May 1998, the Indians formally joined the ranks of the nuclear weapon states by testing five nuclear devices. President Clinton responded by imposing economic sanctions on India. But he was unable to persuade the Pakistanis from reacting in kind to the Indian tests. On May 28, Pakistan conducted five nuclear tests, and one on May 30. The Clinton administration reacted by imposing economic sanctions on Pakistan. However, the US sanctions failed to deter neither India nor Pakistan from developing nuclear arsenals which now number in the hundreds for each country.⁵²

IRAQ'S CHALLENGE

Iraq was still another weapons-of-mass-destruction threat that Clinton had to address. Defeated in the Gulf War, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was compelled to accept the U.N.'s peace terms. Among them, Iraq was required to destroy all nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as terminate all research and development of such weapons. A U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) was established to supervise and monitor Iraq's compliance. Nevertheless, despite these restrictions, and the imposition of painful U.N. economic sanctions, Hussein was still a dangerous threat, a fact that was demonstrated very early in Clinton's presidency.

In April 1993, Clinton was presented with irrefutable evidence that Kuwait officials had thwarted a plan by Iraqi agents to assassinate President Bush during his visit to Kuwait City in June. After determining that Hussein had ordered the assassination plot, Clinton reacted, on June 26, by ordering a heavy cruise missile attack on Iraqi command facilities in Baghdad. In the following year, Hussein sent Iraqi troops to

the Kuwaiti border, prompting Clinton to send division-sized ground forces to Kuwait, backed by heavy air and naval support. Hussein quickly backed off. Nevertheless, by 1997, accumulating UNSCOM reports indicated that Iraq was engaged in a systematic effort to conceal proscribed activities and mislead inspectors from UNSCOM and the IAEA. Matters came to a head in October of that year, when Hussein accused American UNSCOM members of spying, before expelling them from Iraq. Only after the United States threatened military action were the American inspectors allowed to return.

In October 1998, Iraq once again brought the U.N. inspections to an end and announced it would attempt to shoot down coalition aircraft in the no-fly zones over Iraq. Clinton reacted by ordering four days of concentrated air attacks against military installations in Iraq, which took place between December 16–19 (the attacks were limited to only four days out of regard for the Muslim holy season of Ramadan). Although Clinton claimed that the attacks substantially degraded Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, almost no one believed that they were sufficient to eliminate Iraq as a menace.⁵³

Earlier that year, former Republican officials—including Caspar Weinberger, Richard Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld—had signed letters to Clinton urging him to seize the opportunity provided by Iraqi resistance to inspections to overthrow Hussein. The letters' ideas came right out of the 1992 draft defense planning guidance that had been opposed by President Bush.⁵⁴ While Clinton rejected military action to remove Hussein from power, on October 31, 1998, he did sign into law the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that it is the policy of the United States to support democratic movements within Iraq—without mentioning any use of US military forces to do it. As a result, the problem of dealing with Hussein was left to Clinton's successor, George W. Bush.⁵⁵

IRAN

Iran was another Middle Eastern problem for the Clinton administration. Clinton inherited almost 15 years of troubled relations with Iran, dating back to the 1979 Iranian takeover of the US embassy in Tehran. Relations between the two countries also were impeded by the absence of diplomatic ties, layers of sanctions, and deep mutual distrust. Early in his presidency, Clinton declared that Iran was a “state sponsor of terrorism” and a “rogue state” primarily because it actively supported a

terrorist group, Hezbollah, which engaged in regular clashes with Israeli forces in Lebanon.

Clinton reacted by initiating a “dual containment” policy designed to deal with threats posed by Iran as well as Iraq. Iran would be contained by US forces based in the Persian Gulf, targeted economic sanctions designed to discourage foreign investment in Iran, and a diplomatic effort to persuade Iran to abandon its support for terrorist groups and its pursuit of a nuclear capability. However, Clinton also left on the table the Bush administration’s offer to engage in direct government-to-government talks without preconditions. However, the specter of Iranian-backed terror grew worse near the end of Clinton’s first term. On June 25, 1996, a truck bomb exploded at the US Air Force base in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, killing 19 American military personnel and wounding over 350 other Americans, Saudis, and other nationals. Intelligence indicated the bombing was the work of Hezbollah al Hejaz, that is, the Saudi Hezbollah, a terrorist group with close links to Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and Lebanon’s Hezbollah.

Initially, the Clinton administration prepared to retaliate militarily against Iran, but it quickly realized that military operations against that country could escalate into a full-scale war. Consequently, instead of taking military action, the administration settled for warning the Iranians to desist from further attacks, reinforcing US installations in the Gulf States, and deploying US warplanes to a remote air base in the Saudi desert. The administration also took targeted actions against Iran’s Revolutionary Guards and Iranian intelligence personnel around the world.

Clinton also was increasingly concerned about the prospect that the Iranians might develop a nuclear weapon. Although, by 1995, Western intelligence agencies did not discover clandestine Iranian nuclear weapon facilities, they did assemble a substantial body of evidence that suggested that Iran was secretly pursuing a broad, organized effort to develop nuclear weapons. However, because Iran’s industrial infrastructure could not support a nuclear weapon effort, it had to seek important weapon-related equipment and materials from abroad, particularly from Russia and China.

On January 8, 1995, Russia signed a \$1 billion deal with Iran in which the Russians agreed to complete one, and possibly two, partially constructed nuclear power reactors, a project that had been suspended by the Germans in 1979. While the reactors would not contribute

directly to weapons development, US officials worried that the training and technology supplied to the civilian side of the project would spill over into a military program. They also were concerned that plutonium embedded in the reactor's spent fuel could be reprocessed into bomb material, if Iran somehow obtained the necessary technology. China, for its part, had agreed in 1992 to supply Iran with two reactors. However, the Chinese insisted that the reactors were being sold for "peaceful purposes" and would be placed under IAEA safeguards, as required by the NPT, to which Iran adheres. But the administration, remembering how Iraq had circumvented IAEA safeguards, did not believe they would deter the Iranians from using the reactors for military purposes.

Clinton conveyed his displeasure about the Russian reactor sales to Yeltsin at the Moscow summit in May 1995. The administration also threatened to cancel ongoing negotiations for a broad nuclear cooperation agreement involving joint ventures to finance new Russian reactors and the opening of US markets to Russian nuclear equipment. Nevertheless, the Americans were only able to persuade the Russians to cancel part of the Iranian deal, that is, the building of a gas-centrifuge plant, which could produce highly enriched uranium. As a result, most of the Russian–Iranian deal remained intact and a continuing sore point between the United States and Russia.⁵⁶

At the same time, Clinton did not abandon his effort to start a dialogue with the Iranians, especially after a moderate, Mohammad Khatami, was elected Iran's president in May 1997. Clinton even offered to restore diplomatic relations with Iran. However, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, refused to accept the American offer unless the United States formally withdrew its support for Israel, lifted the sanctions imposed by Clinton in 1995, and ended its policy of considering Iran a rogue state that sponsors terrorism. Although Clinton considered the possibility of lifting the sanctions, he refused to comply with Iran's other demands.

Nevertheless, Secretary of State Albright made another attempt to improve US-Iranian relations in March 2000. She formally apologized to Iran for the CIA's role in the 1953 coup which overthrew the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and restored the shah to power. She also announced the lifting of US sanctions on imports of Iranian food and carpets and the granting of permission for Boeing to export spare parts for Iran's aging aircraft. She also offered to settle outstanding legal claims on Iranian assets frozen in US bank accounts

since the 1979 US embassy seizure. However, Ayatollah Khamenei dismissed Albright's concessions as worthless and rejected any official dialogue with the United States. As a consequence, an improvement in US-Iranian relations proved impossible to bring about during Clinton's presidency and, indeed, for long thereafter.⁵⁷

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Toward the end of Clinton's presidency, the foreign policy issue that took up most of his time and energy was the prospect of Arab-Israeli peace. During Clinton's campaign for the presidency, he criticized Bush for tying the approval of a \$10-billion US loan guarantee for Israel to the willingness of the Israelis to halt the construction of new settlements in the occupied territories. Fortunately for Clinton, Bush's decision to strengthen Israel's new prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, with additional US funding had eliminated the loan problem before Clinton took office.

Unlike his predecessor, Likud Party leader Yitzhak Shamir, Rabin was prepared to make peace with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization—albeit on Israel's terms. However, before dealing with the PLO, Rabin, with the backing of the Clinton administration, thought it would be wise to make peace with Israel's northern enemy, President Hafez Assad of Syria. However, the conditions for peace that were demanded by Assad—particularly, total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which Israel had occupied in the 1967 war—made an Israeli deal with him impossible. As a consequence, Rabin turned his attention to the Palestinians.

The result was the successful negotiation of the so-called Oslo Accords, which provided a detailed "agreed framework" drafted by the Norwegian government for an eventual Israeli-PLO peace settlement. In the accords, which were signed by Rabin and Arafat at a White House ceremony on September 13, 1993, the PLO recognized the existence of Israel and renounced the use of terrorism. In return, Rabin recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and permitted limited Palestinian self-rule in some areas of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip for a transitional period not exceeding five years, at which time a permanent settlement was supposed to be concluded.

But in November 1995, the Oslo peace process was dealt a severe blow when Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist. The following June, the Likud Party returned to power with the election of Benjamin

Netanyahu as prime minister. Netanyahu had no use for the Oslo Accords, primarily because he considered the creation of a Palestinian state a mortal threat to Israel. Once the Palestinians became independent, he feared, they would be free to resume terrorist attacks against Israel. As a result, little progress was made in implementing the Oslo Accords while Netanyahu was prime minister.

However, the return to power of the Labor Party in July 1999, with the election of Ehud Barak as prime minister, revived hopes for the conclusion of an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty. To that end, in July 2000, Clinton convened a two-week summit at Camp David attended by Barak and Arafat. But disagreement on a number of key issues blocked the conclusion of a deal. For one, the two sides could not agree on the boundaries of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians wanted full sovereignty over the entire West Bank and the Gaza Strip, although they were willing to consider a one-for-one land swap with Israel. However, the Israelis feared that a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders would be dangerous to Israel's security. Nor could they agree on the final status of Jerusalem. The Palestinians demanded complete sovereignty over East Jerusalem and its holy sites, but Barak rejected that concession, preferring instead to give the Palestinians nothing more than purely symbolic sovereignty over part of East Jerusalem.

A third obstacle to an agreement was the traditional Palestinian demand that Israel recognize the "right of return" for all refugees who wished to settle in Israel. By 2000, there were an estimated four million Palestinian refugees. But the Israelis, fearing they would become a minority of Israel's population if an unlimited right of return were permitted, said they would permit only a maximum of 100,000 refugees to return to Israel. Still another obstacle to an agreement were Israel's security concerns. In an attempt to address them, Barak demanded the right to keep Israeli troops within the new Palestinian state, which he insisted must otherwise be demilitarized, except for permitting Palestinian paramilitary security forces to keep internal order. Nor was Barak willing to eliminate the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The inability to resolve these problems was primarily responsible for the failure of the Camp David summit.

Clinton and the Israelis blamed Arafat for the summit's failure, primarily because he refused to accept Israel's "generous" peace terms. But Arafat realized that acceptance of those terms would have severely impinged upon the sovereignty of the new Palestinian state. Some

analysts charge that the Clinton administration was biased in favor of Israel. Analyst Aaron Miller points out that “not a single senior-level official involved with the negotiations was willing or able to present, let alone fight for, the Arab or Palestinian perspective.”⁵⁸ Neither the Clinton administration nor the Israelis were able to appreciate that the failure to reach a deal with the relatively moderate PLO would only increase the influence among Palestinians of much more radical groups, like Hamas and Hezbollah. This became very evident as unprecedented violence erupted in the West Bank and Gaza in the months and years following the failure of the Camp David summit.

AL QAEDA

The greatest terrorist challenge that faced Clinton, however, was Al Qaeda, Arabic for “the base,” an organization of extremist Islamist jihadists founded by Osama bin Laden, a member of a wealthy Saudi Arabian family. Bin Laden had traveled to Afghanistan, where he used his substantial financial resources to build military facilities and training camps for Mujahideen warriors preparing to resist the Soviet invasion of that country in 1979. In 1990, he turned his efforts against the United States after the Saudi Arabian royal family permitted American troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia after the Iraqis had invaded Kuwait.

The first Al Qaeda attack on US interests occurred on December 29, 1992, when its agents detonated bombs at two hotels in Aden, Yemen, in an unsuccessful attempt to kill American soldiers on their way to Somalia. The first Al Qaeda attack on US soil took place on February 26, 1993, when Ramzi Yousef detonated a truck bomb inside a parking garage of Tower One of the two-tower World Trade Center in New York City. Although the towers did not collapse, as Yousef hoped they would, six civilians were killed and 919 were injured.

Five years later, on August 7, 1998, Al Qaeda agents attacked the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Twelve Americans and 201 Africans were killed in the Nairobi attack. Eleven more people were killed in Dar es Salaam, none of them Americans, and thousands were injured. Clinton responded by ordering an attack by 66 cruise missiles on bin Laden’s training camps in Afghanistan, narrowly missing the Al Qaeda leader by a few hours. Later, the 9/11 Commission was told that bin Laden may have been tipped off by sympathetic Pakistani intelligence officials.⁵⁹

Clinton was roundly criticized by his Republican opponents for the failure to kill bin Laden. They accused the president of launching the cruise missile attack primarily to divert the nation's attention from the scandal resulting from his sexual liaison with Monica Lewinsky. They ultimately impeached Clinton—unsuccessfully—for lying about the affair. Richard Clarke, the administration's chief counter-terrorism adviser, wrote later that he considered “almost incredulous that the bitterness of Clinton's enemies knew no bounds, that they intended to hurt not just Clinton but the country by turning the President's personal problem into a public circus for their own political ends.”⁶⁰

Clinton certainly did not launch the missile attacks on bin Laden's camp in order to divert the nation's attention from the Lewinsky scandal. “Listen,” he said to National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, “retaliating for these attacks is all well and good, but we gotta [sic] get rid of these guys once and for all.”⁶¹ Yet for a variety of reasons, that goal was not realized, much to the frustration of the president. After the 9/11 tragedy, Clinton reportedly said: “I tried to take bin Laden out … the last four years I was in office. I still to this day do not understand why it was impossible for United States to find a competent group of Afghans, American country nationals, or some combination who could locate bin Laden in Afghanistan and kill him.”⁶²

One of the reasons for Clinton's failure to “take out” bin Laden was the CIA's inability to find enough Afghans willing to attack the Al Qaeda leader, partly because they sympathized with his cause and partly because they realized he and his bodyguards would put up a ferocious fight to defend him. The task also was complicated by the fact that bin Laden moved around a lot. And even when fairly good intelligence about his location became available, by the time an attempt was made by the CIA to “snatch” him, he had fled. There also was considerable concern on the part of the CIA, as well as the president, that innocent civilians attached to bin Laden's entourage would be killed in any attempt to seize him.⁶³

Clinton asked General Hugh Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to consider using US commando forces in Afghanistan. But, Clinton recalled, “It was clear to me that the senior military didn't want to do this, perhaps because of [the death of US soldiers in Mogadishu] Somalia, perhaps because they would have to send the Special Forces

without knowing for certain where bin Laden was, or whether we could get our troops back out to safety.”⁶⁴ Clinton could not forget that the failed mission to rescue the American embassy personnel held hostage by the Iranians in 1980 severely damaged the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who had ordered that mission. In a private meeting with President-elect George W. Bush, Clinton said, “One of the great regrets of my presidency is that I didn’t get [bin Laden] for you, because I tried to.”⁶⁵

NORTHERN IRELAND

Clinton had much more success dealing with a religious conflict in Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom (UK). The conflict pitted, on one side, Protestant “Unionists,” who wanted to preserve Northern Ireland as part of the UK and, on the other, Catholic “Republicans,” who sought to unite it with the rest of Ireland. In the late 1960s, the conflict erupted into three decades of violence, known as “the Troubles,” which claimed over 3500 lives and caused over 50,000 casualties.

Clinton played an indirect, albeit important, role in producing a peace agreement between the Republican and Unionist factions. He visited Ireland in 1995, and again in 1998, attempting to persuade both sides to make peace. He also made a number of telephone calls to leaders of both sides to encourage them to reach an agreement. In addition, he appointed former Senator George Mitchell to serve as an honest broker in the peace talks.

Finally, on Good Friday, April 10, 1998, a peace agreement was signed in Belfast. It called for the British Parliament to transfer the legislative and executive authority of the province to a new Northern Ireland Assembly, whose executive branch would include members of both communities. However, years of stalemate would follow the signing of the agreement. This was mainly due to the refusal of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), a paramilitary group, to decommission its weapons. It was not until 2005 that the IRA decommissioned all of its arms, thereby reviving expectations for the fulfillment of the Good Friday Agreement. Despite the delay in implementing the agreement, Clinton justifiably considered his efforts to bring peace to Northern Ireland as one of the major achievements of his administration.⁶⁶

THE STATECRAFT OF BILL CLINTON

Bill Clinton entered the White House in 1993 intending to place more emphasis on advancing American ideals than his predecessor did, but at the same time, of course, without sacrificing US national interests. However, he soon demonstrated that he would ignore American ideals if that proved necessary to secure US national interests. He did this, among other ways, by rapidly withdrawing US forces from Somalia after the loss of 18 American military personnel in Mogadishu. Nevertheless, US intervention in Somalia helped to save an estimated 250,000 lives. The Mogadishu tragedy prompted Clinton to refrain from doing anything to halt the genocide in Rwanda, where more than 800,000 people were massacred.

However, Clinton did not completely forsake international human rights issues. He intervened in the Bosnian crisis to end genocide against Muslims in that country, and his diplomats eventually negotiated a peace settlement that has held until this day. Clinton also employed military force against Serbia to end Serbian attacks on Muslims in Kosovo.

Clinton's record in expanding democracy, one of the initial goals of his administration, was far less spectacular. His threat to use force in Haiti did help to restore to power its democratically-elected president. Clinton also played an indirect but significant role in producing a peace settlement, based on democratic principles, that eventually ended a civil war in Northern Ireland. However, the Clinton administration supported Laurent Kabila in Zaire, whose record of atrocities rivaled that of Pol Pot in Cambodia. The administration also tolerated military dictatorships elsewhere in Africa.

Perhaps the most important of Clinton's foreign policy accomplishments was his successful effort to collaborate with Russia in reducing and making safer the nuclear inventories of the defunct Soviet Union. Early in his administration, Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to expedite the completion of the START I Treaty and to move toward the ratification of START II, both of which were negotiated by President Bush. With this end in mind, the Clinton administration succeeded in facilitating the transfer to Russia of nuclear weapons deployed in the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

Clinton's administration also played a major role in curbing the worldwide proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It successfully encouraged the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)

and the negotiation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention. The administration also negotiated an agreement with North Korea which froze, for a while, that country's nuclear weapon program. However, the Clinton administration was unable to prevent India and Pakistan from becoming nuclear weapon states.

In 1999, Clinton took the lead in bringing under the protection of NATO's shield some of the former Soviet Union's Eastern and Central European satellites, that is, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Clinton's decision to support the expansion was motivated partly by idealistic considerations, spreading democracy and capitalism to some of the former communist satellites of the Soviet Union, and partly by domestic politics—he hoped to win the support of American voters with ethnic roots in Eastern Europe. But realists argue that the expansion of NATO was a huge mistake that was bound to antagonize Russia, which it did, and undermine Russian democrats who were struggling to align their country with the West. The expansion of NATO did in fact play into the hands of Russian nationalists and it facilitated Russia's return to dictatorship under Putin. But the defenders of NATO's expansion also point out that the new NATO members feel much more secure being in the alliance than they would have been outside of it.

Clinton demonstrated that his concern for US economic interests superseded his concern for human rights by granting most-favored-nation status (MFN) to the repressive government of China. To be sure, US trade did expand significantly with China as well as others countries. Clinton was able to win congressional assent to numerous free trade accords, especially the NAFTA and the agreement establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO). But on the downside, NAFTA was responsible for the loss of tens of thousands of American manufacturing jobs and the decline of small peasant-owned farms in Mexico, with the consequent migration of millions of impoverished Mexicans to the United States.

However, Clinton's personal intervention was successful in staving off the impending economic collapse of Mexico in 1995 and helped to alleviate the effects of the Asian economic crisis two years later. Yet Clinton was unable to persuade Congress or the IMF to provide Russia with sufficient funds to halt the collapse of its economy. In fact, the administration's support for "shock therapy" increased the suffering of the Russian masses and their disdain for the West and the United States in

particular, thereby making possible the return to autocratic rule in the person of Vladimir Putin. The negative consequences of freer trade ultimately would play a major role in the rise of the so-called populist movements in Europe and the United States and would help to propel Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016.

Clinton's efforts to produce a peaceful Middle East also failed. He was unable to resolve the threat posed by Iraq's Saddam Hussein, nor to persuade the Israelis and Palestinians to make peace, nor to severely cripple Al Qaeda despite the intensified attempts by his administration to do so. "Above all," observes P. Edward Haley, professor of International Strategic Studies at Claremont-McKenna College, "the Clinton administration utterly failed to achieve the conceptual and organizational breakthrough inside the American government, or to put spies in places that might have led to actions capable of sparing the United States and the world at least some of the agony it experienced on and after September 11, 2001."⁶⁷

On the positive side, Clinton's domestic policies produced several years of US economic expansion. He balanced the national budget in his last year in office and proposed a plan to pay off the entire national debt of 10 trillion dollars within 15 years.

The Clinton administration also was able to substantially downsize the post-Cold War US military establishment from 2.1 million active troops in 1990 to 1.4 million by that decade's end. While Republicans charged that the downsizing was excessive, defense analyst Michael O'Hanlon argues, convincingly, that the United States retained a strong military force after the downsizing and, to support his argument, he points to the quick victories the US military won in Afghanistan and Iraq during the presidency of George W. Bush.⁶⁸

Perhaps Clinton's greatest achievement as a statesman, Harvard Professor Stephen Walt observed, "is that he has done so well at so modest a cost to the United States." He maintained the global primacy of the United States "on the cheap because that is the only strategy the American people, who have made it clear they want neither isolationism nor costly international crusades, are likely to support." This explains why the American people judged his stewardship of foreign policy to be "outstanding," according to polls conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.⁶⁹

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CHAPTER 5

George W. Bush, Realism and Neoconservatism, 2001–2009

Unlike Bill Clinton, who began his presidency intending to place more emphasis on idealistic considerations than his immediate predecessor, George W. Bush initially was determined to follow a more realistic foreign policy, one that gave priority to US national interests over more idealistic concerns, such as nation-building, humanitarian intervention, or the global problems facing the international community.

However, after the 9/11 tragedy, Bush shifted to a much more ideological philosophy, one that was advanced by the so-called neoconservatives. They argued that the United States must work to spread American ideals globally, especially democracy. Ironically, however, the Bush administration not only failed to spread democracy, but also violated basic human rights, and it also implemented policies that were contrary to the national interests of the United States. The most important result of Bush's adoption of the neoconservative philosophy was the disastrous US invasion of Iraq (Fig. 5.1).

THE RISE OF GEORGE W. BUSH

George Walker Bush was born on July 6, 1946, in New Haven, Connecticut, the eldest son of Barbara and George H. W. Bush, the forty-first president of the United States. His grandfather on his father's side, Prescott Bush, was a US Senator from Connecticut. His mother was related to Franklin Pierce, the fourteenth president of the United



Fig. 5.1 George W. Bush, Official White House Photograph (Credit: Eric Draper, photographer, courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library; Draper, Eric, photographer. *President Bush poses for his official portrait in the Roosevelt Room blue tie/Official portrait of President George W. Bush, 2003*. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011645073/>)

States. While born in New England, however, Bush was raised in Texas, where his father moved the family after he entered the oil business.

Bush attended public schools in Midland, Texas, and a prep school in Houston. He finished high school at the Phillips Academy, a boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts. He attended Yale University from 1964 to 1968, a “C” student, by his own admission, and more interested in partying than in studying. His hard-drinking and clowning

antics helped to get him elected president of his “jock” fraternity. But it also got him into trouble with the law. While at Yale, he was detained by the police for disorderly conduct. His unruly behavior at Yale, some biographers believe, masked his growing realization that he was unable to match his father’s notable accomplishments at that university.¹

However, Bush graduated with a B.A. degree in history. From 1968 until 1974, he served in the Texas Air National Guard. In 1973, he enrolled in the Harvard Business School and graduated two years later with an M.B.A. and then went into the oil business in Texas. In 1977, Bush married Laura Welch, a former elementary school teacher and librarian whom he credits for stabilizing his life and persuading him to give up alcohol, which had plagued him since his years at Yale. Bush’s determination to give up drinking also was prompted by his decision to become a “born again” Christian in 1984. Years later, after he had become president, he said: “There is only one reason why I am in the Oval Office and not in a bar. I found faith. I found God. I am here because of the power of prayer.”²

In 1988, Bush got involved in his father’s successful presidential campaign, acting as the “enforcer” in dealing with his father’s staff, the press, and political enemies. In 1989, Bush took another step toward respectability by becoming the managing general partner of the Texas Rangers baseball team. After his father failed to win a second term as president (losing to Bill Clinton), Bush announced that he would run for governor of Texas in 1994. He won an unexpected victory over the popular Democratic incumbent governor, Ann Richards.

Bush proved to be a popular and successful governor, which made him an instant front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination when he announced his candidacy in June 1999. After defeating Senator John McCain (R.-Ariz.) in the primaries, Bush was nominated as the Republican standard-bearer at the party’s convention in August. That November, in the most controversial presidential election in US history, Bush defeated the Democratic nominee, Vice President Al Gore. Although Gore won more popular votes, thanks to a highly controversial Supreme Court decision that stopped a voter recount in Florida, Bush won the all-important Electoral College count. On January 20, 2001, George W. Bush was sworn in as the forty-third president of the United States.

THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW PRESIDENT

Psychologists, among others, have had a field day attempting to characterize George W. Bush. Although some critics considered him to be too “dumb” to be president, Dean Keith Simonton, a leading scholar in the quantitative psychological study of historical figures, estimated Bush’s IQ at 120–125, which puts him in the top 10% of the population and above the 115 average IQ for college graduates.³ Moreover, Bush was elected governor of Texas and president of the United States, two accomplishments which obviously require considerable intelligence.

However, while Bush proved that he has above-average intelligence, he was surprisingly uninterested in the broader world around him. In college, he virtually ignored the war in Vietnam—until he realized that he could be drafted and sent there once his college deferment ended. Bush also admitted that he is disinclined to think about complex subjects. “I don’t do nuance,” as he put it.⁴ Psychologists Felix Thoemmes and Lucian Conway write that individuals who want simple answers, and want them fast, display “low integrative complexity ability.” They trust their instincts, or deep convictions, and discount alternative points of view.⁵ And once they make a decision, adds psychologist Dan McAdams, they “will stick with it, no matter what.”⁶

The shallowness of Bush’s knowledge of world affairs, his preference for simplistic answers, his eagerness for bold action, and his reliance upon his instincts, some observers have concluded, were major factors in explaining his decisions as president. So, too, was his relationship with his father, a man he loved and honored, but with whom he also felt he must compete by doing things differently and, presumably, better.⁷

THE BUSH NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM

Bush’s determination to do things differently than his father was reflected, among other ways, in the selection of his father’s former antagonists to some of the key national security positions in his administration. The most prominent was Richard “Dick” Cheney, whom Bush selected as his vice presidential running mate. Although Cheney had served as secretary of defense in the elder Bush’s administration, he did not always agree with that president’s cautious approach to world affairs, particularly with respect to Iraq. Given Bush’s unfamiliarity with national security affairs, and his disinclination to immerse himself in complex issues,

he was more than happy to allow Cheney to prepare a list of options that he as president would have to address. In fact, while Bush would promote himself as the “Decider,” early in his presidency Cheney was very often the sole framer of the issues and options presented to the president.⁸

In addition to Cheney, Bush appointed another adversary of his father, Donald Rumsfeld, to be secretary of defense. The animosity between Rumsfeld and the elder Bush can be traced to Rumsfeld’s success in persuading President Gerald Ford to bring Bush back from his post as ambassador to China in order to make him director of the CIA. The move effectively sidelined Bush from consideration as Ford’s vice presidential running mate in 1976. When James Baker, the elder Bush’s secretary of state, heard that the president-elect was planning to name Rumsfeld to be his secretary of defense, he told him, “All I’m going to say is, you remember what he did to your Daddy.” But Bush ignored Baker’s warning.⁹

As Rumsfeld’s undersecretary of defense, Cheney persuaded Bush to appoint another antagonist of his father, Paul Wolfowitz, who had held the same position in the administration of the elder Bush. Wolfowitz was one of the recognized leaders of a group of intellectuals and policy experts who were called neoconservatives or, more derisively, “neocons.” The label initially referred to a group of liberal intellectuals who had become more conservative, and anti-Soviet, in the 1970s. They rejected the *Realpolitik* policies of Nixon and Kissinger, and especially their efforts to promote détente with the Soviet Union and China. Rather than dealing with such tyrannical regimes, the neoconservatives insisted that the United States must work to spread American ideals around the world, including democracy and respect for human rights. Moreover, unlike the realists in the administration of the elder Bush, the neoconservatives had little use for diplomacy or for treaties, and even less for multinational institutions like the United Nations, whose effectiveness and regard for US interests they considered to be minimal. The neoconservatives insisted that only the United States could act to advance its interests and, if necessary, it must do so unilaterally or with “coalitions of the willing.”

Ironically, considering Bush’s determination to distance himself from his father’s presidency, as secretary of state he named an arch-antagonist of Cheney’s, retired General Colin Powell, who had served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the elder Bush’s presidency. During his election campaign for the presidency, the younger Bush had hinted

that he would bring the very popular Powell into his administration primarily to enhance his chances of winning. Powell was the co-author of the so-called Powell Doctrine. It established a number of conditions that must be realized before US forces were engaged in military action abroad. They included intervention only in defense of vital national interests, clear objectives for such missions, the use of overwhelming military force to achieve those objectives, and an exit strategy in place before the mission was undertaken. Powell, as secretary of state, would be the major defender of that doctrine in the face of efforts by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz to ignore it.

The unenviable role of trying to balance these two clashing viewpoints was assigned to Condoleezza Rice, who was appointed by Bush to be his special assistant for national security affairs and, during his second administration, secretary of state. Rice, a political science professor and provost at Stanford University, had worked as a Soviet expert for General Brent Scowcroft, the elder Bush's national security adviser. After the younger Bush decided to run for president, Rice conducted a number of tutorial sessions on national security affairs to bring him up to speed. Bush relied on Rice to help form his foreign policy views during the campaign. When Rice first interviewed with candidate Bush, he told her, "I don't have any idea about foreign affairs."¹⁰ Like her mentor, General Scowcroft, Rice was a classic balance-of-power realist—at least initially. In a 1999 article that appeared in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, Rice insisted that the national interest must take precedence over humanitarian interests, or other interests of the international community. She was especially opposed to engaging US troops in humanitarian interventions or for promoting "nation building," as President Clinton had attempted to do in Haiti and Bosnia.¹¹

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Bush received a heavy dose of the neoconservative philosophy from Wolfowitz during his foreign policy tutorial sessions. Nevertheless, while campaigning for the presidency in 2000, he gave many Americans the impression that his foreign policy would be modeled after his father's. He declared that "a president must be a clear-eyed realist," a statement that reflected the elder Bush's approach to foreign policy. He also seemed to accept the basic premises of the Powell Doctrine when he said that US troops should be committed to combat only to secure the "vital

interests” of the United States. Moreover, he continued, “the mission must be clear [and] the force must be strong enough so that the mission can be accomplished. And the exit strategy needs to be well-defined.”¹²

Yet Bush had no intention of following in his father’s footsteps. He intended to be his own man and do things differently as president than his father had. The influence of the neoconservatives gradually replaced Rice’s realism. Where the elder Bush had focused on international relationships and agreements, his son, as president, would display little use for international law or for the United Nations. Where his father had been tactical and reactive—refusing, for example, to make a provocative statement when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989—the younger Bush said he would be “forward leaning,” like Ronald Reagan, when that president had declared, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Rather than cooperating with Russia in curbing the nuclear arms race, as his father had done, Bush declared his intention to abrogate the ABM Treaty and develop a ballistic missile defense system. Rather than working to improve US relations with China—again, as his father did—he threatened to reverse the long-standing policy of “strategic ambiguity” with respect to Taiwan. Rather than pursuing the more even-handed approach of his father toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the younger Bush spurned Yassir Arafat, the Palestinian president, and instead gave unstinted support to Israel’s hard-line prime minister, Ariel Sharon. Bush also showed a disregard for multinational cooperation when he repudiated the Kyoto Accords, an international attempt to curb global warming by reducing fossil fuel emissions.¹³

9/11

By mid-summer 2001, Bush was looking like he would be a one-term president. By then, his malapropisms and his dependence on Cheney had become the butt of comedians’ jokes. In addition, his domestic and foreign policies were regarded as extreme by independents as well as liberals. The growing popular discontent with the president was reflected in his approval rating, which had sunk to 50%, a historic low for a president in office only six months.

On September 11, 2001, however, Bush’s presidency got a major transformative boost. On that day, nineteen Al Qaeda terrorists, under the orders of Osama bin Laden, carried out the most devastating attack on the continental United States in the nation’s history. After

seizing control of four airliners, the terrorists crashed two of them into the World Trade Center in New York City and another one into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Over 2700 people died in the attacks. The target of the fourth plane was the White House, but before that attack could take place, courageous passengers on that plane forced it to crash in a field in Pennsylvania. All aboard were killed. A stunned nation rallied around the flag and the president.

Although Bush seemed unsure of himself in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, he quickly regained his composure and delivered some of the most powerful and effective speeches of his career. Within days, his popularity rating rose to an amazing 90%. On September 14, Congress authorized him to use “all necessary and appropriate force” to win the war on terror. The Senate voted 98-0 in favor of the authorization, while the House approved it by a vote of 420-1.¹⁴

IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN?

While Bush promised to wage the war on terror with vigor, the main target of that conflict quickly became a matter of considerable controversy among his chief national security advisers. The day after the attacks, Richard Clarke, the president’s chief counter-terrorism advisor, was shocked to discover that Bush was determined to make Saddam Hussein, rather than Osama bin Laden, the chief target of the administration’s war on terrorism.

Bush had a variety of reasons for putting Hussein at the top of his hit list. For one, the Iraqi leader was continuing to defy United Nations resolutions requiring him to permit International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections, even after Bush had ordered retaliatory US air strikes against Iraq. The United States, to the president’s frustration, seemed powerless to do anything about Iraq’s noncompliance with the UN’s demands. Bush also had deeply personal reasons for getting rid of Hussein. For one, his overthrow would avenge a thwarted attempt by Hussein’s agents to kill the elder Bush while he was visiting Kuwait in 1993. “The SOB [Hussein] tried to kill my dad,” Bush exclaimed. Bush also believed the intelligence officials who told him afterward that Hussein had planned to murder not just his father, but also his mother, his wife, and his two youngest brothers, Neil and Marvin. According to

family intimates, the Bushes felt they were not safe as long as Hussein remained in power.¹⁵

The Oedipal factor also appeared to be behind Bush's eagerness to overthrowing the Iraqi leader. It would give Bush an opportunity to outdo his father, to succeed where he thought his father had failed. In 1998, he told a family friend: "Dad made a mistake by not going into Iraq when he had an approval rating in the nineties. If I'm ever in that situation, I'll use it. I'll spend my capital."¹⁶

Bush's motives for overthrowing Hussein blended easily with the neoconservative agenda advanced by Wolfowitz. Disposing of Hussein would not only enhance the security of Israel, Wolfowitz argued, it also would give the United States the opportunity to establish democracy, respect for human rights, and other Western values in the Middle East, much as America had done in Japan and Germany after World War II. However, Powell argued that the United States would not be able to obtain the support of other governments for military action against Iraq. "Let's stick to Afghanistan for now," he urged the president. Apparently, Powell's arguments got through to Bush, but he was not alone. Rice also urged the president to concentrate on Afghanistan first, as did British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Consequently, during a council of war at Camp David on September 15, the president announced his decision to go after Afghanistan first. Nevertheless, he added, Iraq also needed to be tackled at a later stage.¹⁷

On September 20, 2001, Bush gave a powerful televised address to a joint session of Congress setting the stage for the US invasion of Afghanistan, where the 9/11 attackers terrorists had trained. He announced that he had sent an unconditional ultimatum to Afghanistan's Taliban government to immediately turn over all Al Qaeda members and allow US forces "full access to terrorist training camps."¹⁸ The Taliban government, as expected, rejected the president's ultimatum, prompting Bush, on October 7, to launch a sustained military campaign against Taliban and Al Qaeda positions in Afghanistan. Within two months, the Taliban were driven from power. However, Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leaders eluded capture by escaping to Pakistan. Taliban guerrillas would remain increasingly active in several regions of the country, prompting the administration to gradually increase the number of US troops to 32,200 by 2008. They were complemented by 29,000 NATO troops.

