

Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide

In Defense of Values



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Is idealism dead? Should the promotion of American values of liberalism, democracy, human rights, and rule of law be a core element of US foreign policy? Where to strike the balance between principles and interests is one of the most enduring debates about America's role in the world. But since September 11, this question has become intensely contested and deeply controversial. It has emerged as one of the central divides between the political right and left—in large part because of the history of the past seven years, the Bush administration's rhetoric, its strong association with the “freedom agenda,” and its actions justified at least in part by democracy promotion (namely the war in Iraq). Yet it is also becoming a sharper division *within* each end of the political spectrum.

Of course, the choice between realism and idealism is a false one: US foreign policy must be firmly rooted in both national interests and values. But now, after two successive presidents of opposite political parties (Bill Clinton and George W. Bush) have argued that the spread of American values is itself a vital interest, there is growing skepticism in many quarters about whether trying to do so is worth significant costs, or even a true

interest of the United States at all. Facts matter, and after several difficult years of pursuing a foreign policy framed as a fight for American values, more are wondering whether the sacrifice is worth it. In the view of many policymakers, politicians, analysts, and average citizens, the time has come to have a more realistic foreign policy—scaling back the United States' global ambitions, respecting the limits to America's capabilities and will, recognizing and embracing the constraints of the international system, and maintaining a healthy skepticism about the broad applicability of American values.

But if the values agenda has been discredited among many on both the left and the right, and a greater realism is the preferred alternative, what would such a strategy look like? Moving beyond the slogans, would a truly values-free foreign policy really secure US interests, strengthen US power, and draw the sustained support of the American people? We think not. American values are an indispensable component of the US role in the world—they are a key part of what unites the United States to allies in Europe and elsewhere and distinguishes the United States from countries like China. Instead of dividing conservatives

and liberals, American values in foreign policy can in fact translate into a set of policies that both sides can rally around. In the current political environment, as we approach the first post-9/11, post-Bush election, building such a policy bridge will be difficult. But given the stakes, it is imperative.

Skepticism on the Left...

The emphasis placed on promoting liberal values internationally has drawn increasing hostility among traditional liberals and within the Democratic Party. Many of those who once embraced the proud liberal tradition of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy find themselves questioning their assumptions. And for those liberals who still embrace the importance of values, their numbers are fewer. According to a June 2006 poll commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, only 35 percent of Democrats said that the United States should “help establish democracy in other countries”—whereas 64 percent of Republicans responded favorably.¹

This skepticism is driven by several factors. First, and most fundamentally, is the fact that this approach is so closely identified with President Bush and his administration’s policies. In the wake of 9/11, Bush tapped into many common (and bipartisan) themes about the enduring importance of American values, but his vision is infused with a religiosity that leaves many liberals nervous. Yet, even when he got his rhetoric right—for example, many liberals admired statements like his November 2003

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speech at the National Endowment for Democracy—the means he chose to implement policies, such as the war in Iraq, have proven very costly. The result now is that for many on the left, efforts to pursue policies largely rooted in values, especially democracy promotion, have become discredited and are increasingly unpopular politically.

For many liberals, some of the political difficulty of supporting a values-based foreign policy stems from a second factor: the structural incentives of the current political environment. Because an unpopular president has so closely identified his policies with the promotion of values, liberals are driven to oppose him. In fact, the president’s leadership style has offered very little in return, even to those liberals who might agree with him. So for many on the left, if Bush is for it, they must be against it—even if this means embracing the cognitive dissonance of turning away from long-held beliefs and traditions. For many liberals, it has become politically incorrect to admit it when Bush has actually gotten something right. With Democrats in control of the US Congress, these incentives of opposition are now also institutional. This creates a similar dynamic to that of the aftermath of the 1994 congressional elections, when the new Republican majority turned increasingly inward in opposition to the internationalism of the Clinton administration. Whereas the Bush team came into office in 2001 with an “ABC” policy—anything but Clinton—the Democratic Congress today, and a possible Democratic president in 2009, will be tempted to do exactly the same: anything but Bush.

But liberal skepticism is more than structural or institutional—it is also internal to the debates among different camps within liberal politics. The history of the past seven years—and the consequences of a policy perceived as driven more by values than interests—has been sobering for a number of left-leaning members of the foreign policy establishment. Many supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq for the same reasons that they supported confronting Saddam Hussein during the Clinton

years. And many applauded President Bush when he talked about the importance of democracy promotion. Yet, now that the costs of such policies are apparent—whether in terms of political capital, US global prestige, or blood and treasure—many in the foreign policy elite have become more cautious, scaling back ambitions and endorsing more realistic goals. For many mainstream foreign policy liberals, the downfall of Britain’s Tony Blair—who championed values-based concepts like “humanitarian intervention” during the late 1990s—is a stark warning about the costs of embracing such policies too tightly.

The intellectual and political disconnect between the liberal establishment and the liberal grassroots activists is growing, especially over US foreign policy and the purpose and use of American power. The convulsions within the political left that began in the late 1990s—illustrated by the rise of the antiglobalization movement and division over the Clinton administration’s military interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and its 1998 air strikes against Iraq—have only become more severe and divisive. To be sure, this reflects anger with President Bush. But it is more than that. When it comes to national security issues, the left has become splintered in a way not seen since the 1970s, when Vietnam split the Democratic party and ruined the post-World War II liberal establishment. A similar dynamic is at work today, as a new generation of liberal activists (fueled by the power of the blogosphere) rages not just against Bush, but against a Democratic foreign policy establishment they perceive as aiding and abetting the Bush agenda—central to which is the promotion of American values. If this divide deepens, it will become very difficult for Democratic leaders to embrace explicitly values-centered policies even if they wanted to.

