Introduction

Foreign affairs have captured (or recaptured) the attention of Americans. The murderous attacks of September 11, 2001, war in Afghanistan, war and insurgency in Iraq, and the continuing dangers of terrorism have triggered profound concern about threats to American security and the nature of America's role on the world stage. The end of the Cold War had ushered in a decade in which the public often appeared indifferent to the outside world and policymakers seemed unsure of the United States' mission in world affairs. To be sure, events sometimes rudely intruded – as in Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and smaller scale terrorist attacks – but the sense of dire threat that pervaded the previous half-century had vanished with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and so did abiding concern over foreign policy.

The vacation from the wider world proved to be temporary, but while it lasted America cut its spending on international affairs and on defense as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), downplayed the subject in newspapers and on TV network news, and dwelled hardly at all on foreign and national security policy in election contests for President and Congress.

This was not a turning inward – globalization, trade, the Internet, and inexpensive travel connected Americans to other cultures – but foreign policy was far from most people's minds. As a sign of the times, in the first year of his presidency Bill Clinton was reluctant to devote sustained attention to the subject. In frustration, his secretary of state,

secretary of defense, and national security adviser sent memos urging him to give them just one hour a week for foreign affairs. Clinton finally agreed, but to his "Yes" he added the words "when possible."[1]

In place of world affairs, a booming "new" economy, surging stock market, and fixation on the foibles of entertainment stars and politicians (O. J. Simpson, Princess Di, Monica and Bill) preoccupied the media and the public. But this holiday from history ended abruptly on 9/11, and in the years since that fateful morning, the claims of a troubled world have intruded into everyday American life. As a result, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Iraq, Iran, North Korea, tensions with Europe, problems of failed states, and seemingly endless turmoil in the Middle East now dominate the attention not only of policymakers and the media but of the wider public as well.[2] As a case in point, the 2004 presidential election was the first since the era of Vietnam in which voters accorded a higher priority to foreign affairs and national security than to the economy. The 2004 figure was 34 percent, whereas in 2000, only 12 percent reported that world affairs mattered most in deciding how they voted for President, and in 1996, just 5 percent did so.[3] In addition, substantial majorities continue to rank Iraq and terrorism as top priorities for the attention of the President and Congress.[4]

In view of this intense preoccupation, debates have erupted at home and abroad not only over specific policies, but also about the proper role of the United States. Urgent questions are now posed by politicians, journalists, ethicists, academics, and ordinary citizens: Has the United States become an empire on a scale surpassing even ancient Rome? Are the burdens of its engagement sustainable or do we risk overstretch? Will this unipolar moment endure? Has America become "Mars" to Europe's "Venus"? Should U.S. grand strategy dictate going it alone or acting only in concert with others? Is there a clash of civilizations? Why can't we bring peace to the Middle East? Why do foreigners have such ambivalent attitudes toward the United States? And given the problems and threats to world order and America's great power, how should we conduct ourselves on the world stage?

Such questions can seem disconnected and perplexing. Ultimately, they require serious thinking about threats, but also about values, historical continuities, and national identity. This book offers some provocative answers to such questions, and goes on to make an argument contrary to the conventional wisdom put forward by many academic experts and pundits. They tend to dwell disproportionately on problems in the exercise of power rather than on the dire consequences of retreat from an activist foreign policy. Some urge strategic disengagement,[5] while others assume that through multilateral cooperation or even "self-binding" to international institutions we can secure our vital interests and even remake the international system as we would like without either incurring serious costs or facing the realities of great power politics.[6] Commentators point to anti-Americanism abroad and frequently find the causes not in the stars but in ourselves, while observers in other countries tend to be more critical, even disdainful of United States policies and objectives. A number of foreign policy thinkers have assimilated the harsh lessons of September 11 in their thinking,[7] but many others – in part because of the overheated political atmosphere – have not. Much of the narrative about foreign policy thus falls short because it fails to take sufficiently into account the stubborn realities of the post-9/11 world.