THE BUSH DOCTRINE

The continuation of the war in Afghanistan, however, did not prevent Bush from shifting his attention to Iraq. In his first State of the Union address, on January 29, 2002, he announced that the emphasis of US counter-terrorist strategy would be shifting from Al Qaeda and states that sponsor terrorists to unfriendly governments—particularly Iraq, North Korea, and Iran—which, he said, constituted “an axis of evil.” In a commencement address at West Point on June 1, Bush announced what amounted to a new strategic doctrine: the Bush Doctrine. In essence, it called for the United States to be prepared to fight a preventive war. “If we wait for security threats to materialize,” he told the cadets, “we will have waited too long. … We cannot let our enemies strike first.”¹⁹

Not surprisingly, Bush’s adoption of a preventive war doctrine was controversial. It represented a major departure from the traditional US foreign policy of not attacking another nation unless attacked first. And if such a conflict were undertaken without the approval of the United Nations, a preventive war would be illegal under international law. Moreover, the adoption of a preventive war doctrine by the United States risked encouraging other countries to launch their own preventive wars, thereby shattering any hope of creating a stable world order.

PREPARING FOR WAR WITH IRAQ

Clearly, the president had Iraq in mind in announcing his preventive war doctrine. He believed that war with Iraq was inevitable, and consequently, he thought that the United States should initiate it before Hussein developed deliverable nuclear weapons. On December 28, 2001, General Tommy Franks presented Bush an operational plan for an invasion of Iraq that the president had ordered him to prepare the previous month.

In a meeting with Bush at the president’s Crawford, Texas, ranch on April 7, 2002, British Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed to go to war with Iraq. But before doing so, Blair said, certain conditions had to be met first, including constructing a coalition to engage Iraq militarily, shaping public opinion, making sure the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was quiescent, and going to war only after efforts to eliminate Iraq’s weapons of massive destruction (WMD) through the UN weapons inspectors had been exhausted.²⁰

While the Pentagon prepared for conflict with Iraq and the president and his hard-line allies tried to drum up domestic and foreign support

for the coming war, opposition to a military conflict grew louder. Humanitarians argued that considering the death, destruction, refugees, and impoverishment that would result from a war to overthrow Hussein, the Iraqi people would be much less worse off if he stayed in power. Realists, on the other hand, were more concerned that a war with Iraq would leave the United States much worse off. They argued that despite Hussein's brutality, not only did he not pose a threat to the United States, Iraq under his rule served to check Iranian influence in the Middle East, as well as prevent Iraq from becoming a base of operations for Al Qaeda. They also dismissed neoconservative claims that Hussein and bin Laden were clandestine allies as well as the neoconservative argument that Hussein was preparing to attack the United States with WMDs. Hussein, they argued, was not suicidal. He knew full well that an Iraqi attack on the United States or its interests in the Middle East would result in devastating US retaliation.

Significantly, two of the most prominent realists who criticized Bush's Iraq strategy, General Brent Scowcroft and James Baker, were former aides and close friends of his father. Scowcroft was the elder Bush's national security adviser, and Baker was his secretary of state. In an op-ed article that appeared in the August 15 edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, Scowcroft warned that a war against Iraq "could well destabilize Arab regimes" and "could even swell the ranks of the terrorists." Agreeing with Scowcroft, in an op-ed piece that appeared in the *New York Times* on August 25, Baker urged the president to go to the United Nations and seek the return of the inspectors to Iraq. They could determine if Hussein truly did possess weapons of mass destruction and was building nuclear weapons.

While Bush would ignore Scowcroft's warning not to go to war with Iraq, in September he did accept Baker's advice to go before the United Nations to present his case against Iraq. Although many of the delegates were upset by the bellicose tone of his address, they were relieved that, apparently, he had decided to work through the United Nations rather than to act alone. And when, on September 16, the Iraqis responded that they would re-admit UN inspectors without condition, many considered Bush's threatening address a diplomatic triumph for the United States. But Bush had no intention of allowing UN inspectors to determine if Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, let alone whether the United States would go to war with Iraq.²¹

Taking advantage of the approaching congressional election, in October 2002 Bush pressured Congress to approve a resolution authorizing him to use force against Iraq if Saddam Hussein did not surrender what everyone on both sides of the debate assumed to be a reality: its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. The House passed the resolution 296-133, on October 10, with 81 Democrats voting in favor. The Senate approved the resolution the next day, 77-23, with 29 of 50 Democrats voting with the majority. Among the Democratic senators who voted for the resolution were a future vice president, Joseph Biden, and Hillary Clinton, the wife of the former president and a candidate for the presidency herself in 2016.

At the December meeting of the National Security Council, the president discussed the new UN inspections in Iraq and said, “It’s clear that Saddam is not cooperating.” He added, “I think war is inevitable.” Bush reached this conclusion five weeks before the final report of chief UN inspector Hans Blix was due. As the inspections continued, US and British forces began to deploy in Kuwait and in the Persian Gulf.²² Nevertheless, on December 21, Bush asked CIA Director George Tenet if Iraq possessed WMDs. Tenet replied, “It’s a slam dunk.” Yet, as Tenet pointed out later, his confirmation of Iraqi WMDs was not the tipping point in the president’s decision to go to war with Iraq. As early as the previous spring, the Pentagon had begun shifting forces from Afghanistan to the Iraq operation.²³

On January 27, Blix’s UN colleague, Mohamed ElBaradei, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), reported that after two months of inspections in Iraq, his team of about 250 inspectors had found no evidence of prohibited nuclear activities, nor any links between Iraq and the September 11 terrorist attacks. In the eyes of many, the reports from the UN weapons inspectors made a war with Iraq not only unnecessary but also morally reprehensible.

The fact that the UN inspectors were finding no evidence of WMDs in Iraq, however, did nothing to deter Bush from going to war with that country. On the contrary, on January 13, he informed Powell that he had made the final decision for war. The secretary of state responded by warning the president that he was about to unlock Pandora’s box. “You know the consequences?” Powell asked. “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people.” And the cost would be crushing. “You own it, you fix it.”²⁴ The president, however, was unfazed by Powell’s warning. He made it clear to the secretary of state that the decision was

already made. “Are you with me on this?” Bush asked Powell. “I think I have to do this. Are you with me?” “I’ll do the best I can,” Powell replied. “Yes, sir, I will help you. I’m with you, Mr. President.”²⁵

On February 5, 2003, Powell went before the UN Security Council to make the administration’s case for war. Powell, with Tenet sitting behind him—to ensure that the CIA chief’s credibility, as well as his own, would be on the line—claimed that “Hussein and his regime are concealing their efforts to produce weapons of mass destruction.” The secretary of state added that there was “no doubt” in his mind that Hussein was working to obtain key components of a nuclear weapon. Powell also charged that “a sinister nexus” existed “between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network.”²⁶ While Powell assured the Security Council that his accusations were backed by “solid sources” and “solid intelligence,” in reality, he still had doubts about the evidence he presented. Powell’s doubts eventually were validated. In a report on October 6, 2004, a year and a half after the US invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration’s chief arms inspector, Charles Duelfer, would conclude that the Iraqis did not possess or produce any WMD “for more than a decade before the U.S. led invasion.”²⁷

Bush, however, was not very concerned about the veracity of the CIA’s intelligence. What increasingly upset him was the length of time it was taking the Security Council to vote on a second resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. He told Tony Blair that he “intended to invade Iraq whether or not there was a second UN resolution, and even if the UN inspectors found no evidence of a banned Iraqi weapons program.” However, Bush wanted at least a majority on the Security Council to approve a resolution in order to make it appear that the world body had authorized military action. But the Security Council refused to vote on the resolution until the UN inspectors had completed their report.²⁸

On March 7, the UN inspection team delivered their report to the Security Council. Chief Inspector Hans Blix reported that the inspectors found no evidence of WMDs at any of the sites suggested to them by US intelligence.²⁹ The inspectors’ report killed any chance that the Security Council would approve the resolution sought by Bush and Blair authorizing the use of force against Iraq. Consequently, the Bush administration dropped its effort to pass the resolution. Instead, it claimed that the United States did not need UN authorization to invade Iraq.

During the afternoon of March 19, Bush issued the order for “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the invasion of Iraq, to begin. The following day, March 20, Congress overwhelmingly approved the war, with the Senate voting 99 to 0 and the House 392 to 11. A *New York Times/CBS* poll that day found 62% agreed with the attack while 35% believed that the inspectors should have been given more time.³⁰

THE SECOND WAR WITH IRAQ

From a military point of view, the invasion of Iraq was a dazzling success. A total of 248,000 US military personnel, representing 83% of the total forces, participated in the invasion. They were complemented by 45,000 British troops and token forces from other members of the “coalition of the willing.”³¹ However, some NATO allies of the United States—particularly France, Germany, and Turkey—refused to participate in the military operation. Turkey even refused to allow coalition forces to launch an attack from its territory bordering northern Iraq.

Nevertheless, after only three weeks of fighting, coalition forces destroyed nearly all of the significant Iraqi resistance outside of Baghdad and advanced to the capital by April 9. Five days later, the city was occupied by US forces. Iraq’s surviving leaders went into hiding, but most of them eventually were captured, including Hussein himself. He was tried and executed by a new Iraqi government in December 2006. In the coalition’s advance to Baghdad, however, thousands of Iraqi soldiers were killed and tens of thousands surrendered or deserted. By contrast, the official tally for US fatalities between the beginning of the war and May 1 was 139. On May 1, President Bush dramatically flew in a Navy aircraft to the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, docked in San Diego harbor. After deplaning in his flight suit to cheering sailors, the president changed to a business suit and appeared beneath a banner proclaiming “Mission Accomplished” and announced that the major part of combat in Iraq was over.

Yet, as events would demonstrate, the US mission in Iraq was far from over. Much of Iraq’s infrastructure was damaged or destroyed. City services—water, electricity, telephones and the like—were disrupted. Hospitals were emptied of much-needed medication and equipment. Along with the Iraqi government, the Iraqi army and police force had dissolved. Looting broke out in the chaotic conditions that prevailed throughout the capital city. With Baghdad out of control, US soldiers,

who had hoped to quickly withdraw from Iraq after the war ended, were compelled to stay and do occupation work. Before long, the Bush administration was faced with a full-scale insurgency, as Sunnis battled Shiites, as well as US troops. The demise of Hussein, who had kept Al Qaeda jihadists out of Iraq, now enabled the terrorists to infiltrate the country and add to the violence.

Nevertheless, the worst effects of that failure apparently were not clear to most Americans, who narrowly re-elected Bush president in 2004. By the time of the congressional elections in 2006, however, the worst effects of that failure were obvious. By then, pictures of American soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison had appeared on televisions around the world. These criminal actions, combined with the torture of detainees by US personnel, did much to tarnish the image of America around the world. It also helped to undermine the administration's rationale for invading Iraq in the first place. As the number of US combat deaths and wounded soldiers climbed, Bush's popularity plummeted, enabling the Democrats to regain control of both houses of Congress in the 2006 election.

In an attempt to rescue his historical legacy, Bush made changes in the nation's military leadership in December 2006. He replaced Rumsfeld as secretary of defense with the more pragmatic Robert Gates. Two years later, a new US commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, implemented a "surge strategy," that is, one that increased the number of US combat troops in Iraq to restore order. As a result, a semblance of order was restored, enabling a new Shiite-dominated government to take control of the country after it won a relatively fair election in 2008. The new Iraqi government and the United States concluded an agreement that called for the withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq by 2011.

Nevertheless, the costs of engaging in regime change in Iraq were enormous, both in treasure and in human life. By 2011, 4700 US military personnel had been killed and thousands more had been maimed, both physically and psychologically. The Iraqis lost many more people—over a hundred thousand were killed—and tens of thousands more were wounded. The war cost the US treasury more than two trillion dollars, an amount that was not raised by increasing federal revenues but through additional borrowing, which contributed to the soaring US national debt.

Despite the enormous cost of the war, regime change in Iraq had other consequences that were not anticipated by the neoconservatives, Cheney,

Rumsfeld, or the president. The leader of the new Shiite-dominated government, Nouri al Maliki, befriended Shiite Iran, America's greatest foe in the Middle East. And, rather than enhancing the security of Israel and other US client states in the Middle East, as the neoconservatives had promised, the overthrow of Hussein, who had fought Iran in an eight-year-long war, actually added to Israel's insecurity by removing Iraq as a buffer to the expansion of Iranian influence.

At the same time that the Bush administration was focusing its efforts on Iraq, conditions in Afghanistan were allowed to deteriorate. By 2006, the Taliban were once again attacking Afghanistan's cities. As a consequence, Bush was compelled to send more US troops to that country as well and to abandon his earlier opposition to nation-building activities. Fighting two wars simultaneously, however, severely strained the human resources of the US Army and Marines. The shortage of troops required the administration to activate National Guard units and to rely on repeated—and often demoralizing—tours of duty for combat troops. Not surprisingly, enlistments in the Army declined—even after enlistment standards were lowered and incentives were increased—thereby threatening the viability of the volunteer army concept, one of the pillars of post-Vietnam US national security policy.

The war with Iraq also severely strained US relations with its NATO allies. France and Germany refused to cooperate with the US effort to overthrow Hussein, and Turkey refused to allow US forces to use Turkish territory from which to invade Iraq.

The war also stressed the US Constitution. As a part of its war on terror, the Bush administration engaged in an unprecedented level of spying on the American people and did so without court authorization. The administration also violated the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war by imprisoning suspected terrorists at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba without recourse to trial. Congress, for its part, not only voted to authorize the war against Iraq, it appropriated funds for the conflict without requiring offsetting increases in revenue, thus doing its part in raising the national debt.

The war also had detrimental consequences for the Republican Party. Partly because of the continuing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and partly because of the deteriorating US economy, the Democrats won control of both houses of Congress and elected a Democratic president, Barack Obama, in 2008.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR CHALLENGE

Still another Middle Eastern problem that the Bush administration had to confront was Iran's developing nuclear program. In August 2002, an Iranian opposition group revealed that Iran had surreptitiously constructed two nuclear facilities to enrich uranium (at Natanz) and produce heavy water (at Arak). Once completed, these facilities would provide Iran with the capacity to produce weapon-grade uranium and plutonium. Inspectors from the IAEA, who visited the sites in February 2003, were surprised when they discovered that Iran had already built more than one hundred centrifuges to enrich uranium and planned to build fifty thousand in all. Moreover, the IAEA learned that the Iranians had imported nearly two tons of uranium in 1991. Obviously, these revelations alarmed the Bush administration. The president responded by declaring, "We will not tolerate the construction of an Iranian nuclear weapon."³² But he was not willing to consider either military action against Iran or engage in direct diplomacy with the Iranians.

For the Bush administration, a diplomatic rapprochement with Iran was out of the question. In Condoleezza Rice's 2000 *Foreign Affairs* article, she blamed Iran for attempting to destabilize Saudi Arabia, support terrorism, develop sensitive military technologies, and threaten Israel. She also questioned how much authority Iran's moderate president, Muhammad Khatami, really exercised in a government in which the hard-line supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had the final say-so.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, however, relations between the United States and Iran seemed to warm up. Khatami not only condemned the 9/11 attacks, his government quietly offered, and the Bush administration accepted, support for the US campaign in Afghanistan. Iran authorized US search-and-rescue operations on its soil, gave sanctuary to over two million Afghan refugees, and provided intelligence for the American war against the Taliban. However, the warm-up in US-Iranian relations was short-lived. In early January 2002, the Israelis boarded a freighter owned by the Palestinian Authority, the *Karine A*, carrying weapons with Iranian markings. One Bush official said that incident "was a sign to the president that the Iranians weren't serious" about improving relations with the United States.³³ Although the Iranians could not prove it, they were convinced that the *Karine A* affair was the work of Israeli hard-liners attempting—successfully, as events would prove—to sabotage the development of US-Iranian détente.

Even more damaging to US-Iranian relations was Bush's inclusion of Iran in the "axis of evil." By lumping Iran with Iraq and North Korea, critics argued, Bush undermined the efforts of President Khatami not only to improve relations with the United States, but also to democratize the Iranian government. In fact, Iran's reactionary clerics used Bush's words to quash Khatami's reform program by reviving previously ebbing anti-Americanism in their country. Nevertheless, in April 2003, the Khatami government secretly sent the Bush administration a proposal for a "grand bargain" between Iran and the United States. According to *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, who obtained a text of the proposal, the United States would remove Iran from the "axis of evil" and list of terrorist states, end economic sanctions on Iran, grant Iran full access to peaceful nuclear technology, and disarm anti-Iranian terrorists. In return, Iran would make their nuclear facilities "fully transparent" to IAEA inspectors in order to reassure the United States that Iran did not seek or possess WMD. In addition, Iran would take decisive action against Al Qaeda terrorists on Iranian territory and promise to support the stabilization of Iraq. Moreover, Iran would also agree to end its aid to Hamas, transform Hezbollah into a Lebanese political organization, and endorse Saudi Arabia's two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³⁴

The Iranian offer generated considerable debate among Bush's chief national security advisers. Rice viewed negotiations with Iran as a way to manage the Iranian nuclear issue, but Cheney "strongly opposed" any grand bargain and instead called for a "more coercive approach" toward Iran. Cheney's neoconservative allies not only opposed talking to "rogue" states, like Iran, they suggested that Iran's clerical regime should be the next target for overthrow by the United States. As a consequence of this division of opinion within the administration, the Iranian proposal for a grand bargain was studiously ignored.³⁵

However, while the Bush administration refused to enter into substantial negotiations with Iran, the major European Union powers—Germany, France, and Britain—were willing to talk to the Iranians. In October 2003, they were able to persuade the Iranians to suspend, albeit only temporarily, their enrichment of uranium, a right granted by the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). As a consequence, Iran cooperated with the IAEA for twenty consecutive months and even opened some of its military facilities to the IAEA inspectors, which was

not required under the NPT. However, because the Bush administration took the position of “no enrichment in Iran,” Ayatollah Khamenei ordered the resumption of Iran’s enrichment program in August 2005. The talks with the Europeans quickly collapsed and were followed by almost a decade of tumultuous relations between Iran and the West.³⁶

The deterioration in Iran’s relationship with the West coincided with the election to the presidency of a hard-liner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in June 2005. His election brought to an end sixteen years of relatively moderate Iranian governments as well as the possibility of a US-Iranian rapprochement during Ahmadinejad’s presidency. In an address before the UN General Assembly, Ahmadinejad depicted the Holocaust as a “myth” and called for Israel to be “wiped off the map.” He also insisted that Iran had the right under the NPT to pursue nuclear energy but, he hastily added, only for peaceful purposes.³⁷

Cheney and the neoconservatives favored military action against Iran’s nuclear facilities. But military action was opposed by Rice, Robert Gates, who replaced Rumsfeld as secretary of defense in 2006, and ultimately the president himself. Bush’s disinclination to attack Iran was influenced in part by the continuing US military involvement in Iraq. But it also was reinforced by a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), published in December 2007, which concluded “with high confidence” that Iran had suspended the military side of its nuclear program in 2003. Moreover, there was no conclusive evidence of its revival. In his memoir, written years later, Bush wrote that the NIE assessment had “tied my hands on the military side.”³⁸

Despite Bush’s deep reluctance to negotiate with the Iranians, the deteriorating military situation in Iraq left him no choice but to give the green light to talks with the Iranians. As a prominent Iranian expert, Dr. Vali Nasr, put it, “the United States wanted an endgame in Iraq, but there was no endgame without involving Iran.” But talks in Baghdad between US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and the Iranian ambassador to Iraq during 2007 floundered after the Americans claimed that Iran was supplying weaponry, training, and finance to insurgents in Iraq who conducted attacks on US and coalition forces, a charge denied by the Iranians. As a result, dealing with Iran was a problem that Bush left to his successor, Barack Obama.³⁹ However, there was a much more potent nuclear threat than Iran: North Korea.

NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR THREAT

When President Bush entered the Oval Office in January 2001, the 1994 Agreed Framework that had been negotiated by the Clinton administration with North Korea was still in place and a high-level bilateral diplomacy had developed between the two long-time foes. However, during his campaign for the presidency, Bush announced that he opposed the Agreed Framework. He claimed that by providing the North Koreans with economic assistance and light-water nuclear reactors it rewarded their bad behavior.⁴⁰ More ominous to the North Koreans was Bush's inclusion of their country in the "axis of evil" as well as the US nuclear targeting list. To the North Koreans, the implication was clear: they could very well be next on the US hit list after Bush had disposed of Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

The North Koreans reacted, on March 13, 2002, by announcing that they would not remain a passive onlooker while Bush targeted them with nuclear weapons. The CIA discovered that they had begun to enrich uranium, in clear violation of the Agreed Framework and a 1992 agreement with South Korea to keep the Korean peninsula denuclearized. The following December, the North Koreans ordered the IAEA inspectors out of the country. This was followed, on January 10, 2003, by North Korea's dramatic announcement that it was withdrawing from the NPT. Soon thereafter, the North Koreans began preparing eight thousand spent nuclear fuel rods for reprocessing. Once reprocessed, the rods could provide enough plutonium for about half a dozen bombs.

Although the Bush administration had opposed negotiating with the North Koreans, the resumption of North Korea's nuclear weapon program compelled the administration, beginning in August 2003, to engage in multinational talks with North Korea, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. However, for the remainder of Bush's first term, the talks went nowhere, primarily because the administration insisted that it would not negotiate with the North Koreans until they first dismantled their nuclear program, thereby depriving the North Koreans of their primary instrument for extracting concessions from the United States.

To pressure the United States to make the concessions the North Koreans were seeking, on February 10, 2005, they announced that they had produced several nuclear weapons. Concerned by the possibility that the North Koreans were telling the truth, the Bush administration returned to the six-party talks. That September, in a complete

turnaround, the administration agreed to a Statement of Principles based on the Agreed Framework, which it earlier had denounced and refused to implement. The Statement of Principles committed North Korea to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and return to the NPT. In return, the six parties agreed to promote economic cooperation with North Korea. In addition, the United States and North Korea agreed to “respect each other’s sovereignty,” and the United States affirmed that it had no intention to attack or to invade North Korea with nuclear or conventional weapons.⁴¹

However, the euphoria generated by the September Agreement was short-lived. The Bush administration said that North Korea would have to abandon its nuclear weapon program before receiving the promised light-water nuclear reactors. The North Koreans reacted by saying that they must have the reactors before they engaged in nuclear disarmament. Almost simultaneously, the United States froze \$25 million of North Korea’s funds that were deposited in a bank in Macau, China, a clear violation of the US commitment in the September Agreement to cooperate economically with North Korea. The North Koreans responded by breaking off the talks until the US financial “sanctions” were lifted. As a result, the talks went into limbo for over a year, during which time the North Koreans promised they would strengthen their “nuclear deterrent.” In July 2006, they tested seven ballistic missiles. On October 9, they conducted their first test of a nuclear weapon.⁴²

North Korea’s nuclear weapon test prompted the Bush administration to reengage the North Koreans in the six-party talks. They resumed after the United States agreed to work toward a resolution of the frozen North Korea funds (they were released during the following year). With this impediment removed, in February 2007 the North Koreans agreed to shut down, disable, and abandon its nuclear weapons program and re-admit IAEA inspectors to its nuclear facilities. In return, the Bush administration promised to provide North Korea with one million tons of fuel oil and remove that country from the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism and the Trading with the Enemy Act.

Nevertheless, the Bush administration insisted that the United States was not prepared to engage broadly with North Korea until “all aspects of its nuclear weapons program are ended first and foremost.” This implied a return to “complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement” of the North Korean nuclear program as a precondition to further negotiations. When the United States refused to budge from this position,

North Korea withdrew from the six-party process in April 2009, threatened to bolster its nuclear deterrent, and ejected the IAEA and US monitors from its nuclear sites. On May 25, 2009, North Korea conducted a second, and more successful, nuclear test.⁴³

Quite obviously, Bush's policy of dealing with North Korea's nuclear challenge was a failure. When the president entered the White House in 2001, North Korea had stopped testing longer-range missiles, possessed only one or two bombs worth of plutonium, and was verifiably not making more. By the time he left office eight years later, North Korea had eight to ten bombs worth of plutonium, had resumed testing missiles, and had tested a nuclear weapon. And the nuclear talks with that country were dead. Leon V. Segal argues that "had Bush not been blinded by ideology and by inexperience with international relations, perhaps this delay could have been avoided."⁴⁴

PAKISTAN AND INDIA

As with North Korea, Bush reversed two other Clinton policies in dealing with two neighboring nuclear weapon states, Pakistan and India. In response to their nuclear weapon tests in May 1998, Clinton had imposed additional sanctions on both countries. However, Bush lifted those sanctions after India and Pakistan promised to assist the United States in fighting Al Qaeda following its attack on the World Trade Towers in 2001. Yet Pakistan's war on the Al Qaeda-Taliban alliance in its north-western provinces proved to be only half-hearted, while its nuclear arsenal continued to grow. By 2015, Pakistan would possess between 100 and 120 nuclear weapons. Although Bush disliked Pakistan's nuclear buildup, Pakistani cooperation with the US in Afghanistan was crucial. As a result, Bush embraced Pakistani General Pervez Musharraf, who had seized power in 2001 and would hold it until August 2008. Bush called Musharraf "a courageous leader and a friend of the United States."⁴⁵

However, Bush could not continue to overlook years-old intelligence reports, once they became public knowledge in 2004, revealing that Pakistan and the United States were working at cross-purposes when it came to resisting nuclear proliferation. For years, Pakistani governments, both civilian and military, attempted to cover up the illicit international nuclear activities of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the "father" of Pakistan's nuclear weapon program. Kahn sold nuclear technology to such "rogue" states as North Korea, Iran, and Libya, and also may have engaged in

nuclear collaboration with Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt as well. Even more disconcerting to US officials were signs that the Pakistani military had assisted Khan's nuclear enterprise. However, Khan's business was finally shut down in February 2004, but only after the United States pressured General Musharraf to do so.⁴⁶

Bush was less concerned about India's nuclear activities. In fact, in July 2005 he signed an agreement with the Indians permitting the United States to resume the sale of civilian nuclear technology to the Indians despite the fact that India had never signed the NPT and had tested a nuclear weapon in 1974. Succumbing to enormous pressure from the Bush administration, the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group agreed to allow its member states to resume nuclear trade with India. As a result, a unique status was created for India: it became the first "legitimate" nuclear weapon state outside the NPT, with none of the responsibilities required by the treaty, but possessing many of its rights. Not surprisingly, Pakistanis also wanted the United States to recognize its status as a nuclear weapon state, but so far, that change in status has not occurred.⁴⁷

LIBYA

One of the major—and unexpected—counter-proliferation successes of the Bush administration was the December 2003 announcement by Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi that he would eliminate his country's weapons of mass destruction, including a decades-old nuclear weapons program.

There were a number of reasons for Qaddafi's decision. For one, he wanted to remove the economic sanctions imposed on Libya by the United States and the United Nations. The sanctions prevented Libya from expanding its oil production. To that end, as early as 1999, in secret talks with the Clinton administration, Libya offered to give up its WMD and open its facilities to international inspection. However, the Clinton administration would not accept Qaddafi's offer until he made a financial settlement with the families of the victims who were killed when their plane, Pan Am 103, exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988. The bomb that destroyed the plane was planted by Libyan agents. By the time Qaddafi did reach a settlement with those families, in 2003, Clinton was out of office.⁴⁸

Qaddafi also was prompted to eliminate his WMD by the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Soon after Afghanistan was invaded,

Qaddafi called Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in a panic, convinced that Bush would attack Libya next. Finally, in November 2003, US intelligence gave the Libyans a compact disc containing an intercept of a long discussion between the head of Libya's clandestine nuclear weapon program and A. Q. Khan, the director of Pakistan's nuclear weapon program. For Qaddafi, it was no longer possible to deny the military intent of his nuclear program. Consequently, on December 19, he announced his intention to dismantle Libya's WMD program. A month later, US military transport planes began transporting Libyan nuclear components to the United States.⁴⁹

In exchange for agreeing to eliminate Libya's WMD program, sanctions on that country were lifted and Libya was no longer treated as an international outcast. Moreover, according to Qaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, Libya received security guarantees from the United States and the promise of future military cooperation. However, Qaddafi eventually became dissatisfied with the slowness of the Bush administration in normalizing relations with his country. As a result, he suspended shipping Libya's enriched uranium abroad as he had promised to do. Consequently, it was not until 2014, three years after Qaddafi was overthrown, that the last remnants of Libya's WMDs were destroyed.⁵⁰

CHINA

Just as Bush entered office determined to alter other aspects of his predecessor's foreign policy, he also promised he would change Clinton's approach to China. Before he left office, Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin had reached a "common commitment to the establishment of a Sino-US constructive strategic partnership."⁵¹ But Bush initially viewed China not as a friend or "strategic ally," but as a dangerous competitor with a communist regime, a growing military capability, and a small strategic missile capability (18–20 ICBMs) that could reach the shores of the United States.

However, Bush soon was compelled to modify his hostility toward China as a result of a midair collision between a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter over the South China Sea on March 31, 2001. The Chinese pilot was killed when his plane crashed into the sea, but the US plane managed to make an emergency landing on the Chinese island of Hainan. However, the Chinese refused to release the plane's 24-person crew until the United States apologized for the incident. Secretary of

State Powell brought an end to the crisis by avoiding the use of the word “apology.” Instead, the president’s message expressed regret for the loss of the Chinese pilot’s life.⁵² Nevertheless, in spite of Powell’s ability to end the crisis diplomatically, Cheney and Rumsfeld considered the wording of the president’s message as “in effect an apology.” Neoconservative writers Robert Kagan and William Kristol concluded that “they [the Chinese] have won and we have lost.”⁵³

Tensions with China quickly flared up again after Bush, on April 24, was asked by a journalist whether the United States had an obligation to defend Taiwan if attacked by China. “Yes, we do,” Bush replied, “and the Chinese understand that.” He added that the United States would do “whatever it took to help Taiwan defend itself.”⁵⁴ Bush’s remarks set off a firestorm of criticism because it violated the two-and-a-half-decades-old US policy of “strategic ambiguity” concerning whether the United States would go to war over Taiwan. Administrative spokesman quickly reassured China that the president’s statement did not signal a switch in existing US policy. Not unexpectedly, neoconservatives criticized the president’s retreat, arguing that there should be no ambiguity regarding the willingness of the United States to defend Taiwan.

Bush’s initial statement on Taiwan had another negative effect on early US-Chinese relations: they greatly encouraged the Taiwanese independence movement. At the end of 2003, Taiwan’s president, Chen Shui-bian, promoted a referendum on reunification with China or independence for Taiwan. His proposal forced Bush to clarify his administration’s position on Taiwan’s independence by saying that he opposed Taiwanese authorities “unilaterally changing the status quo.”⁵⁵ Bush’s stand on Taiwan made possible a gradual but nevertheless significant improvement in US-Chinese relations that would endure for the balance of his presidency. In so doing, he jettisoned the neoconservatives’ ideologically motivated approach to China and instead adopted the realistic policy that had been pursued by his father as well as Clinton, both of whom had committed themselves to a policy of engagement with China and its integration into the international system as a full member.

There were a number of reasons why both countries were willing to improve their relationship. For one, the Bush administration needed to focus on the Middle East and the War on Terror and consequently avoid potential distractions in East Asia. It was no longer plausible to argue, as the neoconservatives had asserted early in Bush’s presidency, that China was the primary security threat to the United States. Now, both countries

had to confront terrorist movements. The United States had to concentrate on fighting Muslim terrorists in Afghanistan and Iraq, while the Chinese were engaging in an ongoing struggle with Muslim terrorists in Xinjiang, in northwestern China. As a consequence, China offered strong public support for the US War on Terror, contributed \$150 million of bilateral assistance to Afghan reconstruction following the defeat of the Taliban, and agreed to participate in counter-terrorism talks with the United States. Furthermore, China did not strongly oppose the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and also took the initiative in bringing about the six-party talks that attempted to address North Korea's nuclear weapon challenge.

The warming of Sino-American relations was quite evident when China's new president, Hu Jintao, visited the United States in April 2006. In Bush's welcoming remarks at the White House, he said that both China and the United States were "stakeholders in the international system," and consequently both countries should contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world. In response, Hu declared that "China and the United States are not only both stakeholders, they should also be constructive partners."⁵⁶

As with his father and Clinton, Bush did not allow China's human rights violations to interfere with the warming US-Chinese relationship. In 2007, for example, the State Department did not list China as one of the world's worst human rights violators—which it was—although a State Department official did concede that China's overall human rights record remained poor.⁵⁷ Nor did social unrest in Tibet dissuade Bush from attending the 2008 Olympic games in Beijing.

However, the most important reason for US-Chinese cooperation during Bush's administration, as it had been for the administrations of his father and Clinton, was the growing economic ties between China and the United States. By the time of Hu's visit to the United States in April 2006, the total amount of US-Chinese trade was \$262.7 billion. Moreover, the United States was China's largest trading partner and overseas export market. At the same time, China was the second-largest trading partner of the United States and America's third largest export market. In addition, American companies had invested a total of \$48 billion in a variety of Chinese economic ventures, including manufacturing, hotels, and restaurant chains.⁵⁸

On the other hand, a number of problems were generated by the expanding US-Chinese economic ties. One was a growing imbalance in their trade relationship. In 2006 the US trade deficit with mainland China exceeded \$350 billion, compared to \$83 billion in 2000. Part of

the explanation for this increase lay with China's manipulation of its currency's value relative to the dollar. By not allowing its currency to rise against the dollar, China made its products cheaper relative to American goods, thereby exacerbating the US bilateral trade deficit with that country. One effect of the US bilateral trade deficit with China was the loss of an estimated 2.3 million American jobs between 2001 and 2007.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of the growing US trade deficit, the Bush administration consistently refused to accuse China of manipulating the value of its currency for competitive advantage. And despite the problems generated by the growing US-Chinese economic relationship and Chinese human rights violations, the US-Chinese political relationship was in relatively good shape as Bush left office in January 2009.