...and Wariness on the Right

The growing discomfort with the promotion of American values in foreign policy is felt not only by those on the left. Increasingly, conservatives are having second thoughts about the extent to which US foreign policy should be driven by ideology and the promotion of val-

ues ahead of interests. Since the Bush administration still dominates conservative politics, the right remains more strongly identified with the values agenda and the wariness among conservatives is more muted than among liberals. But the recent rise of “realists”—as illustrated by the personnel changes at the Defense Department and the US Mission to the United Nations, greater pragmatism at the State Department, and the return to prominence of figures like former Secretary of State James Baker and Brent Scowcroft—has been heralded as a rebalancing away from what many argue were the ideological excesses of the president’s first four years in office. Like liberals, conservatives are contemplating their future beyond the Bush presidency—and this debate will intensify as the focus turns from the current administration to the one that will take office in January 2009.

In several respects, the factors driving conservatives’ frustrations with the values agenda mirror the frustrations on the left. The first issue is a practical one: the American people’s deepening disillusionment with the Bush administration’s policies are raising the political costs of supporting the Bush agenda. Bush’s growing unpopularity makes supporting his policies risky. Put another way, the president’s success at branding his administration’s actions as part of a values-based policy is directly related to the political efficacy of supporting it. When it was seen as working, the bandwagon was enthusiastic and big, but the more it is perceived as a failure, many of the president’s political allies are more than happy to let him ride alone.

Like liberals, conservatives also face a structural challenge that will only increase as the 2008 election draws closer. Any Republican presidential nominee will seek to differentiate himself from his predecessor. And since more conservatives are reading the Bush years as a caution against an ambitious, values-based foreign policy, stressing realism might be the way to distinguish oneself. In this sense, one can foresee a replay of the early 1990s, when the lessons drawn from George H. W. Bush’s electoral defeat in 1992—that his presidency was too focused on

foreign affairs at the expense of domestic issues—caused many conservatives to move away not only from a values-based policy but from internationalism itself.

Moreover, the events of the past several years, especially the war in Iraq, have thrown much of the conservative foreign policy establishment into a crisis of confidence. Like many establishment liberals, conservatives in and out of government are questioning not only the capabilities required to implement values-promoting policies (and whether the United States can ever develop such capabilities) but the underlying assumptions of the policy itself. Such self-doubt is especially acute because many of the officials so closely identified with these policies were once heralded for their national security experience and acumen. Expectations were high, so the results of their time in office—a major crisis for America’s role in the world—have been sobering.

The neoconservatives, those most closely identified with a foreign policy based on promoting American values and bold interventionism—have come in for the most criticism, and not just from the left. The internal split reemerging within conservatism over ideals is the fourth driver of wariness. During the 1990s, neoconservatives saw themselves as insurgents, agitating against both the creeping isolationism within the Republican party and what they considered the feckless policies of the Clinton team (even if most neoconservatives agreed on actions like intervention in the Balkans). But for several years after 9/11, their agenda wielded great influence over the direction of the Bush administration’s policy, especially its focus on spreading American values. Six years later, neoconservatives again find themselves largely on the outside looking in, as many mainstream Republicans seek a return to the kinds of policies then-Governor Bush articulated during the 2000 presidential campaign: a foreign policy based on humility, skepticism about the United States’ interests in “nation-building,” and the limited applicability of American values to regions like the Middle East.

So for political and intellectual reasons, the role of values in foreign policy is now in retreat domestically—liberals are increasingly skeptical and conservatives having deep doubts. One must also note the suspicion (or worse) with which many in other countries view a values-based US foreign policy. In the first place, many around the world are disinclined to take Americans at their word on the principles they claim to be promoting. Many hear rhetoric of principle as nothing more than a cover for the raw assertion of American power. Some world leaders hear the rhetoric of democracy promotion and take it seriously, and for that very reason regard it as dangerous, a threat to their own claims of legitimacy. One could probably break this category down further, into those hostile to any threat to their personal prerogatives on the one hand, and on the other those generally sympathetic to liberalization, but worried that too-hasty movement in that direction might tear their societies apart. Finally, the promotion of American values opens the United States to charges of hypocrisy: Does American conduct actually live up to the values America espouses? Many have found the United States’ actions wanting in areas ranging from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib to the US relationship with Pakistan and the House of Saud, and would urge that the United States tone down its complaints about others until it removes the log in its own eye. By these lights, the promotion of American values should begin at home (a view that also has purchase both on the left side of American public opinion and, to a degree, on the libertarian right).

The “Acirema” World

But if a foreign policy that promotes American values is the problem, what is the solution? In considering this question, it might be helpful to ask: what would US foreign policy actually look like if it were somehow stripped of its “values” component? It’s worth trying to conjure such a vision, not only as an intellectual exercise but also because there is no quicker way to see exactly why such a policy would be a nonstarter for the United States.

