Introduction

Toward a Faustian Diplomacy

> Forgetfulness and . . . even historical falsehoods are an essential factor in the formation of a nation, and so it is that the progress of historical studies is often a danger for the spirit of nationality.
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> Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882)

Unkowningly, American colonists took the first step on the path to a Faustian foreign policy the moment they set out on their "errand into the wilderness" in the New World. Despite their constant jeremiads about sinfulness and "incessant and never successful cry for repentance, the Puritans launched themselves upon the process of Americanization." Even though the Puritans initially expressed doubts about territorial expansion because of their fears of encountering the "profane," later explorers, immigrants, homesteaders, and fur traders carried this Americanization process across the continent with largely the same unshakable and shared belief that their endeavor was blessed by God. In effect, they turned the jeremiad "doctrine of [God's] vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause." Americans came to believe that they would achieve their errand – and ultimately their dream of Manifest Destiny – because they represented a sanguine force for good.[1]

The United States is not alone in developing and nurturing the notion that it is a force for good; all nation-states have their self-serving creation myths. Nations (and sometimes even regions within nations) contrive narratives surrounding the conditions of their foundation. In times of extreme crisis, these original myths are elaborated upon or amended to suit new conditions and, occasionally, new origin accounts are generated. It does not matter whether national myths are positive or negative or represent more faith than fact; they are absolutely essential for the body politic in any country to function collectively. When defeats assume more mythological importance for nations than their victories, they often give rise to fantasies about revenge and restoration of past glory.[2]

Elaboration on and reinvention of these national public myths, sometimes called national cultural identity, also occur after countries have reached the height of their powers and hold sway over other nations. Regardless of the reason for the creation of national myths, whether the impetus derives from negative or positive events or from weakness or strength, national origins stories obscure reality. The clouds of myth are especially useful when it comes to justifying foreign policy. Walter L. Hixson has argued that America's national myth ultimately "create[d] a structure of consent that enable[d] the hegemony of a militant and undemocratic foreign policy in an ostensibly democratic society." Thus, "'taming the frontier,' advancing 'civilization,' or leading the 'Free World' all are inextricably linked to foreign policy goals of the United States." The national creation myth was "crucial in fostering consensus or hegemony; it is a mythical discourse that masquerades as truth to justify imperial conduct as well as the ordering of domestic hierarchies."[3]

Once the United States emerged from the First World War powerful enough to begin asserting its foreign policy worldwide instead of just in the Western Hemisphere, there was little, except rhetoric, left of the Puritan harangues against sin or desire for repentance or doubts about unfulfilled "errands into the wilderness." Instead, the country began to cut "deals with the devil" in order to maintain an expanding list of global goals. Like Jonathan Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust, who gloried in the youth, unlimited knowledge, and fortune temporarily bestowed upon him by Mephistopheles, the United States gloried in its rapid rise in prosperity and power during the American Century. Just as Faust ignored the sordidness and violence of his liaison with Margarete, American presidents from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush failed to acknowledge the often-dirty diplomatic deals they made because to do so would undermine their own and the country's belief in American virtue and exceptionalism.

The comparison to Faust is especially apt in terms of the U.S. foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. Faust, at the zenith of his happiness and potency, broke his pact with the devil by wishing that things would never change. Carrying the metaphor forward, it could be argued that the United States, at the height of its power upon winning the Cold War, made a similar mistake by trying to stop time and impose its hegemony indefinitely on the rest of world. Philosophically, one could retreat to Oswald Spengler's much-maligned theory about the decline of the West and see the United States as the ultimate example of his "Faustian civilization" where the populace constantly strives for the unattainable and goes into protracted, inevitable, and tragic decline, knowing that its goals cannot be achieved but refusing to settle for less. In either metaphor, Faust's relationship to Mephistopheles is emblematic of the ways the United States has conducted its foreign policy from 1920 through 2007.