The argument put forward in this book is, instead, based on three critical premises.[8] First, there is the meaning of 9/11 itself. The lessons of this event require us to alter fundamentally the way we think about the use of force and America's world role. In this sense it merits comparison with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in December 1941 that plunged the United States into World War II.[9] The suicide terrorism of the nineteen hijackers embodies what has been termed "apocalyptic nihilism."[10] It is not something that can be wished away or dealt with primarily by treating "root causes." Instead, the combination of militant Islamic terrorism and WMD poses a threat of a wholly new magnitude. As the 9/11 Commission concluded in its final report, "[T]he enemy is not just 'terrorism', some generic evil. . . . The catastrophic threat at this moment in history is more specific. It is the threat

posed by Islamist terrorism – especially the al Qaeda network, its affiliates, and its ideology."[11] Moreover, the key underlying assumption of deterrence – that one's adversary is a value-maximizing rational actor who treasures his own survival – is not very useful in thinking about countering such a menace. The scale of risk in the coming years, up to and including that of a concealed nuclear weapon or "dirty" bomb being detonated in an American city, is very likely to require a robust defense policy that includes preemption.

Second, as much as we might wish for more effective means of cooperation in addressing common problems, the reality of the United Nations and of other international institutions is that on the most urgent and deadly problems, they are mostly incapable of acting or inadequate to the task. The U.N.'s decision-making structure and institutional weaknesses, the makeup of the Security Council, failures in Bosnia (1991–95) and Rwanda (1994), the massive corruption of the oil-for-food program, the ability of terrorists to drive the organization out of Iraq with one blow,[12] and the feckless response to crimes against humanity in the Darfur region of Sudan are evidence of these grave shortcomings. Nor does the European Union, let alone weaker regional bodies such as the Arab League, African Union, or Organization of American States, have much capacity to deal with the deadliest threats. The U.N. has a significant role to play, not least in burden-sharing and in contributing to the perceived legitimacy of collective action, but its weaknesses remain a fundamental constraint. As Stanley Hoffmann, of Harvard's Center for European Studies, has observed, the U.N. and other international organizations "are increasingly important as sources of legitimacy and stabilizing forces, but often mismanaged and devoid of adequate means."[13]

Third, in an international system with no true central authority and the United States as the preponderant power, other countries will continue to look to us for leadership. In this anarchic and unipolar system, if America does not take action on the most dangerous perils, no one else is likely to have the capacity or the will to do so.[14] Yet, in view of U.S. primacy, it is not surprising that the onus for action falls on

its shoulders and that others may be tempted to act as free riders or "buck-passers" in a situation where security is a collective good.

In light of these premises, preemptive strategies in dealing with terrorism and WMD are, in my view, essential. In the face of lethal threats or imminent dangers, this use of force makes strategic sense. Indeed, under these circumstances, the use of preemption is supported by international law and the just war tradition. The maintenance of primacy – preponderance in the economic, military, technological, and cultural dimensions of power – is also in the national interest. And although the very fact of predominance can be a source of foreign resentment, a large disparity of power is more likely to deter challenges by other would-be powers than to provoke them.[15] American power is likely to remain robust and its costs are necessary and manageable provided we avoid disastrous miscalculations. Moreover, both primacy and active U.S. engagement are essential if we are to cooperate with others in the coming years to build a more stable, less dangerous, and more benign global order. Multilateral initiatives and institutions can be valuable in enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of foreign policy and in coping with common problems, but we must be both unsentimental about their weaknesses and cognizant of their strengths. At times, however, multilateralism becomes more tempting to others as a means of limiting or binding the United States, rather than achieving shared aims. In this regard, during the 2004 election campaign both George Bush and John Kerry were explicit in saying that America cannot wait for the consent of others when action is necessary to defend our national security.[16]

