

Written Testimony of

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Chairman Tierney, Ranking Member Shays, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for providing me with the opportunity to present my views on the vitally important subject of assessing long-term threats and risks and on U.S. strategy for security in a post-9/11 world.

Six years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States continues to possess a unique degree of power and to play an indispensable role in world affairs. Now, however, in the face of difficult and ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and an array of seemingly intractable problems, many authors and strategists are predicting the end of an era of superpower predominance and the need for major, even radical change in grand strategy. They argue that America's size and predominance, as well as its foreign policy conduct, the war in Iraq, and our economic, structural and military vulnerabilities, are triggering the emergence of an increasing number and variety of challenges to U.S. power and influence.

Nonetheless, counterbalancing and the decline of American primacy have yet to take place and it remains a matter of contention whether or when these may occur. Elsewhere, I have argued that the threat from militant Islamic terrorism, the weakness of international institutions in confronting the most urgent and deadly problems, and the unique role of the United States have made a grand strategy of superpower preeminence a logical and necessary adaptation to the realities of the post-9/11 world.<sup>1</sup>

This leads, however, to the question of whether we may be witnessing a major erosion of America's capacity to play such a role. One source of change could come from shifts in the international distribution of power, so that other states, individually or in coalition, acquire power that equals or even exceeds that of America. In addition, there are the human and material costs of a long and difficult war in Iraq and an ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan which together may be undercutting America's strength. At the same time, the U.S. faces current or potential threats from regional and lesser powers as well as radical Islamist terrorist groups, and more diffuse but no less real dangers from nuclear proliferation and failed states. And the rise of the authoritarian capitalist powers, Russia and China, suggests the possible re-emergence of great power competitors.<sup>2</sup>

Threats to primacy can come from many different directions, not only from abroad. A significant yet often under-emphasized dimension concerns the maintenance of a strong domestic

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<sup>1</sup> *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005 and revised edition 2007.) The above testimony is drawn in abbreviated and revised form from Robert J. Lieber, "Persistent Primacy and the Future of the American Era," paper delivered at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 30th-September 2nd, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (July/August 2007): 59-69.

foundation. There are long-term economic challenges in funding a robust national security strategy and meeting the needs of an aging population while maintaining economic growth and financial stability, especially in the context of serious domestic dissensus and political polarization more pronounced than at any time since the Vietnam era.

Here, in addressing the question of whether the American role is sustainable, I briefly review external threats and possible alternatives to the American role. I then examine past and present doctrine and policy and argue that both have sometimes been mischaracterized in debates about strategy and foreign policy. Next I address the problems of domestic capacity. Without minimizing the very real difficulties in both the international and domestic environments, I conclude that the underpinnings of American primacy remain relatively robust. No effective alternative to the American role exists, and the lethal perils that became apparent on 9/11 will not disappear anytime soon. Indeed, whoever takes the presidential oath of office on January 20, 2009 will need to adopt a national security strategy that incorporates key elements of current foreign policy doctrine. This is not only in America's own national security interest, but essential for sustaining a stable and liberal international order.

## I. The International Context

**Threats.** Contrary to widely expressed hopes and expectations following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lethal and sustained threat to America's security and vital interests has emerged. This consists of three distinct but interrelated elements: first, radical Islamist jihadism as ideology and in its varied organizational forms; second, the systematic and widespread use of mass casualty terrorism; and third, the longer term peril that non-state actors may eventually acquire and use some form of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weaponry (CBRN).

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were a watershed event and deserve comparison with Pearl Harbor in marking the start of a great conflict, but the peril had been developing during the course of the 1990s. For example, a 1995 plot, the abortive Bojinka Plan, would have destroyed 10 to 12 wide body passenger aircraft over the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Even earlier, the 1993 truck bomb attack on the World Trade Center in New York only narrowly failed in its aim.