JAPAN

With respect to China's neighbor, Japan, Bush entered office planning three major changes to Clinton's policy. For one, he intended to place more emphasis on US relations with Japan than on China, as Clinton had. A stronger US-Japanese relationship, Bush argued, was necessary in order to cope with the challenge of a rising China. To that end, the Bush administration would require the Japanese to play a much greater military role than they had since the end of World War II. Not only would Japan be expected to continue to pay the costs of stationing US forces in Japan, it would be asked to increase its defense spending by ten times. However, because Japan's economy was still weak when Bush entered office, the administration decided to deemphasize—at least publicly—Japan's continuing restriction of US imports.⁶⁰

Bush was fortunate to have a very pro-American Japanese leader, Koizumi Junichiro, during most of his presidency. Elected prime minister in April 2001, Koizumi held office until 2006. He not only promised major economic reforms, he also agreed to provide more support for the Bush administration's war on terror. Accordingly, Japan took a leading role in organizing international support for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Japanese also provided logistical support for the US military during the Iraq War and, more significantly, sent noncombatant troops to Iraq, the first time Japanese troops were sent overseas since World War II.⁶¹

However, these Japanese moves still were not enough for the Bush administration. The new US global military posture called for shifting

more of America's defense burden to the allies, including Japan. In May 2006 the Japanese complied by agreeing to participate with the United States as well as South Korea in a system of "trilateral military cooperation" designed to deal jointly with rising Chinese power, North Korea's possible collapse, and terrorist threats in Southeast Asia. As a consequence, an alliance that had been limited to the defense of Japan's home islands became one that was global in nature. To that end, Koizumi promised to initiate steps to revise the Japanese constitution. Its Article 9 prohibited Japanese military forces to engage in combat not directly related to the defense of Japan. Koizumi also agreed to deploy US Patriot missiles in Japan, a project dear to the Bush administration. In addition, Koizumi engineered a number of economic concessions to the United States, including reopening the Japanese market to US beef and enacting various other measures to further open Japan's markets.⁶²

Although Koizumi failed to remove Article 9 from the Japanese constitution, Japan continued to be a close ally of the United States during his premiership as well as of those that followed him. Koizumi believed, as did most Japanese, that it was necessary to pay—or at least make an effort to pay—much of the price demanded by the Bush administration in order to maintain the military support of the United States against the military threat posed by China and North Korea. In doing so, however, as historian Gavan McCormack points out, Koizumi also made a "de facto commitment to the policies of pre-emptive war; nuclear intimidation; defiance of international laws and treaties; sidelining of the UN; and defiance of the rules and customs of war, including the Geneva Conventions"—all of which was contrary to the policies of previous Japanese prime ministers.⁶³

BUSH AND PUTIN

In contrast to China, Bush had a much more difficult, and less successful, time dealing with Russia and its increasingly autocratic president, Vladimir Putin. In her article in *Foreign Affairs* in 2000, Condoleezza Rice argued that US relations with Russia should be normalized without Clinton's over-emphasis on personal ties with Russia's leaders. However, from the very start of his presidency, almost to its end, Bush pursued a personal relationship with Putin in an attempt to moderate the Russian

president's behavior. After meeting with Putin in Slovenia in June 2001, the first of 28 meetings with the Russian leader, Bush said, "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy and we had a very good dialogue. ... I was able to get a sense of his soul."⁶⁴ Bush's assessment of Putin alarmed his national security advisors. Every time Cheney saw Putin, he privately told people, "I think KGB, KGB, KGB."⁶⁵

However, the opportunity to build a cooperative relationship with Russia received a huge boost from the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Putin called Bush to let him know that Russia would not object to the establishment of a US military presence in Central Asia "as long as it has the objective of fighting the war on terror and is temporary."⁶⁶ Putin thought that cooperating with the United States against Al Qaeda would eliminate Afghanistan as a base of Islamic radicalism and win US support for Russia's campaign in Chechnya. Moreover, according to Russian scholar Angela Stent, at this point Putin believed that "Russia's future prosperity and status would be enhanced by greater economic integration with the West and cooperation with the United States."⁶⁷

Rice, who had urged "normalizing" relations with Russia, was enthusiastic about Russia's assistance against Al Qaeda. She said it was "confirmation that there is a new basis for a cooperative security relationship with Russia."⁶⁸ But in the end, CIA director George Tenet called Russia's contribution to fighting terrorism "a disappointment." Tenet said the Russians "were preoccupied with Chechnya and were not players in the global war against terrorism, certainly not as we defined it."⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Bush accepted Rice's more enthusiastic assessment of the US-Russian relationship. During Putin's first official visit to the United States, in November 2001, Bush praised him as "a new style of leader, a reformer, a man who loves his country as much as I love mine." He promised to "work with Congress to end the application of the Jackson-Vanik amendment to Russia," which restricted US trade with Russia, and announced that \$3.5 billion of the Soviet debt to the United States was to be forgiven.⁷⁰ However, while Putin was in the United States, neither president addressed two difficult issues that would continue to irritate the relationship for the rest of Bush's presidency: missile defense and US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Bush administration came into office determined to jettison the Cold War-era arms control agreements. Bush had made it clear from the outset that the ABM Treaty was an unnecessary impediment to the United States deploying missile defense components in order to fend off a potential attack from Iran or North Korea. Accordingly, on December 13, 2001, Bush announced his decision to withdraw the United States from the ABM Treaty. Putin, for his part, called Bush's decision mistaken. Nevertheless, he said Russia would remain committed to continued cooperation with the United States. However, for Putin, Bush's unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty was the first signal, only a mere three months after 9/11, that the United States would act irresponsibly of Moscow's views. Bush also said that while the United States was willing to reduce its nuclear weapons substantially, he did not want to engage in lengthy negotiations with Russia in order to produce a nuclear arms control treaty. But when Putin told him that he needed a treaty, Bush rejected the advice of the extreme arms control skeptics in his administration and agreed to Putin's request.⁷¹

The new treaty that was produced was a short three-page document called the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) or Moscow Treaty. It was signed during Bush's first visit to Moscow in May 2002. It committed both parties to reduce the aggregate number of their deployed strategic nuclear warheads to between 1700 and 2200 by December 31, 2012. While this number was three times lower than the limits for warheads established by START I, the treaty did not obligate either side to destroy these weapons. SORT also lacked the verification mechanisms that START had embodied. According to Yevgeny Primakov, who served as prime minister and foreign minister under Boris Yeltsin, "Russia signed the treaty primarily to end the cycle of unilateral decision making by the United States in matters of security."⁷²

However, other nuclear issues remained unresolved. One was Russia's nuclear assistance to Iran. In addition to helping the Iranians construct a nuclear reactor near Bushehr, in July 2002 the Russians agreed to build five additional civilian reactors in Iran over the next decade. The Bush administration believed the Russian reactors would be used by the Iranians to build a nuclear weapon arsenal. But the Russians assured the United States that the reactors would be used only for civilian energy

production. Moreover, Russia had a considerable economic stake in Iran, valued in the billions of dollars, and it viewed US attempts to impose sanctions on Iran for its nuclear activities as a direct assault on Russia's commercial ties with the Iranians.⁷³

NATO EXPANSION

The continued expansion of NATO, however, was a far more important reason than Iran for the inability of Russia and the United States to build a cooperative relationship during Bush's presidency. Like Yeltsin, Putin, shortly after entering the Kremlin, suggested the possibility of Russia joining NATO in order to create "a single area of defense security."⁷⁴ But the Bush administration had little interest in offering Russia NATO membership. Russia's huge landmass, its eastern border with China, and its anticipated demand for a unique role in NATO were some of the factors blocking Russian membership in the alliance.

Nevertheless, as a way of maintaining a NATO tie with Russia, the Bush administration supported the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) at NATO's Rome summit in May 2002. The NRC was designed to give Russia a greater voice in NATO affairs than it had in the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council, which was established by the Clinton administration in 1997. However, the Russians suspected that the NRC would be as ineffective in safeguarding Russia's interests as the old organization.⁷⁵

Yet any good that the creation of the NRC may have produced was quickly undermined by Bush's effort to bring additional countries—but not Russia—into the alliance. In the same session in which the NRC was created, in 2004 NATO decided to allow the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—and four Central European states—Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—to join the alliance in 2004. NATO enlargement was necessary, the Bush administration argued, in order to complete the post-1989 vision of a "Europe whole and free." To reassure Russia, US officials stressed that "NATO enlargement threatens no-one." But the Russians were not convinced. Exclaimed Primakov, "Russia remains staunchly opposed to NATO expansion, since it brings a military alliance right up to our borders for no real purpose." Once again, the United States had ignored Russia's interests, and it appeared as though there was nothing the Russians could do about it.⁷⁶

RUSSIA AND THE FREEDOM AGENDA

US-Russian relations frayed further when Bush used military force to produce regime change in Iraq without the authorization of the UN Security Council, where Russia could have exercised its veto to block it. Even more disturbing to Putin, however, was Bush's proclamation of the Freedom Agenda in the wake of the Iraq War. When the UN inspectors failed to find WMDs in that country—their alleged presence was the ostensible reason for the US invasion—Bush tried to justify the war by saying that the United States was going to bring democracy to the people of Iraq and indeed to all the people of the Middle East, if not the entire world. “The best hope for peace in our world,” Bush proclaimed in his second inaugural address in January 2005, “is the expansion of freedom in all the world. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁷⁷

However, by committing the United States to support democratic movements around the globe—and especially in Russia’s backyard, Eastern Europe—the Freedom Agenda directly challenged the authoritarian regime Putin had created in Russia. By the time of Bush’s 2005 inaugural address, the president had to admit that “Russia stands out as a disappointment in the freedom agenda.”⁷⁸ The Kremlin had taken over independent television, eliminated the election of governors, ousted Western-oriented democratic parties from parliament, and forced defiant oligarchs into exile or prison. In fact, some dissidents were murdered without their murderers ever identified. Seeking to strengthen his legitimacy, Putin also revived symbols from the Soviet era, including restoring the melody of the old Soviet national anthem, as well as the cult of Josef Stalin. During his re-election election campaign for the presidency in 2004, Putin went as far as to declare that the collapse of the Soviet Union was “a national tragedy on an enormous scale.” Not surprisingly, Putin won the presidential election with 71% of the popular votes.⁷⁹ Freedom House, a Washington-based nongovernmental organization that promotes freedom and human rights around the globe, reacted to Putin’s repression by downgrading Russia to “not free” for the first time since 1989.⁸⁰ Congress, in turn, responded by refusing to lift the Jackson-Vanik restrictions on trading with Russia, which Bush had promised Putin would happen.

THE “COLORED” REVOLUTIONS

Particular threatening to Putin’s effort to crush the spread of democracy in the former republics of the Soviet Union were popular uprisings in neighboring Georgia and Ukraine. The uprising in Georgia, the so-called Rose Revolution (named after the symbol adopted by the protesters), took the form of widespread protests over a disputed parliamentary election. On November 23, 2003, protestors compelled President Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister under Mikhail Gorbachev, to resign from office. Six weeks later, on January 4, 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia with 94% of the popular vote. His election was interpreted as a clear signal to other former Soviet states that Georgians were fed up with the corruption, falsified elections, and ways of doing business that characterized the former republics of the Soviet Union. Saakashvili’s election became a major source of friction between Putin’s regime and the Bush administration. Bush considered it a victory for the Freedom Agenda, but Putin saw Saakashvili’s election as another example of how the United States was using pro-democratic, nongovernmental organizations and the money of wealthy Americans, like millionaire George Soros, to undermine Russia’s self-proclaimed sphere of interest in Eastern Europe and the Caucuses. Where would the next American challenge take place, a pro-Putin Web site asked? The answer was not long in coming.⁸¹

In November 2004, a popular uprising erupted in Ukraine. Called the Orange Revolution, after the color of the ribbons protestors wore, it was triggered by the fraudulent election of a Moscow-supported candidate to the presidency of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych. All of the exit polls and parallel vote counts by nongovernmental organizations indicated that the actual winner was the pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko. As a result, Washington reacted by refusing to accept Yanukovych’s election as legitimate. After weeks of protests in Kiev, Ukraine’s capital, the Ukrainian Supreme Court declared the elections null and void. After a second presidential election was held, on December 26, Yushchenko was declared the winner.

As in Georgia, it appeared that Ukraine had rejected the post-Soviet political syndrome and had embarked on a course toward greater transparency, freedom, and democracy, all of which represented another victory for Bush’s Freedom Agenda and a challenge to the preservation of Putin’s authoritarian regime. If Ukraine and Georgia could overthrow

their post-Soviet regimes, Putin feared, they could serve as models for the Russian people to follow as well. The Russian president concluded, as he had after the election of Saakashvili in Georgia, that the United States had engineered the entire Ukrainian revolution in order to ensure that its candidate came to power.⁸²

To reinforce Putin's conviction that the United States instigated the colored revolutions, the new leaders of Georgia and Ukraine requested NATO to admit their countries to the alliance. While Bush was eager to bring the two countries into NATO, Germany and France, fearing the possible consequences of infuriating Russia, refused to go along. As a result, Georgia and Ukraine were not put on the official NATO membership track. Instead, representatives of NATO's member countries merely agreed that they *eventually* would become members of the alliance.

RUSSIA INVADES GEORGIA

With both Georgia and Ukraine careening toward NATO membership, Putin intensified his support for separatist elements in both countries. He told Bush in early 2008 that "Ukraine is not even a state," a comment that was taken to imply that Russia would undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, perhaps by annexing the Crimea, if that proved necessary to block Ukraine's membership in NATO.⁸³

In Georgia, Russia boosted its assistance to separatist elements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, nominally both a part of Georgia, and staged a series of military maneuvers apparently designed to goad the mercurial Saakashvili into overreacting. The Bush administration responded by warning the Kremlin that it would risk its relationship with the West if it invaded Georgia. The warning did not deter Putin. On August 8, 2008, Russian troops poured across the border into Georgia, precipitating the greatest crisis in US-Russian relations since the end of the Cold War.

Bush and his advisors worried that if Moscow were allowed to roll over a weak neighbor, it might next try to seize the Crimea in Ukraine, or even invade the three Baltics countries, which were now members of NATO. On the other hand, the last thing Bush wanted was a military confrontation with Russia. Consequently, he rejected Saakashvili's request for US military equipment and instead asked President Nicolas Sarkozy of France to negotiate a ceasefire. While Sarkozy succeeded in doing so, the ceasefire agreement left the

Russian army in control of the city of Gori, on the doorstep of Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. Bush decided he could no longer sit on the sidelines. He authorized humanitarian aid to Georgia delivered by US military cargo planes. He calculated that the Russians would not attack the Georgian capital with American military planes on the runway in Tbilisi. He also sent Secretary of State Rice to Paris, Moscow, and Tbilisi to broker a new agreement. As a result, the Russians agreed to pull out of Georgia, but not from the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁸⁴

Although the war in Georgia was over, so too was the friendly personal relationship of Bush and Putin. Russia suspended cooperation with NATO and later recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Bush, in turn, shelved a civilian nuclear agreement that he had spent years negotiating with Putin.

THE NATO ALLIES

As well as with an increasingly hostile Russia, the Bush administration had considerable—even unprecedented—difficulties with America’s European allies. The unilateral foreign policy advocated by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neoconservatives, and adopted by the president, produced what was generally regarded as the severest crisis in the history of the NATO alliance. It prompted the allied nations to believe that the Bush administration no longer considered the alliance an essential component of US grand strategy. The administration’s unilateralism was displayed, in one of a number of ways, by the administration’s rejection of key international agreements favored by the Europeans, including the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the International War Crimes Court.

In the case of the Kyoto Treaty, the administration argued that it unfairly penalized the American economy by setting excessively restrictive carbon emission limits for the United States. But in rejecting the treaty, the Bush administration disregarded an even more fundamental US interest: maintaining a healthy biosphere. The absence of that consideration was also evident in the administration’s refusal to support US ratification of the CTBT as well as by the president’s abrogation of the ABM Treaty, both of which were designed to reduce the chances of a nuclear war, which also could produce long-lasting damage to the biosphere.

American unilateralism also was evident in the administration's announcement that it would withdraw US troops from their peace-keeping role in Bosnia unless they were given immunity from prosecution in the International Criminal Court, a body whose jurisdiction the administration refused to recognize. The implementation of that threat was postponed, at least temporarily, by the UN's decision to give the US peacekeepers immunity from prosecution for one year. However, in European eyes, Bush's continued opposition to the Criminal Court undermined the international effort to make nations accountable to the rule of law. In disregarding this and other international arrangements, the Bush administration created the perception that it was not really interested in what the rest of the world thought.

In spite of the animosity generated in Europe by Bush's initial policies, America's European allies rallied to support the United States in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy. The allies took the unprecedented step of invoking the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 5, which declares that an attack on one member of the alliance is an attack on all. However, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld responded by saying that the alliance would not be needed because "the mission would define the coalition."⁸⁵ In effect, Rumsfeld's reaction reinforced the impression of Europeans that NATO was no longer central to America's strategic purposes. In Rumsfeld's defense, however, the failure of European states to maintain sufficient military capabilities after the Cold War was at least partly responsible for his inability to believe the United States could count on the Europeans to play a major military role in Afghanistan.

The gap between US and European policy preferences widened considerably following the promulgation of the Bush Doctrine in early 2002. Europeans argued that Bush's assertion of the US right to use pre-emptive, or even preventive, force to keep an enemy from attacking the United States would violate international law. In addition, Europeans thought the administration put too much emphasis on the threat of military force in approaching these countries, and not enough on diplomacy. Some Europeans characterized Bush's approach to terrorism, particularly his emphasis on the "Axis of Evil" states—North Korea, Iran, and Iraq—as "simplistic" and excessively theological—which they said was exemplified by the president's reference to these countries as "evildoers who hate freedom."⁸⁶

As a result, European governments began to doubt the ability of the Bush administration to lead the Free World. The European Union

responded by pursuing its own foreign and military policies unfettered by consideration of US objectives. For examples, the EU pursued a much more vigorous policy toward improving relations with Russia, and it offered to mediate the conflict between North and South Korea, as well as the one dividing the Palestinians and the Israelis. It also initiated a diplomatic effort with Iran designed to resolve the dispute over that country's nuclear program. In effect, the EU attempted to fill the void left by the Bush administration's reluctance to deal with these international problems. In another demonstration of its desire to separate from the US policy, the EU decided to create its own rapid reaction force and a separate EU military planning cell independent of NATO, which US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns subsequently called "the most significant threat to NATO's future."⁸⁷

Yet the most divisive issue between the United States and its European allies was Bush's decision to go to war with Iraq without the authorization of the UN Security Council. Germany and France responded by refusing to participate in the war, as did a number of other NATO members. Rumsfeld reacted by dismissing France and Germany as "old Europe" while praising the newest members of NATO, who supported the war, as "new Europe." In addition, Rumsfeld attempted to punish France for its opposition by banning high-level US military participation in the annual Paris Air Show.⁸⁸ The inability of the Bush administration to bring peace and stability to Iraq after Hussein's overthrow was, for Europeans, further validation of their belief that the US president was incompetent. As if that were not bad enough, there was outrage throughout Europe over the administration's treatment of terrorist suspects and enemy combatants at the US detention center at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba as well as in the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.

Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, the NATO alliance survived the Bush years. For one, the effort of the EU to become a "balancer" of US power internationally failed. It was crippled in part by the rejection, in a 2005 plebiscite, of a draft constitution designed to create a stronger EU. As a result, European governments believed they had no alternative to remaining in the alliance with the United States. This was particularly true of the new leaders who came to power in Germany (Angela Merkel, elected chancellor in 2005) and France (Nicolas Sarkozy, elected president in 2007). Both worked diligently to repair the damaged relations of their countries with the United States.

Equally important, Bush modified his administration's approach to the Europeans during his second term. Finally recognizing the need for NATO's help, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, he made serious efforts to show that the United States remained committed to the alliance. Following a NATO summit meeting in February 2005, the president proclaimed that "because of NATO, Europe is whole and united and at peace. ... and the United States of America strongly supports it." The allies also were pleased by Bush's emphasis on diplomacy rather than military force during his second term. His administration addressed a number of pressing issues diplomatically—especially Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and North Korea—which it had initially ignored.⁸⁹

Still, differences between the United States and the allies would continue to arise. One was NATO expansion. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Bush pushed hard to put Ukraine and Georgia on the path to NATO membership. Referring to the democratic revolutions in both countries, he said that "welcoming them into the Membership Action Plan. ... would send a signal throughout the region"—meaning Russia—"that these two nations are, and will remain, sovereign and independent states." But Bush's initiative was blocked by a number of NATO members, led by France and Germany, who did not want to challenge Russian opposition to further NATO expansion. Their action demonstrated that in spite of the improvement in relations between the Bush administration and NATO, the allied governments were not about to quietly accept the US position on every issue affecting the alliance.⁹⁰

LATIN AMERICA

Bush had much less success in improving US relations with America's Latin American neighbors. He came into office pledging to make Latin America a priority of his administration's foreign policy. In a speech delivered in early 2002, he summarized the priorities of his Latin American policy. "The future of this hemisphere," he said, "depends on the strength of three commitments: democracy, security, and market-based development. These commitments are inseparable, and none will be achieved by half-measures."⁹¹ He also promised to complete the negotiations begun by Clinton for a hemisphere-wide free trade pact and tackle such chronic problems as immigration and drug trafficking.

His first trip abroad as president, a visit to Mexico in February 2001 to meet with President Vicente Fox, was an auspicious beginning to his Latin American policy. It signaled his support for democracy in Mexico, which was just emerging from seventy years of one-party rule. Another indication that Bush intended to strengthen ties with the region was his attendance at the 2001 Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec. There he and thirty-three other hemispheric heads of state adopted a “democracy clause.” It committed the summit’s participants to oppose any attempt to undermine constitutional democracy in the hemisphere.⁹² However, Bush’s pledge to prioritize Latin America lasted less than a year. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 turned his attention and that of his chief national security advisers to the Middle East and pushed Latin American policy to the back burner. There it was conducted by lower level officials, primarily conservative cold warriors held over from the Reagan years who had little sympathy for the region’s problems and interests.⁹³

One of the major Latin American casualties of the Bush administration’s war on terror was a promised immigration agreement with Mexico. With administration officials, the Republican-controlled Congress, and the American people increasingly concerned about the nation’s so-called porous borders, support for immigration reform languished for years before an immigration bill finally reached Congress in June 2007—dead on arrival.⁹⁴

Another program affected by the administration’s war on terror was “Plan Colombia.” Initiated during the Clinton administration as a program to combat the flow of illicit drugs from that country, it was transformed by Bush into a broader anti-terrorism campaign targeting Colombian left-wing guerrillas as well as drug dealers. While the Colombian government made significant gains against the guerrillas, the flow of illicit drugs continued into the United States, despite over \$5 billion spent on Plan Colombia between 1999 and the end of Bush’s presidency in 2009. Indeed, the only apparent result of Plan Colombia was to shift illicit drug activity from Colombia to Mexico.⁹⁵

Along the US-Mexican border, a marked increase in violence, fuelled by feuding drug gangs, led to the deaths of over two thousand people in 2006 alone. The Bush administration responded with the so-called Mérida Initiative in 2007, which allocated \$1.4 billion over the next five years to aid Mexico and Central American countries fight the drug dealers. But neither plan, critics complained, got to the heart of the matter:

“police corruption across Latin America, the desperate economic conditions that drive many Latin Americans into the drugs trade, and the seemingly insatiable appetite for illicit drugs in the United States.”⁹⁶ Latin Americans also were alarmed by the methods used by the Bush administration in waging the war on terror. They were especially disgusted by the human rights violations committed by US personnel against captured terrorists or terrorist suspects at the Guantánamo Bay detention center in Cuba. They were reminiscent of the tactics employed in the 1970s and 1980s by right-wing Latin American governments trying to eradicate left-wing terrorists and dissident groups, methods that included torture, death squads, and shabby judicial procedures.⁹⁷

The Bush administration, for its part, was increasingly alarmed by the region’s turn to the left. Among the leftist presidents who came to power as a result of democratic elections during Bush’s presidency were Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Nestor Kirchner in Argentina, Tabare Vazquez in Uruguay, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. While some of these leaders were traditional social democrats, others advocated more radical programs. But they shared a common element: their appeal to poor and working-class Latin Americans whose lives had not been improved by the transition to democracy and the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies advanced by the United States. Latin America remained the region with the worst inequality in the world—with 41.7% of the population living in poverty—and with one of the globe’s highest levels of unemployment.⁹⁸

Perhaps the most radical of the new leftist presidents was Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, who proved to be a highly irritating antagonist of the Bush administration. In a 2006 speech at the United Nations, Chávez referred to the US president as “the devil himself.” More ominously, Chávez created a continental television news network devoted to fueling anti-Americanism across Latin America, and he had the temerity to befriend Cuba’s aging leader, Fidel Castro. Like Castro, Chávez exemplified the extreme leaders of the left who love power more than democracy and are more than willing to use undemocratic methods to keep it.⁹⁹

In response to the leftist challenge, the Bush administration employed a variety of methods used by the United States during the Cold War, including the threat of denying economic and military assistance to

unfriendly Latin American countries and intruding into their domestic politics in order to block the election of leftists or to undermine them if they were elected. The only tactic from the Cold War years that the Bush administration did not employ was fomenting military coups, although it did employ covert action to pressure Jean-Bertrand Aristide to surrender the presidency of Haiti in 2004 and praised—but did not initiate—an ultimately unsuccessful coup against Chávez in April 2002.

For a number of reasons, however, the administration's efforts failed to prevent or to reverse Latin America's turn to the left. For one, whenever the administration did focus its attention on Latin America, it did so primarily to advance US foreign policy priorities, such as the global war on terror and the expansion of free trade, and not to ameliorate the conditions that contributed to the popular appeal of leftists, especially widespread poverty. Not until 2007 did the Bush administration launch a program to promote economic development in the region. By then, it was a case of too little too late. In the eyes of elite Latin Americans, Bush would end his two terms in office as one of the most unpopular of US presidents.¹⁰⁰

However, with respect to Latin America, Bush was also one of the least interventionists of US presidents. During his presidency, the United States did not invade any Latin American country. To avoid doing so, in the case of Haiti, where he sent 3000 US troops as a part of a UN peace force, he had to resist domestic and international pressure to become more fully involved in the almost continuous violence that gripped that country. Nor did he get involved in any bailouts of Latin American governments as had his father and Clinton.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the brightest area of Bush's Latin American policy was the expansion of free trade. In June 2005, the Senate ratified the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which included Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. But it passed in the House of Representatives by the slimmest of margins, 217 to 215, which demonstrated how unpopular free trade agreements had become in the United States by 2005. And while all Latin American countries, with the exception of Chávez's Venezuela, supported freer trade, they could not agree on the terms for bringing it about. As a result, Bush's proposal for a broad agreement to liberalize trade across both American continents, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, was still born.¹⁰²

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In February 2000, Bush famously declared that Africa “doesn’t fit into the national strategic interests, as far as I can see them.”¹⁰³ However, after a six-month review of policy, Bush’s top State Department and NSC officials for Africa stressed the new president’s personal commitment to that continent. A number of factors were responsible for his reversal. For one, Rice and Powell, as well as Laura Bush, urged him to try to do something about Africa’s multiple problems, especially the monumental HIV/AIDS crisis. By 2001, over 17 million Africans had died from AIDS-related illnesses and between 25 and 30 million were actively infected. Life expectancies had plunged below 50 years in many countries.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the administration received pressure from evangelical Christian and black leaders to do more about the disease. Bush also realized that focusing on Africa’s health and development challenges was good politics, especially to counter the negative impact of the invasion of Iraq.

The most notable program initiated by the Bush administration to deal with the AIDS crisis was the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Program (PEPFAR). It committed \$15 billion over five years (2003–2008) to fight the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. That amount would grow to \$39 billion by the end of Bush’s presidency. As a result, by 2009, PEPFAR had treated over two million people and provided care for ten million. In addition, protective assistance had been provided during sixteen million pregnancies, and more than 57 million had benefited from AIDS testing and counseling.”¹⁰⁵

Another factor driving the Bush administration’s attention to Africa was the continent’s abundant supply of natural resources, especially oil. When Bush entered the White House in 2001, African states provided about 15% of US crude oil imports, but that number was projected to rise to 25% as new sources were developed. African oil became increasingly important because growing political instability in the Middle Eastern jeopardized the continued flow of oil from that region. However, in seeking to develop Africa’s oil resources the United States was faced with competition from China. By 2005, China derived 31% of its total crude imports from Africa, compared to 11% in 1995.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the main focus of Bush’s African policy was on terrorist threats taking root in, or emanating from, poor African nations with fragile governments. Of special

concern were countries with large Muslim populations, such as Somalia and Sudan. Fearing that Somalia could become a refuge for Al Qaeda fighters or their allies, the administration took urgent steps to reestablish intelligence and operational links in that country. In addition, a small US military team assisted Ethiopian troops that were sent into Somalia in 2006 to quash an Islamist movement with ties to Al Qaeda. Further, in January 2007, a US missile attack was launched against senior Al Qaeda figures in Somalia. But Somalia still remained a threat when Bush left office at the beginning of 2009. By then, radicalized Islamist militias had expanded their control in Mogadishu and southern Somalia, as well as to areas previously under government control.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the most important innovation of the Bush administration with regard to security policy in Africa was the creation of AFRICOM in early 2007. Unlike the Pentagon's five other regional combatant commands, AFRICOM would be less focused on "war fighting" than on anticipating and working to prevent conflicts by complementing US security-related activities with US diplomatic and developmental efforts that related to security issues.¹⁰⁸

Clearly, the Bush administration's preferred policy toward African crises was diplomatic rather than military in nature. It intended to coordinate with willing African states, European allies, and international institutions for "constructive conflict mediation and successful peace operations."¹⁰⁹ The administration applied this approach successfully to resolve conflicts in Burundi, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. But diplomacy did not work to end the war in Sudan.

The conflict in Sudan began in 2003 when that country's Arab-controlled government launched a program of genocide in Sudan's largely black-populated Darfur region. By 2005, government-backed Arab militias killed at least 70,000 black villagers—with estimated deaths ranging above 300,000—and drove some 2 million into refugee camps, many in neighboring Chad.¹¹⁰ Pressured to act by a variety of domestic and international entities, the Bush responded by supporting the efforts of a coalition of African states to mediate an end to the conflict. They succeeded in persuading the Sudanese government to sign a peace agreement in May 5, 2006. But because only one of the three main Darfurian factions engaged in the conflict signed the peace agreement, fighting resumed in July. However, after Bush tightened economic sanctions on Sudan, in June 2008 its government agreed to permit the UN-African Union Mission to deploy 26,000 troops in Darfur. Nevertheless, the

war continued unabated, and by the time Bush left office, an estimated 450,000 people had been killed in Darfur and another 3,245,000 people had been displaced. Bush was roundly criticized for permitting another Rwanda-like genocide to occur in Darfur. Some said that he should have sent US troops into Sudan to halt the genocide, but the president refused. He said he did not want to commit US troops to another Muslim country at a time when US forces were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹¹

Rather than US military intervention, Bush insisted that one of the best ways to prevent wars in Africa, as well as to counter terrorism, was to foster the establishment of democratic African governments. “Democracy is desirable,” he said, “because democracies do not breed those who engage in terrorist acts against the United States.” To that end, the Bush administration tied the advancement of every US interest in Africa—from security and counter-terrorism to economic development, trade, health, and energy—to African governments that were “ruling justly, investing in their people, and encouraging economic freedom.”¹¹² At the turn of the century, eight countries were classified as “liberal democracies”; roughly 24 of Africa’s 48 countries appeared to be viable candidates for building democratic institutions over the long term.¹¹³ Sub-Saharan African countries which met these conditions would be supported by the United States opening its market to them, through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), increasing trade with them, through a new Trade for African Development and Enterprise Program, and encouraging American investment with them, through US government guarantees for private investors. Bush also pledged to increase development assistance to all countries by 50% by fiscal year 2006, with African countries receiving a portion of that aid. Nevertheless, the Bush administration’s efforts to promote democracy and economic development in Africa were only partially successful. Yet, in 2009, forty African countries were eligible for AGOA trade benefits.¹¹⁴

But Somalia and Sudan remained in conflict as the president left office, and wars continued elsewhere in Africa. In fact, seventy percent of the 90,000 UN peacekeeping personnel that were committed to operations worldwide were serving in Africa.¹¹⁵ Moreover, several Sub-Saharan countries—including Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Congo, and Kenya—were either ruled by dictators or were experiencing a willful disregard of democratic norms and a deliberate turning back to harsh, authoritarian

tactics. There were coups in Guinea and Mauritania, and profoundly flawed elections in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, which were accompanied by violent repression.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, *Time* magazine concluded that Africa was the “triumph of American foreign policy” and the “Bush Administration’s greatest achievement.”¹¹⁷

THE STATECRAFT OF GEORGE W. BUSH

Bush entered office attempting to follow a realistic policy, one outlined by his chief national security advisor Condoleezza Rice. It gave priority to US national interests over more idealistic concerns, such as nation-building, humanitarian intervention, or other interests of the international community. However, more than Clinton—and certainly more than the first President Bush—George W. Bush was more heavily influenced by ideology, especially the ideas of the neoconservatives. In addition to safeguarding US interests, the neoconservatives insisted that the United States must work to spread American ideals globally, especially democracy and capitalism. Unlike liberal internationalists, however, the neoconservatives had little use for diplomacy or for treaties, and even less for multinational institutions like the United Nations, whose effectiveness and regard for US interests they considered to be minimal. The neoconservatives insisted that only the United States could protect its interests and, if necessary, it must do so alone or with “coalitions of the willing.”

Bush adopted the neoconservative agenda for a variety of reasons. For one, he wanted to demonstrate that he would be his own man when it came to conducting his administration’s foreign policy. This helps to explain why he selected national security advisors who had opposed his father’s pragmatic approach to world affairs. Moreover, the neoconservatives offered a proactive strategy for dealing with international terrorism in the wake of 9/11. And their goal of spreading democracy throughout the Middle East provided Bush with a messianic mission, that is, leading the fight against “evil” regimes. Ideology—or more precisely religious considerations, specifically Christianity’s affinity to Judaism—also was a paramount motivation behind Bush’s approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at least during his first term. His one-sided support of Israel was an important reason why an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty proved impossible while he was in the White House.

The most important result of adapting this philosophy was the invasion of Iraq, which vies with President Lyndon Johnson’s decision to

escalate US military involvement in the Vietnam War as the greatest foreign policy blunder in American history. The war with Iraq not only was extremely costly in lives and money, it altered the Middle Eastern balance of power in favor of Iran and led to the rise of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). Realists argued, correctly, as time would prove, that the neoconservative goal of replacing dictatorial regimes across the Middle East with US-imposed liberal democracies was little more than a fantasy.

Bush's Middle Eastern policies also helped to fracture the NATO alliance as had no previous episode. Most NATO members refused to support the US invasion of Iraq and some even denounced it publicly. Bush's rejection of the Kyoto Climate Treaty, the International Court of Justice, and the CTBT, all of which were supported by the European Community, also increased allied animosity toward the United States. However, allied relations with the United States improved during Bush's second term, when Rice's more realistic philosophy replaced the views of the neoconservatives, with the result that diplomacy rather than military force was emphasized. As a consequence, the United States and the European Union found themselves on the same side of a number of pressing issues, such as Iran, North Korea, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

During Bush's first term, the neoconservative influence also was dominant in his administration's nonproliferation policies. It was reflected in his decision to scrap unilaterally the ABM Treaty and his refusal to resubmit the CTBT to the Senate for ratification. Yet Bush did succeed in negotiating a treaty (SORT) reducing the size of the US-Russian nuclear arsenals. His administration also persuaded Qaddafi to eliminate Libya's weapons of mass destruction. However, Bush's initial reluctance to engage diplomatically with communist North Korea was at least partially responsible for the failure of the international effort to prevent that country from testing a nuclear weapon during his presidency.

Bush's idealism was at least partly responsible for the failure of his Russian policy. Pushing the expansion of NATO to countries right on Russia's doorstep in order to advance freedom and democracy, as the president put it, was bound to infuriate Putin and indeed many if not most Russians. While it is admirable that NATO undertook the defense of these countries, in no way did Bush consider the long-term consequences of doing so, including deterring a more aggressive Russia. As columnist-historian Peter Baker argues, Bush "misjudge[d] Moscow's intentions by superimposing American ideas of what Russian interests

should be, rather than understanding how Putin and his circle of KGB veterans and zero-sum-gamers actually see those interests.”¹¹⁸

On the other hand, Bush did assume a more pragmatic approach toward China. After initially adopting the neoconservative position that China was a threat to US interests in East Asia as well as American ideals, Bush put US economic interests, particularly trade and investment, at the forefront of his China policy. The result was years of relatively crisis-free relations between the two countries.

During Bush’s first term, and especially after 9/11, when the neoconservative influence on the president was strongest, US relations with America’s Latin American neighbors were stressed. In response to the growing leftist challenge, the Bush administration employed a variety of methods that had been used by the United States during the Cold War, including the threat of denying economic and military assistance to unfriendly Latin American countries and intruding into their domestic politics in order to block the election of leftists or to undermine them if they were elected.

However, the US position in Latin America improved considerably during Bush’s second term, when Rice was secretary of state. The administration secured the ratification of free trade agreements with a number of Latin American states. However, the administration failed to secure a hemispheric-wide free trade agreement. Yet in his second term, Bush did assume a more realistic approach toward Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez by avoiding unwinnable diplomatic rows and allowing the erratic leader to discredit himself. However, the Bush administration did little to address the conditions that gave rise to leftist governments in Latin America, particularly widespread poverty and grievous social and economic inequality.

Africa was one of the bright spots in Bush’s foreign policy legacy. After asserting that Africa “doesn’t fit into the national strategic interests,” Bush pursued a relatively ambitious policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa, where humanitarian rather than US national interests were paramount. The administration spent billions of dollars combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It also engaged diplomatically to resolve a number of African conflicts, some more successfully than others. It also created a US military presence in Africa with AFRICOM as a way of combatting terrorism. Nevertheless, Bush was roundly criticized for permitting another Rwanda-like genocide to occur in Darfur. But Bush refused to commit large contingents of US troops to Sudan especially at a time

when US forces were still fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. While Bush tried to encourage the development of stable democratic regimes in Africa through the expansion of trade and investment, he was only partially successful. As a consequence, Sub-Saharan Africa would remain a trouble spot for his successor.

In assessing Bush's foreign policy legacy, historian P. Edward Haley referred to the words of Hans Morgenthau, for many years before his death a professor at the University of Chicago and one of the leading exponents of the realist school of international relations. Morgenthau wrote that one of the most important tests of a statesman is the ability to distinguish between the desirable and the possible. A good statesman may want to see his own moral values and political principles realized throughout the world, but he chooses to think and act in terms of the national interest. The general consensus appears to be that Bush failed Morgenthau's test.¹¹⁹

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An excellent overview of U.S.-Latin American relations under both Bush presidencies, as well as Clinton's, is provided by Russell C. Crandall, *The United States and Latin America After the Cold War* (2008). For Africa, see Jennifer G. Cooke and J. Stephen Morrison, eds., *U.S. Africa Policy Beyond the Bush Years* (2009).



CHAPTER 6

Barack Obama, the Idealistic Realist, 2009–2017, Part I: The Middle East and East Asia

Barack Obama entered the White House intending to emulate the more realistic foreign policy philosophy of the first President Bush without abandoning American ideals. However, more often than not, his foreign policies reflected the greater emphasis he placed on realistic rather than idealistic considerations.

Nowhere were the realistic and idealistic components of Obama's foreign policy more difficult to blend than in the Middle East. In Eastern Asia, on the other hand, he was confronted with the rising economic and military power of China and the threat of an increasingly nuclear-armed North Korea (Fig. 6.1).

THE RISE OF BARACK OBAMA

Barack Hussein Obama was the first African American to hold the office of president of the United States. He was born on August 4, 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii. His mother, Ann Dunham, was of mostly English ancestry, while his father, Barack Obama Sr., was a Kenyan. Obama's parents divorced in 1964, and Obama Sr. returned to Kenya where he was killed in an automobile accident in 1982. In 1965, Obama's mother married an Indonesian, Lolo Soetoro, and moved to Indonesia with her son two years later. In 1971, Obama, his mother, and her daughter (by Lolo) returned to Hawaii to live with his maternal grandparents, Madelyn and Stanley Dunham. Four years later, Obama chose to stay in Hawaii with

his grandparents when his mother and stepsister returned to Indonesia, where his mother spent most of the next two decades. She died in 1995 in Hawaii following treatment for ovarian and uterine cancer.

