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“The Strength of a Giant”

America as Hyperpower, 1992–2007

After the end of the Cold War, the United States enjoyed a degree of world hegemony beyond George Washington's most extravagant dreams. Despite gloomy talk of decline in the 1970s and 1980s, America in the last years of the twentieth century boasted a seemingly invincible high-tech military machine, a robust computer-driven economy, and an array of “soft power” that gave it nearly incalculable influence over the planet's affairs. Not since Rome, it was argued, had any nation enjoyed such preeminence. The French, so often critical of the United States, coined a new word—*hyperpower*—to describe America's unprecedented status.¹

Yet the attainment of such power did not bring the freedom from fear that Washington had envisioned. During the first part of the post-Cold War era, an uncertain nation focused on problems at home and used its vast power only with great reluctance. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, made clear that even hyperpowers are vulnerable. And even after a smashingly successful 2003 military campaign against Iraq, the United States became bogged down in a confused and costly politico-military quagmire. Strategists pondered anew how the nation's vast power could best be used to protect its vital interests in a newly dangerous world.

For a fleeting moment in the early 1990s, peace and world order seemed within reach. The end of the Cold War and the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union removed the preceding half century's major causes of international tension and eased, if they did not eliminate altogether, the dread of a nuclear holocaust. The emergence of democracies and market economies in the former Soviet satellites, Latin America, and even South Africa offered the hope of a new age of global freedom and prosperity. The U.S.-led victory under the aegis of the United Nations in the Persian Gulf War seemed to hail the triumph of Woodrow Wilson's dream of collective security in which peace would be maintained and aggression repelled by international collaboration. President George H. W. Bush proclaimed a

1. William Safire, “On Language,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 22, 2003.

new world order under U.S. leadership. State Department official Francis Fukuyama hailed the “end of history,” the absolute triumph of capitalism and democracy over fascism and Communism, beyond which no great ideological conflicts could be imagined.²

It did not take long for such prophecies to be exposed as at best wishful thinking, at worst absolute folly. The Cold War had imposed a crude form of order on an inherently unstable world, and its end set loose powerful forces held in check for years. The two dominant trends of the post-Cold War world, integration and fragmentation, were each destabilizing; in a broader sense, they conflicted with each other.³

Almost without notice amidst the last climactic stages of the Cold War, the world changed radically in the 1980s, bringing people still closer together while setting off powerful new and often disruptive forces. A communications revolution—sometimes called the third industrial revolution—shattered old ways of thinking and doing things, challenging geopolitics itself. The development of computers and the Internet, cable television, satellite technology, and new high-speed jet aircraft created global networks that broke down old barriers and brought the world still closer together. These innovations made it impossible for governments to control information, as in the past, contributing to the collapse of the Soviet empire and in time the USSR itself. They empowered individuals and groups, enhancing the influence of non-state actors in international politics and economics. They permitted the globalization of trade in ways heretofore unimaginable, giving rise to new transnational corporations such as Nike that exploited cheap labor in developing countries to produce inexpensive, quality goods for an international market.⁴

Such was the impact of the communications revolution that Cable News Network (CNN) founder Ted Turner banned the use of the word *foreign* in his corporation’s activities. By the mid-1990s, four of every five bottles of Coca-Cola were sold outside the United States, while high-quality European and Japanese goods flooded U.S. markets to satisfy the tastes of well-heeled and sophisticated consumers. Professional athletics became part of the process. National Basketball Association (NBA) games were telecast in 175 countries and broadcast in forty languages to six hundred million households. NBA mega-star Michael Jordan became the

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).

3. John Lewis Gaddis, “Toward the Post-Cold War World,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Spring 1991), 102–5.

4. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone* (New York, 2002), 41–51.

"first great athlete of the wired world"; the paraphernalia of his Chicago Bulls—known in China as the "Oxen"—could be found even in Mongolia. A poll of Chinese high school students ranked Jordan with Zhou En-lai as the person they most admired.⁵ In sports as elsewhere, globalization worked both ways. Seven-foot four-inch Yao Ming of China became an NBA star. European players increasingly joined the rosters of NBA and National Hockey League teams. But the United States dominated the export of culture. "American popular culture is the closest approximation there is today to a global lingua franca," sociologist Todd Gitlin observed in 1992.⁶

The revolutionary changes wrought by "globalization"—defined as worldwide networks of interdependence—raised profound concerns across the world. In fact, American popular culture often coexisted as a second culture alongside long-established local versions. In many instances, it was modified for indigenous tastes before being exported. In other regions, however, especially in Europe, the process was often simplistically viewed as Americanization and provoked angry reactions. Certain as ever of their own cultural superiority and the banality of the U.S. variety, French spokespersons raged against the corruption and trivialization of traditional high culture. France's cultural minister denounced plans for a European Disney World outside Paris as a "cultural Chernobyl." In the Middle East, Islamic fundamentalists railed against the degradation wrought by Satanist American popular culture and plotted terrorist attacks, ironically using instruments of globalization such as jetliners, the Internet, and cellular telephones, on the symbols of U.S. global dominance.⁷

A process that seemed to favor the United States also provoked alarm at home. Americans responded angrily to French protests. "We offer them the dream of a lifetime and lots of jobs. They treat us like invaders," said a Euro Disney spokesperson.⁸ The growing "outsourcing" of jobs to cheaper labor markets made available to Americans less expensive consumer goods but also caused unemployment in U.S. manufacturing. An influx of Japanese capital in the early 1990s, including even the purchase of major communications networks, provoked nationalist fears of foreign

5. Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York, 1999), 14–15, 135; *New York Times*, April 21, 1996.

6. *New York Times*, May 3, 1992.

7. Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York, 1999), offers a paean to globalization. A critical analysis is William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York, 1997).

8. *New York Times*, May 3, 1992.

control of crucial media outlets. College students organized nationwide protests against the way in which giant corporations like Nike, owing allegiance to no nation-state and beyond the control of any government, exploited workers in sweatshops in developing countries to produce maximum goods at minimum cost. Critics complained that globalization was widening an already yawning worldwide gap between rich and poor.

Coexisting uncomfortably alongside these new forces of integration were older, equally potent, and potentially even more disruptive forces of fragmentation: nationalism, ethnic rivalries, and tribal hatreds, forces, historian John Lewis Gaddis wrote in 1991, that were "resurrecting old barriers between nations and peoples—and creating new ones—even as others are tumbling."⁹ The end of the Cold War took the lid off a pot that had been boiling for years. In Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, fragile national loyalties gave way to fierce ethnic and tribal conflicts, secessionist movements, and vicious "ethnic cleansing." Most prominent in the 1990s were the brutal wars between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, and conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslims and Kurds in the Middle East. The *New York Times* counted forty-eight such conflicts worldwide in 1993. New nations took shape almost as rapidly as during the heyday of decolonization. "Get ready for fifty new countries in the world in the next fifty years," a pessimistic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York admonished in that same year, most of them "born in bloodshed." Wilson's dream of self-determination threatened to divide the world with conflict rather than bring it together in peace and harmony.¹⁰

Other commentators forecast even more gloomy scenarios. Some warned that the Cold War struggle between East and West would give way to conflict between North and South, the haves and the have-nots, the West and the rest. Runaway population growth in the developing countries portended a possibly disastrous drain on already scarce resources, environmental crises that could afflict the entire globe, and the rampant spread of crime, disease, and war. Others warned ominously of an assault on the borders of the developed countries through massive emigration. Still others admonished that the anarchy already gripping Africa would spread across the globe, the chaos in the less developed countries eventually contaminating the developed nations.¹¹ Although such predictions appeared unnecessarily pessimistic and may even have reflected a

9. Gaddis, "Post-Cold War World," 105.

10. *New York Times*, February 7, 1993.

11. Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, 44-76.

certain nostalgia for Cold War "order," it was clear that history had not ended. Conflict and disorder would continue to characterize the new era.

The position of the United States in the new world order was paradoxical. During the 1990s and beyond, America enjoyed a preponderance of power with little precedent in world history. Its economy was 40 percent larger than that of the second-rank nation, its defense spending six times that of the next six countries combined. What political scientist Joseph Nye called its "soft power"—the international appeal of its products, lifestyle, and values—gave the United States sway "over an empire on which the sun never sets."¹² Because of its wealth and relative security, it appeared to have unrivaled and unprecedented freedom of action. Neo-conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer proclaimed with unabashed enthusiasm a "unipolar moment."¹³

Not surprisingly, the nation responded uncertainly to the new world order. Its contours were fuzzy at best, and Americans had no blueprint for dealing with it. "The central paradox of unipolarity," political scientist Stephen Walt observed, was that the United States "enjoys enormous influence but has little idea what to do with its power or even how much effort it should expend."¹⁴ The absence of any obvious threat to its security removed any compelling inducement to assume leadership in solving world problems. Most Americans recognized that there could be no isolationism in a world shrunk by technology and bound by economic interdependence, but after forty years of global commitment and heavy Cold War expenditures, many of them yearned for what Warren Harding had called "normalcy" and relief from the burdens of world leadership. As in the aftermath of World Wars I and II, they preferred to focus on domestic problems. Support for foreign policy ventures waned. An always fickle public lost interest in the world. Both reflecting and shaping public opinion, the media drastically reduced coverage of events abroad. Sensing a "peace dividend," Congress slashed expenditures for foreign aid, diplomatic representation abroad, and international public information programs. Despite an overwhelming victory in the Gulf War, bitter memories of the Vietnam debacle continued to haunt the nation two decades after its end, adding yet another constraint. Military leaders were especially leery of so-called humanitarian

12. Nye, *Paradox*, 11.

13. Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70 (*America and the World, 1990-1991*), 23.

14. Stephen M. Walt, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (March/April 2000), 65.

interventions to stop the bloodshed from burgeoning ethnic conflicts across the globe. With Gen. Colin Powell as chairman of a more powerful Joint Chiefs of Staff, the so-called Powell Doctrine first enunciated in the mid-1980s took the form of holy writ.

II

The halting response of the George H. W. Bush administration to the new world order it had proclaimed made clear the challenges of the post-Cold War era. Bush offered no concrete vision of America's future international role now that containment, which had guided policymakers during the Cold War, was no longer relevant. He was perhaps complacent after his triumphant leadership in the Persian Gulf. In his last year, he struggled with a stagnant economy and was politically crippled by enactment of the tax increase he had sworn not to endorse.¹⁵

The one serious effort to plot a post-Cold War strategy was quickly repudiated. A Defense Planning Guidance document drafted in Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz's office under the supervision of Lewis "Scooter" Libby set forth a new vision for the United States as the world's lone superpower. The nation must maintain absolute military supremacy, the draft firmly asserted. It must prevent any power or combination of powers from challenging its position. The document was decidedly unilateralist, minimizing the significance of the UN and alliances. It pinpointed the spread of nuclear weapons as a major concern and suggested that the United States might have to act preemptively to head off that danger. Leaked to the press in March 1992, it provoked a brief furor. With the presidential primaries under way, the White House quickly distanced itself from the controversial draft. A toned-down revision paid lip service to collective security but never received official sanction. The document would be dusted off by another Bush administration after the turn of the century and become the underpinning for post-9/11 defense policy.¹⁶

After the Gulf War, the administration acted decisively only in the Middle East. From the outset, Bush and Secretary of State James Baker had made clear their determination to break the long-standing deadlock in Arab-Israeli negotiations. Israel must accept the principle of land for peace as specified in UN Resolution 242. It must "lay aside, once and for all, the unrealistic vision of a greater Israel," Baker boldly informed an American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) gathering in

15. John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of George Bush* (Lawrence, Kans., 2000), 141-64.

16. James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), 209-15.

May 1989.¹⁷ The end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union, and the defeat of Iraq seemed to strengthen the administration's hand. The Palestinians would no longer have an arms supplier. By easing the threat from Iraq, the United States presumably gained greater leverage with Israel. Working with moderate Palestinians in the West Bank rather than Arafat's PLO, the administration secured agreement of the major Arab states for a peace conference. Baker jawboned hard-line Israeli premier Yitzhak Shamir into attending. The conference, held in Madrid's Crystal Pavilion in late 1991, produced no substantive results, but it was enormously significant. Syria participated, a major breakthrough. For the first time, Palestinians spoke for themselves in an international forum. Ancient foes sat around a common table to discuss issues that had long divided them. The Madrid conference revived a peace process suspended for more than a decade.¹⁸

Baker and Bush also blocked Shamir's efforts to solidify Israel's position in the occupied territories. When they discovered that the prime minister was committed to building more than five thousand new houses, they held up legislation providing Israel \$10 billion in loan guarantees to help settle recently arrived Soviet Jews. They also stood up to the Israel lobby. "The settlements are counterproductive to peace," Bush affirmed, "and everybody knows that."¹⁹ The president warned he would veto any loan that did not include provisions for stopping the settlements. Bush's courageous stand helped drive Shamir from office. His successor, the more amenable Yitzhak Rabin, agreed to stop building new settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Bush's timely and forceful diplomacy kept Middle East peace hopes alive.²⁰

In dealing with Haiti and the former Yugoslavia, the Bush administration was far less assertive. In September 1991, the Haitian military overthrew the popularly elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Baker at first responded firmly: "This coup must not and will not succeed."²¹ But the administration did nothing more than impose sanctions to back up its tough talk. It briefly considered and quickly rejected military intervention. Taking over Haiti would be easy, Powell asserted; getting out, very difficult.²²

17. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (rev. ed., Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 296.

18. Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 297-99.

19. *Ibid.*, 300.

20. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 312-14.

21. Thomas Friedman column, *New York Times*, May 31, 1992.

22. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York, 2001), 267-68.