As a point of departure, we might look to the assumptions about the character of the international system embraced by scholars in the “neorealist” school of international relations, on the grounds that neorealists regard such considerations as morality as largely epiphenomenal in explaining the behavior of states. Since one key neorealist assumption is that the internal characteristics of states don’t matter (or matter much), we find a more or less explicit attempt to write moral considerations out of the rules of statecraft. What they posit, then, is an anarchical international system—no authority higher than the state. Each state wishes to be entirely free to make its own judgments about the conduct of its internal affairs. These judgments, insofar as they implicate events outside the state’s territory and thus beyond its uncontested authority, yield a set of national interests in relation to other states. Because any state’s supreme vital interest is self-preservation, each state’s first priority is to ensure its security. The only means of achieving security is self-help. Unfortunately, the actions states take in pursuit of their own security and national interests tend to bring them into conflict with other states. Some structural configurations of the international system are more conducive to peace and stability than others, but no structure is impervious to internal stresses that may cause it to collapse or change convulsively as states act in pursuit of security under shifting perceptions of national interest.

How might this abstract description of state action in the international system translate into policy choices for a state in the position in which the United States finds itself today? For purposes of our investigation, we will call this state “Acirema,” which is “America” spelled backwards. We do this for two reasons. First, by speculating in accordance with this “values-free” scenario, we do not want to be taken to be proposing what follows as a genuine alternative to US policy; on the contrary, the speculation shows how far removed from the realm of possibility and desirability such a neorealist scenario would be. Second, “Acirema,” strikes us as capturing just how radical an inversion of American

priorities and traditions the pursuit of such a values-free policy would be.

In the first place, Acirema is the dominant military power in the world, and it would certainly make sense to try to maintain that dominance. This is not a judgment alien to existing US policy: The Bush administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) pledged not to allow a “peer competitor” to its military power to emerge. The Bush NSS, however, justified this policy as a way to encourage peaceful relations among states. State-on-state conflict, for example the attempt to conquer territory by force, would be discouraged by overwhelming US power. But it is by no means clear, from a values-free perspective, why we should be attached to a principle of peaceful relations among states and the illegitimacy of aggressive war or conquest. True, Acirema does not want to be attacked, and would seek to maintain sufficient power to deter and if necessary defeat any potential aggressor. But why Acirema would care if Iran attacked Iraq, or China attacked Russia, or France attacked Germany, is entirely a question of whether Acirema’s aims would best be served by peace or war between any given two states.

Acirema would pursue an overall strategy of maintaining its dominance. Again, this is not foreign to current US grand strategy. But the United States has welcomed and encouraged modernization, economic growth, and globalization not only in order to enrich Americans but also according to a theory that greater and greater trade flows and economic interdependence make for a more peaceful international environment and are good in themselves. Neither of the latter two justifications would matter to Acirema.

There is danger in an Acireman policy that encourages other states to become rich: with riches come the capacity to develop military power that in turn might challenge Acirema, or covertly fund challenges and challengers. Acireman policymakers would want to examine the trade-off between the economic benefits of an open trading system and the

potential danger in allowing others to enrich themselves, thus potentially increasing their power. An Asian economic flu might be a bad thing, but it might also be a good thing. China's modernization might yield cheap goods, but if the price is a more formidable military challenge to Acirema, the price might be too high. The best way to deal with China's self-professed desire for a "peaceful rise" might be to disregard the rhetoric of peaceability and act to prevent the rise. Acirema might want to identify potential vulnerabilities in the Chinese economy and try to exploit them to undermine Chinese economic growth. The collapse of central authority in China would be destabilizing—but primarily for the Chinese, who might then be too preoccupied with their internal turmoil to pose a threat.

More generally, the stability Acirema would seek would be the stability of its own position. The stability of other states and relations among other states is of concern only insofar as it impinges on the stability of the Acireman position. Indeed, a subsidiary strategy of preserving dominance might be to maintain a *fragile* international stability, one in which all other states felt themselves to be constantly *at risk* from instability without actually sliding into it, with a potentially adverse effect on Acirema.

Under this scenario, one would have to reject engagement in the Middle East, except with regard to securing Acireman energy needs. To the extent that support for Israel arouses hostility from Israel's neighbors, Acirema should cease such support, unless Israel is capable of providing a benefit to Acirema sufficient to offset the damage—a tall order. Meanwhile, however, it is not solely Acireman support for Israel that antagonizes certain elements in the Middle East and, to the extent that funding for these elements comes from governments that have grown wealthy from oil revenues, it may be best to go directly to the source and deprive the funders of the revenue. Acirema might seize and hold sufficient oilfields to see to its needs and then destroy the capacity of others to exploit the resources on their territory.

In the event that the negative repercussions of such a move might be deemed too costly, then Acireman disengagement from the region might work—provided it is accompanied by an unambiguous warning from Acirema to states in the region about the unacceptability of funding terrorists, their ideological supporters, and their sympathizers. Acirema would have to make clear that regime elimination awaits any states that fail to accept that their continued oil revenue depends on their refraining from harboring, funding, or supporting anti-Acireman terrorism. The credibility of such a policy would likely require a demonstration. A policy of regime elimination would differ from "regime change" in its rejection of Colin Powell's "Pottery Barn" principle: you break it, you own it. On the contrary, any state foolish enough to provoke Acirema to forcibly remove its regime, with all the risk and expense that would entail for Aciremans, would be on its own to sort out what comes next. Acirema wouldn't care, though it would certainly hope that whatever regime emerged had learned a lesson from the experience of the toppling of its predecessor.