Living with his grandparents in Honolulu, Obama attended Punahou School, a private college preparatory school, from fifth grade until his graduation from high school in 1979. He then attended Occidental College in suburban Los Angeles for two years and then transferred to Columbia University in New York City, where in 1983 he received a bachelor's degree in political science, with a specialty in international



Fig. 6.1 Barack Obama, Official White House Photograph (Credit: Pete Souza, courtesy of the Library of Congress; Souza, Pete, photographer. *Official portrait of President Barack Obama in Oval Office/Official White House photo by Pete Souza, December 6, 2012. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017645540/>*)

relations. After serving for a couple of years as a writer and editor for Business International Corporation, in 1985 he took a position as a community organizer on Chicago's largely impoverished Far South Side. Three years later, he entered Harvard University's law school, where he was the first African American to serve as president of the *Harvard Law Review*. He graduated magna cum laude in 1991. The following year, Obama met Chicago native Michelle Robinson, a young lawyer. The two married and subsequently had two daughters.

After receiving his law degree, Obama moved to Chicago where he became active in the Democratic Party. He organized Project Vote, a drive that registered tens of thousands of African Americans on voting rolls and in so doing helped Democrat Bill Clinton win Illinois and capture the presidency in 1992. While lecturing on constitutional law at the University of Chicago and working as an attorney on civil rights issues between 1992 and 2004, Obama wrote his first book, *Dreams from My Father* (1995), which traced the lives of his now-deceased father and his extended family in Kenya. In 1996, Obama was elected to the Illinois Senate, where he served three terms, from 1997 to 2004. While campaigning for the US Senate in 2004, he gained national recognition by delivering the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. After his election to the Senate that November, his political star rose rapidly. In 2008, he won the Democratic Party's presidential nomination after defeating Hillary Clinton in a close primary campaign. He then defeated Republican nominee John McCain in the general election and was inaugurated president on January 20, 2009.¹

OBAMA AND NATIONAL SECURITY

As president, Obama proved to be a very intelligent, relatively introverted—at least for a politician—outwardly calm, and pragmatic chief executive. He also was a very energetic and hardworking president who voraciously read governmental papers, books, newspapers, and letters, often until the late hours of the day. Even his critics conceded that in his personal behavior he set a standard for class, dignity, and integrity that few presidents have matched. His administration was remarkably free of scandal.

Although Obama was not afraid of making difficult decisions, most of them were risk averse. He was determined not to do “stupid things.” As a consequence, he adhered to an elaborate and time-consuming decision-making process. For example, his decision to send 30,000

additional US troops to Afghanistan in 2009 required ten meetings over three months, and unanimity among his senior advisers, before he was willing to issue a public policy statement.² He also insisted on being his administration's chief spokesman, not only to demonstrate that he was in charge, but also because the role enabled him to display his impressive in-depth knowledge of his policies, thereby generating confidence that he knew what he was doing.³

Obama selected two highly experienced individuals to serve as secretary of state: Hillary Clinton during his first term and John Kerry during his second. Clinton's role and influence within the administration, historian James Mann observed, was sometimes immense, sometimes less than she would have liked. But she proved to be a loyal member of the president's team, and in the process added to her extensive resumé, thereby increasing her own presidential prospects.⁴ Before succeeding Clinton as secretary of state, in January 2013, Kerry served five terms in the US Senate, including four years heading the Foreign Relations Committee. As secretary of state, he traveled much more than Clinton, or any other predecessor. He also worked diligently on some extraordinarily difficult foreign policy issues, including China, Russia, Palestine, Iran, and Syria.⁵

Obama had four secretaries of defense. The first, Robert Gates, served in that position under George W. Bush and continued in that post until 2011. He was succeeded by Leon Panetta, who served for the remainder of Obama's first term. Obama's third secretary of defense, Chuck Hagel, held the position from 2013 to 2015, when he was pressured to resign. He was succeeded by Ashton Carter, who served the last two years of Obama's presidency. After leaving office, both Gates and Panetta severely criticized Obama and his closest advisors, charging that they lacked military experience and refused to take the advice of those who did.⁶

General James Jones, the first of Obama's three chief national security advisors, certainly would agree with that criticism. "There are too many senior aides around the president who did not understand war or foreign relations," Jones told *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward.⁷ According to James Mann, Obama was also closer to his National Security Council staff than he was to Jones, Clinton, or Gates.⁸ In November 2010, Jones was replaced by his deputy, Tom Donilon, a lawyer by training, who played a key role in shaping Obama's pragmatic approach to foreign policy. In July 2013, Donilon was succeeded by Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN since 2009. She served for the remainder of Obama's presidency.

OBAMA, IDEALISM AND REALISM

Obama described his philosophy of international relations to Jeffrey Goldberg, who subsequently wrote an article about it for *The Atlantic* magazine. Obama said he ascribed to the realism of the first President Bush, and especially to his chief national security advisor, General Brent Scowcroft. Like Bush, Scowcroft, and other realists, Obama attempted to place US national interests at the forefront of his administration's foreign policy. He added, however, that he was not so much the realist that he would not pass judgment on immoral leaders. He just did not think it was America's responsibility to remove them from power or, as President John Quincy Adams once said, go around the world seeking "monsters to destroy." He insisted that the United States does not have the means to police the world or to make right what is wrong everywhere. Almost every great world power, he told Goldberg, "has succumbed" to over-extension. "This explains," he said, "the Vietnam and Iraq quagmires." Nevertheless, he thought it was possible to "advance both our security interests and those ideals and values that we care about," but not always. "There are going to be times where we can do something about innocent people being killed, but there are going to be times where we can't."⁹

Obama also resented that other nations, particularly the richer members of the NATO alliance, relied excessively on the United States to solve the world's problems and did not do their fair share to uphold the liberal international order. As Brookings analyst Thomas Wright points out, "Obama's solution to this problem was to set a high threshold for U.S. action in those cases where America's core interests—the security of the United States or its citizens, of surrounding territories, and U.S. allies—were not directly threatened." In other cases, "the United States would act only multilaterally, but only if other nations did their fair share, and the costs were relatively low."¹⁰ Moreover, the United States was still in the depth of the Great Recession. Unemployment reached 10% and the national budget deficit for 2010 almost 11% of gross domestic product. If the economy were to recover, and Obama's liberal domestic agenda get enacted, extremely expensive foreign conflicts would have to be avoided. Accordingly, American international leadership would have to be, as critics would call it, a case of "leadership from behind."

Considering Obama's determination to make US interests the paramount consideration in his foreign policy, he entered the presidency with a number of goals that appealed to idealists as well as realists. Among them was the prevention of nuclear weapons proliferation, nuclear

terrorism, and nuclear war. This required, among other actions, steps to ensure the safety of nuclear materials as well as a strengthening of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. To that end, he was particularly interested in negotiating a deal with Iran that would halt its effort to develop a nuclear arsenal. He also wanted to engage the Russians in nuclear arms reduction talks. And he intended to commit the United States to reducing climate-warming gas emissions, which would require intensive diplomatic engagement with other nations, particularly China. In addition, he wanted to improve US relations with the Muslim world by undoing the perception held by many Muslims during Bush's presidency that the United States was at war with Islam. Transforming the US relationship with the Muslim world, in turn, required peace between Israel and the Palestinians, another problem Obama intended to address.

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

With respect to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Obama was largely successful. After boosting US troop strength to 100,000 by 2010—supposedly in a final effort to crush the Taliban before withdrawing militarily from the country—he was able to reduce the number of military personnel to about 5000 by the time he left office in January 2017. Nevertheless, despite over fifteen years of intense military effort and the loss of thousands of American lives and over a trillion dollars, the Taliban controlled more territory in 2016 than they had at any point since 2001. To make matters worse, the US-backed Afghan government still lacked the ability to stand on its own.

More than a few critics blamed Obama for the failure of America's Afghan policy. For one, Robert Gates, Obama's first secretary of defense, wrote in his memoir that the president "doesn't consider the war to be his. For him, it's all about getting out."¹¹ While desiring to end the Taliban threat, Obama clearly was more interested in getting out of Afghanistan, as Gates asserted. During the 2009 review of his Afghan policy, he told his staff that "our entire national policy can't just be focused on terrorism." He said that the "world's 6 billion people have a vast range, diversity and concerns, and we must also focus on our own economy because it's the foundation of our strength in the world."¹²

However, the US failure in Afghanistan was due more to external factors over which Obama had little control. One was the absence of a reliable partner in the person of Afghan President Hamid Karzai,

deeply corrupt and extremely unpopular in the eyes of the Afghan people. Many Afghans were even more critical of the continuing American presence in their country, especially as mounting US air strikes killed noncombatants. The ethnic diversity of the Afghan people also contributed to the difficulty of unifying the country around the national government. In addition to the Taliban, local warlords and armed groups challenged its authority.¹³ Finally, the United States and its NATO partners never deployed enough troops in Afghanistan to pacify the country. Although total NATO forces peaked at 150,000 military personnel, this number was well short of the 500,000 troops required by US counter-insurgency doctrine. The gap was supposed to be filled by training Afghan police and army troops, but they proved notoriously unreliable and remained substantially unprepared.¹⁴

Another reason for the US failure in Afghanistan was the relative safe haven the Taliban found in neighboring Pakistan, and the continuing support they received from the Pakistani military and its main spy agency, the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence. By supporting the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan's generals hoped to counter India, Pakistan's traditional rival, by creating a bloc of Muslim nations, comprising Pakistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and eventually all of Central Asia.¹⁵

THE DEATH OF BIN LADEN

The close connection between Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban, and their Al Qaeda allies explains President Obama's decision not to inform the Pakistani government in advance about the US operation to kill Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. As a result of intelligence gathered by the CIA in late 2010 and early 2011, bin Laden was discovered to be living in a compound right next to the Pakistan Military Academy in Abbottabad, a suburban area 35 miles from Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city. Obama rejected a plan to bomb the compound and instead authorized a "surgical raid" by Navy Seals on May 2, 2011. As a result, bin Laden was killed and then buried at sea several hours later.

In spite of the elation in the West over bin Laden's death, some criticized the continuing US policy of "rewarding" Pakistan with military and economic aid, totalling over \$30 billion by the time Obama left office in 2017, despite Pakistan's long ongoing support for the Afghan Taliban and its collusion with bin Laden. The critics argued that Pakistan should have been named a state sponsor of terrorism, requiring

the termination of US military and economic aid to that country. Such action, the critics believed, would have compelled the Pakistanis to cut their ties to the Taliban. But Obama, like his immediate predecessors, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, refused to take this step, arguing that it was the much lesser of two evils to keep afloat a flawed Pakistani government than to allow it to be overthrown by radical Islamists eager to get their hands on Pakistan's nuclear weapons.¹⁶

IRAQ AND ISIS

Obama also was only partially successful in achieving his goal of withdrawing all US military forces from Iraq. Taking advantage of an agreement that George W. Bush had negotiated with the Iraqis requiring the withdrawal of all US forces by 2011, Obama reduced US military personnel to only 150 by the end of that year, a number that remained at that level for about three years. However, early in the summer of 2014, Obama once again was compelled to react militarily to events in Iraq. The Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was threatened by a rapidly spreading Sunni uprising spearheaded by a former Al Qaeda affiliate, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This jihadist group held to a fundamentalist doctrine of Sunni Islam called Wahhabism or Salafism.

Taking advantage of the hatred of Iraq's Sunnis for the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government, ISIS quickly conquered territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border, including Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. In the face of the ISIS advance, the US-trained and equipped Iraqi army disintegrated, leaving Baghdad, the capital city, in jeopardy. The besieged Iraqi government begged Obama to intervene once again with US military power, but he refused to do so as long as Maliki remained in office. However, with Maliki's resignation imminent, on August 8, 2014, the United States launched air strikes against ISIS forces in Iraq and, a month later, against those inside Syria. And despite his pledge to keep US ground troops out of Iraq, the near collapse of the Iraqi army in the face of the ISIS advance compelled Obama to gradually reinser US ground forces into Iraq until by 2016 they numbered 4400.

Critics blamed Obama for the new war in Iraq, charging that he was too anxious to get US troops out of that country and, consequently, he removed them too quickly. But the president's defenders point out that the Iraqi parliament refused to grant the immunities that would have

enabled US forces to stay in Iraq. Moreover, some analysts asked how keeping 5000 or more troops in Iraq could stabilize the country when the earlier presence of 100,000 US combat troops did not. Nevertheless, other analysts believe that had Obama kept a small residual US force in Iraq, he would have had greater insight into how badly the Iraqi security forces were deteriorating under Maliki.¹⁷ The validity of this assessment seems to be supported by the fact that once Maliki was removed from power, and US air power and ground forces engaged ISIS, the Iraqi army was able to recover and regain much of the territory it had lost to the insurgents. By the time Obama left office in January 2017, Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, was on the verge of liberation by the Iraqi army, with support from Kurdish troops and US special forces. But the ultimate defeat of ISIS was a task left for Obama's successor, Donald Trump.

THE ARAB SPRING

In 2011, just as Obama began to withdraw US troops from Iraq, a revolutionary wave of protests, demonstrations, riots, coups, and civil wars erupted in the Arab world. Civil wars occurred in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, along with uprisings in Tunisia, Bahrain, and Egypt. Numerous factors triggered the uprisings, including repressive dictatorships or absolute monarchies, human rights violations, political corruption, economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. This so-called Arab Spring began in Tunisia on January 14, 2011, with street demonstrations against the government of long-time President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Two weeks later, the Tunisian army put a new constitution into effect that laid the ground for a democratic parliamentary system.

Inspired by the successful popular uprising in Tunisia, on January 25, 2011, tens of thousands of Egyptians began protesting on the streets of that country's major cities against President Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt for thirty years. Although Mubarak was a long-time ally of the United States, and Obama had opposed Bush's campaign to spread democracy throughout the Middle East, the president publicly called for Mubarak to resign. But Mubarak did not resign until mid-February, after the Egyptian generals turned against him. During May and June 2012, Egypt staged a free and fair election, but the winner, Mohammed Morsi, was the leader of a radical Islamist party, the Muslim Brotherhood. Although

Obama publicly supported the right of the Egyptian people to elect their own government, Morsi's Islamist strategy alarmed Israel and the conservative Arab regimes that the United States had supported for decades.

Many Egyptians also became alarmed by Morsi's efforts to turn Egypt into an Islamic-based republic. They again took to the streets demonstrating against the Morsi government, which prompted the Egyptian army, in late June and early July 2013, to remove Morsi from power, in the process killing or imprisoning several thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The following May, the army's leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, was elected president. Despite a legal obligation to suspend aid in the event of a coup, the Obama administration maintained the flow of US military aid to Egypt, which amounted to \$1.3 billion per year. Said Secretary of State Kerry, the Egyptian army was "in effect ... restoring democracy" and averting civil war.¹⁸ Once again, Obama's idealistic side succumbed to the reality of the new order in Egypt. He obviously was not going to intervene in Egypt to restore a democratically elected government.

INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

Stung by criticism that he had not done enough to save democracy in Egypt, Obama reluctantly agreed to limited US military intervention in neighboring Libya. The US action was prompted by an uprising, beginning in February 2011, against the regime of long-time Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi. Concerned about the possibility of a massacre of civilians, like those that had occurred in the Balkans during the 1990s, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy persuaded Obama to intervene in the Libyan civil war. Obama justified his decision to get involved by saying, "To brush aside America's responsibility as a leader and—more profoundly—our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances, would have been a betrayal of who we are."¹⁹ However, fearing a repetition of the extended US ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he insisted that NATO take the lead in the operation to which he committed only US military aircraft.

Although the UN Security Council authorized the intervention in order to protect Libyan noncombatants, the allied effort quickly morphed into an ultimately successful campaign to get rid of Qaddafi. In August, with allied military support, rebel forces compelled him to flee Tripoli, the Libyan capital, but he was captured and killed by rebel

soldiers two months later. However, the overthrow of Qaddafi brought only further violence as rival militias fought for control of the country. Among the victims of the renewed fighting was US ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, who was killed in an Islamist attack on the US consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012.

In the end, the continued warfare in Libya compelled Obama to concede that “we and our European partners underestimated the need [for] a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn’t have any civic traditions.”²⁰ He had thought that the European allies, rather than the United States, should take the lead in rebuilding Libya. But the Europeans were unable, or unwilling, to do so. In effect, in Libya, Obama repeated the same mistake of winning the war and losing the peace that Bush had committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

SYRIA

The Libyan experience reinforced Obama’s resolve to avoid US involvement in the Syrian civil war, which began in March 2011 with massive demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad. After Assad attempted to violently suppress the demonstrations, opposition militias formed and the conflict soon blossomed into a full-fledged civil war. Some rebels had a democratic motive for challenging Assad’s regime, but the rebellion also had sectarian and international components. It pitted Syria’s Sunni majority against Assad’s ruling Shiite minority. Assad received vital military support from Shiite Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, while his opponents, with the notable exception of ISIS rebels, received considerable assistance from Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-run Persian Gulf states.

While Obama was determined to stay out of the Syrian conflict, after witnessing repeated government atrocities against civilians, in August 2011 he said that “the time has come for President Assad to step aside.” But Assad had no intention of giving up power, and with US forces withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama was not about to send US troops to Syria to oust him. However, in May 2012, the president said that he might be willing to order a US military response if as he put it, “we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized.”²¹

On August 21, 2013, Obama’s “red line” was crossed when hundreds of Syrian civilians died as a result of chemical weapon attacks by government forces. But at virtually the last minute, Obama called off

a planned retaliatory US missile strike against Syrian military installations. His change of mind was prompted in part by a vote of the British House of Commons rejecting Britain's participation in military action against Syria. Obama refused to act without Britain. In addition, Pew public opinion surveys revealed that most Americans also opposed military action against Syria; only 28% of those polled supported a US military response. As a consequence, Obama decided to refer the matter to Congress, which he realized would not endorse US military action against Assad.

Obama's failure to carry through with his threat to punish Syria was roundly criticized by his Republican opponents as well as some Democrats. However, a few days later, Obama received unexpected help from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who persuaded Assad to hand over his chemical weapons to international observers for their supervised destruction. Putin intervened in Syria because he feared that allowing Assad to be overthrown would create a power vacuum in that country that jihadists would fill. He pointed to the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the rise of ISIS as a prime example of such action. But it was not only the spread of radical Islamism that Putin feared. He also was well aware that if the democratic elements in the Arab Spring uprisings succeeded in supplanting dictators in the Middle East, his regime could be next. Consequently, Putin not only rejected the US demand that Assad resign, two years later he committed Russian military forces to Syria to save Assad's regime.

On September 30, 2015, Russian military aircraft based in Syria began a sustained campaign of air strikes against rebel forces—and civilian facilities. In response, Obama condemned the Russian action, authorized Secretary of State Kerry to negotiate with the Russians in order to try to end the war, and continued to supply Syrian Kurds and Arab-Syrian forces fighting Assad's army, assistance that he had initiated in 2013. But the US aid proved insufficient in preventing Assad's forces from capturing the rebel-held city, Aleppo, in December 2016.²²

In the end, the Syrian civil war proved to be a monumental humanitarian disaster. By September 2016, almost a half million Syrian civilians had been killed and nearly 5 million had fled to other countries in the Middle East and Europe. The massive influx of terrorized people threatened to unravel the European Union after some member states closed their borders in response to the tide of refugees. Obama was roundly criticized for not doing enough to end the war as well as to

relieve in a substantial way the plight of millions of Syrian refugees. The United States agreed to take in only 10,000 refugees, a very small fraction of the total. But Obama argued that he had done all he could, short of involving the United States in another Middle Eastern war, a step he was determined to avoid. While he conceded that the civil war in Syria was a monumental human tragedy, he placed the blame for it entirely on Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies. Moreover, he argued, no major US national interest was jeopardized by the war against Assad. More vital to US national security, he insisted, was the threat posed by ISIS, both in Syria and in Iraq, where he preferred to engage US forces, albeit in a very limited way. In the end, in Syria, as elsewhere, Obama's realistic inclination overcame his idealistic sentiments.²³

OBAMA AND SAUDI ARABIA

For a variety of reasons, US relations with long-time ally Saudi Arabia deteriorated stunningly during Obama's presidency. One reason was the president's response to the Arab Spring. The Saudis were dismayed by Obama's refusal to support Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a long-time friend of Saudi Arabia, as well as the United States. The Saudis abhorred Obama's toleration of Morsi's Islamist government, which succeeded Mubarak's. Not surprisingly, the Saudis supported the coup that restored Egypt to military rule. They also sent troops into neighboring Bahrain to quash an uprising against its Sunni ruling family by that country's largely Shiite population. Obviously, Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy that adhered to the extremely fundamentalist Wahhabism sect, was determined to do everything in its power to crush the Arab Spring.

The Obama administration, for its part, was increasingly irritated by Saudi Arabia's lackluster military effort against ISIS militants in Syria and Iraq. Instead of ISIS, the Saudis concentrated on assisting the Sunni jihadists fighting Assad's Shiite-dominated government. In 2015, the Saudis shifted their focus to Yemen, where they intervened militarily to put down a rebellion by Shiite Houthis against that country's Sunni-run government. In so doing, the Saudis demonstrated that their top priority was one of rolling back the expanding influence of Iran in the Middle East, and not the war against ISIS.

The Saudis were particularly alarmed by Obama's diplomatic approach to Iran, which culminated in an agreement, in June 2015, that severely

restricted Iran's nuclear program. In return, international sanctions imposed on that country were gradually removed. The Saudis, who initially opposed the deal, feared that it would become the basis for normalizing US-Iranian relations. Although that was Obama's hope, that goal was not realized during the balance of his presidency.

The Saudis also were upset by Obama's disinclination to get deeply involved in the affairs of the Middle East, which they feared would encourage Iran to expand its regional influence at the expense of Sunni Arabs. Reinforcing this fear was Obama's announced intention to "pivot" US resources from the Middle East to Asia, where China appeared to be more menacing to US allies and interests. In an attempt to relieve Saudi anxieties about Iran, Obama traveled to Riyadh in April 2016 to meet with Saudi King Salman and Persian Gulf state leaders. He promised that he would keep close tabs on Iran, to insure that they would not use the billions of dollars they would receive from ending the international sanctions to flex their military muscle. While the Saudis initially opposed the deal, in September 2015 the Saudi foreign minister said his country was "satisfied" with the agreement.

As a consolation prize to the Saudis for acquiescing to the Iran nuclear deal, Obama came to the assistance of the Saudi military campaign in Yemen, even though the United States had no quarrel with the Houthis. On August 8, 2015, the Obama administration notified Congress that it planned to authorize the sale of \$115 billion in tanks and other military equipment to Saudi Arabia. It provided an additional \$2 billion worth of military assistance during the following year. US intelligence also pinpointed Houthi targets for the Saudi air force, and US drones attacked the militants. But the price in human lives for the US-supported Saudi campaign in Yemen was steep: more than 10,000 people were killed and more than three million displaced by the time Obama left office. In November 2016, the World Food Program warned that 7.2 million people in Yemen were on the brink of famine. As in Syria, the Obama administration did try to end the war in Yemen through negotiation. In November 2016, Secretary of State Kerry met with Houthi representatives in Oman and announced a provisional truce and power-sharing plan. But Yemen's Saudi-backed president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, rejected the plan. As a result, the conflict remained unresolved as Obama left office.²⁴

As if the Arab Spring, Syria, and Iran were not enough to strain US-Saudi relations, another was the declining price of oil. Largely because of rising US shale oil production, Saudi oil exports to the United States declined by more than 50% from April to December 2014. The rising oil production and resulting oversupply caused world oil prices to plummet from a June 2014 peak of \$110 per barrel to less than half that amount in 2015, and less than \$27 per barrel in early 2016. Although the price of oil recovered to around \$50 per barrel by the end of that year, there was little prospect of it returning to the halcyon level of \$100 per barrel. As a result, the Saudis were compelled to draw down their financial reserves to compensate for their declining oil income. They also tried to drive American and other oil producers out of the market, initially by persuading the OPEC oil cartel to keep pumping oil in order to force high-cost producers—like US shale oil drillers—to reduce their output. As a result, after September 2014, US shale drillers were compelled to cut the number of their rigs by 75%.

However, on November 30, 2016, the Saudis reversed course and supported an OPEC decision for a small cut in the cartel's oil production, less than 1% of global production. But that amount was hardly enough to significantly dent the massive global oversupply. As a consequence, some analysts believed that Saudi Arabia may exhaust its financial reserves by 2020 if oil prices remained at their low level. To stave off that possibility, the Saudi government would have to make deep cuts in the country's generous social safety net. However, this would risk igniting a social and political upheaval that would threaten the continued survival of the Saudi regime.²⁵

Despite the repressive nature of the Saudi regime and the problems the United States had experienced in dealing with it, the Obama administration argued that the relationship with Saudi Arabia was vital to US security. Both countries considered ISIS and Al Qaeda as threats, and Saudi Arabia maintained a “robust counter-terrorism relationship with the United States” to combat them. And both countries wanted to avoid any disruption of the vast energy supplies that flow through the Persian Gulf. In addition, neither the United States nor Saudi Arabia wanted Iran to dominate the region. Finally, both countries sought a negotiated settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Obviously, these essentially realistic considerations eclipsed the idealistic arguments of those who criticized Obama for supporting a repressive Saudi Arabia.²⁶

IRAN

Of all the Middle Eastern issues that Obama inherited, he was most concerned about the threat of an Iran equipped with nuclear weapons. He feared that the actualization of that possibility would set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, particularly if the Saudis reacted by acquiring their own nuclear weapons, as they threatened they would do. Before that could happen, however, a war between Israel and Iran was more likely to occur. The Israelis warned repeatedly that they would not tolerate the development of a nuclear weapon capable Iran—whose leader had called for the destruction of Israel.

The Bush administration clearly had failed to address Iran's nuclear threat by refusing to talk to the Iranians. As a consequence, Iran moved virtually unhindered toward a nuclear weapon capability during Bush's presidency. When Bush came into office in 2001, Iran did not have any centrifuges for enriching uranium, which is one of the two pathways to producing nuclear material for a bomb, the other being plutonium separation. But by the time he left office in January 2009, Iran had almost 7000 centrifuges. In addition, Iran had built the largest force of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, which soon would have the capability to reach targets in Israel as well as Saudi Arabia.²⁷

To eliminate Iran's nuclear threat, Obama embarked on a complex “dual track” strategy that employed both diplomacy and various forms of pressure. He began the diplomatic approach in his first inaugural address, by offering an “outstretched hand” to US foes like Iran. He also sent letters to Iran's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Khamenei, with an offer to improve relations. And, for the first time in decades, he allowed senior US diplomats to meet with their Iranian counterparts. Predictably, the Iranians resisted such overtures, prompting Obama to ratchet up the pressure.

One form the pressure took was the insertion of “worms” into Iranian computers, which set back the pace of Iran's nuclear development. Another was the exposure of Iranian nuclear deception. US intelligence revealed the construction of a supposedly secret Iranian nuclear enrichment facility deep inside a mountain near the Iranian city of Qom. Obama used the exposure of illicit Iranian nuclear activity to generate support for international economic sanctions on Iran, which severely damaged the Iranian economy. Inflation soared by more than 40%, the value of the Iranian currency plummeted, and Iran's oil exports fell by

more than half with the loss of tens of billions of dollars of sorely needed income. In addition, foreign investors and big multinational companies fled from Iran. Obama also applied military pressure against the Iranians. During his first year in office, he directed the Pentagon to prepare for military action against Iran. As a consequence, 35,000 US military personnel, the most advanced fighter aircraft, and over forty naval ships (including an aircraft carrier strike group) were placed in striking distance of Iran.²⁸

The international pressure finally compelled the Iranians to negotiate. In March 2013, US diplomats began a series of secret bilateral talks with the Iranians. The talks picked up momentum after Hassan Rouhani was elected president of Iran in June 2013. Rouhani was described as more moderate, pragmatic and willing to negotiate than his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. As a result, in November of that year, an interim agreement, known as the Joint Plan of Action, was negotiated by the so-called P 5+1 countries—the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (Britain, France, Russia, China, and the United States) plus Germany. Under its terms, Tehran agreed to freeze many of its nuclear activities for six months, the United States and other countries lifted some of the sanctions they had imposed on Iran, and talks began on a permanent settlement, which was to be concluded within six months. However, a final agreement was not reached until July 14, 2015.

By its terms, Iran agreed to accept restrictions on its nuclear program, all of which would last for at least a decade and some longer, and to submit to increasingly intensified international inspections. In return, the agreement provided Iran with broad relief from US, UN, and multilateral sanctions on Iran's energy, financial activities, shipping, and other sectors of the Iranian economy. On January 16, 2016, the International Atomic Energy Agency certified that Iran had complied with the stipulated nuclear dismantlement commitments under the agreement. Consequently, some sanctions were suspended or lifted. Analyst Marc Lynch called Obama's nuclear diplomacy with Iran "a textbook example of a successfully conceived and implemented foreign policy: priorities outlined, resources allocated, outcome achieved."²⁹

Nevertheless, by the end of Obama's presidency, the Iranians did not experience the full economic benefits they had expected to receive from the deal. Iran gained access to about \$50 billion in assets that were frozen overseas, new foreign bank accounts were opened, and their oil exports doubled to two million barrels a day. But the Iranians did not see

the level of foreign investment that Rouhani had promised the nuclear deal would facilitate. And while international sanctions were largely removed, most American secondary sanctions remained in place. They had been imposed because of Iran's support for terrorism, its human rights abuses, its interference in specified countries in the region, and its missile and advanced conventional weapons programs. In addition, regulations barring transactions between US and Iranian banks stayed in force. The resulting ban on access to US dollars made risk-averse foreign banks nervous about doing business in Iran. As a consequence, Rouhani and other Iranian moderates came under severe criticism from Iranian hard-liners who never liked the nuclear deal in the first place.³⁰

Iran's hard-liners were not the only opponents of the nuclear deal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it "a mistake of historic proportions."³¹ Rather than eliminating the threat of Iran eventually developing a nuclear arsenal, he argued that the agreement permitted the Iranians to retain a significant number of centrifuges and keep intact their entire nuclear infrastructure. As a result, Iran would remain a nuclear threshold state, with the ability to scrap the agreement at any time and, shortly thereafter, "breakout" out of it with a nuclear weapon test. Although the Iranians accepted a number of the nuclear deal's restrictions on their enrichment activities, Obama conceded that even if the agreement lasted its full fifteen-year duration, Iran's breakout time upon the expiration of the deal would "almost be down to zero." Even so, he argued, the deal was worth it because it bought time.³²

While Netanyahu was persuaded by his advisers, as well as the Obama administration, to refrain from launching unilateral Israeli military action against Iran's nuclear facilities, it did not stop him from appealing to the president's Republican rivals to reject the deal. His speech before Congress to that end added fuel to the personal hostility that characterized the relationship between the two leaders. However, a Republican-initiated Senate resolution to reject the nuclear deal was defeated on September 9, 2015, after a procedural vote fell two votes short of the 60 needed to break a Democratic filibuster.

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

One of the major goals of President Obama was to end the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which had helped to radicalize the Middle East and drain US energy and resources for decades. To that

end, in September 2010, the Obama administration pushed to revive the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process by getting the two parties to begin direct talks for the first time in about two years. The talks aimed at bringing the conflict to an end with a two-state solution for the Jewish and Palestinian peoples. It would require Israel to return to its pre-1967 borders, except for mutually agreed upon territorial adjustments. But the talks ran aground in late 2010, largely because of Palestinian opposition to the continued construction of Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

However, in July 2013, Secretary of State Kerry got the parties back to the negotiating table. But the following April, the Israelis suspended the talks after Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Fatah Party, which rules the West Bank, agreed to a unity government with Hamas, a more radical group that controls the Gaza Strip. Unlike Fatah, Hamas refused to recognize the state of Israel. Although the unity government broke up after only a year, Netanyahu refused to resume talks with Abbas.

It appeared that Netanyahu had no intention of permitting the creation of an independent Palestinian state. According to Daniel Levy, an advisor to former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Netanyahu only pretended to support the peace process in order to allow time for new “facts on the ground” to be created, that is, additional settlements in the West Bank. That strategy proved to be highly successful. When Netanyahu entered office in February 2009, there were 73,000 Israelis living in the West Bank; by 2015, there were 93,000. By the end of Netanyahu’s new term as prime minister, in 2019, it was estimated that the population in the settlements would have reached around 115,000.³³ With that many Israelis in the West Bank, a two-state solution became impossible to consider for Netanyahu and his right-wing supporters. He said as much during his reelection campaign in March 2015, when he flatly declared that the two-state solution was dead.³⁴

Obama, like previous US presidents, proved powerless to reverse Israel’s colonization of the West Bank. Although he demanded an end to settlement construction, he did nothing meaningful to stop it, for example, by curtailing US military and economic aid to Israel. Quite to the contrary, he increased US aid to Israel, culminating in a \$38 billion dollar, 10-year assistance package in the fall of 2015. There were a number of reasons why Obama continued to help Israel in spite of the refusal of Netanyahu to cooperate with the administration in dealing with the Palestinians. For one, he wanted the Israelis to feel sufficiently secure to accept the nuclear deal with Iran and refrain from going to war with

the Iranians. And while he obviously was not Israel's enemy, he did not want to appear like one either, particularly before his presidential reelection bid in 2012. At the same time, he also did not want the West Bank to fall under the control of Hamas. Consequently, he also provided the Palestinian Authority with considerable military and economic aid.

In the minds of some critics, however, by assisting the Palestinian Authority to police the West Bank, the Obama administration also helped to perpetuate its occupation by the Israelis, thereby increasing the appeal of Hamas among the Palestinian people. This impression was reinforced in February 2011, when the United States vetoed a UN resolution declaring Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal. The following September, Obama also declared that the United States would veto any Palestinian application for statehood to the United Nations, a step Abbas was considering in order to pressure the Israelis. Obama justified his warning by asserting that "there can be no shortcut to peace."³⁵

However, very late in his presidency, on December 23, 2016, Obama permitted his UN ambassador to abstain during the vote on a Security Council resolution condemning Israel's settlements on the West Bank. Although the US abstention was a significant departure from previous American vetoes of similar UN resolutions, the move had only symbolic value since Netanyahu had no intention of abiding by it. Nor was he at all willing to consider the administration's plan for an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty, which was outlined in a speech by Kerry on December 28.³⁶ Instead, the Israeli prime minister denounced the Obama administration and looked forward to dealing with the new American president, Donald Trump, whose attitude toward Israel seemed to be much more compatible with Netanyahu's objectives.

THE CHALLENGES OF CHINA

One of the main reasons why Obama did not want the United States to get deeply involved militarily in the Middle East was his desire to concentrate US energy and resources on a number of challenges posed by China. One challenge was military in nature. China, with the largest economy in East Asia, was using some of its great financial reserves to increase its military capabilities in the hope of establishing a regional hegemony that would challenge US naval supremacy in the western Pacific. Another Chinese challenge was diplomatic in nature. Obama wanted to enlist China's cooperation in addressing a number of pressing

global problems, including nuclear proliferation, climate change, and international financial instability. Finally, China challenged the free international trading system to which it had only recently become a member by restricting foreign access to its domestic market.

In the first meeting of Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao, in April 2009, at the London G-20 economic summit, they agreed to work together to build a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive US-Chinese relationship. To that end, they announced the establishment of a high-level forum called the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Obama intended to use the dialogue as a way to petition Beijing to put pressure on an increasingly antagonistic North Korean regime. He also wanted to convince China to agree to curb its emissions of carbon dioxide ahead of the key climate change conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. At the London meeting, Obama also accepted Hu's invitation to visit China later in 2009.

However, a number of economic obstacles stood in the path of closer US-Chinese cooperation. The great international financial crisis of 2007–2009 caused the Chinese to doubt the ability of the United States to lead the international economic community. While China experienced impressive 8.9% economic growth in the third quarter of 2009, thanks to the infusion of an enormous economic stimulus by the Chinese government, the United States was struggling with massive (over 10%) unemployment and domestic political infighting between the Obama administration and its Republican opponents in Congress.

The acute US economic crisis—the greatest recession since the Great Depression—caused the Chinese to fear that the United States would not be able or willing to pay back its debt to China, amounting to \$739.6 billion as of late January 2009, without devaluing the dollar. Such a step would adversely affect China's export-dependent economy on which its continued economic growth, social stability, and ultimately the legitimacy of the Communist Party depended. However, China achieved its high level of exports and its impressive economic growth in part by undervaluing its currency the yuan (*Chinese renminbi*), and funneling cheap capital into artificially low-priced industrial exports. As a consequence, China was able to run up huge trade and currency surpluses (\$3 trillion) while hurting exports and employment in many other countries.³⁷

Nevertheless, the Chinese complained about a series of US protectionist measures, including special tariffs on Chinese tire imports and coated paper products, and preliminary duties on some steel products. Yet they

continued to defend their own restrictive measures. Many in Congress insisted that the new administration pressure the Chinese to stop undervaluing their currency, but Obama feared that doing so would trigger a trade war that would damage the US economic recovery.³⁸ Obama's refusal to confront the Chinese on the currency issue prompted opponents to charge him with unprecedented deference to the Chinese leadership.

