

The Foreign Policy of George W. Bush: "More of the Same" in the Second Term?

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When asked whether they expected the foreign policy course of the second Bush administration to change, all American experts replied: "more of the same - but with a nicer face."¹ Therefore the first part of this article will be dedicated to a detailed analysis of the past four years of American foreign policy. President George W. Bush's first term was characterized by his administration's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These events have led to a fundamental paradigm shift in United States foreign and security policy.² Ten years after the end of the Cold War, the age of U.S. geopolitics was consigned to the history books, and an era of U.S. global politics was ushered in. The 20th century was strongly characterized by traditional geopolitics: American security essentially hinged upon preventing the domination of the Eurasian continent by any one European power. This aim was finally achieved with the collapse of the Soviet Union, from which the United States emerged as the world's sole superpower. Despite this turn of events, however, the security of the United States is still threatened, as was proven by the events of three and a half years ago. The attacks of 9/11 changed the United States' perspective on itself and the world. Not since the Japanese raided the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor have Americans been so deeply affected and united as they were by this first major attack on American soil since the British took Washington in 1814, burning the Capitol and the White House.

At the dawn of the 21st century, there are two determining factors in international relations, and these are playing an essential role in shaping United States foreign and security policy: first, America's unprecedented military and political dominance and, second, the emergence of so-called "catastrophic terrorism" in the wake of globalization, which is unleashing political, economic, and social forces that no state - not even the U.S. - can control by itself.

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¹ Replies given to the author by, among others, Strobe Talbott, President of the Brookings Institution, Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Jessica Tuchman Mathews, President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

² Cf. Heinrich Kreft. "Paradigmenwechsel in der Amerikanischen Politik? Der 11. September und die Folgen (A Paradigm Shift in American Policy? The Events of September 11 and Their Aftermath)" *Die Politische Meinung* 384.11 (2001): 41-45.

American Superiority

Even though for the United States the so-called "post-cold-war era" ended on 9/11, as Secretary of State Colin Powell declared shortly afterward, the foundation for many present-day developments was laid over the past decade. If history adopts the current American practice of referring to the "war" on international terrorism, then the ten years that elapsed between the end of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, and September 11, 2001, may go down in history as an "interbellum," similar to that of 1919 to 1939.

When the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States had reached the apogee of its power. It was the world's predominant superpower, in military, economic, and cultural terms. The United States won an overwhelming victory in the Gulf War at the beginning of the 90s, and the Kosovo war against Serbia was ended without the loss of a single American life in combat. Every year since 1992, the United States' share of worldwide military expenditure has exceeded 35 percent. The U.S. defense budget was thereby larger than that of the following six nations combined - not to mention that four of these are close U.S. allies. Provided the so-called "Taiwan problem" was kept under control, there was no reason to expect any clashing of interests with China, despite its great economic success and own political aspirations.³

Country	Military expenditure (in U.S.\$ billion, at 2003 exchange rates)	Percentage of GDP	Percentage of global military expenditure
United States	404.9	3.7	40.6
Russia	65.2	4.9	6.5
China	55.9	3.9	5.6
France	45.7	2.6	4.6
Japan	42.8	1	4.3
Great Britain	42.8	2.4	4.3
Germany	35.1	1.5	3.5
India	16.2	2.6	1.6
North Korea	5.5	25	0.55
Iran	3.1	2.4	0.31

Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance 2004/2005*. Oxford University Press. 353-358.

³ Cf. Heinrich Kreft. "China - die kommende Großmacht. Vom Objekt zum Akteur der internationalen Politik (The Rising Superpower. China's New Active International Political Role)" *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* Vol. 51 (2000): 21-29.

The American Defense Budget: an International Comparison (as of 2003)

Over the course of the past decade, the United States has experienced unprecedented economic growth. At the same time, the "Pacific century" - i.e., the economic challenge that Japan, it was widely believed, would pose on the basis of an ostensibly more efficient form of capitalism - failed to materialize. When this economic boom slowed at the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency, the United States' share of global GDP had risen from 25 to more than 30 percent; in addition, President Clinton had succeeded in transforming the United States' most apparent weakness, its massive budget deficit, into a budget surplus - the first time this had been achieved since 1969.