Abroad, particularly in parts of Europe, there has been a tendency to view 9/11 and radical Jihadism through the lenses of earlier and more familiar experiences with violent domestic groups such as Baader-Meinhof in Germany, the red brigades in Italy, the IRA in Northern Ireland, and the Basque separatist ETA in Spain, and to imagine that the danger can be treated primarily as a

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<sup>3</sup> See Phillip A. Karber, "Re-Constructing Global Aviation in the Era of the Civilian Aircraft as a Weapon of Destruction," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 2, (Spring 2003): p. 789; and *Report of the Joint Inquiry into the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001*, (Washington, DC: 107th Congress, 2nd Session, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, H. Rept. no. 107-792, and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, S. Rept. no. 107-351, December 2002) pp. 129, 192.

criminal matter best dealt with by domestic security, policing and courts. Unfortunately, the scale of threat can not be understood in such limited terms, and though partially obscured by sharp differences about the Iraq War.

European governments do appear to have become increasingly aware of the danger. The head of Britain's MI5 revealed in November 2006 that as many as 30 "mass casualty" terrorist plots had been identified and that British security services and police were monitoring 200 groups or networks totaling more than 1600 persons "actively engaged in plotting or facilitating terrorist attacks."<sup>4</sup> Among more recent events, there were failed bomb attacks in central London and at Glasgow airport in June 2007, and in early September German police seized three Islamist terrorists planning massive bombings against targets in Germany. Moreover, Osama bin Laden, who has been preaching war against the United States since at least 1996, has asserted that acquisition of nuclear weapons is a sacred duty and added that al-Qaeda would be justified in killing four million Americans, half of them children. In recognition of this threat, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission stated in its unanimous report that, "[T]he catastrophic threat at this moment in history is ... the threat posed by Islamist terrorism – especially the al Qaeda network, its affiliates, and its ideology."<sup>5</sup>

It is also the judgment of prominent and largely non-partisan authorities on terrorism and proliferation that the use of CBRN may well occur within the next decade. For example, Robert L. Gallucci has written that, "[U]nless many changes are made, it is more likely than not that al Qaeda or one of its affiliates will detonate a nuclear weapon in a U.S. city within the next five to ten years."<sup>6</sup> In addition, a survey of 100 foreign policy experts by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Center for American Progress found that, "More than 80 percent expect a terrorist attack on the scale of 9/11 within a decade..."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, there are the responses of 85 national security and non-proliferation experts to a survey conducted by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff for its then Chairman, Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana, and published in June 2005. These respondents were asked to predict the likelihood of a CBRN attack occurring anywhere in the world within the following ten years and their average probability estimate was 29% for a nuclear attack, 40% for a radiological attack and 70% for some kind of CBRN event.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dame Eliza Manningham-Butler, cited in Lee Glendinning, *The Independent*, November 10, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 362.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Gallucci, "Avoiding Nuclear Catastrophe," *Vulnerability*, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 607 (September 2006): 51-58 at 52.

<sup>7</sup> "The Terrorism Index," *Foreign Policy* (No. 162, September/October, 2007), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Lugar Survey on Nuclear Proliferation, June 2005, text at: <http://lugar.senate.gov/reports/NPSurvey.pdf>.

Another reason for concluding that the threat is deep-seated and long term has to do with the fundamental underlying sources of radical Islamism. Those who downplay the threat tend to argue that the most important causes stem from specific provocations by America, Israel or the West, particularly the Iraq War, the American presence in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the affront caused by “occupation” of Arab or Muslim lands.<sup>9</sup> Such interpretations not only do not take into account the far deeper origins of radical Islam, but they also tend to oversimplify the explanation of contemporary conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