The policy of Acirema toward Israel is a specific case of what would be a more general revision in alliance policy. The essential question for Acirema with regard to any ally is whether Acireman security is improved, on net, as a result of the alliance. The notion of an alliance as an all-purpose mechanism for securing the cooperation of others in mutual pursuit of security objectives would need to be reassessed. What, specifically, is the value of "cooperation"? Needless to say, Acirema will harbor no prejudice in favor of cooperation or multilateralism, instead asking whether cooperative or multilateral means would bring a benefit that Acirema cannot obtain on its own. Acirema need not be especially concerned with the opinions of states that lack the capacity to make a difference. There will be no free-riding on the provision of security, because Acirema will not enter into alliance relationships except with partners whose tangible assets improve Acireman security.

Needless to say, any assistance Acirema would choose to provide to other states would be tightly tied to the tangible benefit received, either economically or in terms of security. The notion of “humanitarian” aid or “humanitarian” intervention of any kind is self-evidently meaningless to a foreign policy free of moral consideration. Acirema might have a concern with averting refugee flows toward its shores, but only if the cost of action abroad to prevent the flows exceeds the cost of turning away those attempting to enter.

Local disputes in faraway places would not necessarily bother Acirema. There is nothing historically unusual about violent contests for power within states, and Acirema would not worry overmuch about the outbreak of such conflicts. They have disadvantages in terms of disrupting commerce, but they have advantages as well, in that those engaged in fierce local conflict are unlikely to have the surplus capacity to threaten Acireman national interests. Even intense local conflict, with civilian deaths running to hundreds of thousands, would have to be assessed through the prism of whether it poses any sort of threat to Acirema that might warrant intervention.

It is difficult to see what gain Acirema might get from raising the issue of “human rights” with other states. Doing so would come at the cost of pressing other, more useful demands upon weaker states and would needlessly complicate relations with stronger states. There might be advantages to be gained from fomenting internal dissension and rebellion within stronger states, in accordance with a general strategy of fragile stability, and this provocation might be couched in terms of “human rights” in the event that doing so would be efficacious. But the use of “human rights” would be entirely instrumental, and Acirema would have to refrain from establishing any sentimental bonds with those it was encouraging, since the likelihood is that the state in which they are rebelling will move to crush them if the crisis becomes serious, and of course Acirema would have no reason to assist them at that point.

The strongest states will be those with nuclear weapons, and the impulse of states to acquire them would undoubtedly be very strong. Needless to say, Acirema would have to be very wary of states already possessing substantial nuclear arsenals. Freedom of action against Russia, China, Great Britain, France, and Israel would accordingly be constrained. As for those newly seeking to acquire the technology of atomic weapons, Acirema might choose to acquiesce, provided it was confident that its own arsenal was deterring any aggression against Acirema. This might be true of some but not all states. On the other hand, possession of a nuclear deterrent by another state might embolden that state to act against the national interests of Acirema. It might be necessary to take preemptive action to establish that mere possession of a few nuclear weapons is not sufficient to deter or coerce Acirema. Acirema might have to launch a nuclear attack first. Of course, there would be some risk of nuclear counterattack if the other state had the means to deliver its nuclear weapons. On the other hand, Acirema could withstand such a small strike, whereas its antagonist would be obliterated.

Yes, we have wandered into the bizarre territory of *Dr. Strangelove*, and the scenario described above is both monstrous to contemplate and impossible to envision actually coming to pass. But why is that? In the first place, can anyone—liberal or conservative—plausibly imagine the United States electing a president on such a callous “Acirema First” platform? Patrick Buchanan tried a slightly attenuated version of the Acirema project and was unable to win the Republican nomination, let alone seriously contest the general election. During the 2000 election, the platform of Ralph Nader’s Green Party shared many aspects of the Acireman program but garnered little support (yet just enough to help determine the outcome). The closest a Democratic presidential nominee has ever come to the Acirema agenda is probably George McGovern’s disastrous 1972 campaign, in which his slogan “Come home, America” was taken as a call for broad-based disengagement and dramatic

reduction of defense spending, not just an immediate end to the Vietnam War.

Disband NATO, abandon Israel, destabilize China, welcome wars when useful, disregard genocide, and wage preemptive nuclear war? While such views are consistently found in certain small segments of the political spectrum, there is, thankfully, no plausible passageway from America to Acirema.

Some have claimed—and indeed the 2002 National Security Strategy and other statements of President Bush flirt with—the notion that US values and interests are quite closely aligned or can be so. Such an argument effectively dodges the question of which should take precedence. And indeed, it may be that “failed states” are something the United States should take action to prevent because of the potential for danger where no one is adequately in charge. We disagree on the relative magnitude of the danger there.² We agree, however, that US action to prevent the failure of states is morally good. The point is that without the moral frame of reference, one could imagine having a debate about whether the collapse of a state into civil war, warlordism, and genocide is good or bad for the United States—and that such a debate would remain imaginary, because it can never occur in the real world.

Moreover, it is a conceit that this “values-free” *machtpolitik* or *realpolitik* is truly free of moral considerations. Even the proposition “look out for No. 1” has a moral aspect. Why should you look out for No. 1? Because you place a value on No. 1 and think it is morally good to seek the benefit of No. 1. Indeed, there may have been a time in human history—perhaps in Hobbes’s state of nature, the “war of all against all”—when moral considerations, though hardly absent, involved calculations no more complicated than this.