The former Yugoslavia offered an even more glaring example of U.S. unwillingness to uphold the new world order. An unwieldy amalgam of six republics composed of conflicting ethnic and religious groups, the country had been held together by the force of Marshal Tito's personality and fear of the USSR. With the end of the Cold War, ethnic hatreds exploded, and the country knitted together after World War I began to unravel. Fanning the nationalist hatreds of his people, Slobodan Milosevic plotted to create a greater Serbia at the expense of other ethnic groups. In the summer of 1991, he set out to wrest lands from Croatia, laying siege to two major cities and subjecting helpless civilians to deadly bombardment and horrendous destruction. The next year, he joined Bosnian Serbs in military operations against Bosnia's Muslims. The former Yugoslavia would become the burning foreign policy issue of the decade.

The Bush administration had no inclination to stop the carnage. It was by no means clear at the beginning what horrors Milosevic would inflict. Throughout 1991, top officials were preoccupied with the Persian Gulf and the fall of the USSR. Intervention had no strong advocates within the administration. The military adamantly opposed the use of force in the Balkans. To scare off civilians, Powell deliberately exaggerated the number of troops that would be needed. With the end of the Cold War, Yugoslavia lost its geopolitical significance, and civilian leaders saw no compelling national interest there. Memories of Vietnam still held sway. The administration viewed the Balkans as a European problem, and at first Europeans seemed to agree. But even after Milosevic struck Bosnia in 1992 there was no interest in taking action. Despite growing warnings of a new Holocaust, the administration did nothing to halt Serbia's brutal "ethnic cleansing" of Croats and Muslims. "Where is it written that the United States is the military policeman of the world?" State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler asked.²³ "We don't have a dog in that fight," her boss Baker curtly proclaimed after a trip to Yugoslavia in 1991. Baker admitted in 1992 that Bosnia had become a "humanitarian nightmare," but the administration would go no further than assist modest relief efforts and give verbal support to halting and ineffectual European peace efforts.²⁴

In its last weeks in office, a lame-duck administration undertook a limited intervention in embattled Somalia in East Africa. Torn by struggle among competing warlords, with civilians the victims, Somalia by 1992

23. Friedman column, *New York Times*, May 31, 1992.

24. Klaus Larres, " 'Bloody as Hell': Bush, Clinton, and the Abdication of American Leadership in the Former Yugoslavia, 1990-1995," *Journal of European Integration History* 10 (July 2004), 192.

was a horrendous humanitarian disaster. Starvation was epidemic. Thousands had been killed in the fighting, and refugees poured out of the country. Illustrating a new phenomenon in world affairs, images of human misery were beamed around the globe on television, creating demands to do something—the so-called CNN effect. Responding to such appeals, the administration in the summer agreed to transport UN troops to provide food and medical assistance. Perhaps to compensate for his opposition to intervention in Bosnia, Powell endorsed the dispatch of thirty-five thousand U.S. troops on a strictly limited mission of mercy to feed the hungry and aid the suffering. Once some semblance of order was established, they would be replaced by UN forces. The mission at first seemed to work.²⁵ But the Bush administration never really determined whether it was committed to the new world order under U.S. leadership its rhetoric spoke of or, because of domestic preoccupations, preferred retrenchment and retreat. The post-Cold War world was full of surprises, Baker's successor, Lawrence Eagleburger, insisted, resulting in "pasted together diplomacy."²⁶

Even more than its predecessor, the administration of William Jefferson Clinton found adjustment to the new world order vexing. Clinton's aides had salvaged a once floundering election campaign with the simple slogan "It's the economy, stupid." In many ways, this administration seemed more attuned to the new era, making clear from the outset its preference for domestic issues. Although a graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and a Rhodes scholar, Clinton seemed the polar opposite of Bush. Having spent his political career in state politics, the former governor of Arkansas was plainly less experienced with and informed on foreign policy issues. Smart, gregarious, charming, a charismatic and natural-born politician, he was also notoriously undisciplined in his work habits and private life. His few campaign pronouncements on foreign policy hinted at more forthright leadership and a more active role in defending human rights in such volatile areas as the Balkans. At heart, however, Clinton was a domestic policy "wonk" with a full agenda. In the beginning, at least, he appeared to hope that his foreign policy team could hold the world at bay while he implemented domestic reforms.

His top foreign policy advisers, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Secretary of State Warren Christopher, a protégé of Cyrus Vance, came mainly out of the liberal Democratic mold—burned by Vietnam, nervous about unilateral intervention, committed to working

25. Mann, *Vulcans*, 222–23; Halberstam, *War*, 250–52.

26. *New York Times*, December 20, 1992.

through the UN and other international organizations. Although a Kissinger protégé, Lake followed the precedent set by Scowcroft, becoming “by design the most obscure member of the Clinton foreign policy team.”²⁷ The new president’s relations with his uniformed advisers were especially tenuous. Having avoided military service during the Vietnam era and actively protested the war, he was viewed with contempt by some of the top brass who served him. His early efforts to defend the rights of homosexuals in the military provoked seething opposition in the armed services.²⁸

The Clinton administration was deeply committed to promoting domestic prosperity through expanding foreign trade. The president himself was an unabashed enthusiast for globalization, like the eighteenth-century *philosophes* viewing commerce as the essential instrument to promote free markets, democracy, and eventually peace and prosperity. “Since we don’t have geopolitics any more,” one Clinton adviser pronounced, “trade is the name of the game.” In embassies across the world, diplomats turned their attention to economics. Clinton cashed in all his political chips to secure congressional passage in 1993 of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He also vigorously promoted the Asia-Pacific Economic Community as a modern economic NATO and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The Clinton administration eventually presided over an enormous expansion of U.S. foreign trade, sparking one of the nation’s longest periods of economic growth.²⁹

Trade expansion also brought huge short-term tradeoffs and costly job displacement. NAFTA contributed to the prosperity of the 1990s, but it also eliminated jobs in the nation’s already moribund manufacturing sector. Promotion of trade also involved unprecedented and unwelcome intrusion into the internal affairs of other nations. Globalization provoked growing backlash abroad and among protest groups at home. In the 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” fifteen hundred disparate groups waged warfare for days in the streets of that northwestern metropolis, disrupting the meeting of the newly formed World Trade Organization.³⁰

Committed to protecting human rights as well as expanding trade, the administration quickly discovered the two could be incompatible. Exports were important to domestic prosperity. In the most prominent cases, the administration therefore bowed to expediency without totally abandoning

27. Jason DeParle, “The Man Inside Bill Clinton’s Foreign Policy,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 20, 1995, 34.