The collapse of Communism also meant the demise of the only alternative ideology of modernization. It appeared that the spread of Western modernity, with bourgeois-capitalist values and - ushered in by these - democratic principles would continue unchecked.⁴ This is what Francis Fukuyama attempted to express with his theory of "the end of history."⁵ At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States was both indomitable and invulnerable; it appeared to have finally risen to become the new Rome. The former French Foreign Minister Vedriner referred to it as the "hyperpower" at the dawn of the new millennium.⁶ Since 9/11, the United States has expanded its dominant position. In 2003, its military budget grew to U.S.\$ 404.9 billion, thus increasing the U.S. share of global military expenditure to 40.6 percent. As a result, the military expenditure gap further widened between the United States and the rest of the world. However, in 2003, U.S. military expenditure in terms of GDP only increased to 3.7 percent, approximately half of its level at the height of the Cold War.

The Threatened Superpower

While the Cold War was a conflict between two highly-armed blocs with both conventional and nuclear arsenals the new conflict is a hot, and above all asymmetrical, so-called "gray war"⁷ - with no fronts, armies, or rules. The two sides are the United States, or the West, and an obscure

⁴Anatol Lieven. "The Secret Policemen's Ball: The United States, Russia and the international order after 11 September." *International Affairs* 78.2 (2002): 245-59, especially 246.

⁵Francis Fukuyama. "The End of History?" *National Interest* (Summer 1989).

⁶Hubert Vedriner and Dominique Moisi. *France in an Age of Globalization*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001.

⁷On the term "gray war," cf.: Heinrich Kreft. "Vom Kalten Krieg zum 'Grauen Krieg'. Uneingeschränkte Bündnissolidarität mit den USA (From the Cold War to the 'Gray' War: Unlimited Solidarity with the United States)." *Internationale Politik* 12 (2001): 43-46; ---, "Vom Kalten zum 'Grauen Krieg' - Paradigmenwechsel in der amerikanischen Außenpolitik (From the Cold War to the 'Gray' War: a Paradigm Shift in American Foreign Policy)." *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (21 June 2002): 14-22.

enemy that is difficult to locate. The enemy's strength draws on the West's weaknesses, and on its open society. The enemy aims to destroy, and it would not shy away from using weapons of mass destruction should it obtain them. Rather than taking direct action to achieve its goals, this enemy prefers to achieve its aims indirectly, by prompting specific reactions from the other side.⁸

September 11 has disproved Fukuyama's theory. The new challenge facing the West is not an alternative form of modernization, but rather the categorical rejection of modernization in the name of radical religious belief.

The terrorist attacks were brought about by the deep-rooted changes the world has been undergoing in particular as a result of globalization. The revolution in the areas of information and communication technology has resulted in a permanent power shift away from states and governments, and towards individuals and groups. Globalization has thereby brought about a general trend towards the privatization of power, with terrorism being nothing else than a form of the privatization of war.⁹

Already in September 2001, President Bush warned that the fight against international terrorism would be long, often conducted through covert operations, and that it was unclear when it would end. Neither the United States, with the greatest military superiority in history, nor NATO was (and is) in a position to deter such attacks, because those who carry them out have no country to defend. Massive retaliation is virtually part of the terrorists' strategy. What characterizes this new threat is that the balance of terror theory does not apply. The terrorists have succeeded in turning elements of open society against itself; with immense logistical efficiency, they destroyed the World Trade Center and parts of the Pentagon, which were targeted as symbols of American and Western power.

Terrorism has become a strategic challenge for American foreign policy. The events of September 11, 2001, clearly set American foreign and security policy on a new course and gave it a precise "mission"¹⁰: the war on

⁸ David Fromkin. "The Strategy of Terrorism." Eds. James F. Hoge Jr., Fareed Zakaria. *The American Encounter: The United States and the Making of the Modern World*. New York: 1997. 345.