But the United States was founded not as a “values-free” rational calculator of what’s good for No. 1, but as a nation embodying certain values or principles that justified rebellion against its lawful sovereign. While, to this

day, the United States has been accused (often with justification) of failing to live up to the values of the Declaration of Independence, the United States has never been able to or seriously attempted to expunge those values from all consideration in the conduct of domestic or foreign policy. This seems unlikely to change. And rightly or wrongly, Americans demand consideration for those principles not simply because they are “ours”—and no one has the right to interfere in our affairs by telling us anything different—but because of our belief that they are true.

Toward a New Consensus on Principle in Foreign Policy

While the place of American values in foreign policy endures, questions remain about how such policies should be implemented and how the inevitable trade-offs should be managed, especially in the current political environment. The Bush legacy casts a long shadow. During the past several years, intellectuals and policy analysts have offered numerous grand strategies as a corrective to Bush, rebalancing foreign policy between realism and idealism. Some stress one perspective more than the other, and they usually combine some version of both words in their titles: Francis Fukuyama offers “Realistic Wilsonianism,” Robert Wright proposes “Progressive Realism,” John Hulsman and Anatol Lieven describe “Ethical Realism,” Charles Krauthammer espouses “Democratic Realism,” and John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan outline “Liberal Realism” (we could go on).

Instead of adding yet another grand strategy slogan into the mix, we believe that it is more important to describe a set of principles and priorities that should guide US foreign relations in the challenging years ahead. Below we outline six principles, each rooted in American ideals and serving American interests. This is not an exhaustive list (additional policies are described in other papers in this series), yet it shows that it is possible to construct a common agenda between liberals and conservatives that is firmly built upon a commitment to uphold—and promote—values.

Standing Against the Conquest of Territory by Force

The United States must continue to uphold one of the most basic norms of international relations: preventing and when necessary reversing the conquest of territory across an international border by military force. While support for this principle may seem self-evident—after all, it is at the heart of the UN Charter and the underlying rationale of the world’s most important security organization, NATO—it is in fact a value that the United States must choose to defend. As made clear by the alternative Acirema world described earlier, a great power like the United States could decide that upholding this norm is too costly or outside the bounds of its core national interests. We believe that since preventing territorial conquest by force remains a keystone of the international system and a driver of its enduring stability, this must remain a core value of US foreign policy.

Such a commitment entails certain responsibilities around the world and, fundamentally, demands an interventionist foreign policy—preferably as an active partner through international institutions, but if necessary alone. The means that are required will depend on the specific situation and the other US interests at stake, such as alliance or other security or political relationships and the potential for wider violence. Yet the full range of tools—from diplomacy to sanctions and political isolation to military force—must always be available.

Sometimes this might require active diplomacy to prevent one state from threatening another with force, such as the United States’ repeated efforts in recent years to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan. Other instances will require US leadership to try to negotiate an end to conflicts after they have broken out. For example, this is what the Clinton administration did when it hammered out the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, reversing Slobodan Miloševi’s aggression against the newly independent Bosnia. And on some (and hopefully rare) occasions, the United States will have to use military force to reverse aggression, as

George H. W. Bush did in 1991 when he created and led a UN-sanctioned international coalition to kick Iraq out of Kuwait. Today, looking into the future and the probability of a smaller American presence in Iraq, the commitment to territorial integrity will be critical insurance against potential incursions by neighbors such as Iran.

Of course, another way of describing this is that by valuing the protection of territorial integrity from threats of force, we are valuing the defense of sovereignty. That’s correct to an extent, but we do recognize that under certain circumstances this value can be trumped by other values, such as the responsibility to defend the rights and lives of people living within a state’s own territory. We discuss this in greater detail below, but suffice it to say that the United States should not allow any leader to hide behind one value (the right not to be invaded) in order to violate another (his people’s right not to be brutalized).

Defending Liberal Regimes

The United States should be prepared and willing to help any and all democratic governments that come under challenge internationally or from internal antidemocratic elements seeking to overturn liberal political and social order and the rule of law. This is a basic principle of *democratic solidarity*, according to which the most secure, established, and stable liberal democracies, the United States above all, should acknowledge a responsibility to come to the assistance of democratic governments that are threatened, that have yet to become fully consolidated and mature, or are subject to forces of internal instability.

Liberal democracy, in the view of most of those who govern themselves according to its principles, is not merely a matter of sovereign choice—just one among many options. Rather, citizens of democracies tend to regard their form of government as the *right* or *best* choice, at least for them; they would not consider trading their form of government for autocratic or totalitarian or theocratic government,³ and would rightly consider any force in favor of such a change in governance as a serious

threat, one to be challenged and defeated—*not* by whatever means necessary, such as abandonment of liberal principles for the sake of security, but by any means legitimate *within* the horizon of liberal principles.

If citizens of democracies view their system as the right or best choice for themselves, those citizens and that state ought to be willing to acknowledge the rightness of the choice of liberal democracy among the citizens of other states. They have a stake not only in their own domestic political arrangements but in their view of the rightness of liberal democracy, which does not end at their borders. A threat to liberal democracy elsewhere is accordingly a challenge, and one to which any democratic states with the means to do so should be willing to meet head on.