Another display of the president's deference to Chinese sensibilities took the form of ignoring China's human rights issues. For example, Obama initially refused to meet the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, when he visited Washington, in order to avoid offending the Chinese. Another example was the administration's muted response to ethnic riots in China's Xinjiang province, in which scores of people were killed. In return, Beijing offered the United States little cooperation, and in some cases outright hostility. On the issue of climate change, for example, the Obama administration went into the Copenhagen climate conference in December 2009 offering to make significant cuts in American carbon emissions in the hope that this position would trigger similar concessions by the Chinese. But they refused to make any comparable reductions in absolute terms and, as a result, the conference achieved virtually nothing of practical importance.³⁹

The Chinese also did nothing meaningful to halt North Korea's continuing development of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Shortly after Obama entered the White House, the North Koreans conducted their second nuclear weapon test. In response, Obama decided that the Bush administration had been too eager to pursue talks with the North Koreans without a prior commitment by them to halt their nuclear weapon-related activities. As a result, the talks were not resumed for the duration of Obama's presidency.

THE ASIAN PIVOT

Beginning in 2010, the Obama administration took a number of steps to end the perception of excessive US deference to China. In mid-January, the US government officially supported Google's decision to challenge China's censorship of internet content. Shortly thereafter, on February 18, Obama met with the Dalai Lama. In addition, the administration proposed a \$6.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan. The Chinese responded by threatening to impose sanctions on US companies supplying arms to

Taiwan. More significantly, the Obama administration also proceeded with what came to be called the “Asia pivot.”

The Asia pivot called for an enhanced US military presence in the western Pacific, combined with a more active diplomatic approach designed to advance the region’s economic prosperity. On the military side of the pivot, the Pentagon called for devoting 50% of US naval power to the Asia-Western Pacific theater by 2013, and 60% by 2020.⁴⁰ The US military buildup in the region, which actually began during the administration of George W. Bush, helps to explain Obama’s determination to reduce the US military presence in the Middle East.

The economic dimension of the pivot called for an expansion of America’s Asian markets. Although by 2012 US trade with Asian countries was twice as large as its trade with Europe, the United States was running significant trade deficits with Asia because it lacked equal access to Asian markets for many of its export products.⁴¹ As a result, an essential component of the Asian pivot was the administration’s efforts to lower trade barriers, open new markets, and reduce trade deficits.

To these ends, the administration promoted new trade pacts, like the US-South Korea Free Trade agreement, and used institutions, like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation program (APEC), to reduce economic barriers and bolster investment. But the centerpiece of Obama’s effort was the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, which was designed to be the most far-reaching free trade agreement in decades, as well as a strategic, long-term US commitment to Asia. It would have brought together twelve countries (including the United States) into a single trading community representing well over \$1 trillion in global trade. However, the TPP was one of the chief casualties of Donald Trump’s ascension to the presidency in January 2017.

CHINA’S COUNTER PIVOT

Although the Obama administration tried to persuade the Chinese that the US pivot was not designed to contain China militarily, but rather to promote stability in the region, the Chinese were not fooled. As research scholar Justin Logan put it: “If China made this sort of argument to defend deploying more than half its naval assets to the Western hemisphere, American leaders would not give the argument a moment’s consideration.”⁴²

As a counter to the US Asia pivot, Xi Jinping, who became China's president in March 2013, adopted a more assertive and nationalistic approach to the United States and its East Asian allies.

One way Xi tried to counter the US Asian pivot was to propose the creation of a new Asian security system from which the United States would be excluded.⁴³ Xi also initiated the creation of a new international economic structure that he expected China to dominate. Its nucleus was the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which would provide financing for railways, roads, power plants, and other infrastructure projects in the world's fastest growing region. Among these projects was a Chinese effort to rebuild the old Silk Road, which once carried trade between China and the Mediterranean world.

The Obama administration treated the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as a Chinese attempt to rewrite the global rules of international economic engagement and thereby undermine the US-dominated International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Consequently, the United States not only refused to join the Asian bank, but also launched a quiet diplomatic campaign to dissuade its allies from joining. But the US attempt to marginalize the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank failed. The bank was launched in 2015 and, by the middle of the following year, a host of close US allies—including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, South Korea, and Britain—had joined.

Instead of joining the new Chinese international bank, the Obama administration accelerated the TPP negotiations as a way to preserve international property as well as labor and environmental safeguards absent in the Chinese arrangement. The original participants in the TPP were Singapore, New Zealand, Chile, and Brunei. However, a number of additional countries joined the TPP negotiations, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Malaysia, and Vietnam. While China did not participate in the TPP negotiations, Xi Jinping had no intention of curtailing China's trade or risking a war with the United States. "If [China and the United States] are in confrontation," he insisted, "it would surely spell disaster for both countries."⁴⁴ Not only is the United States the leading customer for Chinese goods, China holds almost a couple of trillion dollars worth of US Treasury notes.

In an effort to build a "new model" of US-Chinese relations, in June 2013 Xi met with Obama in California. The two leaders agreed to combat climate change and cooperate in curtailing both Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs. Although China imposed some sanctions

on North Korea, they were not enough to dissuade the North Koreans from continuing to develop their nuclear weapon program. The Chinese obviously did not want the North Korean economy to collapse and bring down its communist regime. However, China did participate in the international talks that produced the agreement restricting Iran's nuclear activities. In addition, Xi signed the Paris Climate Agreement in December 2015. Its long-term goal was one of limiting global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.4 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels. However, the agreement itself remains non-binding and lacks provisions for inspection and enforcement.⁴⁵

On the downside, the Chinese persisted in violating human rights. They also continued to strike trade and investment deals with oppressive regimes that were the objects of international sanctions. In addition, China joined Russia in routinely opposing UN Security Council resolutions aimed at human rights violators, especially countries such as Sudan, Iran, and Syria. In March 2014, after the Russians annexed Crimea, China supported Russia by abstaining on a UN General Assembly resolution affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity.

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA CHALLENGE

Perhaps the most dangerous of the US-Chinese quarrels was China's continuing encroachment into territorial waters claimed by other countries in the East and South China Seas. What concerned the Chinese was the potential positioning of US naval forces in a way that could block China's supply lines through the South China Sea. "The oil and raw materials transported through those shipping lanes," military analyst Richard Halloran noted, "are crucial to a surging Chinese economy—an economy paying for Beijing's swiftly expanding military power."⁴⁶ In addition, the South China Sea may be rich in oil and natural gas deposits, which obviously the Chinese would want to exploit.

China reacted by expanding its territorial claims in the South China Sea hundreds of miles to the south and east of its island province of Hainan. In some cases, the Chinese claims encroached upon those of neighboring countries, that is, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. China also engaged in an extraordinary construction project in the South China Sea by building a string of artificial islands in a contested archipelago called the Spratly Islands. The number, size, and nature of the Chinese construction convinced analysts that it was

for military purposes. The Chinese also drilled for oil in the waters off the contested Paracel Islands and kept Vietnamese ships away from the area. China also sent fishing boats, escorted by coast guard ships, into the waters around the Senkaku Islands, which are claimed and controlled by Japan.⁴⁷

In order to enhance China's ability to defend its territorial claims in the surrounding seas, Xi also accelerated China's military modernization. The Chinese deployed hundreds of accurate, conventionally-tipped ballistic missiles with the ability to attack Taiwan, as well as a smaller number of ballistic missiles capable of reaching US bases in Japan and the western Pacific. In addition, the Chinese developed a terminally-guided, anti-ship missile capable of striking US aircraft carriers. In short, China acquired the ability to challenge US control of the high seas as well as to attack America's regional allies.

The Obama administration reacted by pointing out that China's maritime claims in the South China Sea violate international laws designed to uphold freedom of navigation for all nations. Accordingly, US military surveillance aircraft flew over the Chinese-built artificial islands in 2015 and 2016, and US warships sailed within 12 nautical miles of the disputed Chinese installations on both the Spratly and Paracel Islands.⁴⁸ The administration also took steps to strengthen longtime US alliances with Australia, Japan, and the Philippines, and courted new partners, including Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam.

JAPAN

Japan was another country that felt threatened by China's expansive claims to East Asian territorial waters. China challenged Japan's claim to the Senkaku Islands, a group of uninhabited Japanese-controlled islands in the East China Sea. Although the islands have only limited intrinsic value, they do give the Japanese control of the access routes to the Pacific Ocean and its seabed, as well as to fishing, navigation, and hydro-carbon deposits in the surrounding waters. Japan's dependence on foreign oil is one of that nation's greatest vulnerabilities. Addressing that existential threat prompted Japan to go to war with the United States in 1941. Consequently, the Japanese are hyper-vigilant about any Chinese threat to block the sea-lanes through which ships deliver foreign oil to Japan. It explains their alarmed reaction to the Chinese declaration, in 2013, that they had established an Air Defense Identification Zone over

the Japanese-occupied Senkaku Islands. China also sent coast guard ships to defend Chinese fishing and oil exploration in waters surrounding those islands.⁴⁹

Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, reacted to the Chinese naval challenge by putting the Japanese navy and coast guard on alert and by turning to the United States for support. The Obama administration responded by assuring the Japanese that the Senkaku Islands fall under the protection of Article 5 of the US-Japanese Security Treaty.

Abe also ratcheted up his previous efforts to expand Japan's military forces. In 2011, his government increased Japan's defense budget by nearly three percent per annum over the following five years. In 2013, Abe pushed through the Japanese Diet (parliament) legislation reinterpreting the clause in that nation's constitution prohibiting Japan from waging war except in defense of the Japanese home islands. The new constitutional interpretation permits Japan's military forces to participate in overseas combat missions, thereby enabling the Japanese to assist the United States and other allies if they are attacked.⁵⁰

Paradoxically, while China's new assertiveness strengthened the US-Japanese security relationship, the rising economies of China and other East Asian countries were major causes of the declining significance of the US-Japanese trade relationship. Japanese trade flowed increasingly toward East Asia and away from the United States. Conversely, US trade with Mexico and China surpassed US trade with Japan. Japan's ability to trade with the United States also was affected by the continuing poor performance of its economy, which was damaged by the severe global economic recession that began in 2008, as well as by the tsunami and nuclear accidents that were triggered by an earthquake in March 2011. As a result of Japan's economic decline, the Japanese were no longer viewed by Americans as the competitive threat that they were considered to be in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Nevertheless, a number of US-Japanese trade problems persisted. One was Japan's failure to remove long-standing barriers to US exports, especially automobiles and beef. The Obama administration used the leverage provided by offering US support for Japan's admission to the Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership to win some Japanese trade concessions related to the importation of US beef and automobiles. While Japan's market was not entirely opened to US trade, the Obama administration believed that more progress on that issue could be made once the TPP went into effect.⁵¹

As a result, by the end of the Obama presidency, the economic connection between the two countries, like their security relationship, remained strong and mutually advantageous. They continued to be large markets for each other's exports as well as important sources of imports. In addition, Japan remained a major foreign provider of funds that finance the US national debt, as well as a significant source of foreign private investment in the United States. The United States, in turn, continued to be the origin of much foreign investment in Japan.

THE KOREAS

South Korea was another US ally that was challenged by China. While the Chinese did not directly threaten South Korea militarily, its ongoing economic support for North Korea's communist regime facilitated the development of that country's nuclear arsenal, which threatened not only South Korea but Japan as well—and potentially even the continental United States.

Although China had worked closely with the United States on previous North Korean denuclearization negotiations, especially those between 2006 and 2008, the talks broke down in the last year of the Bush administration. For the first three years of Obama's presidency, the United States made no effort to resume those talks, believing that North Korea first would have to commit itself to denuclearization. However, in early 2012, North Korea's new hereditary leader, Kim Jong-un (the son of Kim Jong-il), expressed his interest in resuming the negotiations, and the Obama administration indicated its interest in doing so as well. But the North Koreans scuttled the possibility of reviving the talks by using ballistic missile technology to launch a satellite. And, in early 2013, the North Koreans conducted another nuclear weapons test, cut off communications with South Korea, and warned that the outbreak of war was imminent.

As a result, Obama made no further effort to resume the talks for the balance of his presidency. Instead, following North Korea's two nuclear tests and multiple missile launches in 2016, the United States and South Korea responded with a more coercive policy. First, they successfully persuaded the UN Security Council to expand economic sanctions on North Korea. In February 2016, Congress also expanded unilateral US sanctions against the North Korean government. In addition, in July 2016,

the United States and South Korea announced plans to deploy the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) ballistic missile defense (BMD) system in South Korea. THAAD ostensibly would give the United States the capability to destroy North Korean missiles launched against South Korea or Japan.

There was another, underlying, motive behind the THAAD decision, that is, to get China to take a much harder line against North Korea. But the Chinese were not prepared to take action that would risk bringing about the collapse of North Korea. Not only did the Chinese fear that a North Korean collapse would prompt tens of thousands of North Korean refugees to flee across the border into China's Manchurian provinces, it could also lead to the reunification of a Korea allied to the United States. Not surprisingly, the Chinese government reacted with hostility to the THAAD deployment decision, denouncing it as a threat to China's nuclear deterrent capability and warning that it warranted an expansion of China's nuclear arsenal.⁵² The Chinese also threatened retaliatory economic measures against South Korea, which had developed an extensive trade relationship with China. The Chinese reduced South Korean tourism in China and permitted Chinese to fish in South Korean waters.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye had attempted to cultivate a stronger strategic relationship with China, partly to motivate a more vigorous Chinese stand against North Korea's menacing actions. But after it became obvious that Chinese pressure had failed to curb Pyongyang's provocations, Park approved the deployment of the THAAD system. However, the Obama administration was unsuccessful in persuading the South Koreans to cooperate more closely with Japan in building a common defense against China and North Korea, primarily because of lingering issues related to Japan's occupation of Korea before World War II. In the end, Obama was no more successful in eliminating North Korea's nuclear menace than any of his presidential predecessors. In January 2017, the task of resolving that threat fell to his successor, Donald Trump.

THE STATECRAFT OF BARACK OBAMA: THE MIDDLE EAST AND EAST ASIA

Obama entered the White House intending to emulate the more realistic foreign policy philosophy of the first President Bush without abandoning American ideals. However, more often than not, his foreign policies

reflected the greater emphasis he placed on realistic rather than idealistic considerations. As a realist, he insisted that the United States does not have the means to police the world or to make right what is wrong everywhere. And he believed the United States had become overextended in areas that did not concern its vital, core national interests, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, he was determined to extract US military forces from those countries as quickly as possible. He also intended to reduce the US military presence in Europe. He argued that the European allies of the United States did not do their fair share to uphold the NATO alliance nor the liberal international order to which it was a part.

In the Middle East, Obama succeeded in reducing the number of US troops in Afghanistan from a peak of 100,000 in 2010 to about 5000 by the time he left office. But the US withdrawal left a void that was rapidly filled by the Taliban, who gained control of over one-half of the country by 2016. Obama also was largely successful in withdrawing US military forces from Iraq. However, by setting in advance a deadline for their complete withdrawal, a military vacuum also was created in Iraq, one that was filled—temporarily and partially—by the so-called Islamic State. Confronted with the imminent collapse of the Iraqi government and its replacement by ISIS, Obama recommitted a small number US ground forces to Iraq. As a result, with the assistance of US air power and special forces, Iraqi Shiite and Kurdish troops were able to drive out ISIS from Iraq shortly after Obama left office.

Nowhere in the Middle East were the realistic and idealistic components of Obama's foreign policy more in conflict than in his varied responses to the popular uprisings of the Arab Spring. Although he felt compelled to give at least lip service to the democratic aspirations of the Arab people, when they failed to actualize them, he felt he had no other choice but to accept the return of the military to power in Egypt and a failed state in Libya. The Libyan experience, in turn, reinforced Obama's resolve to avoid extensive US military involvement in the Syrian civil war. Although he did provide very limited assistance to non-jihadist rebels fighting Syrian President Assad, he was unable to realize his goal of removing the Syrian dictator from power or ending the humanitarian crisis and enormous bloodshed that it produced.

A high point of Obama's Middle Eastern policy was the US operation that killed Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. But Obama left unresolved

the problem of continuing Pakistani support for the Afghan Taliban, which in turn was one of the primary reasons for his inability to stabilize Afghanistan.

Obama also failed to achieve another of his Middle Eastern goals, that is, ending the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Like previous US presidents, he proved powerless to reverse, or even halt, Israel's continued expansion of settlements on the West Bank. To do so, would have entailed a US break with Israel, which Obama considered politically and strategically unacceptable. It was another case of Obama's realism eclipsing his idealism.

As in the Middle East, Obama demonstrated his preference for realism over idealism in dealing with China. His desire to find agreement with the Chinese on issues of mutual interest to both countries required him to downplay China's continuing violation of human rights. He did gain China's cooperation in dealing with Iran's nuclear threat and the menace of global warming. But he was unable to persuade China to do anything meaningful to eliminate North Korea's nuclear threat. However, he was able to avoid a military conflict with China over its continuing encroachments on the territorial claims of other countries in the East and South China Seas. In addition, the US-Chinese trade relationship remained relatively unimpaired even though issues of fair trade continued to persist.

China's continuing support for North Korea and the dispute over the East and South China Sea islands also drew the United States closer to Japan and South Korea. A new interpretation of Japan's constitution enabled the Japanese to assist the United States and other allies outside Japan's home territory. For its part, the Obama administration used the leverage provided by its offer of US support for Japan's admission to the Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership to win some Japanese trade concessions. As a result, by the end of Obama's presidency, the economic connection between the two countries, like their security relationship, remained strong and mutually advantageous.

With respect to South Korea, the Obama administration's most significant accomplishment was one of persuading the South Korean government to permit the deployment of the THAAD ballistic missile defense system in South Korea. THAAD ostensibly would give the United States the capability to destroy North Korean missiles launched against South Korea or Japan.

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Another insider view is provided by Derek Chollet's *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (2016). More critical viewpoints are provided by Robert J. Lieber's *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order*

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CHAPTER 7

Barack Obama, the Idealistic Realist, 2009–2017, Part II: Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Global Problems

Barack Obama entered the White House intending to emulate the more realistic foreign policy philosophy of the first President Bush without abandoning American ideals. However, more often than not, his foreign policies reflected the greater emphasis he placed on realistic rather than idealistic considerations.

In Europe, Obama had to counter Russia's challenge to NATO and the liberal international order. In Latin America, Obama ignored liberal values in order to obtain the cooperation of corrupt and repressive governments in halting the movement of illegal drugs and migrants into the United States. In sub-Saharan Africa, he implemented a number of noteworthy humanitarian aid programs, but was more concerned with assisting friendly African governments resist terrorist groups. Finally, Obama attempted to ameliorate a number of ominous global problems, including climate change, nuclear weapons proliferation, and the negative effects of globalization (Fig. 7.1).

SRAINTS IN US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

When President Barack Obama entered the White House in 2009, relations between the United States and Russia were at their lowest level since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Russians were angered by George W. Bush's decision to deploy a ballistic missile defense system (BMD) in Eastern Europe, as well as by US support for Kosovo's



Fig. 7.1 Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barack Obama, Official White House Photograph (Credit: Pete Souza; Souza, Pete, photographer. *President Barack Obama participates in a bilateral meeting with President Vladimir Putin of Russia at the Esperanza Resort in San Jose Del Cabo, Mexico, June 18, 2012*, June 8, 2012. Photograph: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/06/18/bilateral-meeting-president-putin>)

declaration of independence from Serbia, Russia's historic ally. But the greatest irritant was Bush's decision to continue the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe, Russia's traditional sphere of influence. That irritation was vividly expressed by the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008.

Like his two immediate predecessors, George W. Bush and Clinton, Obama was determined to put US-Russian relations on a more positive footing. That desire was symbolized in a "reset" button that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in March 2009. However, unlike Bush and Clinton, who operated on the assumption that Russia would ultimately become a full member of the democratic West, Obama attempted to pursue a more realistic approach to the Russians. He would try to gain Russian cooperation on a number of issues of mutual interest, such as curbing nuclear proliferation and fighting jihadists in the Middle East. Consequently, there would be little

public criticism of Russia's repressive domestic political system by the new administration—at least not initially—and no linkage between US willingness to engage the Russians on international issues and Russia's attitude toward the human rights of its citizens. Moreover, the Obama administration would remain largely silent on the issue of further NATO enlargement beyond general commitments to keep the process open.¹

Nevertheless, during Obama's first meeting with Vladimir Putin, in July 2009, the Russian leader rudely lectured the American president about NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe. The two leaders also exchanged frank words about US missile defense systems, the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, and other sore spots. However, Obama thought that he could work around Putin, who since 2008 was serving as prime minister, and deal directly with his successor in the Russian presidency, Dmitry Medvedev. (Putin was constitutionally prohibited from holding two successive terms as president. Consequently, he held the post of prime minister until he was eligible to run for reelection to the presidency in 2012, an election he easily won.) But Medvedev proved to be only a figurehead president, with real power remaining in Putin's hands.

Still, the reset initially seemed to take hold. Medvedev made a number of concessions to the new US administration. For one, he agreed to allow US forces to transit across Russian airspace on their way to Afghanistan, primarily because the Russians feared a Taliban resurgence in that country.² The Russians also expressed their willingness to cooperate with the West in reining in Iran's nuclear program. In September 2010, foreign ministers from the United States, Russia, and NATO met in New York to discuss other areas of cooperation, including Afghanistan, combating terrorism, and enhancing European security. In November of that year, Medvedev attended a NATO summit in Portugal where he agreed to cooperate with NATO on missile defense and other security issues. He also agreed to allow more supplies for the US and NATO troops in Afghanistan to pass through Russia.

More significantly, on April 8, 2010, Obama and Medvedev signed a new nuclear arms reduction treaty (called New START). The treaty, which went into effect in December 2011, cut the number of long-range nuclear weapons held by each side to about 1500, down from the 1700 to 2200 set by the Moscow Treaty of 2002. In another nuclear agreement, designed to reduce the danger that terrorists could steal a nuclear weapon, Washington and Moscow agreed to dispose of a combined

sixty-eight metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium, enough material to produce seventeen thousand nuclear weapons.³

Obama committed the United States to seek further nuclear arms reductions, but the Russians were not interested. They refused to consider further reductions in their nuclear weapon arsenal while the United States planned to deploy ballistic missile defense components in Poland and the Czech Republic. While the Obama administration insisted that the missiles were designed to defend NATO countries from a missile attack from North Korea or Iran, the Russians argued that they were designed to neutralize Russia's nuclear deterrent. Medvedev even threatened to deploy missiles in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, on the Baltic coast, north of Poland, and warned that Russia might withdraw from the New START treaty as well as rescind Russian cooperation on Afghanistan.⁴

After engaging the Russians in lengthy, but ultimately unsuccessful, joint missile defense talks, Obama assured Medvedev that "after he was re-elected to the presidency" in November 2012, he would have "more flexibility" on the BMD issue.⁵ And, following Obama's reelection, his administration did announce that the United States would not deploy land-based interceptors in Poland and Romania—a decision that later was reversed as US-Russian relations nose-dived after Putin returned to the Russian presidency.

PUTIN RETURNS

Putin returned to the Russian presidency on May 7, 2012, after winning the presidential election the preceding March with 64% of the vote. And thanks to a decision of the Duma (Russia's parliament) the previous September, the term of the Russian president was extended from four to six years. This made it theoretically possible for Putin to stay in power until 2024, if he won reelection to another term in 2018 (which, not surprisingly, he did). However, in 2012 Putin was confronted with demonstrations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and several other Russian cities even before he returned to the presidency. They began soon after the election of the new Duma the preceding December, an election soiled by the disqualification of opposition politicians and widespread fraud, according to independent monitoring groups. More than 100,000 people, many wearing white ribbons, demonstrated on the streets of Moscow demanding a new and fair election, freedom for political prisoners, and a liberalization of the political system. Putin blamed the United States

for inciting the demonstrations, and specifically Secretary of State Clinton, who had criticized the vote fraud. Putin would get his revenge in the US presidential election in 2016 by authorizing cyber attacks on Clinton's presidential campaign.⁶

Putin was determined to prevent the Moscow demonstrations from evolving into another color revolution similar to those that had occurred earlier in Georgia and Ukraine. He launched a full-scale crackdown on the Russian democratic movement, with the Duma obligingly approving new restrictions on street demonstrations, Web sites, and nongovernmental organizations, including the Memorial Human Rights Center and the Golos vote-monitoring association, which were labeled "foreign agents." In addition, prominent democratic activists and other dissidents and journalist were arrested. Some even were murdered. In response to Putin's repression, on December 14, 2012, Obama signed the Magnitsky Act. The legislation was named in honor of a Russian lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, who was tortured to death in prison after uncovering a tax fraud scheme involving government officials. The act banned Russian human rights abusers from receiving US visas and owning US assets. Putin retaliated two weeks later by banning US citizens from adopting Russian orphans.⁷

Putin assumed a more aggressive posture toward the United States not only to vent his long-standing grievances with US foreign policy, but also to rally Russian support for his increasingly repressive regime. He accused the United States of undermining the strategic balance of forces through its missile defense programs and enlargement of NATO, and he promised a new Russian military buildup in response. During the summer of 2012, Russian military aircraft and warships began harassing US and NATO defenses. In July 2012, two Russian Tu-95 Bear bombers were intercepted in the air defense zone off the US coast of Alaska. During the following month, it was revealed that a Russian submarine had conducted a patrol within the Gulf of Mexico. In 2013, the Russians conducted a military exercise involving some 70,000 troops, a reflection of the hundreds of millions of dollars that Russia had invested in its armed forces over the previous four years.

Some Central European leaders warned the Americans that Russia's strategic posture was changing, but the Obama administration experienced no sense of urgency. It did, however, support two steps by NATO to ease the fears of Eastern Europeans. One was the development of contingency plans for a Russian invasion of NATO's new eastern flank.

The other, in the fall of 2013, was a NATO military exercise in the eastern part of the alliance, the first major exercise to take place there. But the United States sent only 160 troops and the Germans sent only 55. The biggest contributions came from France and Poland, with over 1000 soldiers each. This was a larger effort than anything NATO had put together since 2006, but in light of the shift in Russian military doctrine, it still seemed quite inadequate.⁸

But it was not all downhill for US-Russian relations under Putin, at least not at first. Putin was willing to cooperate with the United States on issues that served Russian interests. On August 22, 2012, Russia joined the World Trade Organization, thereby facilitating the expansion of US-Russian trade. During the following year, Russia sided with the United States against North Korea in the UN Security Council after the North Koreans conducted another nuclear weapon test. In June 2013, the United States and Russia also agreed to intensify their cooperation in countering terrorism, including exchanging information between intelligence organizations and conducting joint counter-terrorist operations. They also signed a cyber security pact to reduce the risk of conflict in cyberspace and a new antinuclear proliferation agreement designed to protect, control, and account for nuclear materials.

Obama was planning to meet with Putin in a Moscow summit that September to further US-Russian cooperation when the case of Edward Snowden intruded. Snowden had stolen classified US government documents and then turned them over to WikiLeaks, which publicized them. Snowden fled to Moscow, where he was granted asylum. After Putin declined US requests to turn over Snowden, Obama reacted by canceling the planned Moscow summit.

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

US-Russian relations took a dramatic turn for the worse as a result of a revolution in Ukraine in February 2014. The pro-Russian Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovych, was overthrown following massive protest demonstrations in Kiev's Maidan Square. Protestors were upset that Yanukovych had rejected closer ties between Ukraine and the European Union in favor of a broader economic relationship with Russia. They also were angered by Yanukovych's lavish lifestyle and the corrupt, incompetent, and increasingly authoritarian government over which he presided. After Yanukovych sent in his special police to suppress the

protests, killing dozens of demonstrators in the process, Ukraine's parliament removed him from office and established an interim pro-Western government.

Within days, Putin reacted by ordering the military occupation and annexation of Ukraine's Crimea. He also provided military assistance to pro-Russian separatists in the eastern part of Ukraine, the Donbas provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, who launched a still ongoing war with Ukrainian government troops. Russia's aggression against Ukraine obviously rendered obsolete the Western notion that the NATO nations and Russia could cooperate in maintaining peace and stability in Europe—at least as long as Putin was Russia's president.

By invading and annexing Crimea and fomenting the conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russia violated a number of agreements that served as the pillars of the post-Cold War international order. They include the Charter of the United Nations and the Final Act of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which requires member states, including Russia, to respect one another's independence and territorial integrity. If Putin could violate international accords with impunity, asked residents of the Baltic countries of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, which, like Ukraine, have substantial Russian minorities, what country on the Russian periphery could feel secure?

THE NATO “THREAT” TO RUSSIA

Despite Russian fears of NATO expansion into Russia's own backyard, in reality the Western alliance posed little military threat to Russia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the military power of NATO declined appreciably. In 1990, the United States had 300,000 troops in Europe. By 2014, there were only 67,000 US military personnel on that continent, of which only 27,000 were combat soldiers. Moreover, US forces were based principally in Italy, Britain, and Germany—far from the Russian border.

Moreover, President Obama continued the process of reducing the forward deployment of US forces in Europe. Early in his administration, the Pentagon withdrew two of the four remaining deployable US brigade combat teams stationed in Europe. In January 2015—after the Russian invasion of Ukraine—the administration announced that it intended to close an additional fifteen military installations in NATO nations. These reductions were a part of the administration's effort to “rebalance” US

military force deployments in Europe and “re-pivot” some of them to Asia, where China appeared increasingly menacing. In addition, Obama believed the US force reductions in Europe would compel the allies to “step up to the plate” and do more to maintain the alliance. But the allies were reluctant to do so. Only four of NATO’s 28 members had met the alliance’s target of spending two percent of their gross domestic products on defense. While the United States—which has global responsibilities that other NATO members do not have—was spending about 4.6% of its gross domestic product on defense, the Europeans were spending collectively 1.6%.⁹

In short, the expansion of NATO posed no threat to Russia. Rather than NATO, the real threat to Russia was the continuation in power of Putin’s regime. As Russian expert Alexander Motyl of Rutgers University aptly describes Putin’s government, it is “a brittle regime that is in the throes of advanced decay. … hyper-centralized, corrupt, inimical to introducing systemic reform, and incapable of changing itself.”¹⁰ What Putin really feared was not NATO, but rather the possibility that Ukraine would become a democratic state and thereby serve as a model for a similar transformation in Russia. Consequently, it was vital for the preservation of his authoritarian regime to keep Ukraine destabilized. There is another reason why Putin felt compelled to destabilize Ukraine. A chaotic Ukraine would serve to undermine the Western European international order, whose foundations rest on the two pillars of NATO and the European Union. If the European Union and NATO were not able to save democracy in Ukraine, then autocracy would be safe in Russia—or at least that seems to be what Putin believed.

While Ukrainian troops were being pounded by heavy guns supplied to the separatist forces by Russia, Obama came under intense pressure to send heavy weapons to the Ukrainians, particularly antitank missiles. But he refused to do so. Arming the Ukrainians, he told his aides, would kick off a cycle of escalation that the West could not win because Ukraine lies on Russia’s border and means much more to Moscow than it does to the United States. Other NATO countries, especially Germany, also opposed providing the Ukrainians with heavy weapons because they too feared Russian military escalation. Accordingly, the NATO countries provided the Ukrainian army with some non-lethal military assistance, including rations, radios, concertina wire, first-aid kits, and body armor. In addition, the International Monetary Fund gave the Ukrainian government

some financial aid to help its economy avoid collapse, but not enough to promote Ukraine's economic recovery.

Instead of substantial military aid to Ukraine, the West relied on the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia as the primary way of ending its aggression against Ukraine. Western sanctions were placed on key sectors of the Russian economy, including arms manufacturers, banks, and state firms. In addition, asset freezes and travel bans were imposed on more than one hundred people, mostly Putin's cronies. The sanctions were extended repeatedly and were still in effect when Obama left office in January 2017.

However, in order to give Russia the prospect of relief from the sanctions, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Fran^coise Hollande met for peace talks with Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in Minsk, Belarus, in September 2014 and in February 2015. As a result, Russia agreed to pullback its forces from eastern Ukraine in return for Ukraine granting Donetsk and Luhansk a degree of autonomy. For its part, the European Union offered to gradually withdraw its sanctions as Russia complied with the agreement. But the Minsk accords have not been implemented in part because a minority faction in the Ukrainian parliament, which is strong enough to block any agreement, fears that granting the Donbas autonomy would give Putin a legal way of continuing Russia's intrusion in Ukraine's affairs. In addition, the Minsk agreements made no mention of Russia's annexation of Crimea. As a result, the war in eastern Ukraine continued as Obama left the presidency. By then, over 10,000 people had been killed, the Donbas was devastated, and Ukraine's fragile economy was severely strained.

THE NEW NATO

While Obama played no major role in the Minsk talks, believing it was primarily the responsibility of the European Union to deal with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, he did attempt to reassure NATO's rattled East European members that they would not be abandoned by the alliance. At the Warsaw NATO summit meeting in July 2016, the alliance's members agreed to station, on a rotating basis, four battalions of 800–1200 multinational troops each in Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. In addition, a brigade of four more battalions would be based in Romania and Bulgaria. The United States assumed the command of the battalion in Poland, which arrived there in January 2017, while

the battalions in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia were placed under the command of Canada, Germany, and Britain. These troops could be reinforced with the enhanced rapid-reaction force being developed by NATO. To this end, the United States agreed to station another armored combat brigade of around 5000 soldiers in Europe (for a total of three) and to pre-position on the continent the brigade's heavy equipment, including tanks and artillery.

In addition to these ground reinforcements, NATO began conducting expanded air-policing missions over the Baltic states, where Russian aircraft had intruded into their airspace, and increased allied naval patrols in the Baltic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. Finally, NATO began deploying ballistic missile defense (BMD) components in Eastern Europe. A base in Romania became operational in early May 2016, and that year ground was broken for a base in Poland. While NATO insisted these BMD systems are designed to protect Europe against Iranian missiles, the Poles and Romanians saw them as another way to deter a Russian invasion by strengthening NATO's involvement in their defense.

None of these measures, however, could prevent the Russians from overrunning the Baltic states if they chose to do so. A study by RAND, a Washington-based think tank, estimated that if Russian tanks and troops rolled into the Baltic states, outgunned and outnumbered NATO forces would be overrun in under three days.¹¹ However, the additional NATO forces could act as a trip wire for further alliance reaction, including the possibility of using NATO tactical nuclear weapons, thereby making a Russian invasion a high-risk gambit for the Kremlin. At the very least, the additional forces might give NATO the means to defeat the type of proxy aggression the Russians are now practicing in eastern Ukraine.

However, the RAND study argued that much more was needed to deter further Russian aggression in that region. It recommended the deployment of multiple brigades of heavy mechanized forces in Eastern Europe. Such a forward presence would act as an instrument of “deterrence by denial,” that is, a strategy designed to prevent an attack rather than repulse it. But this course of action proved unacceptable to most of NATO’s European members, who were confronted with a number of other pressing problems, including Britain’s impending withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit), the flow of Middle Eastern refugees into Europe, the rise of anti-democratic and pro-Putin parties in France, the Netherlands, Hungary, and, most alarmingly, Germany.

RUSSIA AND THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 2016

As a component of Putin's efforts to undermine Western democracy, he ordered a campaign of Russian intrusion into the US presidential election of 2016. Its objective, a declassified US intelligence report concluded, was to harm Hillary Clinton's election prospects and "undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process." To that end, Russian agents hacked the emails of the Democratic National Committee and leaked its documents to WikiLeaks, which then were publicized in the American media. With the presidential election campaign in full swing, and with Clinton leading in the polls, Obama apparently decided not to respond aggressively against the Russians, fearing that he would be seen as aiding her campaign and thereby delegitimizing her election victory.

However, during the September G20 summit in China, the president met with Putin for an hour and a half and told him to stop the hacking or, as he put it, there would be "serious consequences." Putin neither denied nor confirmed the hacking, but replied that the United States had long funded media outlets and civil-society groups that meddle in Russian affairs. With email leaks from the Russian cyber attacks continuing, on October 31 Obama contacted Putin via the Moscow-Washington hotline and told the Russian leader: "International law, including the law for armed conflict, applies to actions in cyberspace. We will hold Russia to those standards."¹²

Yet even after Trump won the election, and US intelligence revealed that there were multiple contacts between his associates and Russian representatives, Obama reacted cautiously, believing that there was no solid evidence that the president-elect had colluded with Russia to interfere with the election. Nevertheless, on December 29, in what amounted to a relatively light slap on the wrist, the US government expelled 35 Russian diplomats, denied access to two Russia-owned compounds, and broadened existing sanctions on Russian entities and individuals. The next day, Putin said his government would not "stoop to the level of irresponsible [U.S.] kitchen diplomacy" by responding in kind.¹³

It was quickly suspected that Trump aides had persuaded Putin not to retaliate in response to Obama's actions. Those suspicions were reinforced by the resignation of Michael Flynn, Trump's designated national security adviser, after Flynn admitted that he had met with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak on December 29 to discuss Obama sanctions. However, Flynn was not fired for meeting with the Russians, but because

he had lied to Vice President-elect Michael Pence about his meeting with Kislyak.

Obama's critics believe the United States should have been tougher on Russia from the beginning of his presidency, rather than pursue what they believe is the "illusion" that Russia and the United States could establish a mutually beneficial relationship. Despite some areas of US-Russian cooperation, particularly in reducing their nuclear arsenals and restricting the nuclear program of Iran, Putin in effect declared a new cold war with the United States and its NATO allies. He invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, challenged NATO by building up and modernizing the Russian armed forces, intervened in Syria to keep President Bashar Assad in power, and intruded in the US electoral process to help Donald Trump win the presidential election.