The United States thus has reason to follow specific policies in Europe, Iraq, the Middle East, East Asia, and elsewhere. For example, in Europe, consultation, cooperation, and joint action should be sought wherever possible, but freedom of action should not be limited only to those cases where there is prior approval by allies and by the U.N. Security Council. On terrorism, the United States should emphasize the fight against radical Islamist networks, work to prevent the proliferation of WMD, assert Western values, and seek to encourage

liberalization and – where feasible – democratization. On Iraq itself, resort to force against Saddam Hussein was a lesser evil because of the dangerous long-term strategic threat he posed to the region and to U.S. national interests. The struggle there remains protracted and very difficult. Unprecedented free elections have shown that the majority of Iraqis do not want rule by radical Islamists or a return to Ba'athist tyranny, though insurgency and ethnic violence pose dire problems.

In the Middle East, the policy of supporting Israel, insisting on a Palestinian leadership not compromised by terrorism and corruption, and readiness to broker a peace process starting from the multilateral "road map" seemed to show progress, with an elected post-Arafat president, cease-fire, and cooperation with Jordan and Egypt in Israel's Gaza disengagement. However, electoral success by Hamas and its refusal to recognize Israel, accept prior agreements, and renounce terrorism pose severe obstacles to peace, as do policies of Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran.

In Asia, there has been alliance with South Korea and Japan, engagement with Vietnam, China, India, Pakistan, and other regional actors, nuanced support for Taiwan, and multilateral negotiations in efforts to deal with North Korea. As in other regions, this involvement is not without risk, but it contributes more to security and stability than would alternative courses of action including outright withdrawal.

Power, primacy, and a willingness to act decisively, including the use of force, are not the only relevant dimensions of foreign policy and grand strategy. *How* policy is conducted can sometimes be as important as the substance of policy, and consultation, adroit diplomacy, and tact in working with other countries and institutions are essential in assuaging the sensibilities of foreign leaders and in gaining political and material support for American objectives. Harsh language and hubris on the part of policymakers are almost always counterproductive. A suitable grand strategy can thus be undermined if it is poorly implemented, and – as John Lewis Gaddis has observed – the "grandness" of strategy does not ensure its success.[17] It is also necessary that American policymakers appreciate the limits and varieties of power and acknowledge the disparity between power and influence,

in the sense that primacy itself does not guarantee desired outcomes. And there remains the question – as evident in the grueling experience with postwar Iraq – of whether the United States possesses the administrative and organizational capacity, the culture, and the national will to play the kind of role its size, position, and interests would appear to dictate. In any case, we ought not to berate ourselves nor entertain the idea of a radical reversal in our world role because of anti-Americanism. The roots of the phenomenon typically have more to do with what the United States is than what it does, and hostility often stems as much or more from reactions to globalization, modernity, and American preponderance than from U.S. policies themselves.

This book presents arguments supporting these propositions in some detail. It also considers the circumstances in which American primacy could be diminished by, for example, a grave economic crisis, a shattered domestic consensus, involvement in a Vietnam-style quagmire, or a mass casualty attack on the continental United States involving nuclear weapons or a viral biological agent. I also consider the implications for international order were the United States to play a far less engaged world role. I suggest that this would bring heightened instability and more dangerous competition and conflict among regional powers, for example, in East Asia (China, Japan, Korea), South Asia (India and Pakistan), and throughout the Middle East.

In sum, at a time when the threats from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are no longer remote contingencies, and when the values of human rights, peace, and stability cannot be reliably assured by institutions such as the U.N. and the European Union, global activism on the part of the United States becomes a necessity, not something about which to be apologetic. In the urgent debate about America's place in the world, this book insists that we grasp the differences between the global arena as we might wish it to be and what it is, the ideals the U.N. was created to serve and why that institution so often falls dangerously short, the reasons why our European allies are often motivated to define their identity in contrast to ours but in the end remain tied to us, the cultural and societal causes of admiration

and resentment, and the reasons why in the most dangerous regions of the world, the absence rather than presence of the United States is more likely to cause harm. Ultimately, it is the inevitable lack of global governance, the burdens of primacy, and the lethality of external threats that shape the requirements of the American era.