⁹ Cf. Joseph S. Nye. *The Paradox of American Power. Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁰ Steven Mufson quotes President Bush as having stated: "We have found our mission." "Foreign Policy's 'Pivotal Moment'" *The Washington Post* (September 27, 2001). Also: Harvey Sicherman. "Finding a Foreign Policy." *ORBIS* (Spring 2002): 215-227. Also cf. G. John Ikenberry. "American Grand Strategy in the Age of Terror" *Survival* 43.4 (Winter 2001-02): 19-34.

international terrorism.¹¹ The United States has lost its legendary invulnerability. Although no one foresaw such acts of "catastrophic terrorism," in particular the attack on the World Trade Center, it was not an unknown threat. The Clinton administration had already substantially increased its budget for combating terrorism in response to an entire series of attacks against American establishments. It began with the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, and included attacks against U.S. military facilities in Saudi Arabia, the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the USS Cole in the Yemeni port of Aden. In all these attacks, including some that had been thwarted, evidence suggested the direct or indirect involvement of Osama bin Laden and his al Qaida terrorist network.

In 1999, the official report of a commission chaired by two prominent former senators warned that America's military superiority could not protect it against an attack on its own territory. The report makes the nearly prophetic statement that "Americans will likely die on American soil, possibly in numbers," as the result of a terrorist attack.¹² However this report, and the warnings that were issued prior to and after it, went unheeded by America's political leaders.

"America Must Show Strength"

In the fall of 2001, a majority of officials within the Bush administration came to the conclusion that in the end it was America's weakness that had encouraged its terrorist enemies to carry out ever more brazen attacks. This view was expressed, for example, by Vice President Cheney: "Weakness, vacillation, and unwillingness of the United States to stand with our friends - that is provocative It's encouraged people like Osama bin Laden ... to launch repeated strikes against the United States, our people overseas and here at home, with the view that he could, in fact, do so with impunity."¹³

On the one hand, "homeland security" became a new priority of the Bush administration, along with improving international cooperation in the areas of intelligence gathering and criminal prosecution (e.g., "counterterrorism" became the number one priority of the CIA and the FBI). On the other hand, the administration's main strategy aimed "to take the battle to the enemy." From the start, President Bush made clear that states that support terrorism would also be targeted: "We will make no distinction between the terrorists

¹¹The U.S. government defines "international terrorism" as terrorism involving citizens and resources of more than one state. Terrorism is broadly defined as politically-motivated violence against civilian targets and "passive" (non-combatant) military establishments by groups or secret agents.

¹²Gary Hart, Warren Rudman. United States Commission on National Security. American Security in the 21st Century. Washington, DC: 1999.

¹³Vice President Dick Cheney on NBC News "Meet the Press." March 16, 2003.

who committed these acts and those who harbor them".¹⁴ This policy soon came to be known as the Bush Doctrine. According to Douglas Feith, the third highest ranking official at the Pentagon, the connection between terrorist organizations and state sponsors is the "principal strategic thought underlying our strategy in the war on terrorism". President Bush made it unmistakably clear that there was no neutral ground in this war: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists".¹⁵

The Toppling of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan became the first target in the gray war on international terrorism. "Terrorism against our nation will not stand",¹⁶ President Bush declared only minutes after a second passenger aircraft crashed into the World Trade Center making unequivocally clear from the outset that the United States would react. Before Osama bin Laden was able to assume responsibility for the attacks, there was strong evidence linking him and his al Qaida terrorist network to them. Since it was well-known that "OBL" was living in Afghanistan, this country was immediately viewed as a possible target for military retaliation. On September 17, 2001, President Bush ordered plans to be drawn up for a military strike against the Taliban regime, since "[there was] nothing on the shelf for this kind of war",¹⁷ said then National Security Advisor and current Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. President Bush was determined to take decisive action - also beyond Afghanistan. On the same day, he told General Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other advisors: "Let's hit them hard. We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their view".¹⁸ Three days later, he presented his plans to Congress and set an ultimatum for the regime in Kabul: "The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate".¹⁹ After the Taliban failed to meet this demand, the first attacks were launched against Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. The military intervention had three main goals: capturing or eliminating the al Qaida leadership, destroying the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan, and toppling the Taliban regime.