The critics also argue that the United States should have done more to support Ukraine, including getting more involved in the Minsk talks and providing more military and economic aid to the struggling Ukrainians. They also think that much more should have been done to reassure the NATO allies that the United States would defend them. In Syria, the critics believe the United States should have provided the anti-Assad rebels with more military assistance. And they insist that Obama should have been more forthright in countering Putin's intrusion into the presidential election, which, they assert, was a direct threat to American democracy. However, while Obama considered Putin dangerous, he did not think a more forceful US response was necessary. Quite to the contrary, he thought it would trigger an escalation that could end in war between the United States and Russia. By contrast, containing Russia with the limited economic and political measures the West took in response to Russian aggression against Ukraine, Obama argued, would give Putin no choice but to deal with the increasingly severe economic and political problems that Russia was experiencing.¹⁴

OBAMA AND THE EUROPEAN ALLIES

The Russian reset was not the only one that Obama attempted. During his campaign for the presidency in 2008, he delivered a speech in Berlin in which he promised a much closer, more cooperative association with the European allies than the strained relationship of the Bush years. However, Obama also warned the allies that "in this new century, Americans and Europeans alike will be required to do more—not

less”—to deal with the challenges they both faced. In the end, the unrealistic hopes that Europeans had placed on him to change the world were matched by the unfulfilled expectations he had made of them. The mutual disappointment that resulted would riddle US-European relations throughout Obama’s presidency.¹⁵

One of the most contentious issues that divided the United States and its European allies was the long-festerling burden-sharing problem. Like previous presidents going all the way back to President Harry Truman, Obama accused the allies of not doing their fair share in maintaining the NATO alliance. He pointed to the fact that most of the allies—with the exception of Britain, Poland, Estonia, and Greece—did not meet the agreed-upon NATO goal of spending 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. In 2014, the European member states of the EU and NATO spent an average of 1.56% of GDP on defense. Germany, with the largest economy in Europe, spent only 1.18%. By contrast, the United States was spending about 4% GDP on defense.¹⁶

Obama charged that the European allies were “free riders” who enjoyed the benefits of an international order safeguarded by the United States without contributing much to support it. Moreover, he said, they had the habit of pushing the United States into dealing with trouble spots in and near Europe and then did little to help. To support the latter charge, Obama said that he had been reluctant to intervene in the Libyan civil war in 2011 and did so only to avert the mass killing of Libyan civilians. However, he had insisted that the Europeans must take the lead in the allied intervention in that country, with the United States playing only a supporting role, because, as he put it, he wanted “to prevent the Europeans and the Arab states from holding our coats while we did all the fighting.” He also placed the blame for the chaos that followed Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi’s overthrow on the Europeans, whom he claimed were insufficiently “invested in the follow-up” to their military action.¹⁷

The dearth of allied military support for the ongoing US campaign against the Islamic State also contributed to Obama’s decision to avoid direct US military action against Assad’s regime in Syria. Even though the Syrian civil war helped to produce the worst refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, as well as tragic terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, and other cities, the European allies did not increase their military involvement against ISIS forces in Syria and Iraq. The lack of allied military support also helps to explain Obama’s refusal to get deeply involved in the European refugee problem or the Minsk negotiations between

Ukraine and Russia. These issues, he insisted, were primarily European problems.¹⁸

The allies, for their part, argued that they did contribute to US militarily efforts, even when their interests were not directly at stake. For example, they participated in the first Iraq war in 1991 with tens of thousands of troops. After the 9/11 attacks on the United States, European leaders unanimously supported, with thousands of troops, the US intervention in Afghanistan—a country where they arguably had few direct interests. However, most of the NATO allies, with the notable exceptions of Britain and Spain, refused to participate in what they considered the unwarranted US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The French also pointed out that they had conducted military missions in Central Africa, with the United States providing only some support, thereby demonstrating the willingness of a key European ally of the United States to bear security responsibilities in a region where US interests are not great. In addition, the European Union took the lead in bringing Iran to the negotiations that produced a nuclear deal with that country, and Germany and France handled the talks that produced the two Minsk agreements between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁹

Nonetheless, even accounting for the different roles of Europe and the United States in global affairs, the burden-sharing deficit remained a serious issue that divided the allies and continued to do so into the Trump administration. Indeed, during his presidential campaign, Trump charged that NATO had outlived its usefulness—in spite of Russian aggression in Ukraine and the threat of additional Russian aggression against the East European members of NATO.

THE GREAT RECESSION

The problems facing the NATO alliance were exacerbated by a number of severe crises that engulfed the European Union during Obama's presidency. For one, the cohesion of the EU was severely strained by the after-effects of the deepest economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Great Recession began in the United States in December 2007 and then spread across most of the globe. It was triggered by the bursting of a huge housing bubble, which had been fueled by risky “sub-prime” mortgage loans to credit unworthy people who ultimately defaulted on their debt repayment. As a result, lending institutions experienced heavy financial losses. In the United States, the Federal Reserve

Board bailed out most of the nation's vulnerable banks, and the Federal government spent \$700 billion on a program to stimulate the economy. Nevertheless, US employment and business activity did not recover to their pre-recession levels until well into Obama's second term in office.

Unfortunately for the Europeans, the EU was not a federal union and, consequently, it lacked the instruments possessed by the United States to deal with the economic crisis. As a result, the task of bailing out banks with large capital losses fell initially upon Europe's national governments, some of which—especially those of Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and Cyprus—were themselves heavily in debt. Fearing that these countries would default on their debt repayments, and thereby jeopardize the stability of the entire European banking structure, a number of international financial institutions—the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—were compelled to lend the debtor countries additional money. While the bailouts staved off default by the debtor countries, the stringent budgetary conditions attached to the loans made it much harder for their governments to stimulate economic growth by boosting spending during a recession. Instead, debtor governments were required to raise taxes and lower expenditures in order to balance their budgets.

The consequences of the austerity measures were fewer jobs, smaller pensions, less affordable health care, tighter school budgets, and cutbacks to local services, all of which contributed to widespread social unrest and political upheaval, especially in Greece and Spain, where unemployment reached 27% of the workforce. Unlike the United States, which recovered from the economic crisis relatively quickly, the austerity programs implemented throughout the EU were largely responsible for the failure of the Euro zone's gross domestic product (GDP) to recover to its 2007 level as late as 2015.²⁰ By then, Greece's economy was 26% smaller than it had been in 2007, and the country remained mired in debt.²¹

The economic crisis split the European Union north and south. Southern European high debt countries, such as Greece, Spain, and Italy, argued that the austerity measures imposed on them in order to get badly needed loans benefited primarily their creditors, who were saved from governmental defaults at the expense of the millions of people who lost their jobs. By contrast, some northern European countries—particularly Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain—complained that the international lending agencies had not been strict enough with the

highly indebted governments. The northern states said that their citizens did not want to be taxed to finance loans to governments that could not reign in their spending and balance their budgets. Needless to say, this controversy generated much hostility on both sides.

THE REFUGEE CRISIS

As if the EU did not have enough trouble dealing with the Great Recession, still another challenge threatened to tear the union apart. The arrival of more than one million migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as a consequence of the wars in those countries, undermined the so-called Schengen agreement, which permits the free movement of people and goods within the boundaries of the EU. Since the EU lacks a common federal system to control its external borders, and no single agency to process asylum claims of refugees, a number of national governments reclaimed their right to control access through their borders independently of the Schengen agreement.

Some East European members of the EU, as well as Britain, also refused to go along with a proposal for a mandatory quota formula generated by the EU for apportioning the refugee burden. The proposal was championed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who invoked the humanitarian ideals of the EU. She said, “The fundamental right to asylum for the politically persecuted knows no upper limit; that also goes for refugees who come to us from the hell of a civil war.”²² However, the huge number of refugees admitted into Germany, some 300,000 people, strained that country’s infrastructure and logistic capabilities. It also diminished Merkel’s popularity, giving rise to anti-immigrant, neo-fascist parties not only in Germany but also elsewhere in the continent.

Resistance to taking in Middle Eastern refugees also was reinforced by a number of terrorist attacks in European cities, including Paris in January and November 2015 and July 2016, Brussels in March 2016, and Berlin in December 2016. As a result, the mandatory quota policy, which went into effect late in 2015, was suspended in September 2016, leaving the EU without a unified policy toward the refugee crisis. However, in late 2015, the EU did reach an agreement with Turkey, the country through which the vast majority of migrants were transiting on their way into Europe. The Turks agreed to take back new migrants who had landed illegally in Greece. In return, the EU agreed to take in one registered Syrian refugee from Turkey for every Syrian sent back from

Greece. The EU also agreed to give Turkey 6 billion euros to help that country provide for its large refugee population.

The refugee crisis also affected the United States, but only marginally, relative to the Europeans. The Obama administration agreed to permit only 10,000 Syrian refugees to enter the United States. In February 2016, at the request of Germany, Greece, and Turkey, NATO decided to help stem illegal trafficking and illegal migration by deploying ships in the Aegean Sea, but the Obama administration was reluctant to place US naval forces in such a chaotic environment.

Fears of unlimited emigration from Middle Eastern countries and terrorist attacks in European cities, combined with the failure of the EU to prevent the worst effects of the Great Recession, contributed to the rise of so-called populist parties throughout the European Union. These parties, in general, were nationalistic, anti-democratic, and anti-immigrant. They also opposed further European integration and instead demanded a return to the nation-states of at least some of the EU's powers. By the end of Obama's presidency, nationalists won the leadership of two EU countries, Hungary and Poland. However, only Britain responded to the crises facing the European community by deciding to withdraw from the EU. The decision was made in the wake of a national referendum in which British voters narrowly supported withdrawal.

Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomed Britain's decision to withdraw from the EU as the first step in its replacement by a new European order based on cultural and national sovereignty—rather than democracy. To that end, and despite Russia's own economic weakness, he provided financial support to the populist parties and authorized Russian cyber interference in national elections in order to increase populists' chances of winning. Not surprisingly, Putin was pleased by the election of the populist Viktor Orban as Hungary's prime minister. Orban promised to turn that country into an "illiberal state."²³

THE THREAT TO THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The rise of populist parties in Western Europe and populist leaders in Hungary, Poland, and, much more significantly, the United States posed a threat not only to the European Union, but also to the liberal international order fashioned by the United States and its European allies during and after World War II. Its key components are the UN, the EU, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), and NATO. The architects of the international order believed that peace, prosperity, and individual fulfillment could be the products of a world based on free markets, respect for individual rights and the rule of law, and democratic governments checked by independent judiciaries, free presses, and vibrant civil societies. The expansion of open markets, they insisted, would lead inevitably to the expansion of democracy. And it did. Between 1997 and 2015, the number of democratic governments increased from 44 to 86 in 2015. By then, 40% of the world's people were governed by democratic governments.²⁴ However, buffeted by the effects of the Great Recession, populist insurgencies, the resurgence of authoritarian governments in Eastern Europe, and the aggression of Putin's Russia, the liberal international order was shaken to its foundation during Obama's presidency. The spread of democracy and the advancement of human rights not only ground to a halt, in some countries, such as Poland and Hungary, it was in retreat.

Yet despite all of the achievements of the liberal international order, political scientists Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, among others, believe that "the system is rigged." They explain: "Elites have taken advantage of the global liberal order—sometimes inadvertently, sometimes intentionally—to capture most of the income and wealth gains in recent decades, and they have not shared much with the middle and lower classes." In addition, during the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s, the wealthy began to undermine the social safety net that protected Americans by enacting regressive tax policies, concluding trade and investment agreements that encouraged corporate outsourcing, and underfunding public and higher education. The growing imbalance of wealth between the upper class and the middle and lower classes undermined domestic support for, and fueled populist hostility toward, free trade, open borders, multilateralism, military alliances, and the institutions that promote them.²⁵

The foreign policies of the United States and its allies also helped to undermine the credibility of the liberal international order by displaying their inconsistent commitment to its principles. During the 1990s, and into the twenty-first century, Western governments asserted their right to intervene in countries whose governments mistreat their populations and foment instability in their neighborhoods. This rationale was the basis of US military interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Haiti during Bill Clinton's administration and was used in part to justify George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq and Obama's intrusion into

the Libyan civil war. While some of these interventions received UN authorization, the United States also acted unilaterally or selectively obeyed the rules of the international order it promoted. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 without UN authorization is the outstanding example. The Bush administration also violated international law by authorizing the use of torture against terrorist suspects. The Congress, for its part, refused to ratify numerous multilateral conventions and treaties, including the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Not surprisingly, Putin called US attempts to enlarge the liberal international order in Eastern Europe a disguise for expanding its own political influence.²⁶

However, a more widely held perception in Europe during Obama's presidency was one of waning US power. For seven decades, the United States had provided the security umbrella under which the liberal international system had flourished. But after the costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the chaos that followed NATO's intervention in Libya, Obama recalibrated the US international role. He consistently encouraged the Europeans to take greater responsibility for their own security. As a consequence, Europeans began to fear that United States was no longer committed to upholding the liberal international order. The election of Donald Trump in November 2016, with his "America First" promise, only reinforced European fears.

Obama certainly realized that the rise of the European populist parties and the extreme nationalism they espoused posed a potential threat to the relative peace and prosperity the continent had experienced since the end of World War II. While a return to war between European countries seemed inconceivable, a renationalized Europe could weaken the cohesion of NATO and its ability to deter further Russian aggression. And a weaker EU would be less willing to assist the United States in maintaining the international order. Consequently, he reacted to the populist threat by speaking out in favor of maintaining the cohesion of the EU as vital to the peace and prosperity of not only the continent but also the world as a whole. He also urged Britain to remain in the EU and the EU to continue bailing out Greece and other European debtor nations. He also pushed hard for a new trade agreement between the United States and the EU, comparable to the Trans-Pacific Trade agreement. Called the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or T.T.I.P., it aimed to create the world's largest trading zone. But after several rounds of talks over three years, the negotiators failed to reach agreement before Obama's term in office came to an end.

In another attempt to uphold the liberal international order, Obama joined Angela Merkel in writing an article that appeared in the German magazine *Wirtschaftswoche* on November 17, 2016, shortly after Trump's election victory. In it, the two Western leaders reaffirmed their countries' shared commitment to the values at the heart of the transatlantic alliance: individual freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. They also promised to maintain their collective defense through the NATO alliance and cooperate on a variety of international issues ranging from refugee policy to climate change mitigation.²⁷ But the task of fulfilling these promises soon was no longer Obama's, for on January 20, 2017, Trump became the president of the United States.

LATIN AMERICA

In April 2009, only a few months after Obama entered the White House, he met with Latin American leaders at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago. He said he wanted the relationship between the United States and the Latin American nations to be an "equal partnership ... based on mutual respect and common interests and shared values." He also promised that his administration would be more open to engagement, even with adversaries, including Cuba, more disposed to multilateral cooperation, and more respectful of international law and international opinion. He even walked over to shake hands with Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's radical president.²⁸ And, Secretary of State John Kerry even formally repudiated the Monroe Doctrine on November 18, 2013.²⁹ However, Obama's promise of improved US-Latin American relations materialized only partially. Although he re-established US diplomatic relations with Cuba, he deviated little from the Latin American policies of his immediate predecessors. Those policies subordinated concern for human rights to the preeminent consideration of US economic and strategic interests in the region.³⁰

The Obama administration's disregard for liberal values was demonstrated only two months after the Trinidad summit when it indirectly supported a military coup d'état in Honduras. The Honduran military overthrew the country's democratically elected president, Manuel Zelaya. When the Organization of American States declared the coup illegal, Obama reacted by saying that the United States would not intervene in Honduras's internal affairs. In fact, the president even refused to admit that a coup had occurred. As a result, the administration believed

it did not have to suspend US aid to Honduras, as was required when a democratically-elected government is overthrown. Nor did the administration impose meaningful economic sanctions on the new Honduran regime. Instead, it called for new elections and then recognized the coup-backed candidate when, as expected, he won. The Obama administration also refused to condemn the massive human rights violations that were committed by the new regime. There were thousands of illegal arrests, beatings, and torture by the police and Honduran military, and even some killings of peaceful demonstrators and opposition activists. The reign of terror prompted tens of thousands of Hondurans to flee for safety to the United States. But instead of granting the refugees political asylum, the administration deported most of them.³¹

COLOMBIA

For a variety of reasons, Obama also supported the right-wing Colombian governments of President Alvaro Uribe and, after 2010, Uribe's successor, Juan Manuel Santos. For one reason, Colombia was the strongest US ally in South America. It also was the only South American nation to support the US-led Iraq War of 2003. It also sent soldiers to Afghanistan and strongly condemned North Korea's nuclear tests. In addition, Obama was determined to strengthen US ties to Colombia because both Uribe and Santos were strongly committed to free market capitalism, in stark contrast to the socialist tendencies of Colombia's neighbors, Venezuela, under Chávez, and Ecuador, under President Rafael Correa. Moreover, Colombia and Venezuela were engaged in a series of commercial spats across their 1500-mile border that spiraled into the killing of border guards and others close to the border. Ecuador aggravated tensions by providing sanctuary for Colombian rebels.

The chief rebel movement, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), was a Marxist guerrilla movement that had waged a war against the Colombian government since 1964. FARC also engaged in a variety of terrorist activities, including assassinations, kidnappings for ransom, extortion, and the production and sale of illegal drugs. Hundreds of thousands of Colombian civilians lost their lives during the civil war. But according to UN estimates, only 12% of those deaths were attributed to rebel groups. Most, 80%, were killed by right-wing paramilitaries that allegedly did the dirty work of the Colombian security forces.³²

In response to the violence in Colombia, the administration of George W. Bush classified FARC as a terrorist group and gave over \$6 billion dollars to the Colombian government to defeat the rebels. In addition, the CIA provided Colombia with intelligence that enabled its military to locate and attack FARC bases. Partly because of US assistance to the Colombian government, FARC agreed to make peace, after four years of negotiations, on August 25, 2016.

As a part of the Obama administration's effort to disrupt narcotics shipments to the United States, as well as to augment the US "forward base" strategy in the Caribbean, in 2009 the administration signed an agreement with Uribe's government granting the United States access to seven military bases in Colombia. The administration also reaffirmed a Bush-era decision to reactivate the World War II Fourth Fleet, which would patrol the Caribbean Sea. However, the US-Colombian base agreement alarmed Latin American leaders who feared that the bases would become jumping-off points for US attacks against their governments. In response, in August 2009, the Union of South American Nations passed a declaration which "reaffirm[ed] that the foreign military forces cannot threaten the sovereignty and integrity of any South American country and, as a consequence, the peace and security of the region."³³

Obama also responded favorably to a request by President Uribe to strengthen the trade relationship between their two countries by moving beyond a preferential tariff agreement with Andean nations to a full free trade agreement. Under the Andean Trade Preference, 80% of US goods were imported into Colombia duty-free and the remainder entered with substantially lower tariffs. However, the free trade agreement was held up in Congress because US labor unions and the Human Rights Watch organization demanded an end to judicial impunity for the assassins of teachers and union members. After notable progress was achieved in these areas, Congress approved the free trade agreement in October 2011. As a result, by the time Obama left office in 2017, the US relationship with Colombia was one of the strongest in Latin America.

MEXICO

Obama had much less success in dealing with the problems posed by Mexico, a nation of 110 million people on the southern border of the United States. In January 2009, Michael Hayden, the outgoing director of the CIA, told the *Baltimore Sun* that the two top national security

priorities for the new president would be the nuclear threat from Iran and the instability in Mexico.³⁴

For decades, Mexico has been the major source of both illegal drugs and immigrants entering the United States. It is also the site of violent warfare among drug cartels, which claimed the lives of over one hundred thousand people by December 2016. The continuing violence in Mexico was partially responsible for the flight of Mexicans to the United States. But so, too, were the poor economic and employment conditions in Mexico, as well as the countervailing demand for cheap labor in the United States. By the time of Obama's presidency, some 12 million Mexicans and over 30 million Mexican Americans called the United States home.³⁵

Ironically, NAFTA contributed to the movement of both Mexican migrants and illegal drugs into the United States. The economic model on which NAFTA was based failed to provide the promised widely shared growth that was supposed to alleviate Mexico's acute maldistribution of income and wealth. When Obama entered the White House in 2009, the poorest 40% of Mexican families received only 13% of the total national income. In contrast, the richest 20% of families received 55%. NAFTA also facilitated the growth of drug trafficking by lowering the barriers to trade between Mexico and the United States. The increased volume of trade across the border made effective inspection of freight impossible, with the result that a virtual drug superhighway now extends across the border.³⁶

Corruption also is a major Mexican problem. According to the Organization of American States, the value of money tied to corruption—often in the form of bribes—is equivalent to ten percent of Mexico's GDP, well above the world average of two percent. The weak rule of law and a politicized judiciary encourages corruption by providing the country's governing elite with a high level of impunity to prosecution. During the presidency of Peña Nieto, which began in December 2012, human rights violations also became more endemic in Mexico. To counter his growing unpopularity, Nieto curtailed freedom of expression, protest, and assembly. Student activists, indigenous people, opposition politicians, and independent journalists came under systematic attack and some were murdered.

As with other countries, Obama turned a blind eye to the corruption and human rights violations of the Nieto government. He was more interested in working with Nieto to halt the movement of illegal drugs and migrants into the United States. To help seal the US border, Obama

provided nearly \$3 billion in security aid to Mexico. But he was unable to alleviate the frustration of Mexican officials, who pointed to the ease with which gangs were able to arm themselves in US gun shops. Obama also sent immigration legislation to Congress designed to provide a path to US citizenship for illegal Mexican aliens. But a strong anti-immigrant wing within the Republican Party, combined with the slowness of the US economic recovery, blocked the enactment of a new immigration policy.³⁷ As a result, Obama acted on his own by issuing an executive order that sheltered longtime residents from deportation, particularly youths who had grown up in the United States, the so-called Dreamers. But that effort was blocked by a court order, secured by opponents of immigration reform, which a deadlocked Supreme Court did not reverse.

At the other extreme, Obama addressed the illegal immigration problem by greatly expanding the deportation of aliens. Although he claimed his administration gave deportation priority to migrants who were dangerous criminals, hundreds of thousands of people with only old or minor convictions also were targeted. Prompted by growing public hostility to Latin American immigration, his administration also refused to admit to the United States entire families who sought asylum in the United States after fleeing from raging gang violence in Central America. Most migrants crossing the southern border of the United States did not come from Mexico but from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.³⁸

CUBA

Obama's preference for realistic considerations over idealistic principles also was evident in his policy toward Cuba. Entering the White House, he inherited an aggressive anti-Cuban policy characterized by 50 years of failed US efforts to overturn the Cuban revolution that brought Fidel Castro and his brother Raul to power. During the 2008 presidential election campaign, he said that it was time for the United States to "pursue direct diplomacy" with Cuba. He pledged that as president he would meet with Raul Castro, who had replaced his brother Fidel as Cuban president that year.³⁹

After taking office, Obama's administration initiated a policy to normalize US relations with Cuba. He allowed Cuban Americans to send unlimited funds to Cuba and he permitted US citizens to travel to that country for religious and educational purposes. But it was not until the spring of 2013, after the president had been safely reelected to a second

term, that he authorized the start of exploratory discussions with Havana designed to normalize US-Cuban relations. The talks were encouraged by Pope Francis, who wrote to the president and to Raul Castro urging them to reestablish diplomatic ties. After a number of secret talks that were facilitated by the Vatican and the Canadian government, on December 17, 2014, Obama and Castro announced that Washington and Havana would resume diplomatic ties, thereby ending 54 years of hostile relations between the two countries. Among other things, the agreement reached by the two governments called for the lifting of some US travel restrictions, fewer restraints on financial transactions, new access for US banks to the Cuban financial system, and the reopening of the US embassy in Havana and the Cuban embassy in Washington, both of which had been closed in 1961. The following May, the Obama administration removed Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. On July 20, 2015, the Cuban and US “interests sections” in Washington and Havana were upgraded to embassies.

In early 2016, Obama took another significant step toward US-Cuban normalization by visiting Havana. It was the first trip to Cuba by a sitting US president since Calvin Coolidge toured the island in 1928. In a keynote address broadcast live, with Raul Castro sitting in the audience, Obama urged the Cuban government to pursue political and economic liberalization and the US Congress to lift the trade embargo. The ongoing embargo, Obama argued, did little to change the behavior of the Castro regime, or compel economic or political liberalization. But congressional leaders in both political parties insisted that before the US embargo would be lifted, the Cuban government would have to improve its human rights record. In 2016, Human Rights Watch reported that Cuban authorities continued “to repress dissent and discourage public criticism” by employing arbitrary arrests of human rights defenders, independent journalists, and others, as well as resorting to beatings, public acts of shaming, and the termination of employment. The fact that repression still continues in Cuba helps to explain why the US embargo on Cuba remains in effect.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, days before leaving office in January 2017, Obama issued another executive order that, critics argue, facilitated continued repression in Cuba. He repealed the so-called “wet foot, dry foot” policy, which since 1995 had allowed Cubans who reached US shores without authorization to pursue permanent residency in the United States. The policy was enacted by the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s, following a

mass exodus of Cubans to the United States. President Clinton changed the previous “open door” policy for Cuban refugees to a “wet foot, dry foot” policy, which required the repatriation of Cubans to Cuba who were intercepted at sea, but allowed those who arrived by land to stay in the United States. The president’s action terminated a policy that many regarded as preferential treatment for a single group of immigrants. The Cuban government, which had long argued that the “open door” policy encouraged Cubans to make the dangerous crossing to Florida by sea, welcomed the new US policy. It also agreed to accept the return to Cuba of all Cubans who tried to enter the United States by sea.⁴¹

The change in US policy toward Cuban refugees was severely criticized by members of both parties. Democratic Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey, a Cuban American, said the move “will only serve to tighten the noose the Castro regime continues to have around the neck of its own people.”⁴² In addition, Menendez and other conservatives criticized Obama’s Cuban normalization policy, arguing that the president had made too many concessions to the Castro regime in return for far too little in the way of political liberalization.

On the other hand, supporters of normalization insisted that it was a long overdo abandonment of a policy that did not work—that is, attempting to overthrow the Castro regime—and only added to the suffering of the Cuban people. They also pointed to the benefits normalization would provide both countries. It would enable the freer flow of people, goods, and information between the two countries. It also could produce bilateral agreements on health-care cooperation, joint planning to mitigate oil spills, coordination on counter-narcotics efforts, and intelligence-sharing. Moreover, business groups, economists, and leading Cuba experts estimated that a reversal of Obama’s policies would cost the American economy \$6.6 billion and affect more than 12,000 American jobs.⁴³ Obviously, these benefits would not have accrued had Obama refused to normalize relations with Cuba because of its continued violations of human rights. Nevertheless, with regard to Cuba, as with other Latin American countries, Obama demonstrated that he was much more concerned with preserving and advancing the economic and strategic interests of the United States than he was in protecting human rights. It was another example of realism trumping idealism in Obama’s foreign policy.

Another issue that only indirectly affected Cuba was the fate of the Guantanamo prison. On the second day of his presidency, Obama

announced that he would close the military prison within a year and would stop CIA torture immediately. While torture did stop, Obama steadfastly refused to prosecute those responsible for the torture of detainees during the presidency of George W. Bush, or even allow the release of much more than the summary of a comprehensive Senate Intelligence Committee report that documented it. As a result, rather than reaffirming the criminality of torture, Obama sent the message that, should future policymakers resort to torture, their prosecution would be unlikely. Obama's inability to close the Guantanamo prison was largely the result of the strong bipartisan opposition to that course of action. To block it, Congress passed laws prohibiting its detainees from being imprisoned in the United States. As a result, while the number of inmates was reduced from about 245 to 41 during Obama's administration,⁴⁴ the former detainees were transferred to other countries.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

When Obama was elected president in 2008, Africans thought this son of a Kenyan father would not only understand their continent better than his presidential predecessors, he would also treat it as a strategic priority and direct more resources its way. However, Obama did not fulfill these expectations. Even his most vocal supporters quietly admitted that he did much less for Africa than his immediate predecessors. Bill Clinton's Africa policy was defined by the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which reduced trade barriers on more than 1800 products exported from the continent to the United States. The hallmarks of George W. Bush's African policy—the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the President's Malaria Initiative, and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief—had a significantly beneficial effect on conditions in Africa and won accolades for that president.

It is quite possible that Obama did not want to be perceived as favoring Africa because of his paternal connection to that continent. It also may explain in part why he made only four trips to sub-Saharan Africa during his presidency. All totaled, he visited six African countries, but made only one visit to Kenya, where he stayed only briefly. By contrast, Hillary Clinton, who served only four years as secretary of state, visited fifteen African countries on four separate trips. Another reason for Obama's relative lack of attention to Africa was his preoccupation with other issues, especially the Great Recession as well as the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, with Federal budgets capped by growing concern for the rising US national debt, there were relatively few dollars available for African initiatives.

Nevertheless, Obama did implement a number of noteworthy African programs. One was the Young African Leaders Initiative, which was designed to help youths on the continent prepare for leadership positions by providing them with training, networking, and skills-building opportunities. More than 250,000 people joined the network and 1000 attended leadership programs at US colleges and universities in 2016. Another Obama initiative was the Feed the Future agriculture program, which was designed to reduce global hunger primarily by boosting farm productivity and improving nutrition, particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children. The program reached more than 9 million households in 12 African countries, and its nutrition programs served more than 12 million children under five.⁴⁵

But rather than foreign aid, the Obama administration preferred to encourage private investment in Africa, home to six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies. Ghana and Botswana, with their combination of democratic governments and market economics, were among the African countries that attracted foreign investors. Even Nigeria and Ethiopia, which were under attack from Islamist terrorists, were leveraging modest reforms into big economic opportunities for US investment, trade, and partnership. One of the Obama administration's most prominent attempts to encourage private-sector investment in Africa was the Power Africa program. Unveiled during the president's visit to South Africa in June 2013, the program was designed to increase electricity capacity by 30,000 megawatts by 2030 for 60 million households and businesses in six African countries. The effort would be financed by long-term commitments of public-private partnerships, for which the administration promised \$7 billion over five years.⁴⁶

There were, however, a number of African regions that lacked the peace and political stability that are the prerequisites of economic progress. One was the Sahel, the large swath of territory along the southern edge of the Sahara Desert that extends from Senegal to the Horn of Africa. The region is the home of Africa's weakest states, poorest economies, and largest ungoverned spaces as well as most of its Muslims. Not surprisingly, rather than a zone of economic opportunity, the Obama administration treated the Sahel primarily as the source of major security threats. Accordingly, the administration increased US

military cooperation with Sahelian governments but kept the number of US “boots on the ground” to a minimum. In addition, the Pentagon expanded US bases in Djibouti and Ethiopia for drone operations against jihadists in the Arabian Peninsula and Somalia. In 2013, the United States also built a new base in Niger in order to conduct operations against Boko Haram Islamists in neighboring Mali and Nigeria. The Obama administration also encouraged Kenya to play a greater role against the Al-Shabab Islamist militants in southern Somalia. To that end, the administration provided the Kenyans with anti-insurgent training programs as well as military equipment.⁴⁷

In the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, the Obama administration concentrated on reducing the humanitarian consequences of seemingly intractable civil wars in which millions have been killed. The United States played an instrumental role in the birth of South Sudan in 2011 by backing the effort of southern rebels to achieve independence from Sudan, but the administration failed to use its leverage to prevent the new country from quickly descending into renewed internecine conflict. The administration also dealt with Congo’s long-ongoing civil war, primarily by paying a sizable portion of the expense of supporting the international peacekeeping forces and refugee camps in the country.⁴⁸

In short, the Obama administration employed a variety of approaches in addressing sub-Saharan Africa’s myriad problems. Some succeeded, others did not. Critics argue that the United States could have done more. But considering the political and economic conditions that Obama faced in the United States, and the numerous global problems that demanded his attention, it is probably safe to say that he did as much as he was capable of doing.

OBAMA’S NUCLEAR PARADOX

President Obama came into office with a dream of a world without nuclear weapons. Ironically, he also later put the United States on a course to spend around \$1 trillion on upgrading its nuclear arsenal over three decades. As a part of that program, he asked Congress to fund a new class of ballistic missile submarines, a new stealth bomber, a new cruise missile, and billions of dollars on other programs. His changing stand on nuclear weapons is one of the most paradoxical aspects of Obama’s foreign policy.

On a visit to Prague in early April 2009, the newly-elected president said the United States would take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons by reducing US warhead stockpiles and negotiating a new strategic arms reduction treaty with the Russians. He also promised to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by aggressively pursuing US ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiating a treaty to restrict fissile materials, as well as secure agreements to enhance the security of nuclear weapons, facilities, and materials. But he also said that “as long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies.”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Obama’s promise to reduce the nuclear threat won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009.

Obama placed considerable emphasis on his nuclear agenda during his first two years in office. In 2010, he succeeded in negotiating a new strategic arms reduction treaty (the New Start Treaty) with Russia that obliged both sides to reduce their numbers of deployed strategic warheads to 1550. However, critics pointed out that the treaty did not address tactical nuclear weapons, most of which were still deployed in Eastern Europe. Obama also made good on his vow to convene regular nuclear security summits aimed at getting control of loose nuclear material. In four such summits, a dozen countries were persuaded to relinquish their nuclear explosives. The administration also invested more than \$5 billion in programs to help Russia and other countries secure their nuclear weapons and to convert research reactors to use nuclear fuels that cannot be diverted to weapon production.⁵⁰

With the exception of the landmark Iran nuclear deal in 2015, however, Obama’s record in curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons was not groundbreaking. He failed to stop the development of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal, primarily because he refused to talk with the North Koreans until they agreed to eliminate their nuclear weapons. He also failed to persuade the Republican-led Senate to consider ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. His administration’s effort to negotiate an international treaty restricting fissile material production was blocked by the opposition of Pakistan.

However, the greatest blow to his nuclear non-proliferation effort was his decision to approve the program to modernize America’s nuclear forces. It was the price he agreed to pay to get Republican support for the New Start Treaty. But it demonstrated to the non-nuclear weapon states that the United States was not serious about living up to its part

of the NPT bargain, which required it to eventually eliminate its nuclear arsenal. Putin also was responsible for undermining the nuclear non-proliferation effort. He refused to consider Obama's offer to reduce further strategic nuclear weapons, and he decided to develop a new nuclear-equipped intermediate-range missile in violation of the 1987 INF Treaty.

Those who favor nuclear disarmament criticized Obama's refusal to take a number of unilateral steps to diminish the risks of a nuclear catastrophe, such as withdrawing tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, as the first President Bush did in South Korea. He also failed to end the dangerous launch-under-attack strategy that requires the launching of America's land-based ICBMs before they could be destroyed by attacking missiles. To nuclear disarmers, Obama failed to fulfill the high expectations that they had of him when he entered office, and especially after he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

GLOBAL WARMING

Even more than the possibility of a nuclear war, Obama appeared to be increasingly concerned about the effects of global climate warming. "Climate change," he said, "is a potential existential threat to the entire world if we don't do something about it."⁵¹

Multiple lines of scientific evidence show that the Earth's climate system is warming. Globally, the average surface temperature has increased more than one degree Fahrenheit since the late 1800s. Most of that increase has occurred over just the past three decades. The year 2016 was the hottest on record. Climate model projections indicate that during the twenty-first century, the global surface temperature is likely to rise a further 0.5–3.1 °F in the lowest emissions scenario, and 4.7–8.6 °F in the highest emissions scenario.⁵² In fact, global warming is already having significant and harmful effects. Sea level rise is accelerating. The number of large wildfires is growing. Dangerous heat waves are becoming more common. Extreme storm events are increasing in many areas. More severe droughts are occurring in others.⁵³

The greatest human contribution to global warming has been the emission of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Consequently, one of Obama's most ambitious stated campaign goals was an 80% reduction in carbon dioxide emission levels by 2050. Once in office, he doubled down on his climate change

rhetoric with action. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 included \$90 billion in subsidies for green energy. Despite this victory, Obama faced opposition in Congress to other climate and energy bills, such as cap-and-trade legislation, in which the government would set a limit (cap) on the total amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted nationally. The failed cap-and-trade bill helped to fuel Democratic losses in the 2010 midterm and put Obama into a defensive position on climate issues in 2011 and 2012. However, after he was reelected in November 2012, he catapulted the global warming issue to the top of his to-do list. To get around congressional opposition, Obama issued a number of executive orders. For examples, in 2015, he issued an order to slash the federal government's emissions by 40% by 2025, largely from the huge inventory of government buildings. In the following year, Obama ordered the national security apparatus to ensure that warming is "fully considered" in its "doctrine, policies and plans."⁵⁴

On the diplomatic side, Obama's rejection of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline in November of 2015 allowed the president to open up a productive dialogue with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding climate change. More significantly, in 2013, he reached an agreement with China—the world's largest emitter of carbon-based gases after the United States—on the reduction of hydrofluorocarbons. The agreement marked the first time the two countries collaborated on the environment. In November of the following year, Obama met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing, where they announced that they would jointly pursue plans to cut domestic greenhouse gas emissions. That breakthrough announcement paved the way, during the following year, for the Paris Climate Agreement, the first international accord curbing global warming gas emissions.