28. Halberstam, *War*, 204–7, 415–19.

29. David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York, 2004), 306–10, 344–49.

30. Nye, *Paradox*, 41.

its principles. Two hundred thousand Americans were employed in the sale of some \$9 billion worth of exports to China, for example. Millions of Americans depended on cheap imports of shirts, pants, and dresses to clothe their families. Yet that country's often gross abuses of human rights offended the sensibilities of pressure groups, many Washington officials, and members of Congress. Clinton had charged Bush with "coddling tyrants from Baghdad to Beijing."³¹ In 1993, his administration authorized most-favored-nation treatment for China for one year but conditioned its extension on China's performance in five human rights areas. When Beijing stonewalled, U.S. business interests complained and Commerce Department officials warned that loss of the China trade would cause higher prices for American consumers. The administration caved in, the following year extending most-favored-nation treatment without any conditions or penalties for violations of the 1993 terms. Henceforth, the administration abandoned any serious effort to shape conditions inside China.³²

Clinton also quickly discovered the painful truth that in foreign policy U.S. presidents do not have to seek trouble, it finds them. The administration was even less surefooted on the increasingly difficult questions of peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions. In the 1992 campaign and its early days, it sounded interventionist. Clinton attacked Bush's inaction on Bosnia and affirmed that "no national issue is more urgent than securing democracy's triumph around the world." Lake hinted at greater activism by coining such vague phrases as "enlargement of democracy" and "pragmatic neo-Wilsonianism."³³

Once more, the administration beat a hasty retreat. Unable to persuade European allies to lift an arms embargo against Bosnia and in the face of Powell's steadfast opposition to intervention, it would approve no more than harmless NATO air strikes to defend embattled UN peacekeepers. It grudgingly agreed to expand the U.S./UN mission in Somalia to capture the ambitious and recalcitrant warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid. But when eighteen GIs were killed in bloody fighting in Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, exposing television viewers to the spectacle of an American corpse being dragged through the streets of the city, it immediately scaled back the U.S. role and promised an alarmed public and Congress that U.S. troops would be out in six months.³⁴ A week later, closer to home—and much more humiliating—American soldiers and technicians dispatched to Haiti

31. Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 348.

32. *Ibid.*, 348–52; James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, 1999), 274–308.

33. *Newsweek*, May 5, 1994, 54; DeParle, "Man Inside," 35.

34. Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York, 1999).

aboard the USS *Harlan County* as part of a larger effort to unseat a cruel military government turned back in the face of armed mobs on the docks of Port-au-Prince jeering "Somalia! Somalia!"³⁵

While rampant instability wracked the globe, the administration developed guidelines for humanitarian intervention critics dismissed as "self-containment."³⁶ The United States would intervene only where international security was gravely threatened, a natural disaster required urgent relief, or egregious violations of human rights occurred. Other nations must share the costs, but GIs would participate only under U.S. command. In response to proliferating UN commitments, the administration in May 1994 spelled out seventeen even more restrictive guidelines for support of that body's peacekeeping operations. Making clear after Somalia its distaste for UN enterprises, it vowed to commit troops only where vital U.S. interests were threatened. Congress must approve the mission and make funds available. There must be clearly stated objectives, a reasonable chance of success, and a strategy for completing the job. The crisis must pose a serious threat to international peace and security or involve major violations of human rights. Clinton also urged the UN to scale back its ambitions. "If the American people are to say yes to UN peacekeeping, the United Nations must know when to say no."³⁷ Parodying John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, critics claimed that Clinton's United States would "pay only some prices, fight only some foes, and bear only some burdens in the defense of freedom."³⁸

Not surprisingly, the United States and the rest of the world looked the other way in 1994 when ethnic and tribal rivalries in Rwanda in Central Africa produced what writer Samantha Power has called "the fastest, most efficient killing spree of the twentieth century."³⁹ While the world did nothing, a vengeful Hutu tribe murdered an estimated eight hundred thousand rival Tutsis, in some cases with machetes. Even a relatively small intervention might have made a difference, but the world did nothing. Paralyzed by recent memories of Somalia and Haiti, the administration did not even discuss the possibility of intervention. As if to insulate themselves from guilt and responsibility, U.S. officials employed the euphemism "acts of genocide." They sought mainly to get Americans out of the country. Clinton later acknowledged that Rwanda had been his

35. Halberstam, *War*, 270-71.

36. Thomas Friedman column, *New York Times*, October 1, 1993.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*; *New York Times*, January 29, 1994; *Washington Post*, May 6, 1994.

39. Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Genocide," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2001, 84.

administration's worst foreign policy mistake. "We never even had a staff meeting on it. . . ." he conceded. "I blew it."⁴⁰

The administration shifted gears in the fall of 1994. Liberals, many of them onetime opponents of the Vietnam War, increasingly urged the use of military force to prevent human suffering. Action-oriented analogies from Munich and the Holocaust now competed with the constraining Vietnam Syndrome as influences on policy decisions. After months of soul-searching, sanctions that hurt victims more than oppressors, and warnings that were ignored, the administration in September used the threat of a full-scale invasion of Haiti along with a peace mission composed of former president Jimmy Carter, the now civilian Colin Powell, and Georgia senator Sam Nunn to remove a brutal military dictatorship and restore to power the erratic—but elected—Aristide. Clinton justified the action as necessary to "restore democracy" and, more pragmatically, prevent a massive flight of Haitian refugees to U.S. shores. As U.S. paratroopers flew toward Haiti, the negotiators finally worked out a deal. This time, GIs met a warm reception. National Security Adviser Lake rode through the streets of Port-au-Prince in the back of a flatbed truck to boisterous shouts of "*bon jour*."⁴¹ The intervention did not bring democracy to Haiti or lead to a new policy toward humanitarian intervention, but it spared some suffering and helped improve a badly tarnished Clinton image.

Although Clinton in 1992 had attacked Bush for inaction in the Balkans, his administration was no more eager to grapple with what came to be called "the problem from hell." Stories of rape, torture, executions, concentration camps, and indiscriminate shelling of civilians all under the anodyne rubric of "ethnic cleansing" provoked growing humanitarian outrage, but the potential costs of intervention and dubious prospects for success stood as insuperable barriers. Congress was leery. There was little public support. Until his departure from government in late 1993, Joint Chiefs chairman Powell stood as a powerful obstacle. The administration would do no more than air-drop food for besieged civilians, undertake "covert inaction" by facilitating arms shipments to Bosnian Muslims, and verbally support the European Community's lame efforts to arrange a diplomatic settlement. Europeans and Americans blamed each other for doing nothing.⁴²

After years of hesitation, the United States in the summer of 1995 finally acted in the former Yugoslavia. By this time, the administration

40. David Remnick, "The Wanderer," *New Yorker*, September 18, 2006, 63.

41. DeParle, "Man Inside," 35; Bob Sacoichis, *The Immaculate Invasion* (New York, 1999).

42. Larres, "Bloody as Hell," 196–97.

seemed to be falling apart. Its major domestic initiatives had been frustrated by an assertive newly elected Republican Congress led by conservative Georgia representative Newt Gingrich. Foreign policy appeared in such disarray that Christopher had to be talked out of resigning. His reputation in tatters, the president plainly faced trouble in the upcoming presidential election. In the Balkans, the Serb massacre of a supposedly UN-protected Bosnian Muslim enclave in the city of Srebrenica in July accompanied by some of the worst war crimes since World War II aroused worldwide outrage and galvanized a reticent Washington to action. Liberal and neo-conservative interventionists pressed the administration to do something. Majority Leader Bob Dole, a potential presidential foe in 1996, put together a Senate bloc for intervention. Humiliated by Somalia and Haiti, three years of inaction in the Balkans, and the increasingly blatant defiance of Milosevic, Clinton himself was moved to exclaim: "The United States cannot be a punching bag in the world any more."⁴³ Its "unique superpower status" was the "only hope for restoring a semblance of order and humanity to the Balkans."⁴⁴ Forceful moves might also help the president's reelection chances. The rise to power of France's hawkish Jacques Chirac in place of the pro-Serbian François Mitterand provided crucial international support. Finally, on July 1995, while chipping golf balls on the White House putting green, Clinton exploded: "I'm getting creamed. . . . We've got to find some kind of policy and move ahead."⁴⁵