The deep causes of radical jihadism and its manifestations of apocalyptic nihilism lie in the failure to cope successfully with the challenges of modernity and globalization and in the humiliation experienced, especially by parts of the Arab-Muslim world, over the past four centuries. These reactions have been expressed at both individual and societal levels. For example, in an implied reference to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and thus the end of the Muslim Caliphate which had extended back some thirteen centuries to the time of the Prophet, Osama bin Laden’s October 2001 video invoked eighty years of Muslim “humiliation” and “degradation” at the hands of the West.<sup>11</sup> In turn, the 2002 UN Arab Human Development Report has described the contemporary Arab world as afflicted by profound deficits in freedom, in empowerment of women, and in knowledge and information. These failures have, in some cases, been amplified by the experiences of individuals who have become detached from one world and yet have been unable to integrate into another.<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy too that the 9/11 attacks took place prior to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and that terrorist attacks against American targets abroad were carried out in 1990s when the Israel-Arab peace process seemed to be making real progress. Suicide terrorism elsewhere has had little to do with “occupation” by the West or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Attacks in Bali, Istanbul, Jakarta, Tunisia, Casablanca, Amman, the murder of the Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh, the effort to blow up the Indian parliament, the destruction of the Shiite golden dome

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. the interpretation of Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (NY: Random, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Assaf Moghadam has provided a compelling refutation of the idea that suicide terrorism is primarily motivated by a resistance to “occupation,” and he emphasizes the way in which it has evolved into a “globalization of martyrdom.” See “Suicide Terrorism, Occupation, and the Globalization of Martyrdom: A Critique of Dying to Win,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Volume 29, Number 8 (December 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Text of bin Laden Remarks. “Hypocrisy Rears Its Ugly Head,” as broadcast by Al-Jazeera television on October 7, 2001. *Washington Post*, October 8, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> See especially Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Fouad Ajami, *The Foreigner’s Gift: The Americans, the Arabs, and the Iraqis in Iraq* (NY: Free Press, 2006).

mosque in Samarra, deadly Sunni-Shiite violence in Iraq, mass casualty attacks on public transportation in London and trains in Madrid, and numerous interrupted plots are among multiple indications not only of the wider threat posed by radical jihadism, but of a deep-seated and fundamental rage against modernity and those identified with it.

In addition to the threat posed by radical Islamist ideology and terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons is likely to become an increasingly dangerous source of instability and conflict. Over the longer term, and coupled with the spread of missile technology, the U.S. will be more exposed to this danger. Not only might the technology, materials or weapons themselves be diverted into the hand of terrorist groups willing to pay almost any price to acquire them, but the spread of these weapons carries with it the possibility of devastating regional wars.

In assessing nuclear proliferation risks in the late-Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in North Korea, and in Iran, some have asserted that deterrence and containment, which seemed to work during the Cold War, will be sufficient to protect the national interests of the U.S. and those of close allies.<sup>13</sup> Such views are altogether too complacent. The U.S.–Soviet nuclear balance took two decades to become relatively stable and on at least one occasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, the parties came to the nuclear brink. Moreover, stable deterrence necessitates assured second strike capability, the knowledge that whichever side suffered an initial nuclear attack would have the capacity to retaliate by inflicting unacceptable damage upon the attacker. It also requires that one's adversary is a value-maximizing rational actor.

A robust nuclear balance is difficult to achieve, and in the process of developing a nuclear arsenal, a country embroiled in an intense regional crisis may become the target of a disarming first strike or, on the other hand, may perceive itself to be in a use-it-or-lose it situation. Moreover, even though American territory may be at less risk within the next few years, its interests, bases and allies surely are. And decision-making control by rational actors in new or pending members of the nuclear club is by no means a foregone conclusion. For example, Iranian President Ahmadinejad has expressed beliefs that suggest an erratic grip on reality or that call into question his judgment, he has invoked the return of the twelfth or hidden Imam, embraced conspiracy theories about 9/11, fostered Holocaust denial, and called for Israel to be wiped off the map.

One more component of threat to the global liberal democratic order concerns what Azar Gat has termed the rise of authoritarian capitalist powers.<sup>14</sup> In his view, radical Islam, is actually a lesser threat in that it fails to offer a viable alternative to modernity, though he does take seriously the potential use of WMD, especially by terrorist groups. However, Gat argues that the more

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); also John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy*, No. 134, January/February 2003: 50-59.