In the Paris Climate Agreement, which was concluded in December 2015, nearly every country in the world—195 in all—committed themselves to reduce their emission of greenhouse gases. The agreement requires each signatory country to determine, plan, and regularly report its own contribution to mitigating global warming. In addition to the US pledge to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 26–28% below its 2005 levels by 2025, it also committed the United States to provide \$3 billion in aid to poorer countries by 2020. In a televised address to the nation, Obama declared that the Paris agreement "sends a powerful signal that the world is fully committed to a low-carbon future."⁵⁵

However, there were a number of limitations that reduced the promise of the agreement. Most importantly, it would not end global warming. At best, it could cut global greenhouse gas emissions by about half the amount necessary to stave off a projected increase in atmospheric temperatures of 3.6 °F. That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages, and more destructive storms. In addition, the Paris agreement lacks an enforcement mechanism. Countries do not have to meet their emission commitments under its language. The only things that are legally binding are requirements for nations to report their progress and do it in a way that is transparent. Moreover, critics argue, the Paris deal essentially lets the biggest polluters off the hook, while transferring responsibility for disproportionate cuts to the smaller nations, which will feel the impacts, but not the benefits, of the world's growing wealth. Conversely, opponents of the agreement in the United States charged that it would disproportionately hurt the American economy.

Facing a hostile Republican-controlled Senate, whose Republican members adhered to the latter viewpoint, Obama realized that had he agreed to put the Paris Agreement into treaty form, it would not have been ratified by the United States. As a result, he intended to tie the United States to the agreement through presidential action. This proved to be the agreement's severest limitation, at least as far as the United States was concerned, because continued US adherence to the agreement could be terminated by a hostile future president. This possibility was actualized by the election of Donald Trump, who withdrew the United States from the Paris agreement on June 1, 2017.

Despite the limitations of the Paris Climate Agreement and the withdrawal of the United States by Trump, Obama did at least raise the profile of climate change globally, and he supported it with numerous executive actions on everything from reducing emissions to minimizing flooding. He acknowledged that all the problems are “not solved because of this accord.” However, he insisted that it “will help delay or avoid some of the worst consequences of climate change, and will pave the way for even more progress in successive stages over the coming years.”⁵⁶ Needless to say, the prospects that Obama’s prophecy would be fulfilled depended to a great extent on whether the United States eventually would re-adhere to the Paris Agreement.

THE STATECRAFT OF BARACK OBAMA: EUROPE, LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, AND GLOBAL PROBLEMS

Obama entered the White House intending to emulate the more realistic foreign policy philosophy of the first President Bush without abandoning American ideals. However, more often than not, his foreign policies reflected the greater emphasis he placed on realistic rather than idealistic considerations. As a realist, he insisted that the United States does not have the means to police the world or to make right what is wrong everywhere. And he believed the United States had become overextended in areas that did not concern its vital, core national interests, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, he was determined to extract US military forces from those countries as quickly as possible. He also intended to reduce the US military presence in Europe. He argued that the European allies of the United States did not do their fair share to uphold the NATO alliance nor the liberal international order to which it was a part.

In Europe, Russia proved to be a major problem for the Obama administration. Among other challenges, the Russians threatened the European international order and the viability of NATO by invading Ukraine. However, while Obama considered Putin dangerous, he did not think a forceful US response was necessary. Quite to the contrary, he thought it would trigger an escalation that could end in war between the United States and Russia. Obama's realism again eclipsed his idealism when he argued that US interests in Ukraine did not warrant taking the risks of a wider war with Russia over that country. Instead, he believed it was sufficient to penalize Russia with economic sanctions and contain further Russian aggression by deploying limited NATO forces in the alliance's East European member states.

With respect to NATO, Obama did restore a more amicable relationship with the allies than the one that had existed under his predecessor. But the continuing withdrawal of US assets as a part of the administration's pivot to Asia tested European confidence in Obama's support for NATO. Yet no matter how much he pushed the allies on the burden-sharing issue, most of them did not meet the agreed-upon NATO goal of spending 2% of their gross domestic product on defense. However, the allies did pick up the ball on Ukraine. Through a combination of diplomacy, sanctions, and limited economic and military assistance to the Ukrainians, the Russians were dissuaded from engaging in further aggression in Eastern Europe. Yet

neither US nor European pressure succeeded in ending the war in eastern Ukraine let alone getting Russia to restore Crimea to Ukraine. Obama's failure to make a more vigorous response to Russia's cyber-aggression may have indirectly contributed to the victory of Donald Trump, who was determined to reverse his predecessor's policies.

The high point of Obama's Latin American policy was Cuba. Obama brought to a close the long US estrangement from that country by abandoning the failed policy of trying to oust the Castro government through military, economic, and diplomatic pressure. But in so doing, he again subordinated concern for human rights to his preeminent consideration of US economic and strategic interests. While he urged the Castro government to move toward democracy and respect for human rights, he did not make those goals conditions for restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries. Obama also demonstrated a disregard for liberal values by indirectly supporting a military coup d'état in Honduras and directly providing military and economic assistance to repressive governments in Colombia and Mexico. He turned a blind eye to the corruption and human rights violations of those countries' governments in order to obtain their cooperation in halting the movement of illegal drugs and migrants into the United States.

With respect to sub-Saharan Africa, Obama implemented a number of noteworthy aid programs, but he was more interested in encouraging American businesses to invest in Africa. He was even more concerned with assisting friendly African governments resist terrorist groups. To that end, he increased US military cooperation with Sahelian governments but, true to form, he kept the number of US boots on the ground in Africa to a minimum. However, the Pentagon did expand US military bases in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Niger and persuaded Kenya to play a greater role against Islamist militants in southern Somalia. The administration also employed diplomacy in attempting to reduce the humanitarian consequences of seemingly intractable civil wars in South Sudan and Congo, but with only very limited success. Critics argued that the United States could have done more for Africa, but considering the political and economic conditions that Obama faced in the United States, and the numerous global problems that demanded his attention, he probably did as much as he was capable of doing.

Although Obama initially dreamed of a world without nuclear weapons and took steps to reduce the risks of a nuclear catastrophe, including the New Start Treaty and the Iran nuclear deal, he also capitulated to the

Republican demand that he modernize America's nuclear weapon facilities—to the tune of \$1 trillion. That decision cannot but help to undermine the international effort to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons by demonstrating to the non-weapon states that the United States is not serious about its promise to eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

Despite the limitations of the Paris Climate Agreement and the subsequent withdrawal of the United States from that accord by President Trump, Obama did raise the profile of climate change globally and he issued numerous executive actions to ameliorate the problem. Moreover, since the provisions of the Paris agreement will not go into effect until 2020, it is possible that a Trump successor to the presidency could resurrect Obama's climate legacy by re-adhering the United States to that accord.⁵⁷

One of the most potentially damaging threats to Obama's legacy, and the liberal international order that was fashioned by the United States and its European allies after World War II, was the rise of so-called populist movements in Europe and ultimately in the United States in the person of Donald Trump. While Obama realized that the European populist parties and the extreme nationalism they espoused posed a potential threat to the relative peace and prosperity of that continent, he was unable to do much about it. He did speak out in favor of maintaining the cohesion of the European Union, and he also pushed hard—and unsuccessfully—for a new trade agreement between the United States and the EU, comparable to the Trans-Pacific Trade agreement, but these moves only added fuel to the populist fire. Obama, as well as the leaders of the political establishments in Europe and the United States, failed to realize—or preferred to ignore—the fact that the market-friendly policies they advanced and defended had helped to destroy the social mobility and economic opportunity that underpins democracy.

Like his predecessors, Obama attempted to blend realism with idealism, but he increasingly came down on the realistic side of that binary as he matured in the presidency. In the process, he managed to avoid major disasters during his presidency and, as analyst Thomas Wright points out, left office with the United States more powerful than it was when he entered the White House. The nation emerged from the Great Recession with its economy more resilient than ever, and indeed much stronger than Russia's or China's. And while America's allies had serious problems, most of them were still wealthy and capable countries, and at least in Western Europe most continued to adhere to the values espoused

by the liberal international order.⁵⁸ The extent to which these conditions would endure depended to a large degree on the policies of Obama's successor, Donald Trump.

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FOR FURTHER READING

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Another insider view is provided by Derek Chollet's, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (2016). More critical viewpoints are provided by Robert J. Lieber's, *Retreat and Its Consequences: American Foreign Policy and the Problem of World Order* (2016); Colin Dueck's, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (2015); Sean Kay's, *America's Search for Security: The Triumph of Idealism and the Return of Realism* (2014); and Thomas J. Wright's, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the 21st Century and the Future of American Power* (2017). See also Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle over American Power* (2016).

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CHAPTER 8

Donald Trump and “America First,” 2017–

The election of Donald Trump brought to the White House a billionaire businessman who never held a political office and had virtually no experience with, or knowledge about, international relations not related to his business activities. In the first seventeen months of his presidency, he struck a significant blow at the liberal international order that was created and maintained by the United States since the Second World War (Fig. 8.1).

THE RISE OF DONALD TRUMP

Donald Trump was born on June 14, 1946, in Queens, New York City, the fourth of five children of Fred Trump, a residential real estate developer, and Mary Anne MacLeod Trump, an immigrant from Scotland. Donald’s father appears to have had a much greater influence on his son than his mother. Fred Trump was a tough, driven man whose energy seems to have been passed onto Donald. He impressed upon his son that life is a competitive struggle between winners and losers. He called the winners “killers.” If you were a loser, you were nothing.¹

Donald took this advice to heart. He viewed himself as a tough S.O.B., and he tried to prove it in encounters with his teachers, his father, and others throughout his life. “He was a pretty rough fellow when he was small,” his father said, and apparently too much for even him to handle.² Consequently, to instill discipline in his unruly son,



Fig. 8.1 Donald J. Trump, Official White House Photograph (Credit: Shealah Craighead, courtesy of the Library of Congress; Craighead, Shealah, photographer. *Official portrait of President Donald J. Trump*, October 6, 2017. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017656484/>)

Fred Trump enrolled Donald, then age 13, in the New York Military Academy. While some of Donald's classmates considered the academy a prison, he reveled in the military drills and trappings. However, Trump did not serve in the military during the Vietnam War. He obtained four student deferments while he was in college, from 1964 to 1968. Trump started college at Fordham University, but transferred to the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School in order to enroll in its real estate studies program. He graduated in 1968 with a bachelor's degree

in economics and returned to New York and the family business, which he took over from his father in 1971 and then renamed The Trump Organization.

One of young Trump’s dreams was to break into the Manhattan real estate business. It was a dream he fulfilled in a big way, building Trump Plaza, an apartment development, and the Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue, which became home to luxury stores as well as to Trump’s multifloor residence and company headquarters. Trump’s company engaged in constructing and renovating skyscrapers, hotels, casinos, and golf courses. While his casino businesses, and some of his other ventures, went through a series of bankruptcies, his personal fortune escaped undamaged, largely because he realized that licensing the Trump name was more important to his financial status than real estate development and ownership. Successful name-branding feats included how-to books like *The Art of the Deal*, golf and hotel resorts, beauty pageants, and miscellaneous products ranging from suits to bottled water. He also expanded his entertainment ventures, which culminated with his years-long run as star of NBC’s reality show *The Apprentice*.³

According to *Forbes* magazine, Trump was the world’s 766th richest person as of March 2018, with an estimated net worth of \$3.1 billion.⁴ However, his holdings continued to be highly leveraged. In August 2016, the *New York Times* reported that Trump’s real estate network in the United States—not counting interests in about 20 other countries—was at least \$650 million in debt. “I am the king of debt,” he bragged during the campaign. “I love debt.”⁵ Just before his inauguration as president, he handed over management of the company to his two sons, Donald Jr. and Eric.

Although Trump had voted in the past as a Democrat, he ran as a Republican in the 2016 presidential campaign. Much to the surprise of many, if not most people, he defeated sixteen opponents in the primaries. He then went on to defeat his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, in the 2016 general election—even though she won 3 million more popular votes. Inaugurated on January 20, 2017, Trump became the oldest and wealthiest person ever to assume the presidency, the first without prior military or government service, and the fifth to have won a presidential election despite losing the popular vote.

TRUMP'S CHARACTER

According to a long time adviser, Trump is perpetually playing a soundtrack in his head containing the advice his father gave him. Besides his father, another mentor was Roy Cohn, a caustic McCarthy-era lawyer, who counseled Trump never to give in or concede error. In 1973, Trump hired Cohn to defend him and his father, who were sued by the federal government for discriminating against black renters looking for apartments in their buildings. Trump asked Cohn if they should settle. “Never settle,” Cohn replied. “You need to fight back harder than they ever hit you.” Even though the Trumps lost the case, Donald claimed they had won a victory.⁶ Cohn’s advice may explain why Trump reacts to every affront, real or imagined, in Pavlovian fashion. “He beats every perceived slight to death and, even when he’s won the point, he continues beating.”⁷

Dan McAdams, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University, is one of a number of psychologists who have attempted to explain Trump’s behavior. He characterizes Trump as highly extroverted, aggressive, narcissistic, and low in agreeableness. People low in agreeableness, McAdams adds, are usually callous, rude, arrogant, and lacking in empathy. McAdams believes that anger may be largely responsible for Trump’s high extroversion and his low agreeableness. “Anger,” McAdams explains, “can fuel malice, but it can also motivate social dominance, stoking a desire to win the adoration of others.... And anger permeates his political rhetoric.” McAdams also thinks that Trump is “unlikely to shy away from risky decisions that could, should they work out, burnish his legacy and provide him an emotional payoff.”⁸

It is the possibility of making a risky decision—such as attacking North Korea—that worries people. In fact, some mental health experts worry about Trump’s mental stability. In February 2017, a letter appeared in the *New York Times* from 35 psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers who charged that the president’s “speech and actions make him incapable of acting safely as president.” Their letter prompted Richard Friedman, another psychiatrist, to reply by reflecting the sentiments of the so-called Goldwater Rule. It states that diagnosing a president’s condition without first personally psychoanalyzing him can produce distorted psychological judgments. Friedman recommends that psychiatrists should discuss psychological symptoms only in general terms and then let the public decide whether the symptoms apply to a political figure.⁹

CHALLENGES TO THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Trump was elected president in large part because he successfully tapped into populist hostility toward globalism, and particularly the liberal international order that the United States took the lead in creating and sustaining since the end of World War II. That world order is called liberal because of the values it seeks to perpetuate, including democracy, respect for human rights, individual freedom, the rule of law, and open economic international relations. It is supported by a number of multi-national institutions that are designed to keep the peace and foster international economic stability, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund.

In addition, the United States created a system of alliances after World War II not only to deter aggression against the allied countries, but also to create a community of nations whose members did not fear one another. The alliances helped to prevent the revival of the nationalistic animosities that contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War, and which could prompt another major conflict if NATO or the European Union ever dissolved. For example, the security that NATO gives Germany makes it unnecessary for the Germans to recreate a large army, a move that would unsettle their neighbors. The United States also provides much of Japan’s security in order to preclude massive Japanese militarization, which would worry America’s other East Asians allies, particularly South Korea and the Philippines.

US presidents also have supported the United Nations’ multitudinous activities, including its worldwide peacekeeping actions and its humanitarian relief efforts with money and sometimes with soldiers. In addition, the United States has participated in the negotiation of a wide variety of international agreements. For example, in 2015, President Obama signed the Paris Climate Agreement, which committed the United States to curb carbon emissions that threaten the Earth’s biosphere. US presidents also have negotiated international agreements reducing the number of existing nuclear weapons and curbing their spread throughout the world.

To prevent another Great Depression and the ruinous trade wars that helped to trigger the outbreak of World War II, the United States took the lead in creating an open economic system. It has made possible the most rapid and prolonged economic expansion in world history. Even more importantly, the liberal international order provided the economic glue that binds together many nations, thereby making another global

war less likely. The liberal international order that was designed and maintained by US presidents since World War II is a blend of American idealism and realism that has largely succeeded in preserving Western values, promoting the prosperity and enhancing the security of its member nations, and preventing another global war.

The architects of the liberal international order believed that the expansion of open markets would lead not only to greater prosperity, but would also increase the number of democratic governments that respect human rights and the rule of law. But buffeted by the effects of the Great Recession that began in 2008, the liberal international order was shaken to its foundation by populist insurgencies during Obama's presidency. The spread of democracy and the advancement of human rights ground to a halt. And in many countries, including some in Eastern Europe, democracies were replaced by authoritarian governments that violated the human rights of their citizens.

To be sure, the populist insurgency was largely a reaction to serious flaws in the liberal world order. The argument that globalization permits workers to buy cheaper goods is small compensation for the tens of thousands who lost their jobs because their former employers shifted production overseas. In addition to manufacturing jobs migrating abroad, technological advances, particularly automation, eliminated workers and added to the widespread sense of economic insecurity. The suffering of displaced workers was compounded by the failure of democratic political leaders to provide job training and other programs that might have cushioned the blow for communities hurt by the expansion of imports.

In addition, most of the gains in income and wealth resulting from globalization have not been shared with the middle and lower classes. In the United States, the wages of workers in real terms have barely risen since the 1970s, while the wealth of the upper-income group has expanded enormously. Compounding the problem, beginning in that decade, the wealthy began to undercut America's social safety net by enacting regressive tax policies and underfunding programs that benefit most Americans, such as public schools and universities. The most recent example of this phenomenon was the \$1.5 trillion package of tax cuts passed by the Republican-controlled Congress and signed by President Trump in December 2017. Among other things, it trimmed spending on publicly financed health care as a way of covering the revenue lost by cutting corporate taxes.

Combined with the economic inequities and insecurity produced by globalization, which was brought to a head by the Great Recession, surging migration from the Middle East to Europe and from Latin America to the United States also did much to undermine domestic support for, and fuel populist hostility against, the key features of the liberal international order: free trade, open borders, immigration, multilateralism, military alliances, democracy, and the institutions and political leaders that support them. To populists, like Steve Bannon, Trump’s chief presidential campaign advisor, xenophobic nationalism is a better alternative to the liberal international order—even if it threatens democracy, basic freedoms, and the rule of law.¹⁰

Tapping into this populist sentiment, Trump claimed a mandate to attack the liberal international order and its institutions and to reassert American nationalism. He declared: “We’ve made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon.... From this day forward, it’s America first!”¹¹

TRUMP’S AMERICA FIRST POLICIES

During the first months of his presidency, Trump almost gleefully attempted to implement the America First philosophy. During his first meeting at NATO headquarters, in Brussels, on May 24, 2017, he criticized European leaders for not meeting their spending commitments to the alliance. While previous presidents expressed similar, justifiable complaints, Trump took them to a new level by refusing to pledge a continued US commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty. He called NATO “obsolete,” and warned that if the United States were not “reasonably reimbursed for the tremendous cost of protecting these massive nations with tremendous wealth,” he would be “absolutely prepared to tell those countries, ‘Congratulations, you will be defending yourself.’”¹²

In addition, Trump ended seventy years of US support for European integration by endorsing Britain’s planned exit from the European Union. He also praised right-wing European nationalists who seek to unravel the European Union, especially Russian President Vladimir Putin. Moreover, Trump not only refused to condemn continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine, he soft-pedaled—after having publicly invited—Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

In the Middle East, Trump added fuel to an inchoate but increasingly violent conflict between the Sunni-run Gulf kingdoms and a

countervailing Shiite-led coalition of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. He took the side of Saudi Arabia in its dispute with Qatar, apparently ignorant of the fact that the United States has a major air base in Qatar. He also approved the sale of more than \$100 billion worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia and embraced the young Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, whom the Iranians consider a hot head.

Moreover, Trump emphasized a closer alliance with Israel. To that end, he moved quickly to embrace Israel's hard-right prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, with whom Obama had a fraught relationship. He supported the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and decided to move the US embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. The embassy decision broke with an international consensus that called for the status of Jerusalem to be settled in peace talks with the Palestinians. Ironically, Trump received nothing in the way of concessions from Israel in return for his embassy decision. The UN General Assembly responded by rebuking the US decision by a vote of 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions. Trump reacted by threatening to cut off aid to any country that voted against the United States.¹³

Trump also withdrew the United States from a number of international agreements. One is the Paris Climate Agreement, which requires its signatories to curb their emission of greenhouse gases, the major human cause of global warming. Trump embraced isolationist voices who argue that the Paris agreement was a pernicious threat to the US economy and American sovereignty. However, Trump said he would adhere to the withdrawal process laid out in the Paris agreement, which Obama signed and most of the world has already ratified. That could take nearly four years to complete, meaning a final decision would be up to the American voters in the next presidential election.¹⁴

On June 16, 2017, Trump partially undid another of Obama's diplomatic legacies. He announced that he was reinstating travel and commercial restrictions on Cuba, which had been eased by the Obama administration in 2014 in an effort to liberalize the policies of the Cuba's communist government. Trump called Obama's policy "terrible and misguided" because it did nothing to end "communist oppression." As a result of Trump's action, American companies and citizens were barred from doing business with any firm controlled by the Cuban military or its intelligence or security services. However, under the directive, embassies in Washington and Havana will stay open and cruises and direct flights between the United States and Cuba will be protected under an

exception from the prohibition on transactions with military-controlled entities. In addition, Cuban Americans will continue to be allowed to travel freely to Cuba and send money to relatives there. Also left in place was a broad array of rules the Obama administration put in place to make it easier for American companies to do business in Cuba. Although Trump’s directive left much of Obama’s Cuban policy intact, critics argued that the president was returning to a strategy that had been a proven failure—that is, punishing Cuba—a policy that they said would embolden Cuban hard-liners who are opposed to moving their country toward democracy.¹⁵

TRUMP’S ATTACK ON THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM

Trump also abandoned US leadership in the international effort to liberalize trade. Immediately after his inauguration, he withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which Obama took the lead in negotiating. TPP was not only designed to expand trade among the nations of the Pacific Rim, but also to add more protection to US workers, farmers, and business people. In response, in March 2018, eleven other TPP nations created their own free trade zone, one that does not include the United States. Trump’s withdrawal from the TPP left other Pacific Rim countries less dependent on the United States for their trade and more susceptible to Chinese economic and political influence. As Robert J. Samuelson, a *Washington Post* economic affairs columnist, commented, “Rarely has the United States embraced a policy that, in contrast to the supporting rhetoric, is so contrary to its own interests.”¹⁶

Trump also called the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) “the worst trade deal in history,” and he threatened to abrogate the act if Mexico and Canada did not agree to give the United States better trade terms.¹⁷ But his demands on Canada and Mexico were so extreme that negotiations slowed to a crawl. Many have feared that US withdrawal from NAFTA would imperil commerce among the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and perhaps serve as a shock to the global supply chain.

On top of threatening to withdraw from NAFTA, Trump severely frayed US relations with Mexico by calling Mexican immigrants “criminals” and “rapists” who steal American jobs and threaten American lives.¹⁸ He promised to build a wall along the US-Mexican border—and force Mexico to pay for it. Mexico not only flatly refused to pay for any border wall, it warned that if Trump goes ahead with his threat to

abrogate NAFTA, continued US-Mexican security cooperation and collaboration in stopping the flow of illegal immigrants and drugs into the United States would be jeopardized. In the meantime, and without waiting to see if NAFTA issues could be resolved, Canada and Mexico concluded agreements with other trading partners. Both countries joined the new TPP and concluded trade agreements with the European Union as well as a number of Western hemispheric countries.¹⁹

In addition to Mexicans, Cubans, and other Latin Americans, Trump also alienated a host of African leaders by allegedly saying that the United States should not accept any more immigrants from “shit holes” like Haiti and African countries. In response, South Africa and Nigeria joined a chorus of nations condemning Trump’s inflammatory remarks, and Africa experts warned that the controversy threatened to set back US interests across the world’s fastest-growing continent.²⁰

TRUMP AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

During his first year in office, Trump also weakened the international effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. He refused to certify that the Iranians are abiding by the terms of the multinational agreement freezing Iran’s nuclear weapon program (formally called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), and he threatened to re-impose US sanctions on Iran if it did not renegotiate the international nuclear deal concluded in 2015. On May 8, 2018, Trump finally carried through with his threat and withdrew the United States from the Iran nuclear deal.

Trump also recommended that Japan and South Korea develop their own nuclear arsenals in response to North Korea’s nuclear program. More ominously, he threatened North Korea with nuclear destruction. Obviously, that threat only reinforced North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s determination to continue developing his country’s nuclear arsenal. During Trump’s first year in office, the North Koreans tested intercontinental ballistic missiles that they would need to deliver nuclear weapons on the United States. When Secretary of State Rex Tillerson attempted to get talks started early in the administration, the president said his secretary of state was “wasting his time.”²¹

Trump acted against another nuclear-armed state by suspending aid to Pakistan because of that country’s ambiguous support for the US war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Obama also had suspended US aid to the Pakistanis, but only temporarily because he feared weakening

Pakistan’s continued control over its nuclear arsenal in the face of a Taliban threat to seize it. In addition, by cutting off US aid, argued François Heisbourg, a French defense analyst, Trump was “pushing Pakistan into an exclusive relationship with China.”²²

Far more ominously, Trump approved a new nuclear strategy proposed by the Pentagon that would permit the military to use nuclear weapons in response to much narrower and limited circumstances, such as the use of biological weapons against the United States.²³ In addition, Trump not only preserved the Obama-initiated nuclear arsenal modernization program, he also approved a program to develop new “low-yield” nuclear weapons that critics charge will make them more usable and a nuclear war more likely.²⁴

Fearing that an impulsive Trump might unilaterally decide to use nuclear weapons, perhaps against North Korea, Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey and California Representative Ted Lieu, both Democrats, introduced a pair of bills that would prohibit a president from launching a nuclear first strike without a congressional declaration of war. Said Markey, “there has to be a firewall that is erected so that a single human being cannot impulsively launch nuclear weapons.” While hearings were held on the issue, nothing in the way of legislative action to restrain a president’s use of nuclear weapons occurred.²⁵

CHINA

In his first few weeks in office, Trump infuriated China by communicating directly with the president of Taiwan and by suggesting that he might not uphold the “one China” policy, which the United States has followed since the early 1970s.²⁶ However, he retreated from that stance in an attempt to win China’s support against North Korea. He invited Chinese President Xi Jinping to his Florida resort, where he showered Xi with fawning accolades and blamed the huge US trade deficits with China on Xi’s predecessors.

But after a year passed, during which time Xi did little to reverse North Korea’s nuclear program, Trump declared that the US trade deficit with China was unsustainable. On March 22, 2018, he announced that he was prepared to impose a 25% tariff increase on steel and aluminum imports in order to save American jobs in those industries. He also threatened to impose tariffs on China that would cost the Chinese as much as \$150 billion worth of export sales to the United States if they

did not end their unfair trade practices. China responded by announcing that if Trump imposed these tariff increases, it would impose a 25% tariff increase on imports of American-produced fruit, pork, wine, seamless steel pipes, and more than 100 other American products.²⁷

RUSSIA

Every US president since 1992 has come into office believing that, unlike his predecessor, he would be able to create and sustain a new and improved relationship with Russia. But just as Trump's predecessors had experienced, that did not happen. In spite of Trump's flattering remarks about Putin, and his own confidence that he could work out a "deal" with the Russian president, perhaps on Syria, his first year in office ended with US-Russian relations badly strained.

Moreover, congressional committees continued to investigate Russian intrusion into the American electoral process while Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller's agents pursued senior campaign officials to determine the extent of Trump's clandestine ties to Russia. Those ties became increasingly less secret as a result of leaks from disillusioned bureaucrats and the diligent work of news reporters. Congress and the State Department responded by voting to impose more sanctions on Russia. But, in another demonstration of Trump's pro-Russian bias, he initially did not put them into force.

However, as Russian scholar Angela Stent has noted, the real impediments to better US-Russian relations go far deeper than the latest revelations about Trump's clandestine activities with the Russians. Putin, she explains, wants the United States to recognize that Russia is once again a great power with a sphere of influence that incorporates the former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine.²⁸ Moreover, Putin also is diligently trying to destroy the US-led liberal international order, whose democratic values he sees as an existential threat to his repressive regime. As a result, Russian efforts to undermine democratic elections continued in Europe and could be repeated in the US congressional elections in fall of 2018.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Personally, Trump has ignored Russian violations of human rights as well as those of other repressive regimes. He took only cursory notice of the repeated arrests of the Russian dissident Alexei Navalny or the death of

the Chinese Nobel Prize winner and prisoner of conscience Liu Xiaobo. Nor did he object after the security detail of Turkish President Recep Erdogan beat American protesters when he visited Washington in April 2017. Trump also reportedly told Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte, who has used death squads to deal with offenders of local narcotics laws, that he was doing an “unbelievable job on the drug problem.”²⁹ He also invited Duterte to visit the White House, an invitation the Filipino president so far has not accepted.

As Sarah Margon, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch, points out, “All U.S. presidents have, to varying degrees, downplayed or even overlooked concerns about human rights in order to get things done with unsavory foreign partners. But none has seemed so eager as Trump to align with autocrats as a matter of course.” The result of losing the United States as a champion of human rights, the rule of law, and good governance, she warns, “will further encourage governments to treat their citizens poorly, confident that no meaningful rebuke will follow.”³⁰

This outcome was actualized in the refusal of the Trump administration to do anything to end the genocide in Myanmar (Burma). That country’s army has engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingyas, a predominantly Muslim minority, killing thousands of them and forcing over 700,000 to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. Although Secretary of State Tillerson said “the world just can’t stand idly by and be witness to [these] atrocities,” the administration passed up an opportunity to rally Myanmar’s neighbors against the atrocities when Trump attended a summit of Southeast Asian nations in the Philippines in November 2017.³¹

TRUMP’S NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM

Ironically, but not surprisingly, Trump’s chief national security advisors as his second year in office began—Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, and National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster—are not populists; they are internationalists. But neither are they prominent members of the Republican foreign policy community. (In March 2016, during the presidential election campaign, 122 Republican national security professionals signed an open letter charging that Trump was unqualified to be president. None of the signatories received positions within his administration.)³² Tillerson was a businessman, the former chairman of Exxon Corporation, while Mattis and

McMaster are generals. Nevertheless, Tillerson, Mattis, and McMaster adhered—with some significant exceptions—to the so-called bipartisan foreign policy consensus that has guided US policy since the end of the Cold War. In so doing, they had to battle Bannon and other extreme nationalists in the National Security Council who pressured Trump to adhere to the America First agenda.

Mattis proved to be the most influential of the internationalist advisors. A retired four-star general whom Trump admires and respects, Mattis has expressed views contrary to those of the president and avoided his wrath for doing so. Among the cases in which he has done so, he succeeded in impressing on the president the inefficacy of torture and the consequences of military action against Iran or North Korea. Mattis—with the assistance of McMaster, General John Kelly, Trump's chief of staff, and Vice President Mike Pence—persuaded Trump to send an additional 3900 troops to Afghanistan, raising the total there to 17,000 troops, and to keep a small contingent of US forces in Iraq, despite the president's inclination to withdraw from those countries.³³ Trump also approved an indefinite extension of the US military presence in eastern Syria, even though ISIS was driven out of the country. Tillerson said the continued US presence in Syria was necessary to prevent the return of ISIS and to keep pressure on Syrian President Bashar Assad to resign. But another US motive was a desire to check Iran's growing influence in the region.³⁴

Mattis also consistently, but unsuccessfully, challenged Trump's plan to slash the diplomatic budget by one-third. "If you don't fund the State Department fully," he warned, "then I need to buy more ammunition." No doubt, Mattis was pleased when Congress, in March 2018, ignored Trump's plan and approved only a modest cut in the State Department's funding. Nevertheless, the Trump administration declined or failed to appoint senior officials and ambassadors to critical places, like Germany, Turkey, Brussels, Egypt, and Seoul. Attempting to justify the deliberate shrinking of America's foreign service, Trump quipped, "I'm the only one that matters."³⁵

On the other hand, Mattis had little difficulty persuading the president to increase military spending. Trump's budget for fiscal year 2018 called for military spending to increase by 10% during the following five years, for a total of over \$3.6 trillion.³⁶ Mattis planned to use the additional money to prepare the military for a potential conflict with Russia or China, which are now considered major challenges in the administration's Mattis-generated National Security Statement (NSS).

“PRINCIPLED REALISM”

The strategy described in the NSS is characterized as “principled realism.” It is called “principled” because it professes a continued commitment to advancing American values abroad. It is considered realistic because it acknowledges the centrality of power in international politics, identifies key US national interests, and asserts that cooperation among sovereign states, rather than multinational institutions, is the best hope for global peace and stability.

To be sure, the NSS does lament “the increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order.” But it is not the *liberal* international order that it is concerned about, but rather the *security* international order. While professing a continued commitment to America’s traditional ideals, there is no promise to support those who share those ideals abroad. Tillerson said that advocating human rights “creates obstacles” to US security and economic interests. The central challenge to those interests, the NSS contends, is “the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by revisionist powers”—primarily China and Russia—which are “undercutting its principles” and the “rules of the road.” In addition, “rogue” states, like North Korea, the NSS adds, are considered as destabilizing regional stability “through their pursuit of nuclear weapons or sponsorship of terrorism.”³⁷

Unlike Trump, who initially called NATO obsolete, Mattis emphasizes that the United States must strengthen its alliances. In remarks introducing the NSS on January 19, 2018, Mattis said, “Working by, with, and through allies who carry their equitable share allows us to amass the greatest possible strength.” He added, “a strong and free Europe, bound by shared principles of democracy, national sovereignty, and commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is vital to our security. The alliance will deter Russian adventurism, defeat terrorists who seek to murder innocents, and address the arc of instability building on NATO’s periphery.”³⁸

Accordingly, the NSS makes the case for active US engagement in Europe, noting that “a strong and free Europe is of vital importance to the United States.” And despite Trump’s repeated criticism of NATO and his tough language on burden sharing, actual US support for NATO remains unchanged. US defense spending in Europe increased by \$1.4 billion in 2018, a new American-led battalion is stationed in Poland,

and American forces continue to participate in major European military exercises.

In addition, the NSS promises to uphold the “free and open international order.” It rejects a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and a Chinese one in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, the United States continues the non-recognition policy toward Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, and the US Navy still carries out freedom-of-navigation exercises in the South China Sea.³⁹

Nevertheless, Trump’s administration has refused to uphold the global multilateral economic system. The NSS contends that it no longer serves American interests. Instead, the president favors protectionism and bilateral deals, rather than multilateral arrangements like the TPP and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Community.

Mattis’s NSS is a schizophrenic document that tries to blend America’s traditional national security concerns with Trump’s version of the America First program. It has removed the word “liberal” from the liberal international order and instead defined it as an international *security* order. As a result, predict two analysts, Erik Brattberg, director of the Europe Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Michael Kimmage, a professor of history at the Catholic University of America, “the administration will continue to defend—aggressively perhaps—the existing security order against great power competition from China and Russia and threats from rogue states like Iran and North Korea. Yet it will not protect or even aspire to perpetuate the liberal ideals—including respect for human rights and the advancement of freedom and democracy—of the liberal international order.”⁴⁰ Even worse, by associating with the leaders of repressive governments and continuing to attack the press, the judicial system, and his political opponents in the United States, Trump undermines the foundations of democracy not only globally, but also in the United States.⁴¹

A NEW NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM

Although Trump gained experience in dealing with international affairs in his first seventeen months in office, his knowledge of the subject remained very shallow. “He knows very little about the world, about history, about the policy details,” said Eric S. Edelman, a former under secretary of defense for policy in the George W. Bush administration,

and he appears to have little interest in deepening it. He reportedly does not read documents, such as the National Security Strategy, nor does he delve into books. He prefers to talk to people in person or by phone, and he gets much of the news from the Fox channel and then acts on his own instincts. Nevertheless, Edelman adds, “he does have strong convictions and they are remarkably durable and apparently impervious to contrary evidence.” He continues to believe that “his predecessors were gullible, and that he will do better; that allies have exploited the United States, and must pay back their debts; that free trade is bad; and that military force should be used sparingly,” but that “we should be strong and scary and that will make people afraid to screw with us.”⁴² To that can be added his determination to reverse anything Obama did and his reluctance to criticize Putin.

As a new president, however, Trump was inclined to listen to his top advisors, but as his self-confidence grew, he listened even less, and at times not at all. Moreover, he was less willing to put up with advisors who disagreed with him. On March 13, 2018, he fired Secretary of State Tillerson and replaced him with CIA Director Michael Pompeo. Tillerson not only had called the president a “f...ing moron” during a meeting with colleagues at the Pentagon, he had differed with him on a number of issues, among them, the Paris climate accord and the Iran nuclear deal, both of which Tillerson wanted to preserve and Trump did not. In addition, Tillerson favored negotiations with North Korea at a time when the president still opposed them. Tillerson also called for a much stronger US reaction to Russian cyber-aggression, which Trump refused to even consider, most probably because he feared it would delegitimize his election as president.