In August 1995, with full U.S. backing, NATO began intensive bombing of Bosnian Serb positions using the most modern military technology and eventually taking out Milosevic's communications center. This action shattered the aura of Serb invincibility. It forced a cease-fire in October and drove the warring parties to the conference table at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. There, in late 1995, U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke brokered what journalist David Halberstam called "an imperfect peace to a very imperfect part of the world after an unusually cruel war."⁴⁶ The Dayton Accords divided Bosnia into autonomous Muslim-Croat and Serb regions and provided, for a NATO force to maintain the precarious cease-fire. Clinton sent U.S. troops to participate in the peacekeeping mission; to cover his political flanks, he limited the commitment to twelve months (later extended).

43. Halberstam, *War*, 331.

44. Larres, " 'Bloody as Hell,' " 201.

45. Halberstam, *War*, 303-6, 317.

46. *Ibid.*, 358; Larres, " 'Bloody as Hell,' " 200-201.



Clinton defeated Dole by a substantial margin in 1996, but foreign policy played no more than a peripheral part, and his reelection brought no clarity to America's role in the world. With no clear external threat and the nation prospering, there was little incentive for engagement. A band of avidly nationalistic congressional Republicans flaunted their hostility to the world. Some boasted of not having passports. House leader Richard Arney of Texas claimed that he did not need to go to Europe because he had been there—once! Gingrich's Contract with America, a much publicized political agenda for conservative Republicans, mentioned foreign policy only in passing and stressed simply that America should maintain a strong defense and GIs must not serve under UN command. The ascension of the arch-nationalist Jesse Helms to chairmanship of the once prestigious Senate Foreign Relations Committee seemed to internationalists the cruelest of ironies.⁴⁷

47. Max Frankel, "The Shroud," *New York Times Magazine*, November 17, 1994.

After January 1998, Clinton's presidency was increasingly crippled when he first denied, then, faced with incontrovertible evidence, admitted, an affair with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, prompting his congressional foes to initiate impeachment proceedings.

The Clinton foreign policy team underwent major changes in the second term. Samuel "Sandy" Berger replaced Lake as national security adviser. An old friend and political soul mate of the president, Berger was a lawyer and political operative with little foreign policy experience. But he knew Clinton's mind better than anyone else. He was a consummate pragmatist untroubled by the lack of a strategic blueprint.⁴⁸ More important in terms of precedent—and policy—was the replacement of Christopher with UN ambassador Madeleine Albright, the first female secretary of state. The daughter of a Czech diplomat who escaped both the Nazi invasion and the Communist takeover, Albright claimed to know the meaning of Munich firsthand. The United States, in her view, must take responsibility for upholding world order. She was consistently the most hawkish of Clinton's advisers. "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about," she once berated Powell, "if we can't use it?" Described as the "ultimate independent woman," she had raised three daughters before launching a career. She bristled when reporters wrote about her appearance. Effective on television and in public, she won points at the White House during the 1996 campaign by telling an appreciative Cuban-American audience in Miami's Orange Bowl that the shooting down of a civilian aircraft by Fidel Castro's pilots was "not *cojones* but cowardice." By sheer force of personality, she became a key player, especially with regard to the Balkans.⁴⁹

While the Clinton administration struggled to survive, southern Europe seethed with conflict. This time it was Kosovo, the most volatile area of a strife-torn part of the world. The region was populated mainly by Kosovar Albanians who were also Muslims. But Serbs viewed Kosovo as sacred ground because of their military defeat there in 1389 at the hands of the Turks, on which they blamed the fall of their empire. Left out of the Dayton discussions, Kosovo exploded soon after. In 1997, the Kosovars formed a Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to win their independence and mounted guerrilla warfare against local Serbs. The Serbs struck back with a vengeance, burning villages and murdering those Kosovars they could get their hands on. They moved slowly at first; "a village a day keeps

48. Halberstam, *War*, 404–9.

49. Elaine Sciolino, "Madeleine Albright's Audition," *New York Times Magazine*, September 22, 1996, 66–67, 87–88, 104.

NATO 'away' was their sardonic slogan. Their intent was nonetheless unmistakable, the results devastating. An especially bloody massacre at the town of Racak in late 1998 where all adult males were marked for execution again provoked cries for international action. In Washington, the killing gave ammunition to hawks and weakened foes of intervention.⁵⁰

In early 1999, a still-reluctant administration once more decided to act. The Senate acquitted Clinton of impeachment charges in February. Still leery of a Balkans quagmire, most military leaders continued to resist intervention. Within and outside the government, however, pressures mounted. Advocates increasingly compared the Serbs' ethnic cleansing with the Holocaust. Albright passionately warned of another Munich and derided the military's caution. So important and visible was her role that the conflict came to be called "Madeleine's War."⁵¹ In March, the United States along with NATO finally went to war. If memories of World War II pushed the administration to act, more recent and still-haunting recollections of Vietnam dictated the way it fought. Clinton hoped to replicate the Bosnian experience, where modest bombing had forced Milosevic to negotiate. To assuage fears in Congress and among European allies, the administration again relied exclusively on air power. In what proved a major miscalculation, the president even publicly affirmed: "I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war."⁵²

As always, the conflict in Kosovo proved more complex than anticipated. NATO commander U.S. Gen. Wesley Clark, another Rhodes scholar from Arkansas, ran the war from Brussels and faced the unenviable challenge of working out strategies acceptable to seventeen allies and a divided Washington. His greatest problems were with the Pentagon. The allies underestimated Milosevic's determination. The bombing was implemented gradually, and the Serbs stubbornly withstood it, evoking in some quarters memories of Vietnam. But Milosevic also misjudged NATO's unwillingness to lose. Faced with that prospect, the allies at an April meeting in Washington celebrating the alliance's fiftieth anniversary agreed to escalate the war. They drastically stepped up the bombing. More important, they authorized preparations for the use of ground troops: "All options are on the table," Clinton publicly affirmed.⁵³

What U.S. military leaders called the Revolution in Military Affairs worked dramatic results. It was a new kind of high-tech war, virtual war, it

50. Halberstam, *War*, 409-10.

51. Colin L. Powell with Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York, 1995), 576.

52. Halberstam, *War*, 409, 423.

53. *Ibid.*, 475.