The United States has a number of alliances with democratic states, including several with allies that were not democratic when the alliance relationship began but became so, perhaps partly as a result of the security provided by the United States. These alliance commitments remain fully in force, but they are only a beginning. The United States must recognize that it will not sit idly by as nondemocratic states try to undermine or even overturn democracies or fragile liberalizing states. On the contrary, the United States should step up, together with other democratic states, to provide all the support or assistance possible.

The correct response when a powerful nondemocratic state tries to coerce a weaker democratic state—such as Russia has tried with Ukraine and especially Georgia—is not to temporize out of deference to the power of the strong but to speak up unequivocally in defense of democracy under threat. To stand aloof or to appease the stronger power would be to embolden antidemocratic forces, and not just locally. Some argued that extending the NATO alliance to the Baltic States was foolish because of the military difficulty of defending Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania against attack and because extending the Atlantic Alliance onto the territory of the former Soviet Union would unnecessarily antagonize Russia. We

strongly disagreed at the time and believe we were correct. In our view, the newly won freedom of the Baltic nations and the establishment of liberal, democratic governments there *already* created obligations for the United States and NATO countries. NATO accession did not create, but ratified and codified that obligation toward these peoples. The process was exemplary in warding off any urge to interfere with and disrupt democratic development and consolidation there—and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, in our view.

A principle of democratic solidarity is not only good in itself, it makes external threats to democratic governments less likely by demonstrating that making such threats will have adverse *global* consequences for anyone inclined to pursue such a course. It would be a mistake to view the principle of democratic solidarity as a military doctrine; its main components are political, diplomatic, and social.

There are some instances in which democratic solidarity comes with conditions. For example, US willingness to defend Taiwan against Chinese attack depends on Taipei not taking the provocative step of a declaration of independence—to which China would respond militarily, according to Beijing's declaratory policy. This is a reasonable codicil given local circumstances. There may be others (though Taiwan is arguably the most neuralgic of such at present). An absolute *military* doctrine of democratic solidarity would create moral hazard, since a state might conclude it could act as provocatively as it wished in response to local circumstances and still receive the backing of the United States and other democratic states. That is not the deal. Such a state, by taking action other democratic states would regard as unreasonable, would itself be breaking from democratic solidarity. But with such nuances always in mind, a principle of democratic solidarity should guide US policy, and the United States should encourage other democratic states to embrace it.

Promoting Liberal Governance

If a principle of democratic solidarity makes sense at the level of state-to-state relations, it

also makes sense for the United States in relation to people working toward liberalization and democracy in their own societies. This is not likely to be especially controversial as a matter of principle among democratic allies. Opinion surveys in Europe, for example, show large majorities in favor of promotion of democracy by peaceful means.⁴ And it seems likely that a substantial part of the lingering opposition is a product of concern that democracy will not be liberal, but rather will bring to power illiberal elements. Our discussion should be understood to refer to the promotion of liberal democracy, in which the two components are a liberal social order based on principles of freedom and minority rights, as well as popularly elected governments followed by peaceful transfer of power.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a principle of democratic solidarity—even if broadly accepted by and among, and in application to, democratic states facing external threats or internal challenge, and even if accepted as the rightness of supporting development of liberal democracy in principle—will surely be controversial when considered in application to supporters of democracy in nondemocratic states.

We think that the United States should, as far as possible, provide whatever help aspiring democrats and liberalizers seek. The United States should also encourage similar support among fellow democratic states—an extension of democratic solidarity. But considerations of prudence, national interests (such as access to energy resources), and *force majeure* will inevitably weigh into such decisions.

What we propose is the imperative of *balancing prudential considerations and principle*. It is not enough to take note of Saudi oil fields and declare, therefore, that Saudi Arabia is off limits for criticism and promotion of reform of its extraordinarily repressive regime. Similarly, China is big, powerful, rising—and undemocratic (indeed, increasingly openly antidemocratic). We must deal with the fact that China is a vast and increasingly powerful country; it would be madness to try to deny it. But we must also deal with the fact that China is undemocratic.

The United States can and must pursue dual-track policies in such cases, as Francis Fukuyama and Michael McFaul argue.⁵ One track will address exigency, the other the moral case.

On the moral track, rather than a one-size-fits-all model of democracy promotion, we propose a method, a way of thinking about and acting on the problem that does not pretend to a greater degree of generality than is appropriate. The objective, in each country in which liberal democracy has yet to take hold, or take hold fully, is to identify *next steps*. What is the next plausible step for the expansion of the liberal and democratic space? Conversely, what is the next plausible step for the constriction of the space in which authoritarians or antidemocratic elements operate? The United States should then work vigorously to promote the next step, applying pressure for reform against the authoritarian element (typically, the government) and assistance to the democratic element to help achieve measurable progress. Once the next-step objective has been achieved, the United States must immediately move on to the *next* next step. Pressure and assistance must not let up following interim successes; on the contrary, it should increase.

We agree that the key failure of the Bush administration's democracy promotion policy in Egypt, for example, was overeagerness to claim credit for progress in response to small positive steps. Yes, it was consequential that the Mubarak government decided to allow other parties to compete in a presidential election. But it was hardly the birth of liberal democracy on the Nile Delta. Mubarak deserved congratulations for taking the step he took—followed without pause by the demand that he take the next step of moving toward a free and fair election.