¹⁴ George W. Bush. "Address to the Nation." September 11, 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>, viewed in January 2005.

¹⁵ George W. Bush. "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People." September 20, 2001. Same URL as above.

¹⁶ George W. Bush. "Remarks after Two Planes Crash into the World Trade Center." September 11, 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09>, viewed in December 2004.

¹⁷ Quoted in James Carney and John F. Dickerson. "Inside the War Room." TIME Magazine (December 12, 2001): 117.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bob Woodward. Bush at War. New York: 2003. 98.

¹⁹ George W. Bush. "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People." September 20, 2001. Same URL as above.

The war in Afghanistan strengthened the administration's conviction that offensive strikes would be the best defense against terrorism. It also confirmed the administration's analysis that the problem of terrorism was essentially one of state conduct, and that the way to combat terrorism was to take action against these states. The ultimatum demanding that the Taliban regime hand over the al Qaida leadership, and the regime's failure to comply with it, in the end led to the ouster of the Taliban. However, this did not eliminate the threat that the al Qaida terrorist network posed to the United States.

"À la Carte Multilateralism"

From the beginning, the Bush administration deeply mistrusted any multilateral approach to policy-making. During its first eight months, it provided several examples of this unilateralist tendency (among other things, its policies on the Kyoto Protocol and the International Criminal Court). The new approach was "à la carte multilateralism", a term coined by Richard Haass, Director of Policy Planning at the Department of State. This meant the Bush administration would be willing to pursue cooperation only where necessary, and not wherever possible, as had been the policy under the Clinton administration. At first, following (and due to) 9/11, it seemed this might change. On the day of the attacks, the American government requested a showing of international solidarity from the United Nations and NATO. On September 12, both the UN Security Council and General Assembly adopted resolutions to this effect and, for the first time in its history, NATO invoked the collective security clause of its Treaty. The attacks were declared to be an attack on the United States in the sense of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. However, it soon became apparent that the Bush administration merely sought to instrumentalize multilateral institutions. A mistrustful Pentagon feared that if NATO were to play a greater role, this in turn would excessively restrict America's scope for action. Although this apprehension was in part founded upon actual or alleged experiences during the Kosovo war, it was also in line with the President's desire for America to have as free a hand as possible in the fight against international terrorism: "At some point we may be the only ones left. That's okay with me. We are America".²⁰ Also, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld repeatedly stated: "The mission determines the coalition and we don't allow coalitions to determine the mission".²¹

Although there was broad international support for the war in Afghanistan, initial U.S. operations were only supported by British and Australian units. It was not until the second phase, when it appeared the

²⁰ Quoted in Bob Woodward. *Bush at War*. New York: 2003. 81.

²¹ Donald Rumsfeld on CBS's "Face the Nation." September 23, 2001.

American strategy might fail, that the United States accepted the support of troops from more than 25 nations. In August 2003, NATO even took over command of the peacekeeping operation. Although the country is a long way from being pacified, at the beginning of 2005 U.S. soldiers accounted for less than half of the foreign troops stationed in Afghanistan.

The "Axis of Evil" Speech and the New Doctrine of Preemptive War

Following the success in Afghanistan, many observers expected the Bush administration to concentrate on long-term strategies in the fight against international terrorism, e.g. intensified cooperation in the areas of criminal prosecution, intelligence gathering, and combating money laundering.

In his State of the Union Address in January 2002, it became clear however that President Bush intended to move in a different direction. He argued that the United States was not threatened by terrorists alone, but also by so-called "rogue states", and that these states were aiming to acquire weapons of mass destruction. States such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea "and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred". The United States could not simply stand by and watch this danger grow: "time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons".²² Vice President Cheney, too, was quick to take up this issue: "We have to be prepared now to take the kind of bold action ... with respect to Iraq in order to ensure that we don't get hit with a devastating attack when the terrorist organization gets married up with a rogue state that's willing to provide it with the kinds of deadly capabilities that Saddam Hussein has developed and used over the years".²³

"Rogue states" thereby became the focus of the post-9/11 threat analysis, and the Bush administration considered regime change to be a logical aim of its foreign and security policy.