<sup>14</sup> Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (July/August 2007): 59-69, at 59-60.

dangerous challenge stems from the rise of China and Russia, both of which represent an alternative path to modernity. He concludes, that while either country could eventually evolve in a more democratic direction, the United States continues to be the key actor for the future of liberal democracy.

**Alternatives.** Almost every deliberation about foreign policy sooner or later gives rise to calls for renewed or enhanced reliance on international institutions and multilateralism as preferred means for addressing common problems and threats. The emergence and expansion of international norms and regimes is seen as evidence of a growing degree of global governance. For some, authorization by the United Nations Security Council has come to be regarded as the litmus test for the legitimacy of any foreign intervention. The UN specialized agencies are pointed to, and global, functional or regional bodies such as the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA), World Trade Organization and the European Union are praised for their roles above and beyond the nation state.

Of course, international law does operate in certain realms (for example Law of the Sea), and traditional national sovereignty has eroded under pressure from the forces of modernity and globalization. This is especially true for smaller and medium sized countries and for rules and practices involving trade, finance, investment, intellectual property, air travel, shipping and sports, as well as for international tribunals to punish a select number of gross human rights violators from conflicts in places such Bosnia, Rwanda, and Liberia.

Shared understandings and rules of the road are often important. But by no means do all societies accept the norms of liberal democracy, transparency and the rule of law. Moreover, even shared norms and beliefs can sometimes be flawed. Why, for example, is a decision to act against threats to the peace more legitimate when it is validated by the representatives of authoritarian regimes in Moscow and Beijing than when merely agreed to by the elected leaders of liberal democracies? In crisis situations the invocation of global governance, international norms, or treaty obligations is as much or more likely to be a pretext for inaction rather than a spur to compliance. And the more urgent, dangerous or deadly the peril, the less likely there is to be effective agreement by the international community. Consider a number of cases in point:

- Bosnia, from 1992 to 1995, where UN resolutions and peacekeepers proved unable to halt the carnage or to rein in Serbia, and where UN peacekeepers stood by impotently during the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

- The Rwanda genocide of 1994, where the UN Security Council permanent members consciously averted their gaze and deliberately reduced the small UN troop presence.

- Iraq under Saddam Hussein, which from 1991 to 2002 failed to comply with its obligations in successive UNSC resolutions passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

- Syria and Hezbollah, which have repeatedly defied Security Council resolutions concerning Lebanese sovereignty and the disarming of militias.

- North Korea, which has – at least until very recently – systematically, secretly, and sometimes openly, flouted both IAEA and UN resolutions as well as its obligations under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

- Iran, whose concealed nuclear program violated NPT and IAEA requirements for more than eighteen years, as well as recent Security Council resolutions, and whose Revolutionary Guards have repeatedly intervened covertly in Lebanon and Iraq, and have carried out terrorist bombings as far afield as Argentina.
- Sudan, whose depredations in the Darfur region have caused as many as 400,000 deaths and the flight of some two million refugees, and which has managed (with Chinese help) to minimize effective international intervention;
- Russia, which has used both overt and covert means to intimidate or coerce independent states of the former Soviet Union by such means as arming separatist groups, refusing to withdraw its troops and bases, and manipulating energy supplies.

Not all of these cases are threats to America's national security, interest or allies, but they illustrate the limitations of the UN and mechanisms of global governance. At times, it has been possible to work with allies in responding effectively to crises. An instructive case was the 1999 agreement of NATO member states to intervene in Kosovo in order to halt ethnic cleansing and mass murder. This took place after it had become clear that Russia would veto any UN Security Council authorization to act against Serbia. Many, though not all, international law experts saw the intervention as lacking international legitimation, but the American-led air war against Serbian forces in Kosovo and targets within Serbia itself ultimately did bring ethnic cleansing to a halt. The NATO intervention, however, exhibited key limitations. The great majority of the air sorties were conducted by the Americans, with some participation by the British and to a limited extent others (French, Italian, etc.), but most of the NATO contingents lacked the advanced military technology and force deployments to be able to cooperate effectively with the U.S. Air Force.