American Exceptionalism

From its inception religious and political leaders have nourished and perpetuated a mythical view of America as an exceptional nation with God always on

its side. John Winthrop preached that the crucial purpose of the Puritan venture into the New World in 1630 was to establish a "city set on the hill" with the "eies of all people uppon us." In a variety of religious and secularized versions this Puritan vision of America as "uniquely pleasing to God" and as "the new Jerusalem" or "the New Israel" became one of the enduring features of U.S. foreign policy down to the present. Perpetuation of this mythical view has been enormously successful: a Pew Center poll taken in 2003 indicated that 71 percent of evangelical Christians believed that the United States had "special protection of God"; 40 percent of mainline Christians did, and 39 percent of all Catholics did. Given the fact that a little over three-quarters of Americans are Christian and only 10 percent of the remainder consider themselves neither religious nor spiritual, it is difficult to overestimate how deeply this God-endowed exceptionalism permeates contemporary society. This permeation makes it next to impossible for average citizens to recognize limits to national power by viewing the "American way of life [as] no more than one variation among many to which humanity adheres."[4]

Cultural and literary scholars have elaborated on this foundation of American exceptionalism and its secularization. They point out that the use of morality, pseudo-religious concepts, and linguistic gymnastics has consistently been present and behind the "divinely sanctioned national greatness" at the heart of American cultural identity as a nation. From the early colonial period, the Puritans (and their southern counterparts) began to impose "civilization" on "savages" and on the environment in order to create a New World that they believed was foreordained by God. This constituted a "cultural approach to understanding national identity" that Sacvan Bercovitch called the "myth of America," meaning the pursuit of an unattainable "errand into the wilderness . . . through the technique of the Biblical jeremiad, a ritualized denunciation of sin with an attendant call for redemption." This American myth is rooted in Puritan Massachusetts and its convictions about "inherent virtue, providential destiny, and mission." According to Bercovitch, "the ritual of the jeremiad" provided "a frame for understanding the emergence of a [capitalist middle-class] hegemonic national identity . . . [which] 'bespeaks an ideological consensus . . . unmatched in any other modern culture' [and is] unsurpassed by any other modern nation."[5] While the mythical foundation of American national cultural identity is not unprecedented in the history of the world, it is the dominant one at the moment.

The New World's physical isolation from other continents augmented this myth of moral and geographic exceptionalism and ultimately led to the idea that the United States had sovereignty over the entire Western Hemisphere and could always protect itself from the rest of world if it had to. President Woodrow Wilson would later refer to the sanctity and physical separation and superiority of the United States as its "self-possession," meaning he believed that whatever America touched – that is embraced, whether it be justice, democracy, or self-government – it "made holy" because it operated out of a sense of disinterest and universal service to the world. Such beneficent selflessness arose from the

fact that the United States, according to Wilson, had no "reason to fear that from any quarter our independence or the integrity of our territory" could be threatened and because as a Christian nation the country "exemplif[ied] that devotion to the elements of righteousness . . . derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture."[6]

This exceptionalist belief in the county's "rightness" and military capability led to the corollary that it should at the same time protect itself from the evils of the world whenever American principles were perceived to be rejected or ignored or under attack. While September 11 temporarily shattered "the ethos of American invulnerability," as not even Pearl Harbor or the Cuban missile crisis had, it quickly became unpatriotic to question the myth about the exceptional ability of the United States to protect itself. Exceptionalism is also at the core of the singular American belief in its foreordained prosperity and at the core of the victim mentality and loss of innocence expressed by its politicians and pundits every time America experiences a major domestic or foreign policy setback or disaster.[7]

Without too much exaggeration one could say that upon entering the new millennium the United States was at the height of its myth-affirming powers. Unfortunately, instead of triggering new domestic perspectives and a reassessment of its Cold War foreign policies, the tragic events of September 11 simply reinforced the country's view of its moral and physical uniqueness among nations as it tried to compensate for its most severe encounter with vulnerability.