By contrast, Pompeo has been an enthusiastic defender of the president’s policies, especially his opposition to the Iran nuclear deal. However, he is much more skeptical than Trump about North Korea’s willingness to abandon its nuclear arsenal. And, as C.I.A. director, Pompeo said he believed US intelligence assessments that Putin was behind the effort to influence the 2016 election, at a time the president was dismissing those reports as a hoax.⁴³

On March 22, 2018, Trump announced that McMaster would be replaced as national security advisor by John Bolton. For months, McMaster had struggled to impose order on a president who resisted the sort of discipline customary in the military. McMaster succeeded in removing Bannon and a number of other nationalists from the National

Security Council, but he could not get Trump to abandon key features of his America First agenda. McMaster argued against tearing up the nuclear deal with Iran and insisted on keeping US forces in Afghanistan. He also warned the president not to congratulate Putin after his reelection to the Russian presidency on March 20, but Trump did it anyway, and then was infuriated when the episode was leaked to the press.⁴⁴

Bolton, who served briefly as George W. Bush's U.N. ambassador, is an outspoken advocate of military action, particularly against Iran and North Korea. The Republican-controlled Senate refused to confirm him for the U.N. position in 2005 because of his hard-line views, compelling Bush to appoint him while the Senate was in recess. Bolton was serving as a military analyst on Fox News when Trump gave him the national security advisor post. Mattis, who had acted with Tillerson and McMaster in attempting to restrain Trump's more bellicose tendencies, told colleagues that he would find it difficult to work with Bolton.⁴⁵

TRUMP “UNLEASHED”

Apparently less restrained by national security advisors, Trump made a number of snap decisions without much, if any, thought for the consequences. For example, on March 8, 2018, without much previous staff consultation, he announced that he had accepted North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s invitation for a face-to-face meeting. Almost two weeks later, on March 22, Trump took the first step toward a potential tariff war with China by announcing that he was prepared to impose tariff increases on Chinese exports if the Chinese did not end their unfair trade practices. Previous US presidents were frustrated in their efforts to end China’s cheating primarily because they did not want to trigger a ruinous trade war with that country. It remains to be seen if Trump’s willingness to run that risk will be any more successful in changing China’s international economic behavior than the much less risky—but unsuccessful—efforts of his predecessors.

Trump’s impulsivity is often compounded by his inconsistency. He can, and often does, change his mind quickly, and then changes it back to his original position. For example, on April 3, he told reporters that he wanted to withdraw the remaining 2000 US troops in Syria as well as cut more than \$200 million in recovery aid to ISIS-damaged areas. At the same time that he was saying this, his point man for combating the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, was making the case for more aid and

proclaiming that the US troops would remain in Syria until its mission to destroy ISIS was finished. After a hastily called meeting with Mattis and other key generals the next day, Trump backed off and said the troops could stay another six months.⁴⁶

Yet one of the most astounding examples of Trump’s inconsistency has been his position on Russia. For almost his entire first year in office, he refused to do much to prevent Russian interference in the American electoral process. He called the findings of US intelligence agencies that the Russians did in fact interfere with the 2016 presidential election a “hoax.” However, on February 16, 2018, the FBI’s indictment of 13 Russians for engaging in cyber attacks on the American electoral process took much of the steam out of the president’s hoax charge. Moreover, a little over a week later, on February 27, Admiral Michael S. Rogers, the outgoing head of US Cyber Command, told Congress that he still was not granted enough authority to fight back against the Kremlin’s meddling. He said that the Russians “haven’t paid a price … that’s sufficient to get them to change their behavior.”⁴⁷

Perhaps prompted by increasing pressure to do something about the Russian threat, in the following month Trump appeared to take a harder line toward Russia. After Russian agents were accused of poisoning a former Russian spy and his daughter in London, the Trump administration imposed additional, albeit minimal, sanctions on select Russian entities. That was followed, on March 26, by the expulsion of 23 Russian diplomats. Nevertheless, Russia’s aggressive activities did not stop Trump from congratulating Putin after he won reelection to the Russian presidency a week earlier. But in a surprising turnabout, on April 6, Trump permitted the Treasury Department to impose sanctions on 7 of Russia’s richest men with close ties to Putin and 17 top government officials as a way of punishing Russia for its interference in the 2016 US election and other acts of aggression. Said the president, “We cannot allow those seeking to sow confusion, discord, and rancor to be successful.”⁴⁸

This move was followed, on April 8, by a Trump tweet condemning Russia—even singling out Vladimir Putin by name—for supporting the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, whose army the previous day used chemical weapons that killed over 40 civilians and injured about 500 others, including women and children. In response, during the evening of April 13, Trump announced that the United States, France, and Britain had launched air strikes against Syrian chemical weapon installations. The attacks, which risked military engagement with Russian forces still

in that country, were a major departure from the president's expressed desire of two weeks earlier to withdraw US forces from that country.⁴⁹ However, when Nikki R. Haley, the US ambassador to the United Nations, announced that new sanctions would be imposed on Russia for supporting Syria's use of chemical weapons against its own people. Trump publicly contradicted her and refused to authorize the move.⁵⁰ At a bare minimum, the episode again demonstrated Trump's inconsistency, but also his reluctance to go too far in punishing Putin for his actions.

TRUMP AND IRAN

On May 8, 2018, Trump announced that he was withdrawing the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear deal with Iran. He signed a presidential memorandum imposing the "highest level" of economic sanctions on Iran, subject to certain 90-day and 180-day "wind-down periods."⁵¹

There were a number of reasons why Trump pulled out of the Iran agreement. For one, he called it the "worst deal ever."⁵² He said its expiration date—2030—left open the door to an eventual Iranian nuclear bomb and did not address the current threat of Iran's ballistic missiles nor its support for terrorist groups in the Middle East. Trump had delayed his decision to withdraw from the deal for almost a year and a half in part because Tillerson, McMaster, and Mattis had urged its continuation in order to maintain the freeze on Iran's nuclear weapon program for at least another dozen years. But with the departure of Tillerson and McMaster, and their replacement by the more hawkish Pompeo and Bolton, Trump faced less internal resistance to the move. In addition, Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu urged him to abrogate the deal.

No doubt, Trump also was eager to tear up Obama's proudest foreign policy achievement. He already had withdrawn from his predecessor's TPP and his Paris Climate Agreement. The Iran nuclear deal was just the latest of Obama's achievements to be disassembled by his successor. However, Trump said he was prepared to negotiate an entirely new agreement with the Iranians, rather than try to make improvements in Obama's nuclear deal. He even predicted that the Iranians would be rushing back to the table begging for a new deal, one that would be much better for the United States than the one signed by Obama.

Yet the Iranians were highly unlikely to acquiesce to the demands that the Trump administration expected to satisfy in order to get a new deal. Those demands, 12 in number, were spelled out by Secretary of State Pompeo on May 21, 2018. Among them, Iran was required to stop nuclear enrichment, end the proliferation of ballistic missiles and the development of nuclear-capable missile systems, and allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to have “unqualified access to all sites throughout the entire country.” In exchange for Iran meeting these demands, Pompeo said the United States would be prepared to end “the principal components of every one of our sanctions against the regime,” as well as re-establish full diplomatic and commercial relationships and allow Iran to have “advanced technology.”⁵³

Many commentators considered it difficult to imagine that the Iranians would comply with many, if not most, of Pompeo’s demands. In fact, some observers thought they were designed to be unacceptable because the Trump administration’s unstated goal is the overthrow of Iran’s theocratic regime. Attempting to achieve that goal, analyst Paul Pillar argues, would be foolhardy. He points out that George W. Bush’s overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq “was a prelude to a long, costly, and highly destabilizing war” in which of thousands of people were killed, trillions of dollars were spent, and Iraq as well as Syria became the ongoing battleground between Sunnis and Shiites, triggering a mass exodus of refugees to Europe that still destabilizes the European Union.⁵⁴

Ironically, Trump predicted that his tough line with Iran would strengthen his hand as he prepared to meet North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, on June 12, to begin negotiating the surrender of his nuclear weapons. However, critics asked, why would the North Koreans trust the United States to adhere to any future agreement with them when Trump so easily had abandoned the one with Iran?

THE EUROPEAN REACTION

In addition to decreasing the international credibility of the United States, Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal widened the split between the United States and its European allies. European businesses and banks had been eager to begin commercial activities in Iran with the lifting of sanctions. But with the withdrawal of the United States from the agreement, European businesses were likely to avoid doing business in Iran for fear

of risking sanctions that could keep them out of the much more lucrative American markets.⁵⁵

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, said that the EU would remain a party to the Iran deal as long as the Iranians continue to implement its nuclear-related commitments, which the International Atomic Energy Agency certifies they have done. However, with Trump unwilling to exempt the Europeans from the imposition of secondary sanctions on parties sticking to the deal, European businesses will pull out of Iran, thereby removing much of the incentive for the Iranians to remain in the deal. With the deal's collapse looking probable, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, announced that Iran would begin to increase its nuclear enrichment capacity. If the Iranians decide to resume their nuclear weapon program, the risks of military action against Iran's nuclear facilities by the United States or Israel, or both, are bound to increase.⁵⁶

TRADE WARS

Iran was not the only issue straining the European Union's relationship with the Trump administration. On May 31, 2018, Trump imposed on the European Union—as well as Canada, Mexico, and Japan—the 25% tariff on steel and 10% tariff on aluminum that he had first announced in March but delayed imposition while talks proceeded. Trump said he imposed the tariffs because the talks with the allies were taking too long. But it is also likely that the president was trying to burnish his tough-on-trade image after substantial criticism that he had gone easy on the Chinese telecommunications company ZTE. That company was identified as a security risk by US intelligence agencies. It had flagrantly violated US sanctions against the export of advanced technology to Iran and North Korea. Nevertheless, the Trump administration said that it would let ZTE continue to buy American semiconductors and other components, the president said, in order to protect Chinese jobs. It seems more than coincidental that the president's concession came shortly after China had awarded trademarks to his daughter Ivanka.⁵⁷ However, administration officials said the president's concession would help defuse tensions with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who personally asked Trump to intervene to save ZTE, and whom the president relied on to help pave the way for the summit meeting with the North Korean leader on June 12.⁵⁸

In addition, Trump appeared to be using the threat of tariffs to force America’s trading partners to make concessions to the United States. This approach had been somewhat successful with South Korea, a major steel exporter. The South Koreans were exempted from the US tariff increase in exchange for agreeing to open their market to American-made automobiles. Trump hoped to use the South Korean agreement as a template for extracting similar concessions from the European Union. The Europeans would be exempted from the US metals tariffs if they reduced their own duties on American autos and limited their exports of steel. If they refused to do so, the Trump administration announced it was considering imposing a tariff on \$350 billion of imported automobiles and parts and levies on \$150 billion worth of Chinese goods.⁵⁹

European leaders—as well as those of Canada, Mexico, and Japan—were infuriated by Trump’s tariffs, which they considered to be demeaning treatment from a long-standing ally. They were particularly angered by Trump’s argument that the tariffs were necessary to preserve US national security, an allegation that permitted him to impose tariffs without congressional approval. “The idea that we are somehow a national security threat to the United States,” Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau complained, “is quite frankly insulting and unacceptable.”⁶⁰

Instead of buckling under to Trump’s tariff threats, the European Union, as well as Canada and Mexico, quickly imposed their own retaliatory tariffs on American imports. The European tariffs were aimed at key Republican leaders in the hope that they would pressure the president to abandon his tariff war. They included a tariff on bourbon, made in Kentucky, the home state of Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican majority leader, and a tariff on motorcycles, which are made by Harley-Davidson in Wisconsin, the home of Republican House Speaker Paul D. Ryan. The E.U. further said it would challenge the US decision at the World Trade Organization.⁶¹

Canada announced that it would impose retaliatory tariffs on everything from American toilet paper to ballpoint pens. On June 5, Mexico imposed tariffs on \$3 billion worth of US exports, such as pork, whiskey, cheese, and agricultural products. American farmers, in particular, complained that the Mexican tariffs would devastate US agriculture. Said Angela Hoffman, deputy director of Farmers For Free Trade, “farmers need certainty and open markets to make ends meet.” Tariff reprisals from Canada and Mexico, if they escalate, would hit the

US economy even harder than those from the EU. Mexico alone buys almost as many US goods as all of Europe.⁶²

The Trump administration also threw yet another complication into the fractious trade talks with Canada and Mexico. It said that it was prepared to abandon NAFTA and instead negotiate separate agreements with each country. This news came soon after Vice President Pence had said that the administration wanted a “sunset clause” in the agreement, that is, a five-year limit on the duration of NAFTA unless the parties voted to renew it. Neither proposal was acceptable to the Mexicans or the Canadians. However, on June 9, Trudeau said he was willing to discuss a compromise on the sunset clause. In the meantime, the NAFTA talks remained in impasse over significant provisions, including manufacturing rules for autos.⁶³

THE G7 SUMMIT

Matters came to a boiling point between Trump and America’s major allies at the Quebec meeting of the Group of Seven (G7) leaders on June 8–9. The G7 consists of the world’s seven largest advanced economies. They include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, and the United States. Trump came to the meeting reluctantly, showed up late, and left one day early. Once there, he demanded that the other G7 members remove their “ridiculous and unacceptable” tariffs on American exports.⁶⁴

However, economist Paul Krugman, among others, argued that it would be hard to lower already very low tariff rates. Tariff rates for Canada as well as the European Union average about three percent, roughly the same as the United States. True, each country does impose special interest tariffs that are very high, such as the 270% Canadian tariff on certain American dairy products, which Trump blasted at Quebec, and the 25% tariff the United States imposes on imports of light trucks. But, asserted Krugman, “the overall picture is that all of the G7 members have very open markets.”⁶⁵

Trump also stunned the other leaders of the G7 by recommending, in an off-hand remark, that Russia should be readmitted to the group. Russia was expelled from the G8 as a result of its invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014. In a blunt retort to the president, Prime Minister Theresa May of Britain said that Russia would have to change its behavior before she would support welcoming that country back into

the diplomatic fold. Peter Westmacott, a former British ambassador to Washington, said that Trump’s Russian readmission proposal demonstrated that the president “is readier to give a pass to countries that pose a real threat to Western values and security than to America’s traditional allies.”⁶⁶

Ironically, but not surprisingly, as Trump was clashing with European leaders about a Russian return to the Group of 7, his director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, was warning a French audience that “Russian actions are purposeful and premeditated and they represent an all-out assault by Vladimir Putin on the rule of law, Western ideals and democratic norms.” He added that “the Russians are actively seeking to divide our alliance, and we must not allow that to happen.”⁶⁷ Added Senator Ben Sasse, Republican of Nebraska, “Putin is not our friend and he is not the president’s buddy. He is a thug using Soviet-style aggression to wage a shadow war against America, and our leaders should act like it.”⁶⁸ Some commentators expressed their belief that Trump’s America First policies were helping Putin achieve his goals of dividing the West and destroying democracy. In this vein, Susan Rice, Obama’s last national security adviser, wrote that although “there is no evidence that Mr. Putin is dictating American policy, it’s hard to imagine how he could do much better, even if he were.”⁶⁹

As if the tariff and Russian imbroglios were not enough to divide the allies at Quebec, Trump quarreled with them over the wording of the communiqué that was issued at the end of the summit. Trump’s delegation objected to the inclusion of a number of words, including the insertion of the term “the rules-based international order.” Finally, the Trump team accepted a compromise wording that expressed support for “a” rules-based order, rather than “the” rules-based order. Yet when the communiqué was released on the last night of the summit, Trump disavowed it. The president accused Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau of making “false statements” at an end-of-summit televised news conference. He also called Trudeau “dishonest and weak.” But all the prime minister said was that Canada “will not be pushed around” and would respond to American tariffs with tariffs of its own.⁷⁰

The next morning, Peter Navarro, the president’s trade adviser, declared on “Fox News Sunday” that “there’s a special place in hell for any foreign leader that engages in bad-faith diplomacy with President Donald J. Trump and then tries to stab him in the back on the way out the door.”⁷¹ Two days later, Navarro apologized for the harshness of

his words, but not their meaning. Nevertheless, the damage already had been done. The German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, told reporters that he was not surprised by Trump's attack. "We have seen this with the climate agreement or the Iran deal. In a matter of seconds, you can destroy trust with 280 Twitter characters. To build that up again will take much longer."⁷²

AMERICA ALONE

The end result of Trump's verbal barrage at the Quebec summit and immediately afterward was the isolation of the United States from its major allies. In fact, Europeans suggested renaming the G7 the G6 plus 1, to indicate the departure of the United States. Trump not only did not seem to mind, it appeared that he intended to destroy the international order because he believes it favors the allies and China. But the other members of the G7 gave no sign of buckling under to Trump's threats and they strongly supported Trudeau. French President Emmanuel Macron reacted in an especially acerbic tweet, saying "the American President may not mind being isolated, but neither do we mind signing a 6 country agreement if need be. Because these 6 countries represent values, and they represent an economic market which has the weight of history behind it and which is now a true international force."⁷³ The Europeans had already signed trade agreements with Canada and Mexico that did not include the United States. But, obviously, a trade war with the United States, if it came to pass, would severely hurt all of the trading partners and possibly touch off an economic depression, as did the tariff wars of the 1930s.

America's isolation from its trading allies not only served Russia's objectives but also those of China. G7 leaders had hoped to use the Quebec meeting to formulate a joint strategy to combat China's trade inequities. Instead, they wound up fighting over tariffs with the United States, China's largest trading partner. Observed Bonnie Glaser of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Beijing can't believe its luck. The isolation of the United States serves to reinforce China's narrative that the United States is an unreliable partner, and it helps advance Beijing's goals of weakening governance mechanisms like the G-7 that don't include China."⁷⁴

THE TRUMP-KIM JONG-UN SINGAPORE SUMMIT

Trump was eager to leave the G7 summit, not only to get away from the allies, but also to travel to Singapore, where he was to meet with North Korea’s dictator Kim Jong-un on June 12. The rushed summit that day proved to be more about pomp than substance. It began with a 12-second handshake between the two leaders and a one-on-one meeting with interpreters only. The introductory talks were followed by an expanded bilateral meeting in which Trump and Kim were joined by their key advisors. On the US side, they were Secretary of State Pompeo, National Security Adviser John Bolton, and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly.

The meeting produced a largely symbolic joint statement in which both parties promised to improve US-North Korean relations and “build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” The North Koreans also reaffirmed their commitment to work toward “the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.” Both sides also promised to collaborate in recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified. The joint statement reaffirmed Trump’s commitment to providing security guarantees to North Korea. Finally, the statement said that follow-up negotiations would take place between Pompeo and an undetermined high-level North Korean official.⁷⁵

In a news conference following his last session with Kim, Trump announced—without consulting the South Koreans in advance—the end of the joint US-South Korea military exercise scheduled for August. He also expressed his hope that the 28,000 US troops defending South Korea could eventually be withdrawn, saying their continued presence was “expensive” and “provocative.”⁷⁶

Returning to Washington on the following day, Trump proclaimed on Twitter that North Korea is “no longer a nuclear threat.” He added, “President Obama said that North Korea was our biggest and most dangerous problem. No longer. Sleep well tonight!” But critics pointed out that North Korea did not give up any of its estimated 60 nuclear warheads or ballistic missiles, nor agree to dismantle any of its 141 known sites devoted to the production or use of weapons of mass destruction, other than blowing up a test site.⁷⁷

Furthermore, two of the most basic issues continued to divide the two countries. One was the terms and timing under which North Korea would surrender its nuclear arsenal. Another was how—and indeed, whether—denuclearization would be verified. Pompeo said that the word “‘complete’ encompasses ‘verifiable’ in the minds of everyone concerned. One can’t completely denuclearize without validating, authenticating—you pick the word.” Nevertheless, verification is bound to be one of the thorniest problems to resolve considering that the locations of many of North Korea’s nuclear sites are unknown, and Kim’s regime is one of the world’s most secretive. Pompeo also told reporters that the Trump administration hoped to complete the “major disarmament” of North Korea within the next two and one-half years, although experts have said that completely unwinding North Korea’s nuclear program could take 10–15 years.⁷⁸

Some critics pointed to North Korea’s record of non-compliance with previous nuclear disarmament agreements. Bruce Klingner, a Korea expert at the Heritage Foundation and a former C.I.A. analyst, said the joint statement did not even commit North Korea to do as much as it promised in deals negotiated in 1994 and 2005—and then failed to adhere to them. “It’s weaker than its predecessors,” he said, “it’s not worth the hype that’s being accrued to it.”⁷⁹

Particularly ominous is the possibility that Kim Jong-un will insist on sticking to the sequence in which the conditions are fulfilled. The joint statement listed them in this order: (1) establish mutual “relations”; (2) build a “lasting and stable peace regime”; and (3) “work toward complete denuclearization.” Just as words matter, so does their order, argues Robert Carlin, a veteran CIA and State Department analyst. Denuclearization, Carlin thinks, will only take place—if ever—once the other two conditions are met. That was evident in Kim’s public message on his way to Singapore, in which he listed these same three points in the same order.⁸⁰

Moreover, as analyst Philip Orchard points out, North Korea has not expressed its willingness to surrender any nuclear weapons, particularly within the 2.5-year timeline Pompeo said the administration expected to see significant North Korean denuclearization. Orchard thinks that North Korea’s view of denuclearization is the same held by the United States when it signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1968, which requires nuclear states to pursue disarmament at some point in an indefinite future.⁸¹ However, Trump dismissed such concerns and expressed his confidence that, despite past North Korean failings, Kim Jong-un would meet his commitment to denuclearize.⁸²

Yet it is doubtful that the United States will have the leverage to bring about complete, verifiable, and irreversible nuclear disarmament by North Korea anytime soon. Although Trump promised that sanctions would remain on North Korea until its denuclearization was completed, China said that with North Korea now at the negotiating table, sanctions could be eased. Furthermore, Trump would face almost certain opposition from China, South Korea, and the international community if he again threatened to launch a US military strike against North Korea if it failed to carry through with its promise to denuclearize.

However, Orchard believes a tacit deal short of complete North Korean denuclearization is possible. Considering the unlikelihood of North Korea surrendering its nuclear weapons and the unwillingness of the United States to go to war to destroy them, Orchard thinks a “freeze-freeze” may be all that is obtainable. Under such an arrangement, North Korea would refrain from testing missiles, and especially intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking the United States, while continuing to make occasional and symbolic concessions that sustain a sense of momentum toward denuclearization. The United States, for its part, would refrain from attacking North Korea, while matching North Korean concessions with an easing of US sanctions. In effect, this solution would resemble the phased approach that Trump said he was willing to accept, but it also would require at least tacit US acceptance of a nuclear-armed North Korea for the indefinite future. Of course, whether Trump is able and willing to accept such an arrangement remains to be seen.⁸³

THE TRADE WAR WITH CHINA

Basking in the glow of the Singapore summit, Trump resumed his trade war by focusing on China. During a round of talks in Beijing in early June, the Chinese offered to make nearly \$70 billion worth of purchases of American-manufactured goods, natural gas, oil, coal, soybeans, and other agricultural products—which was far short of the \$200 billion worth of goods that Trump wanted them to buy. But China’s offer was conditional on the Trump administration not proceeding with tariffs on \$50 billion worth of Chinese goods. However, on June 15, the administration announced that it would impose tariffs on \$50 billion worth of Chinese products. President Trump charged that trade between the two countries had been “very unfair, for a very long time.” He added, “These

tariffs are essential to prevent further unfair transfers of American technology and intellectual property to China, which will protect American jobs.”⁸⁴ The White House also was preparing a plan to restrict Chinese investments in the United States and place stricter limitations on the types of advanced US technology that can be exported to China country. The restrictions were planned to go into effect shortly after June 30. China quickly responded that day by imposing tariffs on \$50 billion worth of American goods including beef, poultry, tobacco, and cars.⁸⁵ The Chinese Ministry of Commerce also stated that “all the economic and trade achievements previously negotiated by the two parties will also be invalid.”⁸⁶

American business leaders were alarmed by the possibility of an escalated tariff war with China as well as with America’s allies. Economists said the tariffs would drive up prices for American consumers and particularly for businesses that depend on China for parts used in making other goods in the United States. The effects also would fall unevenly on American farmers who export much of their crops to China. And even Trump’s Council of Economic Advisers concluded that the tariffs would hurt economic growth in the United States.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, as Trump ended his seventeenth month in office, he was planning to ratchet up the trade war further. In response to the added Chinese tariffs, he told his trade representative, Robert Lighthizer, to target an additional \$200 billion in Chinese goods for 10% tariffs. If the Chinese retaliate with additional tariffs on American products, Trump said he was prepared to place additional tariffs on another \$200 billion worth of Chinese products. That would bring to \$450 billion the total value of Chinese products exposed to new US tariffs, which represents 89% of the total value of China’s exports to the United States. Said Wendy Cutler, a former US trade negotiator, the president is “willing to totally close our market to their exports. ... There are going to be serious consequences.”⁸⁸

IDEALISM AND REALISM, FROM GEORGE H. W. BUSH TO DONALD TRUMP

In dealing with the international problems facing the United States during the post-Cold War years, the first four presidents of that era—George H. W. Bush (1989–1993), William “Bill” Clinton (1993–2001), George W. Bush (2001–2009), and Barack Obama (2009–2017)—attempted

to blend realistic considerations with American ideals, some with more success than others. All of these presidents tried to protect and advance what they perceived to be US national interests abroad without abandoning American values in the process. Although US national interests were almost always preeminent in the consideration of these presidents, they usually attempted to drape them with American ideals, such as freedom and democracy. For the most part, Trump’s predecessors realized that realism unhinged from ideals is not attractive to the American people, while idealism not supported by realistic considerations is not only naïve, but often leads to costly misadventures.

George H. W. Bush came the closest to conducting a purely realistic foreign policy. The preservation of US national interests was his lodestone—even if it meant ignoring American values while doing so. To be sure, Bush upheld the liberal international order—as far as it did not threaten US interests. He cooperated with the United Nations when it was possible to do so, such as during the first war with Iraq, but ignored the U.N. when he thought that was necessary, such as overthrowing Noriega in Panama.

Clinton, on the other hand, sought to put more emphasis on promoting American values than his predecessor. He believed that the expansion of democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe, and especially in Russia, would enhance the chances of preserving peace in Europe. Democracies, he believed, do not make war on one another. Yet he expected too much of countries that had been ruled by communists for decades, and in many cases continued to be ruled by former communists after the dissolution of the Soviet empire. In short, his expectation that Russia and East European countries would accept Western values totally was unrealistic.

George W. Bush endeavored to be more realistic than Clinton. But he launched an unnecessary war with Iraq in 2003 that, with Saddam Hussein’s overthrow, created a power vacuum in the Middle East that Iran tried to fill. The damage caused by Bush’s Iraq invasion was compounded by his attempt to disguise that folly by promising to bring democracy to the Middle East, a promise that was even more unrealistic than Clinton’s ambition to spread democracy to Eastern Europe.

Believing that Bush’s decision to invade Iraq was a disaster, Barack Obama entered the White House determined to withdraw US forces from that country as well as Afghanistan as soon as possible. Only belatedly did he realize that US withdrawal would create a military vacuum

in both countries, one that was soon partially filled by ISIS in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan. As a result, he was compelled to reintroduce large contingents of US military forces in both countries to prevent them from being conquered by the jihadists.

While the first four presidents of the post-Cold War era attempted to give precedence to what they conceived to be the national interests of the United States, again to a varying degree, they also upheld an international order that promoted democracy, free enterprise, open trade, and respect for human rights.

In an attempt to expand international trade and investment, the first President Bush negotiated the North America Free Trade Agreement in 1992. President Clinton pushed it through Congress and, along with the second President Bush and President Obama, defended it against strenuous criticism. All of these presidents also tried to expand trade with Asiatic and Pacific Rim countries as well as Europe, culminating in Obama's negotiation of the TPP.

The first four presidents of the post-Cold War era also upheld, again in varying degrees, the system of US alliances created after World War II. The first president Bush relied heavily on help from NATO countries during the Persian Gulf War, and Clinton received assistance from NATO countries during the US military interventions in the Balkans. George W. Bush, on the other hand, strained US-NATO relations to an unprecedented degree by criticizing allied countries that refused to participate in his ill-fated invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, he subsequently realized that NATO's assistance was necessary to pacify Iraq and Afghanistan, with the result that he attempted to improve relations with the allies during his second term in office.

The idealism of Clinton and George W. Bush was largely responsible for the decision to expand NATO into Eastern Europe. Realists opposed expansion because they predicted that it would alienate Russia—which it did—as well as commit NATO to the defense of countries that would be difficult if not impossible to defend. However, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Obama approved the unprecedented step of deploying a small contingent of US troops in Poland, while Canada, Germany, and Britain sent small contingents to the Baltic states. Nevertheless, Obama complained that most of the allied states still were not doing their fair share to maintain NATO as well the liberal international order, both of which were largely responsible for their freedom, security, and prosperity. Consequently, he refused

to involve the United States in the European Union’s negotiations with Russia over Ukraine, arguing that Ukraine was a purely European problem.

All five of the presidents of the post-Cold War era, including Donald Trump, also were confronted with a number of pressing global problems, one of which was the threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The first four of these presidents concluded agreements with the Soviet Union or its nuclear-armed successor states—Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—to reduce or eliminate nuclear weapons. They also supported steps to safeguard the remaining nuclear weapons, materials, and installations against seizure by terrorists. However, their efforts to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons were largely unsuccessful. Although Obama signed an agreement freezing Iran’s nuclear weapon program, along with his three immediate predecessors, he failed to prevent the development of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. The international nuclear nonproliferation regime was weakened further by the continued development of new nuclear weapons by the major nuclear powers, specifically Russia and the United States.

The post-Cold War presidents also were confronted with the increasingly menacing threat posed by global warming, but they did not agree on how—or whether—to deal with the problem. The Clinton administration helped to write the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement with binding limitations on greenhouse gas emissions for developed countries, but George W. Bush rejected that agreement. Obama signed the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, but he was compelled to support it with an executive agreement because the Senate would not ratify it. US participation in the Paris Agreement was subsequently terminated by his successor, Donald Trump.

Again, all of the presidents of the post-Cold War era subordinated their concern for international human rights issues to their preeminent concern for protecting US economic, political, and strategic interests. They ignored China’s violations of human rights in order to promote trade with that country and hopefully make it a part of the international economic order. They also overlooked human rights violations by repressive governments in Latin America and Africa. And in a few cases, such as Haiti, some of them interfered with the democratic process.

In the name of national security, George W. Bush’s administration incarcerated alleged terrorists at the Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba and the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, where prisoners were tortured

in violation of the Geneva Convention's rules pertaining to the proper treatment of prisoners of war. Ironically, these violations of international law, and American values, were largely ineffective in gaining information from the prisoners. When they were publicized, they also undermined an important US national interest, that is, maintaining a good relationship with Latin American and other countries, as well as America's professed image as the world's leading defender of human rights.

Finally, the first four presidents of the post-Cold War era failed to correct serious flaws in the liberal international order, including growing income inequality, stagnant wages, and the migration of American jobs overseas. Their failure to ameliorate the problems generated by globalization did much to undermine popular support for, and fuel populist hostility against, free trade, open borders, immigration, multilateralism, military alliances, and the institutions and political leaders that support them. To populists, xenophobic nationalism is a better alternative to the liberal international order—even if it undermines democracy and freedom. Trump tapped into this populist discontent to win the presidency of the United States.

During his first year as president, Trump, with no previous experience with international relations, except for his business affairs, and limited knowledge of the subject, attempted to implement the America First agenda. He called NATO obsolete, criticized the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, and rejected multilateral trade agreements, like the TPP and the Paris Climate Agreement. He also praised authoritarians and ignored their violations of human rights and their attacks on democracy in the United States and in Europe.

The prime example of such an autocrat is Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose agents, American intelligence officials concluded, interfered in the US presidential election of 2016 in order to prevent the election of Hillary Clinton. However, Trump refused to accept that conclusion and authorize meaningful steps to prevent Russian intrusions into future American elections. Moreover, his America First strategy in many ways served Putin's objectives, especially the weakening of democracy in Europe and the confidence of America's NATO allies that the United States would come to their assistance in the event they were attacked by Russia.

During his first year in office, Trump also threatened to engage the United States in a number of potentially counterproductive—if not dangerous—actions, such as tearing up the Iran nuclear deal and threatening to go to war with North Korea if it does not denuclearize. In his first few

weeks in office, Trump infuriated China by communicating directly with the president of Taiwan and by suggesting that he might not uphold the “one China” policy, which the United States has followed since the early 1970s. In the second year of his presidency, he also initiated a trade war with American allies and China in response to what he considered their unfair trade practices.

In the Middle East, Trump sided with the Sunni-run Persian Gulf kingdoms and against a countervailing Shiite-led coalition of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. He also emphasized a closer alliance with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. He supported the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and decided to move the US embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. He also kept relatively small contingents of US forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, primarily to combat the Taliban and ISIS, but also to check growing Iranian influence in the region.

In the Americas, Trump undid Obama’s Cuban legacy by reinstating some of the travel and commercial restrictions on Cuba that had been eased by the Obama administration in 2014. However, responding to pressure from American business interests, he permitted the embassies in Washington and Havana to remain open, and he left in place a broad array of rules established by the Obama administration to make it easier for American companies to do business in Cuba. Trump also targeted Mexico and Canada by threatening to withdraw from NAFTA if those countries did not agree to modify the treaty to Trump’s satisfaction. He severely frayed US relations with Mexico, among other ways, by insulting Mexicans and by promising to build a wall along the US-Mexican border in order to end illegal immigration and then force Mexico to pay for it.

During the second year of his presidency, Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster and replaced them with more hawkish and like-minded advisors, Mike Pompeo, the new secretary of state, and John Bolton, the national security advisor. “Unleashed” from Tillerson and McMaster, Trump began acting on his “America First” impulses in ways that sent shock waves across Europe, Asia, and North America. On March 22, 2018, he announced that he was prepared to impose tariff increases on steel and aluminum imports in order, he said, to save American jobs in those industries. On May 8, he withdrew the United States from the nuclear deal with Iran. In June, he imposed the steel and aluminum tariffs on America’s key allies, including the European Union and Japan, followed by additional tariffs on China. At the Quebec meeting of G7 leaders, in

early June, he berated America's democratic allies for imposing retaliatory tariffs on US exports, while also recommending that Russia should be readmitted to the G7 group, despite its continuing aggression in Ukraine and Putin's attacks on democracy at home and abroad. More than a few commentators concluded that Trump was helping Putin achieve his goal of dividing the Western world in order to save his authoritarian regime in Russia.

But Trump was also attacking democracy at home and abroad. At home, he attacked key US democratic institutions—including the judiciary, the Justice Department, the free press, and the integrity of the electoral process—while he denigrated immigrants and racial and religious minorities. Abroad, he refused to defend the liberal features of the international order and in fact worked to undermine them. That order was created and maintained by the United States to prevent the revival of nationalistic animosities, aggressive authoritarian states, and international tariff wars, the likes of which triggered the last global war nearly eight decades ago. In that war, hundreds of thousands of Americans were killed or wounded in order to defeat aggressive fascism. Their sacrifice enabled the United States to create a new world order designed to prevent future world wars. Ironically, the United States and its democratic allies again face the threat of revived fascism today. This time, however, that threat is a domestic phenomenon as well as a foreign challenge. Instead of being the leader of the democratic world, Trump has been acting as its enemy.

Obviously, Trump's "America First" foreign policy is not idealistic. But neither is it realistic. By attacking an international order that, despite its flaws, not only has defended and promoted democracy, but also has enhanced the security and prosperity of the American people and their allies, Trump has undermined a vital national interest of the United States.

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FOR FURTHER READING

Prior to his 2016 campaign for the presidency, the books that appeared about Trump dealt primarily with his life as a businessman. Trump wrote, or hired ghostwriters to write, autobiographies, self-help books, personal finance books, and political policy treatises. They include *Trump: The Art of the Deal* (1987), *Time to Get Tough* (2011), and *Crippled America* (2015).

On January 17, 2018, a British newspaper, *The Guardian*, reported that more than 4500 English-language books were published during Trump’s first year in office compared to just over 800 works about Barack Obama. A bibliography of some of these books by and about Trump is provided by Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliography_of_Donald_Trump.

Not surprisingly, as of this writing, very few scholarly books have appeared dealing with Trump’s early foreign policy. One is Charlie Laderman’s and Brendan Simms’s *Donald Trump, The Making of A World View* (2017). For the most part, it is a collection of excerpts from over 30 years of Trump interviews that trace the origin of his America First philosophy to the early 1980s and into the first 100 days of his presidency. An excellent overview of Trump’s first year in office, with a chapter on his foreign policy, can be found in Michael Nelson’s *Trump’s First Year* (2018).

The scholarly journals that proved to be major sources for this chapter, as well as the others, are *The National Interest*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *World Affairs*, *Arms Control Today*, and *The American Interest*. Also important were the reports of the Brookings Institution, at <https://www.brookings.edu/topic/international-affairs/>, and those by Geopolitical Futures, at <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/>.

MAPS¹

See Maps A.1, A.2, A.3, A.4, and A.5

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Map A.1 Europe (Source "Regional and World Maps," World Factbook)



Map A.2 Middle East (*Source* "Regional and World Maps," World Factbook)



Map A.3 Asia (Source "Regional and World Maps," World Factbook)



Map A.4 Caribbean (Source “Regional and World Maps,” World Factbook)



Map A.5 Africa (Source “Regional and World Maps,” World Factbook)

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