**Shifts in the International Distribution of Power** Despite expectations that a period of unipolarity would trigger balancing behavior or that French-German-Russian opposition to the American-led intervention in Iraq would stimulate the formation of such a coalition, effective balancing against the United States has yet to occur, and principal European leaders have either maintained (as in the case of Britain) or reasserted (Germany and France) pragmatic Atlanticist policies. And for its part, the European Union has not distanced itself from the United States let alone emerged as a strategic competitor. There are good reasons for this long-term continuity, including shared interests and values as well as the inability of the EU member countries to create a military with sufficient funding, advanced military technology, power projection and the unity of command that could enable it to play the kind of role in security that its size, population and wealth would otherwise dictate.

Other major powers have actually tightened their bonds with Washington. India and Japan have developed closer ties with the United States than at any time in the past. Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, Canada and others have also leaned more toward than away from America. Despite a significant rise in expressions of anti-Americanism as indicated in opinion polls, it would be a mistake to assume that the world has turned against the United States.

As for the leading authoritarian capitalist powers, Russia under Putin has adopted a much more critical and assertive stance, but well short of outright confrontation; and China, despite its



booming economy and rapidly modernizing armed forces, has yet to take an overtly antagonistic position toward the U.S.

Thus while a major balancing coalition against the United States has not taken shape, formidable challenges will face whoever becomes the next president on January 20, 2009. Moscow and Beijing have not formed an alliance against Washington, but both have acted to support regional states that pose significant problems for the U.S. For example, Russia has sold advanced anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran and Syria, and neither Russia nor China is likely to accede to Western urging for truly effective measures against Iran's nuclear program or Sudan's depredations in Darfur.

Power itself by no means guarantees the achievement of desired outcomes. Nuclear proliferation constitutes a severe and growing menace. Iran, Venezuela, and Syria have proved difficult to influence or coerce. The war in Afghanistan has no end in sight, and the willingness and ability of NATO allies to provide sufficient numbers of effective troops remains limited. American forces are fully stretched in Iraq where stability remains an elusive goal. Al-Qaeda has reestablished itself in the tribal areas of Western Pakistan and the adjacent border regions of Afghanistan. And the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolvable in the absence of a Palestinian leadership with the capacity to act on behalf of its population and the will to end terrorism and to work toward a two-state solution and a durable peace.

In sum, the international environment in which the United States finds itself is one in which there are both stubborn and lethal threats. Multilateral and international mechanisms for responding to these perils can be effective, but they are difficult to achieve. Meanwhile, in the absence of an effective counterbalance, America maintains a position of primacy. The extent to which it can continue to do so is, however, as much or more dependent on internal and domestic considerations as it is on the difficulties it faces abroad.

## **II. Domestic Considerations: Doctrine and Policy**

American national security policy since the end of the Cold War, and especially since 9/11 has often been characterized as an aberration, either because it takes place without the restraint required by adaptation to bipolarity during the Cold War, or because it is said to have abandoned past multilateral practice in order to act unilaterally. But these depictions do not serve well as explanations of past and present doctrine or policy. As John Lewis Gaddis and others have noted, the United States has characteristically reacted to being attacked by adopting strategies of primacy and preemption. Its neighbors in the 18th and 19th Century found the United States a "dangerous nation."<sup>15</sup> And since World War II, presidents of both parties have invoked a sense of mission in describing America's international role, in ways that go well beyond the kind of limited engagement that some critics insist is a more consistent or desirable strategy.