What is often forgotten about this conflation of exceptionalism, invulnerability, endless prosperity, and periodic loss of innocence is that, to preserve these myths, presidents beginning with Wilson have revealed themselves willing to enter into "pacts with the devil" in foreign policy matters. As subsequent chapters will illustrate, Wilson entered into a series of mini-Faustian bargains both before and after World War I, as have most presidents since, particularly in time of war. The cumulative effect of these greater and lesser "deals with the devil" to impose American values and win foreign policy conflicts at any cost reached such an apex during the Cold War that even critics of U.S. diplomacy did not think the Cold War Faustian bargains could be surpassed following the fall of Communism. Yet they were confounded and often silenced by government propaganda in the wake of September 11 as the United States embraced any unsavory government that promised to fight terrorism.

Consequently, since the end of the Cold War there has been little public reevaluation of how the United States obtained the unprecedented position of power in the world that it now occupies. This means that even after the terrorist attacks, most Americans continue to perceive themselves as blessed and deserving, never questioning the domestic or foreign price of the victory in the Cold War. There is little recognition that hubris about the country's ability to maintain its current unrivaled position in the world may not be the best basis on which the United States should continue to conduct itself. Thus, although September 11 exposed U.S. vulnerability, most of the country's leaders still cling to certain Cold War foreign policies that are no longer germane in an age

of random terrorism, including the idea that the United States is always an innocent victim on the world stage.

The need to reassess past and present assumptions about U.S. foreign policy is the underlying theme of this book. This need arises from the way in which the original creation myth of exceptionalism fostered several foreign policy concepts such as self-determination. Beginning with Wilson during the First World War, self-determination came to be associated with the ahistorical notion that democracy and capitalism are inextricably intertwined and can be imposed on all parts of the world. Another questionable aspect of U.S. foreign policy is the conviction that the unfettered pursuit of free trade is a prerequisite for world peace. Still another is the idea that the United States can create a lasting New World Order in which it is the sole, unchallenged hegemonic force. Finally, there is the refusal of most Americans and their leaders to admit that by the end of the twentieth century their country had, for reasons other than jealousy, become an unloved empire in many parts of the world.[8] Unless the United States critically reexamines all these foreign policy assumptions, it will not be able to formulate a new diplomacy for promoting a more peaceful and humanitarian twenty-first century.

The Problems with Democracy and Capitalism

The end of the Cold War gave the United States the opportunity not only to take stock of its domestic political and economic problems, but also to shoulder responsibility and rethink the coercive aspects of its successes abroad as well as some of the less-than-savory and unsuccessful endeavors in the last fifty years of American foreign policy – not the least of which is the fact that "war seldom creates democracy." According to a 2003 Carnegie Endowment survey in *The Christian Science Monitor*, "of the eighteen regime changes forced by the United States in the 20th century, only 5 resulted in democracy, and in the case of wars fought unilaterally, the number goes down to one – Panama." Yet throughout the Cold War groups on both the left and the right argued that democracy could or should be imposed from above. Theoretically at least, the original meaning of democracy was "the rule of everyone by everyone." It rises from below, not from the top, and is, therefore, conditioned more by cultural and economic conditions than by military might. So it should not have come as any surprise that at the end of the twentieth century one could read many variations on the following theme: "[D]emocracy does not result from either military intervention and regime change or from the various current models of 'transition to democracy,' which are generally based on some form of Latin American *caudillismo* and have proved better at creating new oligarchies than a democratic system."[9]