With this next-step policy of constant pressure to expand the liberal space while contracting the authoritarian space, the United States will be in a position to say it is keeping faith with the forces of democracy and liberalization in every country, even in the face of inevitable practical constraints.

Enforcing the Responsibility to Protect

Liberal democracy, in which people choose their leaders in free and fair elections and in which political and human rights are secure, including for minorities, stands at the pinnacle of human political achievement. For some states, such as the United States, the most urgent political task lies in helping others achieve this great end while being ever mindful of and seeking to address the imperfections of its own governance. For others, the consolidation of transition to democratic governance is the key political task, and it can often be one of life and death, as the case of the assassination of reformist Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic or the dioxin poisoning of Orange Revolution leader Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine. For still others, the political challenge is to pry open any space at all for the opposition in an authoritarian country.

But for the worst off of all, such as the Tutsi minority in Rwanda or the Kurds of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the essential political challenge is survival—against the wishes of the government or the mob in whose midst they have the misfortune to live. Surely, it cannot be right to embrace a principle of democratic solidarity and democracy promotion for those relatively high on the social ladder while offering nothing to those in greatest peril of losing the most basic human right: the right to live.

At the United Nations' 2005 World Summit in New York, the world's leaders embraced for the first time the doctrine of *The Responsibility to Protect*. It holds, briefly, that with sovereign rights come sovereign responsibility, and the primary responsibility of a government is to protect the people who live within its territory. In the event that a government is unable or unwilling to provide protection for its people from would-be perpetrators of genocide or mass killing and ethnic cleansing—or worse, is complicit in such crimes against humanity—the international community must take upon itself the responsibility to protect. No government that fails to protect its people may legitimately assert a right to noninterference in its internal affairs.

The responsibility to protect is a transformational concept in international relations. Previously, the victims of the worst sort of war crimes and human rights abuses on a mass scale had no recourse, trapped as they were behind a curtain of sovereign right. The adoption of the responsibility to protect grants them an appeal to the international community.

This is often construed solely through the prism of military intervention and, in some cases, the only way to stop determined genocidaires may be by force. But it is wrong to think that military means are the first or main recourse. The international community needs to take active measures in terms of monitoring and applying diplomatic and other forms of pressure (such as sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and negotiations) to avert mass killings and ethnic cleansing whenever possible.

Of course, there is much dispute over how the “international community” may act. We agree that the United Nations Security Council is the best venue, not because we think that the United Nations is the only path to legality and legitimacy, but because so many other states take this view, and their wishes deserve respect. However, in the event the Security Council fails to take timely and effective action as a human rights catastrophe unfolds, the United States must not stand on the sidelines. In the case of Kosovo, when the Security Council was blocked, NATO stepped up to take decisive action, thereby preventing a genocide. Some still question the legality of that action. We take the concern seriously coming from those who were willing to act; we do not take it seriously coming from those who were prepared to let hundreds of thousands fall prey to ethnic cleansing and genocide. When necessary, the United States must lead or be willing to join others to mobilize an effective response to mass killing and widespread repression.

Addressing Global Hardship

As the world's most powerful country, the United States has the capability to help address

the challenges stemming from poverty, hunger, disease, and lack of opportunity for billions of people in the developing world. We believe that leadership in these areas is not just something the United States can do—it is what the United States *must* do.

While these issues were once only considered “humanitarian” or “soft”—implying that they are always elective or secondary—there are instrumental reasons why the United States should focus on them. If one accepts the argument (and we do) that threats emanating from weak or failed states can endanger US national security, then it is in America’s interest to help these states stabilize. Some describe this as part of “draining the swamp” of desperation and hardship that radical jihadists and other extremists thrive in by reducing extreme poverty and replacing the extreme fundamentalism taught in some madrassas with basic education. As evidence of the growing consensus on the relationship between these issues and national security, the Bush administration justifies many of its efforts along these lines—and when it is criticized, it is usually for not doing enough.

But US leadership in these areas is about more than protecting security. America’s actions in the world are a powerful demonstration of what it wants to accomplish with its power and the values it wishes to uphold. In this sense, the United States should embrace humanitarianism, and not consider it optional or of minor importance. To do so is both the smart and the morally right thing to do for our security.

This is also an area where there is significant common ground between the political right and left. Liberals have long argued that addressing issues like poverty and disease need to be a core part of US foreign policy. Many conservatives have as well, especially among the evangelical community (as exemplified by the work of Franklin Graham and Rick Warren). Spurred in part by evangelical advocates, the Bush administration has made positive strides in this direction, increasing assistance to Africa by 67 percent and boosting spending for programs to fight HIV/AIDS.

Meanwhile, three of the major Democratic candidates for president have talked about the importance of fighting global poverty and making a major push to improve education throughout the developing world.

Looking ahead, both conservatives and liberals should embrace an agenda centered on stronger American leadership in these areas—in fact, one valid criticism of recent US policy is that it too often cedes the initiative to others. For example, greater resources should be put behind combating poverty and disease, and a broad recognition that free trade is critical to helping the developing world advance economically. And we should consider fundamental reforms in the way the US government is organized to implement such policies, including ideas like establishing a Department of Global Development (along the lines of that in the United Kingdom) and replacing the Foreign Assistance Act.