In order to counter this new apocalyptic threat, the United States also had to be prepared to take military action against certain regimes - in order to preempt a possible attack. This idea was set out in the administration's

²² George W. Bush. "State of the Union Address." January 29, 2002.

²³ Dick Cheney on NBC News' "Meet the Press." March 16, 2003.

National Security Strategy, which it published in September 2002: "Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first".²⁴

With the President's "Axis of Evil" speech and the subsequent underscoring of preemption as a new strategic concept, the Bush administration was consciously turning away from the principles of deterrence and containment that for decades had stood at the center of American foreign and security policy. As President Bush declared in January 2003: "After September the 11th the doctrine of containment just doesn't hold any water, as far as I'm concerned".²⁵

In the face of considerable international criticism,²⁶ the Bush administration qualified its shift in strategy by declaring that military force was only one of the options for dealing with "rogue states". Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, told Congress: "We want to contain North Korea's activities with respect to proliferation, and we are going to keep the pressure on them. But there is no plan to begin a war with North Korea; nor is there a plan to begin a conflict with Iran".²⁷ Indeed, the Bush administration's policy on North Korea would prove to be very different from its policy on Iraq.²⁸

The Ouster of Saddam Hussein and the Occupation of Iraq

From the beginning, the Bush administration singled out one member of the "axis of evil", the regime of Saddam Hussein. Iraq became the "country of greatest concern", even though the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran were in a far more advanced stage of development - Pyongyang was reputedly selling missiles and nuclear technology, and Tehran was known to support terrorist groups. By contrast, Iraq's efforts to acquire weapons of

²⁴ National Security Strategy of the United States. September 2002. 15.

²⁵ George W. Bush at a press conference with Prime Minister Tony Blair on January 31, 2003.

²⁶ In *The New York Times*, French Foreign Minister Vedrine described America's new foreign policy as being "simplistic", and in *The Guardian*, European Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten spoke of the Bush administration's "unilateralist overdrive".

²⁷ United States Senate Committee on the Budget. Hearing with Secretary of State Colin Powell on the President's Fiscal Year 2003 Budget Proposal. 107th Congress. Second session. February 2, 2002. <http://www.fnsg.com>, viewed in December 2004.

²⁸ Cf. Heinrich Kreft. "Die USA und die zweite nordkoreanische Nuklearkrise (The United States and the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis)". Korea 2003, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft. Ed. Patrick Köllner. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 2003. 1-10.

mass destruction were, at the very least, significantly hampered by the UN inspection regime during the 90s. Nevertheless, the Bush administration focused its attention on Iraq, for essentially five reasons:²⁹

- Several high-ranking Bush administration officials, most of whom had served under the administration of George W. Bush's father, assumed office with the aim of toppling Saddam Hussein. They believed President Bush senior had been mistaken in his decision to not march on Baghdad following the liberation of Kuwait. These critics included both then Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz³⁰ and then Vice President Dick Cheney.

- President Bush, as well as several of his advisors, were obviously convinced that Saddam Hussein was in some form involved in the 9/11 attacks. While the President never openly made this connection, he is reported to have said "I believe Iraq was involved" to his aides on September 17, 2001.³¹

- The majority of Bush's advisors on this issue believed Saddam Hussein could be toppled without too great an effort. North Korea, on the other hand, already had weapons of mass destruction, and the United States would hardly have been able to prevent its threatened retaliation attacks on South Korea. Iran was several times larger than Iraq, and in the event of a U.S. attack its leadership could have counted on broad support from the Iranian population. By contrast, the Iraqi army had never recovered from the first Gulf War, and the entire country had been weakened by twelve years of economic sanctions.