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The book is structured as follows. Chapter 1, "Caveat Empire: How to Think about American Power," examines the nature of U.S. power as well as its limits in achieving desired political outcomes, and considers contending views about America's world role. Chapter 2, "New (and Old) Grand Strategy," addresses the overall logic of U.S. policies toward the outside world, including the controversial ideas of primacy and preemption. Though these have been characterized as radical departures, there are in fact important precedents in U.S. history. This chapter also considers the dilemmas of grand strategy, threats to American predominance, and the reality that how a strategy is implemented can at times be as important as the strategy itself.

Chapter 3, "Europe: Symbolic Reactions and Common Threats," explores this country's single most important relationship: the troubled yet intimate tie with Europe. Despite predictions of a rupture and the emergence of an expanding European Union as a counterweight to the United States, there will be no divorce. Though the policies adopted by France and to some extent Germany in recent years have been described as an attempt to counterbalance the United States, it is at least equally significant that Europe itself remains deeply divided. Over the long term, Europe is likely to have only limited ability to provide for its own security and will continue to need the United States as a hedge against future threats. Despite the narcissism of small differences, we do share economic interests as well as the legacy of common institutions and values.

The American era cannot be understood only in geopolitical terms. Chapter 4, "Globalization, Culture, and Identities in Crisis," shows how the global diffusion of culture is bound up with U.S. primacy

and why this results in a paradoxical blend of attraction and repulsion toward the United States to be found in many regions of the world. This chapter identifies both the material effects of globalization and American/Western values as triggers for cultural anxiety and turmoil, and finds that cultural and economic resentments, especially in countries where modern values do not prevail, are often deflected from domestic and systemic causes and redirected at the United States as a convenient symbolic target. In consequence, the root causes of anti-Americanism, like those of anti-Semitism, lie within the societies and identities of those who promote them.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine two of the most important theaters in which the United States is engaged: Iraq and East Asia. In each case, America's pivotal role is driven both by the lack of viable alternatives and by our national interest. No other country or international institution has a comparable capacity to deter threats to regional stability and to deal with terrorism and WMD, but this creates policy dilemmas. In the Middle East, the United States becomes a target for local actors aggravated by the failures of their own societies and because they often perceive the United States as guarantor for rulers they detest. Elsewhere, longer term great power challenges are at issue, and the gradual emergence of China as a true global competitor to the United States may ultimately present the single greatest source of opposition to American primacy.

In conclusion, chapter 7 addresses the simultaneous admiration and resentment directed toward the United States as a consequence of American primacy. Contradictory attitudes are both the product of the societies out of which they emerge and the inevitable result of that primacy. In a world where the demand for "global governance" greatly exceeds the supply, and in which U.S. power remains critical for coping with security threats as well as for resolving problems of cooperation, both attraction and backlash are unavoidable. More can be done to win "hearts and minds," but the beginning of wisdom is to know that these contradictory impulses and an accompanying anti-Americanism are inevitable as long as the United States exists as a great power.

1 Caveat Empire: How to Think about American Power

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Nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power; nothing. . . . Charlemagne's empire was merely Western European in its reach. The Roman empire stretched farther afield, but there was another great empire in Persia, and a larger one in China. There is therefore no comparison.

– Paul Kennedy[1]

I cannot succeed in pursuing my domestic objectives, economic or political; I cannot succeed in pursuing my regional objectives . . . and I cannot succeed in pursuing my global objectives . . . – be it on social issues, on arms control issues, on economic issues – without engaging America.

– Nabil Fahmy, Egyptian Ambassador to the United States[2]

It's strange for me to say it, but this process of change has started because of the American invasion of Iraq. . . . I was cynical about Iraq. But when I saw the Iraqi people voting . . . 8 million of them, it was the start of a new Arab world. . . .

– Lebanese Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt[3]

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