seemed, fought by professional forces with no sacrifice required of the American people and minimal intrusion on their lives. Giant B-2 Stealth bombers that could not be seen from the ground flew fourteen hours from bases in Missouri to deliver large payloads of two-thousand-pound bombs guided by global positioning systems with remarkable accuracy to targets fifty thousand feet below. The bombing devastated Serb airfields and ground forces and eventually Belgrade itself, causing troops to mutiny and political opposition to form. In June, Milošević conceded.⁵⁴ A war fought to minimize Western military losses killed an estimated ten thousand people, many of them civilians, turning on their head just-war principles of sparing noncombatants. The high-technology war fought in Kosovo cost the United States alone an estimated \$2.3 billion, not the sort of price tag even a hyperpower can afford on a regular basis. The distinguished military historian John Keegan excitedly hailed the outcome as a “victory for air power and air power alone.” In some ways it was, but the threat of ground troops and Russia’s refusal to back the Serbs also contributed to the outcome.⁵⁵

The war in Kosovo solved the immediate problem without providing a long-term solution. Milošević was defeated, a major achievement, and in September 2000—with substantial U.S. assistance—those Serbs who had once cheered his nationalistic rantings voted him out of office. Indicted for war crimes while the fighting raged in Kosovo, he was subsequently tried at the UN’s International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and died before the proceedings were completed. Milošević had used the start of the war to drive Albanians from Kosovo, producing more human suffering and millions of refugees. As the war ended, a vengeful KLA sought complete independence and expulsion of the remaining Serbs from Kosovo, making victims of those who had once been perpetrators and creating new political problems. Although he had gone to war with great reluctance and fought with the utmost caution, Clinton basked in NATO’s victory. There was even talk of a Clinton Doctrine under which the United States would employ its power in cases of humanitarian disaster where the costs seemed manageable and prospects for success reasonable. In fact, the president never openly articulated such a policy. There was little public support. In any event, such wars proved not to be the norm in the new world order.⁵⁶

54. *Ibid.*, 457–60.

55. George C. Herring, “Analogies at War: The United States, the Conflict in Kosovo, and the Uses of History,” in Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur, eds., *Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention* (Tokyo, 2000), 355.

56. G. John Ikenberry, “The Costs of Victory: American Power and the Use of Force in the Contemporary Order,” in Schnabel and Thakur, *Kosovo*, 87–88.

Ironically, a president who had taken office with a full domestic agenda and little apparent interest in foreign policy ended his second term by becoming a foreign policy president. Frustrated at home by an unrelenting and fiercely partisan Republican opposition, he turned his attentions abroad, traveling to places where U.S. presidents had not gone before, Botswana, Slovenia, South Africa.⁵⁷ Pushed by war veterans in the Senate, he defied the die-hards by normalizing relations with Vietnam in 1995. Five years later, he became the first president to visit the former enemy. He stayed four days, longer than customary for such visits. In Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, he drew huge crowds. His triumphal visit represented for himself and his nation a sort of closure for a long and painful national experience.⁵⁸

Clinton also took an active role in international peacemaking, even in such perennial trouble spots as Northern Ireland and the Middle East. He and his special envoy, former Senate majority leader George Mitchell, exerted great effort to broker a tenuous power-sharing agreement between Catholics and Protestants in embattled Northern Ireland. The deal fell apart before Clinton left office, but it marked a small step on the long road toward peace in that war-torn area.

In October 1993, Clinton had presided over the signing of the Oslo Accords, an agreement negotiated through Norwegian good offices calling for the PLO to recognize Israel and renounce terrorism and for Israel to turn over the Gaza Strip and the town of Jericho to a newly constituted Palestine Authority. That agreement was supposed to lead to further negotiations on the status of the West Bank and Jerusalem. The Oslo agreement immediately came under fire from extremists on both sides. In November 1995, Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing law student, ironically while making an appeal for peace. Clinton in his last years tried desperately to revive the peace process. In 1998, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, he persuaded hard-line Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu to turn over more of the West Bank to Palestinians. Confronted with staunch opposition when he returned home, the prime minister reneged. During his last year in office, Clinton dragged new Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and Arafat to Camp David for a meeting. Barak seemed flexible, but Arafat rejected any deal that did not provide for Israel's withdrawal from its pre-1967 borders. When war hero Ariel Sharon in September 2000 made much publicized and highly

57. Halberstam, *War*, 482-83.

58. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (4th ed., New York, 2002), 365, 367-68.

provocative visits to two of Islam's holiest places in Jerusalem, a new *intifada* erupted in the West Bank. The peace process was dead.⁵⁹

The Clinton foreign policy legacy is surprisingly full given his administration's early hesitancy and his personal predilection for domestic policy. The United States collaborated with Russia to reduce nuclear inventories left from the Cold War. It opened a diplomatic dialogue with North Korea to check a rising nuclear threat. It enlarged NATO to include some of the former Soviet Union's Eastern and Central European satellites, rewrote the post-World War II peace treaty with Japan, and in 1996 sent warships to help defuse a dangerous crisis in the Taiwan Straits. The administration branched out in new directions. Activist first lady Hillary Clinton also traveled widely abroad, promoting the radical notion that women's rights had a place on the international agenda. In the second term, she gained support from Albright, who instructed diplomats to monitor women's rights internationally.⁶⁰

In the realm of international politics, as Garry Wills has observed, Clinton was a "foreign policy minimalist, doing as little as possible as late as possible in place after place."⁶¹ He apologized for U.S. inaction in Rwanda. In the Balkans, his administration at first stumbled badly, at very high human cost. To its credit, it eventually employed U.S. military power in collaboration with NATO to limit the bloodshed and work out shaky peace arrangements in Bosnia and Kosovo, even though there was little popular or congressional support for such interventions. In all, Clinton employed military forces eighty-four times in eight years.

Clinton's administration was the first to deal systematically with what would become the most pressing national security issue of the new century: international terrorism. It responded perfunctorily, normally with sporadic air strikes, against terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center in 1993, a U.S. Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996, embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the destroyer USS *Cole* on the eve of the 2000 election. The president authorized the killing of al Qaeda terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, scoring one near miss with a missile. But he never seriously considered ground operations against bin Laden's base camp in Afghanistan or going after his host, the Taliban government. Behind the scenes, the administration worked with other governments to foil several major terrorist plots, including one against the Los Angeles airport on the eve of the millennium. It named the indefatigable and

59. Little, *American Orientalism*, 301-4.

60. *Newsweek*, April 7, 1997.

61. Garry Wills, "The Clinton Principle," *New York Times Magazine*, January 19, 1997, 44.

abrasive Richard Clarke as coordinator of counterterrorism operations. But there was no real sense of urgency and thus no strong incentive to take drastic action. "What's it gonna take, Dick?" a terrorism specialist asked Clarke prophetically. "Does Al Qaeda have to attack the Pentagon to get their attention?"⁶²

In foreign as in domestic policy, the administration's major claims to success were in the realm of economics.⁶³ A timely bailout loan of \$25 billion helped avert economic disaster in Mexico in 1995. By keeping U.S. markets open, the administration also helped contain the impact of the Asian economic meltdown of 1997. During the Clinton years, the United States concluded more than three hundred trade agreements. While the country enjoyed unparalleled prosperity, there was little sign that globalization was advancing prosperity in less developed nations or producing the stabilizing and democratizing results its enthusiasts claimed. On the contrary, by the end of the century it had provoked a strong backlash from labor unions and some liberals at home, and from leaders of developing nations who on the one hand resented the competitive edge enjoyed by the rich nations and on the other feared outside reformers who sought to impose on their shops labor and environmental standards.