- Some administration officials, most notably Wolfowitz, believed that regime change in Iraq would create an opportunity for restructuring the entire Middle East and in particular for moving closer to a solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Some were even of the opinion that, via Iraq, America could succeed in democratizing and modernizing the Middle East.³²

²⁹ For more detailed analysis, see Heinrich Kreft. "Weltpolitik statt Geopolitik. Die amerikanische Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik im Zeichen des 'Grauen Krieges' (From Geopolitics to Global Politics. American Foreign and Security Policy as Part of Its 'Gray War')." *Jahrbuch für internationale Sicherheitspolitik* 2003. Ed. Erich Reiter. 441-461, especially 456.

³⁰ See Michael Elliott and James Carney. "First Stop, Iraq". *TIME Magazine* (March 31, 2003): 75.

³¹ According to Bob Woodward, Bush made this comment on several occasions. *Bush at War*. Loc. cit. 99 and 167.

³² e.g. Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz's comments at a discussion at Johns Hopkins University (SAIS) in the summer of 2002, attended by the author, and his statements in *The Washington Post* on September 12, 2003. "Wolfowitz Shifts Rationale on Iraq War". Page A 23.

- The Bush administration also hoped that a convincing victory in Iraq would have a deterrent effect on other "rogue states".

Although all relevant players within the Bush administration were convinced of the necessity of regime change in Iraq, they did not agree on how to best achieve this goal. While Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld from the beginning considered military intervention to be the only option, Secretary of State Powell believed that Saddam Hussein's desire to remain in power would force him to bow to international pressure to disarm under the supervision of UN inspectors.

When, in the late summer of 2002, everyone involved realized that "regime change" in Baghdad had become the top priority, internal discussions focused on what course of action should be adopted. Secretary of State Powell remained firm, insisting that Iraq's remaining or new WMD stockpiles needed to be uncovered and destroyed through UN weapons inspections. Looking back in a March 2003 *Newsweek* interview, Powell said: "... there was a realistic chance that it could have worked, if [Saddam had] realized the seriousness of the President's intent".³³ By contrast, Vice President Cheney argued in an August 26, 2002, speech that was also widely noted in Germany that inspections would only give rise to a false sense of security by promoting the idea that Saddam Hussein was "... somehow back in the box". Meanwhile, he was still trying to obtain nuclear weapons as a means "... to seek domination of the entire Middle East, take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies, directly threaten America's friends throughout the region, and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail".³⁴

In the end, President Bush decided to pursue Powell's path to achieving Cheney's goal, namely the toppling of Saddam Hussein. The unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 on November 8, 2002, was a great success of American diplomacy. However, this momentum could not be maintained into 2003. The United States failed to obtain a further Security Council resolution, which would have stated that Iraq had forfeited its last chance to disarm pursuant to Resolution 1441.

As a result, military intervention in Iraq, which began on March 19, 2003, was not explicitly sanctioned by the UN Security Council. The military scored a decisive victory, and the campaign to topple Saddam Hussein was

³³Richard Wolfe and Tamara Lipper. "Powell in the Bunker". *Newsweek* (March 24, 2003): 31.

³⁴Dick Cheney. "Speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention". August 26, 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>, viewed in December 2004.

brought to a surprisingly swift conclusion. However, the actual challenge did not begin until after major combat operations ended and President Bush declared victory on May 1. In the months that followed, the United States did not manage to transform this military victory into a success. In early 2005, it is still far from clear whether the United States will ever achieve its original goal of not only rebuilding, but also modernizing and bringing democracy to Iraq - and thereby making it a model for the entire region.

A New Mandate for President Bush

Despite the difficult situation in Iraq, President Bush not only won a decisive victory in the November 2, 2004, elections, he also succeeded in securing an even greater Republican majority in Congress. Some 59.5 million Americans voted for Bush, with 56 million casting their ballot for his challenger John Kerry. Bush's perceived powerful leadership in the fight against international terrorism, along with his appeal to the religious right as a defender of traditional conservative values, most likely tipped the scales in his favor.