Specifically, a 2004 UN report indicated that a majority of Latin Americans in eighteen nations would support the return of authoritarian governments, rather than the current democratic ones, because the latter had not resulted in enough economic benefits, social equality, effective legal systems, or social services. If

this trend continues, it could mean that economic progress might become more important than the support of democracy. The Mexican ambassador to the United States pessimistically concluded in 2004: "This shows that democracy is not something that has taken hold of peoples' minds as strongly as we had thought it would." His statement reflected the economic harm that Mexico had suffered after Congress passed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993. Despite exaggerated claims by the Clinton administration, NAFTA failed to produce jobs in either the United States or Mexico. Moreover, it contributed to speculative foreign investment and the subsequent peso devaluation crisis in Mexico. The contestable results of NAFTA logically delayed the approval of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) until 2006 because it is based on the same "Washington Consensus" economic principles, also known as neo-liberal economics, liberal capitalist internationalism, or by the more modern term "economism." By the 1990s, these terms, when applied globally, referred to privatization of state-owned businesses, free trade, openness to foreign investments, balanced budgets (based on cutting social welfare programs), and deregulation (which had the backing of Wall Street and conservative think tanks, as well as the centrist wing of the Democratic Party). But instead of "lead[ing] to economic takeoff," the "Washington Consensus" has often produced sluggish growth, increased economic inequality, and a series of economic crises.[10]

Attempts by the United States to force its economic views on other areas of the world have also been problematic. Even the advent in the 1980s, of modern global capitalism, based on free trade, open markets, unregulated international investments, and dramatic improvements in communication technology, has "yet to produce anything like universal prosperity." (Globalism is simply a hyper version of the "Washington Consensus," or neo-liberal economics.) Because capitalism is the product of Western values, some societies are simply less culturally adaptable to its development. Major reasons why capitalism has largely failed outside of the West are the absence of property rights, the existence of underground, nontaxable economies, and corrupt or collapsing legal and political institutions in most poor countries – all of which provide a breeding ground for terrorism. There also is evidence that unregulated global capitalism actually hinders the development of democracy because it fosters anarchical economic forces that undermine national cultural and political institutions that might otherwise foster democratic governments.[11]

Historically, moreover, there is no more connection between democracy and free-market capitalism than there is between social justice and the bottom line. "Neither history nor philosophy link free markets and free men," according to John Ralston Saul. "They have nothing more to do with each than the accidents of time and place." One need only look at both England and the United States in the different centuries when these countries industrialized to realize that it happened before universal suffrage, child labor laws, and health regulations existed. Likewise, capitalism thrived in the undemocratic times of Louis Philippe, again under Emperor Napoleon III, and under Kaiser Wilhelm II and

Nicholas II. In the last fifty years, "market economies have shown a remarkable adaptability and have flourished in many tyrannical states from Chile to South Korea, from Panama to Singapore. . . . On the level of the individual, capitalism seeks consumers susceptible to the shaping of their needs and the manipulation of their wants while democracy needs citizens autonomous in their thoughts and independent in their deliberative judgments. . . . but capitalism wishes to tame anarchic democracy and appears to have little problem tolerating tyranny as long as it secures stability."[12]

Honest recognition of these jarring hypotheses about democracy, war, and capitalism should have produced a self-critical, rather than triumphal, exceptionalist, or defensive mind-set at the end of the Cold War. Yet such a reevaluation has not taken place, in part because U.S. diplomacy for most of the twentieth century has been characterized by a mercurial assortment of unilateral and collective actions that I first described in the 1970s as the practice of "independent internationalism" and that now can perhaps more accurately be described as "unilateral internationalism."

Independent or Unilateral Internationalism

Both terms refer, not to the ideology that had imbued U.S. diplomacy by 1900, but to the modus operandi characterizing the country's foreign affairs. Most simply, it means that when the United States cannot, or does not, want to solve a particular diplomatic problem through unilateral action, it seeks cooperative methods for pursuing its goals. The country's first inclination for most of the last century was to act unilaterally whenever possible and to cooperate with other nations only when absolutely necessary. A presidential commission first noticed this trend in 1933, reporting to the outgoing and discredited Depression president, Herbert Hoover, that the postwar diplomacy of the United States in the 1920s had alternated