The American mood at the end of the century was one of triumphalism and smug, insular complacency. According to a January 2000 poll, Americans ranked foreign policy twentieth in terms of importance. Following the lead of cable television, network news focused increasingly on entertainment and trivia and further slashed its coverage of events abroad. On college campuses, the teaching of foreign languages and area studies declined sharply. Defense spending remained at a remarkably high level through the 1990s—more than \$325 billion in 1995. The United States maintained the capability to fight two major wars simultaneously. But the foreign affairs budget was sharply reduced. The United States was deeply in arrears to the UN and the World Health Organization. The State Department closed thirty embassies and twenty-five United States Information Agency libraries, provoking Christopher to protest that we "can't advance American interests by lowering the flag."⁶⁴ Foreign policy played no more than an incidental role in the 2000 presidential campaign. To foreigners, self-indulgent Americans seemed to revel in their prosperity, a minority of the world's population recklessly consuming a huge proportion of its resources. America was both admired

62. Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 385; *Washington Post Weekly*, January 7–13, 2002.

63. *Newsweek*, March 6, 1996.

64. *New York Times*, October 17, 1996.

and feared. Other peoples saw its ability to project its values abroad as a threat to their identities. The awesome display of U.S. military power in Kosovo worried allies as well as potential enemies. German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder fretted about the danger of U.S. unilateralism. A French diplomat observed in the spring of 1999 that the major danger in international politics was the American "hyperpower."⁶⁵

III

After another period of stumbling and uncertainty, the new Republican administration of George W. Bush, son of the former president, would use the opportunity created by the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to effect the most revolutionary changes in U.S. foreign policy since the Truman Doctrine of 1947.

The younger Bush gave little hint in his campaign of what was to come. Compared to his father's deeply rooted internationalism, his experience and mindset were parochial. A graduate of Yale University and the Harvard Business School, he had traveled abroad very little, worked mostly in business, and in politics served only as governor of Texas. In the campaign, he emphasized the need for humility in dealing with other nations. He distanced himself from the Wilsonian idealist label he sought to pin on the Democrats and especially his opponent, Vice President Al Gore, expressing disdain for humanitarian interventions and "nation-building." "We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten" in the Balkans, added his future national security adviser and foreign policy alter ego Condoleezza Rice, the first African American and first woman to hold that post. The United States must no longer be the "world's 911."⁶⁶

Bush sought to make up for his own lack of preparation by naming what seemed a strong national security team. Appointment of the immensely popular Colin Powell as secretary of state, the first African American to hold that position, cheered internationalists perhaps more than it should have given his stalwart opposition to using force for humanitarian purposes. But the real power rested with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney. The two had worked together since the Nixon years. They shared their former boss's view that national security policy was the top priority. Gloomy in outlook and countenance, conservative in his politics, secretive almost to the point of

65. Ikenberry, "Costs of Victory," 97.

66. Michael C. Desch, "Liberals, Neocons, and Realcons: The Politics of Humanitarian Interentions," *Orbis* 46 (Fall 2001), 528.

being sinister, Cheney sought to restore to the presidency the power he believed had been lost through Watergate. He would become the most powerful vice president ever. The dynamic, hard-driving Rumsfeld was a master of bureaucratic warfare. The two men had been deeply disturbed by U.S. failure in Vietnam, the denouement of which they had witnessed from the Ford White House. They had opposed Kissinger's policy of detente. They believed that the United States must maintain absolute military supremacy and use its power to promote its own interests, not permitting the niceties of diplomacy or the scruples of allies to get in the way. Above all, they shared an especially assertive form of nationalism.⁶⁷ Less noticed at the outset but equally important was the presence in key second-level positions of neo-conservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz, "Scooter" Libby, and Douglas Feith, men who passionately believed that America's power must be used to reshape the world in its image.

From the start, the new administration took a decidedly unilateralist turn. Top officials expressed contempt for Clinton's bumbling internationalism. They believed that the United States, as the world's only superpower, could best protect its interests by shedding international constraints and acting alone, even preemptively if necessary, to eliminate potential threats. They revived and gave top priority to developing the missile defense system that Reagan had initiated, a project of dubious practicality and reliability that offered the allure of invulnerability but also violated treaties with the former Soviet Union. In the first months, they seemed to go out of their way to thumb their noses at other nations and international institutions. Bush spurned the Middle East peace process Clinton had nurtured. Without any prior consultation, Rice informed the European ambassadors that the Kyoto Protocol on global warming was dead, thus drastically weakening an admittedly flawed agreement the Clinton administration had helped negotiate but had not submitted to the Senate. The new administration also suspended talks with North Korea aimed at stopping the development of long-range missiles. State Department spokesperson Richard Haas euphemistically labeled it "a la carte multilateralism." "We'll look at each agreement and make a decision, rather than come out with a broad-based approach," he said.⁶⁸ Critics at home and abroad deplored the administration's rude manners and go-it-alone methods as a new isolationism.

In the early morning hours of September 11, 2001, an unusually clear and crisp late summer day, nineteen Arab terrorists operating under orders

67. Mann, *Vulcans*, 163.

68. *New York Times*, July 31, 2001.

from Osama bin Laden hijacked four commercial airliners and used them as missiles to strike New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A planned attack on the Capitol or White House was thwarted when a revolt of courageous passengers forced a crash landing on Pennsylvania farmland. After two enormous explosions, Manhattan's landmark twin towers crumbled, killing 2,603 people, filling the city with smoke, and leaving a massive pile of rubble at what came to be called Ground Zero. The attack on the Pentagon left another 125 people dead; an additional 246 died on the aircraft.

The 9/11 attacks were not random acts of violence. Bin Laden's al Qaeda organization aimed to restore traditional Islam to its rightful place in the universe. The immediate goal was to eliminate the "near enemy," "apostate states" like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Jordan. Because the United States backed the rulers of these nations—indeed ensured their survival—it became the "far enemy." America's long-standing support for Israel and its "occupation" after 1991 of Saudi Arabia, site of Islam's most holy places, further branded it as the font of evil. Bin Laden and his followers hoped by striking the United States in a spectacular manner to rally jihadists across the world. By exposing U.S. vulnerability, they sought to destroy the aura of its power. They also hoped to goad it to invade a Muslim country where its killing of the faithful would provoke rage and rally more adherents. America might also bog down as the USSR had and be forced to abandon the "apostate" states.⁶⁹