Immediately following his re-election, Bush let there be no doubt that he would stay the course - a foreign policy that Colin Powell described as "aggressive" in an interview with the *Financial Times*: "It's going to be a continuation of his principles, his policies, his beliefs".³⁵

The great challenges that President Bush is confronted with at the beginning of his second term mean that his room for maneuver is now significantly less than it was four years ago. The reasons for this diminished leeway are both foreign and domestic. While needing to deal with Iraq, North Korea, Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, America's double deficit, its deep national division that was brought to the forefront by the elections, and the ever more apparent overstretch of the U.S. military have greatly reduced the second Bush administration's policy options.

The United States currently has at least three conflicts on its plate: the greatest challenge is no doubt Iraq, where Washington is left with no positive options. In the opinion of RAND Corporation expert Jim Dobbins, by losing the trust of the Iraqi people, the Bush administration has already lost the war in Iraq. Moderate Iraqis can still win it, but only if they can wean

³⁵ Interview with Hubert Wetzel and Guy Dinmore. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/37937pf.htm>, viewed in December 2004.

themselves from Washington. The United States' only way out of this intractable situation is to reduce its own presence in, and eventually fully withdraw from, Iraq. In addition, it must quickly train Iraqi security forces and rally neighboring states and Europe to the cause.³⁶

At the same time, Iraq is at the center of the war on international terrorism, a war against an enemy that has set its sights on the West. Osama bin Laden is still at large and able to recruit new followers in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The danger has hardly subsided that his group, or other terrorists, could get hold of fissile material, a nuclear bomb, or other weapons of mass destruction.

Although last fall's elections in Afghanistan were a success, this first site of the gray war is still far from being consolidated. The central government remains weak in comparison to the powerful "warlords" in the provinces, and poppy seed production has reached record levels.

It is highly unlikely that President Bush will manage to effectively end even one of these three conflicts during his second term.

Furthermore, it is entirely feasible that North Korea and/or Iran will develop into a similar or even greater foreign policy challenge for the United States. North Korea possesses, or at least has sufficient material to produce, between six and ten nuclear weapons.³⁷ With respect to Iran, it remains to be seen whether or not Tehran can be convinced by Germany, France, and Great Britain to permanently freeze its uranium enrichment program, which is further advanced than experts had thought. If either of these countries were to publicly declare and realize their nuclear weapons ambitions, this could prompt neighboring states to join the nuclear arms race, which would have a dangerous destabilizing effect on the region and drastically increase the danger of terrorists getting hold of fissile material.

Another central challenge for President Bush is to get the stalled peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians back on track. During his visit to Washington in November, Tony Blair described this as "the single most pressing political challenge in our world today". The democratic election

³⁶ James Dobbins. "Iraq: Winning the Unwinnable War." *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2005). (Dobbins is Director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation. He was a US Special Envoy in Kosovo, Bosnia, Haiti, Somalia, and Afghanistan.)

³⁷ Heinrich Kreft. "Die USA und die schwelende nordkoreanische Nuklearkrise (The United States and North Korea's Smoldering Nuclear Crisis)" *Korea 2004, Politik, Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft*. Ed. Patrick Köllner. Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 2004. 263-275.

of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian National Authority following the death of Yassir Arafat, along with the planned Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, have opened a window of opportunity for reviving the peace process. President Bush will have to put pressure on Israel to make certain that the withdrawal is not limited to Gaza, and he must ensure that Gaza does not become a "failing state".

Europe: the former and future partner?

Weighed down by the burden of Iraq, and with the significant loss of U.S. credibility in the Arab world, the United States will have to enlist Europe's support in order to revive the Middle East peace process. At his November 4 press conference, President Bush declared his willingness "to reach out to our friends and allies, our partners in the EU and NATO, to promote development and progress, to defeat terrorists and to encourage freedom and democracy as alternatives to tyranny and terror". This was also the purpose of President Bush's first state visit to Europe in his new term, which took place in mid-February, with stops in Brussels, Mainz, and Bratislava and which was regarded as successful on both sides of the Atlantic. In Slovakia, President Bush also met with Russian President Putin. During 2004, relations between the United States and Russia cooled considerably due to the actions taken by Russian authorities against oil oligarch Khodorkovsky, and as a result of Putin's political maneuvers in connection with the elections in Ukraine.