President Harry Truman, for example, in his March 1947 speech to a joint session of congress setting out what became known as the Truman Doctrine, asserted that "it must be the

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<sup>15</sup> See Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (NY: Knopf, 2006).

policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” John Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address proclaimed that “we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” Ronald Reagan’s State of the Union address in February 1985 insisted, that “We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives--on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua--to defy Soviet aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth. Support for freedom fighters is self-defense.” Bill Clinton’s 1993 inaugural address asserted that “Our hopes, our hearts, our hands, are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America’s cause.” And in July 1994, his *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* advocated expanding the community of democracies and market economies. In view of these precedents, the Bush administration’s embrace of both democratization and primacy in its 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) and in the second inaugural address of January 2005, are not inconsistent with past rhetorical statements of American doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

It is also commonplace to assert that, prior to 9/11, American foreign policy had been multilateral in character, built upon Republican built international institutions, alliances, and acceptance of “self-binding” in order to secure common objectives.<sup>17</sup> But the record of the past six decades is more varied than a neat bifurcation between the multilateral past and the unilateral present would imply. Harry Truman sent American forces to Korea in 1950 without awaiting UN authorization, President Dwight Eisenhower ordered U.S. troops to Lebanon in 1958, John F. Kennedy appeared ready to launch a preemptive attack on Soviet missiles in Cuba had the Russians not backed down during the October 1962 missile crisis, Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford sent American troops to Indochina. Ronald Reagan invaded Grenada and George H. W. Bush intervened in Panama. The elder Bush also worked closely with Chancellor Helmut Kohl to achieve German unification despite the reservations of Britain, France and Russia, and President Clinton used Tomahawk missiles and combat aircraft to strike targets in Afghanistan and Iraq and launched the 1999 air war in Kosovo with NATO agreement but without the formal approval of the UN Security Council.

Other evidence of policy continuity can be found in the more or less bipartisan character of decisions to intervene with military force during the period between 1989 and 2001. Ivo Daalder and Robert Kagan observe that of eight such interventions during those years, four were carried out by Democratic administrations and four by Republicans. They add that the circumstances in which a president may need to use force have increased since 9/11, these now include terrorism threats, weapons proliferation, prevention of genocide, as well as in response to traditional forms of aggression. At the same time, they do advocate a policy of seeking consensus among

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Kagan makes this point in “End of Dreams, Return of History,” *Policy Review*, August/September, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and “The End of the Neoconservative Movement,” *Survival*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2004): 7-22.

democratic states as a way of securing domestic consensus for the use of force.<sup>18</sup>

### III. Domestic Capacity

Can the United States sustain the financial costs of its global role and national security strategy? The answers are not simple. Viewed historically the burden of defense spending as a percentage of GDP seem manageable. Despite the enormous burdens of the Iraq and Afghan wars, America now spends approximately 4.2% of GDP on defense. This contrasts with figures of 6.6% at the height of the Reagan buildup in the mid-1980s, and up to 10% and more during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy years. There are, however, important differences, which make the financial problem potentially more difficult than it might seem. In all likelihood, defense budget costs will increase even after a drawdown of troops in Iraq begins. The price tag for replacing worn out or obsolete equipment will be enormous, expensive new weapons systems remain to be funded, and leading figures in both parties have called for increasing the size of the Army and Marine Corps. A volunteer army is much more costly than one based on the draft, which was phased out in 1971. Meanwhile, the pending retirement of the baby boom generation, looming deficits in the Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid budgets, and a gradually aging population all make this task significantly more difficult.

The problem of costs is not merely one of numbers. Aaron Friedberg emphasizes the long term challenge of bringing means and ends into alignment. He observes that this will be a daunting task, especially in view of the fact that since the early 1960s, the government has been without a mechanism for sustained interagency planning and for bringing the conflicting demands of finance and strategy into some kind of long term balance.<sup>19</sup> In addition, in an intensely partisan domestic climate, reaching bipartisan consensus on high-stakes issues has become exceptionally difficult.