Strengthening Alliances and Institutions

Any discussion of implementing the principles outlined above begs a fundamental question about means: how should the United States work with other countries? Throughout American history, the subject of whether the United States should tie itself to the fate of others abroad—or work with others to solve problems—has been hotly contested. This has been especially true since the end of the Cold War and the apogee of US primacy, when we really didn’t *need* others to solve most problems. While this tugging between unilateralism and multilateralism is often seen as concerned solely with efficacy and instrumentality—sometimes it is better for us to share the burden, sometimes not—we believe that it is in fact a debate about what kind of global power America should be and what kind of international system we should support. It is not about instruments; it is about principles.

As Ivo Daalder and Robert Kagan argue, it is important for US policies to be seen as legitimate both in the eyes of the American people and the world.⁶ That is a value that other countries—certainly Acirema—might not

necessarily care about. America does and should. But the question is how best to uphold this value, and what institutions (whether existing or new) or multilateral arrangements are the best means to do so. As discussed earlier, when it comes to implementing values-based policies like defending liberal regimes or enforcing the responsibility to protect, working through alliances and international institutions should be as important to the United States (at least as something to aspire to) as it is to others.

The challenge has been that for many conservatives and liberals, the unilateral vs. multilateral discourse has framed these ideas as an either/or choice. The right has focused too much on the constraints of multilateralism and maintaining US freedom of action. We agree that the United States always reserves the right to act alone if the circumstances require, but this should not be the preferred option. In this sense, the Bush administration's substance and style—exemplified by its “with us or against us” statements or rhetoric about preemption—has prompted international skepticism about whether the United States genuinely wants institutions like the United Nations to function, or even exist at all.

Yet too many liberals slide into the opposite problem: upholding multilateralism for its own sake. This has only intensified during the Bush years, when support for the United States around the world has reached alarming lows. If the United States is unpopular, some believe that it must be solely our fault and make no judgment about the behavior of our allies. The remedy among many on the left seems to us to be overly simplistic: defer at all times to the collective decisions of institutions. This confuses the reality that international organizations are stages, not actors. They are simply groupings of other sovereign states, and while organizations can help facilitate decisions for states, they cannot make choices for them. They can neither prevent internal disagreements nor force free-riders and buck passers to act.

Recently we've seen signs of greater nuance in the unilateral/multilateral debate between left and right. For example, in his second term President Bush began working through institutions like the UN Security Council to deal with problems like Iran and Darfur, and with an ad hoc coalition to negotiate with North Korea. Even his rhetoric is softening: when asked recently what he has learned from his European partners, he said that “I have come to realize that other countries do rely upon the United Nations, and I respect that a lot. So there's an area, for example, where I have been taught a lesson by my allies and friends.”⁷ And among liberals, there is greater recognition that the multilateral route often can frustrate rather than facilitate action. For example, the longer the Security Council's divisions prevent strong action to end the genocide in Darfur, the louder the calls become for a NATO response or even unilateral US military intervention.

This bolsters our belief that a new consensus can be formed in support of seeking the broadest possible coalition to pursue US foreign policy goals. This means working through alliances and institutions, but also ensuring that these organizations work. The United States should have high expectations of its alliances, and in turn it should have high expectations of its allies. It should be an active and energetic partner, recognizing that getting something done through a coalition often requires the same kind of daily politicking, strong-arming, logrolling, and handholding used every day in working with the US Congress. And while the United States should seek to make existing institutions like the United Nations and NATO stronger and more effective, it should also work to build other organizations like the Alliance of Democracies.

The conclusion we come to is that while an idealistic foreign policy has become harder to defend politically, it is possible to construct a forward-looking, values-based agenda that both liberals and conservatives can support. In fact, such an approach should garner more than just passive support—the

policies presented above can actually serve as part of the foundation for US foreign policy in the years ahead. Neither sentimental nor coldly aloof, these values comprise the core of the rules-based, liberal international order that the United States should aspire to achieve. This is about more than what we want; it is about who we are.

Yet because the political incentives against an approach to foreign policy that promotes American values remain so powerful, as we described at the outset, such a policy will not emerge on its own. Even with greater clarity about what values we want to uphold and promote, difficult questions will remain about how to do so. There will always be debates about acceptable costs and the trade-offs involved. So success will require sustained attention and steadfast leadership. With both, the American people will rise to the challenge.

Endnotes

¹ *Transatlantic Trends 2006*. The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, p. 16, http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/2006_TT_Key%20Findings%20FINAL.pdf.

² Lindberg tends to the view that failed states mainly pose a problem for those directly affected, who have their hands full trying to survive the local crisis. Chollet is more concerned about spillover effects and broader destabilization.

³ There is, of course, a substantial amount of disagreement over the extent to which conservative evangelical Christians in the United States seek, ultimately, the enactment of their religious views into law. Chollet sees this as a potentially serious threat to liberal constitutional principles and minority rights. Lindberg does not consider it as serious of a threat, viewing the political activities of even those who would wish to see their views enacted in such fashion as circumscribed by a liberal, democratic political order out of which they are unwilling to break.

⁴ *Transatlantic Trends 2006*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006.

⁵ See their paper in this series, *Should Democracy Be Promoted or Demoted?*

⁶ See their paper in this series, *America and the Use of Force: Sources for Legitimacy*.

⁷ See Bush Press Conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, January 4, 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070104-2.html>.

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