In Northeast Asia, the United States is faced with the increasingly difficult task of reconciling its "One China" policy with its security obligations towards Taiwan. If Taiwanese politicians should take serious steps towards independence, then President Bush could be drawn into a conflict in the Taiwan Straits during his second term for it is relatively certain that China would respond to such moves by using military force, as was recently underlined by the Anti- Secession Law passed by the Chinese People's Congress, which is directed against Taiwan.

While the United States is still the sole undisputed military, political and economic superpower, during the second half of the first Bush administration Washington clearly reached its own limits.

Although the United States economy is undoubtedly growing faster than that of Europe, the underpinning of this growth increasingly appears to be crumbling. During the final year of the Clinton administration, the U.S. budget showed a surplus of U.S.\$ 236 billion. Drastic budget increases for

defense and homeland security in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, coupled with tax cuts, have been the essential contributors to the annual budget deficit, which currently stands at U.S.\$ 400 billion. Despite the Republican majority in Congress, the Bush administration will most likely face increased pressure to cut expenditure on defense and homeland security, as well as development aid and programs to fight HIV/AIDS. In addition, the United States has a widening current account deficit that in 2004 was estimated at U.S.\$ 600 billion, or approximately 5.5 percent of GDP. Both these deficits have led to increased dependence on countries with major dollar reserves in East Asia, e.g. China and Japan. Should these countries no longer be willing to finance the United States deficit, then Alan Greenspan or his successor would be left with only one option, namely to significantly raise interest rates. This would have a drastic negative effect on the U.S. economy, and on the economies of other highly indebted nations, for example in Latin America.

At the beginning of 2005, the United States has 135,000 troops stationed in Iraq and a further 15,000 in Afghanistan. Additional troops must be found, and this is proving to be an increasingly difficult task. Should the U.S. military have to respond to a crisis on the Korean peninsula, this would create serious planning problems. Although the United States is still in a position to carry out pre-emptive strikes, it is currently not able to sustain another military operation on the scale of that in Iraq.

The United States 'Achilles' heel is its dependence on foreign energy supplies. It currently imports approximately 12 million barrels of oil per day, or more than half of its consumption needs. The price of oil is not likely to fall significantly in the foreseeable future. Supply is currently just meeting demand, and if a medium-sized producer such as Nigeria or Venezuela were to halt production, oil prices could climb to new record highs.

The Same Foreign Policy Course - but "with a Nicer Face"

Despite these weaknesses, the United States remains the world's predominant superpower. Without it, world order could not be maintained, and new structures could not be established. The great majority of Americans - including the majority of those who voted for John Kerry on November 2 - supports an active American global foreign policy.

Following 9/11, the Bush administration was quick to turn its back on classic geopolitics. However, only now in the face of the continuing difficulties in Iraq is it beginning to realize that the structure of today's world no longer resembles that of the Cold War. In the words of the French political

scientist Dominique Moisi: "The global age has not changed the fact that nothing in the world can be done without the United States. And the multiplicity of new actors means that there is very little that the United States can achieve alone".³⁸ For Henry Kissinger, the test of history for the United States will be whether it can turn its current predominant power into international consensus and its own principles into widely accepted international norms. That was the greatness achieved by Rome and Britain in their times.³⁹

Most observers expect only an adjustment in the style and rhetoric of United States foreign policy, with no great changes in substance. During the press conference immediately following his re-election, President Bush said that in future meetings with allies: "I will reach out to others and explain why I make the decisions I make" - there was no mention of consultations. However, there is still hope that "a nicer face", and an awareness of the United States' overextension, will result in at least some actual influence on the foreign policy of the second Bush administration. President Bush's February visit to Europe and his subsequent support for European efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis can be regarded as a first sign of this.

³⁸ Dominique Moisi. "The Real Crisis over the Atlantic". *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2001): 153.

³⁹ Henry Kissinger. "Our Nearsighted World Vision". *The Washington Post* (January 10, 2002): page A 19.