For the United States, September 11, 2001, ranks with Pearl Harbor as a colossal intelligence failure. After the fact, as with December 7, 1941, numerous clues pointed to a possible terrorist action and even to its type and target. Bin Laden was known to be responsible for earlier attacks on U.S. interests, most recently the *Cole*. Some of the hijackers had entered the United States illegally; the names of several were in databases with lists of potential terrorists. Some had violated the rules of their immigration status. Hijackers aroused suspicions by inquiring at flight schools about learning to fly passenger aircraft but admitting they would not need to know how to land. In 1998, an NSC counterterrorism group had carried out an exercise in which hijackers took over aircraft and loaded them with explosives to attack Washington. The World Trade Center had been the target of one terrorist explosion and was mentioned as a candidate for another. During the summer, U.S. intelligence intercepted al Qaeda communications promising that "something spectacular" was going to happen. "Bin

69. Mark Danner, "Taking Stock of the Forever War," *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 2005, 50–51.

Laden Determined to Attack in U.S." screamed the headlines of one section of the CIA's August 6, 2001, President's Daily Briefing.⁷⁰

A government lulled into a false sense of security by a decade of peace, riven by bureaucratic rivalries, and focused on other matters missed the signals. The various agencies responsible for counterterrorism, the FBI, CIA, Defense Department, and NSC, did not communicate and, worse, sometimes concealed information from each other, preventing them from putting together the pieces of the puzzle. Despite a pattern of terrorist attacks up to the *Cole*, the agencies had not assigned high priority to the issue and even sought to shift responsibility elsewhere. Top officials were focused on missile defense and a possible threat from Iraq. They dismissed warnings of terrorist threats passed on during the transition. It was a classic case of lack of interest, imagination, and communication leading responsible officials to look past plain if not always distinct signs of a deadly terrorist attack.⁷¹

Nine-eleven worked dramatic changes in the national psyche. For the first time since 1814, the continental United States came under foreign attack. In one fiery moment, the intellectual and emotional baggage left from Vietnam and the complacency that marked the 1990s were swept aside in a surge of fear and anger. An already faltering economy suffered further damage. In their shock and grief, Americans suddenly felt vulnerable. Speaking with a single voice for one of the few times since the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Congress granted the president sweeping new authority to combat international terrorism.

An administration seemingly unfocused and floundering suddenly found purpose and direction. Experts warned that terrorism represented a new kind of non-state threat not to be dealt with by conventional means, but Bush and his advisers responded in entirely traditional ways. Confounding those who only recently had dismissed him as a lightweight, the president gave a powerful address before a joint session of Congress, rallying the nation behind an all-out global war "to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil." The analogue of war was familiar to Americans and therefore reassuring, but it proved problematic in confronting a very different enemy. Responding slowly and deliberately, the administration mobilized military forces to strike bin-Laden and the

70. *New York Times*, July 25, 2004; *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States* (New York, 2004), 254-77; Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror* (New York, 2004), 227-46.

71. *9/11 Commission Report*, 339-60.

fundamentalist Taliban regime that sheltered him in Afghanistan. In the parlance of the Old West, the president vowed to bring back the "evil one" dead or alive.⁷²

September 11 evoked an outpouring of sympathy from abroad. "We are all Americans," the French newspaper *Le Monde* eloquently opined. "We are all New Yorkers." Officials who only recently had spurned collaboration with other nations now under Powell's leadership began cobbling together an unwieldy coalition composed of old allies such as Britain and France, former enemies Russia and China, and even pariah states such as Pakistan to attack on a variety of fronts and in different ways a new kind of foe and its backers, hinting, mistakenly as it turned out, that the summer's unilateralism was a thing of the past. The president's stark and tactless warning that "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" more accurately reflected the direction the administration would take.⁷³

The first phase of the war confounded military experts. Because of its forbidding geography, harsh climate, and fierce tribal rivalries, Afghanistan was historically a graveyard of great-power ambitions, most recently, of course, the Soviet Union's. Applying on a much larger scale the new high-tech methods of warfare used in the Balkans—"the first cavalry charge of the twenty-first century," Rumsfeld called it—the United States relied on air power and Afghan proxies to eliminate the despised and surprisingly weak Taliban and destroy bin Laden's training camps. Small numbers of U.S. special forces slipped into Afghanistan and sent signals to B-52 bombers to direct laser-guided bombs against suspected Taliban and al Qaeda bases. Americans on horseback worked with the friendly Northern Alliance to attack enemy fighters. In less than four months the Taliban was on the run and al Qaeda's operations in Afghanistan were crippled. Only one U.S. casualty was incurred from enemy fire. The United States in December 2001 installed Hamid Karzai as head of a new interim government. Administration supporters sneered at those who had warned of a quagmire.⁷⁴

In fact, the war managers made crucial errors that turned tactical success into strategic failure. Properly worried about getting bogged down in Afghanistan and determined to convert the armed services to a new form of warfare, Rumsfeld and his civilian planners relied on air power and local forces to do what otherwise would have required large numbers of

72. September 20, 2001, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Michael Kelly, "Myths of the Month," *Washington Post*, October 31, 2001; John Leo, "Quagmire, Schagmire," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 26, 2001, 52.

Americans. Without sufficient U.S. forces on the ground, bin Laden and Taliban leader Mullah Omar, along with numerous supporters, eluded capture near Tora Bora in December 2002 by paying off or evading Afghan fighters. They slipped away into the impenetrable mountains of Pakistan, an event of huge symbolic importance. Never enthusiastic about the job of reconstruction, the administration engaged in what critics called "nation-building lite," making inadequate preparations and providing insufficient funds for a formidable task. United States officials were already contemplating an invasion of Iraq, and preparations for that war diverted attention and resources from Afghanistan. Large parts of the country fell under the control of local warlords. Opium production regained its place as the nation's major cash crop. The government's authority barely extended beyond the capital, Kabul. Afghanistan, in time, disappeared from the front pages; an administration that had vowed to take the "evil one" stopped using bin Laden's name in public statements.⁷⁵

While the war in Afghanistan lagged amid claims of victory, the White House unveiled a new national security doctrine. Even before the end of 2001, top officials had turned from the complicated task of destroying terrorist cells to the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). To the shock of many observers, in his January 2002 State of the Union address, Bush identified an "axis of evil" composed of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea and sounded alarms that weapons of mass destruction produced by such rogue states might get into the hands of terrorists. He thus connected the global war on terrorism (GWOT in bureaucratese) with the danger of nuclear proliferation. *Coming without any consultation, the speech caused consternation among major allies.* In a June 2002 commencement address at West Point, the president affirmed that "in the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action."⁷⁶

In September, the administration issued the new doctrine. Prepared mainly in Rice's NSC and written, at Bush's instruction, in words "the boys in Lubbock" could understand, the strategy paper used 9/11 and the war on terrorism to elevate to doctrine ideas conservative and neo-conservative Republicans had been discussing for years. It drew heavily on the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance Document repudiated by the first Bush administration. It manifested the influence of Wolfowitz and those

75. Seymour Hersh, "The Other War," *New Yorker*, April 12, 2004, 40-47; Michael Ignatieff, "Nation-Building Lite," *New York Times Magazine*, July 28, 2002, 26-31, 54, 57, 59.

76. The origins of the "axis of evil" phrase are discussed in David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George Bush* (New York, 2003), 238-45, 268-71.