Others have argued that this polarization along with bitter divisions about Iraq and the war on terror threaten to erode America's ability to sustain its international role, and they argue for a scaling back of foreign commitments in order to stabilize the political foundations for foreign policy.<sup>20</sup> However, it is not self-evident that a less engaged foreign policy and reduced commitments are really what matter most. Political dissensus, the war in Iraq, and public judgments about whether foreign interventions will succeed or fail matter more than the scale of intervention itself. Over-extension is to be avoided, but domestic support is a *sine qua non* for sustainable foreign policy commitments, and there is a tendency to assume that public reluctance

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<sup>18</sup> Ivo Daalder and Robert Kagan, "The Next Intervention," *Washington Post*, August 6, 2007; also "America and the Use of Force: Sources of Legitimacy," (Muscatine Iowa: The Stanley Foundation, June 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Aaron Friedberg, "The Long Haul: Fighting and Funding America's Next Wars," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4, July/August 2007.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, "Grand Strategy for a Divided America," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4, July/August 2007.

to bear the costs of foreign interventions is a function of increasing casualties. However, public tolerance for the human costs of war is mainly affected by beliefs about the rightness or wrongness of the war and especially by the likelihood of success.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, there is the problem of institutional capacity to manage, coordinate and execute national security policy in its multiple dimensions. Not only foreign policy and military spending, but force deployments, political and military commitments, intelligence, counter-terrorism, public diplomacy, foreign broadcasting, trade policy, and economic sanctions are among the elements that require coordination and skilled implementation.<sup>22</sup> Recent experience provides cause for concern. Shortcomings in intelligence coordination before and after 9/11, the occupation of Iraq, public diplomacy, immigration policy and a dysfunctional visa system, failure to take more effective steps to reduce oil consumption and imports, and inadequate local, state and national response to the Katrina hurricane provide evidence that governmental capacity to manage large scale challenges is often badly flawed. Yet 20th Century American history includes massive undertakings which were carried out successfully, for example mobilization of manpower and industry in World War II, the Manhattan Project, the Marshall Plan, the interstate highway program of the 1950s and 1960s, the Apollo project to put a man on the moon, and successful waging of the Cold War. These precedents offer no assurance about future successes, but they provide evidence that government can develop the capacity for effective response and at times even do so with speed and efficiency.

The intangible yet indispensable element of domestic capacity is public support and the social cohesion necessary for sustaining national power and strategy. As noted above, the expectation of eventual success is critical. So too are the political skills, and leadership capacity of any administration as well as its diplomatic adroitness in gaining support from other countries, not least to enhance the perceived legitimacy of an intervention. Here, cooperation with the European democracies becomes especially important in ways that go well beyond burden sharing because it reinforces the perceived validity of the action being taken.

There is one additional and often insufficiently appreciated element, the urgency of external threat. During six decades, from Pearl Harbor to the end of the Cold War, the United States faced successive and profound threats to its national security and vital interests, first from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and then after a brief interlude from the Soviet Union. The substantial domestic consensus about these threats, shared by the public, foreign policy elites and decision makers, political parties and the media provided a solid domestic basis for a robust national security strategy. This did not preclude domestic dissent and disagreement, let alone insure unanimity of views, for example in regard to the Vietnam War, but it did provide a basis for coherent and effective state action in mustering the needed resources and maintaining sufficient public support.

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Gelpi, Peter Feaver, Jason Reifler, "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06): 7-46, at 8.

<sup>22</sup> Dennis Ross makes this point in *Statecraft and How to Restore America's Standing in the World* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.)

The post-Cold War era (1991-2001), provided a contrast. In the absence of consensus about the existence of a profound overall threat, the salience of foreign policy dropped quite noticeably. Election exit polls during the 1990s found only single digit percentages of voters identifying foreign or security policy as among the leading concerns shaping their votes. Television and newspaper treatment of foreign affairs also plummeted. Together, these factors contributed to a weakening of the Clinton administration's ability to muster public and congressional support for foreign policy.

Post-9/11, these circumstances changed dramatically, but the passage of time, partisan acrimony, disillusionment with the Iraq war, and the absence of another mass casualty attack on the homeland have eroded both the sense of threat and any consensus about strategy. That leaves a major uncertainty in any attempt to gauge the future domestic policy environment. In view of the sustained nature of external threat described above, the possibility of a future mass casualty attack within the United States remains significant, even though its probability is a matter of educated guessing. Were such an attack to occur, it is likely that there would be a domestic resurgence of support for a very robust, even draconian, response and for paying whatever price was required in the effort to prevail against lethal adversaries. Conversely, in the absence of another such attack, domestic support for an interventionist foreign policy would be more likely to be contested.