> between isolation and independence, between sharply marked economic nationalism and notable international initiatives in cooperation moving in a highly unstable zigzag course. . . . Some signs point in the direction of independence and imperialism of a new Roman type, reaching aggressively for more land or wider markets under political auspices; others toward amiable cooperation in the most highly developed forms of world order. It is not unreasonable to anticipate that these opposing trends will continue to alternate sharply in their control over American policy. In any case there can be little doubt that the trend will be in the future as in recent years in the direction of more intimate relations through developing modes of intercommunication and through economic interchange and on the whole toward an increasing number of international contacts; and this, whether the future pattern of action [by the United States] is predominantly imperialistic or cooperative in form and spirit.[13]

This summary of American foreign policy in the 1920s fairly well describes the diplomacy of the United States for the next seventy years. The only thing this commission report logically could not have anticipated in the early 1930s

was the impact the practice of independent or unilateral internationalism would have on the powers of the modern presidency. The premier modern president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, set in motion increased executive powers – first over domestic policy and later over foreign policy. The Cold War greatly enhanced these "semi-constitutional" powers of successive presidents. They are still in place and remain unquestioned even though that bipolar conflict is over. The evolutionary relationship between the power of the United States and the power of the president is another of the themes of this book – from the premodern, mercurial presidency, to the modern, imperial presidency, to the postmodern, imponderable presidency.

The United States began to follow this "highly unstable [and] zigzag course" of independent internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, again after the Second World War, and still again in the post–Cold War era. All modern and postmodern presidents have engaged in independent or unilateral internationalistic behavior. American exceptionalism encouraged their conduct as they also believed in the country's invulnerability because of its continental isolation, its abundant natural resources, its ability to protect itself, regardless of world events, and its stable, balance-of-power political system.

Most significantly, the practice of independent internationalism since 1920 has perverted in practice any sustained commitment to collective diplomacy on the part of the United States – except, temporarily, in times of crises. Because the 1990s was not perceived as a crisis decade,[14] the United States did not develop any consistent cooperative foreign policy for the post–Cold War era. It remains to be seen whether it will in the first decade of the twenty-first century. So far, it has not, even though the war on terrorism has thrown U.S. diplomacy back into crisis mode.

Using this definition of independent or unilateral internationalism as an analytical tool also helps to explain the exaggerated moralistic fervor with which the United States has pursued its foreign policy since the American Revolution – particularly after winning both world wars, at the end of Cold War, and now, again, since September 11 – because it exposes the exceptionalism that prevails whether the United States is acting cooperatively or unilaterally. Arrogant sanctimoniousness is natural following any unexpected military and economic victory such as the United States enjoyed with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War wrapped up with a whimper. Europe and Asia were physically undamaged. The two previous global conflicts had been fought with real bullets, real bombs, real deaths, and real devastation of entire countries in real time. In each case the United States had emerged stronger than ever – uninjured except for wartime casualties. At the end of the Cold War, by contrast, Europe (and most of Asia) were actually better off than ever before, and so was the United States, except that it faced regional trade and technological competition for the first time. What was there for American leaders to think about? Victors, untouched by crises of confidence or identity, usually view history as their intellectual property, especially when there are no discernible enemies of any size or danger left.

As long as the ideological outcome of the Cold War remained in doubt, there was little reason for American presidents or government decision makers to question the Faustian results of independent internationalism. Once the United States emerged victorious from that conflict, it should have been possible for American foreign affairs experts and scholars to reassess established strategies for controlling Hobbesian nation-state conflict between (and sometimes inside) countries and to devise a less erratic and arbitrary way of implementing them in the best interests of the world. In order to do so realistically, however, a critical mass of such diplomatic authorities inside and outside government would have had to admit past American diplomatic mistakes and Faustian deals. They would also have had to factor in the "irreversible effects" of economic globalization based on modern technology, and to look hard at the impact of the information revolution, not only on conventional capitalism, but also on the traditional nation-state system and, perhaps equally important, on classical Western civilization.[15]

Something less obvious than smug triumphalism has also contributed to the lazy intellectual vacuum or lack of imagination demonstrated by American post–Cold War diplomacy during the 1990s and by the country's open embrace of the seductive age-old idea of hegemonic dominance after September 11. This something has so benumbed U.S. foreign policy experts that they have retreated to, and seem only capable of perfecting, actions that prevailed during the height of the Cold War with a hubris typical of conquerors. Why hasn't there been more creative, cooperative conceptual thinking now that the United States is the preeminent power on the globe? The answer lies in the way the United States fought and ultimately won the Cold War, and it can be found symbolically in the use of the term "Wilsonian" before September 11, to mean anything and everything from unilateralism to international cooperation.