#### IV. Challenges and Challengers

Can American primacy be sustained? Threats from radical Islamist groups, nuclear proliferation, the potential use of CBRN weapons, and competition from authoritarian capitalist powers pose challenges that require assertive American engagement. In addition, democratic allies and others have shown few signs of wanting to forego the involvement of the North American "Goliath,"<sup>23</sup> and despite heated rhetoric about real or imagined excesses of unilateralism, multilateral cooperation has continued to take place. The National Security Strategy of September 2002 included a much overlooked endorsement of multilateralism and in recent years there have been six-party talks with North Korea, deference to Germany, Britain and France (the EU-3) in their unsuccessful negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program, promotion of the multilateral Proliferation Security Initiative aimed at strengthening the NPT, co-sponsorship with France of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, an increase in funding to combat AIDS in Africa, an expanded NATO role in Afghanistan, and even a UN mandate – UNSC Resolutions 1546 (2004) and 1637 (2005) – for the U.S. led multinational force in Iraq.

Effective alternatives to the role played by the United States are inadequate or absent altogether, and neither the United Nations, nor other international bodies such as the European Union, the African Union, the Arab league or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations offer an effective substitute. As Robert Kagan has observed, "American predominance does not stand in

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Mandelbaum makes good use of this metaphor in *The Case for Goliath* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

the way of progress toward a better world....It stands in the way of regression toward a more dangerous world.”<sup>24</sup> In short, on the demand side, there is ample need for America’s active engagement.

What then about the supply side? The domestic costs and complications are evident but need to be weighed in context. The long-term reality of external threats creates a motivation for engagement abroad, as does the possibility of future attacks at home. Despite a heated domestic political climate, none of the leading presidential candidates of either party have called for dramatic retrenchment, and while disagreeing sharply about Iraq and the foreign policy of the Bush administration, they tend to concur on the need to increase the size of the armed forces. Unlike the Vietnam era, popular support for the troops is widespread, even among many critics of the Iraq war.

Constraints on the capacity of adversaries also need to be taken into account. Russia under Putin has put pressure on its immediate neighbors and seeks to rebuild its armed forces, but Moscow’s ability to regain the superpower status of the former Soviet Union remains limited. The Russian armed forces are in woeful condition, the total population is half that of the USSR and declining by 700,000 per year, the economy is overwhelmingly dependent on revenues from oil and natural gas and thus vulnerable if world market prices soften, and the long term stability of its crony capitalism and increasingly authoritarian political system are uncertain. China, despite extraordinary economic growth and modernization, will continue to depend on rapid expansion of trade and the absorption of vast numbers of people moving from the countryside to the cities. It may well become a major military challenger of the United States, first regionally and even globally, but only over the long term.

Demography also works to the advantage of the United States. Most other powerful states, including China and Russia as well as Germany and Japan, face the significant aging of their populations. Although the U.S. will need to finance the costs of an aging population, this demographic shift is occurring to a lesser extent and more slowly than among its competitors, and these changes in global aging will facilitate the continuation of American economic and military power.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the United States benefits from two other unique attributes, flexibility and adaptability. Time and again, America has faced daunting challenges and made mistakes, yet it has possessed the inventiveness and societal flexibility to adjust and respond successfully. Despite obvious problems, there is reason to believe that the country’s adaptive capacity will allow it to respond to future requirements and threats. None of this assures the maintenance of its world role, but the domestic underpinnings to support this engagement remain relatively robust.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Kagan, “End of Dreams, Return of History,” *Policy Review*, August/September, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Mark L. Haas, “A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer 2007): 112-147, at 113.

Thus for the foreseeable future, U.S. primacy is likely to be sustainable. America's own national interest – and the fortunes of a global liberal democratic order – depend on it.

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