"Good" and "Bad" Wilsonianism

After September 11 the idea that "virtually every American concerned with international issues is, or at least claims to be, a Wilsonian" has become increasingly problematic. In contrast to the post–Cold War Wilsonians of the 1990s, who, according to Ronald Steel, "favor[ed] open market economies, self-determination for restive ethnic or nationality groups, collective security, and democratic governments," twenty-first-century Republican neo-conservatives have misappropriated the idealistic aspects of the foreign policy of the twentieth-eighth president of the United States to endorse American domination of the world by any means. They have done this using various euphemisms to refer to U.S. imperialism and empire, invoking "Wilson's name . . . to sanctify virtually every military action that an American president has chosen to pursue, including the current war in Iraq." Wilson's rhetoric about freedom, democracy, free trade, and the rule of law has been easily co-opted over the years to justify the United States "act[ing] as the chief of the constabulatory" to impose its values on the world, particularly in those areas deemed unenlightened.[16]

When placed in historical context, Wilson's foreign policy legacy appears, at best, to have been "richly hypocritical." This is because two types of Wilsonianism existed by the end of the First World War, and the United States pursued both as it began to practice independent internationalism for the rest of the twentieth century. The major American political and economic component of what I am calling the "good" Wilsonian diplomacy consisted of the president's belief in spreading self-determination and free trade capitalism to the world through collective security arrangements. The positive Wilsonian legacy was not simply one of liberal capitalist internationalism but also one of anticolonialism, ethnic national sovereignty, and multilateral cooperation. As early as May 1915, he informed the League to Enforce Peace that "every people has a right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live," and Wilson later came to believe that his beloved League of Nations would be able to make peaceful territorial adjustments "pursuant to the principle of self-determination." At the end of his presidency Wilson fervently asserted that U.S. foreign policy would be used only "toward the greater good of mankind, not toward aggrandizement and oppression."[17]

However, even this positive view of Wilsonianism is based on a very selective analysis of his diplomatic record from 1913 to 1921. It is a view that mainly focuses on the three years from the spring of 1917 to the fall of 1920, and it ignores Wilson's less-than-altruistic diplomacy from 1913 through 1916. During these years he moralistically justified unilateral U.S. military and economic action against sovereign nations in the Western Hemisphere that were not threatening the United States. Similarly, he demanded that American neutrality rights be honored by the warring powers in the First World War even though his economic dealings with them were not neutral, and neither was his belated sending of American troops in 1919 and 1920 to interfere with the Russian civil war on the side of the anti-Bolshevik forces.

Naturally, materialism played a role in U.S. foreign policy during the twentieth century, but Wilson thought that the League of Nations had the ability to restrain capitalist greed for the benefit of all nations. As the United States grew more powerful after 1920, based on an evolving sense of its economic self-interest, little restrained its expansionism following the Great Depression as the country emerged ever more prosperous from the Second World War and then from the Cold War. Yet since 1945 the United States has seldom acknowledged that its "foreign policy in a given instance may be driven by economic and financial interests." While economic considerations (and even imperial interests) are logically an essential part of any major country's foreign policy, American leaders hid these crasser aspects of U.S. diplomacy from the public with self-serving legitimating claims about the moral superiority and defensive nature of the country's diplomacy.[18]

This misleading rhetoric combined with the negative, or what I am calling the "bad," unilateral interventionist aspects of the Wilsonian legacy led the United States to commit excesses during the Cold War, specifically with respect to access to such natural resources as oil deemed necessary to shore up its economic